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Haines et al.

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(45) **Date of Patent:** **Mar. 28, 2017**

(54) **ELECTRONIC SWITCHING DEVICE AND SYSTEM**

(56) **References Cited**

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- (*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this patent is extended or adjusted under 35 U.S.C. 154(b) by 930 days.

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(21) Appl. No.: **13/681,592**

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(51) **Int. Cl.**

H01H 9/56 (2006.01)
H01H 47/22 (2006.01)
H03K 17/96 (2006.01)
H01H 9/18 (2006.01)
H01H 13/14 (2006.01)

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

CPC **H01H 9/56** (2013.01); **H01H 47/22** (2013.01); **H03K 17/962** (2013.01); **H01H 9/182** (2013.01); **H01H 13/14** (2013.01); **H01H 2239/07** (2013.01); **H03K 2217/960755** (2013.01); **Y10T 307/944** (2015.04)

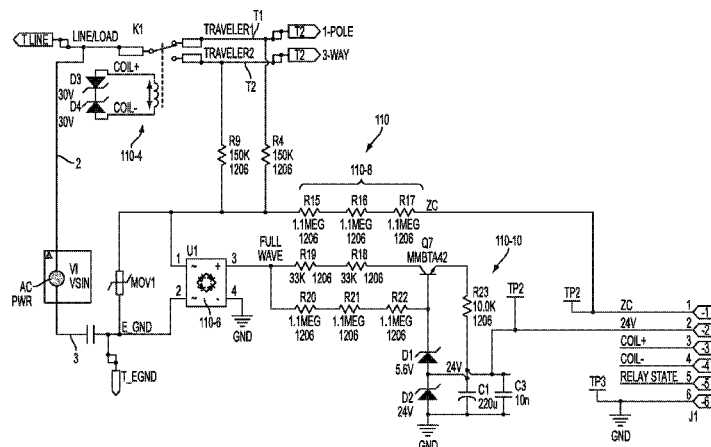
(58) **Field of Classification Search**

CPC H02J 13/0041; H01H 11/0062
USPC 307/139, 140
See application file for complete search history.

(57) **ABSTRACT**

The present invention is directed to an electronic switch device that includes a front cover assembly having a user interface, a back body assembly, and a plurality of terminals configured to be coupled to an AC power source and the load. A circuit assembly is coupled to the plurality of terminals. The circuit assembly includes a relay switch having a commutator and a set of contacts. The relay switch is characterized by a predetermined commutator period, the predetermined commutator period being substantially the commutator travel time between the set of contacts during a relay switch actuation. The circuit assembly further includes an actuation circuit configured to provide a constant current actuation signal that energizes the relay switch in response to an input stimulus via the user interface such that an end of the predetermined commutator period substantially coincides with a predetermined point in an AC power cycle.

58 Claims, 30 Drawing Sheets



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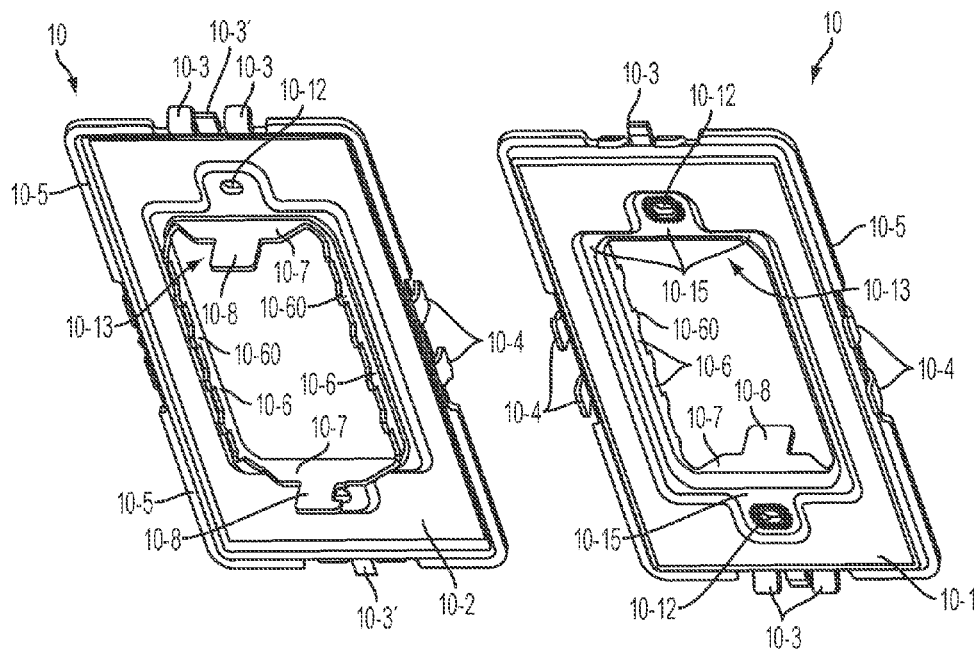


