



(19) **United States**

(12) **Patent Application Publication**

Graham et al.

(10) **Pub. No.: US 2002/0088930 A1**

(43) **Pub. Date: Jul. 11, 2002**

(54) **USER INPUT DEVICE FOR A COMPUTER SYSTEM**

continuation of application No. 08/818,774, filed on Mar. 14, 1997, now Pat. No. 5,914,709.

(76) Inventors: **David S. Graham**, San Francisco, CA (US); **Daniel A. Francis**, San Francisco, CA (US)

Publication Classification

(51) **Int. Cl.⁷** **G01J 1/04; G01J 5/08**
(52) **U.S. Cl.** **250/227.11**

Correspondence Address:

BEYER WEAVER & THOMAS LLP
P.O. BOX 778
BERKELEY, CA 94704-0778 (US)

(57) **ABSTRACT**

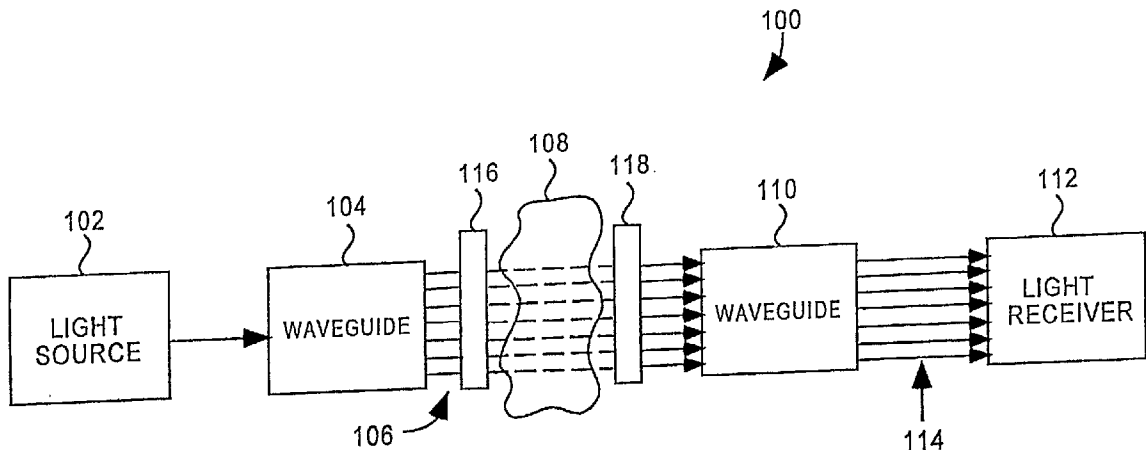
(21) Appl. No.: **10/044,460**

(22) Filed: **Jan. 11, 2002**

Related U.S. Application Data

(63) Continuation of application No. 09/262,398, filed on Mar. 4, 1999, now Pat. No. 6,351,260, which is a

A user input device for an electronic device is disclosed. The user input device provides positional information using a grid of light. The grid of light is produced from a light source and waveguides. The grid of light is also received and processed using waveguides and a light detector. Optionally, optics may be used to enhance the operation of the user input device. The user input device is particularly suited for use as a user input device for a computer system or the like.



