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(12) **United States Patent**
Eriksson et al.

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(45) **Date of Patent:** **Mar. 10, 2015**

(54) **USER INTERFACE FOR WHITE GOODS AND ASSOCIATED MULTI-CHANNEL PROXIMITY SENSORS**

(71) Applicant: **Neonode Inc.**, Santa Clara, CA (US)

(72) Inventors: **Thomas Eriksson**, Stockholm (SE); **Stefan Holmgren**, Sollentuna (SE); **Carl Richard Henriksson**, Stockholm (SE); **Stefan Östergårde**, Skarpnäck (SE)

(73) Assignee: **Neonode Inc.**, Santa Clara, CA (US)

(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this patent is extended or adjusted under 35 U.S.C. 154(b) by 0 days.

(21) Appl. No.: **14/229,913**

(22) Filed: **Mar. 29, 2014**

(65) **Prior Publication Data**

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Related U.S. Application Data

(63) Continuation-in-part of application No. 14/140,635, filed on Dec. 26, 2013, which is a continuation of application No. 13/732,456, filed on Jan. 2, 2013, now Pat. No. 8,643,628, application No. 14/229,913, which

(Continued)

(51) **Int. Cl.**

G06F 3/042 (2006.01)
G06F 1/16 (2006.01)
G06F 3/0488 (2013.01)

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

CPC **G06F 3/0421** (2013.01); **G06F 1/169** (2013.01); **G06F 3/0428** (2013.01); **G06F 3/04883** (2013.01)
USPC **345/175**

(58) **Field of Classification Search**

CPC G06F 3/017; G06F 3/042; G06F 3/0421; G06F 3/011

USPC 345/175
See application file for complete search history.

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Primary Examiner — James Trammell

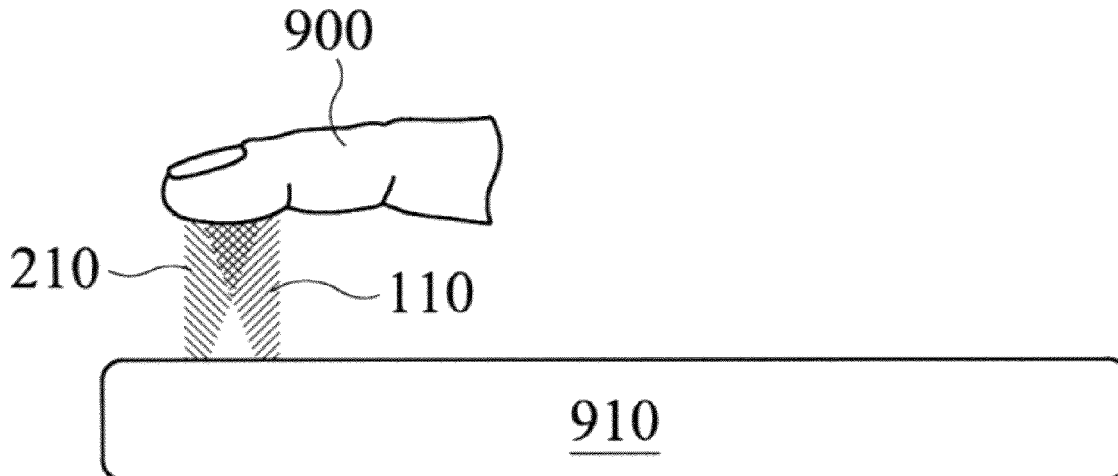
Assistant Examiner — Anne Mazzara

(74) *Attorney, Agent, or Firm* — Soquel Group LLC

(57) **ABSTRACT**

A touch sensor including a housing, a light guide mounted in the housing the light guide featuring an aperture through which light exits and enters the light guide, and an inner surface facing the interior of the housing, the sensor further includes two light emitters mounted in the housing for emitting light beams into the light guide that exit the aperture at diverging angles and a light receiver mounted in the housing for receiving reflected light beams entering the aperture at an angle of incidence different than the diverging angles.

21 Claims, 76 Drawing Sheets



Related U.S. Application Data

is a continuation-in-part of application No. 14/088,458, filed on Nov. 25, 2013, which is a continuation-in-part of application No. 13/854,074, filed on Mar. 30, 2013, which is a continuation of application No. 13/424,592, filed on Mar. 20, 2012, now Pat. No. 8,416,217, which is a continuation-in-part of application No. 12/760,568, filed on Apr. 15, 2010, which is a continuation-in-part of application No. 12/371,609, filed on Feb. 15, 2009, now Pat. No. 8,339,379, said application No. 14/088,458 is a continuation-in-part of application No. 13/775,269, filed on Feb. 25, 2013, which is a continuation-in-part of application No. 13/424,543, filed on Mar. 20, 2012, which is a continuation-in-part of application No. PCT/US2011/029191, filed on Mar. 21, 2011, and a continuation-in-part of application No. 12/760,567, filed on Apr. 15, 2010.

- (60) Provisional application No. 61/806,414, filed on Mar. 29, 2013, provisional application No. 61/713,546, filed on Oct. 14, 2012, provisional application No. 61/730,139, filed on Nov. 27, 2012, provisional application No. 61/564,868, filed on Nov. 30, 2011, provisional application No. 61/169,779, filed on Apr. 16, 2009, provisional application No. 61/564,164, filed on Nov. 28, 2011, provisional application No. 61/379,012, filed on Sep. 1, 2010, provisional application No.

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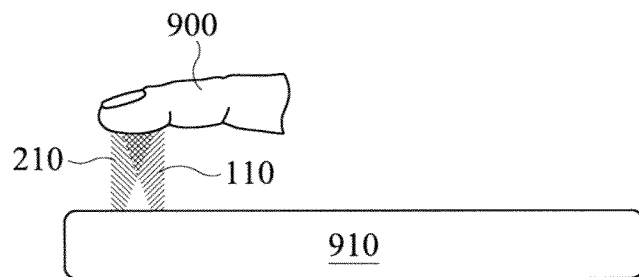