FIG. 1A

FIG. 1B

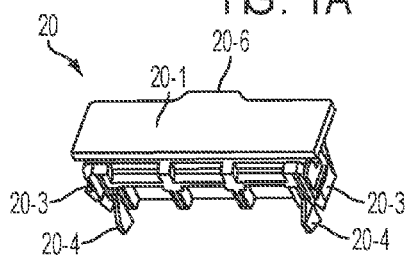


FIG. 2A

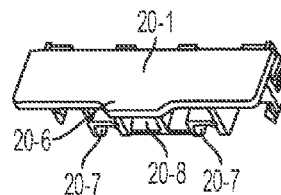


FIG. 2B

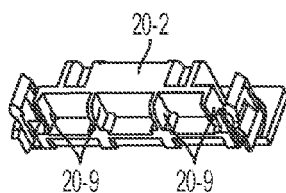


FIG. 2C

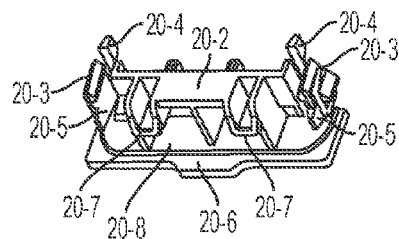


FIG. 2D

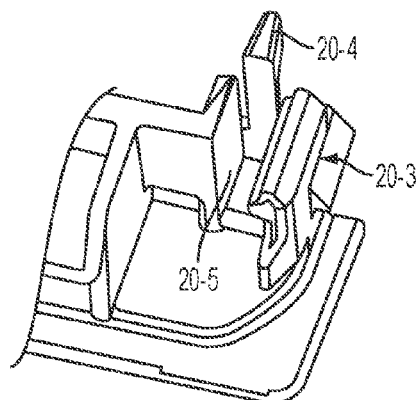


FIG. 3

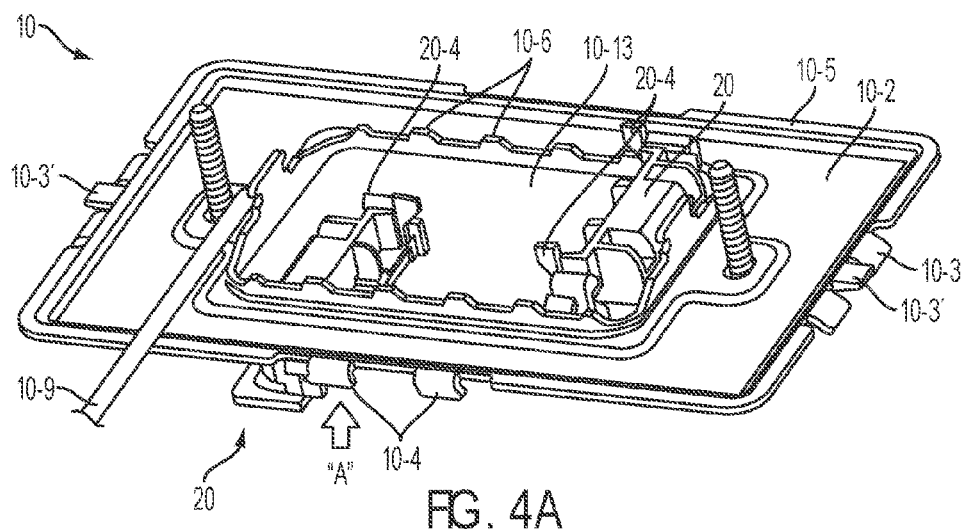


FIG. 4A

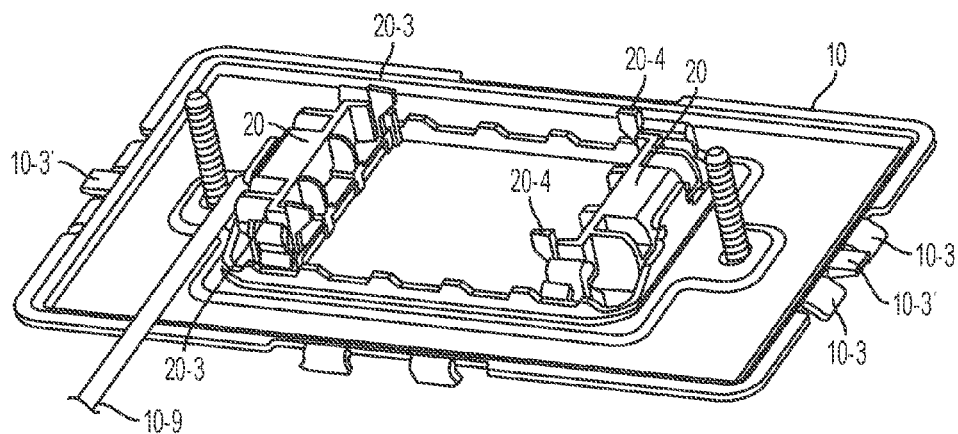


FIG. 4B

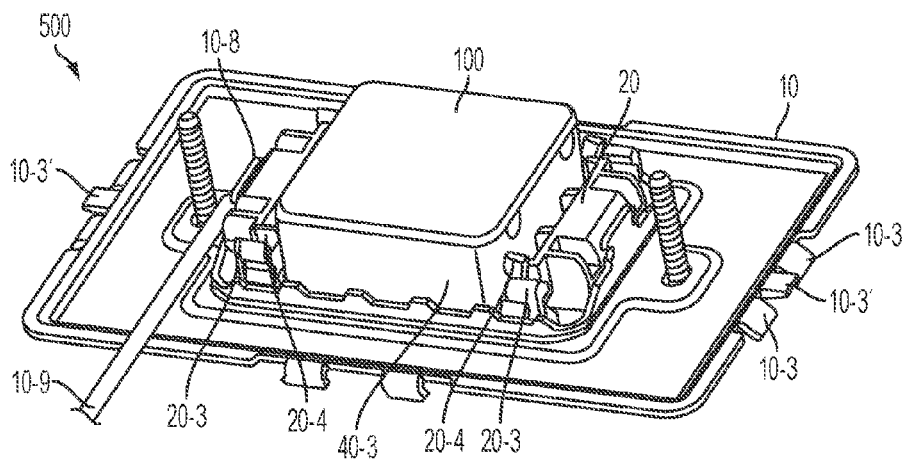


FIG. 4C

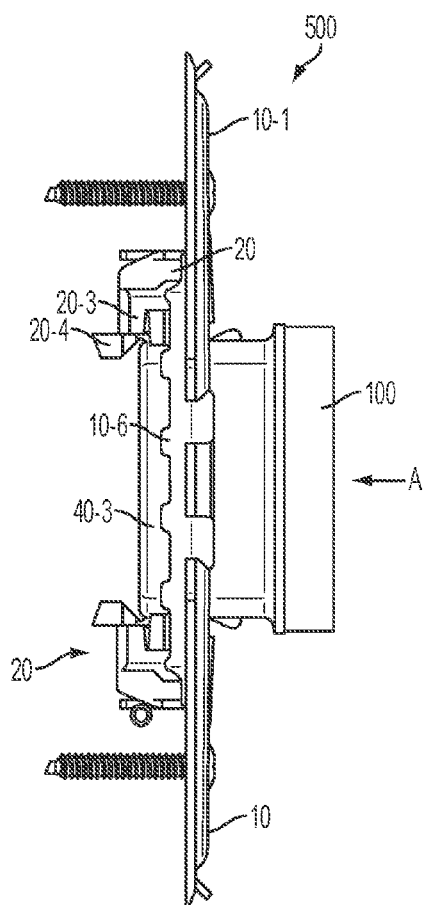


FIG. 4D

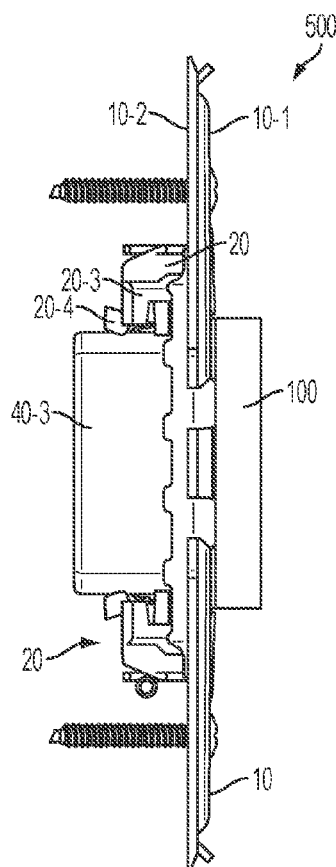


FIG. 4E

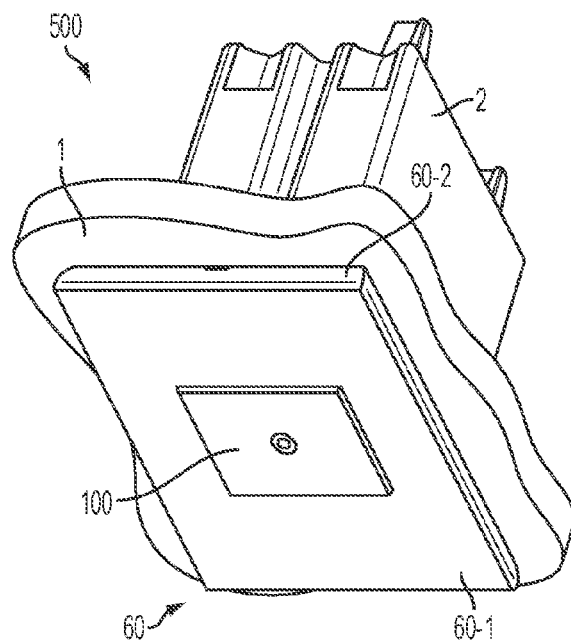


FIG. 5A

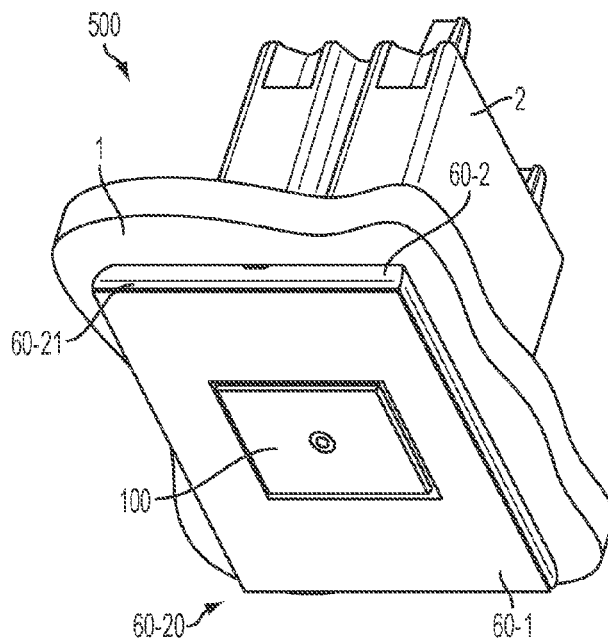


FIG. 5B

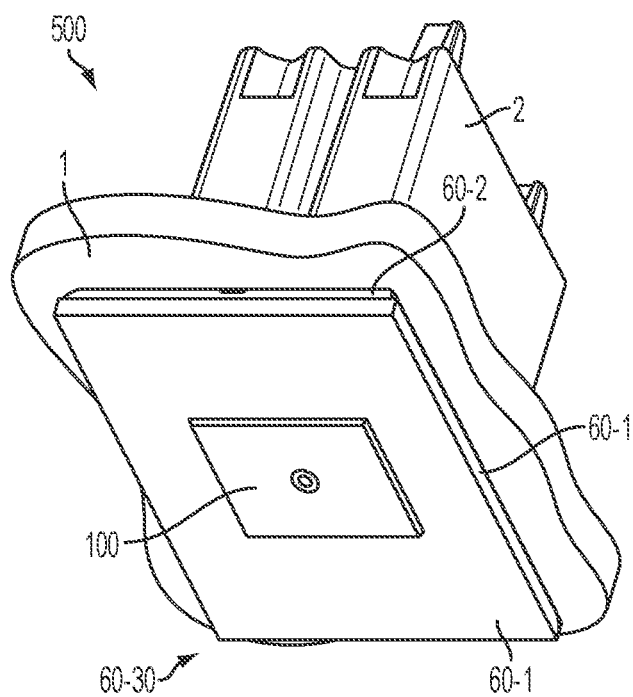


FIG. 5C

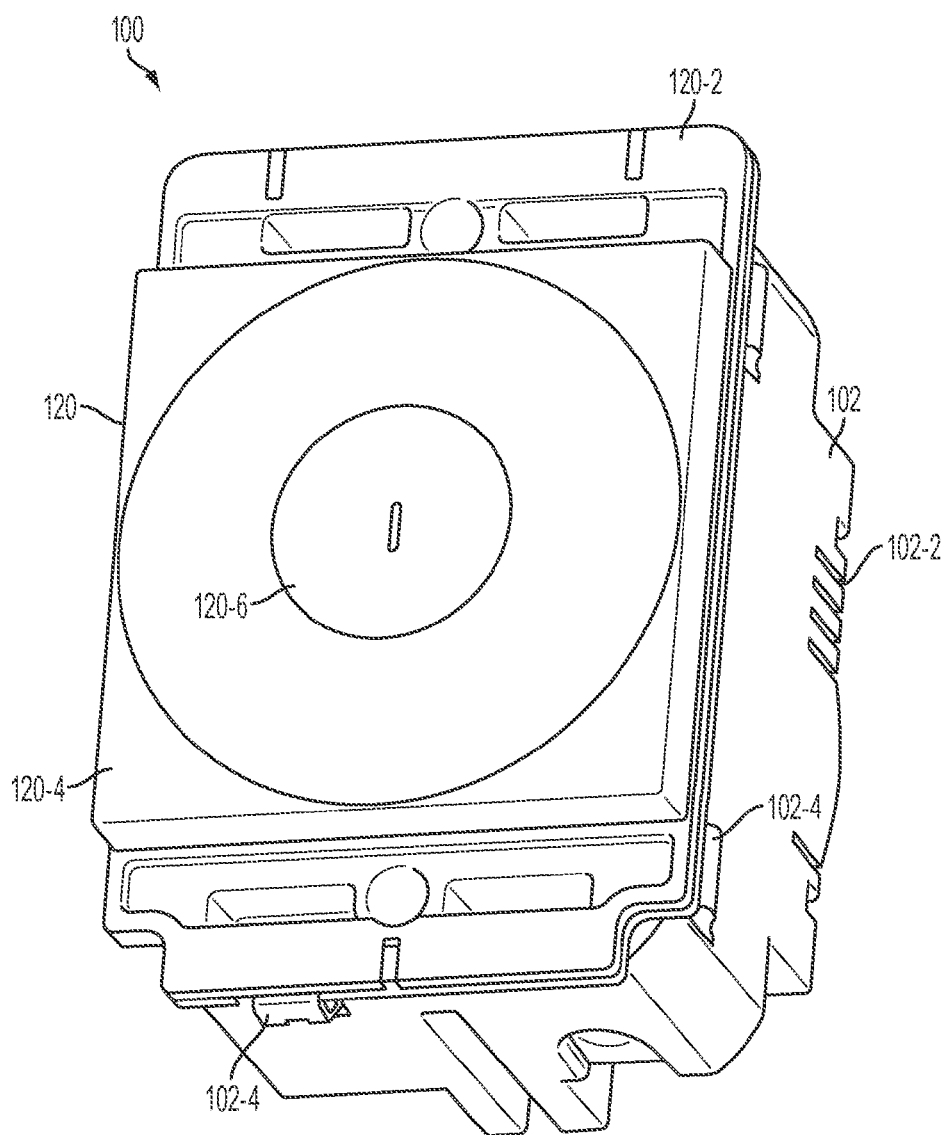
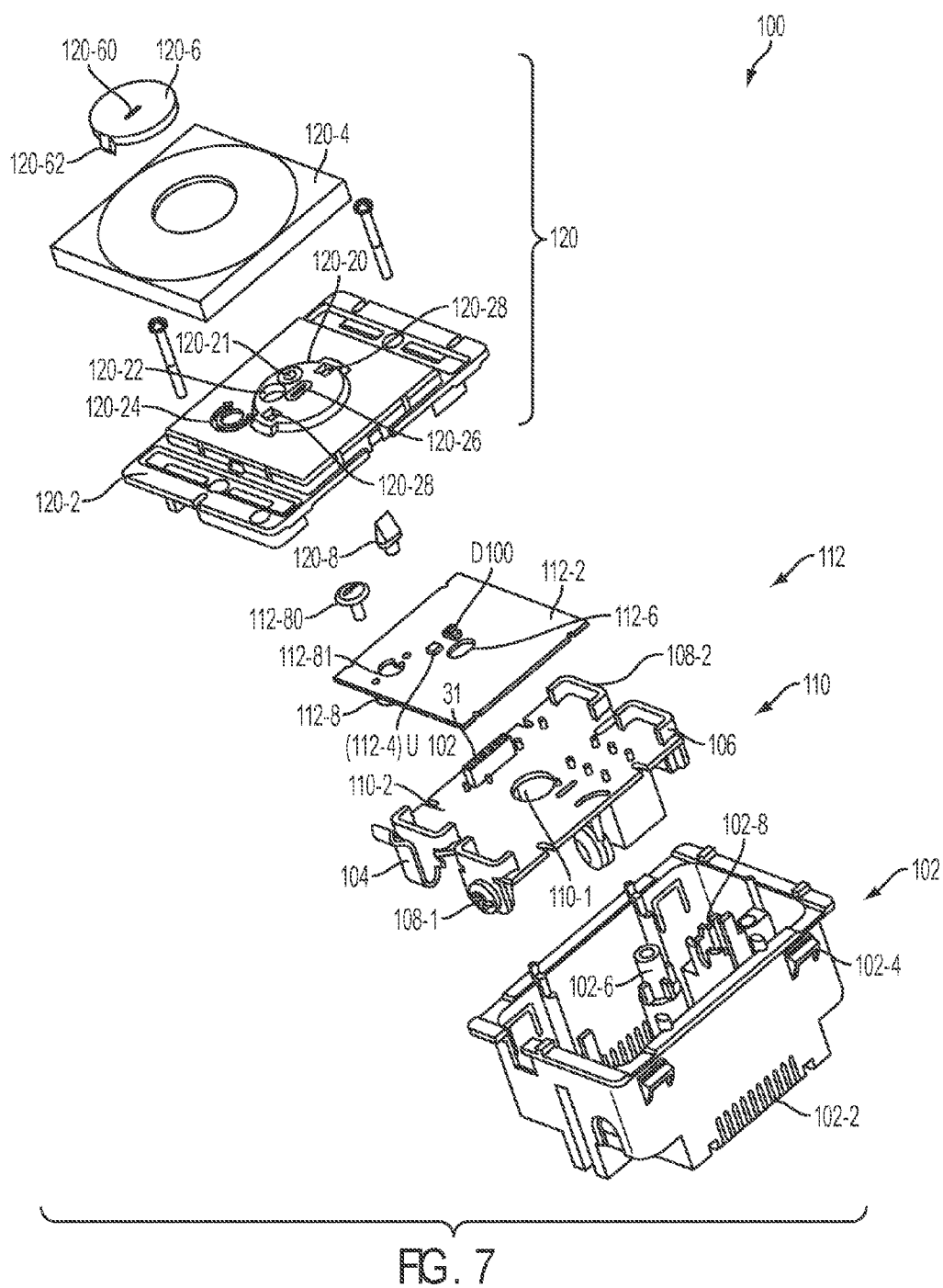


FIG. 6



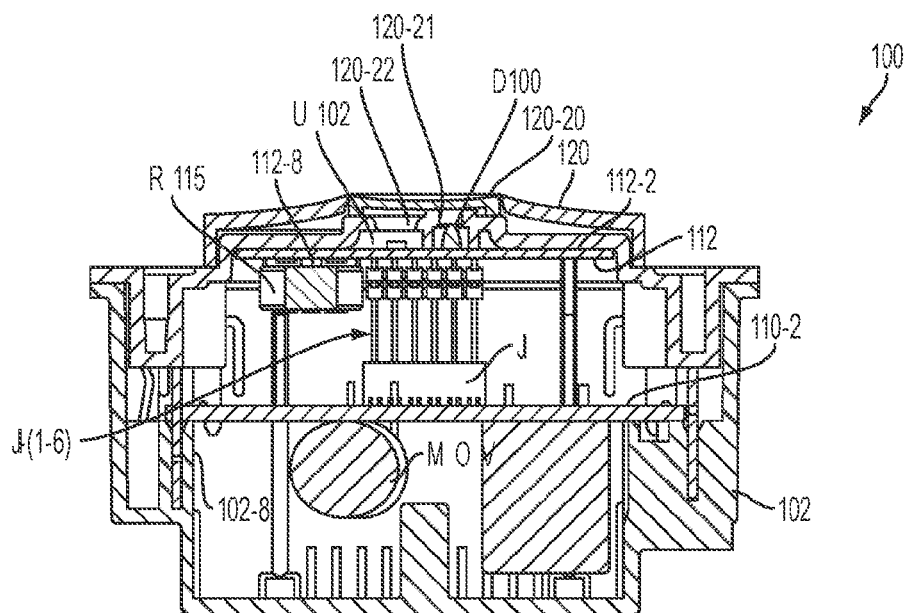


FIG. 8A

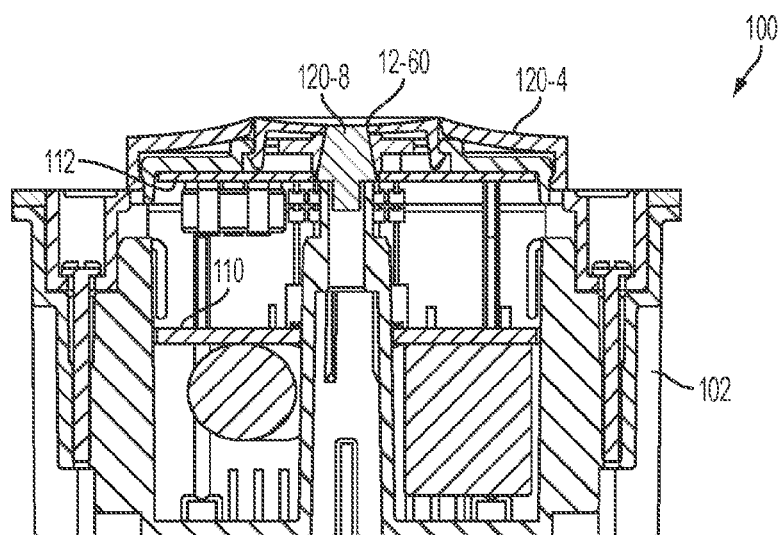


FIG. 8B

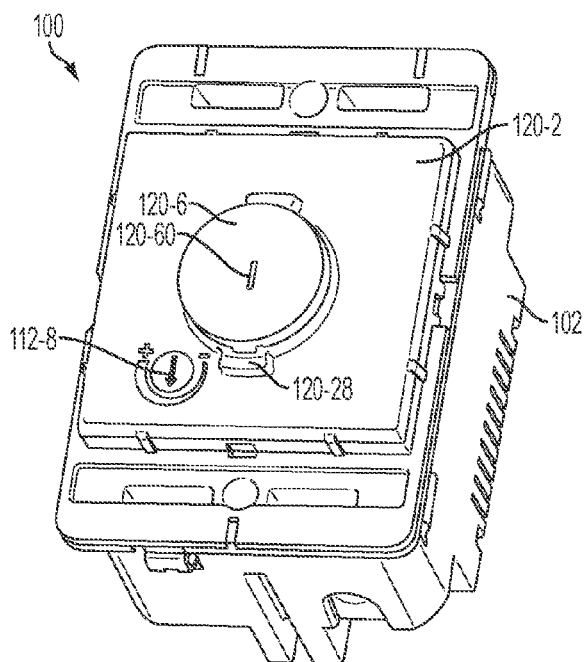


FIG. 9 A

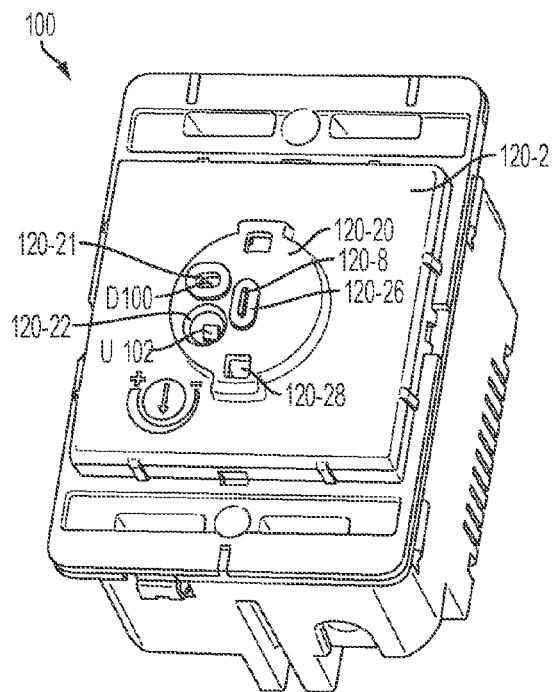


FIG. 9 B

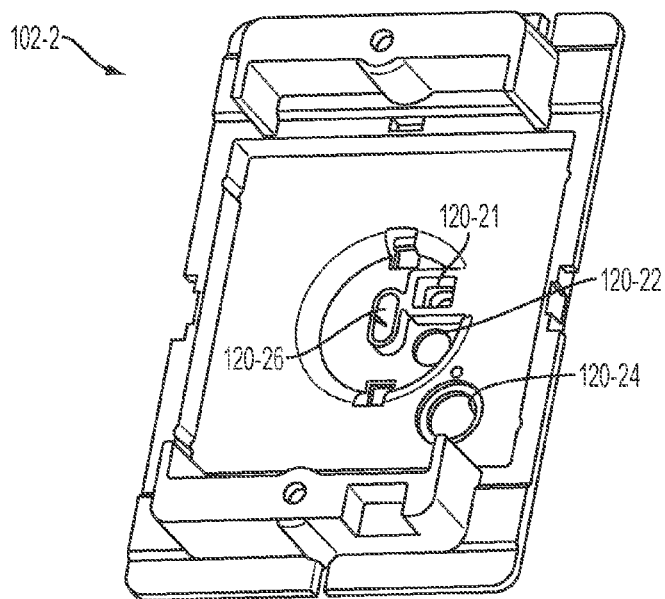


FIG. 9 C

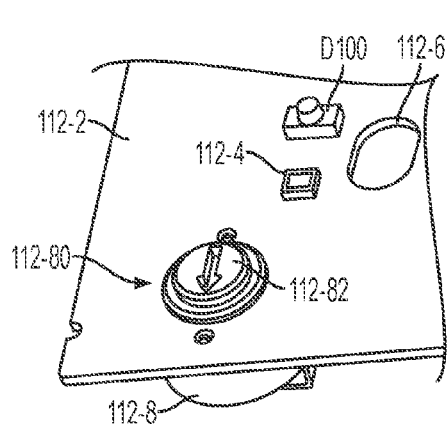


FIG. 9 D

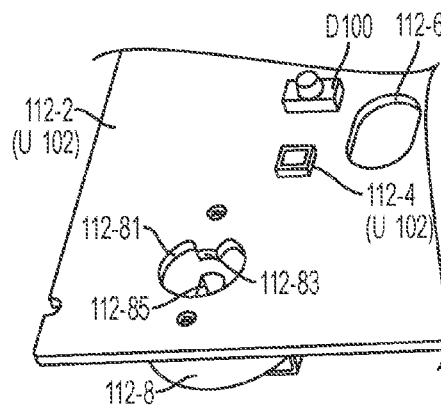


FIG. 9 E

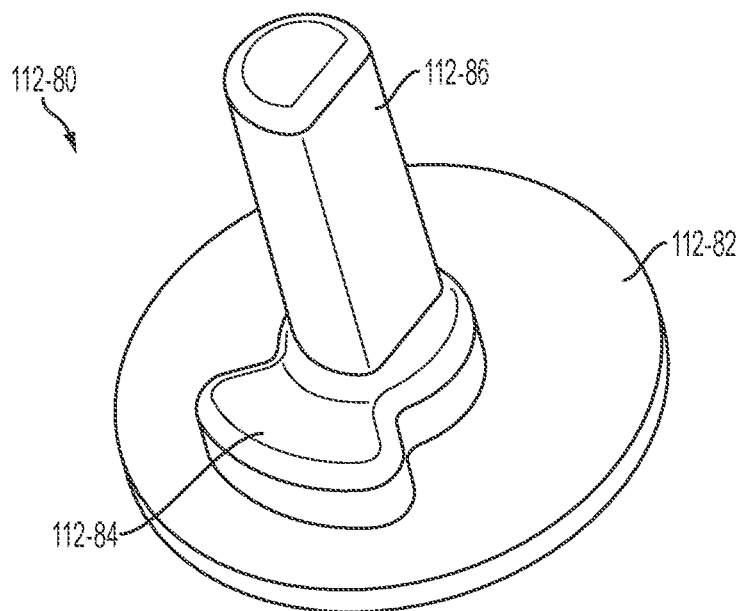


FIG. 9 F

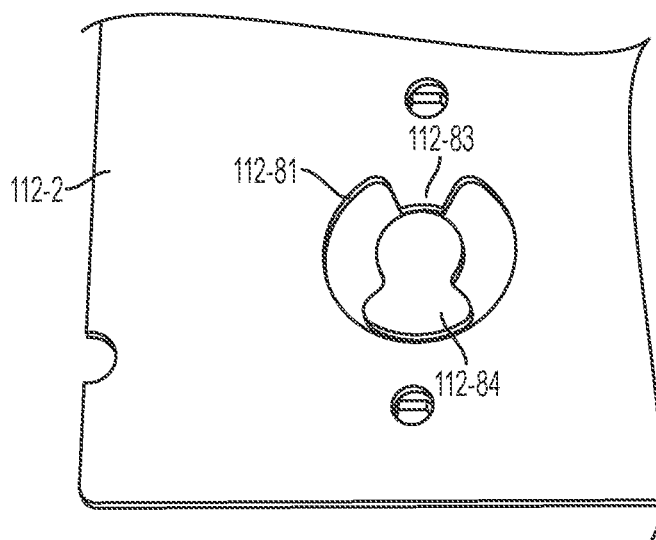
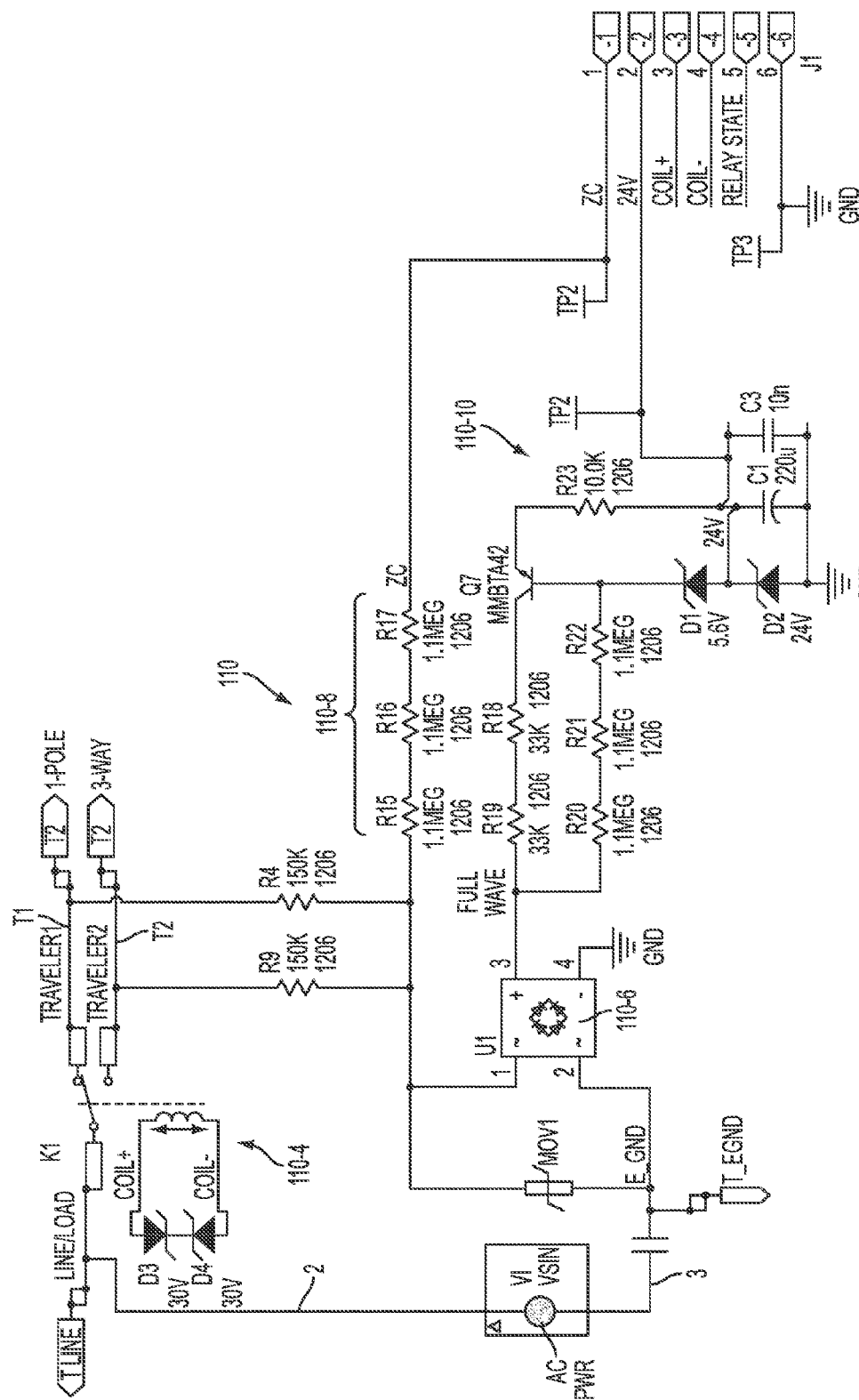