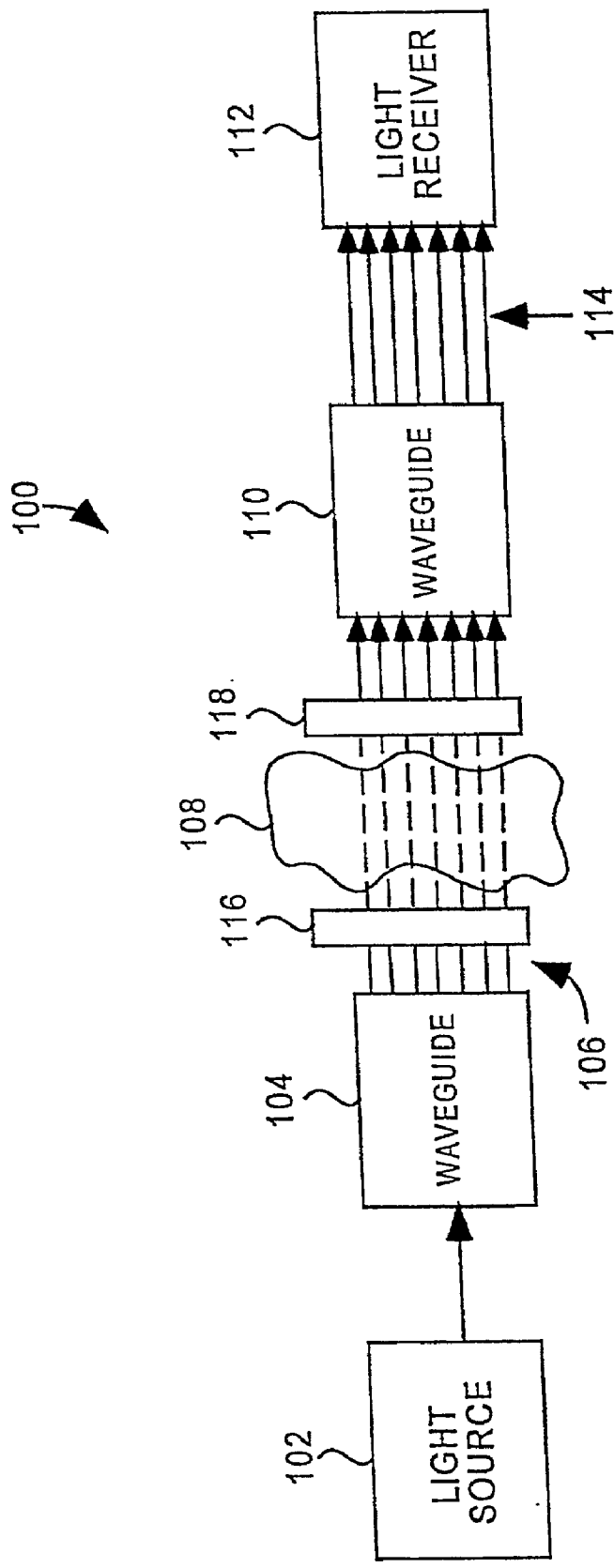


FIG. 1

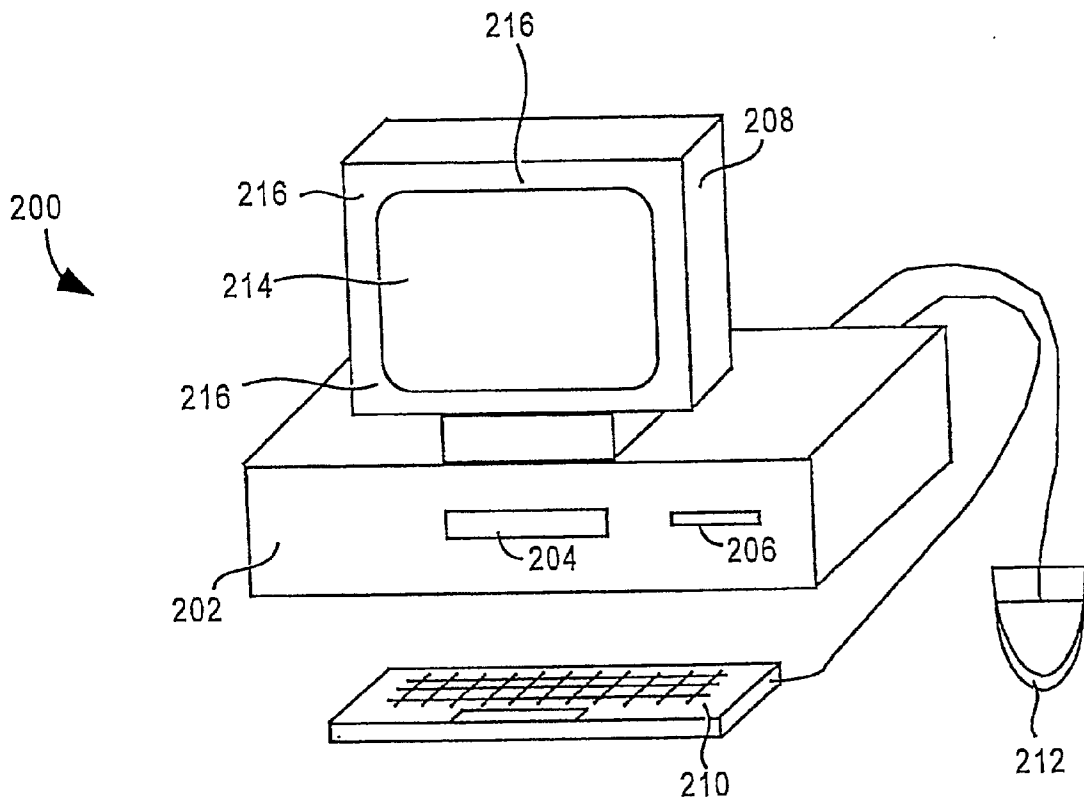


FIG. 2

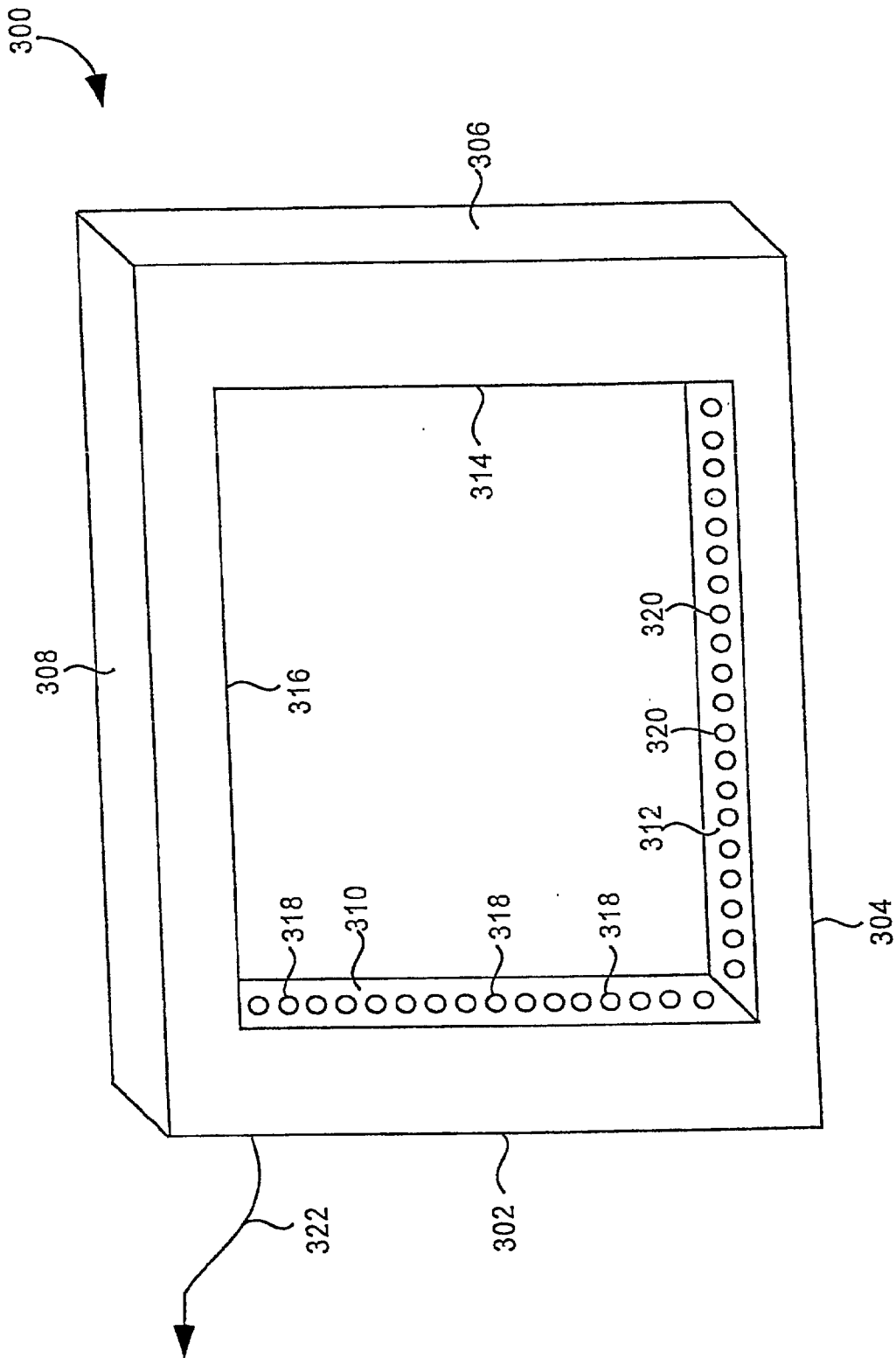


FIG. 3

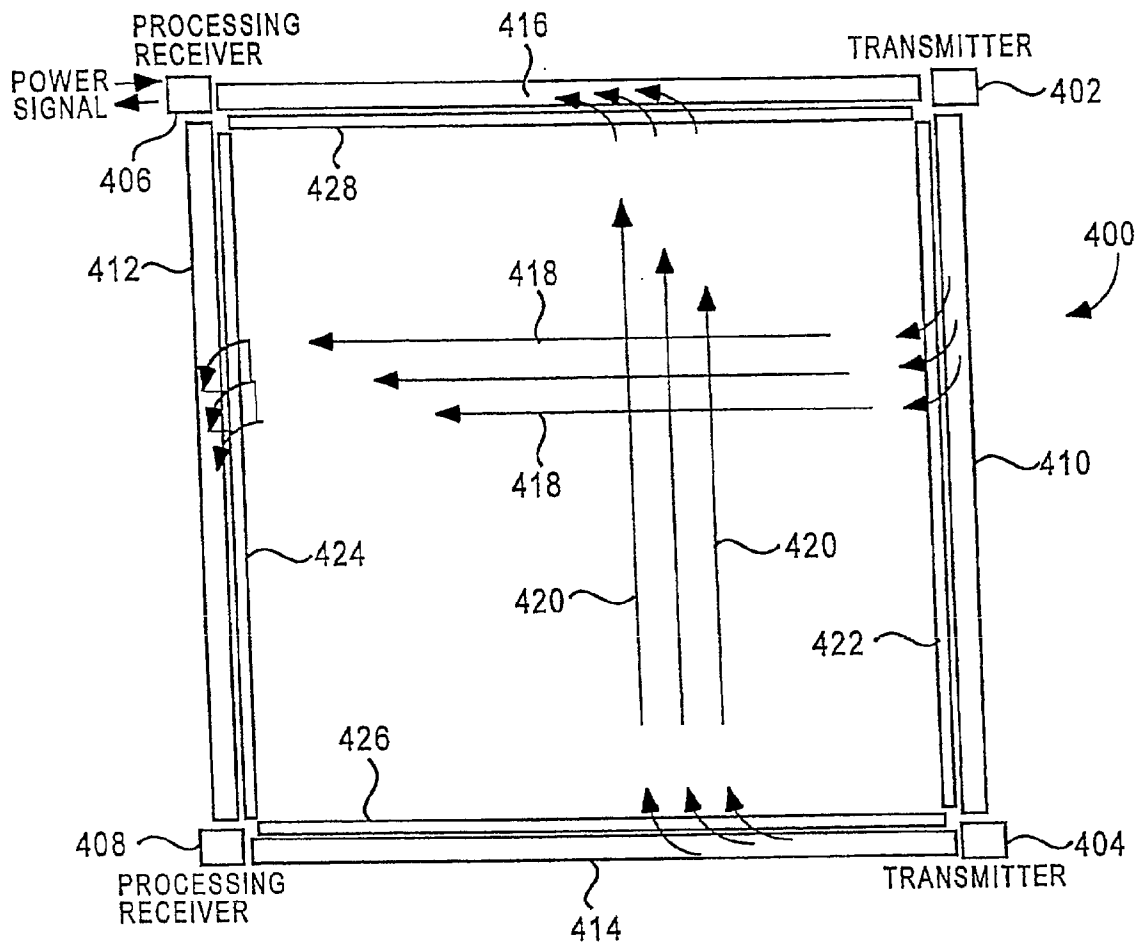


FIG. 4

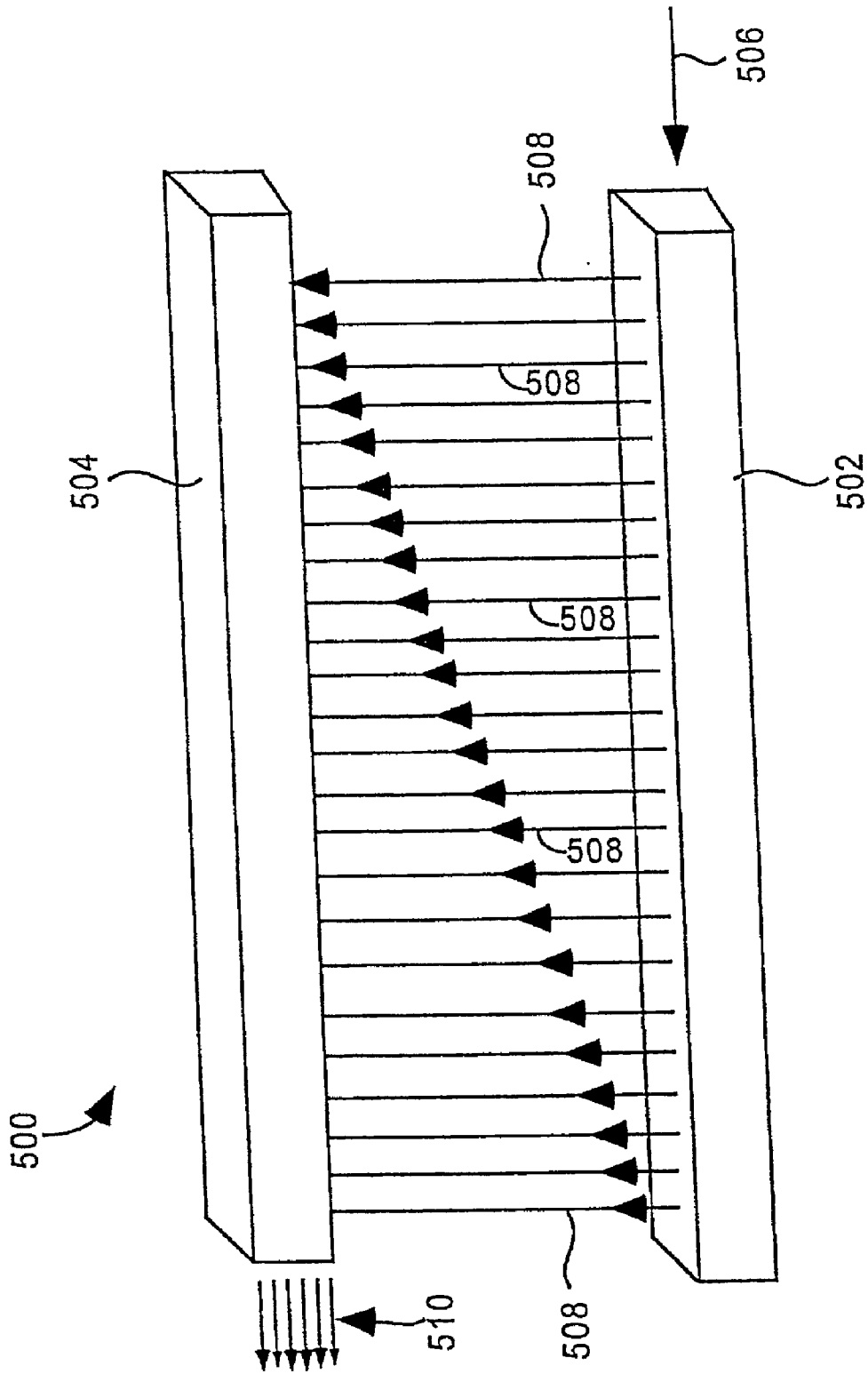


FIG. 5

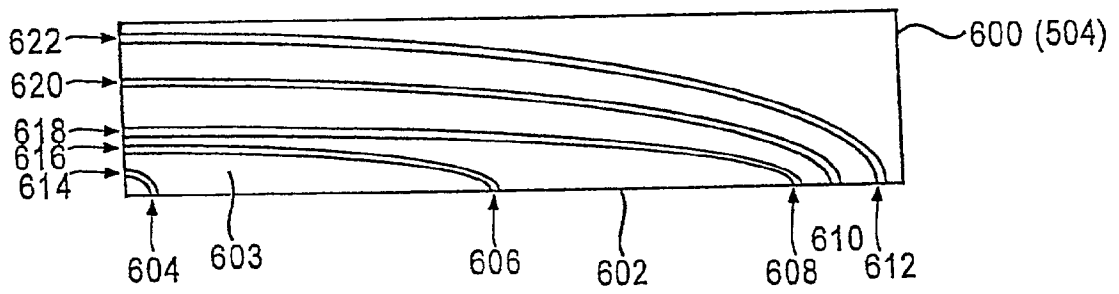


FIG. 6A