FIG. 1

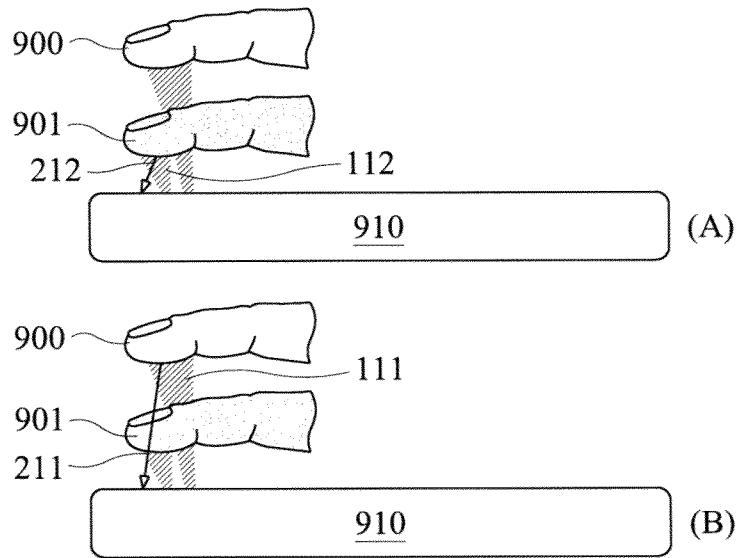


FIG. 2

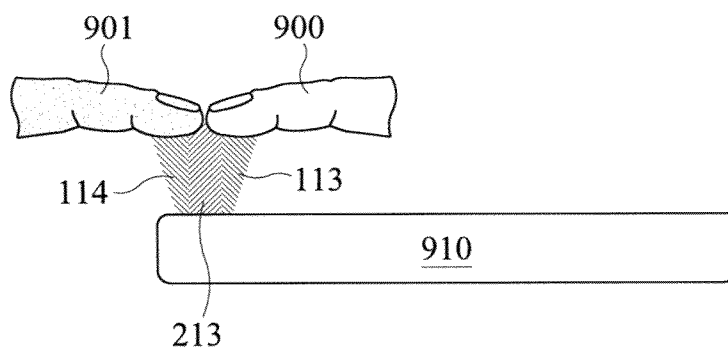


FIG. 3

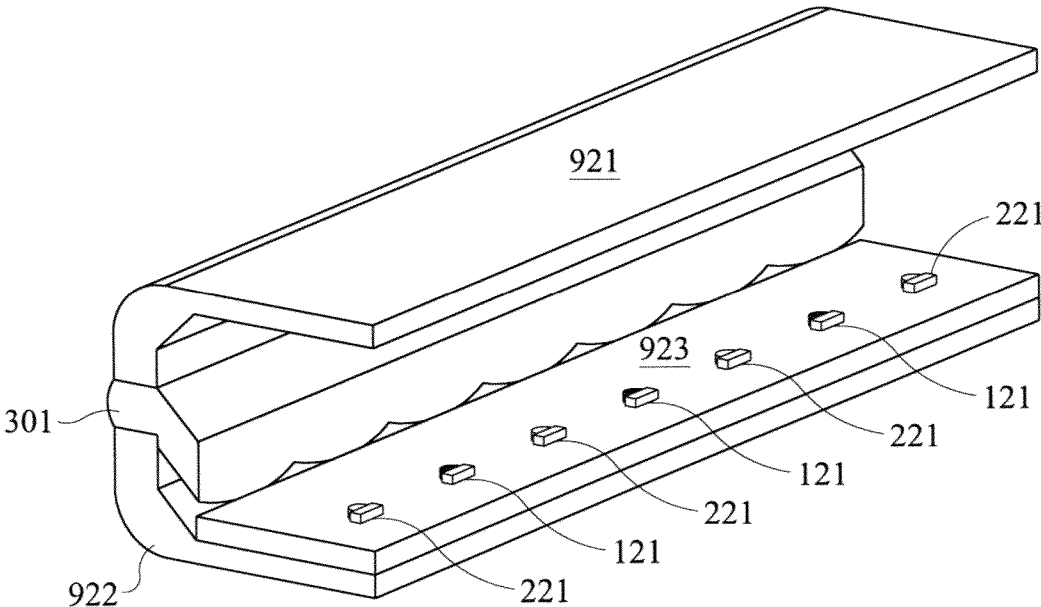


FIG. 4

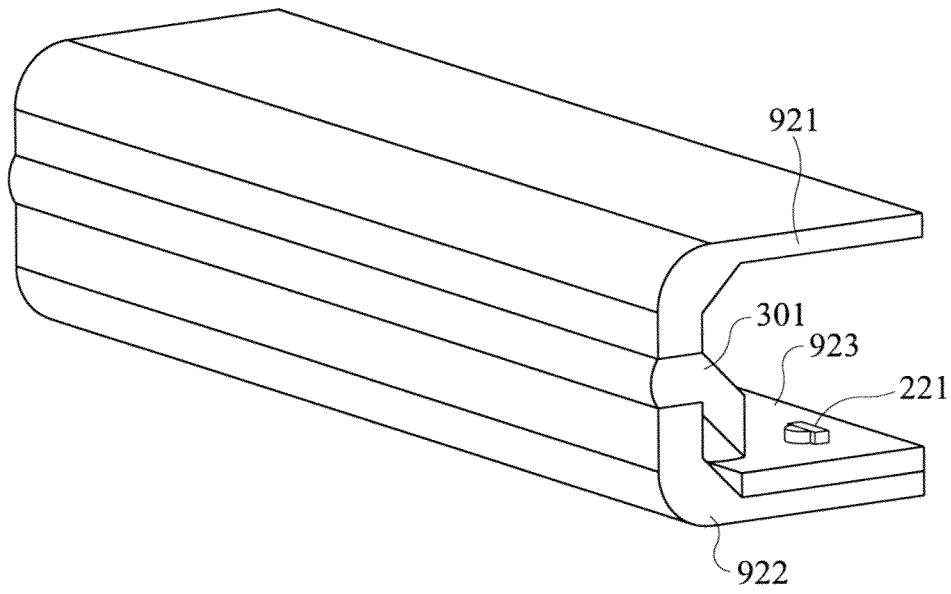


FIG. 5

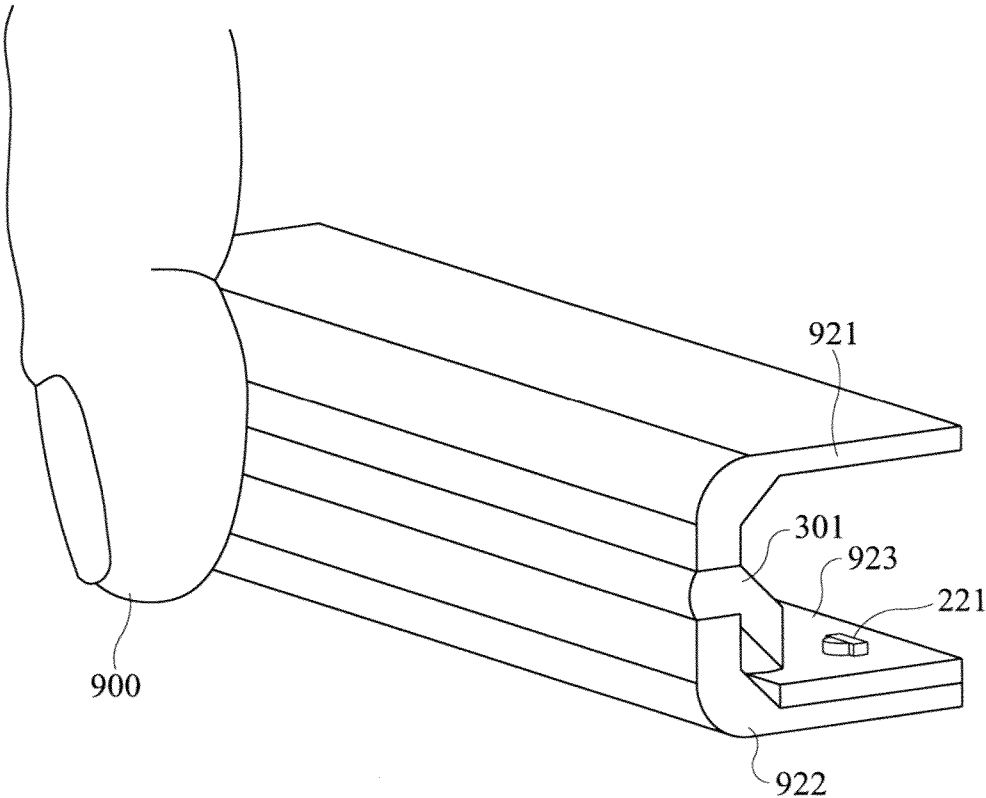


FIG. 6

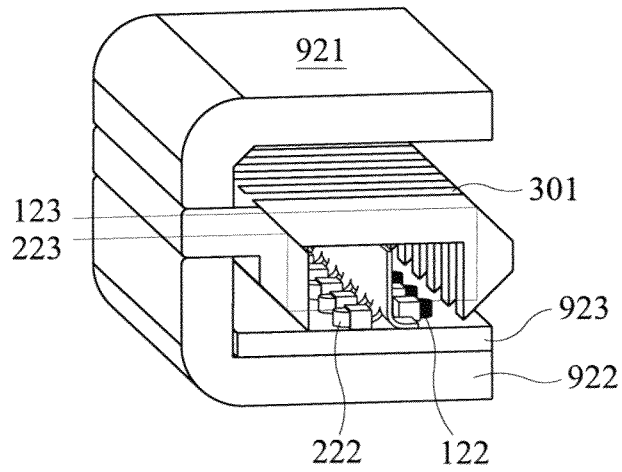


FIG. 7

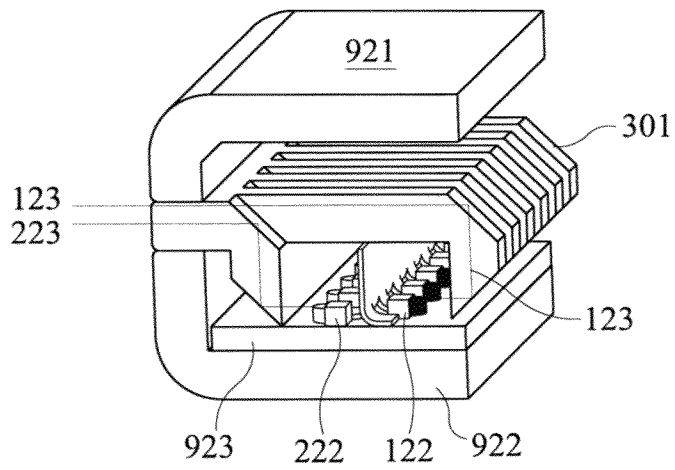


FIG. 8

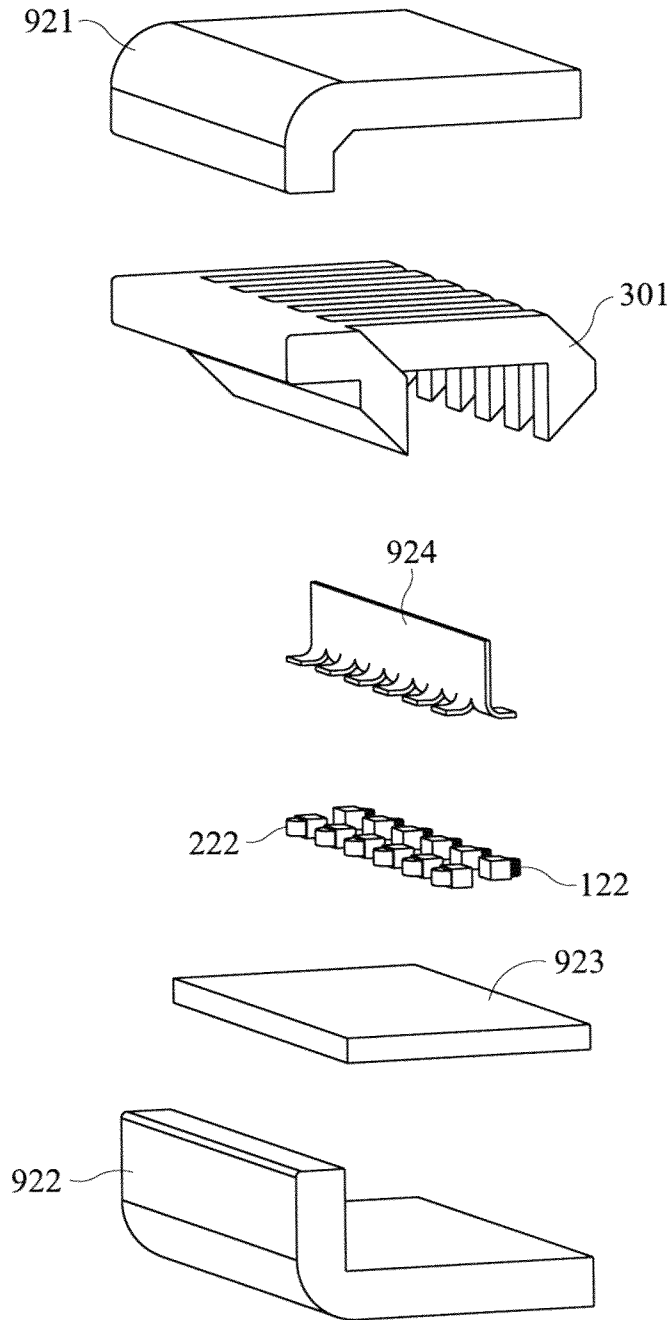


FIG. 9

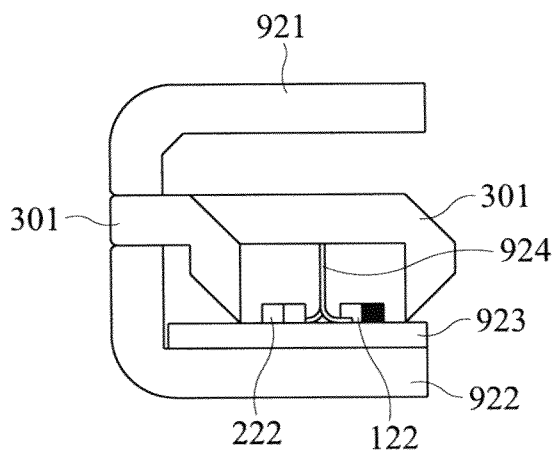


FIG. 10

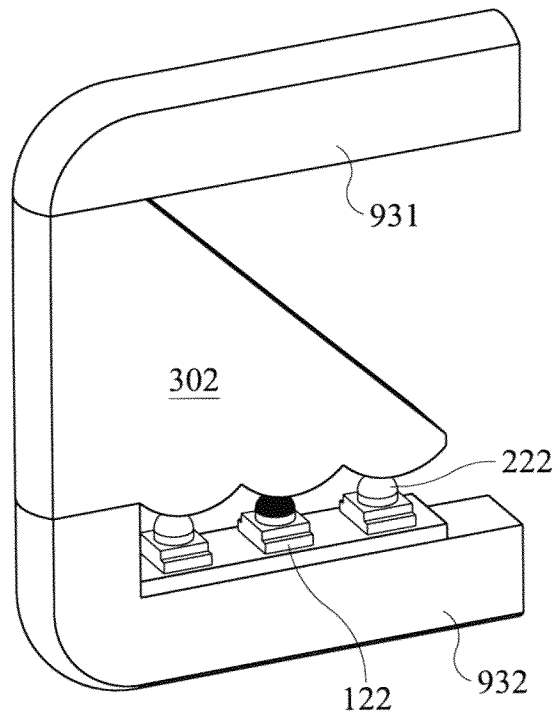


FIG. 11

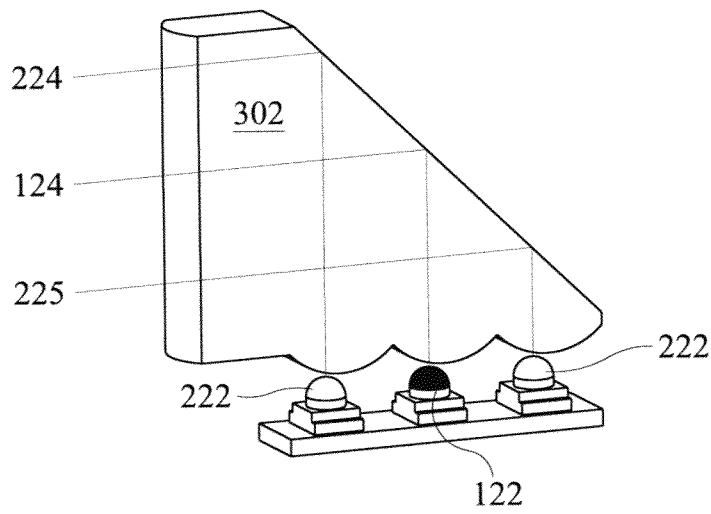


FIG. 12

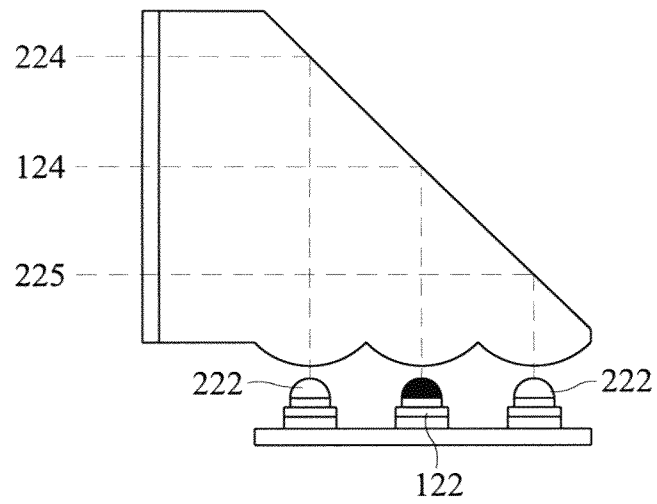


FIG. 13

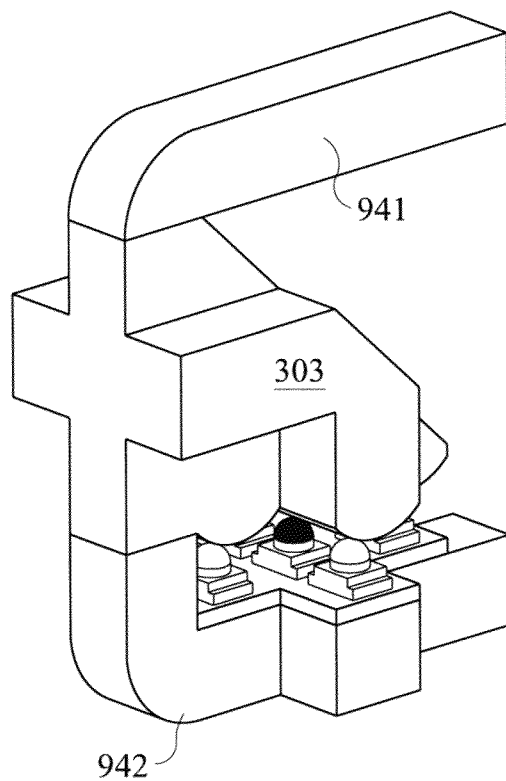


FIG. 14

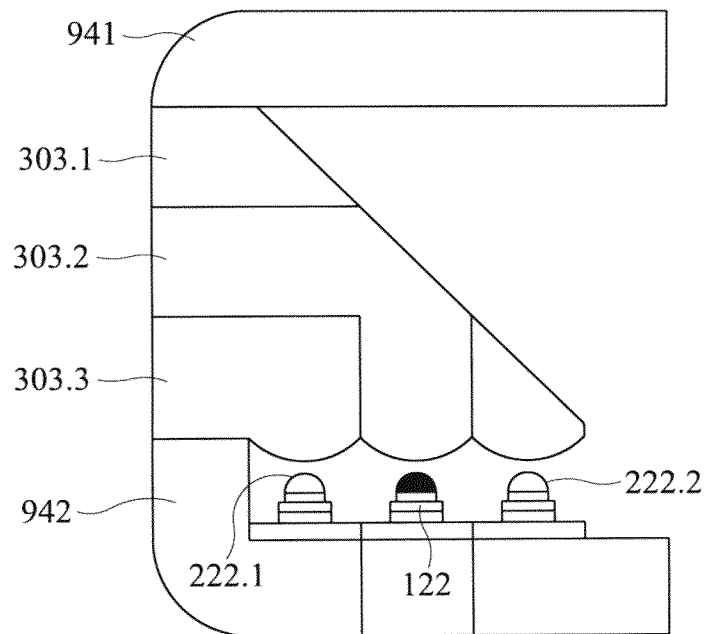


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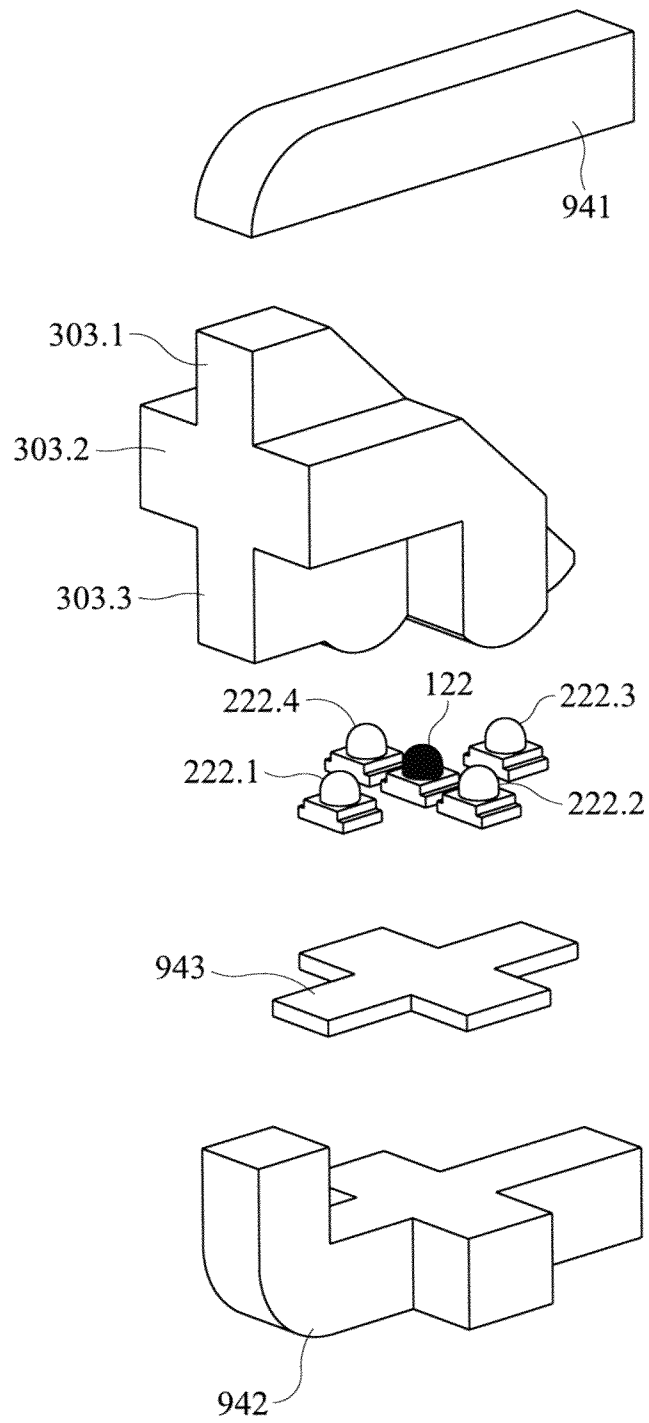


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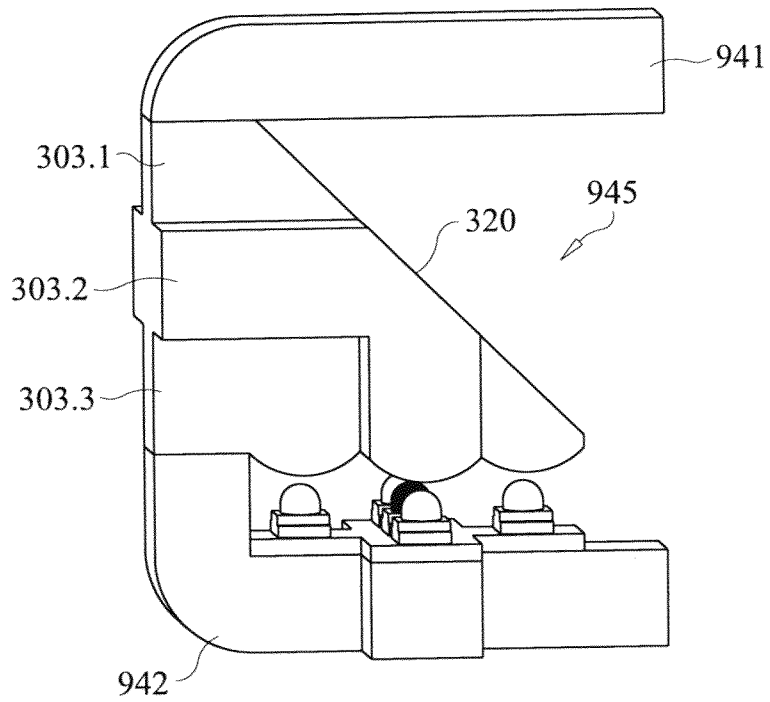


FIG. 17

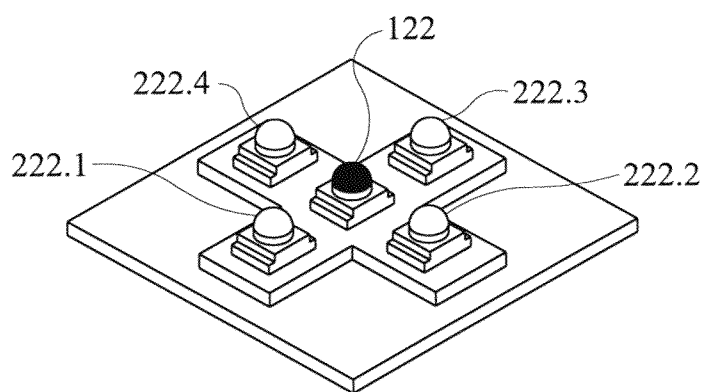


FIG. 18

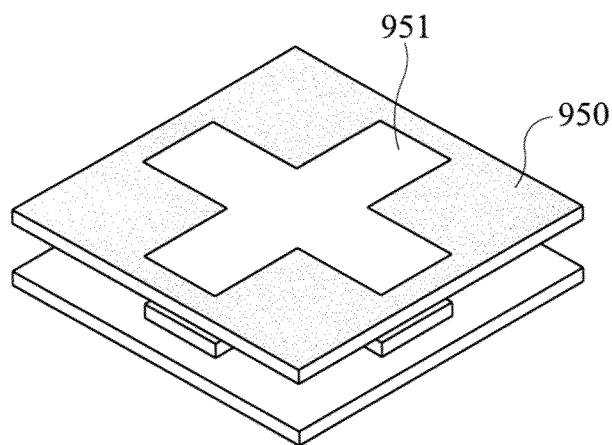


FIG. 19

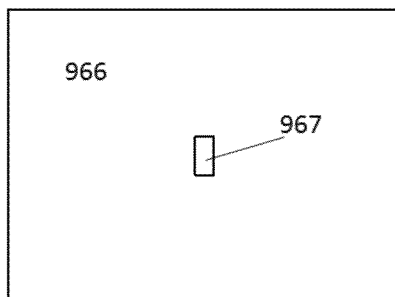


FIG. 20

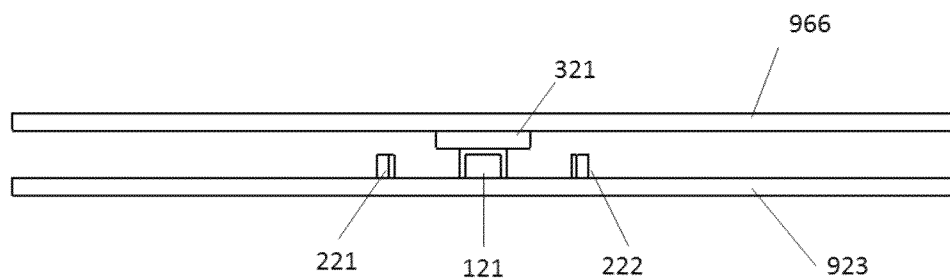


FIG. 21

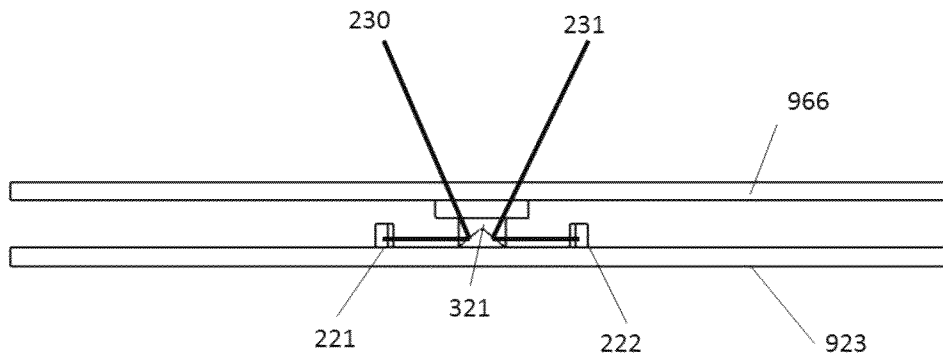


FIG. 22

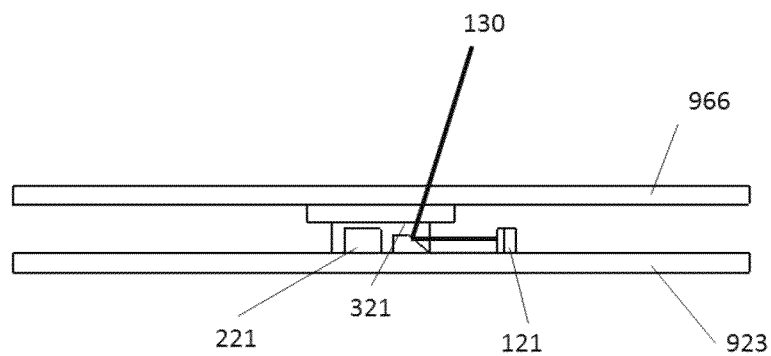


FIG. 23

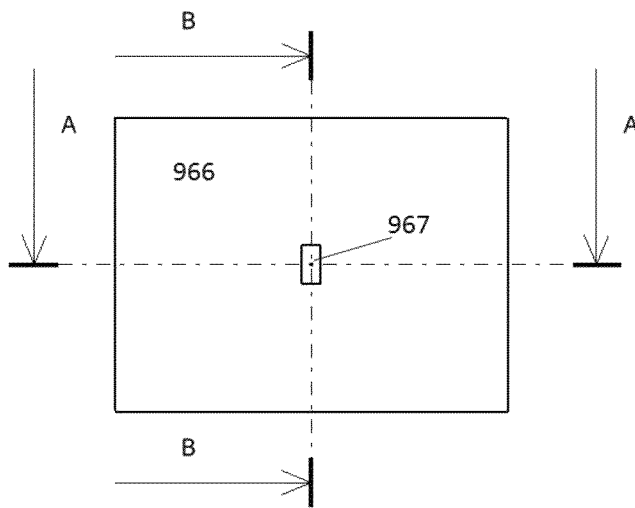


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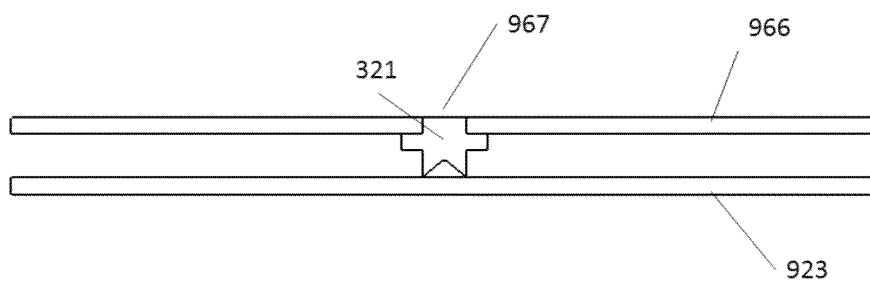


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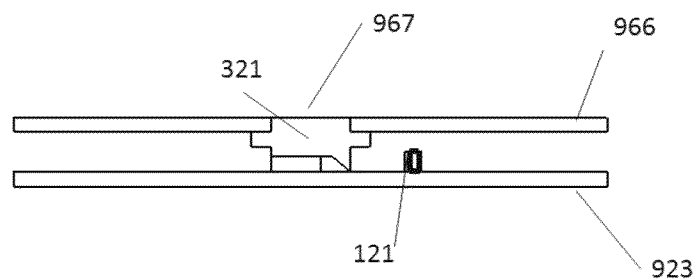


FIG. 26

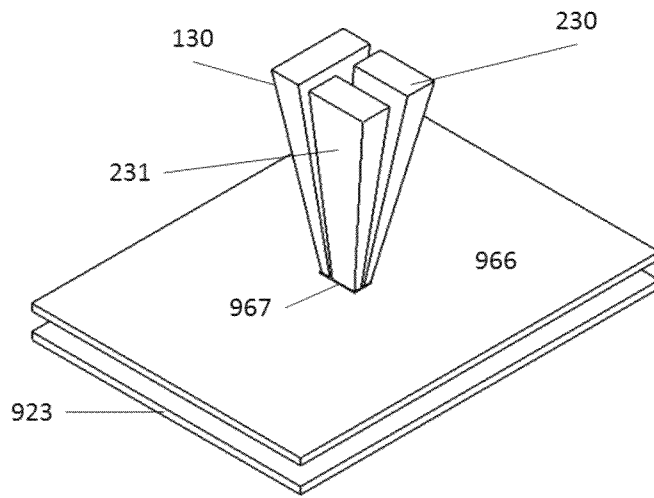


FIG. 27

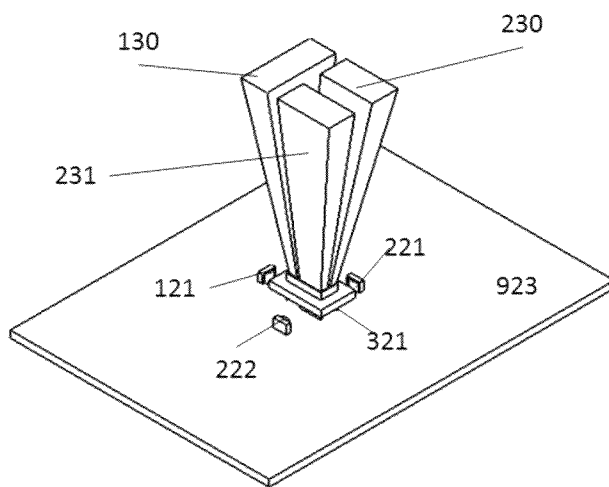


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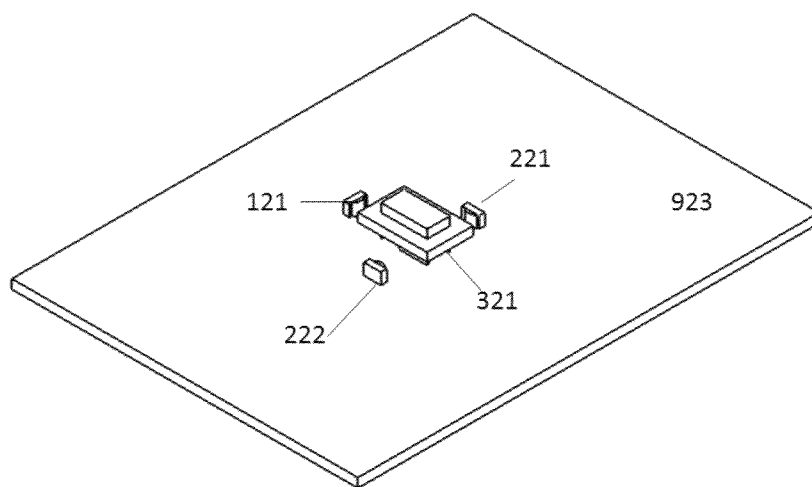