FIG. 9 G

FIG. 10A
cnd

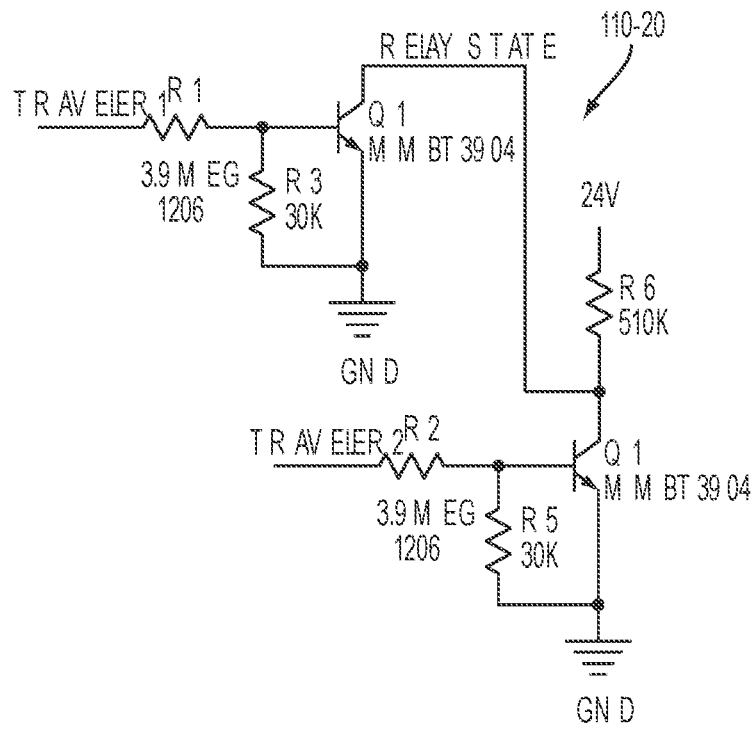
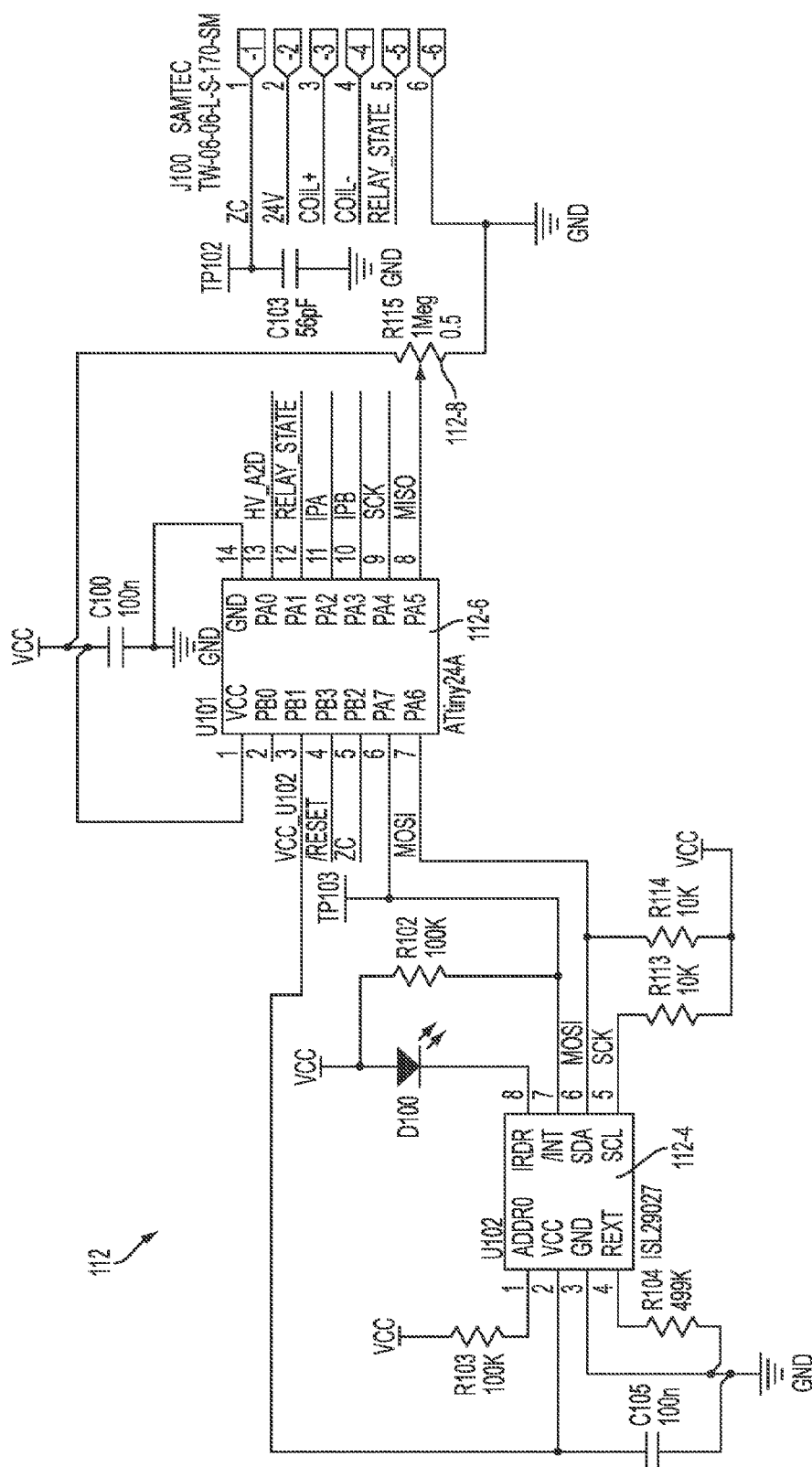