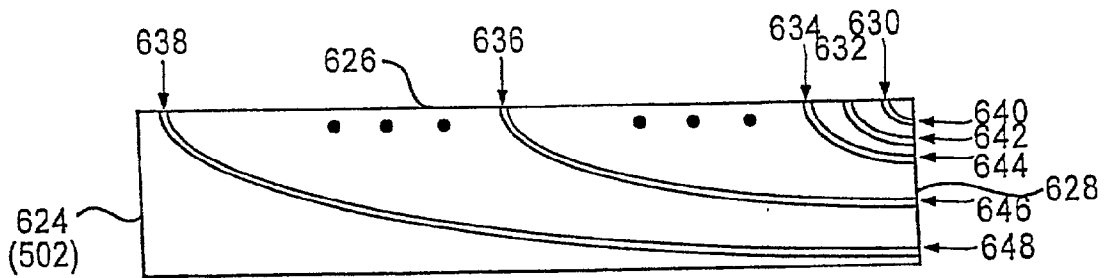


FIG. 6B

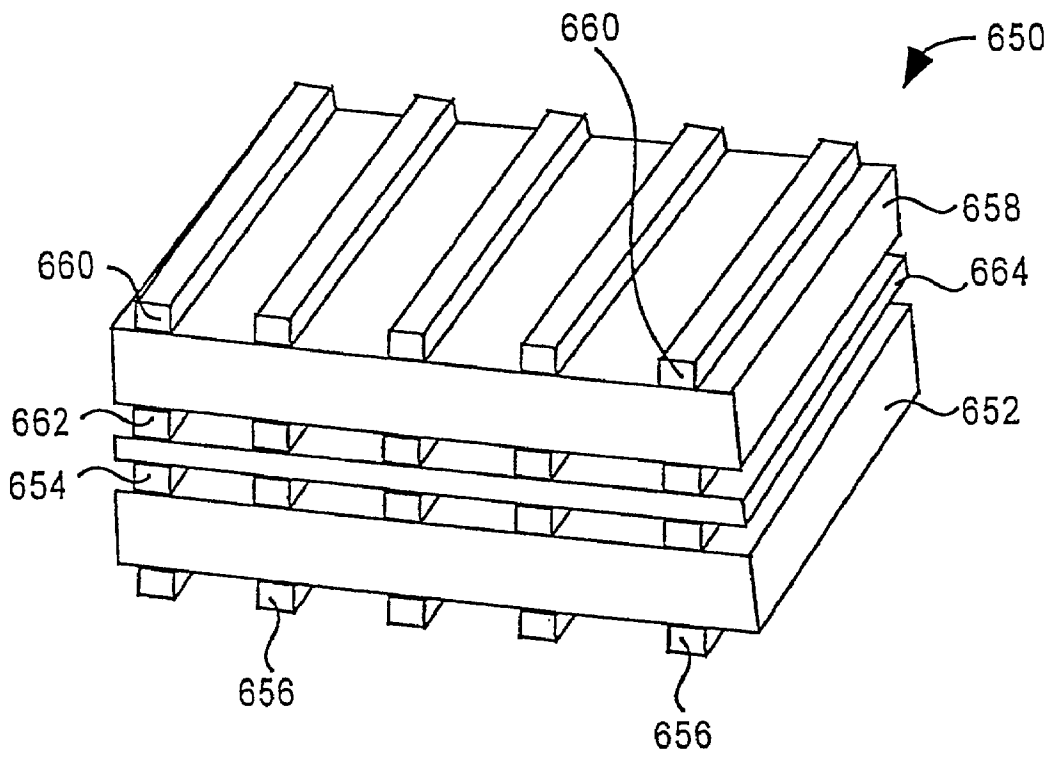


FIG. 6C

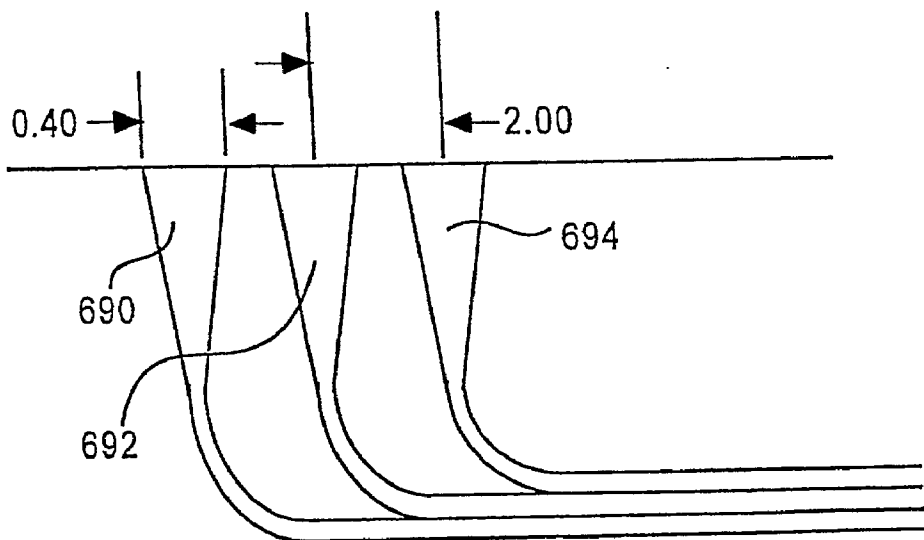


FIG. 6E

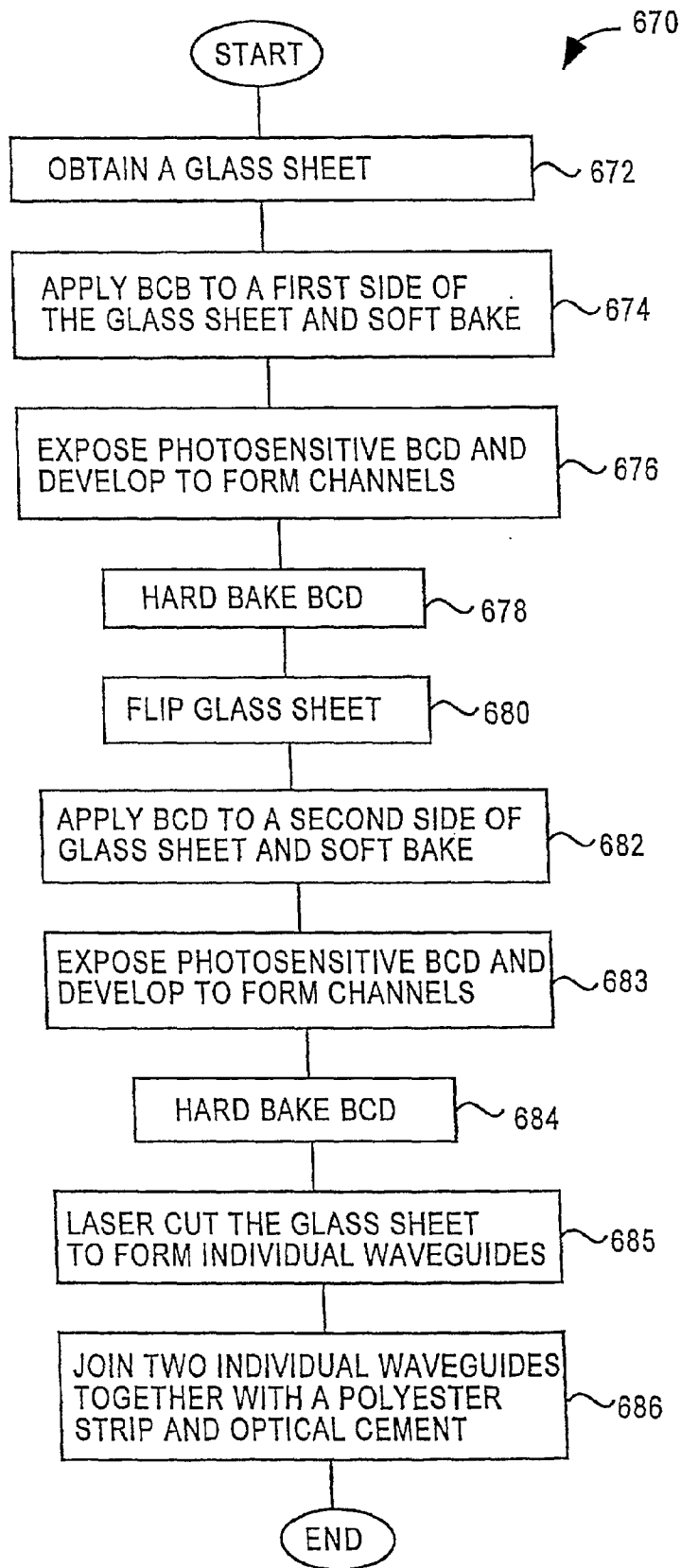


FIG. 6D

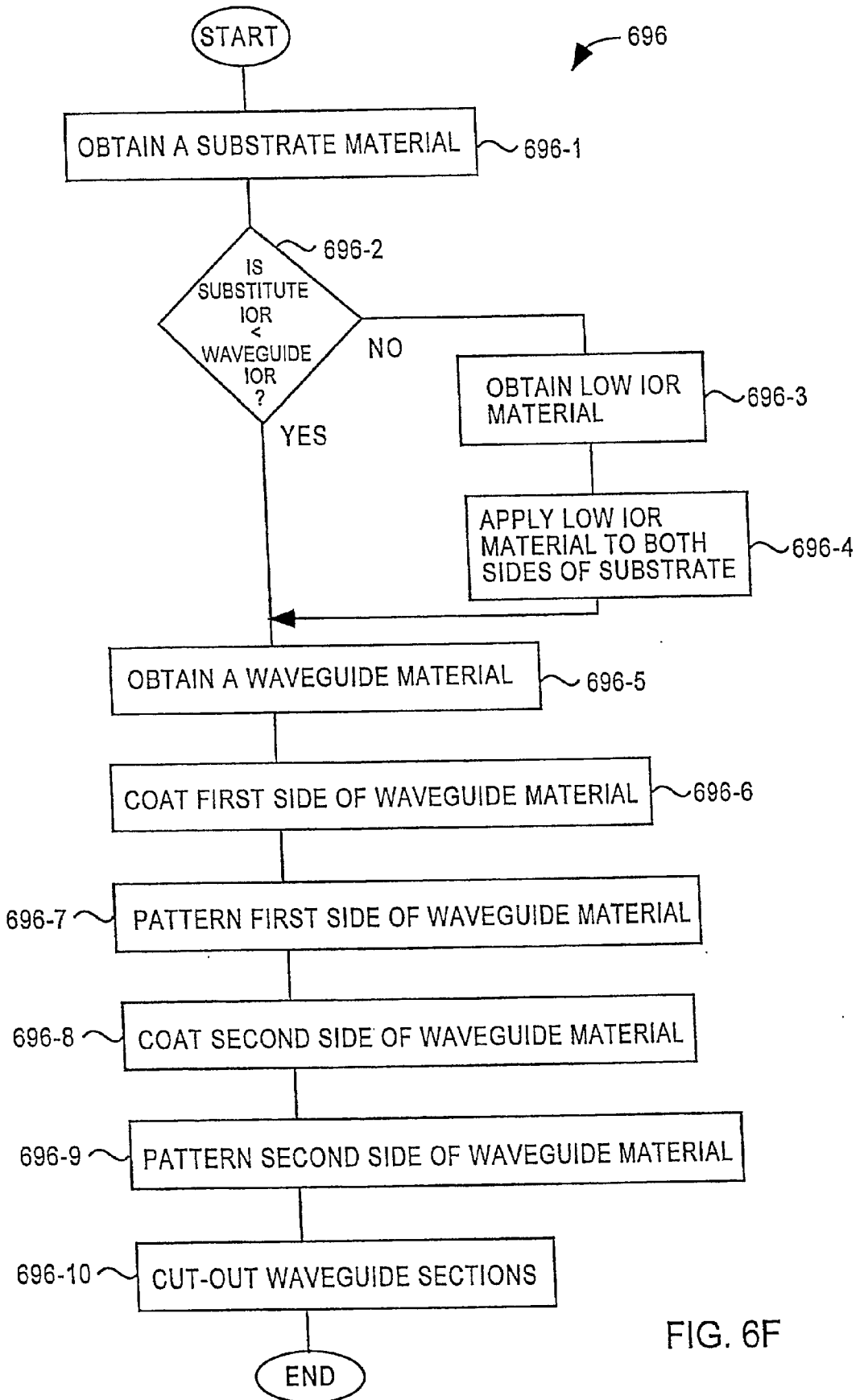


FIG. 6F

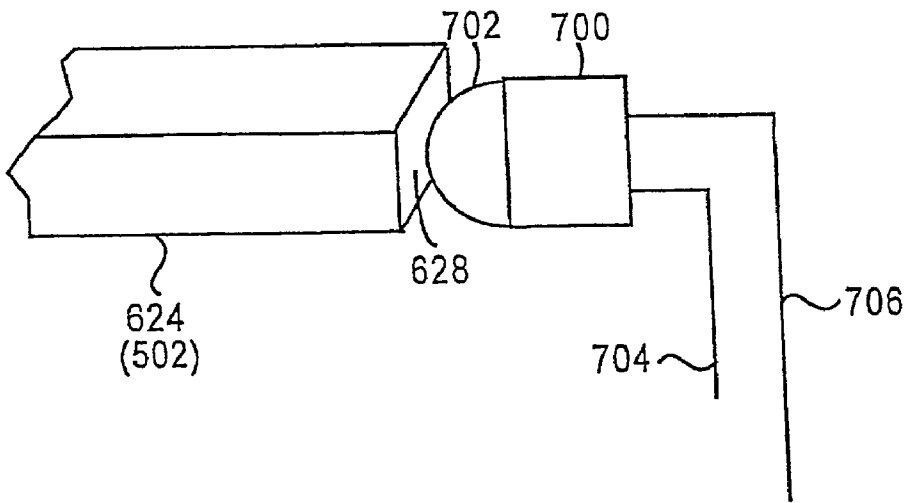


FIG. 7A