FIG. 29

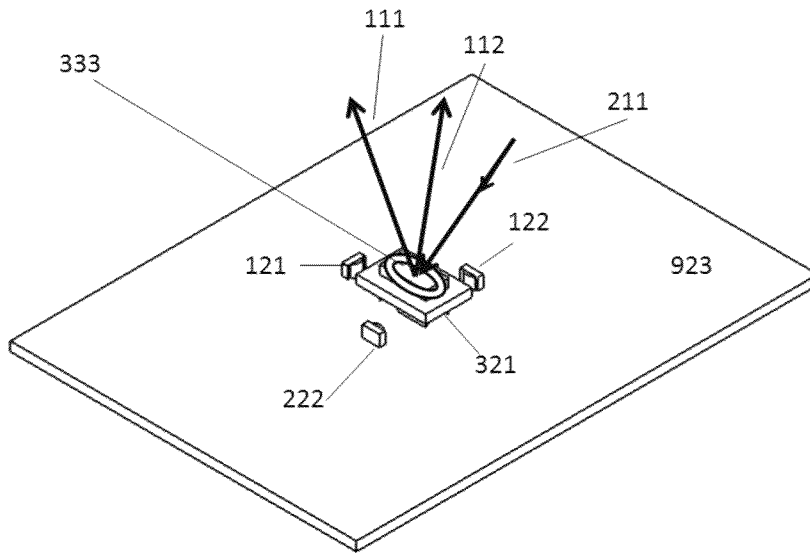


FIG. 30

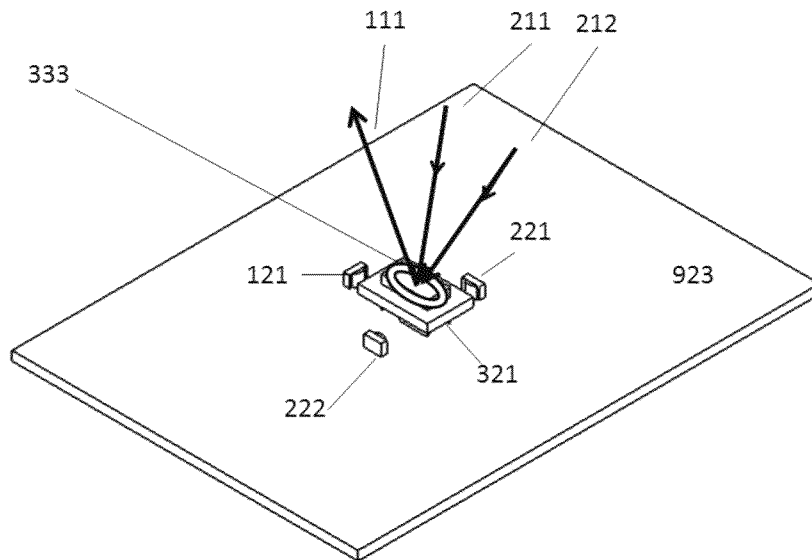


FIG. 31

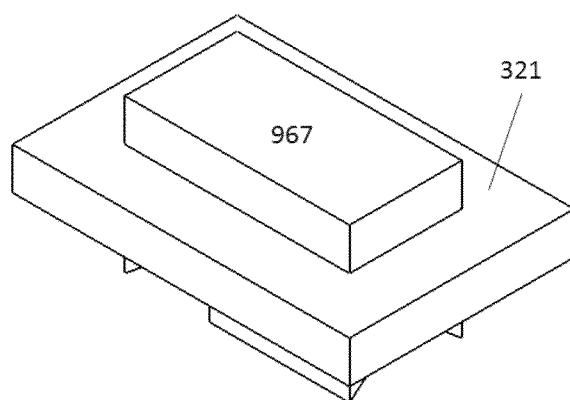


FIG. 32

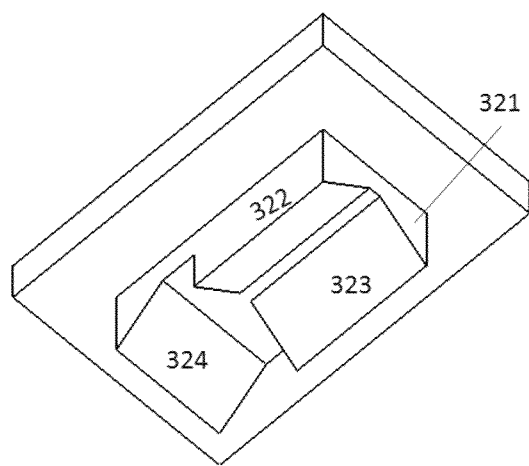


FIG. 33

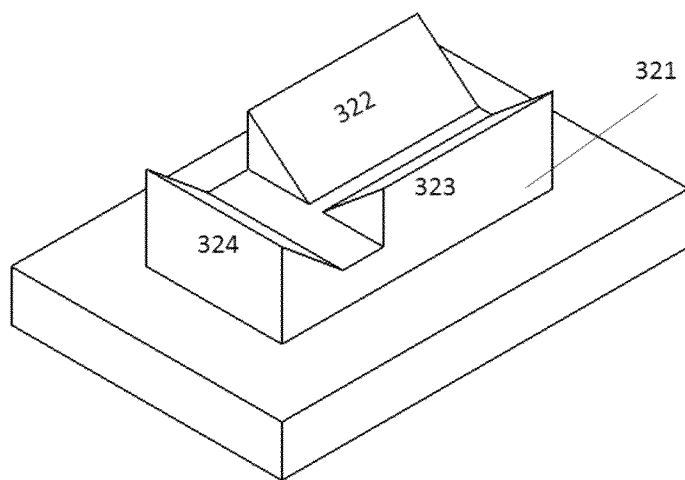


FIG. 34

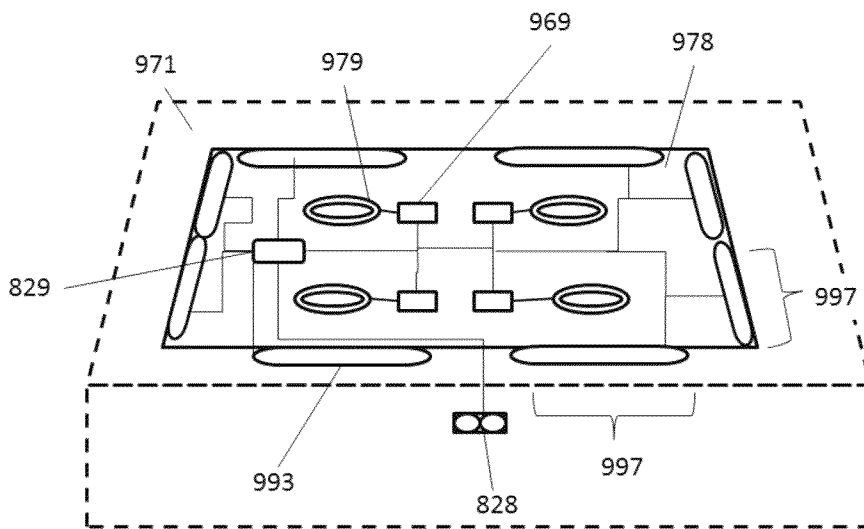


FIG. 35

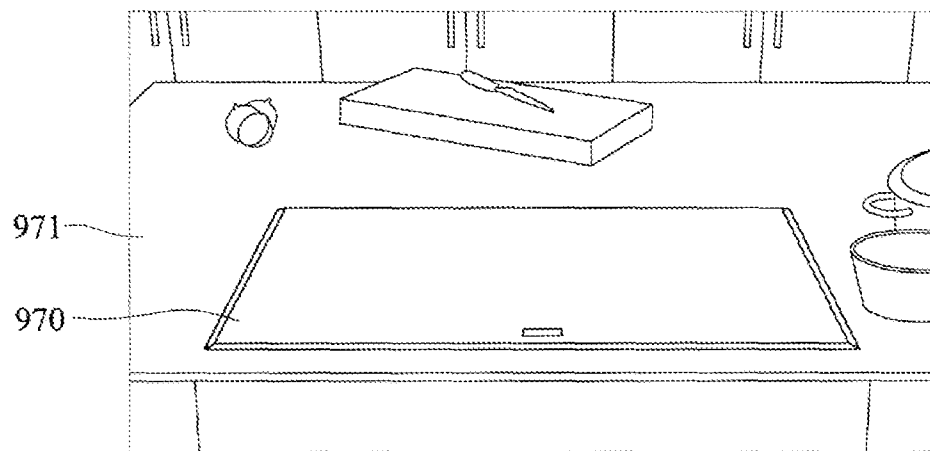


FIG. 36

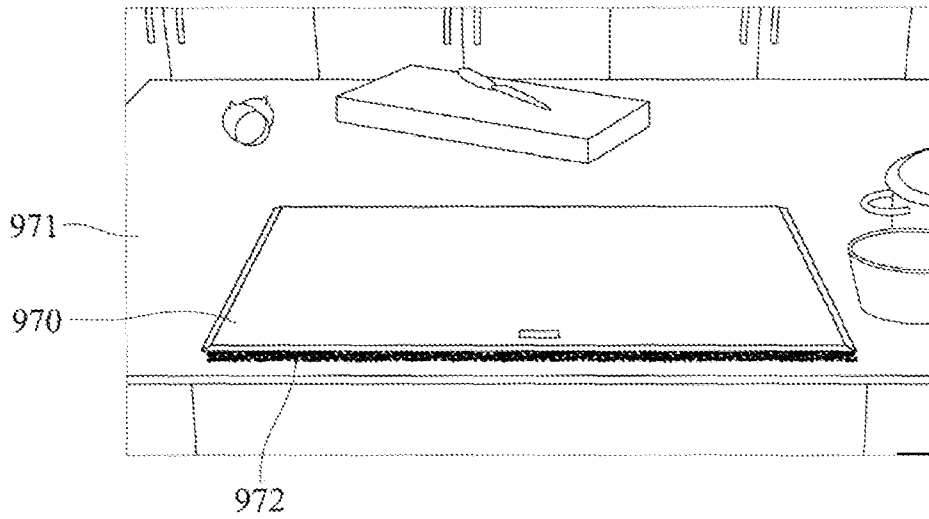


FIG. 37

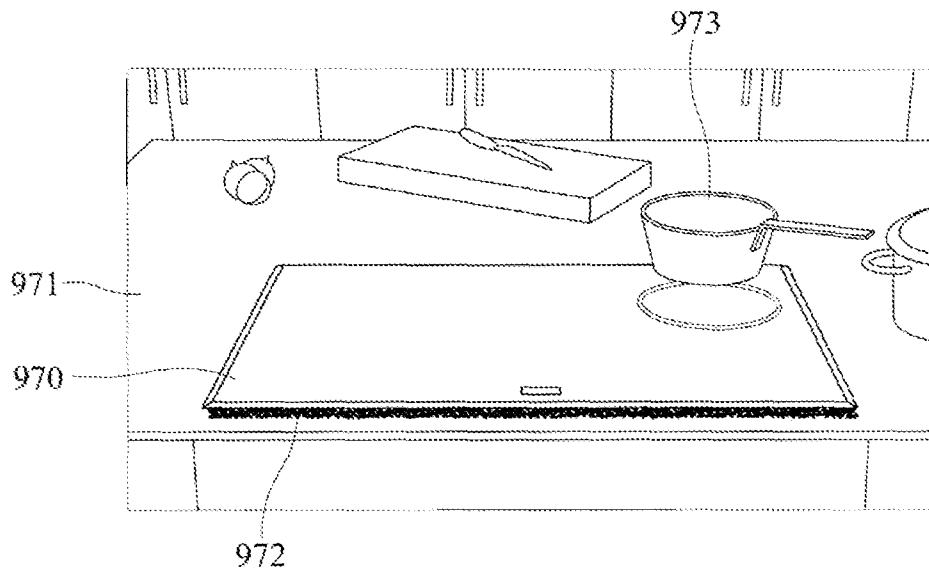


FIG. 38

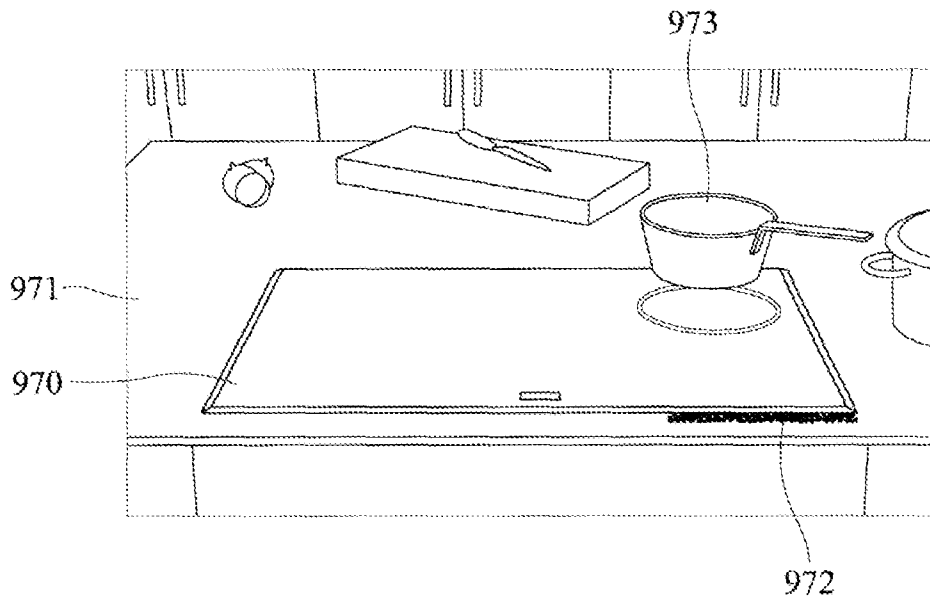


FIG. 39

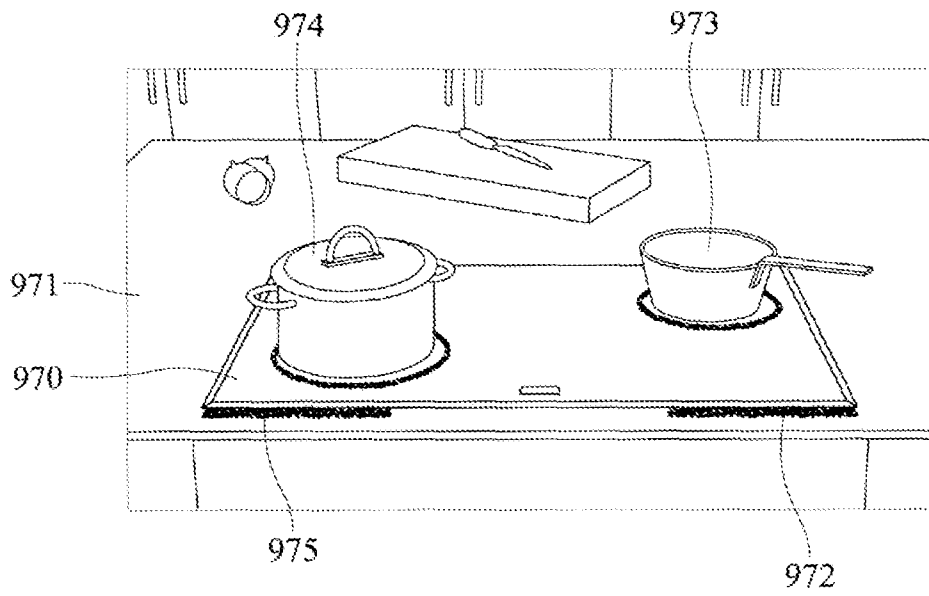


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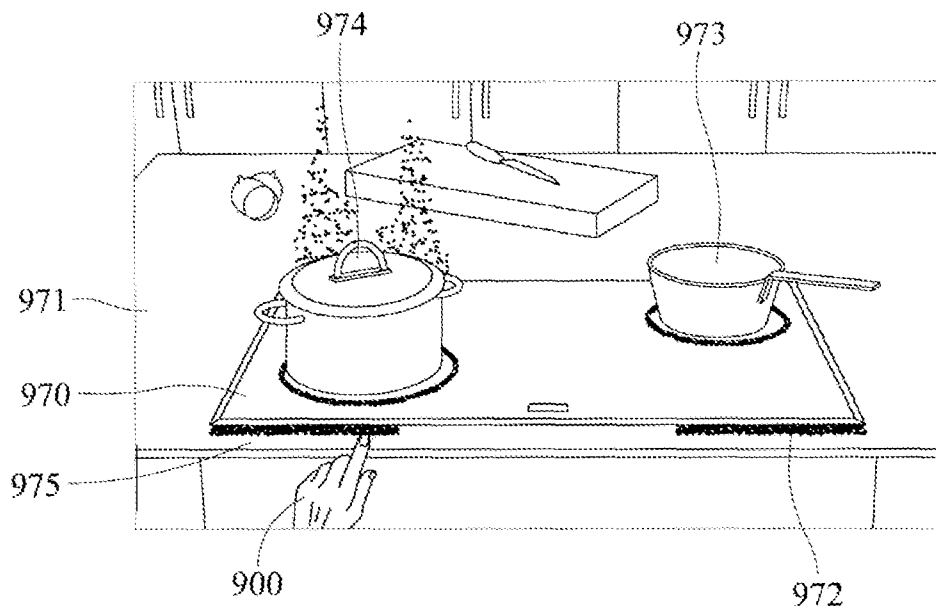


FIG. 41

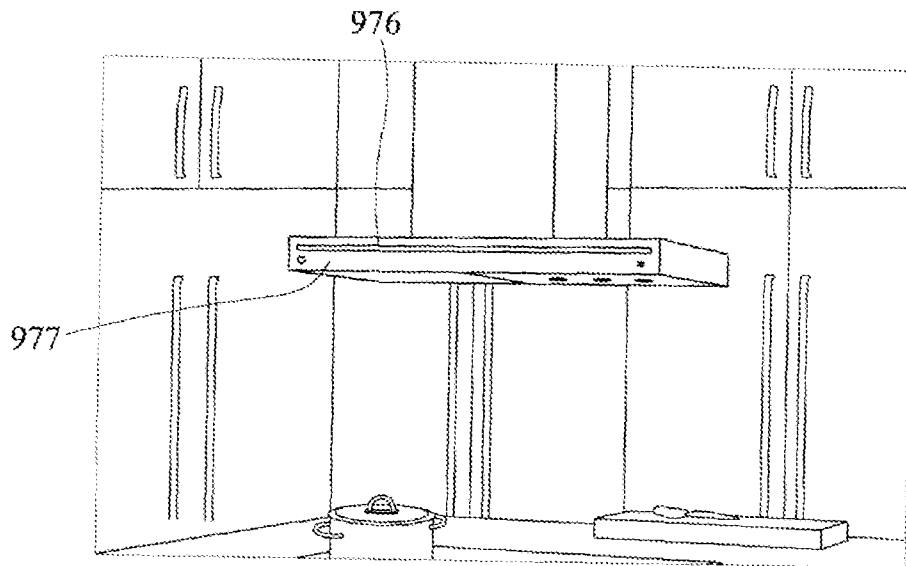


FIG. 42

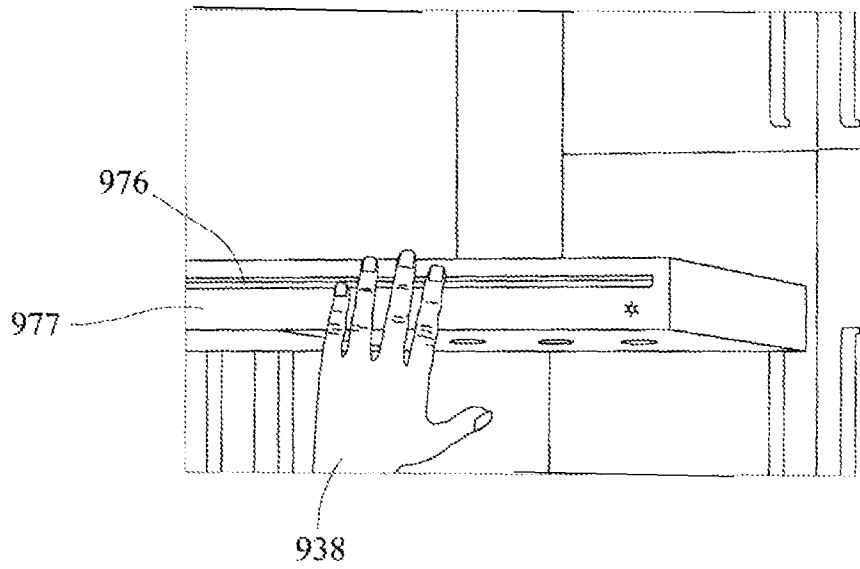


FIG. 43

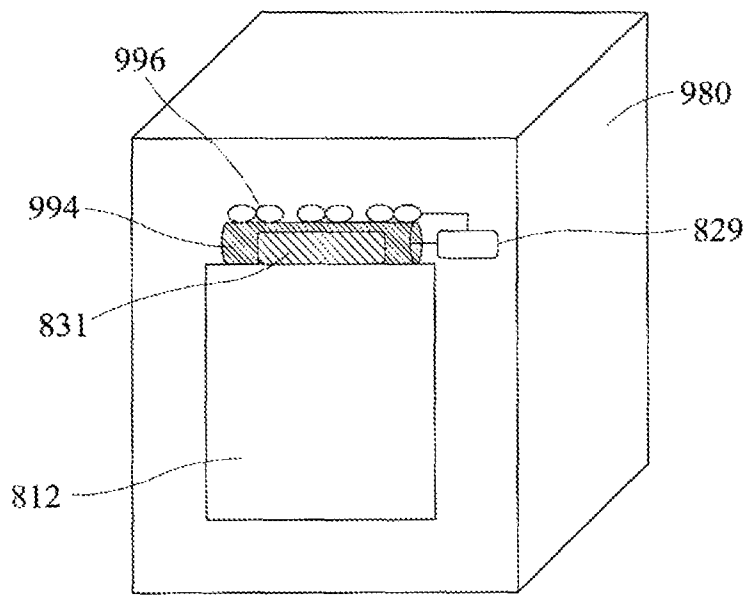


FIG. 44

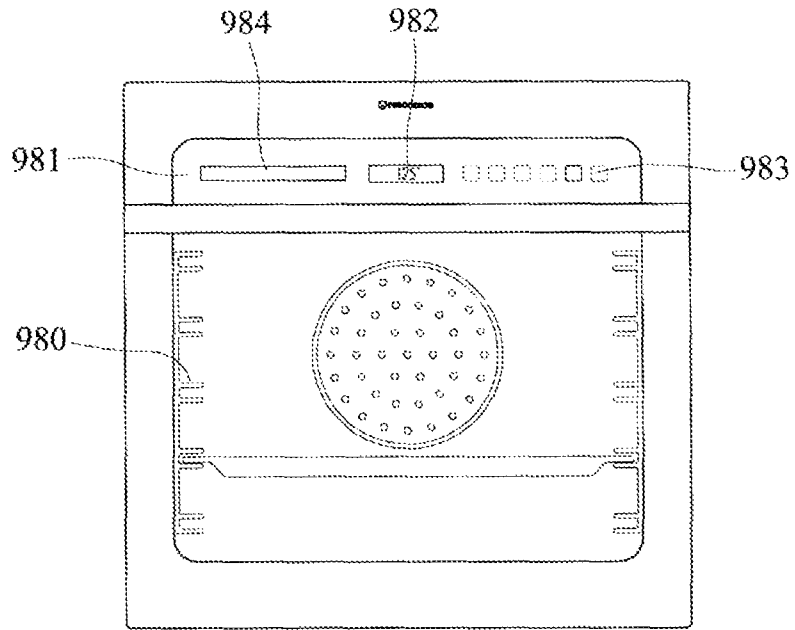


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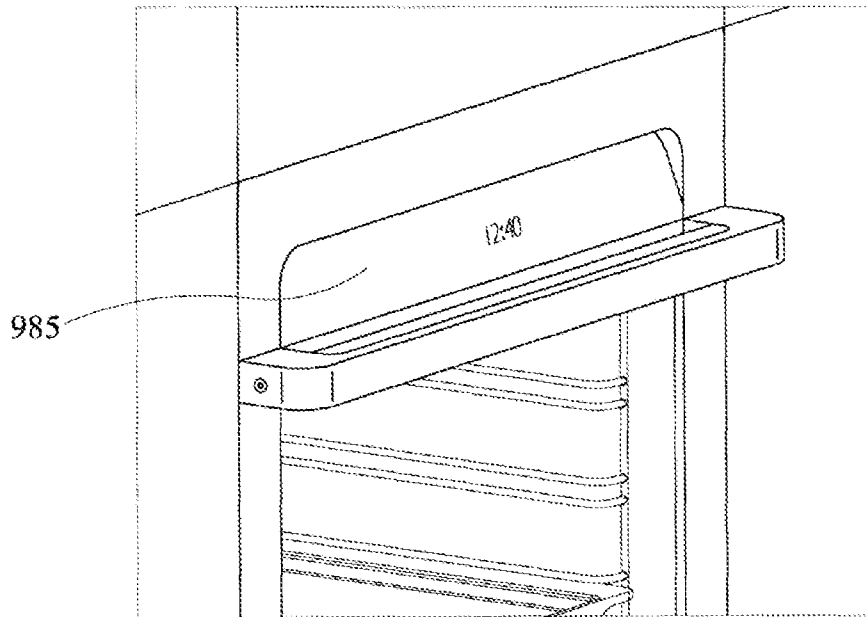