FIG. 10B



FILE

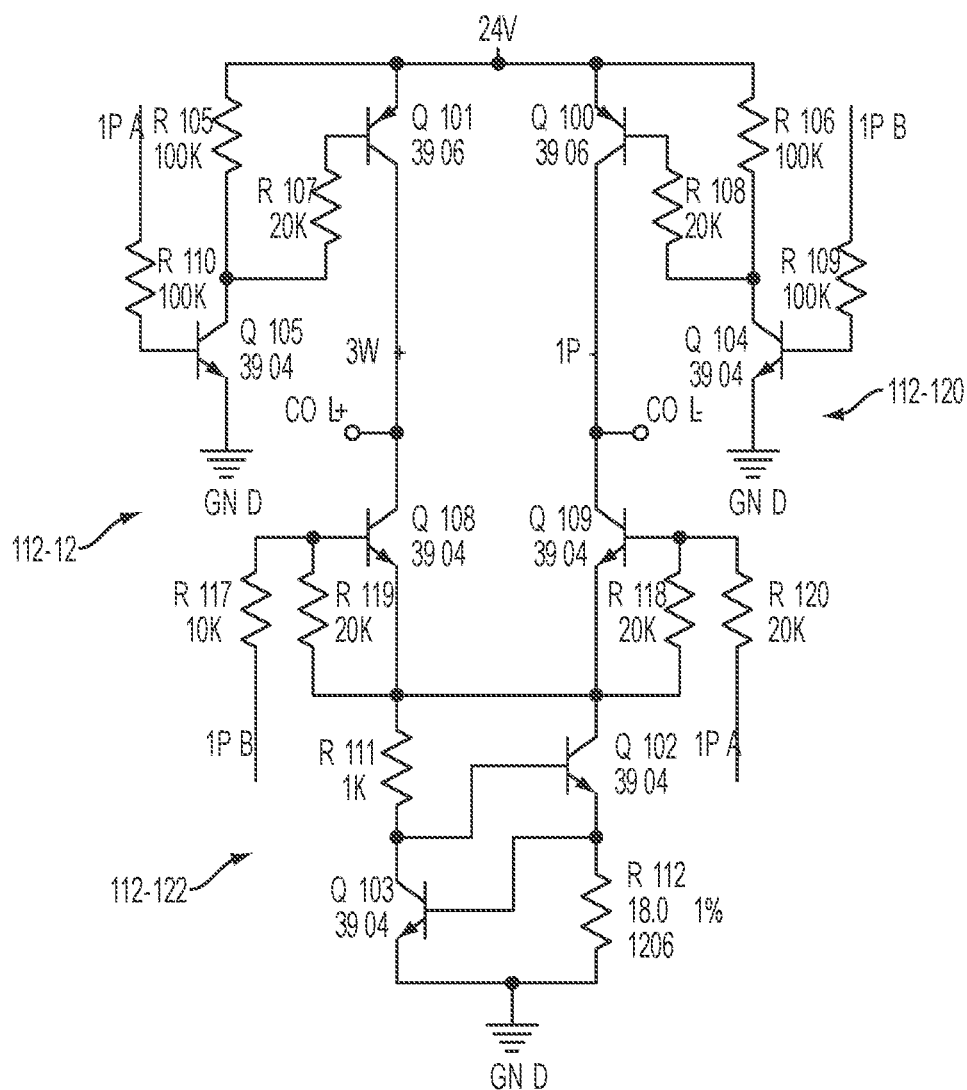


FIG. 11B

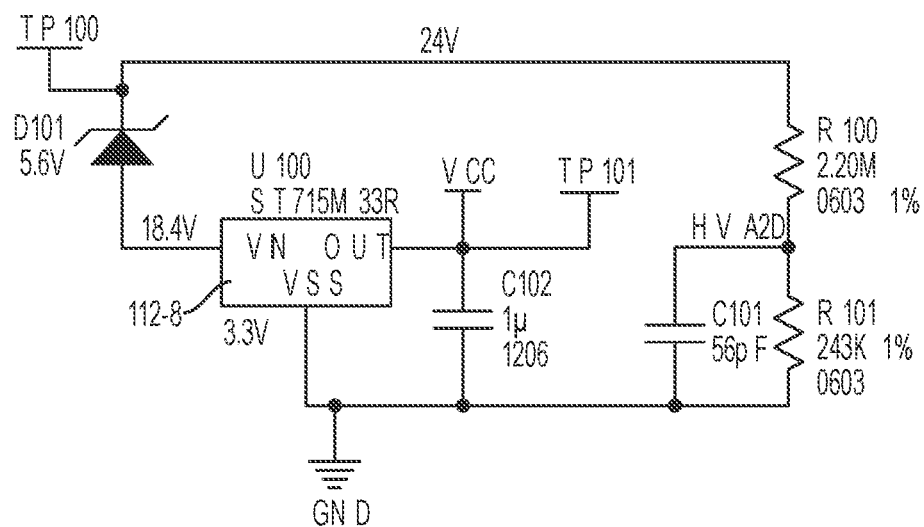


FIG. 11C

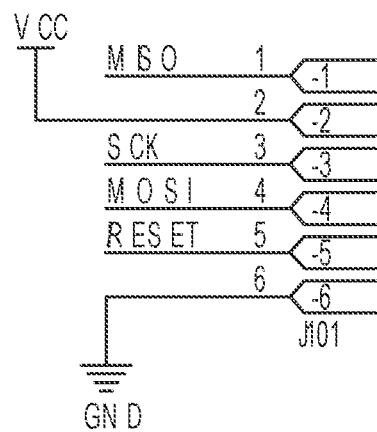


FIG. 11D

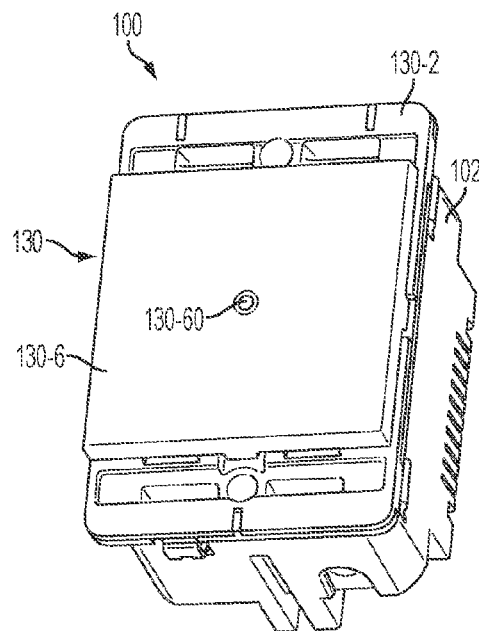


FIG. 12A

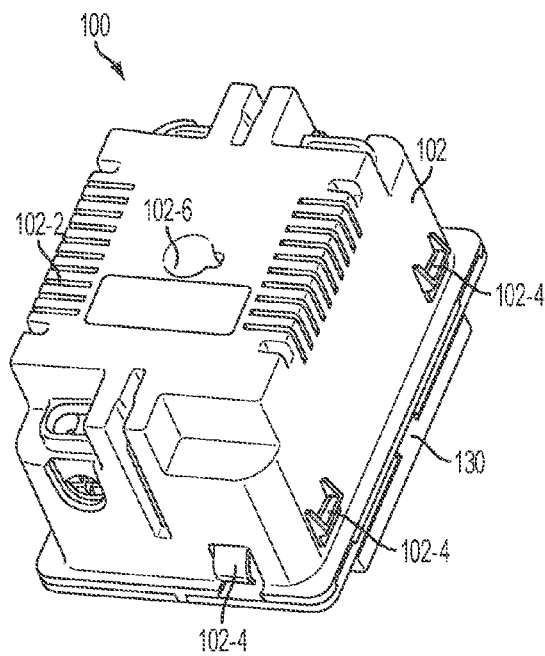


FIG. 12B

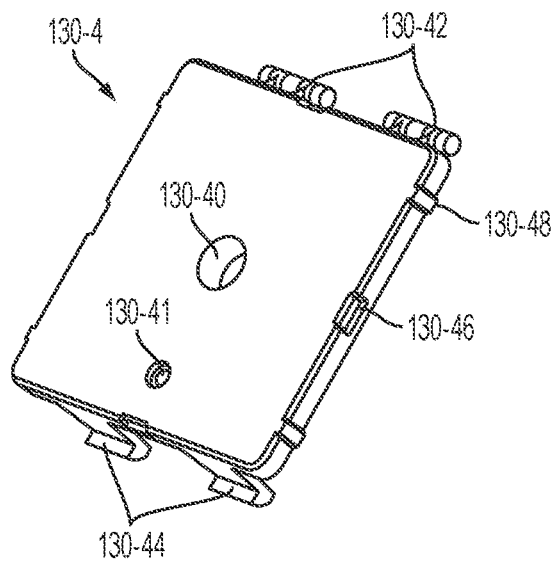


FIG. 13A

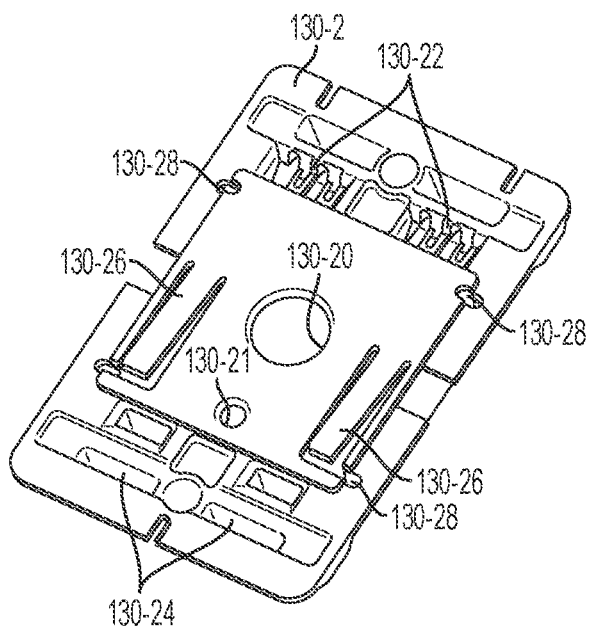


FIG. 13B

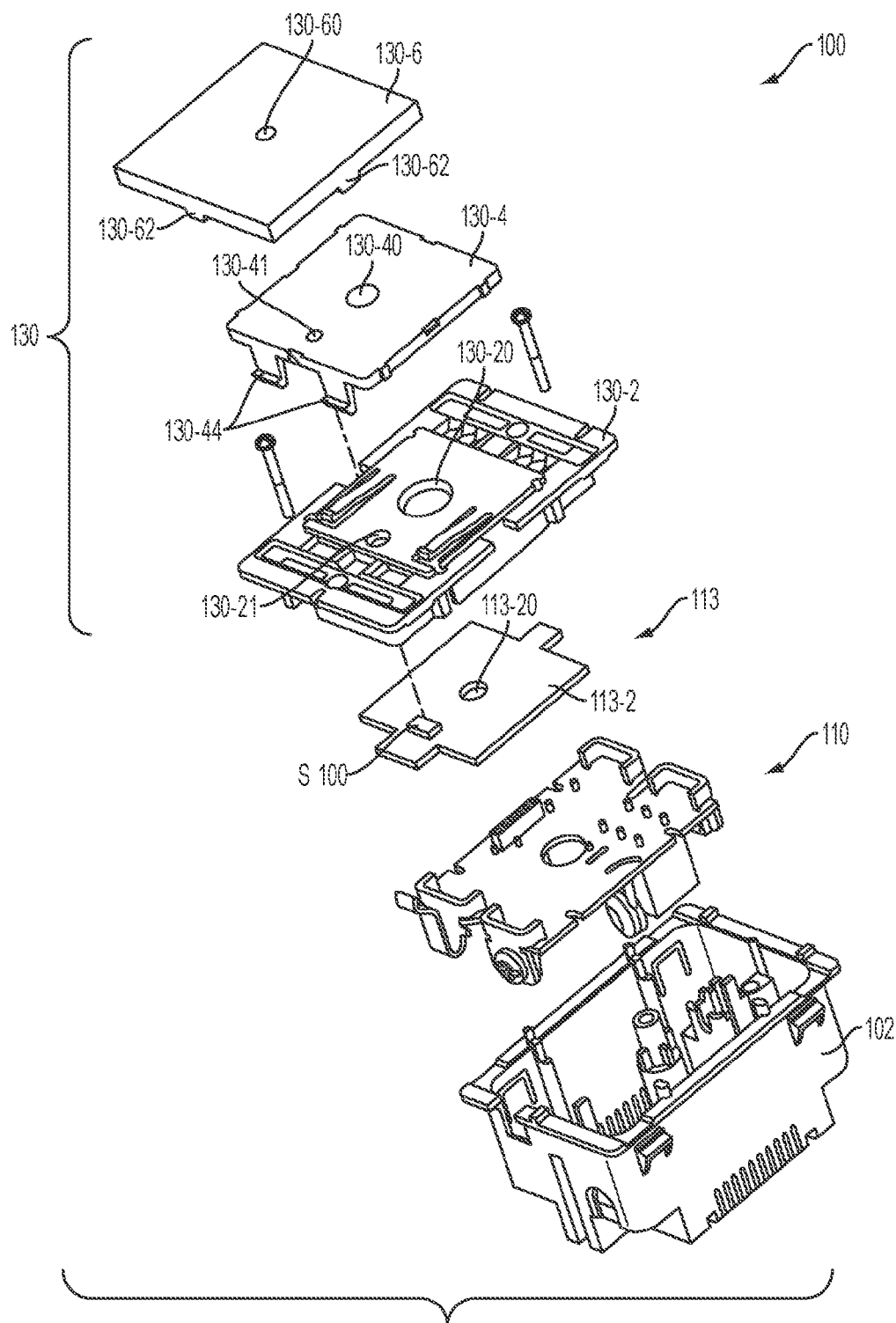


FIG. 14

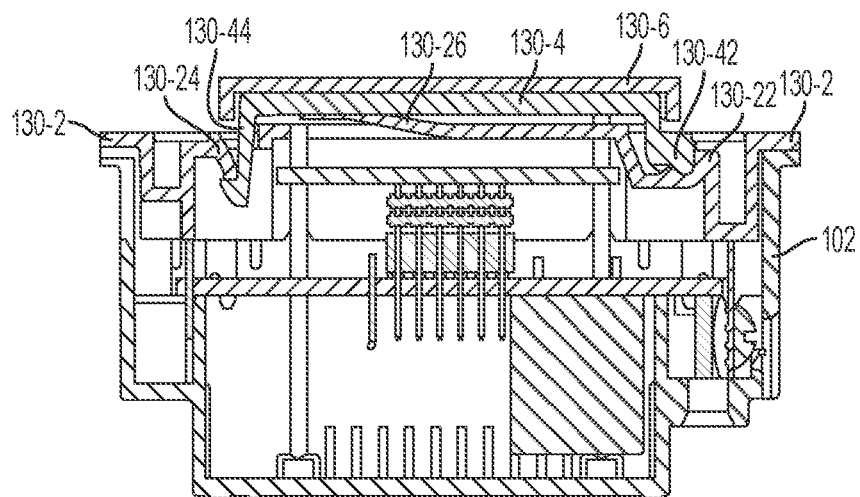


FIG. 15A

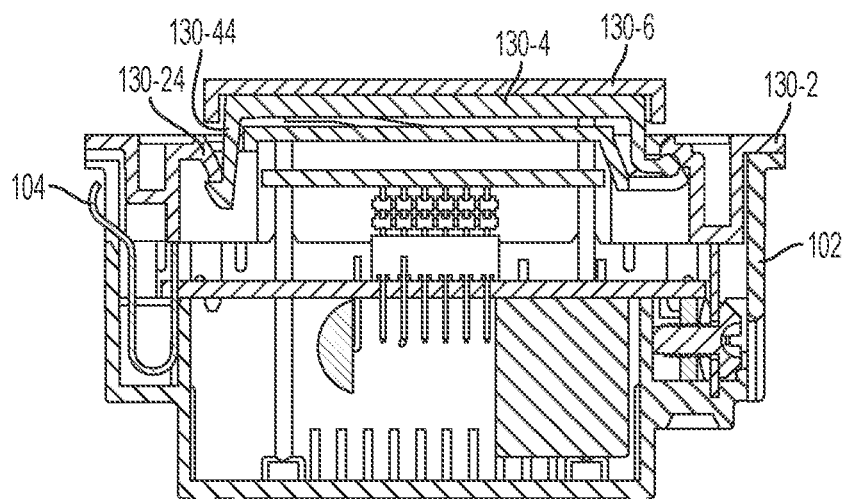


FIG. 15B

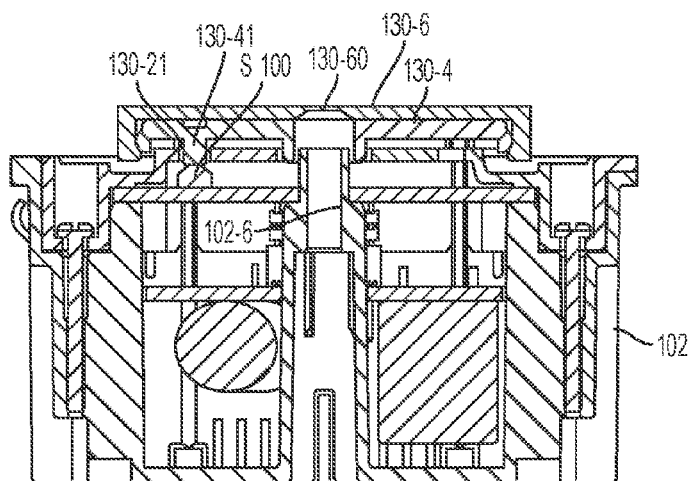


FIG. 15C

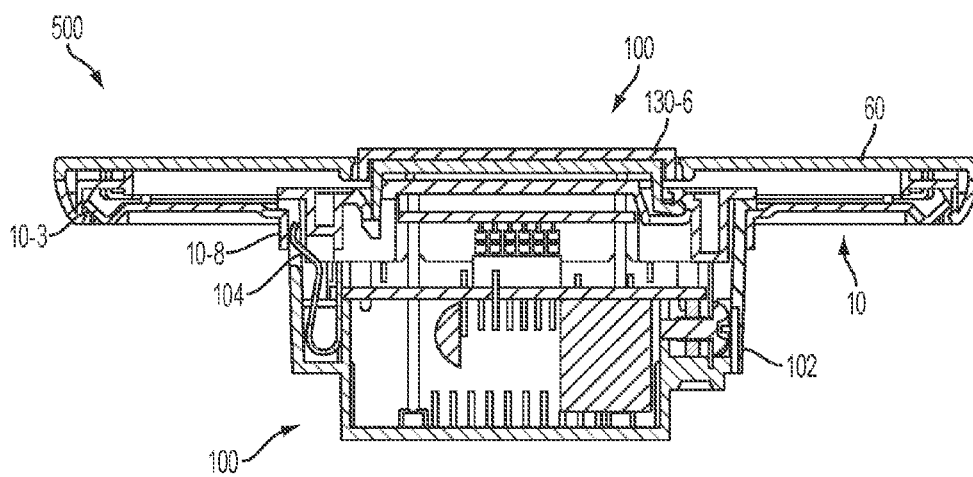


FIG. 15D

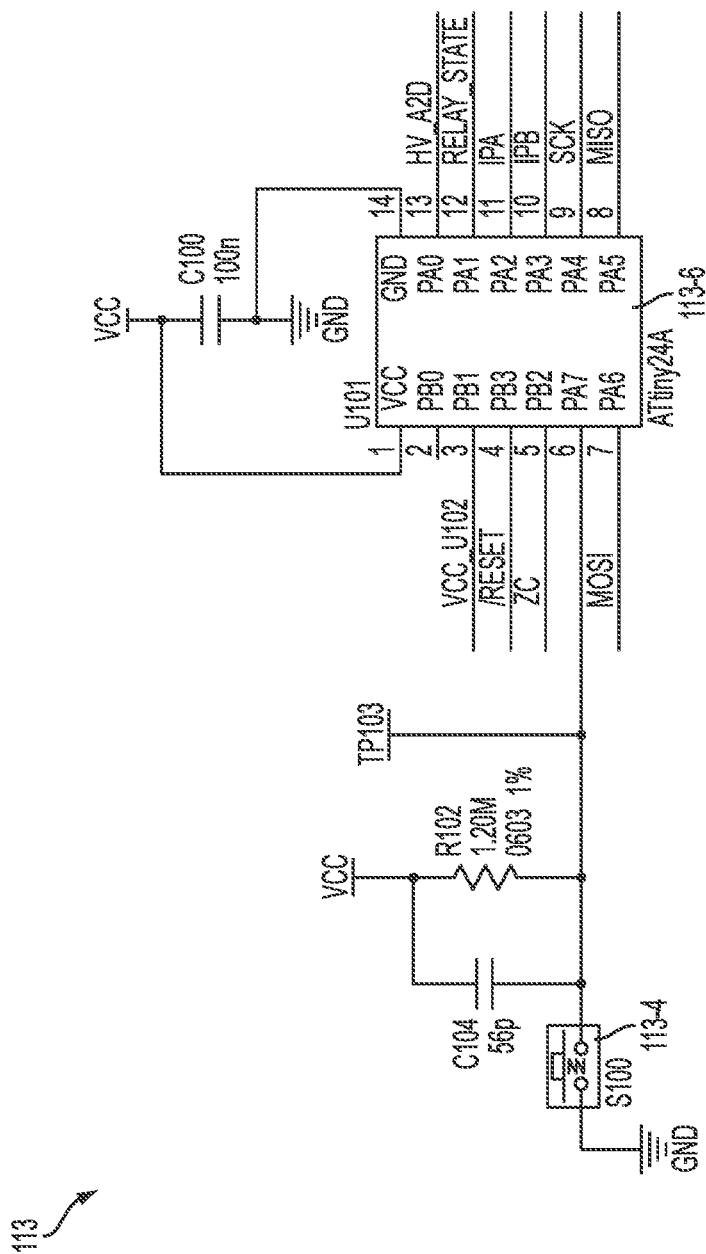


FIG. 16

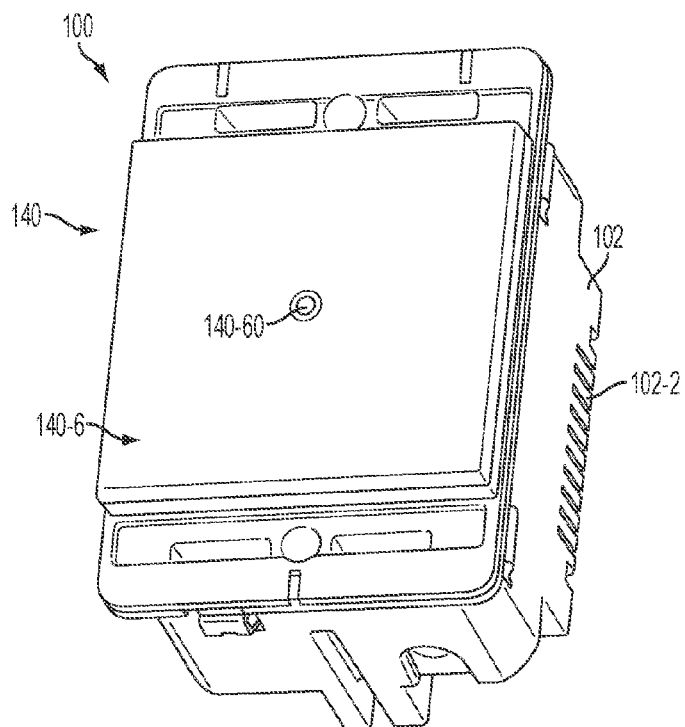


FIG. 17A

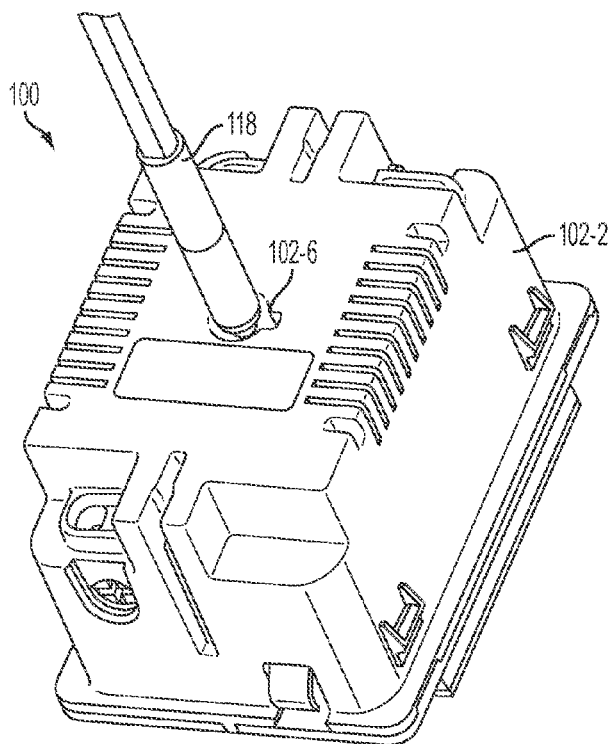


FIG. 17B

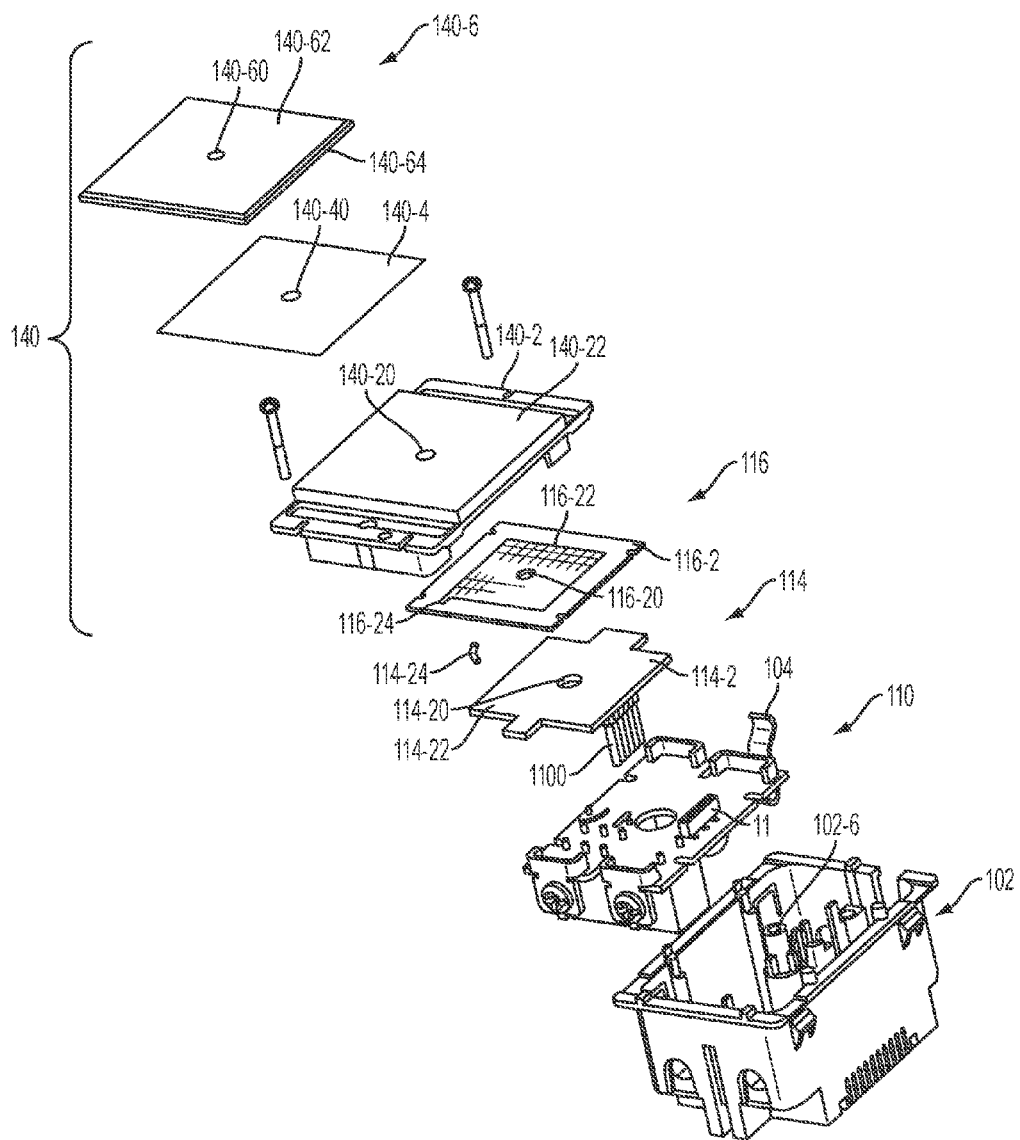


FIG. 18

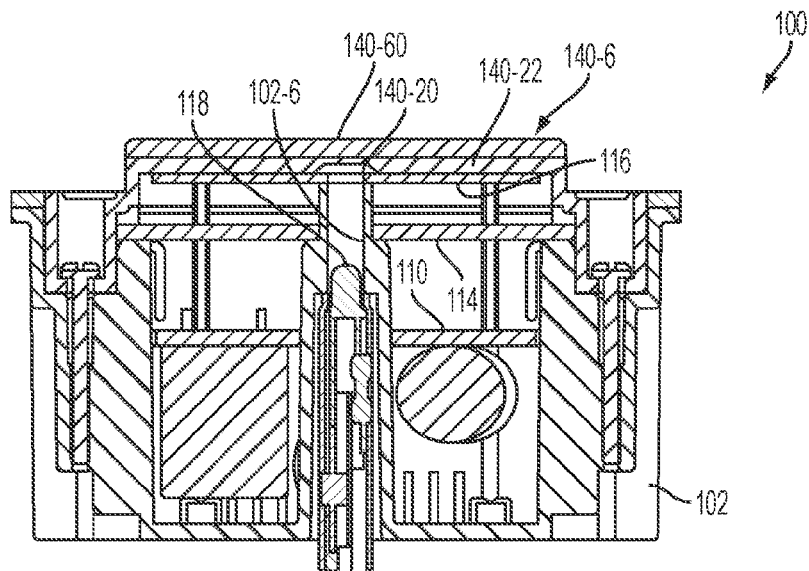


FIG. 19 A

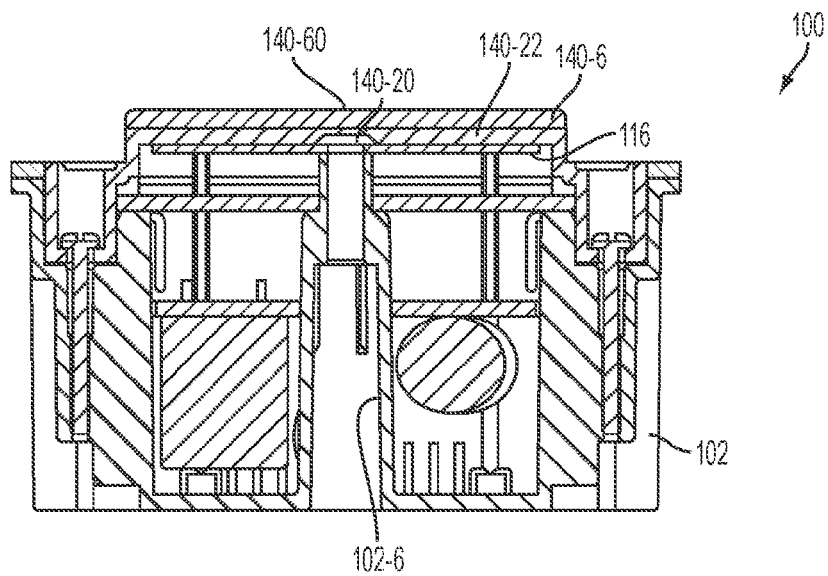
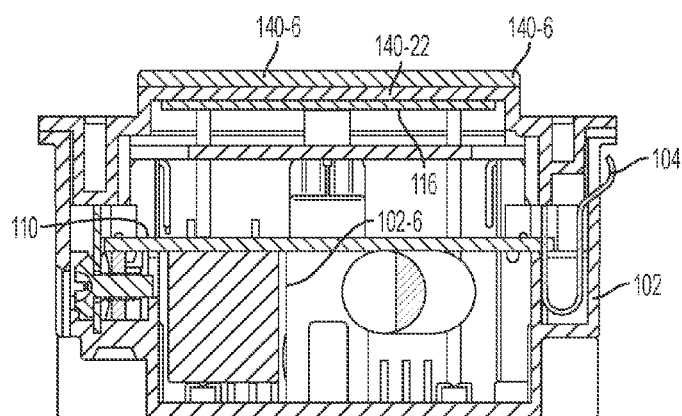