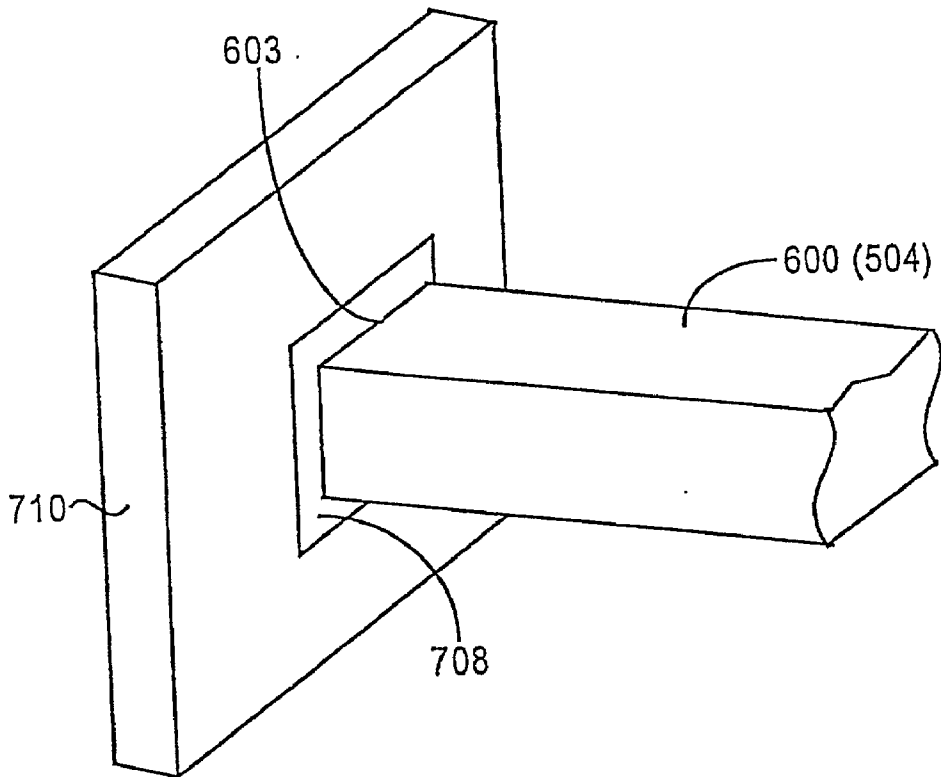


FIG. 7B

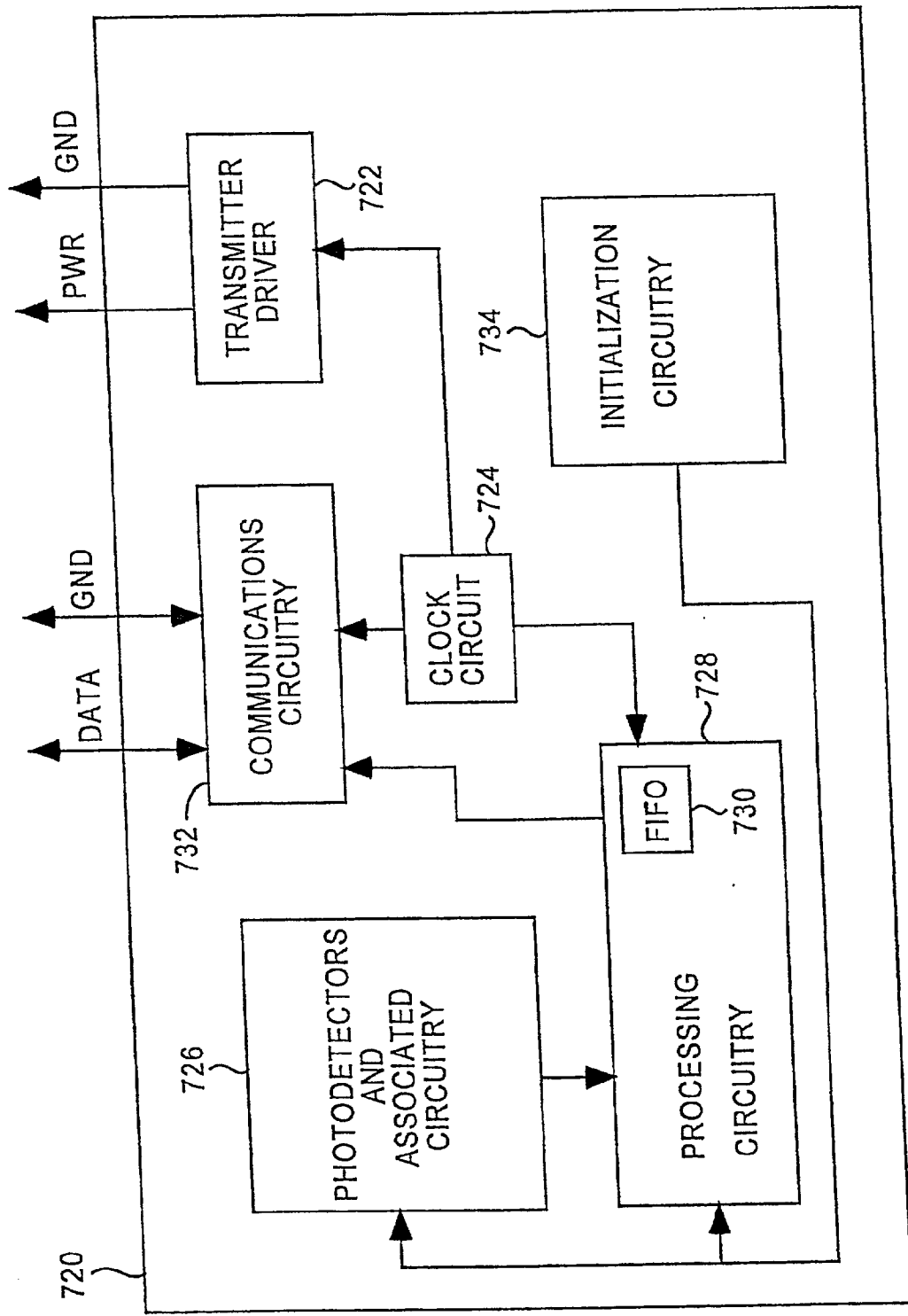


FIG. 7C

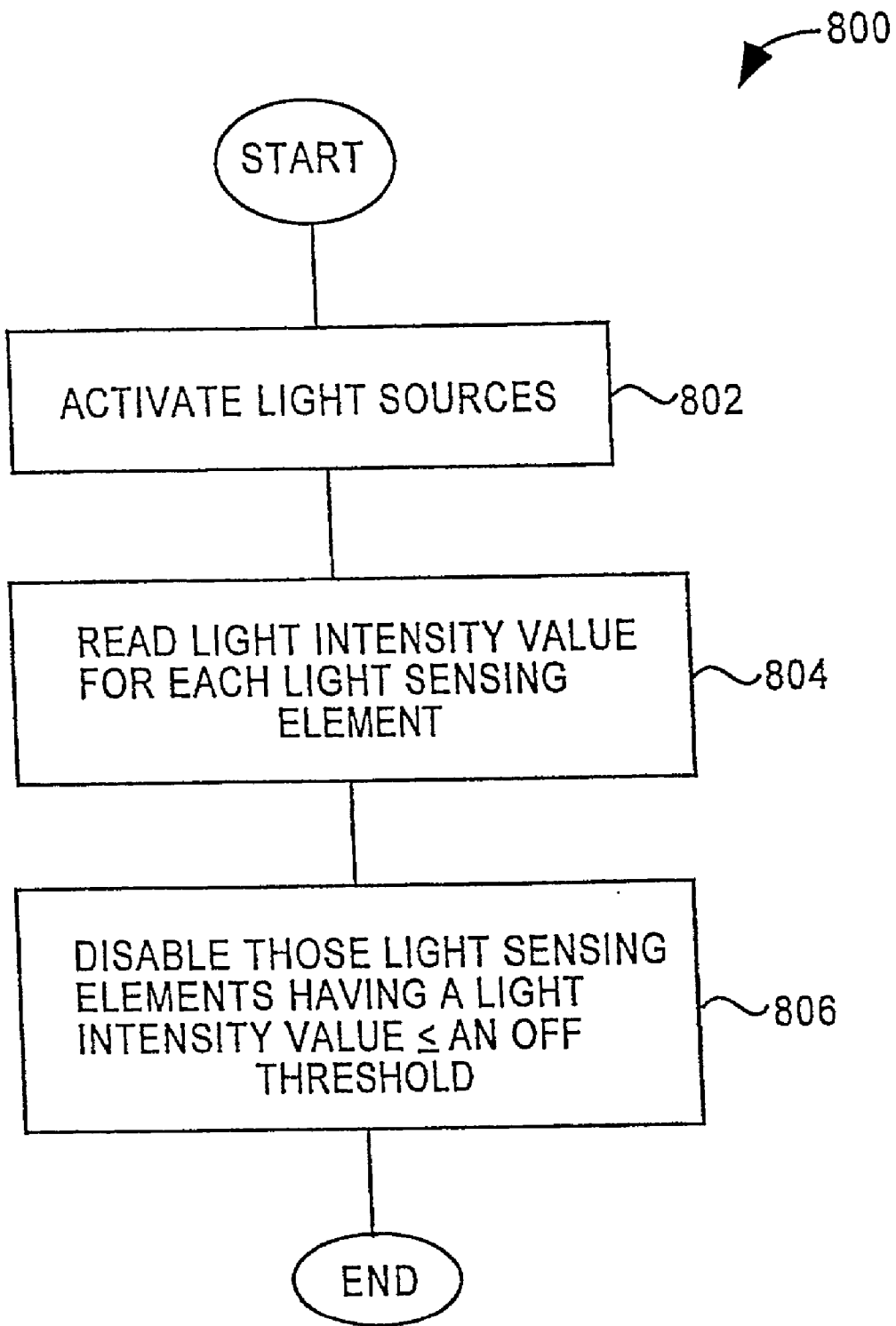


FIG. 8

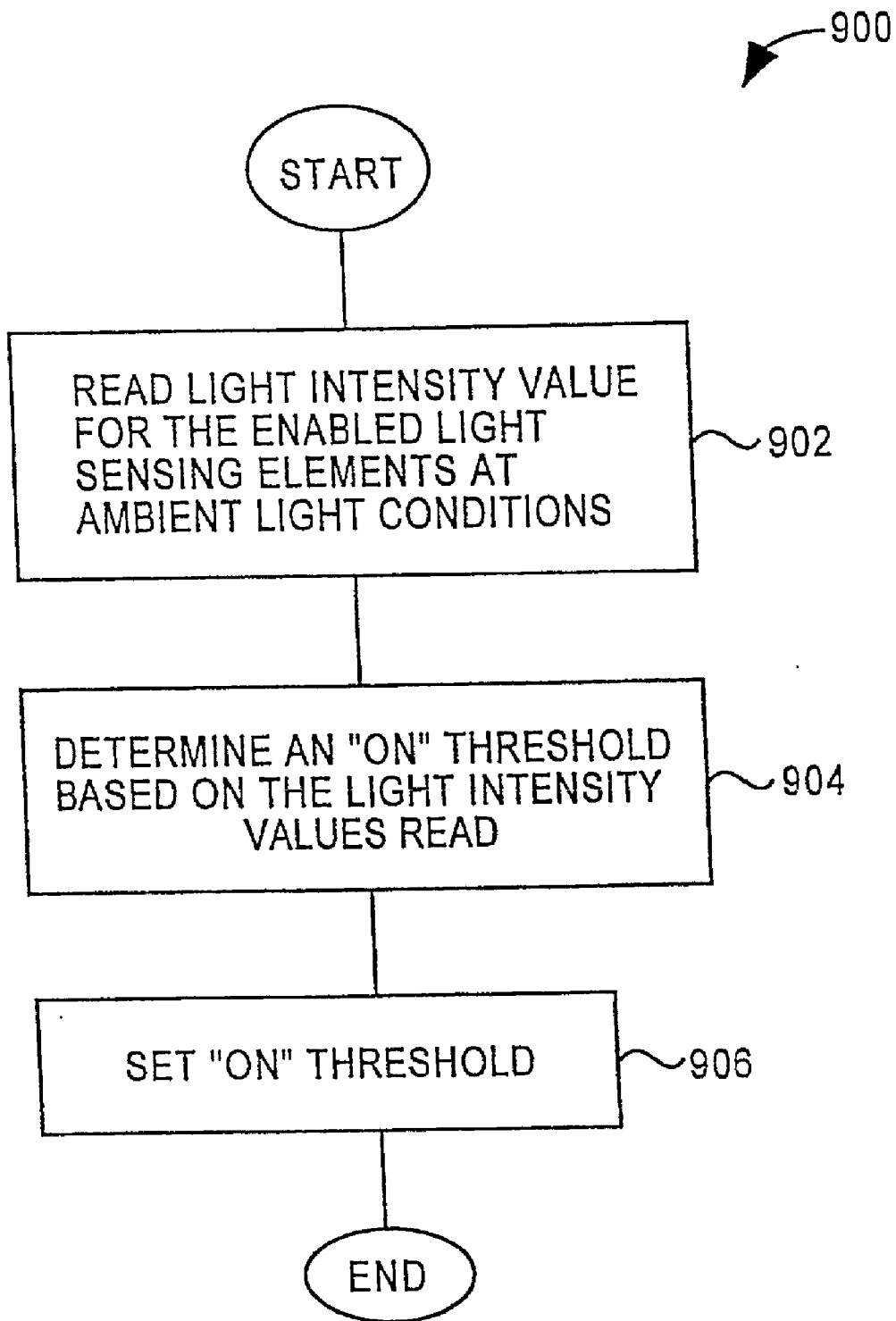


FIG. 9

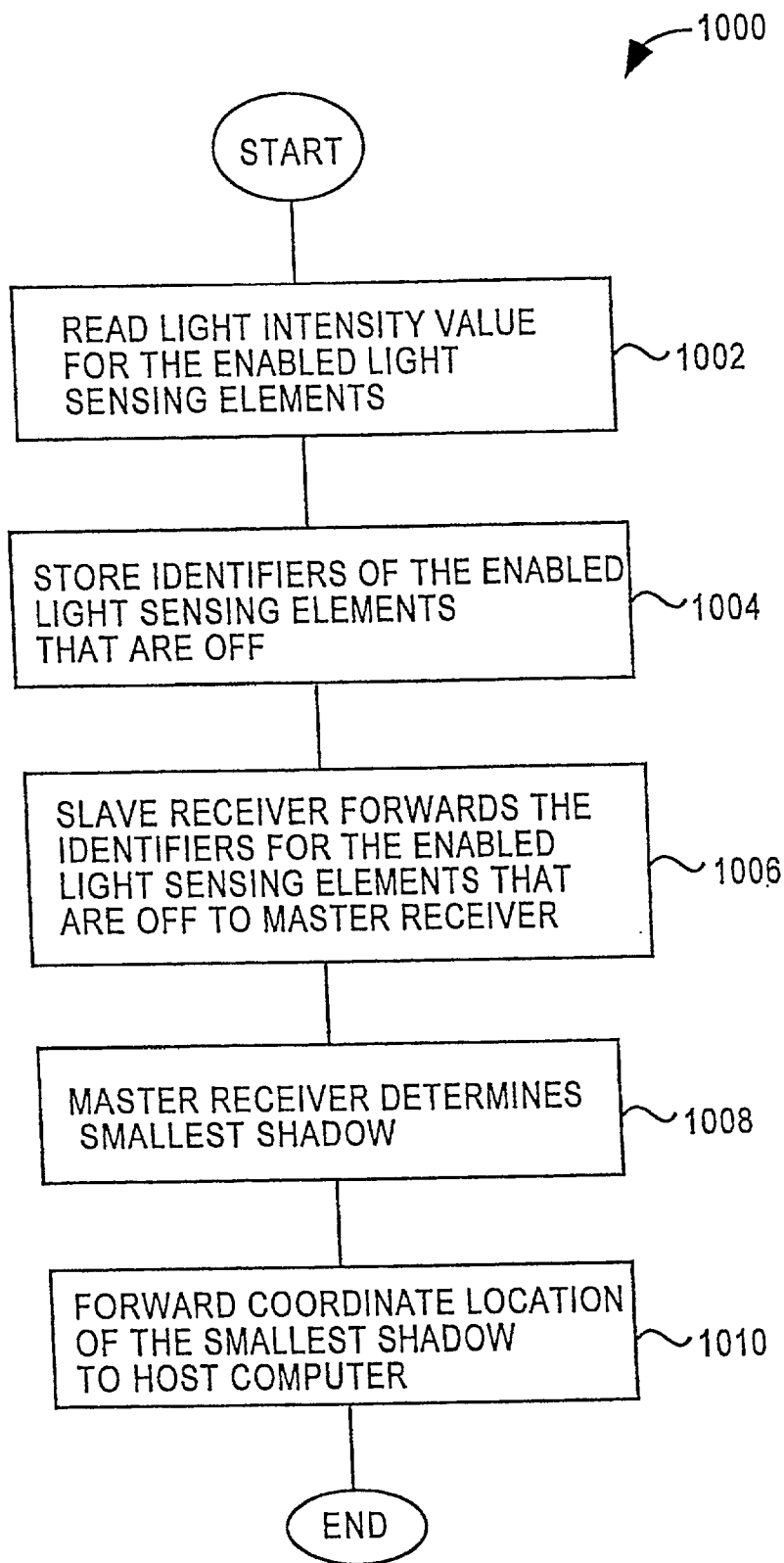


FIG. 10A

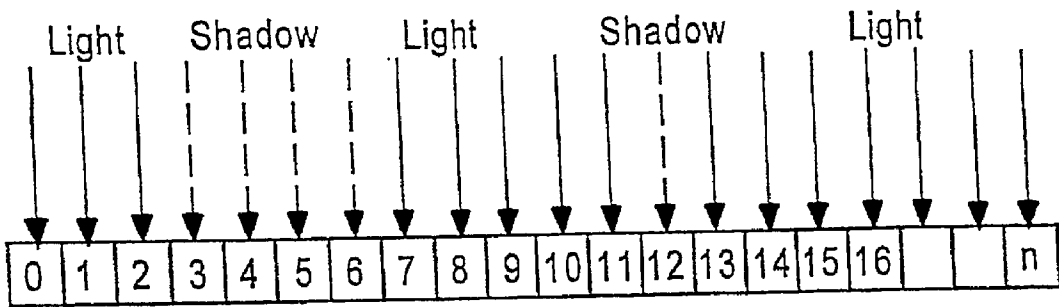


FIG. 10B