FIG. 46

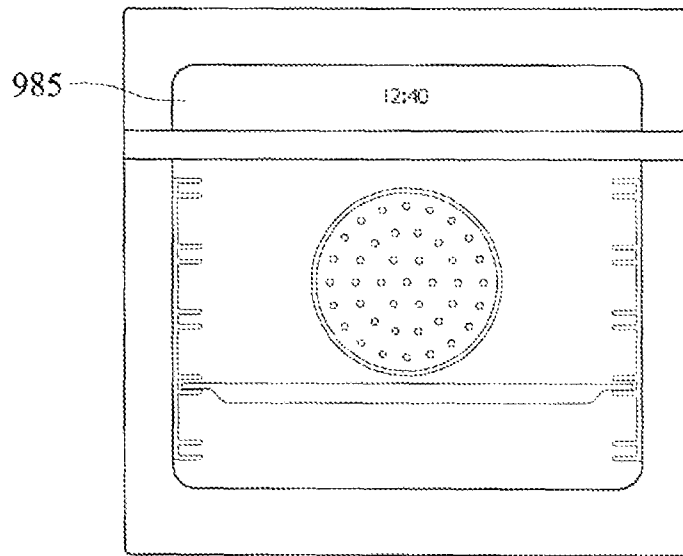


FIG. 47

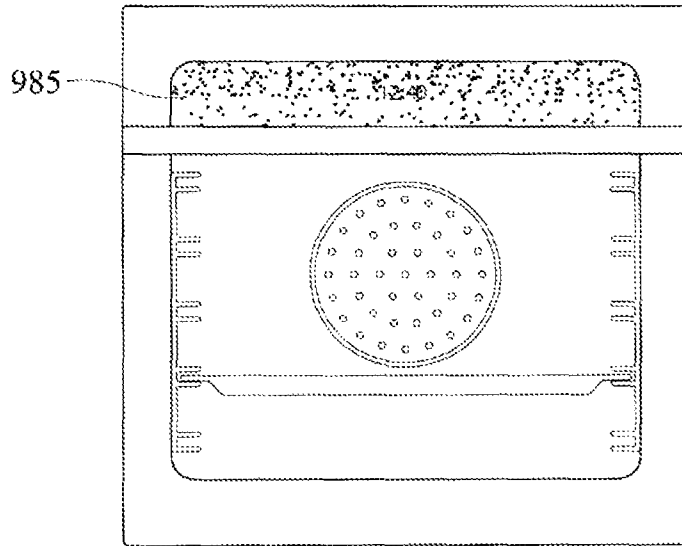


FIG. 48

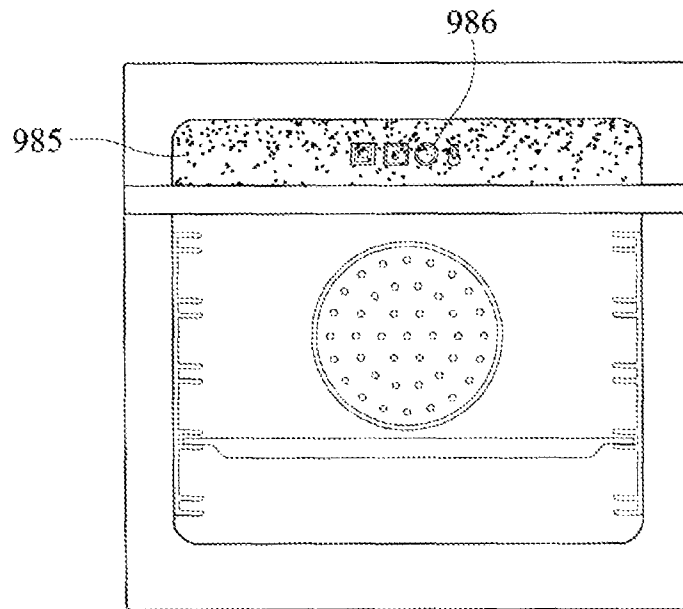


FIG. 49

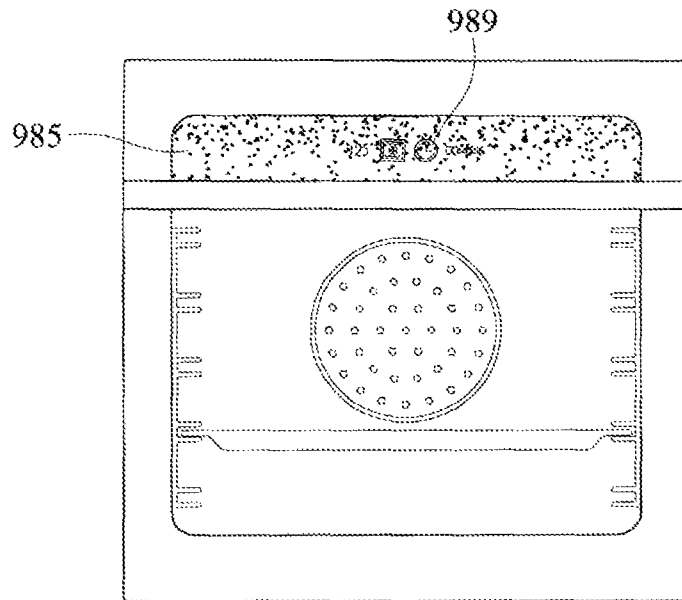


FIG. 50

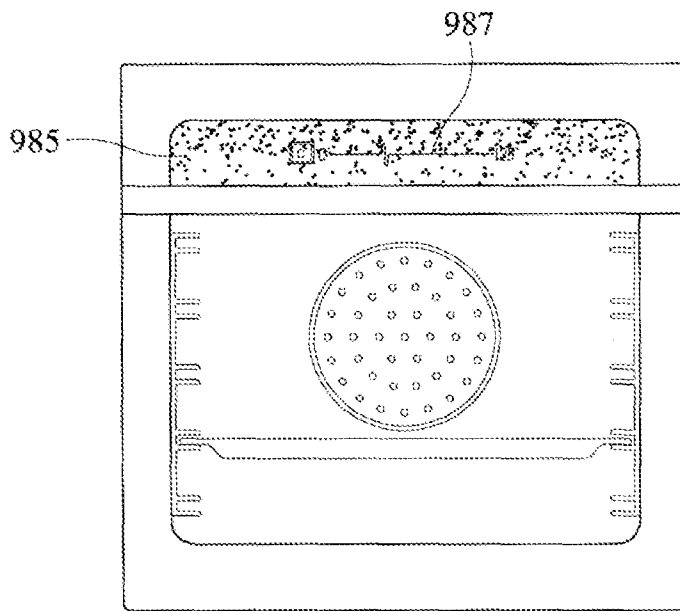


FIG. 51

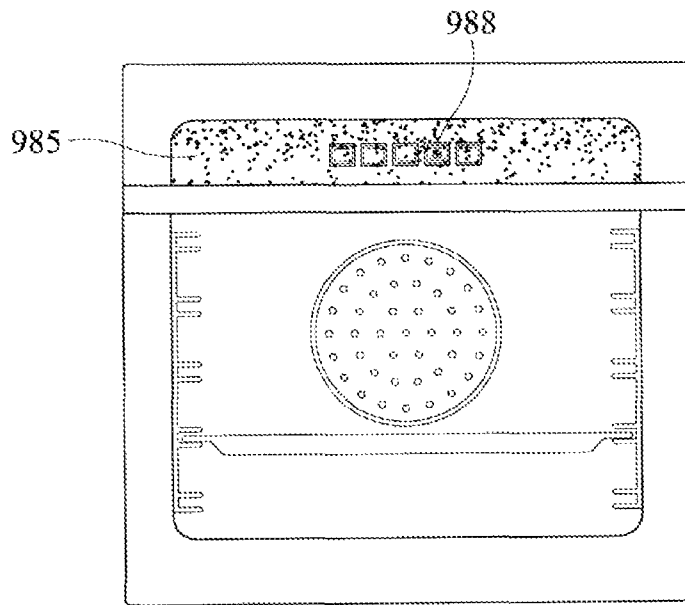


FIG. 52

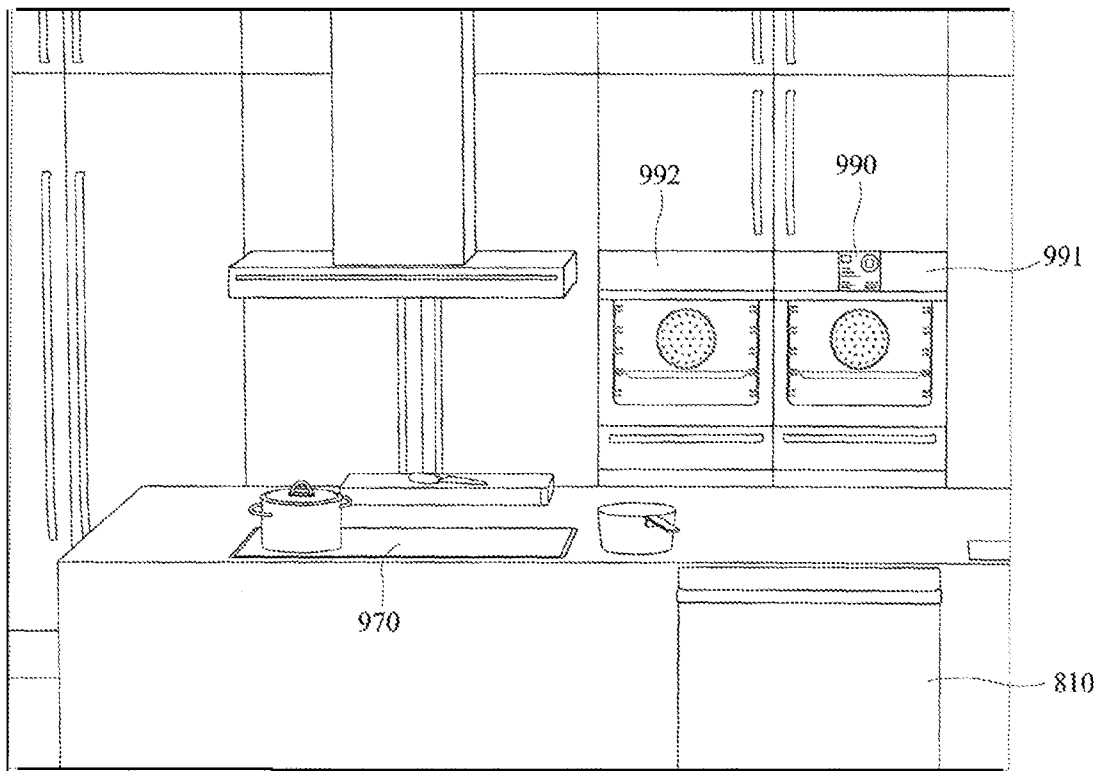


FIG. 53

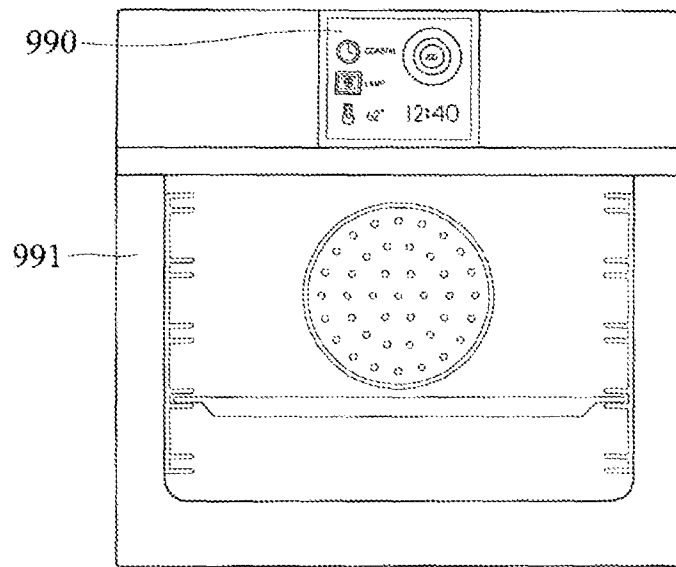


FIG. 54

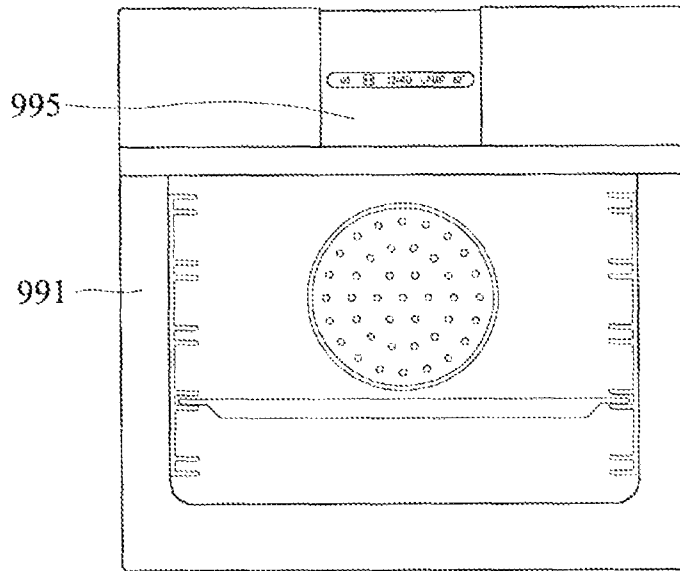


FIG. 55

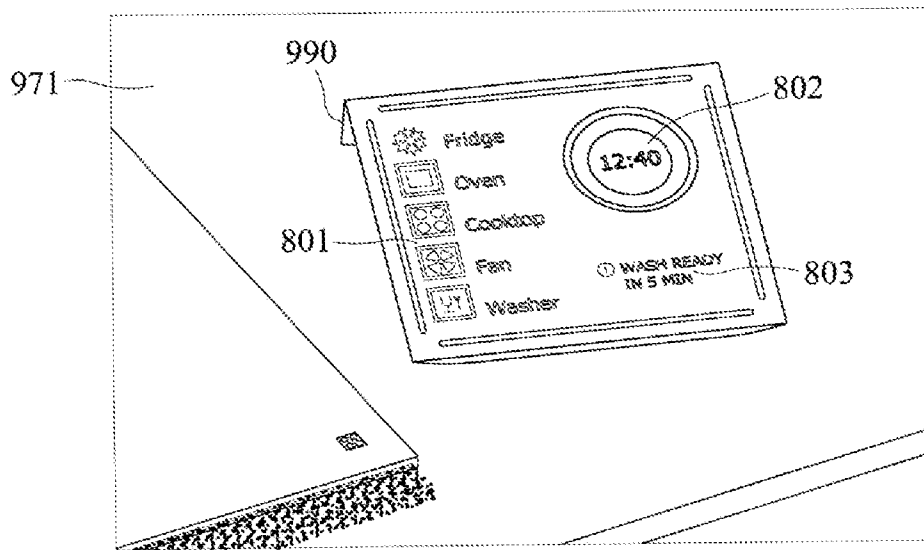


FIG. 56

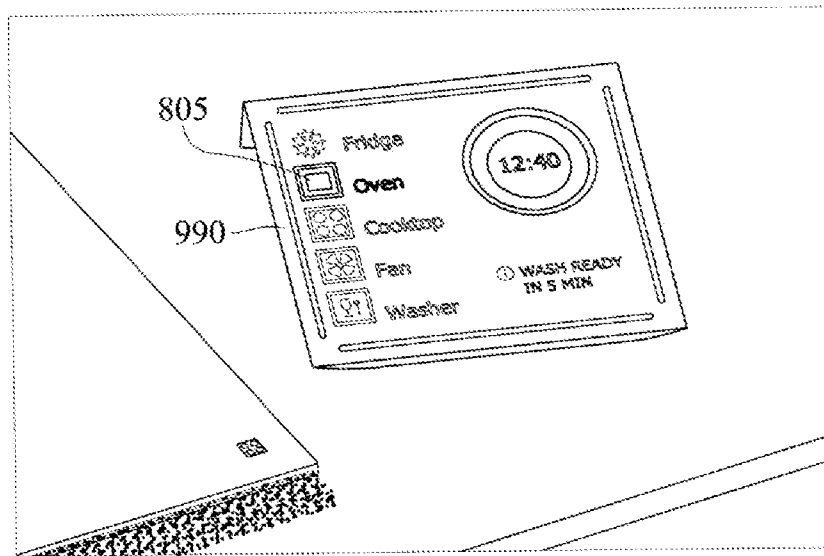


FIG. 57

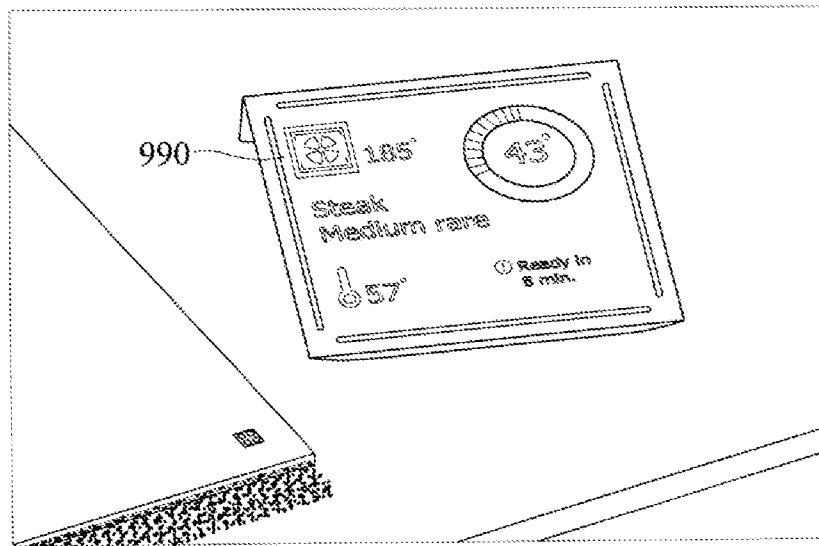


FIG. 58

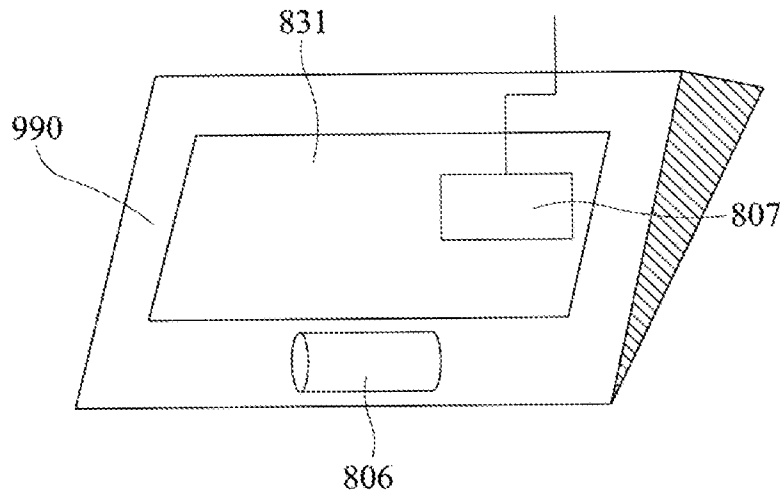


FIG. 59

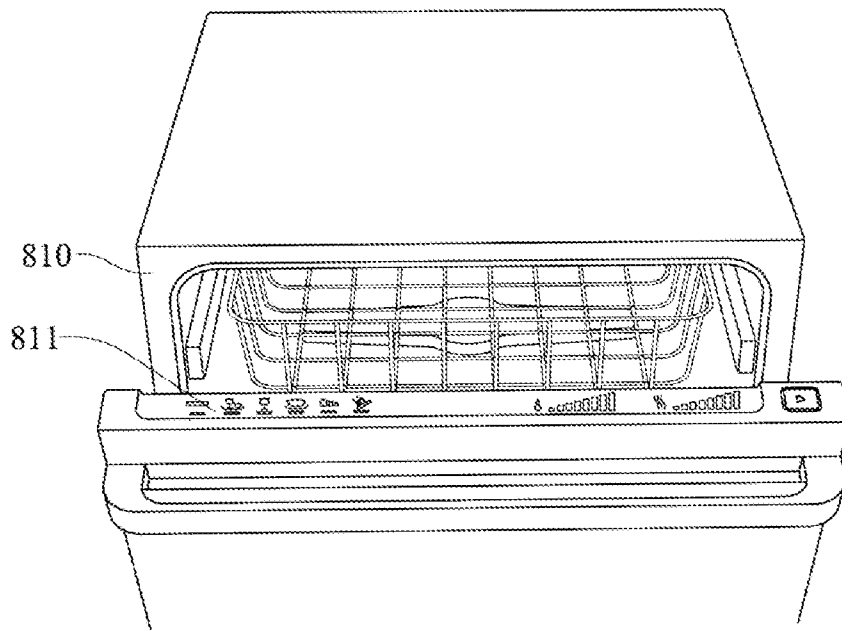


FIG. 60

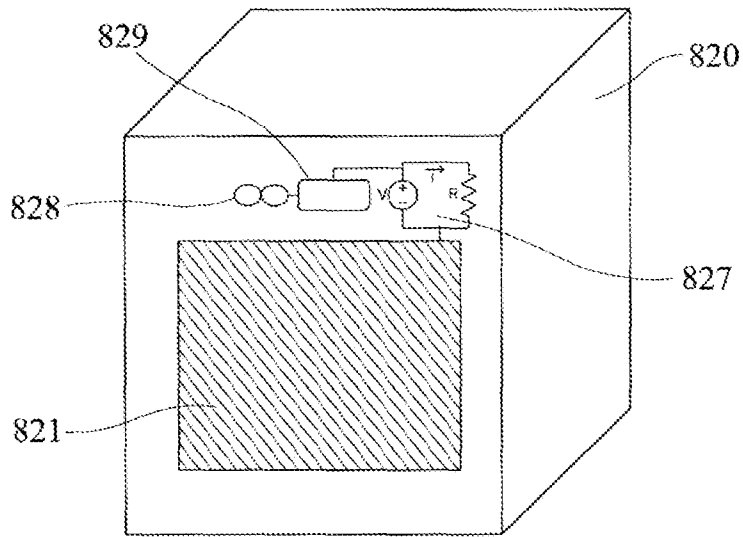


FIG. 61

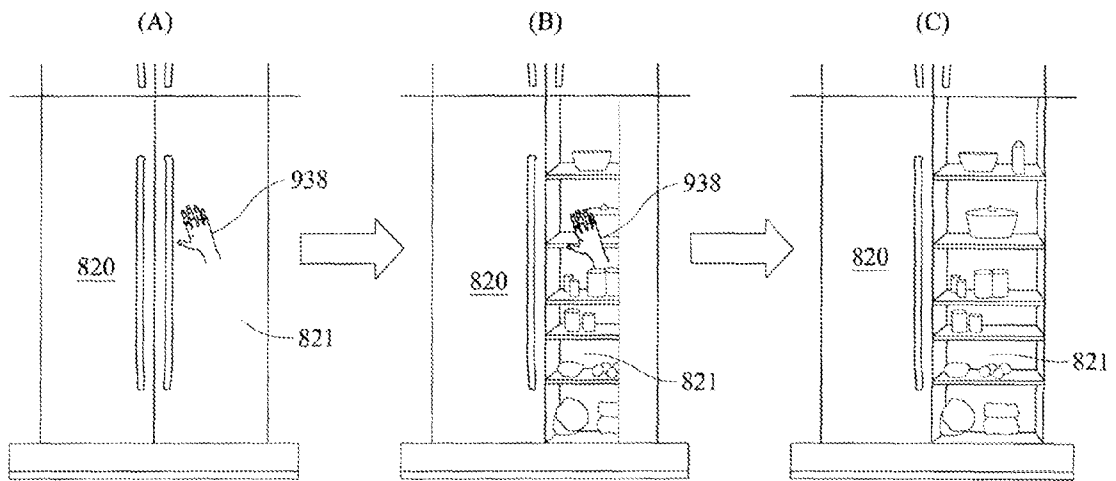


FIG. 62

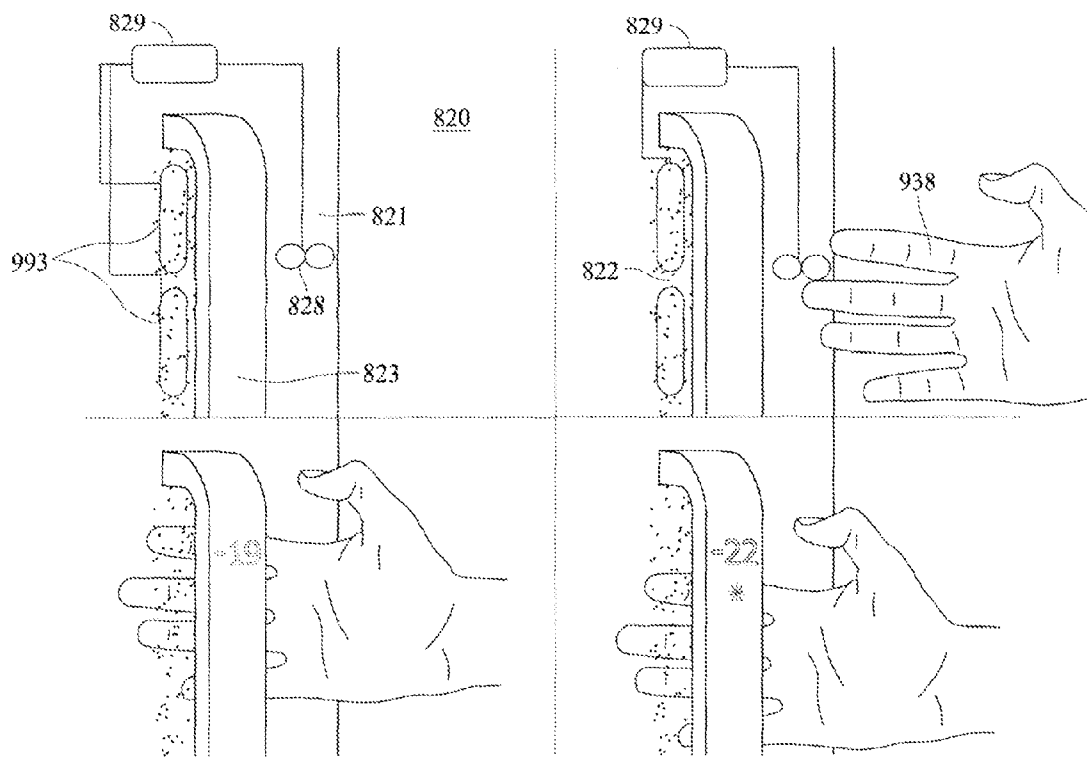


FIG. 63

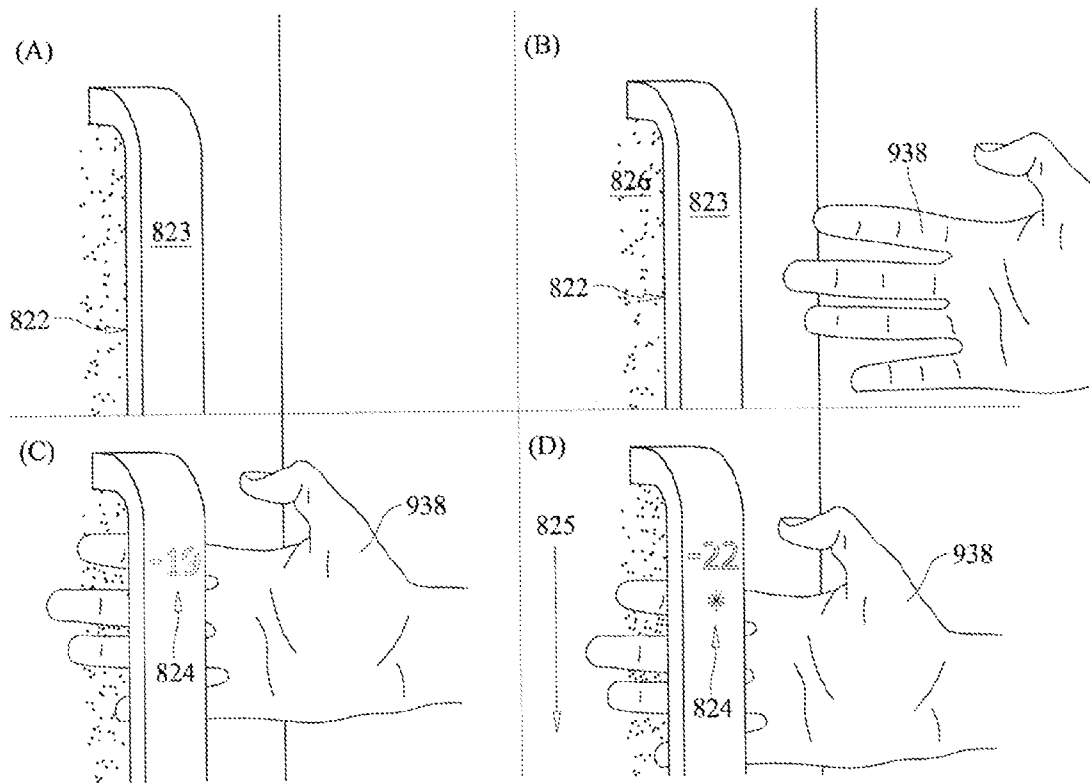


FIG. 64

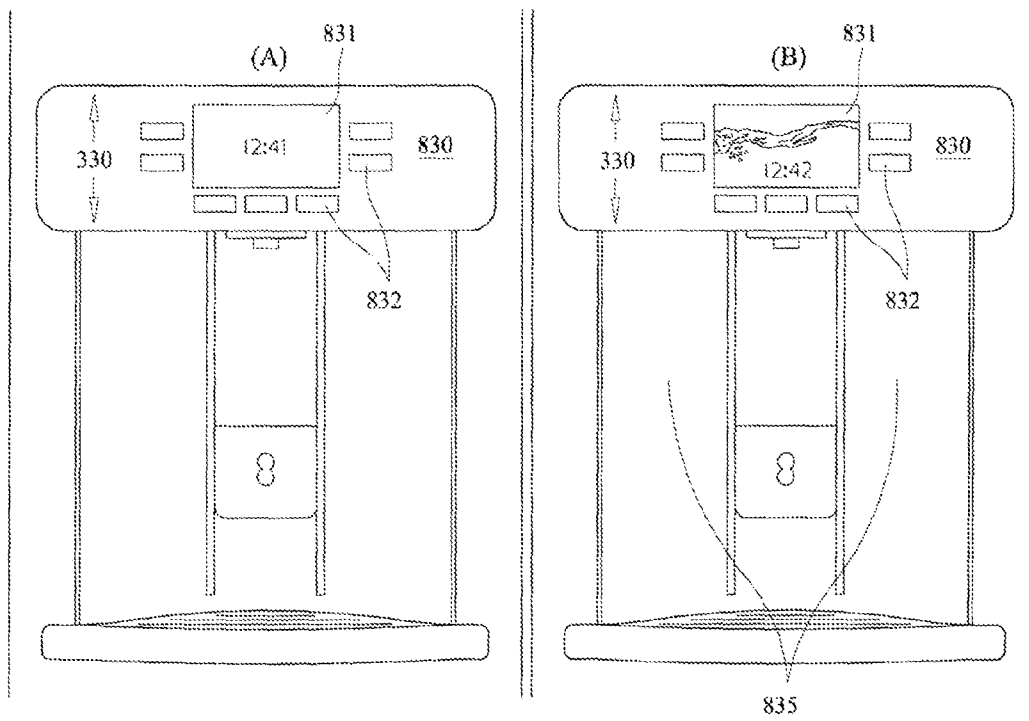


FIG. 65

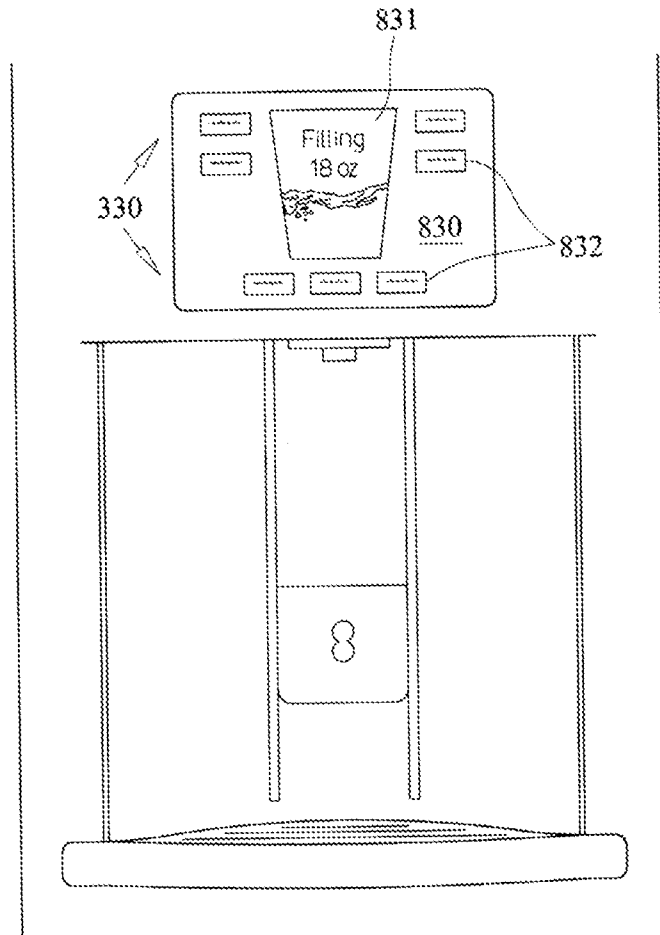