FIG. 19 B



FG. 19 C

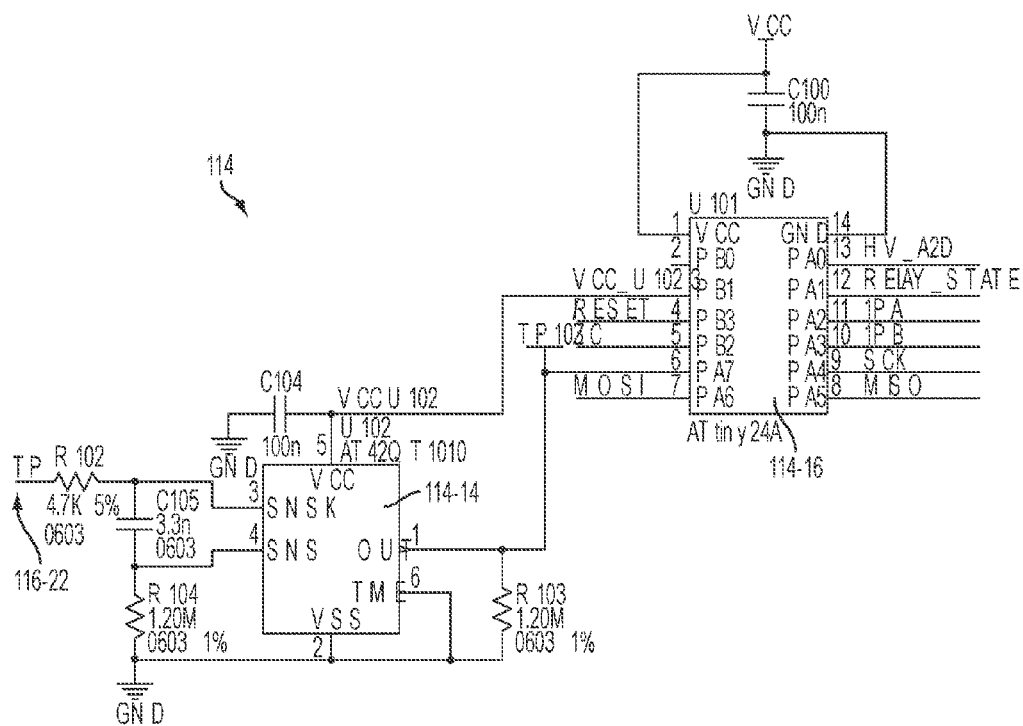


FIG. 20

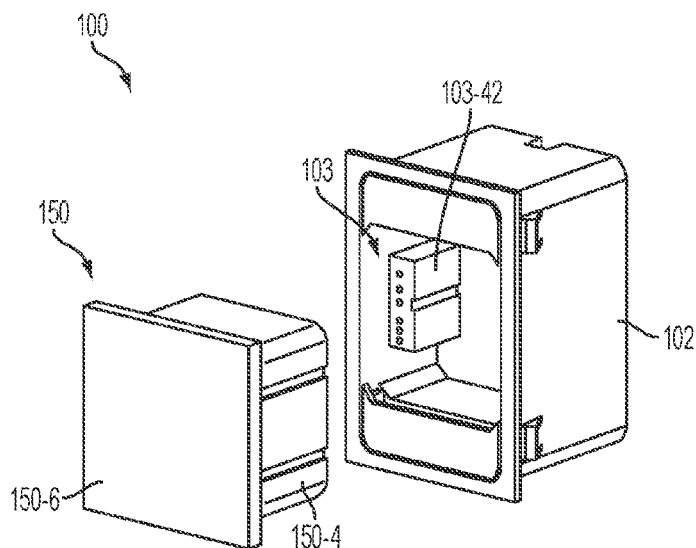


FIG. 21

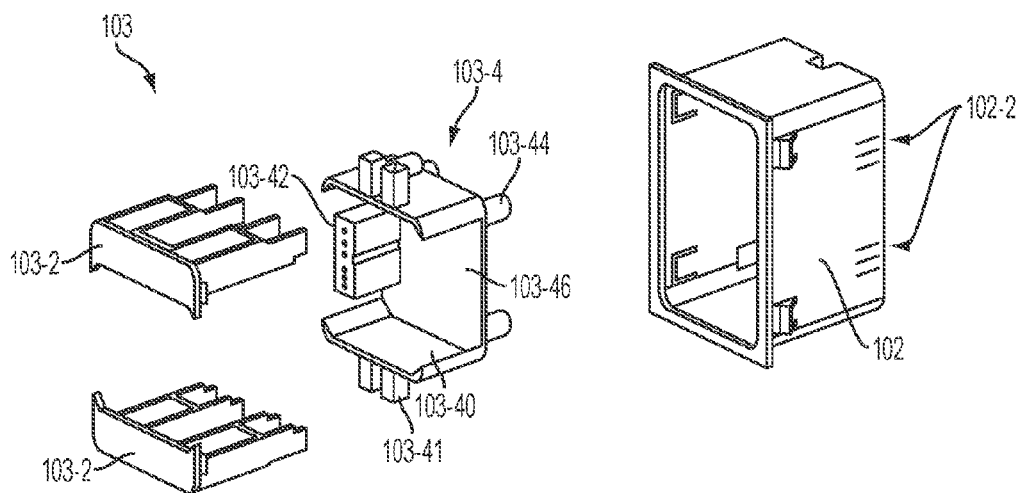
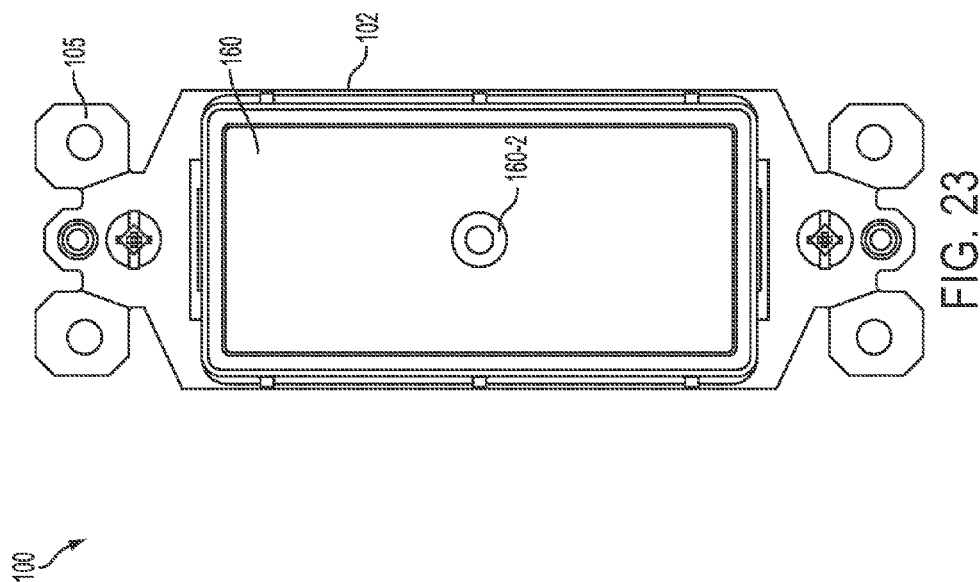
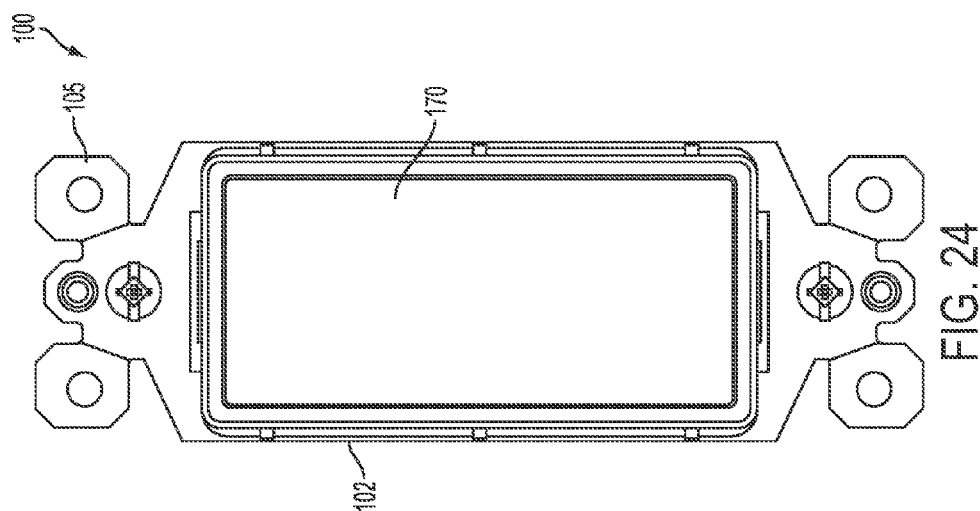
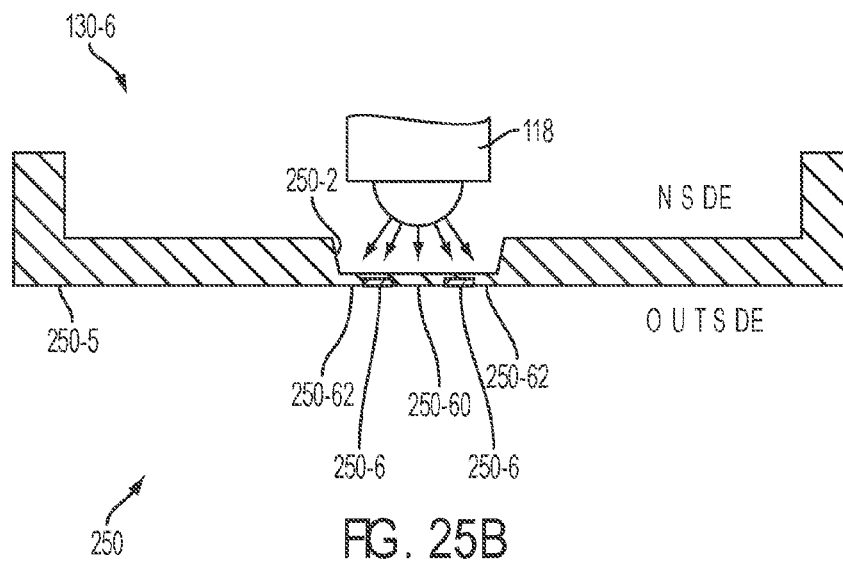
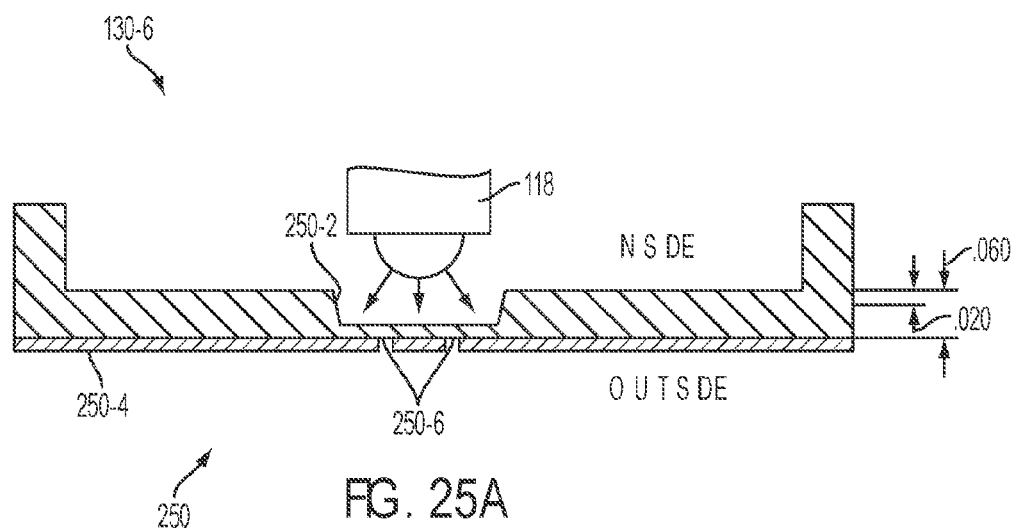


FIG. 22





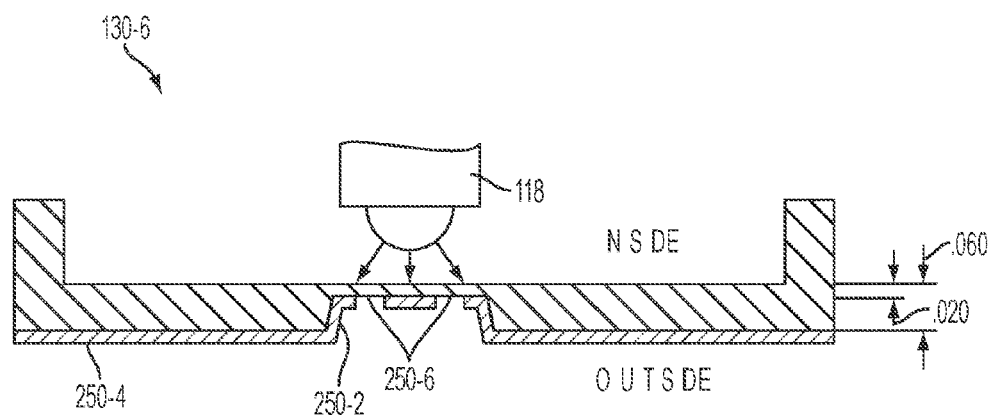


FIG. 25C

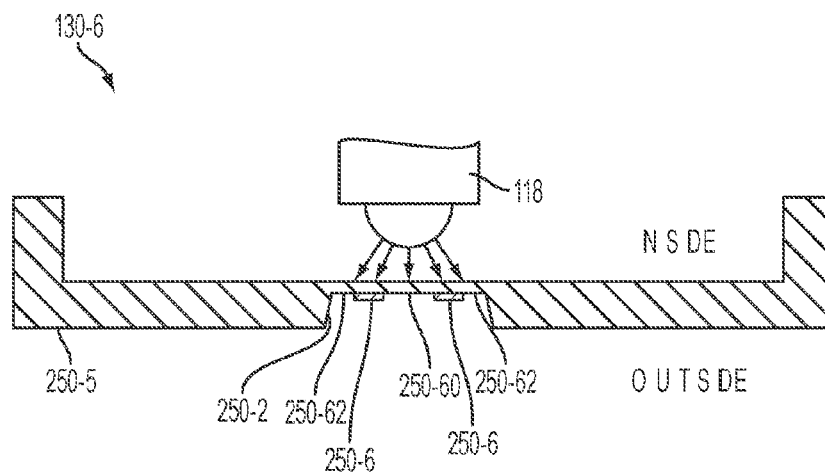


FIG. 25D

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ELECTRONIC SWITCHING DEVICE AND SYSTEM

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates generally to electrical devices, and particularly to electrical switch devices.

2. Technical Background

The conventional method for installing electrical circuits includes a rough-in phase and a finish phase. In the rough-in phase, conduit or cable is disposed throughout the structure in accordance with the building plans. Junction boxes are installed at appropriate locations to house electrical connection points where two or more conductors are spliced together. Device boxes are installed throughout the structure where electrical service is desired. After the boxes are placed, the electrical wires are pulled through the conduits (if provided) and all of the circuits are bonded.

After the "rough-in" phase has been completed, the electrical wiring devices are terminated, i.e., they are electrically connected to the wire leads. This part of the installation process is typically performed or supervised by a journeyman electrician. Subsequently, the ground strap of the electrical wiring device is mounted to the device box. One or more electrical wiring devices may be mounted to a device box depending on its size. A single-gang device box typically accommodates one electrical wiring device, a two-gang device box will typically accommodate two electrical wiring devices; and so on and so forth. Once an electrical wiring device is installed inside the device box, a cover plate is disposed over the electrical wiring device to "complete the electrical enclosure" such that individuals are not exposed to "hot" electrical wiring after the electrical power is turned ON.

There are several drawbacks associated with conventional installation methods and conventional wiring devices. Conventional wiring devices often do not make efficient use of space due to their one-size-fits-all device box designs. What is needed, for example, is an electrical switching device that makes more efficient use of the available space, e.g., one that does not require all of the space available in a single gang device box.

Mounting the ground strap of an electrical wiring device to the device box is tedious, time consuming, and therefore costly. The same can be said of mounting the cover plate to the electrical wiring device. In multi-gang installations, the finished look is often ragged because the electrical devices and the cover plates are not in alignment. The misalignment is often in all three dimensions. Retrofitting an installation can also be problematic from a finished look standpoint because the device box or an old work box may not be precisely aligned to the plane of the wall surface. Moreover, the wall surface itself may be uneven. After remodeling a space, homeowners often seek to replace an existing wall plate with one that better matches the new decor. Thus, a homeowner may inadvisably remove the faceplate cover from an energized wiring device and inadvertently become exposed to a shock hazard from the "hot" electrical wiring. What is needed therefore is a modular electrical wiring device system that addresses the drawbacks articulated above.

Electrical switches are a well known type of electrical wiring device and are commonly employed as, e.g., light switches. "Toggle" switches include single pole single throw (SPST) switches that are used to mechanically switch lights between an ON state and an OFF state. One drawback to

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these types of switches is that a light must be turned ON/OFF from one location. A light may be controlled from two locations by using three way toggle switches, i.e., by employing two single pole double throw switches (SPDT). Each SPDT switch depends on the switch position of the other. When one SPDT switch turns a light ON, it is because the switch position of the other SPDT was in a switch position that resulted in the light being previously OFF. Thus, the two SPDT work in tandem such that the light may be controlled at two locations. Certain switches of this type incorporate a bistable latching relays. Latching relays often include solenoids that are electrically actuated by a low power signal. Some of the drawbacks associated with relay switches relate to degradation, fatigue, undesired arcing and excessive leakage current to ground. What is needed therefore is an electrical switch that addresses these drawbacks.

The concept of modularity may also be extended to electrical switches. As noted above, after remodeling a space, homeowners often seek to replace an existing switch with one that better matches the new decor. Again, the homeowner may inadvisably attempt to replace the existing electrical switch with a new device and become exposed to a shock hazard from the "hot" electrical wiring. A modular electrical switch that addresses the needs previously identified is also desirable. What is also needed is a modular electrical switch that is interchangeable; i.e., it allows for the removal of the actuator portion without becoming exposed to shock or electrocution.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is directed to an electrical switching system that addresses the needs described above.

One aspect of the present invention is directed to an electronic switch device for controlling a load. The device comprises a housing assembly including a front cover assembly having a user interface, a back body assembly, and a plurality of terminals configured to be coupled to an AC power source and the load. A circuit assembly is coupled to the plurality of terminals. The circuit assembly includes a relay switch having a commutator and a set of contacts. The relay switch is characterized by a predetermined commutator period, the predetermined commutator period being substantially the commutator travel time between the set of contacts during a relay switch actuation. The circuit assembly further includes an actuation circuit configured to provide a constant current actuation signal that energizes the relay switch in response to an input stimulus via the user interface such that an end of the predetermined commutator period substantially coincides with a predetermined point in an AC power cycle.

In another aspect, the present invention is directed to an electronic switch device that comprises a housing assembly including a plurality of terminals configured to be coupled to an AC power source and a load. The housing assembly also includes a user interface and a sensitivity adjustment interface. A circuit assembly is coupled to the plurality of terminals. The circuit assembly includes a relay switch having a commutator and a set of contacts. The relay switch is characterized by a commutator period, the commutator period being substantially the commutator travel time between the set of contacts. The circuit assembly also includes a sensor detector receptor portion coupled to the user interface and configured to sense perturbations of a signal parameter. The circuit assembly also includes a sensor detector coupled to the sensor receptor portion. The sensor detector is configured to determine whether the perturbation

tions of the signal parameter correspond to a switch actuation command in accordance with a detection rule. The circuit assembly also includes a regulation circuit coupled to the sensitivity adjustment interface and the sensor detector. The regulation circuit is configured to adjust the detection rule in accordance with a setting of the sensitivity adjustment interface and direct the relay switch to actuate in response to the switch actuation command in accordance with a selected sensitivity adjustment.

In yet another aspect, the present invention is directed to an electronic switch device configured to be installed within a device box, the device comprises a housing assembly that includes a plurality of terminals configured to be coupled to an AC power source. The housing assembly further includes a first circuit assembly coupled to the plurality of terminals. The first circuit assembly includes a relay switch having a commutator and a set of contacts, the relay switch being characterized by a commutator period, the commutator period being substantially the commutator travel time between the set of contacts. An interchangeable switch module is configured to be coupled and decoupled from the housing assembly. The interchangeable switch module is selected from a plurality of interchangeable switch modules. Each interchangeable switch module is characterized by a user interface that is implemented by one of a plurality of switching technologies. The interchangeable switch module also includes a second circuit assembly coupled to the first circuit assembly when the interchangeable switch module is coupled to the housing assembly. The second circuit assembly propagates a constant current actuation signal that energizes the relay switch in response to an input stimulus via the user interface such that an end of the predetermined commutator period substantially coincides with a predetermined point in an AC power cycle.

Additional features and advantages of the invention will be set forth in the detailed description which follows, and in part will be readily apparent to those skilled in the art from that description or recognized by practicing the invention as described herein, including the detailed description which follows, the claims, as well as the appended drawings.

It is to be understood that both the foregoing general description and the following detailed description are merely exemplary of the invention, and are intended to provide an overview or framework for understanding the nature and character of the invention as it is claimed. The accompanying drawings are included to provide a further understanding of the invention, and are incorporated in and constitute a part of this specification. The drawings illustrate various embodiments of the invention, and together with the description serve to explain the principles and operation of the invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIGS. 1A-1B are perspective views of a frame member in accordance with the present invention;

FIGS. 2A-2D are perspective views of a modular alignment connector in accordance with the present invention;

FIG. 3 is a detail view of the modular alignment connector depicted in FIGS. 2A-2D;

FIGS. 4A-4E are illustrative views showing installation details of the frame, modular alignment connector and electrical wiring device;

FIGS. 5A-5C are perspective views of a modular electrical wiring system showing an electrical switching device in conjunction with an aesthetic overlays 60 in accordance with the present invention;

FIG. 6 is a perspective view of an electronic wave switch in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 7 is an exploded view of the electronic wave switch depicted in FIG. 6;

FIGS. 8A-8B are cross-sectional views of the electronic wave switch depicted in FIG. 6;

FIGS. 9A-9G are detail views of the cover assembly of the electronic wave switch depicted in FIG. 6;

FIGS. 10A-10B are schematic diagrams of the AC power PCB in accordance with the present invention;

FIGS. 11A-11D are schematic diagrams of the low voltage PCB of the electronic wave switch depicted in FIG. 7;

FIGS. 12A-12B are perspective views of an electronic tap switch in accordance with another embodiment of the present invention;

FIGS. 13A-13B are detail views of various layers of the front cover assembly of the electronic tap switch depicted in FIGS. 12A-12B;

FIG. 14 is an exploded view of the electronic tap switch depicted in FIGS. 12-13;

FIGS. 15A-15D are cross sectional views of the electronic tap switch depicted in FIGS. 12A-12B;

FIG. 16 is a schematic diagram of the low voltage PCB of the electronic tap switch depicted in FIG. 13;

FIGS. 17A-17B are perspective views of an electronic touch switch in accordance with yet another embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 18 is an exploded view of the electronic touch switch depicted in FIG. 17A;

FIGS. 19A-19C are cross sectional views of the electronic touch switch depicted in FIGS. 17A-17B;

FIG. 20 is a schematic diagram of the low voltage PCB of the electronic tap switch depicted in FIG. 18;

FIG. 21 is an exploded view of the modular electrical wiring system in accordance with another embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 22 is a detail exploded view of the modular electrical wiring system shown in FIG. 21;

FIG. 23 is a front view of an electronic switch in accordance with yet another embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 24 is a front view of an electronic switch in accordance with yet another embodiment of the present invention; and

FIGS. 25A-25D are directed to various embodiments of LED locator lenses in accordance with the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Reference will now be made in detail to the present exemplary embodiments of the invention, examples of which are illustrated in the accompanying drawings. Wherever possible, the same reference numbers will be used throughout the drawings to refer to the same or like parts. An exemplary embodiment of the frame is shown in FIGS. 1-4, and is designated throughout as reference number 10. An exemplary embodiment of the electrical switch device of the present invention is shown in FIG. 6, and is designated generally throughout by reference numeral 100. An exemplary embodiment of the framing system that includes the frame member, frame components, and switch 100 is shown in FIGS. 5A-5C and is designated generally throughout by reference numeral 500.

As embodied herein, and depicted in FIGS. 1A-1B perspective views of a frame member in accordance with the present invention are disclosed. FIG. 1A is directed to the rear side 10-2 of the frame member 10 and FIG. 1B is

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directed to the front side **10-1** of the frame member **10**. Reference is made to U.S. patent application Ser. No. 13/680,675, filed on Nov. 19, 2012, which is incorporated herein by reference as though fully set forth in its entirety, for a more detailed explanation of the framing system shown in FIGS. 1-5. The frame member **10** is configured to “complete the electrical enclosure” when the modular electrical device is properly installed within the frame device opening **10-13**. Stated differently, instead of using a conventional wall plate to complete the enclosure, the present invention counter-intuitively endows the frame with the function of preventing individuals from being exposed to hot electrical wiring in the device box when the device is energized.