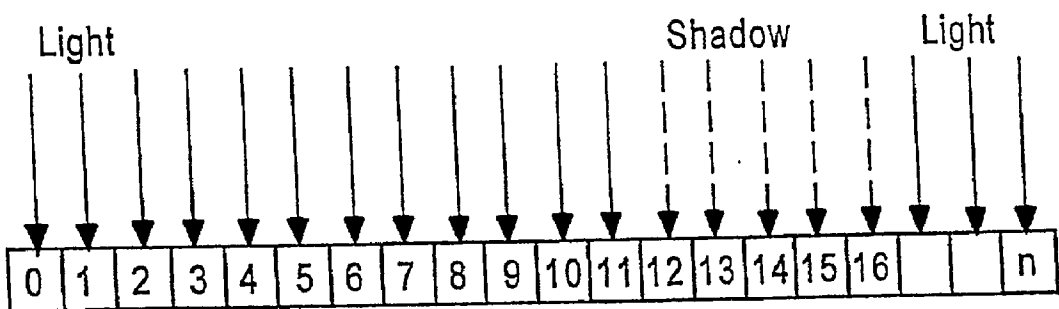


FIG. 10C

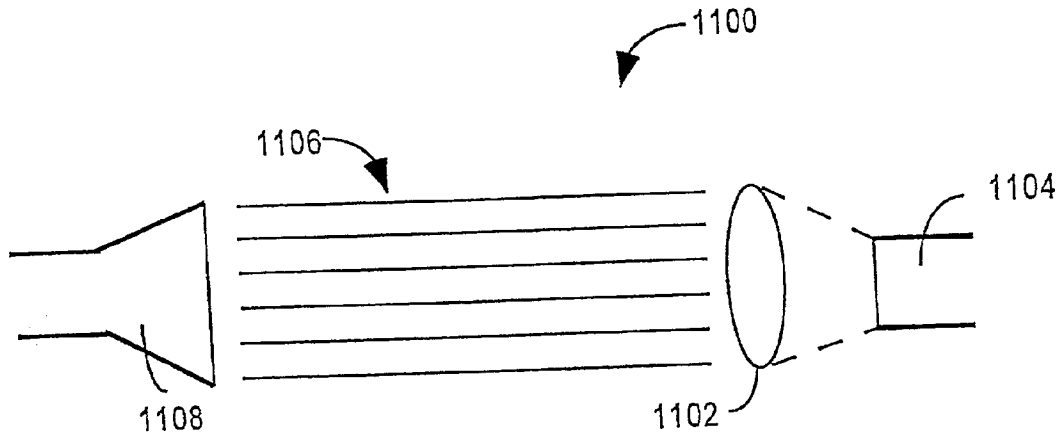


FIG. 11A

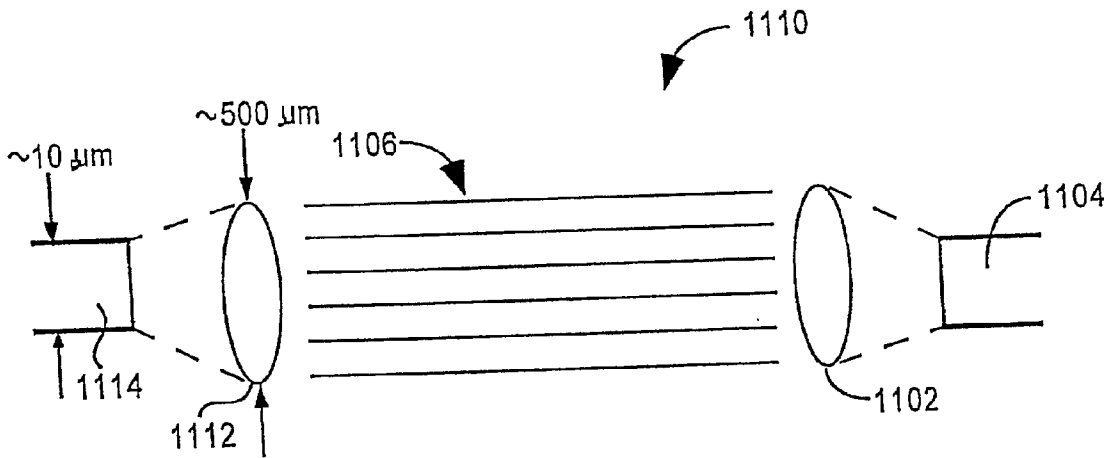


FIG. 11B

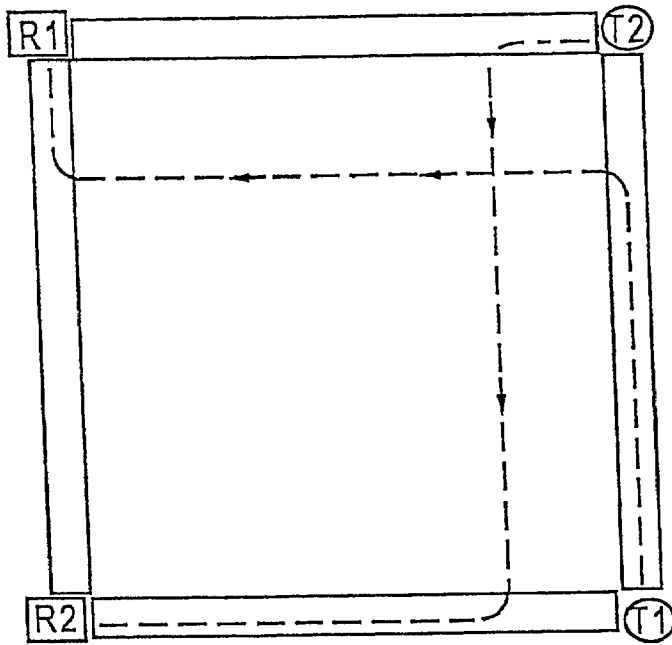


FIG. 12A

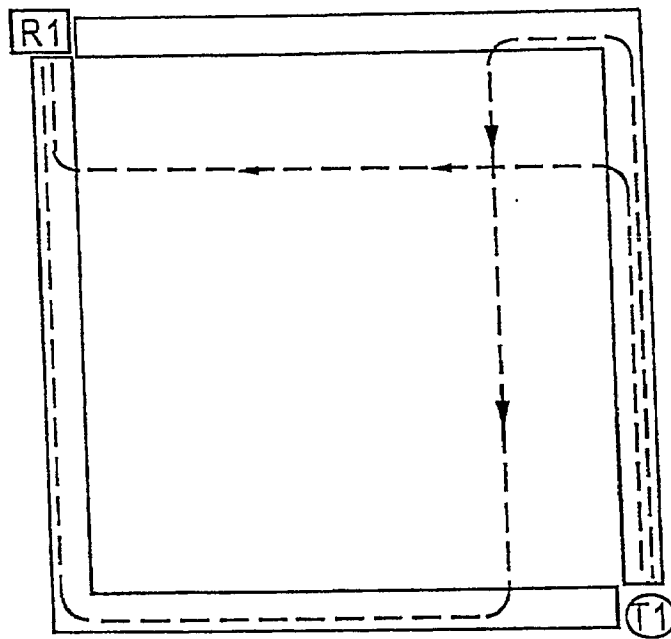


FIG. 12B

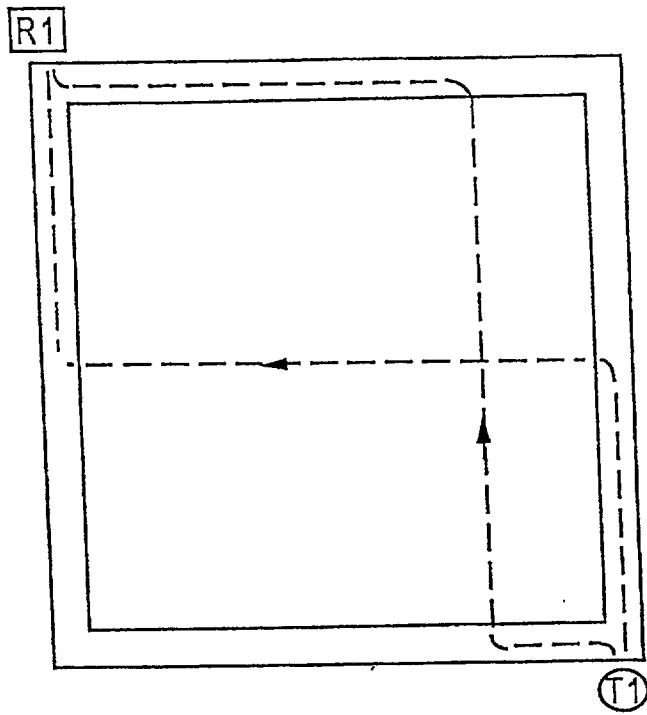


FIG. 12C