FIG. 66

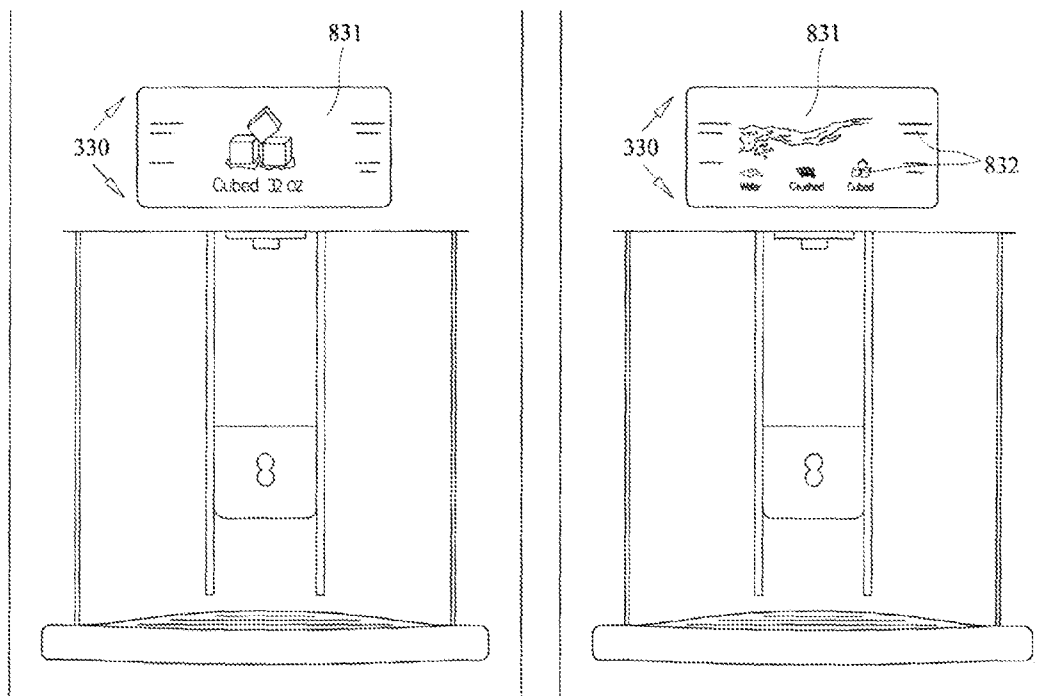


FIG. 67

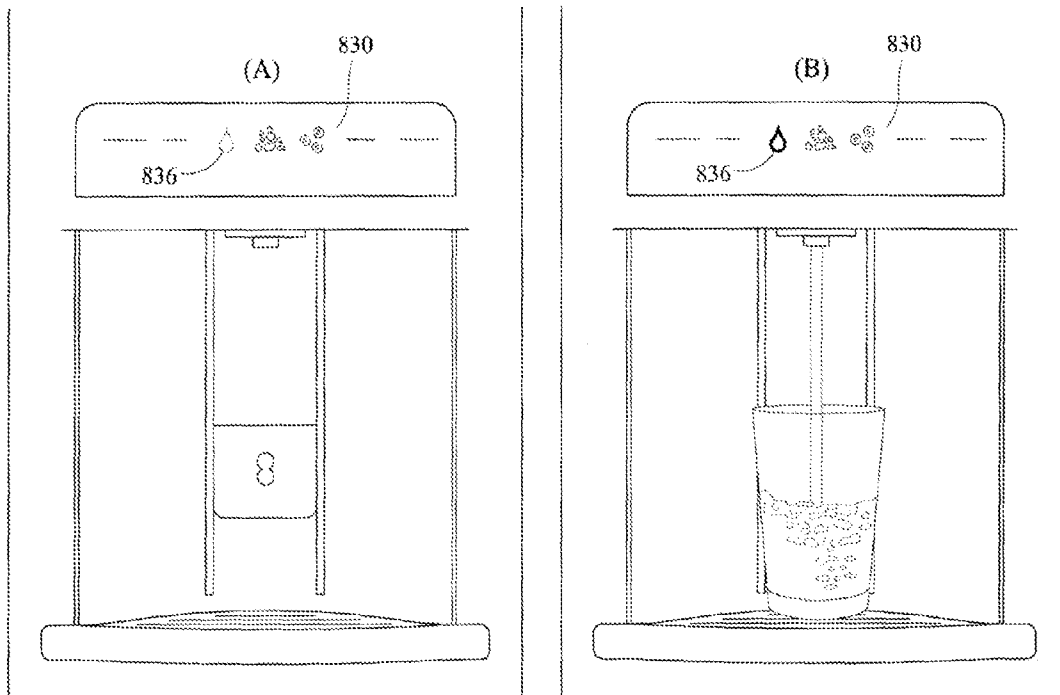


FIG. 68

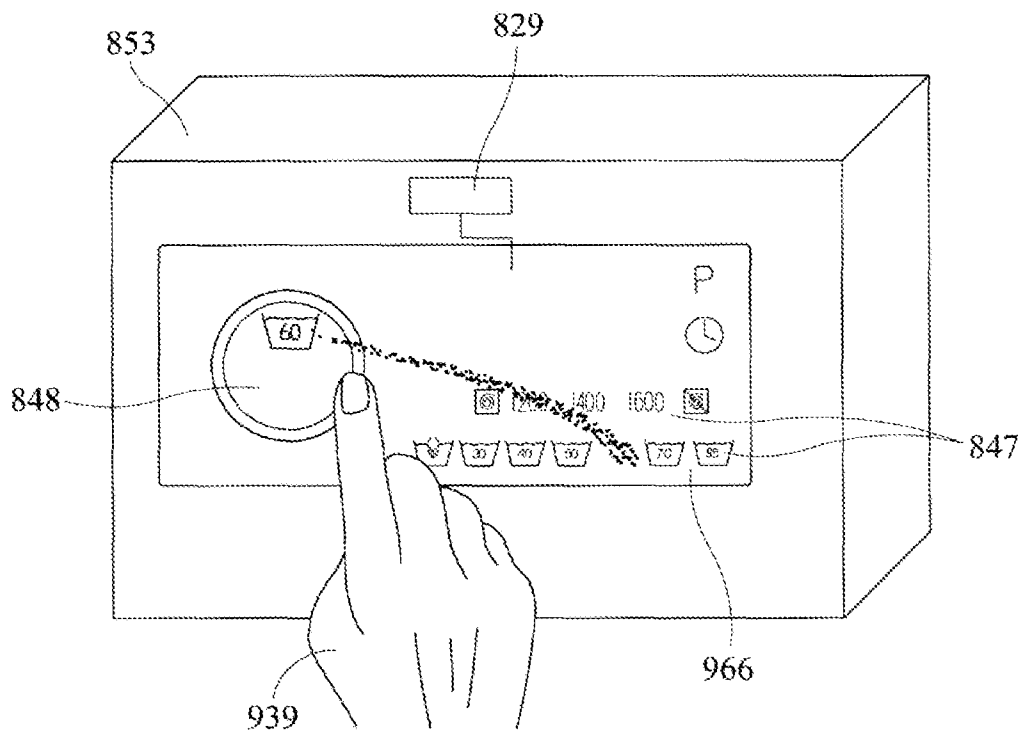


FIG. 69

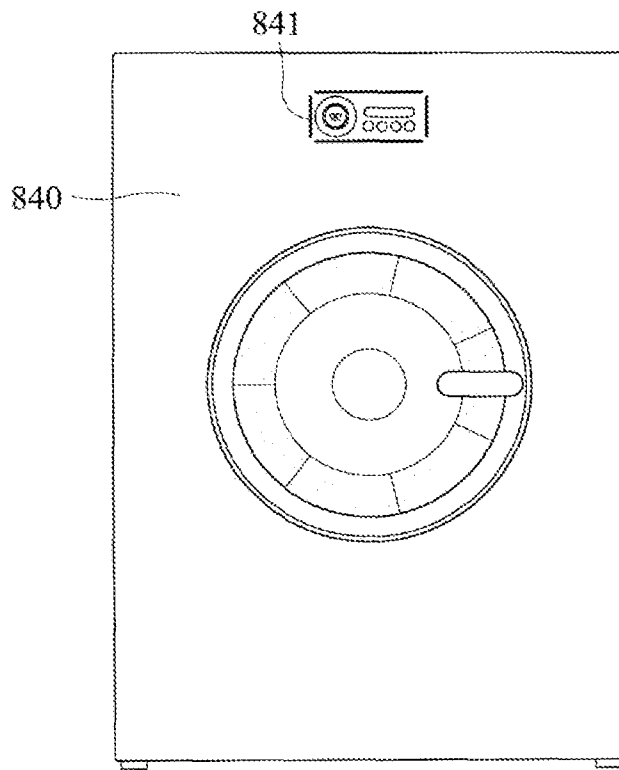


FIG. 70

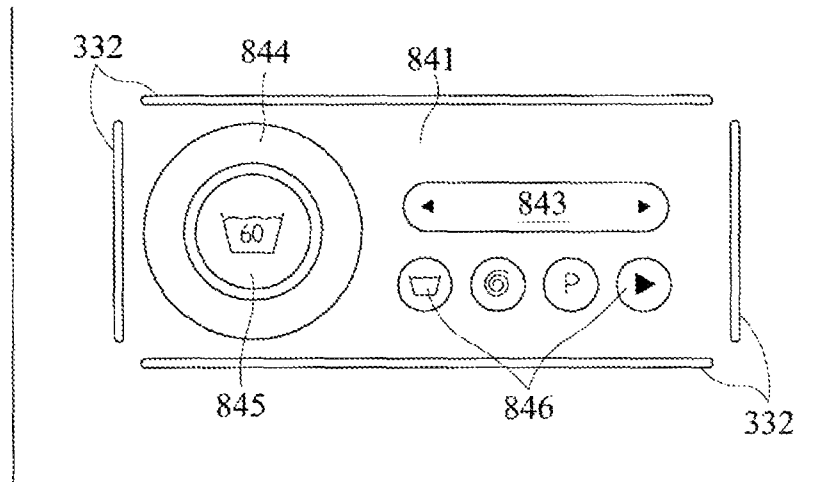


FIG. 71

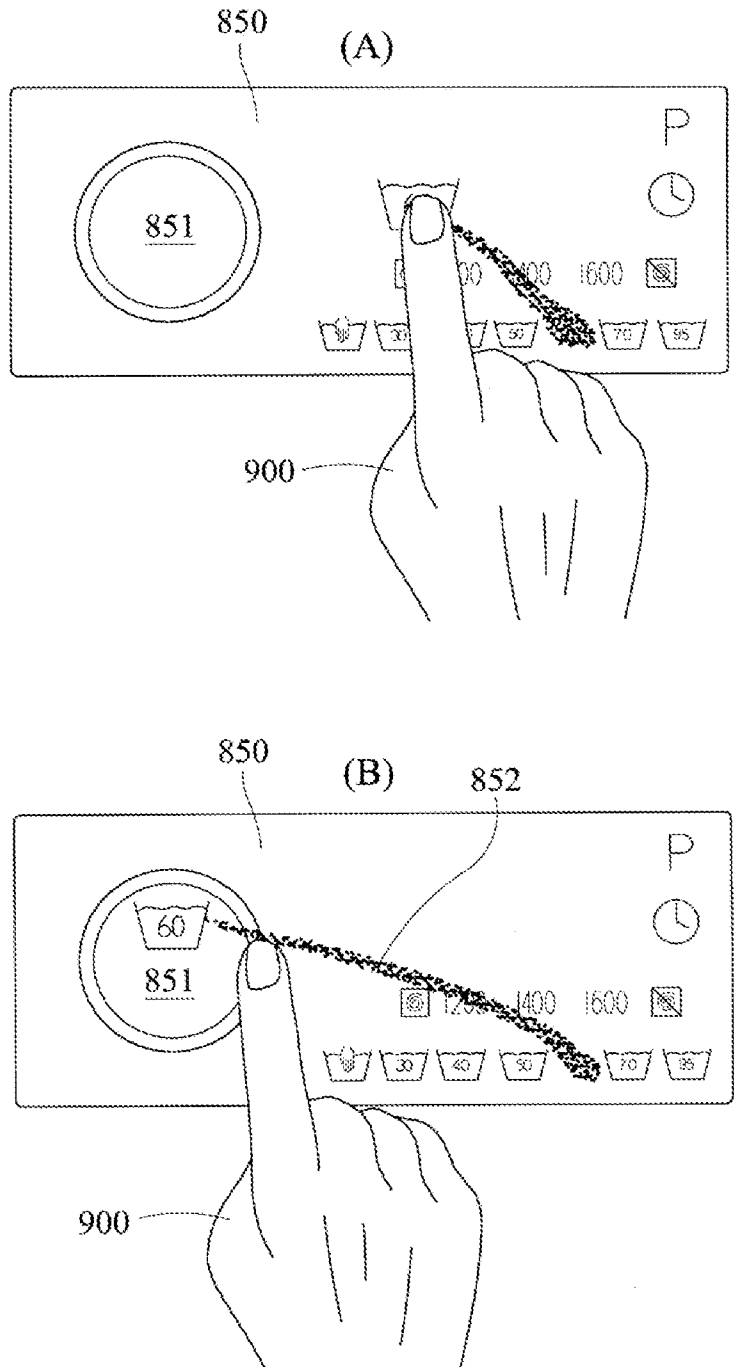


FIG. 72

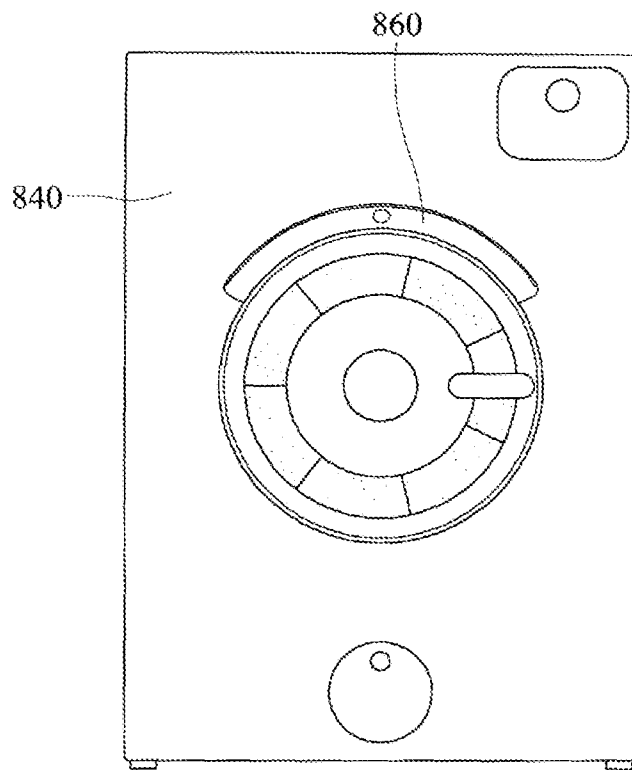


FIG. 73

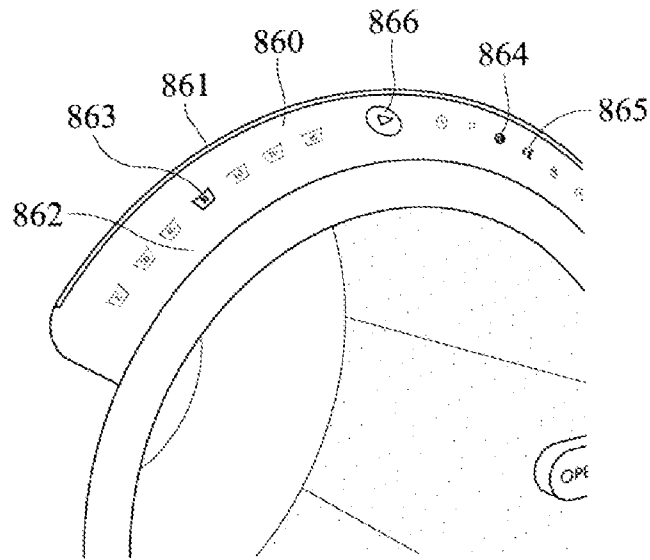


FIG. 74

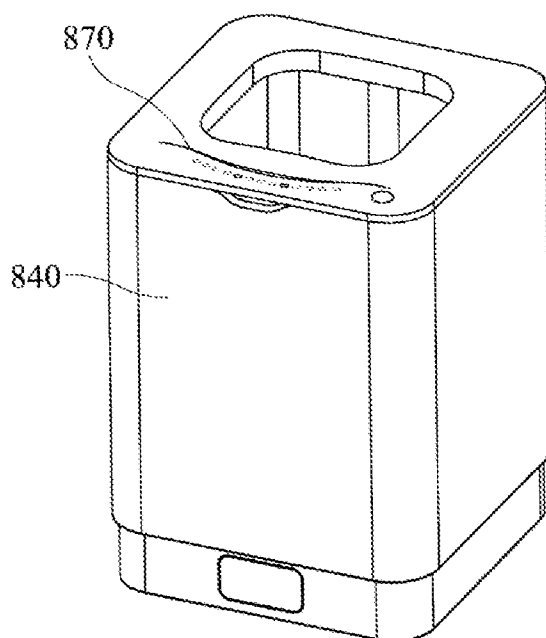


FIG. 75

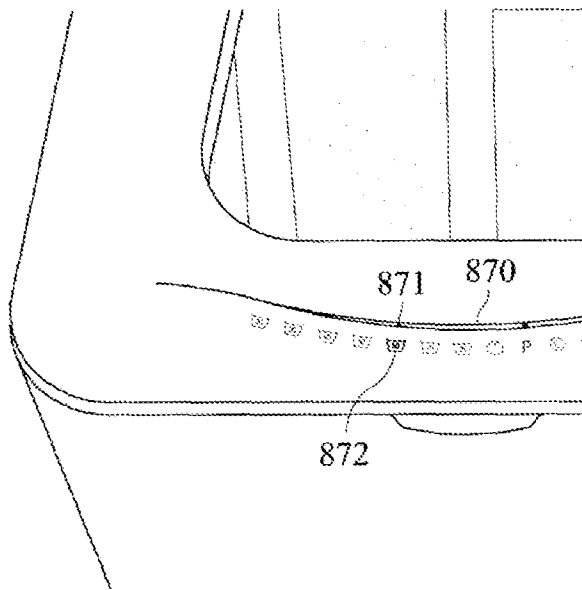


FIG. 76

**USER INTERFACE FOR WHITE GOODS AND
ASSOCIATED MULTI-CHANNEL
PROXIMITY SENSORS**

CROSS REFERENCES TO RELATED
APPLICATIONS

This application is a non-provisional of U.S. Provisional Application No. 61/806,414, entitled USER INTERFACE FOR WHITE GOODS AND ASSOCIATED MULTI-CHANNEL PROXIMITY SENSORS, and filed on Mar. 29, 2013 by inventors Thomas Eriksson, Stefan Holmgren, Carl Richard Henriksson and Stefan Östergårde, the contents of which are hereby incorporated herein in their entirety by reference.