One way the enclosure is completed is by providing a frame enclosure lip **10-5** around the perimeter of the frame. The frame lip **10-5** is configured to abut the adjacent wall surface such that the edge of the properly installed wall box cannot touch the rear side of the frame because of the frame lip **10-5**. This is true even when old work boxes having flanges that mount to the outer surface of the sheet rock are used. The lip **10-5** does not interfere with the old work box flanges; it allows the frame **10** to abut the wall surface. The frame **10** also includes a frame opening **10-13**. The edges of the frame opening **10-13** are configured to abut modular alignment connectors **20**, or electrical wiring devices **100**, in the manner disclosed below. Once the frame is installed and the opening **10-13** is filled with one or more electrical wiring devices and/or one or more modular alignment connectors **20**, the enclosure is completed.

The frame **10** further includes interior serrated wall members **10-6** and connector landing elements **10-7** that extend around the perimeter of the frame device opening **10-13** to form an integral rim or skirt that is inserted into the device box. The serrated wall members **10-6** are disposed along the sides of the opening **10-13** whereas the landing elements are disposed at either end of the opening **10-13**. Each landing element **10-7** includes a ground connection tab **10-8**. Thus, the region of the frame **10** disposed between the enclosure lip **10-5** and the integral rim (formed by **10-7** and **10-8**) covers the wall surface **1**. Once the wall box screws/fasteners **10-10** (not shown) are inserted into the fastener slots **10-12** and tightened, the only way of accessing the interior of the device box is via the frame opening **10-13** which is completely filled by modular alignment connectors **20** and/or a modular wiring device **100** after installation. In another embodiment, the modular wiring device may be configured to completely fill the enclosure.

As embodied herein and depicted in FIGS. 2A-2D, perspective views of a modular alignment connector **20** in accordance with the present invention are disclosed. FIG. 2A shows the front major surface **20-1** of the modular alignment connector **20** when it is inserted within the opening **10-13** of the frame **10**. The connector front surface **20-1** includes a front connector flange **20-6** which is configured to fit within the frame connector seat **10-15** when the connector is disposed within the frame **10**. The modular alignment connector **20** further includes bending snap arms **20-3**, spacer tangs **20-4**, and a spacer channel **20-5** disposed therebetween. The bending snap arms **20-3** are provided on either side of the connector **20** to allow the connector **20** to snap into the frame when inserted into the opening **10-13**. The spacer tang **20-4** is used to lock the modular alignment connector **20** into the frame **10**. Briefly stated, connector **20** is locked when the spacer tang **20-4** is pressed into the spacer channel **20-5** (see, e.g., FIG. 2D). As its name suggests, the modular alignment connector **20** provides a

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correctly sized frame opening **10-13** such that various combinations of wiring devices complete the opening when they are installed in frame **10**. In particular, the frame opening is configured to accommodate three “one-module” sized wiring devices. A “two-module” sized device requires two modular alignment connectors **20** to complete the opening. A “three-module” sized device is inserted into the frame opening **10-13** to complete the enclosure. The snap connect assembly (**20-3**, **20-4**, and **20-5**) is configured to withstand at least 50 foot-pounds of pulling force.

FIG. 2B shows the modular connector **20** rotated 180° with respect to the view provided by FIG. 2A. In this view, the connector **20** is shown to include a front stabilizing plate **20-6** that works in conjunction with the frame’s rear connector flanges **20-7** to form a connector channel **20-8** that is sized to be seated on, and grip, the frame connector landing **10-7** (shown in FIGS. 1A and 1B). The stabilizing plate **20-6** is also configured to overlay a portion of frame front face **10-1** (FIG. 1B) when the modular alignment connector **20** is inserted into, and fully seated at the end of the opening **10-13**. Stated briefly, the front stabilizing plate **20-6** is configured to prevent the modular alignment connector **20** from being pushed inwardly through the opening **10-13**.

FIG. 2C is a rear view of the modular alignment connector **20** and shows the rear major surface **20-2** which forms a ledge having device stop elements **20-9** extending downwardly therefrom. The device stop elements **20-9** have the same or similar function as the serrated stop elements **10-60** formed in the interior serrated wall **10-6** of the frame **10**. Reference is made to U.S. patent application Ser. No. 13/680,675, filed on Nov. 19, 2012, which is incorporated herein by reference as though fully set forth in its entirety, for a more detailed explanation of the framing system that includes the elements (**10-60**, **20-9**) configured to mate with the snap elements formed in the back body portion **102** of the modular devices. All of these elements work together to complete the electrical enclosure such that the user cannot obtain access to hot electrical wiring. Moreover, the modular wiring devices **100** is prevented from moving laterally within the frame opening when the device snaps are snapped into place within elements **10-60** and **20-9**. Stated briefly, the aforementioned elements work together to secure and align electrical wiring device(s) within the opening **10-13**.

FIG. 2D shows the modular connector **20** rotated 180° with respect to the view provided by FIG. 2C. When the connector **20** is installed into the opening **10-13**, the bending snap arms **20-3** are deflected inwardly until they snap into the serrations **10-60** formed in interior serrated walls **10-6**. This snap-fit arrangement prevents helps to secure the connector **20** within the opening **10-13**. Note that when the connector **20** is in this position, the rear stabilizing plate **20-7** bears against edges of connector landing **10-7** (shown in FIG. 1). Altogether, the snap-arms, front stabilizing plate **20-6** and the rear stabilizing plate **20-7** restrict the movement of the modular alignment connector **20** such that it is prevented from moving in or out of the opening **10-13** once the connector **20** is installed within the opening **10-13**.

FIG. 3 is a detail view of the modular alignment connector **20** depicted in FIGS. 2A-2D. This is yet another view of the bending snap arm **20-3**, the spacer tang **20-4**, and the spacer channel **20-5** therebetween. In this view, the snap fit arm **20-3** is shown being deflected inwardly as the connector **20** is being inserted into the opening **10-13**. Once the snap-arms **20-3** snap or deflect outwardly into the serrations **10-60** (shown in FIG. 1), the spacer tang **20-4** may be pressed into channel **20-5** to lock the modular alignment connector within the opening **10-13**.

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Referring to FIGS. 4A-4E, illustrative views showing installation details of the frame 10, modular alignment connector 20 and electrical wiring device 40 are disclosed. In FIG. 4A, a modular alignment connector 20 is shown as being inserted into opening 10-13 of frame 10 by the direction of the arrow. Another modular alignment connector is shown as being previously installed at the opposite end of the opening 10-13. As depicted in FIG. 4B, both of the modular alignment connectors 20 are shown as being installed and locked into the opening 10-13.

In FIG. 4C, a wiring device 100 is shown as being inserted between the modular alignment connectors 20. Note that a portion of the device 100 bears against the spacer tangs 20-4. As noted previously, the tangs 20-4 are inserted to prevent the snaps 20-3 from disengaging the frame opening 10-13. Once the device 40 is installed, therefore, the spacer tangs 20-4 function as a stop that prevents the device 100 from falling through the opening 10-13. Stated differently, once device 100 is installed into the frame opening 10-13, the modular alignment connectors are locked into place and cannot be removed. FIG. 4C also shows a ground wire 10-9 that extends from the ground connection tab 10-8.

FIG. 4D is a side view that shows device 100 being inserted into the frame opening 10-13 by the direction of the arrow. FIG. 4E shows the device 100 being fully installed in the frame opening 10-13 with alignment connectors 20 disposed at either end thereof. Reference is made to U.S. patent application Ser. No. 13/680,675, filed on Nov. 19, 2012, which is incorporated herein by reference as though fully set forth in its entirety, for a more detailed explanation of the framing system and the method of removing a modular device 100 from the frame.

Referring to FIGS. 5A-5C, various perspective views of the modular electrical wiring system 500 are disclosed. System 500 is shown to include the electrical switching device 100 in combination with the aesthetic overlays 60. The aesthetic overlays are depicted in FIGS. 12, 13 and 14, of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 13/680,675 referenced above. As noted therein, each type of aesthetic overlay (60, 60-20 and 60-30) disclosed in the provisional application substantially abuts the adjacent wall surface 1 by virtue of a ratcheting overlay snap 10-3. This feature allows system 500 to accommodate uneven wall surfaces. As alluded to above, wall box 2 may be a pre-existing wall box disposed in a pre-existing electrical distribution system. Thus, the present invention readily accommodates existing installations.

As embodied herein and depicted in FIG. 6, a perspective view of an electronic wave switch 100 in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention is disclosed. Again, like every embodiment of the present invention, when the device 100 is inserted into the frame opening 10-13 (see FIGS. 1-4), the user is not exposed to any of the electrical wiring stowed in the device box. Having said this, the electronic wave switch 100 includes a wave switch actuator assembly 120 coupled to a back body 102. The back body 102 includes heat dissipation vents 102-2. The actuator assembly 120 includes an enclosure portion 120-2 that mates with the back body 102 to form a device housing. The actuator assembly 120 includes an aesthetic cover portion 120-4 that is connected to the enclosure portion 120-2. An infrared ("IR") lens 120-6 is disposed in the center portion of the aesthetic cover 120-4. The wave switch device 10 is configured to actuate whenever a user waves his hand (or some other object) in front of the lens 120-6.

Referring to FIG. 7, an exploded view of the electronic wave switch 100 depicted in FIG. 6 is disclosed. The electronic wave switch device 100 includes an AC power

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circuit 110 disposed within the back body 102. The AC power circuit 110 provides power to an electronic actuator circuit 112 that is disposed in the wave switch actuator assembly 120. The electronic actuator circuit 112 is spaced apart from the AC power circuit 110. The back body assembly 102 and the AC power circuit 110 are identical for each of the embodiments disclosed herein.

The back body 102 includes heat dissipation vents 102-2 that allow thermal energy generated by the electronics to vent and dissipate. Snaps 102-4 are formed along the perimeter of the back body member 102 and are configured to engage frame 10 in the manner described above. Stated differently, the electronic wave switch 100 is mounted within the frame and not to the device box; thus, the device 100 does not include and does not require a mounting strap. The back body 102 includes an LED tube 102-6 that is formed in the center portion thereof. The light tube 102-6 is configured to accommodate an LED locator light 118 (not shown in the view) that extends through the center portion of the device 100 through various openings (110-1, 112-6, etc.). The back body 102 also includes ribbing of various shapes and sizes that accommodate and space apart the printed circuit boards (PCBs 110, 112).

The AC power circuit 110 is disposed on a printed circuit board (PCB) 110-2 and shown schematically in FIG. 10. The PCB 110-2 includes a central aperture 110-1 that allows the LED tube 102-6 to extend there through. A plurality of terminal structures (104, 106, 108-1, and 108-2) are connected to the PCB 110-2 around its periphery. For example, a ground clip terminal 104 is configured to engage the ground connection tab 10-8 (See FIG. 4C). The ground clip 104 provides the power supply return path (See FIG. 10) with an "earth link" to the frame 10. As shown in FIGS. 4A-4C, the frame 10 includes a ground wire 10-9 that can be attached to the ground tab 10-8 by any suitable means.

The electronic actuator circuit 112 is disposed on PCB 112-2 and is shown schematically in FIGS. 11A-11D. A sensor adjustment aperture 112-81 is formed in a corner portion of the PCB 112-2 and accommodates the sensor adjuster 112-80. The sensor adjuster 112-80 is coupled to a potentiometer 112-8 (R115), which is also shown in FIG. 11A. The potentiometer 112-8 controls the sensitivity of the sensor 112-4 (U102), which is also mounted on PCB 112-2. An IR LED D100 is also mounted on the PCB 112-2 adjacent to the sensor 112-4 (U102). The function of these components will be described below in the description of FIG. 11A. A central aperture 112-6 is formed in PCB 112-2 and is configured to allow the LED tube 102-6 to extend there through. The electronic actuator PCB 112-2 is positioned within the enclosure 120-2 by several rib elements 102-8 formed in the back body 102.

The wave switch actuator assembly 120 includes enclosure portion 120-2, an aesthetic cover 120-4 and an IR lens element 120-6. The enclosure portion 120-2 includes a raised cylindrically shaped plateau 120-20 that includes several apertures (120-21, 120-22, 120-26 and 120-28) formed therein. The LED aperture 120-21 is aligned with an IR LED (D100) mounted on PCB 112-2. The sensor aperture 120-22 is aligned with the sensor integrated chip (IC) U102, which is also mounted on PCB 112-2. An oblong aperture 120-26 is disposed adjacent to apertures 120-21, 120-22 and is configured to receive the locator LED light pipe element 120-8 from underneath the enclosure portion 120-2. Snap-holes 120-28 are disposed at either end of the cylindrical portion 120-20 and are configured to accept the snaps 120-62 formed along the periphery of IR lens 120-6. As

described below, an aesthetic cover **120-4** and an IR lens **120-6** are configured to be connected to enclosure **120-2** to complete the assembly.

Referring to FIG. 8A, a latitudinal cross-sectional view of the electronic wave switch depicted in FIG. 6 is disclosed. This view shows more clearly the raised cylindrically shaped plateau **120-20** formed in the enclosure **120-2**. Plateau **120-20** is shown to include the LED aperture **120-21** which is aligned with an IR LED (**D100**) mounted on PCB **112-2**. The sensor aperture **120-22** is also shown as being aligned with the sensor integrated chip (IC) **U102**. The sensor adjuster **112-80** is shown as being coupled to a potentiometer **112-8** (See also **R115** in FIG. 11A). The AC power PCB **110-2** includes connector **J1** mounted on the top surface thereof. The connector **J1** is shown to provide signal connectivity to the actuator circuit PCB **112-2** via lines **J1(1-6)**.

Referring to FIG. 8B, a longitudinal cross-sectional view of the electronic wave switch depicted in FIG. 6 is disclosed. In this sectional view, the aesthetic cover **120-4** and the locator LED light pipe element **120-8** are shown. As described below, the LED light pipe **120-8** directs light from an LED light source that is inserted from the rear of the device **100**.

FIGS. 9A-9G are detail views of the cover assembly of the electronic wave switch depicted in FIG. 6. In FIG. 9A, the front aesthetic cover **120-4** removed and the IR lens **120-6** is shown as being disposed over the cylindrically shaped plateau **120-20** portion of the enclosure **120-2**. In FIG. 9B, the IR lens **120-6** is removed from overtop plateau **120-20** to reveal the oblong aperture **120-26** that accommodates the light pipe **120-8**. This view also shows the LED aperture **120-21** with the IR LED (**D100**) there within. The sensor aperture **120-22** is also shown visibly aligned with the sensor integrated chip (IC) **U102**. Finally, the snap-holes **120-28** are shown at either end of the cylindrical portion **120-20**. As noted above, the snap holes **120-28** accommodate the snaps **120-62** for the IR lens cap **120-6**.

In reference to FIG. 9C, an underside of the enclosure cover **102-2** is depicted to illustrate the optical isolation between the locator light LED **118**, the LED **D100** and the sensor **112-4** (**U102**). The size of the LED aperture **120-21** encloses and isolates the IR LED **D100** from the other components. The IR LED aperture **120-21** also prevents the infrared light that is emitted from the LED **D100** from interfering with the IR Sensor **112-4** (**U102**). Stated differently, LED aperture **120-21** allows the LED light to be emitted into the ambient space around the device **100**, but it also prevents IR light from bleeding through the plastic in enclosure **102-2** to inadvertently cause the IR Sensor **112-4** to actuate the switch. On the other hand, the sensor opening **120-22** is also important. If the opening size is too small, the amount of reflected light is limited such that the amount of light directed to the sensor is not sufficient to effect a desired switch actuation (hand wave). If the opening is too large, internal IR light may be reflected by the lens **120-60** and inadvertently actuate the switch. In sum, the opening **120-22** maximizes the sensor viewing angle of the sensor **112-4** to optimize its ability to sense reflected IR light (i.e., from a hand wave).

Referring to FIG. 9D, a detail view of the sensor adjuster **120-80** disposed on PCB **112-2** is disclosed. In this view, the sensor adjuster **112-80** is shown on one side of the low voltage PCB **112-2** with the potentiometer **112-8** being disposed on the other. The sensor adjuster **112-80** includes an adjustor dial **112-82** that provides the user with means to rotate the sensor adjuster **112-80** when adjusting the sensor

sensitivity. FIG. 9E is a detail view that shows the PCB **112-2** with the sensor adjuster **120-80** removed to reveal the sensor adjustment aperture **112-81** (which accommodates the sensor adjuster **112-80**). The sensor adjustment aperture **112-81** includes a limiter portion **112-83** that prevents the sensor adjuster **112-80** from being over-rotated (such that potentiometer **112-8** is damaged). The potentiometer **112-8** is shown to include a keyed opening **112-85** for a longitudinal portion of the sensor adjuster **112-80** (i.e., adjustment key **112-86** shown in FIG. 9F).

FIG. 9F is a rear detail view of the sensor adjuster **112-80**. The underside of the adjustor dial **112-82** has adjustment key **112-86** extending therefrom. The adjustment key **112-86** is formed by a substantially cylindrical member having a flat surface formed in one side thereof. The keyed shape mates with the keyed opening **112-85** formed within the potentiometer **112-8**. Thus, when the dial **112-82** is rotated by a user, the key **112-86** and the keyed opening **112-85** move together to adjust the potentiometer **112-8**. The base of the adjustment key **112-86** includes an adjustment stop member **112-84**. As shown in FIG. 9G, the adjustment stop member **112-84** is configured to engage the limiter portion **112-83** formed in the sensor adjustment aperture **112-81**. As alluded to above, when the stop member **112-84** engages either side of the limiter portion **112-83**, the user is thus prevented from over-rotating the sensor adjuster **112-80**.

As embodied herein and depicted in FIG. 10A, a schematic diagram of the AC power circuit **110** in accordance with the present invention is disclosed. As an initial point, the AC power schematic of FIG. 10 shows that the present invention may be used to realize a three-way switch that can be used to control a light from two (or more) locations in an AC branch circuit. The terminals are labeled as T-line, 1-Pole, 3-Way, and Ground. T-line may be connected to line or load; and 1-Pole may be connected to load or line. The ground terminal (i.e., T_EGND) may be implemented by a ground clip terminal **104** (See, e.g., FIG. 7) that engages the frame **10** (See, e.g., FIGS. 1-5). The frame **10**, of course, includes ground wire **10-9** (See, e.g., FIGS. 4A-B) which is connected to the premise ground.

In FIG. 10A, the terminal T-Line is shown as being connected to AC power provided via an upstream circuit breaker AC PWR. The AC branch circuit, of course, provides a line conductor **2** and a neutral conductor **3**. The break in the neutral conductor **3** in FIG. 10A indicates that it is connected to ground at the breaker box. The terminal T-EGND is connected to premise ground via the frame **10** as previously described. The terminal T-line is coupled to two traveler conductors **T1** and **T2** by way of a relay **110-4**. A positive pulse on signal line "coil+" will throw the relay switch to traveler **T1** whereas a positive pulse on signal line "coil-" will throw the relay switch to traveler **T2** (The relay coil actuation circuit is shown at FIG. 11B). As noted previously, the terminal T-Line can be connected to a load (e.g., a light element); the load would, of course, be connected to a neutral conductor that extends back to the circuit breaker CB to complete the circuit.

In any event, both the first traveler **T1** and the second traveler **T2** are connected to the power bridge circuit **110-6**, a scaling circuit **110-8** and the calibration circuit **110-20** (See FIG. 10B). The bridge circuit **110-6**, of course, provides full wave rectified power to the power supply circuit **110-10** and is always coupled to AC power via resistor **R9** or resistor **R4**. The scaling circuit **10-8** is configured to provide a current limited signal to the zero cross input (ZC) of connector jack

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J1. As explained below, a processor on the low voltage PCB **112-2** uses the zero cross information for signal timing purposes.

The power supply circuit **110-10** includes transistor Q7 which provides a current limited source to charge capacitor C1 to about 24 VDC. The 24 VDC is provided to power the coil actuator circuit in FIG. **11B**. Diode D1 clamps the voltage across R23 to limit the charging current to about 0.5 mA or less. An unlimited current would damage the circuit during a start-up or charging event. Also since the power supply circuit leaks current from either line powered conductor T1 or T2 to earth, it is important to limit this current to minimize the effect on upstream devices that are sensitive to earth leakage, such as GFCIs. As alluded to above, when a neutral conductor 3 is present in the device box, the power supply **110-10** may derive power between the traveler conductor T1 (or T2) to neutral, instead of to earth ground.