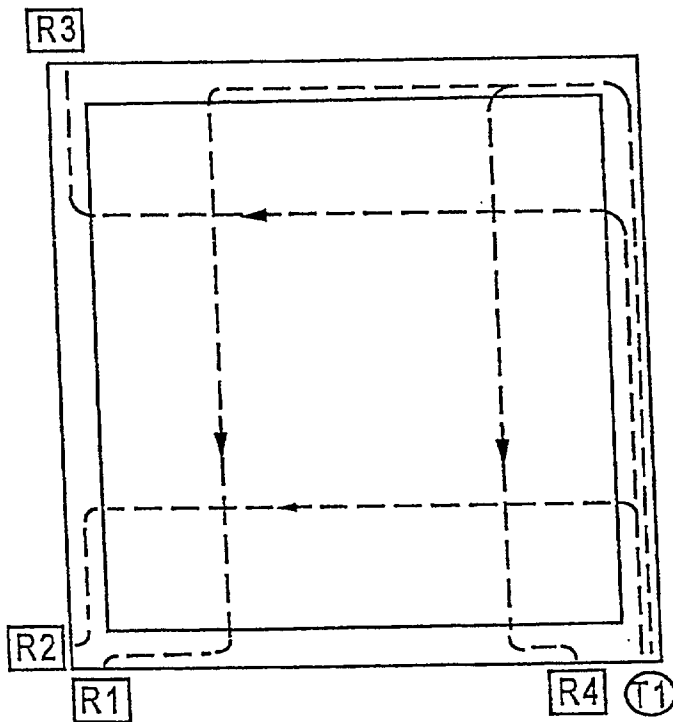


FIG. 12D

USER INPUT DEVICE FOR A COMPUTER SYSTEM

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0001] 1. Field of the Invention

[0002] The present invention relates to a user input device and, more particularly, to a user input device for a computer system.