This application is a continuation-in-part of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 14/140,635 entitled LIGHT-BASED PROXIMITY DETECTION SYSTEM AND USER INTERFACE, and filed on Dec. 26, 2013 by inventors Thomas Eriksson and Stefan Holmgren, the contents of which are hereby incorporated herein in their entirety by reference.

U.S. patent application Ser. No. 14/140,635 is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 13/732,456, now U.S. Pat. No. 8,643,628, entitled LIGHT-BASED PROXIMITY DETECTION SYSTEM AND USER INTERFACE, and filed on Jan. 2, 2013 by inventors Thomas Eriksson and Stefan Holmgren.

U.S. patent application Ser. No. 13/732,456 claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 61/713,546 entitled LIGHT-BASED PROXIMITY DETECTION SYSTEM AND USER INTERFACE, and filed on Oct. 14, 2012 by inventor Stefan Holmgren.

This application is a continuation-in-part of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 14/088,458 entitled LIGHT-BASED TOUCH CONTROLS ON A STEERING WHEEL AND DASHBOARD, and filed on Nov. 25, 2013 by inventors Gunnar Martin Fröjd, Simon Fellin, Thomas Eriksson, John Karlsson, Maria Hedin and Richard Berglind, the contents of which are hereby incorporated herein in their entirety by reference.

U.S. patent application Ser. No. 14/088,458 claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Application No. 61/730,139 entitled LIGHT-BASED TOUCH CONTROLS ON A STEERING WHEEL AND DASHBOARD, and filed on Nov. 27, 2012 by inventors Gunnar Martin Fröjd, Thomas Eriksson, John Karlsson, Maria Hedin and Richard Berglind.

U.S. patent application Ser. No. 14/088,458 is a continuation-in-part of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 13/854,074 entitled LIGHT-BASED FINGER GESTURE USER INTERFACE, and filed on Mar. 30, 2013 by inventors Thomas Eriksson, Per Leine, Jochen Laveno Mangelsdorff, Robert Pettersson, Anders Jansson and Magnus Goertz.

U.S. patent application Ser. No. 13/854,074 is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 13/424,592, now U.S. Pat. No. 8,416,217, entitled LIGHT-BASED FINGER GESTURE USER INTERFACE, and filed on Mar. 20, 2012, by inventors Thomas Eriksson, Per Leine, Jochen Laveno Mangelsdorff, Robert Pettersson, Anders Jansson and Magnus Goertz.

U.S. patent application Ser. No. 13/424,592 claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 61/564,868 entitled LIGHT-BASED FINGER GESTURE USER INTERFACE, and filed on Nov. 30, 2011 by inventors Thomas Eriksson, Per Leine, Jochen Laveno Mangelsdorff, Robert Pettersson and Anders Jansson.

U.S. patent application Ser. No. 13/424,592 is a continuation-in-part of U.S. application Ser. No. 12/760,568, entitled

OPTICAL TOUCH SCREEN SYSTEMS USING WIDE LIGHT BEAMS, and filed on Apr. 15, 2010 by inventors Magnus Goertz, Thomas Eriksson and Joseph Shain.

U.S. patent application Ser. No. 12/760,568 claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 61/169,779, entitled OPTICAL TOUCH SCREEN, and filed on Apr. 16, 2009 by inventors Magnus Goertz, Thomas Eriksson and Joseph Shain.

U.S. patent application Ser. No. 12/760,568 is a continuation-in-part of U.S. application Ser. No. 12/371,609, now U.S. Pat. No. 8,339,379, entitled LIGHT-BASED TOUCH SCREEN, and filed on Feb. 15, 2009 by inventors Magnus Goertz, Thomas Eriksson and Joseph Shain.

U.S. patent application Ser. No. 14/088,458 is a continuation-in-part of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 13/775,269 entitled REMOVABLE PROTECTIVE COVER WITH EMBEDDED PROXIMITY SENSORS, and filed on Feb. 25, 2013 by inventors Thomas Eriksson, Stefan Holmgren, John Karlsson, Remo Behdasht, Erik Rosengren and Lars Sparf.

U.S. patent application Ser. No. 13/775,269 claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 61/713,546 entitled LIGHT-BASED PROXIMITY DETECTION SYSTEM AND USER INTERFACE, and filed on Oct. 14, 2012 by inventor Stefan Holmgren.

U.S. patent application Ser. No. 14/088,458 is a continuation-in-part of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 13/424,543 entitled OPTICAL ELEMENTS WITH ALTERNATING REFLECTIVE LENS FACETS, and filed on Mar. 20, 2012 by inventors Stefan Holmgren, Lars Sparf, Magnus Goertz, Thomas Eriksson, Joseph Shain, Anders Jansson, Niklas Kvist, Robert Pettersson and John Karlsson.

U.S. patent application Ser. No. 13/424,543 claims priority benefit of U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 61/564,164, entitled OPTICAL ELEMENTS WITH ALTERNATING REFLECTIVE LENS FACETS, and filed on Nov. 28, 2011 by inventors Stefan Holmgren, Lars Sparf, Thomas Eriksson, Joseph Shain, Anders Jansson, Niklas Kvist, Robert Pettersson and John Karlsson.

U.S. patent application Ser. No. 13/424,543 is a continuation-in-part of PCT Application No. PCT/US11/29191 entitled LENS ARRANGEMENT FOR LIGHT-BASED TOUCH SCREEN, and filed on Mar. 21, 2011 by inventors Magnus Goertz, Thomas Eriksson, Joseph Shain, Anders Jansson, Niklas Kvist, Robert Pettersson, Lars Sparf and John Karlsson.

U.S. patent application Ser. No. 13/424,543 is a continuation-in-part of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 12/760,567 entitled OPTICAL TOUCH SCREEN SYSTEMS USING REFLECTED LIGHT and filed on Apr. 15, 2010.

PCT Application No. PCT/US11/29191 claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 61/379,012 entitled OPTICAL TOUCH SCREEN SYSTEMS USING REFLECTED LIGHT, and filed on Sep. 1, 2010 by inventors Magnus Goertz, Thomas Eriksson, Joseph Shain, Anders Jansson, Niklas Kvist and Robert Pettersson; the benefit of U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 61/380,600 entitled OPTICAL TOUCH SCREEN SYSTEMS USING REFLECTED LIGHT, and filed on Sep. 7, 2010 by inventors Magnus Goertz, Thomas Eriksson, Joseph Shain, Anders Jansson, Niklas Kvist and Robert Pettersson; and the benefit of U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 61/410,930 entitled OPTICAL TOUCH SCREEN SYSTEMS USING REFLECTED LIGHT, and filed on Nov. 7, 2010 by inventors Magnus Goertz, Thomas Eriksson, Joseph Shain, Anders Jansson, Niklas Kvist, Robert Pettersson and Lars Sparf.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The field of the present invention is light-based proximity sensors and graphical user interfaces for large electrical

goods used domestically, inter alia, refrigerators, ovens and washing machines. These goods are collectively known as “white goods” because formerly these items were typically finished with white enamel.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Conventional touch sensitive virtual buttons, i.e., buttons painted on a stationary flat surface and actuated by touch, are capacitance-based or resistance-based. Certain touch sensitive user input systems detect hovering objects as well. Examples include U.S. Publication No. 2008/0012835 A1 for HOVER AND TOUCH DETECTION FOR DIGITIZER and U.S. Publication No. 2006/0244733 A1 for TOUCH SENSITIVE DEVICE AND METHOD USING PRE-TOUCH INFORMATION.

Prior art hover detection systems based on reflected light determine a height of an object above a surface based on an amount of reflected light: the nearer the object—the more light is reflected onto the detector situated beneath the touch surface. Therefore, prior art systems are able to detect a hovering object over time and determine whether the object is moving closer or farther away based on relative amounts of detected light. I.e., diminishing light detection over time indicates an object moving away from the surface, and increasing light detection over time indicates an object moving toward the surface. In other words, the determined height is relative to other heights in a series of detections, but the actual height remains unknown. Indeed, different materials reflect different amounts of light, e.g., a white glove reflects more light than a black glove, and the reflective properties of a hovering object are not known by the system. Therefore, the system cannot determine the height at which the object is situated above the surface based on the amount of reflected light detected. In addition, because prior art proximity detectors require a series of detections of the object at different heights in order to rank the heights in relation to each other, a single proximity detection or a series of detections of a stationary hovering object will provide little information about the height of the object.

White goods typically have multiple controls that are set by a user. For example, a washing machine has controls for selecting the size of a wash load (e.g., large, medium, small), the fabric (e.g., cotton, synthetic, wool) and the temperature (e.g., hot, warm, cold). Some white goods have control panels having multiple touch-sensitive controls. In accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, white good control panels use light-based proximity sensors.

One problem with prior art proximity sensors is that they are prone to false touch detection, especially when the user wears shiny jewelry that reflects light onto a proximity sensor. For example, assume an array of controls placed together on a control panel, where a respective proximity sensor is situated underneath each control. When a user approaches or touches one control, a ring on the user’s finger may reflect either ambient light, or light from one of the proximity sensors in the array, onto an unintended neighboring proximity sensor. This will erroneously activate the neighboring control. It would be advantageous to have a robust proximity sensor that distinguishes between intended touches and inadvertent reflections.

SUMMARY

Aspects of the present invention relate to touch sensitive surfaces used to implement tap-activated button controls, switches and slider controls for household appliances such as washing machines, refrigerators, ovens and cooktops.

Aspects of the present invention also relate to graphical user interfaces (GUIs) designed for white good applications. Cooktops

There is thus provided in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention a cooktop including a surface on which to place pots containing food to be heated, a plurality of heating elements and their corresponding control circuits, situated underneath the surface, for heating the food in the pots, wherein each heating element is associated with a respective section of one or more edges of the surface, a plurality of sources of visible light arranged along the one or more edges of the surface, a proximity sensor directed at the airspace in front of the cooktop for detecting a person approaching the surface, the proximity sensor including an infrared light emitter for projecting light onto the approaching person, and an infrared light receiver adjacent to the light emitter for receiving a portion of the projected light reflected by the person, and a processor mounted beneath the surface connected to the proximity sensor and to the visible light sources, for illuminating the visible light sources when the approaching person is detected by the proximity sensor.

Additionally in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, the cooktop further includes a first plurality of optical sensors arranged along the one or more edges of the surface for detecting a location of a pot positioned above one of the heating elements, and not touching the surface, wherein the processor activates certain of the visible light sources to illuminate the section of the one or more edges associated with the heating element above which the pot is positioned, and deactivates the remaining visible light sources.

Further in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, the optical sensors along the edges of the cooktop identify one or more of the heating elements over which pots are placed on the surface, and the processor activates certain of the visible light sources to illuminate the sections of the one or more edges associated with those heating elements over which the pots are placed.

Yet further in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, the cooktop further includes a second plurality of optical sensors situated along the one or more edges and coupled with the control circuits, whereby each of the control circuits enables its heating element to be controlled via touch gestures detected by the second plurality of optical sensors at the section of the one or more edges associated with its heating element, when that section is illuminated by the visible light sources.

Moreover in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, each of the cooktop control circuits is operative to raise the temperature of its heating element, in response to detection by the second plurality of optical sensors of a glide gesture at the section of the one or more edges associated with its heating element, and the processor increases an illumination intensity of the visible light sources at that section, to indicate the rise in temperature.

Additionally in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, the cooktop proximity sensor is mounted in a ventilation hood situated above the cooktop, and each of the control circuits is operative to raise the temperature of its heating element in response to a hand wave gesture in the airspace opposite the ventilation hood detected by the proximity sensor.

Ovens and Stoves

There is further provided in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention an appliance including a hollow for holding items for use with the appliance, a door for opening and closing the hollow, a transparent panel having an exposed cylindrical surface situated above the door, a display

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behind the panel and visible through the panel, an array of proximity sensors arranged along an edge of the panel for detecting nearby objects and for detecting user gestures performed on the exposed cylindrical surface of the panel, the proximity sensors including infrared light emitters for projecting light onto an object near the panel, and infrared light receivers adjacent to the light emitters for receiving a portion of the projected light reflected by the object, and a processor connected to the proximity sensors and to the display, for presenting information on the display in response to the user gestures detected by the proximity sensors.

Yet further in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, the appliance includes an auxiliary proximity sensor mounted in the appliance and connected to the processor, for detecting a person approaching the appliance, and sources of visible light separate from the display mounted behind the panel and connected to the processor, wherein the processor is operative to illuminate the visible light sources in response to the auxiliary proximity sensor detecting the approaching person.

Moreover, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, the processor is operative to display user control icons on the panel in response to the proximity sensor array detecting an object near the panel.

Additionally, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, when the appliance is in use, the user control icons display current appliance settings.

Further in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, a configurable appliance setting is presented on the display in a scroll-bar graphic, and the processor is operative to adjust the appliance setting in response to the proximity sensor array detecting a glide gesture along the scroll-bar graphic.

Yet further in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, the configurable appliance setting is a temperature setting or a time setting.

Moreover in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, the appliance is a member of the group consisting of a dishwasher, a refrigerator, a washing machine and an oven.

Appliance Control Hub

There is additionally provided in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention a stationary appliance including a stationary appliance housing including a socket for a mobile appliance control hub, a display panel mounted on an inner wall of the socket that is covered by the control hub in the socket and exposed when the control hub is removed from the socket, and the mobile appliance control hub, including a mobile housing configured to be inserted into the socket and removed therefrom, circuitry mounted in the mobile housing for wireless communication with the stationary appliance and with at least one additional appliance, a touchscreen mounted in the mobile housing for presenting controls for operating the stationary appliance and for operating the at least one additional appliance, and a rechargeable battery mounted in said mobile housing that is coupled to an electrical outlet provided in the socket when the hub is inserted into the socket.

Further in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, the touchscreen presents icons identifying the stationary appliance and the at least one additional appliance, and presents current settings for the stationary appliance and the at least one additional appliance, in a single screen.

Refrigerator and Freezers

There is yet further provided in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention an appliance including a hollow for holding items for use with the appliance, a door for

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opening and closing the hollow, including a panel of electrically switchable glass having an opaque light transmission state that changes to a transparent state when voltage is applied, a proximity sensor mounted in the door for detecting hand wave gestures in the airspace opposite the door, and a processor connected to the panel and to the proximity sensor for applying a voltage to the glass to enter the transparent state in response to the proximity sensor detecting a hand wave gesture.

Moreover in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, the appliance is one of a refrigerator and a freezer.

There is additionally provided in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention an appliance including a storage hollow for storing items for use with the appliance, a door for opening and closing the storage hollow, a handle on the front of the door forming a cavity positioned and sized to permit several fingers to grip the handle, a first proximity sensor mounted in the door for detecting an approaching user, a light source mounted in the perimeter of the handle cavity and connected to the processor, for illuminating the handle cavity, and a processor connected to the proximity sensor for illuminating the light source in response to the proximity sensor detecting the approaching user.

Further in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, the appliance includes a second proximity sensor mounted in the perimeter of the handle cavity and connected to the processor, for detecting the grip, and at least one illuminable icon on an outward-facing surface of the door handle, connected to the processor, wherein the processor illuminates the icon in response to the second proximity sensor detecting the grip of the handle.

Yet further in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, the processor is operative to intensify illumination of the light source illumination in response to the second proximity sensor detecting the grip of the handle.

Moreover in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, the illuminated icon displays a temperature setting for the appliance.

Additionally in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, the processor adjusts the temperature setting in response to the second proximity sensor detecting a directional movement of the inserted fingers within the handle cavity.

Further in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, the processor is operative to release an inner vacuum in the storage hollow to facilitate opening the door, in response to the second proximity sensor detecting the grip of the handle.

Yet further in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, the appliance is a member of the group consisting of a dishwasher, a refrigerator, a freezer, a washing machine and an oven.

Washing Machines and Clothes Dryers

There is moreover provided in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention an appliance including a touch sensitive panel on which a plurality of icons representing different settings are displayed, and including a demarcated area separate from the icons, and a processor connected with the panel, operative to select an icon's setting in response to detecting a finger gliding from that icon into the demarcated area.

Light-Based Touch Sensors

There is additionally provided in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention a touch sensor including a housing, a light guide mounted in the housing including an aperture through which light exits and enters the light guide,

and an inner surface facing the interior of the housing, two light emitters mounted in the housing for emitting light beams into the light guide that exit the aperture at diverging angles, and a light receiver mounted in the housing for receiving reflected light beams entering the aperture at an angle of incidence different than the diverging angles. In some embodiments the diverging light beams exit the aperture at one and the same location on the aperture that the reflected light beams enter the aperture.

There is further provided in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention a touch sensor including a housing, a light guide mounted in the housing including an aperture through which light exits and enters the light guide, and an inner surface facing the interior of the housing, a light emitter mounted in the housing for emitting light beams into the light guide that exit the light guide at the aperture, and two light receivers mounted in the housing for receiving reflected light beams entering the light guide at the aperture at two different angles of incidence. In some embodiments the diverging light beams enter the aperture at one and the same location on the aperture that the emitted light beams exit the aperture.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The present invention will be more fully understood and appreciated from the following detailed description, taken in conjunction with the drawings in which:

FIG. 1 is a simplified illustration of a proximity sensor having one emitter-detector channel, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 2 is a simplified illustration of a first configuration of a proximity sensor having two emitter-detector channels, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 3 is a simplified illustration of a second configuration of a proximity sensor having two emitter-detector channels, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIGS. 4 and 5 are simplified diagrams of a touch sensitive slider window having multiple emitter-detector channels that detect a location of a finger along the length of the window, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 6 is a simplified illustration of a finger placed along the touch sensitive slider window of FIGS. 4 and 5, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIGS. 7-10 are simplified diagrams showing different views of a touch sensitive slider window having multiple emitter-detector channels that detect a location of a finger along the length of the window, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIGS. 11-13 are simplified diagrams of a touch sensitive slider window having two emitter-detector channels that detect a location of a finger along the height of the window, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIGS. 14-17 are simplified diagrams of a configuration of a touch sensitive window having four emitter-detector channels operative to detect a glide movement in both horizontal and vertical directions, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIGS. 18 and 19 are simplified illustrations of top-shooting diodes in a configuration of a touch sensitive window having four emitter-detector channels operative to detect a glide movement in both horizontal and vertical directions, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 20 is a simplified illustration of a single touch sensor on a control panel, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIGS. 21-23 are simplified cutaway profile views of a touch sensor in a control panel, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIGS. 24-26 are simplified cross-sectional views of a touch sensor in a control panel, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIGS. 27 and 28 are simplified illustrations of emitter and receiver light beams for a multi-channel touch sensor, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 29 is a simplified illustration of touch sensor components arranged on a substrate or printed circuit board (PCB), in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 30 is a simplified illustration of a multi-channel touch sensor, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 31 is a simplified illustration of a multi-channel touch sensor, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIGS. 32-34 are rotated views of a lens element used in multi-channel touch sensors and proximity sensors, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 35 is a simplified illustration of a cooktop with illumination, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIGS. 36-41 are simplified illustrations of a user interface for a cooktop, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIGS. 42 and 43 are simplified illustrations of a cooktop user interface placed in the cooktop exhaust hood, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 44 is a simplified illustration of an appliance, e.g., an oven, with an illuminated cylindrical control panel, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIGS. 45-52 are simplified illustrations of a user interface for an oven, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIGS. 53-58 are simplified illustrations of a centralized wireless hub for controlling multiple while good appliances in a home, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 59 is a simplified illustration of an appliance hub for controlling a plurality of kitchen appliances, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 60 is a simplified illustration of a control panel for a dishwasher, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 61 is a simplified illustration of an appliance, e.g., a refrigerator, having a hollow compartment for storing items and a door that switches from an opaque state to a transparent state for viewing the stored items through the door, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 62 is a simplified illustration of smart glass door for a refrigerator, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 63 is a simplified illustration of an appliance, e.g., a refrigerator, having a hollow compartment for storing items and an illuminable door handle, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 64 is a simplified illustration of a control panel and associated user interface in a door handle of a refrigerator, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIGS. 65-68 are simplified illustrations of user interfaces for water and ice dispensers mounted in a refrigerator door, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 69 is a simplified illustration of an appliance, e.g., a washing machine or dryer, having a hollow compartment for storing items such as clothes to be washed or dried and a touch

sensitive panel for providing a gesture-based user interface, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIGS. 70 and 71 are simplified illustrations of a washing machine control panel, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 72 is a simplified illustration of an alternative control panel and associated user interface for a washing machine, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention; and,

FIGS. 73-76 are simplified illustrations of additional control panels for frontloading and top loading washing machines, in accordance with embodiments of the present invention.