In reference to FIG. **10B**, the relay state calibration circuit **110-20** is a NOR circuit that is used to calibrate the electronics (FIG. **11A**) to switch relay **110-4**. Stated differently, the purpose of the relay state calibration circuit is to prevent contact welding by assuring that any switch bounce at relay contact closure occurs at or near the “zero crossing.” The output of the calibration circuit (“relay state”) is a logic one (high) only when the relay switch **110-4** is between the T1 and T2 contacts. Thus, the relay state output is monitored by the processor on the low voltage PCB to measure the time it is a logic one since this is the time it takes for the relay switch element to move from the traveler T1 contact to the traveler T2 contact (and vice-versa). As explained in more detail below, this value is stored in EEPROM and used during relay switching. This feature allows the processor to time the relay switch command such that the relay switch element strikes the traveler contact (T1 or T2) at precisely the zero crossing of the AC waveform. At the zero cross moment, there is no current flowing through the Line/load conductor given a resistive load, and thus, there will be no arcing as the traveler contact is engaged by the switch relay contact. As a result, the life of the relay contacts is significantly extended. Moreover, the size of the relay can be significantly reduced. This feature yields an efficient design because it lowers component costs and requires less space.

As embodied herein and depicted in FIGS. **11A-11D**, schematic diagrams of the low voltage PCB depicted in FIG. **7** are disclosed. In FIG. **11A**, the various signals from the AC power PCB **110** are provided to the sensor **112-4** and the processor **112-6** via the connector jack J100 which is coupled to the connector jack J1 disposed on the AC power PCB **110**. For example, the +24 VDC signal is provided to the voltage regulator **112-8** (See FIG. **11C**). As shown in FIG. **11C**, the voltage regulator circuit **112-8** (i.e., U100) is a load drop out regulator that creates a lower DC voltage (3.3 VDC) for the processor **112-6**. The regulator **112-8** itself is configured to consistently draw 30 uA. In reference to the signal HV_A2D, it is the output of the circuit formed by resistors R100 and R101, and capacitor C101. This circuit measures the bulk supply provided by the regulator **112-8**.

Referring back to FIG. **11A**, the processor **112-6** (see also **113-6** in FIG. **16**, and **114-6** in FIG. **20**) may be implemented using a “ATtiny 24A” processor as shown in the accompanying drawings. The processor includes 2K of flash memory. This IC includes twelve general purpose I/O pins. Pin 1 is connected to VCC, which is provided by the voltage regulator **112-8**. Lower voltage processors that use 3.3 VDC (compared to 5 VDC) use less power. The processor **112-6** draws approximately 4-6 uA when it is “asleep.” Its current draw when “awake” is about 1-2 mA. The internal clock

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oscillator of the processor **112-6** runs at 20 MHz. In an alternate embodiment, the internal oscillator runs at 20/8 Mhz. The reason for selecting the oscillator frequency relates to power tradeoff: the lower frequency causes less current draw but the instructions take longer to execute.

It will be apparent to those of ordinary skill in the pertinent art that modifications and variations can be made to the processor (**112-6**, **113-6**, or **114-6** shown in the various embodiments of the present invention) depending on a variety of factors including cost, power and speed. In addition, the selected processor must perform the core functions of the present invention. Many of the pins on the left side of the processor **112-6** are used to interface the switch or switch sensor, depending on the embodiment. Pins 4, 7 and 8 are factory programming pins that provide reset, MOSI (“master out slave in”) and MISO (“Master in slave out”), respectively. The zero cross (ZC) signal and the RELAY STATE signals are provided to pin 5 and pin 12, respectively, of the processor **112-6**. As noted above, these signals are used to control the timing of the relay switch actuation. The output signal HV_A2D is provided to the analog to digital input of the processor **112-6**. Thus, the processor **112-6** monitors the bulk supply and locks out switch actuations that are below a certain voltage. This feature ensures that the relay switch closure times are consistent. The signal 1PB is provided to the relay switch actuation circuit (FIG. **11B**). It has a normally low output, and is driven HIGH for 10 milliseconds to actuate the relay switch solenoid. The signal 1PA also has a normally low output, and it is also driven HIGH for 10 milliseconds to actuate the reverse solenoid current.

The sensor **112-4** (U102) is an active sensor that is powered by the micro-controller **112-6** output (VCC U102). The processor keeps the sensor **112-4** OFF during power-up to speed the charging of C1 (the 220 uF capacitor.) on the AC power board **110**. When the sensor is operational, it turns D100 ON for a short amount of time. The sensor **112-4** (U102) is coupled to the infrared (IR) LED D100 which is mounted on the PCB **112-2** adjacent to sensor **112-4**. In operation, the IR LED D100 emits infrared light at a predetermined frequency. The sensor includes an integral photo-sensitive element that is configured to receive reflected IR light. When a person waves his hand or some other object in proximity to the LED D100, the emitted infrared light is reflected back toward the photo-sensitive element integrally formed in the sensor **112-4**. When the reflected light is received by the sensor **112-4**, it is detected by the sensor as being reflected light based on its frequency. However, ambient infrared light that has different frequency characteristics is ignored by the sensor since the photosensitive element is attuned to light having a certain frequency (i.e., a unique signature). In any event, when this detection occurs, the signal/INT on pin 7 of the sensor **112-4** goes LOW. This signal (/INT) interrupts the processor **112-6**, which interprets the interrupt as a command to actuate the switch relay. Note that the mechanical structure of the wave switch actuator assembly **120** and its constituent parts prevents cross-talk in multi-gang installations.

The present invention is configured to substantially prevent such cross-talk by way of other means. For example, the sensitivity control described above allows the user to adjust the sensitivity of a switch as needed. When used alone, the wave switch **100** of the present invention can be set to detect motions that are relatively far away from the sensor **112-4**. When two or more wave switches are disposed in a multi-gang array, the wave switch **100** can be set to detect motions that are substantially proximate the sensor

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112-4 to prevent unintentional actuations of adjacent wave switches. The sensitivity adjustments are accomplished by adjusting the potentiometer 112-8 setting. The potentiometer is coupled to the MISO input of the processor 112-6 which reads the potentiometer setting and provides a corresponding sensitivity setting to sensor 112-4 by way of the MOSI pin. In an alternate embodiment, an individual wave switch can be equipped with LEDs and sensors that are tuned to different duty cycles (i.e., ON and OFF times of D100).

As noted above (FIG. 10B), the purpose of the relay state calibration circuit is to prevent contact welding by ensuring that any switch bounce at closure occurs at or near the zero crossings (or at any predetermined point in the AC cycle). The processor 112-6 performs an automated calibration sequence to achieve this purpose. As explained above, the relay state circuit 110-20 monitors the two travelers and determines when the two switch positions are open at the same time. This of course only happens when the commutator (moveable) contact is between the T1 and T2 contacts. The relay state circuit 110-20 output goes high when the two switch positions are low (NOR gate function). The processor 112-6 thus measures the commutator period, i.e., the time it takes for the commutator to move from the T1 contact to the T2 contact (or vice-versa). The processor 112-6 is also configured to measure the relay switch contact bounce time and store the time interval (i.e., the commutator period as measured from commutator start transit until the last bounce concludes) as a single constant. Alternatively, the processor could store the transit time and bounce time as two distinct constants. The automated calibration sequence can be performed during production or during each operation of the switch by the user, or both. If the automated calibration sequence is performed during production, the relay switch is connected to a pure DC voltage source and the switch is toggled four or five times. Once the constants, have been measured, they are loaded into EEPROM memory. After the switch is sold and connected to AC power, the solenoid is pulsed relative to the zero cross (ZC) in accordance with the constants stored in memory. In an alternate embodiment of the present invention, an average or estimated commutator transit time can be pre-stored in memory. The average or estimated commutator period may be obtained from the relay switch manufacturer or from testing a number of relay switches to obtain an average number.

Turning to FIG. 11B, the current source relay switch actuation circuit 112-12 provides the relay switch output signals (COIL+, COIL-) in accordance with the inputs signals 1PA and 1PB provided by the processor 112-6. The relay switch actuation circuit 112-12 includes an "H-bridge" circuit 112-120 and a constant current sink 112-122. The H-bridge circuit 112-120 includes transistors Q100, Q101, Q108 and Q109. The output COIL+ is disposed at the common collector node between Q101 and Q108. The output COIL- is disposed at the common collector node between Q100 and Q109. These outputs are provided to the relay solenoid coil via jack 100.

The input 1PA is provided by the processor 112-6 and is coupled to the bases of the transistors Q105 and Q109, respectively. The transistor Q105 is part of an inverter stage that is coupled to H-bridge transistor Q101. The other input, 1PB, is coupled to the bases of input transistors Q108 and Q104, respectively. Transistor Q104 is also part of an inverter circuit, and is coupled to H-bridge transistor Q109. The purpose of the inverters is described in greater detail below. The emitters of transistors Q108 and Q109 are

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connected to the constant current sink 112-122. Taken together, these circuits provide the relay switch 110-4 with a constant current source.

The operation of the constant current source is as follows. The processor controlled signals 1PB and 1PA are never ON at the same time. When the processor drives the input control signal 1PA HIGH, the relay commutator is driven in one direction, and when it drives 1PB HIGH, the commutator is driven in the opposite direction. Thus, only one operation (1PA or 1PB) of the constant current source (112-20, 112-22) need be described. When 1PA is driven HIGH, transistors Q109 and Q105 are turned ON because they are NPN transistors. Q105 is an inverter which drives the base of transistor Q101 LOW. Since Q101 is a PNP transistor, it is turned ON. As a result, current flows from the +24 V supply and into the COIL+ input of the relay 110-4 via transistor Q101. The current returns to the H-bridge circuit 112-20 via the node COIL- and flows through Q109 to the constant current sink circuit 112-122.

At this point, the current flows through resistor R111 to the base of transistor Q102, turning it ON, such that current flows through resistor R112. When the voltage across resistor R112 reaches a predetermined threshold (e.g., about 0.6-0.7 V) the transistor Q103 also turns ON to divert current away from the base of transistor Q102 such that the voltage across R112 is substantially constant. Stated differently, the resistor R112 controls the constant current source by maintaining the current flow through Q102. The constant current sink 112-22 thus regulates the current flowing through the relay switch 110-4 (via output nodes COIL+, COIL-). Again, the constant current source 112-12 is employed to obtain consistent commutator periods (commutator transit times between T1 and T2). Again the constant current sink 112-22 works in the same manner for both the 1PA and the 1PB actuations.

The consistent commutator periods hold true even if the switch is actuated by the user in rapid succession, e.g. once a second. Using the tap switch embodiment (FIGS. 12-16) as an example, any user input from S100 (FIG. 16) will yield a predictable sequence. The level of constant current multiplied by the solenoid impedance yields 12 VDC. Thus, the constant current source discharges C1 to not less than 12 VDC during the 10 millisecond pulse interval while, at the same time, the current remains constant.

In an alternate embodiment, the constant current source may be eliminated by locking out user switch actuations to less than, e.g., 2 second intervals. In this embodiment, the relay would always be energized via decaying exponential voltage starting at 24 VDC. In yet another alternate embodiment that can be employed with inductive loads, the processor is configured to close the relay at the optimum phase angle for the anticipated inductive or capacitive loads. Thus, the automated calibration would take the load phase shift into account.

In reference to FIG. 11D, the processor can be programmed using signals MISO, MOSI which are present on jack J101.

As embodied herein and depicted in FIGS. 12A-12B, perspective views of an electronic tap switch 100 in accordance with another embodiment of the present invention is disclosed. FIG. 12A shows a top perspective view of the tap switch 100. The tap switch device 100 includes tap switch cover assembly 130 coupled to the back body member 102. The top layer of the cover assembly 130 is the changeable decorative cover 130-6 which snaps into the functional actuator 130-4 (not shown) using snaps 130-62. The circular lens 130-60 is a relatively thin portion of the cover 130-6

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that allows light emitted by the separate LED locator light **118** (not shown in this view) which is configured to transmit light into the ambient environment around the cover assembly **130-6** when the device **100** is installed and energized.

FIG. **12B** shows the rear perspective view of the tap switch **100** which shows the back body member **102**. The back body **102** is identical to the one shown in FIGS. **6-9**. The light tube **102-6** is configured to accommodate the LED locator light **118** (not shown in the view). As noted previously, the LED locator light **118** extends through the center portion of the device **100** via locator light tube **102-6**. The center aperture **130-40**, of course, accommodates the LED locator light **118** that extends through the tube **102-6**. As noted previously, there are corresponding apertures in the AC power PCB **110** and the low power voltage PCBs **112**, **113** and **114**).

In reference to FIGS. **13A-13B**, detail views of the tap switch functional actuator **130-4** and the enclosure **130-2** are more clearly depicted. The functional actuator **130-4** includes slidable snaps **130-44** that are configured to snap into apertures **130-24** of enclosure layer **130-2** (See FIG. **13B**). At the opposite end, the functional actuator **130-4** includes hinge elements **130-42** which are configured to snap into the hinge receptors **130-22** formed in the enclosure layer **130-2**. The functional actuator **130-4** further includes a switch boss **130-41** which is configured to extend through boss aperture **130-21** of the enclosure layer **130-2**. The enclosure layer **130-2** further includes leaf spring elements **130-26** which causes the switch boss **130-41** of functional actuator **130-4** to disengage from the tap switch **S100** disposed on the low voltage board **113** (See FIG. **14**) after the user has finished depressing the tap switch.

In reference to FIG. **14**, an exploded view of the electronic tap switch **100** depicted in FIGS. **12-13** is disclosed. Again, the decorative cover **130-6** snaps into the functional actuator **130-4** using snaps **130-62**. A switching axis is shown extending from the switch boss **130-41**, through boss aperture **130-21**, and to the tap switch **S100** disposed on the low voltage tap switch board **113**. Taking FIGS. **12-14** together, the functional actuator **130-4** is shown to be fixed at one end by the hinge members (**130-24**, **130-44**) and the switch actuator **130-4** rotates about the hinge axis such that switch boss **130-41** can slidably move within boss aperture **130-21** to actuate the tap switch **100** disposed underneath on the low voltage PCB **113**. The low voltage tap switch board **113** receives power from the AC power PCB **110** which is disposed in the back body **102**. The same AC power PCB **110** and the same back body **102** are used in the wave switch embodiment (FIGS. **6-9**) and the instant embodiment.

FIGS. **15A-15D** are cross sectional views of the electronic tap switch depicted in FIGS. **12-14**. FIG. **15A** provides a longitudinal cross-sectional view that shows the slidable snap **130-44** disposed in the aperture **130-24**. At the opposite end, the hinge **130-42** is shown as being disposed in the hinge receptors **130-22**. In the mid-portion in between the ends, the leaf spring **130-26** can be seen supporting the functional actuator **130-4**. In FIG. **15B**, a second longitudinal cross-sectional view is provided. This view shows the second set of slidable snaps and hinges.

FIG. **15C** provides a latitudinal cross-section that extends through the tap switch **S100** and the center light tube **102-6**. This view illustrates how the switch boss **130-41** extends through boss aperture **130-21** to actuate the electronic switch **S100**. In addition, the decorative cover **130-6** is shown to include a light window or lens **130-60** formed therein. The lens **130-60** may be mechanically machined or etched out by a laser.

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FIG. **15D** is another longitudinal cross-section of the tap switch **100**. In this view, the tap switch **100** is shown mounted to the frame **10** (FIGS. **1-4**). The device box is not shown in this view for clarity of illustration. However, a person having ordinary skill in the art will understand that the back body **102** of the device is housed within the device box. Moreover, as described previously, the frame **10** is coupled to the device box and the device **100** is snapped into the frame **100** such that the various terminals automatically make connection to the connection tabs provided by the frame **10**. For example, this view shows the device **100** ground tab **10-8** engaging the ground connection tab **104**. Once the device is installed within the frame **10**, then the user will connect the aesthetic cover plate **60** to the frame. Each type of aesthetic overlay (**60**, **60-20** and **60-30**) substantially abuts the adjacent wall surface **1** by virtue of a ratcheting overlay snap **10-3**.

As embodied herein and depicted in FIG. **16**, a schematic diagram of relevant portions of the low voltage PCB **113** depicted in FIG. **13** are disclosed. With the exception of the switch **113-4** (**S100**) and the processor **113-6**, this circuit is identical to the one shown in FIG. **11A**. Stated differently, the switch **113-4** replaces the sensor **112-4** (in FIG. **11A**) and the processor **113-6** replaces the processor **112-6** (in FIG. **11A**). While both processors can be implemented using the same hardware, the software may be different since one embodiment responds to sensor actuation and the other embodiment responds to switch actuation. In any event, when the user wishes to change the state of the lighting load, he or she merely taps the decorative plate **130-6** such that the switch button **113-4** (**S100**) is depressed. The processor reads the interrupt much like it did in the previous embodiment. Once the processor **113-6** senses the interrupt signal it provides the signals **1PA** and **1PB** to the relay switch actuation circuit **112-12** (See FIG. **11B**) in accordance with the timing signals **ZC** and **RELAY STATE** as described previously.

As embodied herein and depicted in FIGS. **17A-17B**, perspective views of an electronic touch switch in accordance with yet another embodiment of the present invention is disclosed. FIG. **17A** shows a top perspective view of the touch switch **100**. The touch switch device **100** includes cosmetic cover assembly **140** coupled to the back body member **102**. The top layer of the cover assembly **140** includes a circular lens **140-60** is a relatively thin portion of the cover **140-6** that allows light emitted by the separate LED locator light **118** (not shown in this view) which is configured to transmit light into the ambient environment around the cover **140-6** when the device **100** is installed and energized.

FIG. **17B** shows the rear perspective view of the touch switch **100** which features the back body member **102**. The back body **102** is identical to the one shown in the previous embodiments. The light tube **102-6** is configured to accommodate the LED locator light **118**. As shown herein, the LED locator light **118** extends through the center portion of the device **100** via tube **102-6**.

Referring to FIG. **18**, an exploded view of the electronic touch switch depicted in FIGS. **17A-17B** is shown. The cover assembly **140** includes a decorative cover **140-6** that has a clear plastic top layer **140-62** bonded to a colored under layer **140-64**. The purpose of this arrangement is to provide the decorative cover with the perception of depth. Again, the lens aperture **140-60** is a narrow region in the center of the cover **140-6**. The decorative cover **140-6** is coupled to a major surface **140-22** of the cover enclosure **140-2** by an adhesive layer **140-4**. The adhesive layer **140-4**

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includes a central aperture **140-40** that allows the LED locator light **102-18** to emit light there through. The cover enclosure **140-2** also includes a thin lens region **140-20**. The cover enclosure also houses an antenna assembly **116** that includes an antenna **116-22** disposed on a printed circuit board **116-2**. The antenna **116-22** is coupled to a via **116-24** which couples the antenna **116-22** to the low voltage PCB **114** via an interconnection wire **114-24**. Of course, the antenna PCB **116-2** includes a central aperture **116-20** that accommodates the LED locator light **118**.

As before, the low voltage signal processing assembly **114** includes a PCB **114-2** that includes a central aperture that accommodates the LED locator light **118**. And as before, the low voltage PCB **114-2** is connected to the AC power board **110** by the interconnection of jacks **J1** and **J100**. Moreover, the AC board **110** is identical to the AC PCBs **110** used in the previous embodiments. Finally, like the previous two embodiments, the AC PCB **110** and the low voltage PCB **114-2** are housed within the back body member **102**.

Referring to FIGS. **19A-19C**, cross sectional views of the electronic touch switch **100** depicted in FIGS. **17-18** are disclosed. FIGS. **19A** and **19B** are directed to longitudinal cross-sectional views of the touch switch **100**. FIG. **19A** shows the switch with the LED locator light **118** inserted into the tube **102-6** whereas FIG. **19B** shows the locator light **118** removed from the tube **102-6**. This view shows all of the lenses (**140-20**, **140-60**) in alignment. FIG. **19C** is another longitudinal cross-sectional view of the touch switch **100**. This view shows the ground terminal **104** accessible from the back body **102**. As explained above, the ground terminal **104** is a flexible element that is configured to make contact with the frame **10** (which is coupled to premise ground).

Note that the antenna board **116** abuts the underside of the cover enclosure **140-22**. As depicted in FIG. **18**, the antenna **116-22** is actually a copper grid or mesh disposed on PCB **116-2**. The copper mesh implements a “single ended” electrode, or conductor. The copper area creates a capacitance with respect to neighboring grounds; this capacitance is defined as the load capacitance. As explained previously, the copper mesh and PCB is disposed under the cover enclosure **140-2**. The load capacitance is typically below about 20 pf since the load capacitance can affect the rise and fall times of the burst patterns generated by the sensor test signal (SNSK). The test signal creates an E-field; and the E-field must be an appropriate distance from ground. This distance is implemented by placing the copper mesh on a separate PCB under the cover enclosure **140-2**, and implementing a ground plane about 1/8 inches away on the low voltage PCB **114-2**. When a person’s finger approaches the actuator, the person’s body provides the capacitance that changes the E field. In another embodiment of the invention the ground plane is implemented on the underside of PCB **116-2** made about 1/8 inch thick.