[0003] 2. Description of the Related Art

[0004] User input devices for computer systems can take many forms. Two forms of user input devices of interest are touch screens and pen-based screens. Touch screens provide a user's input by way of a user touching a display screen with one's finger. Pen-based screens provide a user's input by way of a user touching a display screen with a stylus or pen.

[0005] One conventional approach to providing touch or pen-based screens is to overlay a resistive or capacitive film over the display screen. One problem of the conventional film approach is that the films are easily damaged. Another problem with the conventional film approach is that the cost of this approach tends to be too expensive for standard size or larger display screens because it scales quadratically with area. Another problem of the conventional film approach is that the largely translucent film is laid over the display screen. The film thus causes the display screen to appear dimmed. To compensate, the display screen could offer a greater intensity of light output but such is not always sufficiently available. For example, in the case of portable computers, additional light intensity is usually not available and, if it were, it would lead to additional power consumption that strains the battery of the portable computer.

[0006] Another approach to providing touch or pen-based screens is to use banks of infrared Light Emitting Diodes (LEDs) to provide light and a corresponding bank of phototransistors to detect the light. A major problem of the conventional light-based approach is that it requires a large number of components. The components are also too large for use on portable computers. Another problem with the conventional light-based approach is that it is unable to provide the high resolution needed for pen-based screens. Additionally, the conventional light-based approaches are expensive given the large number of components required.

[0007] Another approach to providing touch or pen-based screens is to use a bundle of fiber optic cables, a liquid crystal display (LCD) as a controllable mask, and a multiplexing scheme. Such an approach is described in U.S. Pat. No. 5,196,836. Here, although only a single light emitter is used, the spreading of the light output from the fiber optic cables is severe such that controllable LCD masks are needed to sequentially isolate light output from only one fiber optic cable at a time. The reception of the light from an isolated fiber optic cable is also isolated on the reception side. Given this arrangement, the system has to scan through each of the fiber optic cables using the multiplexing scheme which makes the approach very slow. Furthermore, this approach cannot yield high resolution needed for pen-based screens and is also rather expensive to fabricate.

[0008] Thus, there is a need for improved user input devices that can provide high resolution at moderate cost

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0009] Broadly speaking, the invention relates to a user input device for an electronic device that provides positional information using a grid of light. The grid of light is produced and processed using waveguides that direct the transmission and reception of light. Optionally, optics may be used to enhance the operation of the user input device. The user input device is particularly suited for use as a user input device for a computer system or the like.

[0010] The invention can be implemented in numerous ways, including as an apparatus, a system, and a method. Several embodiments of the invention are discussed below.

[0011] An apparatus according to one embodiment of the invention includes: a light source; a transmission waveguide portion optically coupled to receive light from the light source, the transmission waveguide portion including a plurality of light transmission waveguides that produce a first set of light beams in response to the light received from the light source, and the first set of light beams emanate from the light transmission waveguides in a first direction; a reception waveguide portion spaced apart from the transmission waveguide in the first direction, the reception waveguide portion including a plurality of light reception waveguides for receiving the first set of light beams emanating from the light transmission waveguides; and a light detector optically coupled to the reception waveguide portion to receive the light from the light reception waveguides of the reception waveguide portion, the light detector measures light intensity of the light from the light reception waveguides of the reception waveguide portion. The embodiment may further include lenses optically positioned proximate to the transmission waveguide portion to collimate the first set of light beams emanating from the light transmission waveguides towards the corresponding light reception waveguides of the reception waveguide portion.

[0012] As an input device for an electronic device another embodiment of the invention includes: at least one light source; a light detector to detect light intensity at a plurality of light detecting elements; and a lithographically defined waveguide structure including a plurality of waveguides. The light source couples light into a first set of the waveguides of the waveguide structure and the waveguide structure produces a grid of light beams from the light coupling into the waveguides. The grid of light beams traverse an input area and are then directed to the light detector by a second set of the waveguides of the waveguide structure.

[0013] As a method for determining a user's input with respect to an input device, an embodiment of the invention includes the operations of: providing a source of light; producing a plurality of parallel light beams from the source of light; simultaneously directing the parallel light beams across an input area of the input device, the input area being positioned with respect to the input device; simultaneously receiving certain of the parallel light beams after having crossed the input area; determining light intensity for each of the parallel light beams received; and determining whether there is a user's input with respect to the input area based on the determined light intensity values.

[0014] The advantages of the invention are numerous. One advantage of the invention is that high resolutions are obtainable. Another advantage of the invention is that the

cost of the input device is moderate and significantly lower than conventional designs because cost scales linearly with perimeter, thus making the input device especially beneficial for normal and large size display screens. Still another advantage of the invention is that display screen intensity is not hindered. Yet another advantage of the invention is that the input device requires few components which are relatively small, inexpensive, and easily assembled onto two-dimensional surfaces.

[0015] Other aspects and advantages of the invention will become apparent from the following detailed description, taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, illustrating by way of example the principles of the invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0016] The present invention will be readily understood by the following detailed description in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, wherein like reference numerals designate like structural elements, and in which:

[0017] FIG. 1 is a block diagram of an input position detection system according to an embodiment of the invention;

[0018] FIG. 2 is a diagram of a computer system;

[0019] FIG. 3 is a diagram of an input device according to an embodiment of the invention;

[0020] FIG. 4 is a schematic diagram of an input device according to an embodiment of the invention;

[0021] FIG. 5 illustrates a schematic diagram of a waveguide arrangement according to an embodiment of the invention;

[0022] FIGS. 6A and 6B are cross-sectional diagrams of the waveguides illustrated in FIG. 5;

[0023] FIG. 6C is a diagram illustrating a structural construction for a waveguide section according to an embodiment of the invention;

[0024] FIG. 6D is a flow diagram of fabrication procedures for making the waveguide illustrated in FIG. 6C according to one embodiment of the invention;

[0025] FIG. 6E is a diagram illustrating output waveguides;

[0026] FIG. 6F is a flow diagram of fabrication procedures for making a waveguide structure according to another embodiment of the invention;

[0027] FIG. 7A is a diagram illustrating optical coupling of light into a waveguide;

[0028] FIG. 7B is a diagram illustrating optical coupling of a waveguide to a receiver;

[0029] FIG. 7C is a block diagram of an ASIC layout for implementing a receiver according to an embodiment of the invention;

[0030] FIG. 8 is a flow diagram of initialization processing according to an embodiment of the invention;

[0031] FIG. 9 is a flow diagram of threshold adjustment processing according to an embodiment of the invention;

[0032] FIG. 10A is a flow diagram of shadow detection processing according to an embodiment of the invention;

[0033] FIGS. 10B and 10C are diagrams illustrating examples of shadow detection processing according to an embodiment of the invention;

[0034] FIGS. 11A and 11B are schematic diagrams illustrating placement of a microlens proximate to waveguides to mitigate spreading of the light transmitted from a waveguide; and

[0035] FIGS. 12A-12D are schematic diagrams of input devices according to other embodiments of the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0036] The invention relates to a user input device for an electronic device that provides positional information using a grid of light. The grid of light is produced and processed using waveguides that direct the transmission and reception of light. Optionally, optics may be used to enhance the operation of the user input device. The user input device is particularly suited for use as a user input device for a computer system or the like.

[0037] Embodiments of the invention are discussed below with reference to FIGS. 1-12D. However, those skilled in the art will readily appreciate that the detailed description given herein with respect to these figures is for explanatory purposes as the invention extends beyond these limited embodiments.

[0038] FIG. 1 is a block diagram of an input position detection system 100 according to an embodiment of the invention. The input position detection system 100 includes a light source 102 that directs light to waveguides 104. The waveguides 104 redirect the incoming light into a plurality of light beams 106 that are directed across a transmission media 108 to waveguides 110. The waveguides 110 direct the received light beams 107 to a light receiver 112 as light beams 114. The light receiver 112 then determines whether each of the light beams 114 that the light receiver 112 receives is "on" or "off" based on an intensity level of the received light for each of the light beams 114.

[0039] Those of the light beams 106 that are blocked (e.g., by user input) while being directed across the transmission media 108 are identified as "off" light beams by the light receiver 112. A user's finger (touch input) or a stylus (pen-based input) blocks one or more of the light beams 106 from reaching both the waveguides 110 and the light receiver 112. The particular one or more of the light beams 106 being blocked thus provides a position of the user's input with respect to the light beams 106 that preferable have a predetermined relative location with respect to the transmission media 108 (e.g., display screen). Consequently, the one or more light beams 114 that the light receiver 112 determines to be "off" indicates the position of the user's input.

[0040] Optionally, the input position detection system 100 may include lenses 116 (e.g., polymer microlens arrays) at the transmit side, i.e., proximate to the output of the waveguide 104. Preferably, the lenses 116 are collimating lens that direct the light beams 106 across the transmission media 108 towards the respective waveguides 110. The input

position detection system **100** may also include lenses **118** at the receive side (i.e., proximate to the input of the waveguide **110**). The lenses **118** direct the light beams being directed across the transmission media **108** into the respective waveguides **110**.

[0041] FIG. 2 is a diagram of a computer system **200**. The computer system **200** is a representative computer system suitable for hosting an input device according to the invention. The computer system **200** includes a computer housing **202** having a CD-ROM drive **204** and a floppy drive **206**. The computer system **200** also includes a display device **208**, a keyboard **210** and a pointing device (e.g., mouse) **212**. The computer system **200** illustrated in FIG. 2 is a desktop computer system in which the display device **208** is normally a separate article of manufacture that couples to the computer housing **202** through a cable (not shown). The keyboard **210** and the pointing device **212** of the computer system **200** enable a user to provide user input to the computer system **200**.