In this specification and in the figures, the following numbering scheme is used. Light emitting elements and emitted light beams are numbered in the range of 100-199. Light receiving elements such as PDs, and reflected light beams are numbered in the range of 200-299. Lens components, reflective and refractive elements are numbered in the range of 300-399. Fingers, styli, electronic devices and their housings are numbered in the range of 800-999.

The following tables catalog the numbered elements and list the figures in which each numbered element appears.

Emitters and Emitter Beams

Element	FIGS.	Description
110	1	emitter beam
111, 112	2, 30, 31	emitter beam
113, 114	3	emitter beam
121	4, 21, 23, 26, 27, 29-31	emitter
122	7-16, 18, 30	emitter
123	7, 8	emitter beam
124	12, 13	emitter beam
126	23	emitter beams
130	23, 27, 28	emitter beam

Receivers and Receiver Beams

Element	FIGS.	Description
210	1	receiver beam
211, 212	2, 30, 31	receiver beam
213	3	receiver beam
221	4-6, 21, 22, 23, 28, 29, 31	receiver
222	7-13, 21, 22, 28-31	receiver
222.1, 222.2	15, 16, 18	receiver
222.3, 222.4	16, 18	receiver
223	7, 8	receiver beam
224, 225	12, 13	receiver beam
230, 231	22, 27, 28	receiver beam

Lenses

Element	FIGS.	Description
301	4-10	lens
302	11, 12	lens
303	14	lens
303.1-303.3	15-17	lens section
320	17	diagonal face
321	21-23, 25, 26, 28-34	light guide
322-324	33, 34	reflective light guide wedge
330	65-67	light guide frame
332	71	embossed light guide
333	30, 31	aperture

Miscellaneous Elements

Element	FIGS.	Description
5	801	56 appliance icons
	802	56 clock
	803	56 notification
	805	57 oven icon
	806	59 battery
	807	59 communication circuitry
10	810	53, 60 dishwasher
	811	60 dishwasher control panel
	812	44 appliance door
	820	61-63 refrigerator
	821	61-63 refrigerator door
	822	63, 64 handle cavity
15	823	63, 64 refrigerator door handle
	824	64 temperature display
	825	64 arrow indicating movement
	826	64 glow
	827	61 voltage source
	828	35, 61, 63 proximity sensor
	829	35, 44, 61, 63, 69 processor
20	830	65, 66, 68 water dispenser control panel
	831	44, 59, 65-67 display
	832	65-67 touch sensitive buttons
	835	65 water dispenser shaft illumination
	836	68 water dispenser touch icon
	837	68 water glass
25	840	70, 73, 75 washing machine
	841	70, 71 washing machine control panel
	843	71 slider groove
	844	71 circular groove
	845	71 digital display
	846	71 sunken buttons
30	847	69 icons
	848	69 demarcated area
	850, 860, 870	72-76 washing machine control panel
	851	72 recessed area
	852	72 dragging an icon
	853	69 washing machine
35	861, 862	74 curved light guide
	863-866, 872	74, 76 washing machine controls
	871	76 array of proximity sensors
	900	1, 2, 3, 6, 41, 72 finger
	901	2, 3 finger
	910	1-3 device
40	921	4-10 upper casing part
	922	4-10 lower casing part
	923	4-10, 21-23, 25-31 PCB
	924	9, 10 isolating barrier
	931	11 upper casing part
	932	11 lower casing part
	938	43, 62-64 hand
45	939	69 finger
	941	14-17 upper casing part
	942	14-17 lower casing part
	943	16 PCB
	945	17 air gap
	950	19 light transmissive cover
50	951	19 cross shape
	966	20-27, 69 touch panel
	967	20, 24-27, 32 touch control
	969	35 heating element control
	970	36-41, 53 induction cooktop
	971	35-41, 56 kitchen counter
55	972, 975	37-41 radiance of light
	973	38-41 saucepan
	974	40, 41 pot
	976	42, 43 temperature control
	977	42, 43 range exhaust hood
	978	35 surface
	979	35 heating element
60	980	44, 45 oven
	981	45 UI panel
	982	45 clock
	983	45 icons
	984	45 slider control
	985	46-52 oven touch panel
65	986, 988	49, 52 tap touch controls
	987	51 slider touch control

-continued

Miscellaneous Elements		
Element	FIGS.	Description
989	50	oven settings
990	53, 54, 56-59	appliance control hub
991, 992	53-55	oven
993	35, 63	visible light source
994	44	cylindrical panel
995	55	hub socket
996	44	array of proximity sensors
997	35	section of an edge

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Aspects of the present invention relate to light-based touch controls such as virtual buttons, sliders and touch pads. Aspects of the present invention also relate to proximity sensors for hover gestures, tap gestures and sweep gestures. According to embodiments of the present invention, a light-based touch control and proximity sensor includes infra-red light-emitting diodes (LEDs) and photodiodes (PDs) situated inside a housing for an electronic device, beneath an infrared-transmissive section of the housing. The LEDs project light substantially incident to the housing surface, through the transmissive section. When an object touches or approaches the transmissive section, it reflects the light back into the housing where it is detected by the PDs. Each detection of reflected light represents a detection channel.

A proximity sensor having only one LED and one PD has a single detection channel that provides one signal. In principle this signal provides binary (yes/no) information as to whether or not an object is present above the sensor. In addition, this signal provides information as to a direction of movement of the object along the proximity axis, i.e., whether the object is moving toward the sensor or away from the sensor. Thus, if the signal increases over time, the object is moving toward the sensor, whereas if the signal decreases over time, the object is moving away from the sensor.

Reference is made to FIG. 1, which is a simplified illustration of a proximity sensor having one emitter-detector channel, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. FIG. 1 illustrates an embodiment whereby one LED and one PD are situated together beneath a control surface embedded in the housing. In this embodiment one detection channel is provided.

FIG. 1 shows a portable electronic device 910 in profile view. An emitter beam 110 is projected above the device and is reflected 210 back into the device by a finger 900 placed above the device. Thus, the light channel 110-210 is provided to detect a proximal finger 900.

As explained hereinabove, one example of the limitations of a single channel is that it is impossible to determine a distance of the object from the sensor based on the strength of the detection signal since different objects can be used that have different reflective properties. For example, a black glove near the sensor and a white glove further away from the sensor provide substantially similar levels of detection. More channels generate more information. However, an extra channel does not necessitate adding an additional LED and an additional PD. Rather, several PDs can share the light from one LED to provide multiple detection channels. Similarly, one PD can provide multiple detection channels when it is able to receive reflected light from several LEDs.

Reference is made to FIG. 2, which is a simplified illustration of a first configuration of a proximity sensor having two

emitter-detector channels, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. FIG. 2 illustrates two LEDs and one PD situated in a row beneath a control surface embedded in the housing. This row of two LEDs and one PD has one of the LEDs placed between the other LED and the PD. In this embodiment two detection channels are provided. With two channels positional information along one dimension can be generated by interpolation.

FIG. 2 shows a portable electronic device 910 in profile view and two emitter-detector light channels. Thus, FIG. 2(A) demonstrates a first light channel 112-212 that detects a near finger 901; and FIG. 2(B) demonstrates a second light channel 111-211 that detects a more distal finger 900. The emitter beams 111 and 112 issue forth from the upper surface of device 910 at an angle in order that their respective reflected beams arrive at the location of the detector. The proximity detector of FIG. 2 provides an indication of the height of the object based on which channel is detected. An interpolation of signals from the two channels will indicate a position of the object within the range of heights detected by both channels.

By contrast, prior art proximity detectors determine proximity based on a relative intensity of a reflected signal and require a series of detections in order to rank the different signals, as explained hereinabove. Thus, the system of FIG. 2 addresses two shortcomings of the prior art: (1) it provides an indication of the absolute height of the object above the screen, as opposed to a relative height; and, (2) it provides this indication based on detections of a stationary object and does not require a series of detections over time.

Two similar detection channels are provided by two detectors and one emitter, for example by replacing the emitters of the FIG. 2 system with detectors, and replacing the detector of the FIG. 2 system with an emitter. In this case, beams 211 and 212 are one and the same emitter beam issued by the one emitter, and the reflected beam 111 or 112 arrives at one of the two detectors depending on the height of the finger 900 or 901 above the device 910.

Reference is made to FIG. 3, which is a simplified illustration of a second configuration of a proximity sensor having two emitter-detector channels, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. FIG. 3 shows a portable device 910 with two detection channels, but in this case the detector is situated between the two emitters and the two channels provide lateral position information. A first emitter beam 113 is projected above the device to the right of the detector, and a second emitter beam 114 is projected above the device to the left of the detector. When a finger hovers above the space between the first emitter and the detector, as illustrated by finger 900 in FIG. 3, it creates a first detection channel 113-213. When a finger hovers above the space between the second emitter and the detector, as illustrated by finger 901 in FIG. 3, it creates a second detection channel 114-213. An interpolation of signals from the two channels indicates a position of the object between the outermost components. As explained hereinabove, the emitters and detectors may be swapped and still provide two similar detection channels.

Aspects of the present invention relate to providing a thin window spanning the height or thickness of a device, such as a mobile phone. The user interacts with the phone by performing finger gestures against this window, and the proximity sensor detects the position or gesture of the finger. One application is to replace physical buttons. In the most basic case light from an LED is sent out of the device and reflected by the finger. The reflected light is detected by two PDs situated on either side of the LED and the position of the finger is interpolated from the signals. For instance such an arrangement may replace the volume buttons on a mobile

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phone. In principle such an arrangement may have limited proximity functionality. This conceptual model can be extended with additional components.

Reference is made to FIGS. 4 and 5, which are simplified diagrams of a touch sensitive slider window having multiple emitter-detector channels that detect a location of a finger along the length of the window, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. Reference is also made to FIG. 6, which is a simplified illustration of a finger placed along the touch sensitive slider window of FIGS. 4 and 5, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. FIGS. 4 and 5 show front and back views of a touch sensitive slider window featuring multiple emitter-detector channels that detect a location of a finger along the length of the window. FIGS. 4 and 5 show a sidewall of a device housing formed by an upper casing part 921 and a lower casing part 922. A lens 301 is wedged between casing parts 921 and 922. FIGS. 4 and 5, and in particular FIG. 4, show a PCB 923 placed inside the device housing. Light emitters 121 and light detectors 221 are mounted in an alternating row on PCB 923. Every emitter-detector pair of neighboring elements provides a detection channel for detecting an object touching the outer side edge of the housing along the length of lens 301, as illustrated by finger 900 in FIG. 6.

When the emitters and detectors are placed together inside the housing, light scatters inside the housing when an emitter is activated and a portion of the scattered light arrives at the detectors without being reflected by an object outside lens 301. In order to minimize the amount of scattered light that reaches the detectors, the emitters and detectors are mounted on PCB 923 facing opposite directions.

Reference is made to FIGS. 7-10, which are simplified diagrams showing different views of a touch sensitive slider window having multiple emitter-detector channels that detect a location of a finger along the length of the window, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. FIGS. 7-10 show inward-facing emitters 122 and outward-facing detectors 222. In addition, an isolating barrier 924 is placed between the emitters and the detectors to further shield the detectors from scattered light. FIG. 9 is an exploded view of this configuration. FIG. 10 is a cross-section view of the same configuration.

Lens 301 in FIGS. 7-10 is more complex than lens 301 in FIGS. 4 and 5. In FIGS. 7-10, in order to direct light from the inward-facing emitters out through lens 301 and back onto the outward-facing detectors, lens 301 extends over and around the emitters 122 but not the detectors 222. Two light paths are shown in FIGS. 7 and 8. Emitter beam 123 is reflected twice inside lens 301 before it travels over emitter 122 and out of the device. Incoming beam 223 enters lens 301 and is reflected twice inside the lens before arriving at detector 222.

Reference is made to FIGS. 11-13, which are simplified diagrams of a touch sensitive slider window having two emitter-detector channels that detect a location of a finger along the height of the window, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. FIGS. 11-13 illustrate another configuration of a two-channel control. In this case, the control detects objects along the height of the device rather than along the length of the device as in FIGS. 3-10. FIGS. 11-13 show upper and lower casing parts 931 and 932. One emitter 122 and two receivers 222 are connected to lower casing part 932. The detection channels are made possible by a reflecting lens 302 inserted between casing parts 931 and 932. The light path from emitter 122 through lens 302 is illustrated in FIG. 12 as outgoing emitter beam 124. The light paths of the two incoming beams 224 and 225 that are directed at the two detectors

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222 are also illustrated in FIG. 12. FIG. 13 is a cross-section view of lens 302 and the light beam paths 124, 224 and 225 of FIG. 12.

With three channels, position information in two dimensions is obtained. One application is an optical joystick. A second application is a two-dimensional navigation pad. A third application is a mouse touchpad. For example, arranging three emitters at three corners of an equilateral triangle and placing a detector at the triangle's center of gravity provides three detection signals. By interpolating the signals, a two-dimensional location of the object is obtained. As a second example, begin with the two channels of FIG. 2 to provide height information, and add one channel to provide lateral information as in FIG. 3.

Reference is made to FIGS. 14-17, which are simplified diagrams of a configuration of a touch sensitive window having four emitter-detector channels operative to detect a glide movement in both horizontal and vertical directions, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. FIGS. 14-17 illustrate a cross-bar control for detecting up-down and right-left movements of a finger or other object. The illustrated control has four detection channels created by one central emitter 122 surrounded by four detectors 222.1-222.4. An alternative configuration has one central detector surrounded by four emitters and is similar in operation to the system of FIGS. 14-17. FIG. 14 shows a lens 303 situated between upper and lower casing parts 941 and 942 and the five components (emitters and receivers) mounted inside the device on a PCB (943 in FIG. 16) connected to the lower casing part. An outer cross-shaped surface of lens 303 is flush with the outer casing.

FIG. 15 is a cross-sectional view of the system shown in FIG. 14. Lens 303 is shown divided into sections to illustrate how each section is used by a different component. Detector 222.1 receives light beams that enter the lens through section 303.1; emitter 122 uses section 303.2 to reflect light out of the lens; detector 222.2 receives light beams that enter the lens through section 303.3.

FIG. 16 is an exploded view of the system shown in FIG. 15. FIG. 16 shows detectors 222.1-222.4 and emitter 122; PCB 943; upper and lower casing parts 941 and 942; and lens 303 divided into upper section 303.1, middle section 303.2 and lower section 303.3.

FIG. 17 is a slightly rotated side view of the system of FIG. 16. FIG. 17 illustrates how middle section 303.2 of the lens is used by detectors 222.2 and 222.4 in addition to emitter 122. An air gap 945 behind lens 303 is also shown. The purpose of air gap 945 is to make the diagonal face 320 of lens 303 internally reflective.

Reference is made to FIGS. 18 and 19, which are simplified illustrations of top-shooting diodes in a configuration of a touch sensitive window having four emitter-detector channels operative to detect a glide movement in both horizontal and vertical directions, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. FIGS. 18 and 19 illustrate a mouse pad or other two-dimensional control. This configuration places the emitters and detectors directly beneath the control surface. FIG. 18 shows four receivers 222.1-222.4 surrounding an emitter 122 to provide four channels, substantially similar to those described hereinabove with reference to FIGS. 14-17. In FIG. 19 an infrared light transmissive cover 950 with a cross shape 951 etched thereon is placed above the emitters and receivers. The cross shape indicates navigational paths to the user.

A system with four channels also provides information in three dimensions regarding a proximal object. For example, begin with the two channels of FIG. 2 to provide height

information. Add one channel to provide lateral information as in FIG. 3. Add one more channel to provide information in a second lateral dimension, also as in FIG. 3.

FIGS. 20-29 show a touch sensitive control having two detection channels. This control is typically used for tap-activation. The two detection channels detect reflected light from different directions, with a small area of overlap between the channels. When a user touches the control both channels are activated. This two-channel proximity sensor is able to distinguish between light reflected by a touch and light reflected from a distance, because light reflected from a distance is only detected by one of the two channels.

Reference is made to FIG. 20, which is a simplified illustration of a single touch sensor on a control panel, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. FIG. 20 shows a top view of a portion of touch panel 966 having touch control 967 at its center.

Reference is made to FIGS. 21-23, which are simplified cutaway profile views of a touch sensor in a control panel, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. FIG. 21 shows a first side view of touch panel 966 and PCB 923. One light emitter 121, two light detectors 221 and 222, and light guide element 321, are mounted on PCB 923 beneath touch panel 966. An upper surface of light guide 321 is exposed at control 967, not shown in FIG. 21. The current disclosure uses an embodiment of one light emitter and two light detectors. However other configurations, such as (a) one light detector and two light emitters, or (b) more than two detection channels, are also within the scope of the present invention.

FIG. 22 shows a second side view of touch panel 966 and PCB 923. The viewpoints in FIGS. 21 and 22 are from opposite edges of touch panel 966. From the viewpoint of FIG. 22 two light detectors 221 and 222 and light guide element 321, are visible; light emitter 121 of FIG. 21 is blocked from view in FIG. 22 by light guide element 321. From the viewpoint of FIG. 22 two diagonal reflective facets are visible on the underside of light guide 321. These direct divergent incoming beams 230 and 231 onto light detectors 221 and 222, respectively. Thus, when light is reflected onto touch control 967 from a distance, e.g., by a shiny object such as a user's jewelry, only one of the detectors will detect the light. At the very least, there will be a significant difference in the amount of light detected at the two detectors. This difference indicates a false detection. In other words, the system detects a touch only when both detectors 221 and 222 detect similar amounts of reflected light. This occurs when the user's finger touches, or is very close to, touch control 967 and reflects light in many directions inside the light guide.

FIG. 23 shows a third side view of touch panel 966 and PCB 923. From the viewpoint of FIG. 23 light emitter 121, one light detector 221 and light guide element 321 are visible; the second light detector 222 of FIGS. 21 and 22 is blocked from view in FIG. 23 by light guide element 321. From the viewpoint of FIG. 23 a diagonal reflective facet is visible on the underside of light guide 321 that directs light beam 130 from emitter 121 out above touch control 967. Light beam 130 is projected at an angle that is divergent from the incoming angles of reflected beams 230 and 231. In FIG. 23, light beam 130 is projected at an angle above touch control 967, not at 90° to the touch panel 966. This further reduces the likelihood that a distant reflective object will reflect beam 130 back onto touch control 967 in a manner that the reflected beam will be equally detected at both detectors 230 and 231. Thus, touch detection is characterized by equal detections of

reflected emitter beam 130 at both detectors 221 and 222, and occurs only when the user's finger touches, or is very close to, touch control 967.

Reference is made to FIGS. 24-26, which are simplified cross-sectional views of a touch sensor in a control panel, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. FIG. 24 shows the touch panel of FIG. 20 with cross sections A-A and B-B. Cross section A-A is shown in FIG. 25, and cross section B-B is shown in FIG. 26. Both FIGS. 25 and 26 illustrate how an upper surface of light guide 321 is exposed at touch control 967.

Reference is made to FIGS. 27 and 28, which are simplified illustrations of emitter and receiver light beams for a multi-channel touch sensor, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. The two detection channels of this proximity sensor are shown in FIGS. 27 and 28 by emitter beam 130 and two detector channels 230 and 231. The term "detector channel" refers to a detectable reflected beam. FIG. 27 shows emitter beam 130 and two detector channels 230 and 231 above touch control 967. In FIG. 28, touch panel 966 has been removed exposing light guide 321 emitter 121 and detectors 221 and 222 on PCB 923.

Reference is made to FIG. 29, which is a simplified illustration of touch sensor components arranged on a substrate or printed circuit board (PCB), in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. FIG. 29 shows light guide 321 emitter 121 and detectors 221 and 222 on PCB 923. Emitter beam 130 and detector channels 230 and 231 diverge to a lesser degree in FIGS. 27 and 28 than those illustrated in FIGS. 22 and 23.

Reference is made to FIG. 30, which is a simplified illustration of a multi-channel touch sensor, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. Shown in FIG. 30 is light guide 321 surrounded on three sides by emitters 121 and 122, and receiver 222. An aperture 333 at the center of light guide 321 is the exposed portion of the touch sensor when the sensor is mounted in a device. Light guide 321 is configured so that light from each of the emitters exits through aperture 333 at a different angle. Thus, light beam 111 from emitter 121 exits aperture 333 at a first angle, and light beam 112 from emitter 122 exits aperture 333 at a second angle, divergent from the first angle. Light guide 321 is also configured so that light directed to receiver 222 enters aperture 333 at a third angle, different than the angles that beams 111 and 112 exit aperture 333. Thus, light beam 211 enters aperture 333 at a third angle. All of the components are mounted on PCB 923. In some embodiments, none of the angles are 90° with respect to the aperture.

Reference is made to FIG. 31, which is a simplified illustration of a multi-channel touch sensor, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. The touch sensor of FIG. 31 is similar to that of FIG. 30, except that in FIG. 30 the two detection channels are formed by one emitter and two receivers. Shown in FIG. 31 is light guide 321 surrounded on three sides by receivers 221 and 222, and emitter 121. In this case the three divergent light beams entering and exiting aperture 333 are emitter beam 111 and receiver beams 211 and 212.

Reference is made to FIGS. 32-34, which are rotated views of a lens element used in multi-channel touch sensors and proximity sensors, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. FIGS. 32-34 are three-dimensional views of light guide element 321 alone. FIG. 32 shows a view of light guide element 321 from the top, showing the surface exposed through control 967. FIG. 33 shows a view of light guide element 321 from below. In this view, three reflective wedges 322, 323 and 324 are shown. Light enters each wedge

and is reflected by the wedge's diagonal facet as illustrated by beams **130**, **230** and **231** in FIGS. **22**, **23**, **27** and **28**. When mounted on PCB **923**, wedge **324** is situated opposite light emitter **121** to reflect and project emitter beam **130** in FIGS. **23**, **27** and **28**; and wedges **322** and **323** are situated opposite detectors **221** and **222**, respectively, to create detection channels **230** and **231** in FIGS. **21**, **27** and **28**. In FIG. **34**, light guide element **321** has been turned upside down, showing reflective wedges **322-324** prominently.

White Goods User Interfaces (UIs)

Aspects of the present invention relate to user interfaces (UI) for household appliances. This section describes user interfaces for stoves, refrigerators, ovens and washing machines.

I. Cooktop UI

Reference is made to FIG. **35**, which is a simplified illustration of a cooktop with illumination, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. Shown in FIG. **35** is a surface **978** on which to place pots containing food to be heated. The cooktop is mounted in counter **971**. A plurality of heating elements **979** and their corresponding control circuits **969** are situated underneath surface **978**. The heating elements are used to heat the food in the pots. FIG. **35** shows that each heating element **979** is associated with two respective sections **997** of one or more edges of surface **978**. Light sources **993** are situated underneath surface **978** along its edges. Proximity sensor **828** faces the airspace in front of the cooktop. When a person approaching the cooktop is detected by proximity sensor **828**, an indication of this detection is transmitted to processor **829** which, in response thereto, activates light sources **993** creating a visible glow along the edges of surface **978**.

Reference is made to FIGS. **36-41**, which are simplified illustrations of a user interface for a cooktop, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. FIG. **36** shows an induction cooktop **970** having one or more electromagnets sealed beneath a heat-resisting glass-ceramic sheet. Cooktop **970** is embedded in kitchen counter **971**. When the cooktop is not in use it is muted, as all indications and markings disappear. As explained in detail hereinbelow, this is a subtle cooktop UI that senses and reacts to user needs, contextually.