Referring to FIG. **20**, a schematic diagram of the low voltage PCB **114** of the electronic touch switch depicted in FIG. **18** is disclosed. Again, only the sensor **114-4** and the processor **114-6** are shown because all of the other components are identical to what is shown in the first embodiment. The sensor **114-4** (U102) is an active sensor that is powered from the processor **114-6** via the “VCC-U102” output. One reason for this arrangement is that the processor **114-6** can remove power from the sensor **114-4** during power-up such that the charging of the +24 VDC power supply output (i.e., capacitor C1 in FIG. **10A**) can be expedited. The sensor **114-4** (U102) is coupled to the antenna **116-22** by capacitor C105 and resistor R102. In operation, when a person’s finger

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touches the dielectric plate **140-22**, the capacitance changes significantly because the circuit is configured in such a way that the capacitive effects of the finger dominate. When the sensor **114-4** detects the change in capacitance, the sensor OUT (pin 1) goes LOW to provide a signal interrupt to the processor **114-6**. As before, the interrupt is interpreted as a command to actuate the switch relay. Once the processor **112-6** senses the interrupt signal it provides the signals 1PA and 1PB to the relay switch actuation circuit (FIG. **11B**) in accordance with the timing signals ZC and RELAY STATE as described previously.

In one embodiment of the present invention, the sensor **114-4** is implemented as an integrated circuit chip (“AT42QT1010”) manufactured by ATMEL CORPORATION. This IC is a momentary responding device that provides a HIGH output signal when a person’s finger is touching or proximate the plate (**140-62**). Stated differently, SNSK output provides a periodic pulse train at a first frequency (f_1) across the measuring capacitor C105. When a human finger touches the plate (**140-62**) or is close to touching it, the capacitance across capacitor C105 changes such that the signal presented on the OUT pin is a logic HIGH. The processor reads this logic HIGH as an interrupt and a command to switch the relay. Once the finger is no longer touching or proximate the plate, the OUT pin signal is a logic LOW.

In another embodiment, the sensor **114-4** is configured to include a serial data input pin similar to the one employed by sensor **112-2** in FIG. **11A**. Much like the previous embodiment, the potentiometer **112-8** (As per FIG. **11A**) is connected to the MISO input of processor **114-6**. The processor output port (MISO) is connected to the serial data input port of the alternate embodiment sensor **114-4** to thereby provide it with sensitivity adjustment data such that the sensitivity of the capacitive sensor can be adjusted. For example, the user may become annoyed if the switch is actuated when a person, or the person’s shoulder inadvertently brushes by the switch. On the other hand, the user may desire to raise the sensitivity when the required touch is too heavy or pronounced.

In an alternate embodiment of the invention, the sensor **114-4** is configured as a latching device. Once the sensor output is driven HIGH, it will remain that way until the user touches the plate again. Thus, the processor is programmed to switch the relay when transitions occur (LOW to HIGH, or HIGH to LOW).

As embodied herein and depicted in FIG. **21**, an exploded view of the modular electrical wiring system in accordance with yet another embodiment of the present invention is disclosed. In this embodiment, the three types of electronic switches are interchangeable. The switches are interchangeable at the factory or may be configured to be interchangeable by the user. Stated differently, the electronic switch functionality implemented on the low voltage PCB is disposed within the switch module **150**. The decorative cover **150-6** of the module would be used to implement the wave switch (FIGS. **6-9** and **11**), the tap switch (FIGS. **12-16**) or the touch switch (FIGS. **17-20**). The power supply is provided by the separator assembly **103**, which is inserted over the AC power PCB (FIG. **10**) disposed in the back body **102**. FIG. **22** is a detail exploded view of the modular electrical wiring system shown in FIG. **21**. As shown, the back body **102** is sized as a three-module (i.e., a single gang size) device and easily accommodates the AC power PCB **110** (See FIG. **10**). The separator assembly **103** includes alignment connectors **103-2** that mate with the separator side portions **103-40** and **103-41** at either end thereof. The

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separator **103-4** includes a jack **103-42** that functions much like J1/J100 (FIGS. **10-11**). The AC circuit (FIG. **10**) is disposed under the separator floor **130-46** which is separated from the floor of the back body **102** by stand-off elements **103-44**.

The present invention may be implemented using a standard wiring device form factor. FIG. **23** is a front view of an electronic switch **160** in accordance with yet another embodiment of the present invention. In this embodiment, a wave, tap and touch switch embodiments with a centrally disposed locator light **160-2** are disclosed. FIG. **24** is a front view of an electronic switch **170** in accordance with yet another embodiment of the present invention. In this embodiment, a wave, tap and touch switch embodiments without a centrally disposed locator light are disclosed.

As embodied herein and depicted in FIGS. **25A-25D**, various embodiments of LED locator lenses **250** are disclosed. While the embodiments described below use the decorative cover **130-6** as an example, one skilled in the art will understand that any of the decorative covers (**120-6**, **130-6**, **140-6**, and **150-6**) may employ any one of the locator lens embodiments described below. Moreover, it should be understood that any of the following embodiments may be used to implement any of the lenses previously depicted herein (e.g., lens **130-60** in FIG. **12A**, lens **140-60** in FIG. **17A**, or lens **160-2** in FIG. **23**).

Referring to FIG. **25A**, one embodiment of the LED locator lens **250** in accordance with the present invention is disclosed. Locator lens **250** includes a circular stepped region **250-2** formed in rear surface of the decorator cover **130-6** proximate the LED locator light **118**. As shown, the cross-sectional thickness within the stepped region is relatively thin, at about 0.020 inches. The stepped region **250-2** is formed by injection molding or by another similar process. The front portion of the decorator cover is painted with a dark gray paint **250-4** that is substantially opaque. The paint layer **250-4** is laser etched to reveal a thin layer of translucent material in an annular ring region **250-6** that is sometimes referred to as the "bull's eye." Since the paint **250-4** is removed and the plastic region **250-2** is relatively thin, when light is emitted by locator LED **118**, the annular ring **250-6** is illuminated for the user. Obviously, if the optional LED locator light **118** is not installed here or in other embodiments, the so-called "bull's eye" will still be visible to the user even though it is not back-lit by the locator light **118**.

Referring to FIG. **25B**, another embodiment of the LED locator lens **250** is disclosed. Like the previous embodiment, the locator lens **250** includes a circular stepped region **250-2** that is formed in rear surface of the decorator cover **130-6** proximate the LED locator light **118**. In this version, the front surface of the decorator cover **130-6** is not painted. The outside surface is of a uniform color except where the cover material is etched by a laser to form an annular ring pattern **250-6**. In this case, when the material is etched, it changes to a darker color or less translucent. Thus, the annular ring **250-6** is not illuminated when the locator light **118** is ON. Instead, the region **250-60** inside the annular ring **250-6** is translucent and illuminated when the LED **118** is ON. In addition, the region **250-62** outside the annular ring **250-6** may provide a lesser degree of illumination when the LED **118** is emitting light. This is especially true if the outside diameter of the stepped region **250-2** is greater than the outside diameter of the annular ring **250-6**. Although the laser etch has darkened the plastic in the annular ring **250-6**, this region is typically not fully opaque.

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Referring to FIG. **25C**, yet another embodiment of the LED locator lens **250** is disclosed. In this embodiment, the locator lens **250** includes a circular stepped region **250-2** formed in the front surface of the decorator cover **130-6** proximate the LED locator light **118**. The stepped region **250-2** in this embodiment is also formed by an injection molding process or an equivalent. Again, the cross-sectional thickness within the stepped region is relatively thin, at about 0.020 inches. Like the embodiment of FIG. **25A**, the front portion of the decorator cover is painted with a dark gray paint **250-4** that is substantially opaque. The paint layer **250-4** is laser etched to reveal a thin layer of translucent material in the annular ring region **250-6**. Since the paint **250-4** is removed and the region **250-2** is relatively thin, the annular ring **250-6** is illuminated when light is emitted by locator LED **118**.

Referring to FIG. **25D**, yet another embodiment of the LED locator lens **250** is disclosed. Like the embodiment of FIG. **25C**, the locator lens **250** includes a circular stepped region **250-2** formed in the front surface of the decorator cover **130-6** proximate the LED locator light **118**. Like the embodiment of FIG. **25B**, the front surface of the decorator cover **130-6** is not painted. The outside surface is of a uniform color except where the cover material is etched by a laser to form an annular ring pattern **250-6**. When the material is etched, it changes to a darker color or becomes less translucent. Thus, the annular ring **250-6** is not illuminated when the locator light **118** is ON. Instead, the region **250-60** inside the annular ring **250-6** is translucent and illuminated when the LED **118** is ON. Moreover, the region **250-62** outside the annular ring **250-6** may provide a lesser degree of illumination when the LED **118** is emitting light if the outside diameter of the stepped region **250-2** is greater than the outside diameter of the annular ring **250-6**. Although the laser etch has darkened the plastic in the annular ring **250-6**, this region is typically not fully opaque.

The bull's eye feature shown in conjunction with the family of electronic switches described herein, may also be incorporated in other wiring devices including those that employ the framing system depicted in FIGS. **1-5**.

All references, including publications, patent applications, and patents, cited herein are hereby incorporated by reference to the same extent as if each reference were individually and specifically indicated to be incorporated by reference and were set forth in its entirety herein.

The use of the terms "a" and "an" and "the" and similar referents in the context of describing the invention (especially in the context of the following claims) are to be construed to cover both the singular and the plural, unless otherwise indicated herein or clearly contradicted by context. The terms "comprising," "having," "including," and "containing" are to be construed as open-ended terms (i.e., meaning "including, but not limited to,") unless otherwise noted. The term "connected" is to be construed as partly or wholly contained within, attached to, or joined together, even if there is something intervening.

The recitation of ranges of values herein are merely intended to serve as a shorthand method of referring individually to each separate value falling within the range, unless otherwise indicated herein, and each separate value is incorporated into the specification as if it were individually recited herein.

All methods described herein can be performed in any suitable order unless otherwise indicated herein or otherwise clearly contradicted by context. The use of any and all examples, or exemplary language (e.g., "such as") provided herein, is intended merely to better illuminate embodiments

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of the invention and does not impose a limitation on the scope of the invention unless otherwise claimed.

No language in the specification should be construed as indicating any non-claimed element as essential to the practice of the invention.

It will be apparent to those skilled in the art that various modifications and variations can be made to the present invention without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention. There is no intention to limit the invention to the specific form or forms disclosed, but on the contrary, the intention is to cover all modifications, alternative constructions, and equivalents falling within the spirit and scope of the invention, as defined in the appended claims. Thus, it is intended that the present invention cover the modifications and variations of this invention provided they come within the scope of the appended claims and their equivalents.

What is claimed is:

1. An electronic switch device for controlling a load, the device comprising:

a housing assembly including a front cover assembly having a user interface, a back body assembly, and a plurality of terminals configured to be coupled to an AC power source and the load;

a circuit assembly coupled to the plurality of terminals, the circuit assembly including a relay switch having a commutator and a set of contacts, the relay switch being characterized by a predetermined commutator period, the predetermined commutator period being substantially a commutator travel time between the set of contacts during a relay switch actuation, the circuit assembly further including an actuation circuit having a current source configured to provide a predetermined constant current actuation signal to effect the predetermined commutator period, the actuation circuit energizing the relay switch in response to an input stimulus via the user interface such that an end of the predetermined commutator period substantially coincides with a predetermined point in an AC power cycle.

2. The device of claim 1, wherein the predetermined point in an AC power cycle corresponds to a zero crossing of the AC power cycle.

3. The device of claim 1, wherein the predetermined point corresponds to a predetermined phase shift relative to a zero crossing of the AC power cycle.

4. The device of claim 3, wherein the predetermined phase shift corresponds to an inductive load.

5. The device of claim 3, wherein the predetermined phase shift corresponds to a capacitive load.

6. The device of claim 1, wherein the circuit assembly is configured to measure the commutator period of the relay switch.

7. The device of claim 6, wherein the commutator period is measured before the device enters the stream of commerce during a calibration procedure and is stored in the circuit assembly.

8. The device of claim 6, wherein the commutator period is measured from time to time after the device enters the stream of commerce.

9. The device of claim 8, wherein the commutator period is measured by a processor and stored in memory, the processor and memory being included in the circuit assembly.

10. The device of claim 1, wherein the commutator period is an estimated value.

11. The device of claim 1, wherein the commutator period is an average value derived from measuring a plurality of the relay switches during a calibration procedure.

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12. The device of claim 1, wherein the circuit assembly includes a command input circuit coupled between the user-interface and the actuation circuit, the command input circuit being configured to propagate a switch actuation command in response to detecting the input stimulus.

13. The device of claim 12, wherein the command input circuit includes an electronic push button switch coupled to the user interface.

14. The device of claim 12, wherein the command input circuit includes a signal receptor portion and coupled to the user interface, the signal receptor portion being configured to sense perturbations in a signal parameter.

15. The device of claim 14, wherein the signal receptor portion includes a photo-sensitive element configured to measure light reflected from a light emitting diode (LED).

16. The device of claim 15, wherein the light emitted from the LED is infrared light.

17. The device of claim 15, wherein the signal parameter includes a pulse train frequency.

18. The device of claim 14, wherein the command input circuit coupled between the user-interface and the actuation circuit is a wave switch.

19. The device of claim 14, wherein the command input circuit coupled between the user-interface and the actuation circuit is a touch switch.

20. The device of claim 14, wherein the signal receptor portion includes a capacitive sensor configured to measure changes in capacitance.

21. The device of claim 14, wherein the circuit assembly includes a sensor detector coupled to the signal receptor portion, the sensor detector being configured to determine whether the perturbations of the signal parameter correspond to a switch actuation command in accordance with a sensor detection rule.

22. The device of claim 21, wherein the circuit assembly also includes a processing circuit configured to drive the actuation circuit in response to the switch actuation command.

23. The device of claim 22, wherein the sensor detection rule is implemented by an algorithm executed by the processing circuit.

24. The device of claim 22, wherein the command input circuit includes a sensor sensitivity adjustment interface coupled to the processing circuit, the processing circuit being configured to adjust the sensor detection rule in accordance with a setting of the sensor sensitivity adjustment interface.

25. The device of claim 21, wherein the sensor detection rule includes a predetermined threshold.

26. An electrical wiring system comprising a frame member configured to be connected to a device box, the frame member including a frame opening substantially conforming to the housing assembly of the device of claim 1 such that the device box enclosure is substantially completed when the device of claim 1 is secured within the frame opening.

27. The system of claim 26, further comprising at least one modular alignment connector disposed within the frame opening adjacent the device of claim 1, wherein the at least one modular alignment connector and the device of claim 1 complete the device box enclosure when the device of claim 1 and the at least one modular alignment connector are secured within the frame opening.

28. The system of claim 26, wherein the device of claim 1 is secured to the frame member but not to the device box.

29. The system of claim 26, further comprising an aesthetic cover plate configured to be coupled to the frame member, the aesthetic cover plate including a plate opening

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that is configured to expose the user interface of the device of claim 1 when the aesthetic cover plate is coupled to the frame member.

30. The device of claim 1, further comprising a mounting strap configured to secure the device to a device box during device installation.

31. An electronic switch device comprising:

a housing assembly including a plurality of terminals configured to be coupled to an AC power source and a load, the housing assembly also including a user interface and a sensitivity adjustment interface;

a circuit assembly coupled to the plurality of terminals, the circuit assembly including a current source configured to provide a predetermined constant current actuation signal and a relay switch, the relay switch having a commutator and a set of contacts, the relay switch being characterized by a commutator period, the commutator period being substantially a commutator travel time between the set of contacts, the circuit assembly also including a sensor detector receptor portion coupled to the user interface and configured to sense perturbations of a signal parameter, the circuit assembly also including a sensor detector coupled to the sensor receptor portion, the sensor detector being configured to determine whether the perturbations of the signal parameter correspond to a switch actuation command in accordance with a detection rule, the circuit assembly also including a regulation circuit coupled to the sensitivity adjustment interface and the sensor detector, the regulation circuit being configured to adjust the detection rule in accordance with a setting of the sensitivity adjustment interface and direct the relay switch to actuate in response to the switch actuation command in accordance with a selected sensitivity adjustment.

32. The device of claim 31, wherein the sensor receptor portion includes a photo-sensitive element configured to measure light reflected from a light emitting diode (LED).

33. The device of claim 32, wherein the sensitivity adjustment interface is configured to adjust a sensitivity of the photosensitive element.

34. The device of claim 32, wherein the signal parameter is selected from a group of parameters that includes a pulse train frequency, a light frequency, an amplitude, or a duty cycle.

35. The device of claim 31, wherein the sensor receptor portion includes a capacitive sensor configured to measure changes in capacitance.

36. The device of claim 35, wherein the sensitivity adjustment interface is configured to adjust a sensitivity of the capacitive sensor.

37. The device of claim 31, wherein the sensor receptor portion includes an electronic switch, and wherein the detection rule includes a switch closed time duration greater than a predetermined time interval.

38. The device of claim 31, wherein the constant current actuation signal is configured to energize the relay switch in response to a regulation circuit directive such that an end of the predetermined commutator period substantially coincides with a predetermined point in an AC power cycle.

39. The device of claim 38, wherein the predetermined point in an AC power cycle substantially corresponds to a zero crossing of the AC power cycle.

40. The device of claim 38, wherein the predetermined point corresponds to a predetermined phase shift relative to a zero crossing of the AC power cycle.

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41. The device of claim 40, wherein the predetermined phase shift corresponds to an inductive load.

42. The device of claim 40, wherein the predetermined phase shift corresponds to a capacitive load.

43. The device of claim 38, wherein the circuit assembly is configured to measure the commutator period of the relay switch.

44. The device of claim 43, wherein the commutator period is measured before the device enters the stream of commerce during a calibration procedure.

45. The device of claim 43, wherein the commutator period is measured from time to time after the device enters the stream of commerce.

46. The device of claim 45, wherein the commutator period is measured by a processor and stored in memory, the processor and memory being included in the circuit assembly.

47. The device of claim 38, wherein the commutator period is an estimated value.

48. The device of claim 38, wherein the commutator period is an average value derived from measuring a plurality of the relay switches during a calibration procedure.

49. The electronic switch device of claim 31, wherein the commutator period is accomplished by applying the predetermined constant current actuation signal to the relay switch.

50. An electronic switch device configured to be installed within a device box, the device comprising:

a housing assembly including a plurality of terminals configured to be coupled to an AC power source, the housing assembly further including a first circuit assembly coupled to the plurality of terminals, the first circuit assembly including a relay switch having a commutator and a set of contacts, the relay switch being characterized by a commutator period, the commutator period being substantially the commutator travel time between the set of contacts; and

an interchangeable switch module configured to be coupled and decoupled from the housing assembly, the interchangeable switch module being selected from a plurality of interchangeable switch modules, each interchangeable switch module being characterized by a user interface that is implemented by one of a plurality of switching technologies, the interchangeable switch module also including a second circuit assembly coupled to the first circuit assembly when the interchangeable switch module is coupled to the housing assembly, the second circuit assembly propagating a constant current actuation signal that energizes the relay switch in response to an input stimulus via the user interface such that an end of the predetermined commutator period substantially coincides with a predetermined point in an AC power cycle.

51. The device of claim 50, wherein the housing assembly includes a separator portion disposed in a back body assembly, the separator portion including at least one first connector jack configured to provide electrical circuit paths between the housing assembly and the interchangeable switch module.

52. The device of claim 50, wherein one of a plurality of user-interfaces includes an electronic push button switch coupled to the second circuit assembly.

53. The device of claim 50, wherein one of a plurality of user-interfaces includes a wave switch assembly coupled to the second circuit assembly.

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54. The device of claim 50, wherein one of a plurality of user-interfaces includes a touch switch assembly coupled to the second circuit assembly.

55. An electrical wiring system comprising a frame member configured to be connected to a device box, the frame member including a frame opening substantially conforming to the housing assembly of the device of claim 50 such that the device box enclosure is substantially completed when the device of claim 50 is secured within the frame opening.

56. The system of claim 55, further comprising at least one modular alignment connector disposed within the frame opening adjacent the device of claim 50, wherein the at least one modular alignment connector and the device of claim 50 complete the device box enclosure when the device of claim 50 and the at least one modular alignment connector are secured within the frame opening.

57. The system of claim 55, wherein the device of claim 50 is secured to the frame member but not to the device box.

58. The system of claim 55, further comprising an aesthetic cover plate configured to be coupled to the frame member, the aesthetic cover plate including a plate opening that is configured to expose the user interface of the device of claim 50 when the aesthetic cover plate is coupled to the frame member.

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