The cooktop ceramic sheet has arrays of lenses along each of its edges. These lenses are coupled to visible-light emitting diodes to create a steady radiance of light or glow along the cooktop edges that signals the state of the cooktop to the user. In addition, the lenses along the forward-facing edge of the cooktop are also coupled to near-infrared emitters and detectors to provide proximity detection of an approaching user and of user gestures. Thus when a user approaches the cooktop, the cooktop emits a visible glow along its edges indicating that it has "woken up" and is waiting for user input. Such a visible glow **972** along the forward-facing edge of cooktop **970** is shown in FIG. **37**.

Additional proximity sensors are placed beneath each of the cooktop burners to detect a pot or pan being lowered over the burner. Alternatively, light beams are projected from the edges of the cooktop across the cooktop burners to detect a pot or pan being lowered over the burner and thereby blocking the light beams that traverse the burner. When pots and pans are held over the cooking surface, a visible glow along the cooktop edges guides the user as he places the pot or pan onto the cooktop, as shown in FIGS. **38** and **39**. FIG. **38** shows saucepan **973** is hovering above cooktop surface **970**. Visible glow **972** appears along the edge of cooktop **970**. Alternatively, and as shown in FIG. **39**, only a portion of the cooktop edge corresponding to the burner beneath the hovering saucepan is illuminated to guide the user as he sets the saucepan

down. FIG. **39** shows how, once saucepan **973** is set down on a cooktop burner, a segmented interaction area lights up **972** along the borders of the cooktop, corresponding to the burner beneath the saucepan. This lit-up segment is an input control for configuring the heating element beneath the saucepan. In its lit-up state the segment is ready for receiving user input. The user does not need to separately turn on the cooktop controls as is typically required in prior art cooktops. In accordance with embodiments of the present invention, detection of the saucepan places the control into an active mode ready to receive user input. FIG. **40** shows that several interaction areas are indicated by illuminated borders depending on active cooking zones. Thus, in FIG. **40** illuminations **972** and **975** indicate active areas on cooktop **970** at which saucepan **973** and pot **974** have been placed.

The user adjusts the heat on an active burner by gliding his finger along the burner's corresponding illuminated border segment. FIG. **41** shows a user finger **900** gliding from left to right along illuminated segment **975** to increase the heat under pot **974**. The light intensity of the illuminated segment increases as the temperature setting increases. This provides intuitive feedback to the user.

Reference is made to FIGS. **42** and **43**, which are simplified illustrations of a cooktop user interface placed in the cooktop exhaust hood, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. In FIG. **42** temperature control **976** is realized as a proximity sensor strip placed along a surface of exhaust hood **977** above cooktop **970**. FIG. **43** shows that a user can adjust the temperature setting by waving his hand **938** along the temperature control strip **976** without touching the strip. An array of proximity sensors in the strip detects the position of the user's hand when it hovers at a distance of a few centimeters away from the strip. Thus, no direct touch is needed, and this keeps the surfaces and hands clean.

II. Oven and Stove UI

This section describes three appliance UI control panels. The present description mentions ovens as an example appliance into which the UI panels are incorporated, but other appliances are also within the scope of the present invention. Reference is made to FIG. **44**, which is a simplified illustration of an appliance, e.g., an oven, with an illuminated cylindrical control panel, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. Shown in FIG. **44** is oven **980** having a hollow compartment for storing food items to be cooked, and oven door **812** for opening and closing this compartment. Just above door **812** is a control panel featuring display **831** mounted behind transparent cylindrical panel **994**. An array of proximity sensors **996** is mounted above panel **994** for detecting nearby objects and for detecting user gestures performed on the exposed cylindrical surface of panel **994**. Processor **829** receives outputs from proximity sensors **996**, which indicate user gestures, and presents information on display **831** in response to the user gestures.

Reference is made to FIGS. **45-52**, which are simplified illustrations of a user interface for an oven, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. FIG. **45** shows an oven **980** having a first UI panel **981** above the oven door. The UI panel has two, touch-sensitive sections separated by digital clock **982**. To the right of clock **982** are touch-sensitive static icons **983** for selecting oven element configuration, e.g., roast/bake/grill. To the left of clock **982** is slider groove **984** for adjusting values, e.g., oven temperature. The user glides his finger along groove **984** to raise or reduce the oven temperature, or to set the time.

This first oven UI panel can be realized in several ways. In some embodiments, proximity sensors are placed underneath icons **983** and slider control **984**. In other embodiments, a row

of proximity sensors is situated along the upper or lower edge of UI panel **981** that detect a finger inserted onto the panel. In other embodiments, emitters along an edge of control panel **981** send light beams across control panel **981** to respective detectors along the opposite edge of control panel **981**. An inserted finger touching a control blocks one or more emitter beams from reaching corresponding one or more detectors. In some embodiments where detection is based on the absence of expected light, the emitters are arranged as a one-dimensional array along the top of control panel **981** and the detectors are arranged as a one-dimensional array along the bottom of control panel **981**. This provides detection in only one dimension, namely, along the length of the control panel **981**. As such, the controls are distributed along the length of control panel **981**.

A second oven UI panel is illustrated in FIG. **46**, which shows a convex, curved control panel **985** above the oven door. This convex panel is transparent and cylindrical. Beneath the panel, illuminated controls appear as described below. In FIG. **46**, a clock is displayed on panel **985**. An array of proximity sensors is situated along the upper edge of this panel and aimed along the panel's curved surface to detect hand gestures performed on the panel.

As in the first oven UI panel, when the UI is not in use the panel is clean and muted. FIG. **47** shows this state in which panel **985** is dark except for a digital clock displayed at its center. When a user approaches the oven, panel **985** is illuminated with a radiant glow as illustrated in FIG. **48**. The approaching user is detected by forward-facing proximity sensors above, near, or behind, panel **985**. When a user's hand nears panel **985**, as detected by an array of proximity sensors along the panel's front edge, user control icons **986** appear on panel **985**, as shown in FIG. **49**. When the oven is in use, the display provides an overview of current oven settings **989** and also allows quick access to adjust any setting directly, as shown in FIG. **50**.

Both sweep gestures and tap gestures are enabled on panel **985**. The user taps on one of icons **986** of FIG. **49** or oven settings **989** of FIG. **50** to open a control for configuring the parameter associated with the selected icon or setting. Parameters such as oven temperature and setting the time are adjusted using a graphic slider bar **987** that the user manipulates by sweeping his finger along the slider graphic. Slider bar **987** is shown in FIG. **51**. Other parameters are configured using button controls **988**, as shown in FIG. **52**.

Reference is made to FIGS. **53-58**, which are simplified illustrations of a centralized wireless hub for controlling multiple white good appliances in a home, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. A third oven UI is shown in FIG. **53**. FIG. **53** shows a central control hub **990** for controlling multiple kitchen appliances, such as ovens **991** and **992**, cooktop **970** and dishwasher **810**. Hub **990** can be inserted into a socket **995** (shown in FIG. **55**) above oven **991**, or removed from socket **995** and placed on a kitchen counter. By enclosing light-based touch sensors in an airtight sealed housing that includes infrared transmissible portions, hub **990** can be made waterproof. FIG. **54** shows hub **990** in socket **995**; FIG. **55** shows socket **995** without hub **990**; and FIG. **56** shows hub **990** on kitchen counter **971**. FIG. **56** shows hub **990** displaying an array of appliance icons **801** monitored by hub **990** (fridge, oven, cooktop, fan, dishwasher), clock **802** and appliance notification **803** informing the user that the dishwasher will be done in 5 minutes.

FIG. **57** shows that the oven appliance is selected on the hub screen, by a tap on oven icon **805**. This selection opens the screen shown in FIG. **58** showing detailed settings and status of the oven appliance.

Reference is made to FIG. **59**, which is a simplified illustration of an appliance hub for controlling a plurality of kitchen appliances, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. As shown in FIGS. **54** and **55**, the appliance control hub is seamlessly inserted into a socket in a built-in kitchen appliance, e.g., oven **991**, and removed therefrom. Thus, one of the appliances controlled by the hub is the built-in appliance housing the hub's socket. Shown in FIG. **59** is appliance control hub **990** having touchscreen display **831**, for presenting controls for operating the plurality of appliances. Hub **990** communicates wirelessly with the appliances it controls via wireless communication circuitry **807**. Rechargeable battery **806** powers the hub and is charged when coupled to an electrical outlet provided in the built-in kitchen appliance socket.

III. Dishwasher UI

Reference is made to FIG. **60**, which is a simplified illustration of a control panel for a dishwasher, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. FIG. **60** shows a dishwasher **810** equipped with a touch sensitive control panel **811** utilizing proximity sensors across the top edge of the dishwasher door. This creates a smooth and easily cleaned control surface, and enables both slide gesture and touch button functionality. In some embodiments, visible-spectrum light emitters are used to provide glow indication of an active interaction area on panel **811**.

IV. Refrigerator and Freezer UI

Reference is made to FIG. **61**, which is a simplified illustration of an appliance, e.g., a refrigerator, having a hollow compartment for storing items and a door that switches from an opaque state to a transparent state for viewing the stored items through the door, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. Shown in FIG. **61** is refrigerator **820** having a smart glass door **821**. Smart glass is electrically switchable glass which changes light transmission properties when voltage is applied. FIG. **61** shows processor **829** connected to proximity sensor **828** and to voltage source **827**. Proximity sensor **828** faces the airspace in front of refrigerator **820**. When a wave gesture performed in front of the refrigerator is detected by proximity sensor **828**, an indication of this detection is transmitted to processor **829** which, in response thereto, activates voltage source **827** switching glass door **821** from an opaque state to a transparent state.

Reference is made to FIG. **62**, which is a simplified illustration of a smart glass door for a refrigerator, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. FIG. **62** shows a refrigerator **820** having a smart glass door **821**. The door is equipped with proximity sensors for detecting a hand-wave gesture in front of the refrigerator door. In response to this gesture, the glass door changes from opaque to transparent, providing a view of the refrigerator contents without opening the door. This feature saves energy, by avoiding unnecessary openings and reduces the time the door is kept open by a user. Thus, FIG. **62** shows (A) glass door **821** in an opaque state and hand **938** placed near door **821**; (B) a wave gesture by hand **938** in front of door **821** detected by proximity sensors in door **821** activates a circuit that applies voltage to glass **821** that switches the glass from opaque to transparent; and (C) the glass is fully transparent.

Reference is made to FIG. **63**, which is a simplified illustration of an appliance, e.g., a refrigerator, having a hollow compartment for storing items and an illuminable door handle, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. Shown in FIG. **63** is refrigerator **820** having door **821** and door handle **823**. FIG. **63** shows processor **829** connected to proximity sensor **828** and to visible light sources **993**. Proximity sensor **828** faces the airspace in front of door

821 near handle **823**. When hand **938** approaches handle **823** it is detected by proximity sensor **828**. An indication of this detection is transmitted to processor **829** which, in response thereto, activates light sources **993** illuminating the cavity behind handle **823**, i.e., cavity **822**.

Reference is made to FIG. **64**, which is a simplified illustration of a control panel and associated user interface in a door handle of a refrigerator, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. FIG. **64** shows a user interface for a refrigerator door handle **823**. Proximity sensors on the door detect an approaching user, and additional proximity sensors on the inside of door handle **823**, i.e., in cavity **822** formed between the handle and the door, detect when a user wraps his hand **938** around handle **823**. Visible-spectrum light emitters are provided in the door or handle to illuminate cavity **822**. (A) shows the handle before a user has approached the door. No icons are displayed on the outer surface of handle **823**, and the visible-spectrum light emitters are turned off. (B) shows that when proximity sensors in the door detect an approaching user, the visible-spectrum light emitters are turned on and generate a glow **826** in handle cavity **822**. (C) shows that when the user wraps his hand **938** around door handle **823** this is detected by the proximity sensors that project light into cavity **822**. In response, three events occur: (i) the glow **826** in handle cavity **822** is intensified; (ii) the refrigerator temperature **824** is displayed on the outer surface of door handle **823** by an embedded display; and (iii) the refrigerator releases its inner vacuum in order to facilitate opening the refrigerator door. (D) shows that the user can adjust the refrigerator temperature by sliding his hand **938** up or down inside cavity **822**. In (D) arrow **825** indicates that the user slid his hand **938** downward in cavity **822**, and as a result, the displayed refrigerator temperature **824** was lowered from -19° in (C) to -22° .

V. Water and Ice Dispenser UI

Reference is made to FIGS. **65-68**, which are simplified illustrations of user interfaces for water and ice dispensers mounted in a refrigerator door, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. FIG. **65** shows a water and ice dispenser. Water and ice dispensers are often included in high-end refrigerators. The water and ice dispenser has control panel **830** that includes an embedded display **831** and touch-sensitive buttons **832**. Control panel **830** is surrounded by a light guide frame **330** that is coupled with arrays of light emitters and light receivers inside the dispenser housing that project light beams across the control panel to enable touch detection at any location within frame **330**. In addition, frame **330** is also coupled to light emitters and detectors that serve as proximity sensors for sensing an approaching user. Thus frame **330** projects light beams across panel **830** for touch detection, and also projects light beams outward, perpendicular to panel **330**, for proximity detection.

When the proximity detectors sense an approaching user, the dispenser lights up, as illustrated in FIG. **65(B)**, where display **831** and dispenser shaft **835** are illuminated. Before an approaching user is detected, the dispenser display **831** is muted, and the dispenser shaft lights are turned off, as shown in FIG. **65(A)**.

FIG. **66** shows an alternative water and ice dispenser control panel **830** with a larger display screen **831**. FIG. **67** shows another alternative water and ice dispenser control panel **830** whose entire control panel is display screen **831**. In FIG. **60**, touch-sensitive buttons **832** are graphic icons rendered by display screen **831**. Reference is made to FIG. **68** showing two views of yet another alternative water and ice dispenser control panel **830**. In FIG. **68**, the touch-sensitive buttons are

illuminated when activated, as illustrated by button **836** which is muted in FIG. **68(A)** but illuminated in FIG. **68(B)** as glass **837** is filled with water.

VI. Washing Machine and Clothes Dryer UI

Reference is made to FIG. **69**, which is a simplified illustration of an appliance, e.g., a washing machine or dryer, having a hollow compartment for storing items such as clothes to be washed or dried and a touch sensitive panel for providing a gesture-based user interface, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. Shown in FIG. **69** is washing machine **853** having touch sensitive panel **966**. Touch panel **966** presents icons **847** representing various wash settings, e.g., temperature and spin speed. Apart from icons **847**, panel **966** also has a demarcated area **848**. When a user performs a gesture of dragging finger **939** from one of the icons into demarcated area **848**, a signal indicating the icon and the gesture are communicated to processor **829**, which selects the corresponding wash setting.

Reference is made to FIGS. **70** and **71**, which are simplified illustrations of a washing machine control panel, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. FIG. **70** shows a frontloading washing machine **840** with control panel **841**. An enlarged view of control panel **841** is shown in FIG. **71**. In FIG. **71** control panel **841** is surrounded by four raised, unconnected borders **332**, embossed in the washing machine housing. These raised borders are transparent to infrared light; they are light guides that direct light over and across panel **841** to enable touch detection on the panel. Light emitters and receivers are coupled to these light guides inside the washing machine housing.

Controls **843**, **844** and **846** are debossed in panel **841**: **846** are sunken buttons, **843** is a sunken slider groove and **844** is a sunken circular groove surrounding a small digital display **845**. When a user actuates any of these controls, the actuation is detected by the light emitter-detector array coupled to raised borders **332**; the sunken controls **846**, **843** and **844** are formed in the housing, but have no active parts. No extra split lines or parts are needed as all input is captured by the light emitters and receivers beneath the surface. Typically, button controls **846** are used to select a mode or to start the machine and slider controls are used to adjust a value such as temperature or time. Slider controls **843** and **844** are actuated when a user glides his finger through the groove.

Reference is made to FIG. **72**, which is a simplified illustration of an alternative control panel and associated user interface for a washing machine, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. FIG. **72** shows an alternative washing machine control panel UI that is modeled on an intuitive "filling the washing machine" concept. Control panel **850** displays multiple settings. To set up a wash, the user drags and drops each setting into a round recessed area **851**. This avoids accidental selection, for example by a toddler or child touching the machine. Settings can be chosen in any order. FIGS. **72(A)** and (B) illustrate a user dragging **852** a temperature setting into recessed area **851** using his finger **900**.

Reference is made to FIGS. **73-76**, which are simplified illustrations of additional control panels for frontloading and top loading washing machines, in accordance with embodiments of the present invention. FIG. **73** shows a washing machine **840** with a control panel **860** in the form of a ribbon surrounding the frontloading door. FIG. **74** is a detailed view of control panel **860**. As shown in FIG. **74**, control panel **860** is an arc-shaped ribbon in which an array of tap-activatable icons are arranged along the arc. Touch detection is accomplished by an array of light emitters along the outer arc edge sending light beams across the width of panel **860** to an array

of receivers along the inner arc edge. Light guide **861** is situated along the outer arc edge for guiding light from the emitters across the panel, and light guide **862** is situated along the inner arc edge for guiding the emitted light onto the receivers. These emitters and receivers are inside the washing machine housing; only a small light guide bezel from light guides **861** and **862** protrudes along the inner and outer arc edges to project the light beams over panel **860**. A user touching a control blocks a corresponding light beam from reaching its receiver. Alternatively, light emitters and receivers are arranged only along the outer arc. In this case, the receivers detect light from the emitters that is reflected by a user's finger touching one of the controls on panel **860**. When a user touches a control, that control is illuminated. For example, FIG. **74** shows controls **863-865** illuminated. When a plurality of controls are illuminated, configuring a wash cycle, the user presses start button **866** at the top of the control panel arc to begin the wash cycle.

FIG. **75** shows a top loading washing machine **840** with a control panel **870** according to embodiments of the present invention. A detailed view of control panel **870** is provided in FIG. **76**. As shown in FIG. **76**, control panel **870** has a slightly curved array of proximity sensors **871** along a row of icon controls **872**. When a user selects a control, selection is indicated either by illuminating the control or by illuminating a corresponding location on the curved proximity sensor array **871**. In FIG. **76** both the selected controls and their corresponding locations on array **871** are illuminated.

In the foregoing specification, the invention has been described with reference to specific exemplary embodiments thereof. It will, however, be evident that various modifications and changes may be made to the specific exemplary embodiments without departing from the broader spirit and scope of the invention. Accordingly, the specification and drawings are to be regarded in an illustrative rather than a restrictive sense.

What is claimed is:

1. A touch sensor comprising:
 - a housing;
 - a light guide mounted in said housing comprising:
 - an outer surface through which light exits and enters said housing; and
 - three reflective or refractive inner surfaces;
 - two light emitters mounted in said housing in such a way that light beams emitted by the two light emitters into said light guide are re-directed by two of said inner surfaces and exit said outer surface; and
 - a light receiver mounted in said housing in such a way as to receive the light beams exiting said outer surface that are reflected back into said light guide by an object outside said light guide and further re-directed by the third of said inner surfaces, the light receiver outputting a signal indicative of light beams that it receives.
2. The touch sensor of claim 1, wherein said two light emitters and said light receiver are arranged at three points beneath and surrounding said outer surface.
3. The touch sensor of claim 2, wherein the two of said inner surfaces comprise first and second prisms inside said light guide.
4. The touch sensor of claim 3, wherein the third of said inner surfaces comprises a third prism inside said light guide.
5. The touch sensor of claim 1, further comprising a processor connected to said two light emitters and to said light receiver, operative to detect a touch above said outer surface based on signals output by said light receiver, wherein said processor only reports a touch detection when said processor

confirms that said light receiver outputs similar signals when each of said two emitters is separately activated.

6. An appliance in accordance with claim 1, comprising:
 - a panel comprising a plurality of illuminable icons, wherein a current setting for the appliance is indicated by one or more concurrently illuminated icons;
 - a plurality of touch sensors, each touch sensor comprising a touch sensor in accordance with claim 1 and being situated beneath a respective one of said icons; and
 - a processor connected with said touch sensors, operative to select one or more of said icons and to illuminate the selected one or more icons in response to the one or more icons' respective touch sensors detecting a touch.
7. The appliance of claim 6, further comprising a cavity into which items to be processed by the appliance are placed, the cavity comprising a circular opening, wherein said panel is an arc-shaped ribbon surrounding a portion of said circular opening.
8. The touch sensor of claim 1, wherein the two of said inner surfaces are positioned in such a way as to re-direct the light beams emitted by the two light emitters so that the light beams emitted by one of the two emitters diverge from the light beams emitted by the other of the two emitters, as they exit said light guide.
9. The touch sensor of claim 8, wherein the third of said inner surfaces is positioned in such a way that light beams, entering said light guide along a path substantially different than the exit paths of the emitted light beams, are re-directed by the third of said inner surfaces to said light receiver.
10. A touch sensor comprising:
 - a housing;
 - a light guide mounted in said housing comprising:
 - an outer surface through which light exits and enters said housing; and
 - three reflective or refractive inner surfaces;
 - a light emitter mounted in said housing in such a way that light beams emitted by the light emitter into said light guide are re-directed by a first of said inner surfaces and exit said outer surface; and
 - two light receivers mounted in said housing in such a way as to receive the light beams exiting said outer surface that are reflected back by an object outside said light guide and further re-directed by the second and third of said inner surfaces, the light receivers outputting signals indicative of light beams that they receive.
11. The touch sensor of claim 10, wherein said two light receivers and said light emitter are arranged at three points beneath and surrounding said outer surface.
12. The touch sensor of claim 11, wherein the first of said inner surfaces comprises a first prism inside said light guide.
13. The touch sensor of claim 12, wherein the second and third of said inner surfaces comprise second and third prisms inside said light guide.
14. The touch sensor of claim 10, further comprising a processor connected to said light emitter and to said two light receivers, operative to detect a touch above said outer surface based on signals output by said two light receivers, wherein said processor only reports a touch detection when said processor confirms that each of said light receivers outputs a similar signal when said emitter is activated.
15. An appliance in accordance with claim 10, comprising:
 - a panel comprising a plurality of illuminable icons, wherein a current setting for the appliance is indicated by one or more concurrently illuminated icons;
 - a plurality of touch sensors, each touch sensor comprising a touch sensor in accordance with claim 10 and being situated beneath a respective one of said icons; and

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a processor connected with said touch sensors, operative to select one or more of said icons and to illuminate the selected one or more icons in response to the one or more icons' respective touch sensors detecting a touch.

16. The appliance of claim 15, further comprising a cavity 5 into which items to be processed by the appliance are Placed, the cavity comprising a circular opening, wherein said panel is an arc-shaped ribbon surrounding a portion of said circular opening.

17. The touch sensor of claim 10, wherein the first of said 10 inner surfaces is positioned in such a way as to re-direct the emitted light beams to exit said light guide along an exit path, wherein the second of said inner surfaces is positioned in such a way as to re-direct light beams, that enter said 15 light guide along a first entry path, to one of said light receivers, wherein the third of said inner surfaces is positioned in such a way as to re-direct light beams, that enter said light guide along a second entry path, to the other of said light receivers, and

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wherein the exit path, the first entry path and the second entry path are substantially different paths.

18. An appliance comprising:
a touch sensitive panel on which are displayed a plurality of icons representing different appliance settings, and comprising a demarcated area separate from the displayed icons; and

a processor connected with said panel, operative to select an icon's appliance setting in response to detecting a finger gliding from that icon into said demarcated area.

19. The appliance of claim 18, wherein said panel comprises a touch screen, and wherein representations of the appliance settings selected by said processor are rendered on said touch screen inside said demarcated area.

20. The appliance of claim 19, wherein said demarcated area comprises a sunken portion of said panel.

21. The appliance of claim 19, wherein the appliance is a member of the group consisting of a dishwasher, a refrigerator, a washing machine, an oven and a clothes dryer.

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