[0042] As previously noted, the invention pertains to an input device based on a grid of light that is used by an electronic device such as a computer. According to one embodiment of the invention, an input device is placed over a screen area **214** of the display device **208** and affixes to a peripheral portion **216** of the display device **208** that surrounds the screen area **214**. Preferably, the input device does not extend over or block the screen area **214**. Alternatively, the input device could be made integral with the display device **208**. A user is able to provide user input to the computer system **200** by interrupting certain portions of the grid of light produced by the input device. Hence, the input device is different from conventional touch screens or pen-based screens, yet provides positional information to the computer system **200** in much the same way. According to another embodiment of the invention, an input device can be placed over or integral with a display screen of a portable computer. Although an input device according to the invention is preferably placed over or integral with a display screen, it should be recognized that an input device according to the invention can also be placed over surfaces other than display screens. For example, the input device could surround a pad, board or tablet for pen or touch input.

[0043] The input device could also be used in various environments other than for user input to computer systems. For example, the input device could be used for robotics positioning where the input device provides robotic positioning information. As another example, the input device could be used with a safety or emergency sensor where interruption of the light beam operates as a switch.

[0044] FIG. 3 is a diagram of an input device **300** according to an embodiment of the invention. The input device **300** is a rectangular structure having a left side **302**, a bottom side **304**, a right side **306**, and a top side **308**. At two of the sides, the input device **300** produces numerous parallel light beams, and at the other two sides, the input device **300** receives numerous parallel light beams. Light detectors associated with the input device **300** interpret the received light beams to determine a positional reference of any user input with respect to the rectangular structure. The input device **300** includes a waveguide structure that directs light either from a light source or to the light detectors. The waveguide structure contains waveguide sections **310-316**,

with each of the waveguide sections **310-316** having a plurality of waveguides. The waveguides operate as light channels. In FIG. 3, the waveguide sections **310** and **312** are depicted as having a plurality of waveguides **318** and **320**, respectively. Each waveguide is used to either produce a light beam or receive a light beam.

[0045] In this embodiment, the input device **300** is placed around a screen area of a display device for a computer system. For example, the input device **300** can be placed around the screen area **214** of the display device **208** of the computer system **200** illustrated in FIG. 2 by affixing the input device **300** to the peripheral portion **216** of the display device **208**. The input device **300** can be held in place in a variety of ways. For example, the input device could be fabricated or assembled into the display device, or mechanically attached to the peripheral portion of the display device that surrounds the display device **308**. In one case, a snap-in plastic frame holds the components of the input device **300** and the plastic frame can be incorporated into the display device **208**. Alternatively, in the another case where the display device is a flat display (e.g., flat panel display for portable computer), a subassembly holding the components of the display device can be incorporated into the metal bezel that surrounds the flat display.

[0046] Although FIG. 3 illustrates the input device **300** as having a rectangular structure, the input device according to the invention need not be regular or rectangular. In fact, the waveguide structure utilized with the input device according to the invention provides flexibility in the shape that the input device takes.

[0047] FIG. 4 is a schematic diagram of an input device **400** according to an embodiment of the invention. The input device **400** is a detailed diagram of the input device **300** in which two light sources and two receivers are respectively utilized to transmit and receive a grid of light. FIG. 4, however, does not depict a housing for the input device **400** such as is depicted in FIG. 3 for the input device **300**.

[0048] The input device **400** includes a first transmitter **402**, a second transmitter **404**, a master receiver **406** and a slave receiver **408**. In addition, the input device **400** includes waveguide sections **410**, **412**, **414** and **416**. The arrangement of the waveguide sections **410-416** are such that they are placed around the periphery of an input area (i.e., a screen area of a display device). The slave receiver **408** communicates with the master receiver **406**, and the master receiver **406** communicates with a host computer (e.g., the computer system **200**).

[0049] The input device **400** may also include lens sections **422**, **424**, **426** and **428** that would also be preferably within the housing for the input device **400**, though not illustrated in FIG. 3. Each of the lens sections **422**, **424**, **426** and **428** respectively correspond to the waveguide sections **410**, **412**, **414** and **416**. The arrangement of the lens sections **422**, **424**, **426** and **428** are proximate to the waveguide sections **410-416** and are thus placed around the periphery of an input area (i.e., a screen area of a display device).

[0050] The operation of the input device **400** is as follow. When the transmitter **402** is activated, light is coupled into the end of the waveguide section **410** adjacent to the transmitter **402**. The light that is coupled into the waveguide section **410** is then directed to a plurality of waveguides (i.e.,

light channels) within the waveguide section **410**. Each of these waveguides within the waveguide section **410** produces a horizontal beam of light **418** that traverses across the screen area of the display device to the waveguide section **412**. The waveguide section **412** contains a plurality of waveguides that correspond to the waveguides in the waveguide section **410**. The beams of light **418** from the waveguide section **410** are directed towards and aligned with the waveguides in the waveguide section **412** so that the light beams being received are directed to light detecting elements of the slave receiver **408**. The slave receiver **408** abuts (or nearly abuts) to the end of the waveguide section **412** so as to receive the light from each of the respective waveguides within the waveguide section **412** at the light detecting elements of the slave receiver **408**.

[0051] Likewise, when the transmitter **404** is activated, light is coupled into the end of the waveguide section **414** adjacent to the transmitter **404**. The light that is coupled into the waveguide section **414** is then directed to a plurality of waveguides (i.e., light channels) within the waveguide section **414**. Each of these waveguides within the waveguide section **414** produces a vertical beam of light **420** that traverses across the screen area of the display device to the waveguide section **416**. The waveguide section **416** contains a plurality of waveguides that correspond to the waveguides in the waveguide section **414**. The beams of light **420** from the waveguide section **414** are directed towards and aligned with the light channels in the waveguide section **416** so that the light beams being received are directed to light detecting elements of the master receiver **406**. The master receiver **408** abuts (or nearly abuts) to the end of the waveguide section **416** so as to receive the light from each of the respective waveguides within the waveguide section **416** at the light detecting elements of the master receiver **406**.

[0052] When the input device **400** includes the lens sections **418-424**, the operation is basically the same, though enhanced by mitigating spreading. The benefit of using lenses is that the light is collimated such that the light beams can traverse larger screen areas and the fabrication of the waveguide sections is simplified. The horizontal beams of light **418** that leave the waveguide section **410** are collimated by the lens section **422**, and then focused again by the lens section **424** so that the horizontal beams of light **418** are received by the waveguides in the waveguide section **412**. Likewise, the horizontal beams of light **420** that leave the waveguide section **414** are collimated by the lens section **426**, and then focused again by the lens section **428** so that the horizontal beams of light **420** are received by the waveguides in the waveguide section **416**. The transmitters **402** and **404** are preferably light sources. For example, each of the transmitters **402** and **404** can be a Light-Emitting-Diode (LED). The wavelength of the light emitted by the transmitters can vary widely. However, the wavelength is preferably in the range of 0.38 to 1.10 micrometers. More preferably, the wavelength of the light is in the range of 0.40 to 0.48 micrometers. Alternatively, the wavelength of the light is in the range of 0.70 to 0.95. In one embodiment, the LED used as the transmitters can be a blue gallium nitride LED with a wavelength of about 0.43 micrometers. The waveguide sections **410-416** are explained below with reference to FIGS. 5, 6A, 6B, 6C and 6D.

[0053] The slave receiver **408** and the master receiver **406** can be designed in a number of different ways. For example,

the receivers **406** and **408** can be implemented by customized Application Specific Integrated Circuits (ASICs) or other circuits with photosensitive areas.

[0054] The receivers **406** and **408** also couple to or include circuitry that converts photosensitive measurements from the photosensitive areas to a digital quantity, and then transmits the digital quantities to the host computer. This circuitry can be implemented in many forms, including on a dedicated integrated circuit (IC) or on the ASIC or other circuits containing the photosensitive areas. Regardless of implementation, the receivers **406** and **408** perform processing tasks to operate the input device **400**. The advantage of using an ASIC approach is that photosensors (light detecting elements) can be formed on the same integrated circuit as logical elements for performing the other processing tasks performed by the receivers **406** and **408**. The photosensors can also be made in a number of ways. Charge-Coupled Devices (CCD) are suitable for light detection but their circuitry requires more silicon and consumes more power than CMOS circuits. CMOS technology cannot fabricate CCD sensors, but other photosensors can be made using CMOS technology as well known in the art. Additional details on the ASIC approach are discussed below with reference to FIG. 7C.

[0055] FIG. 5 illustrates a schematic diagram of a waveguide arrangement **500** according to an embodiment of the invention. The waveguide arrangement **500** depicts optical coupling from a light source, through a pair of waveguide sections, to a receiver. The waveguide arrangement **500**, for example, is suited for the waveguide sections **414** and **416** of the input device **400** illustrated in FIG. 4.

[0056] The waveguide arrangement **500** includes a first waveguide section **502** and a second waveguide section **504** that form a pair of waveguide sections for one direction of input. When light **506** is applied to an end of the waveguide section **502**, a plurality of light beams **508** are formed and directed towards the waveguide section **504** by a plurality of light transmitting waveguides (i.e., light transmitting channels) in the waveguide section **502**. Each of the light beams **508** is directed to a corresponding light receiving waveguide (i.e., light receiving channel) of the waveguide section **504**. The light receiving waveguides of the waveguide section **504** then direct the light being received from the light beams **508** to an end of the waveguide section **504** where a plurality of light beams **510** are produced (for a receiver). Each of the light beams **510** corresponds to the light received in one of the light receiving waveguides of the waveguide section **504**. The direction of input that the waveguide arrangement **500** is useful for determining is perpendicular to the light beams **508** (i.e., horizontal in FIG. 5).

[0057] FIGS. 6A and 6B are cross-sectional diagrams of the waveguide sections **504** and **502** illustrated in FIG. 5. In FIG. 6A, a waveguide section **600** is shown as having a light receiving side **602** and a light output end **603**. The light receiving side **602** includes a plurality of waveguides (channels) to receive light. In particular, the light receiving side **602** is illustrated as having numerous light receiving waveguides, of which light receiving waveguides **604**, **606**, **608**, **610** and **612** are illustrated. Each of these light receiving waveguides has a corresponding light output waveguide (channel) **614**, **616**, **618**, **620** and **622**, respectively, at the light output end **603** of the waveguide section **600**. The light

receiving waveguides **604**, **606**, **608**, **610** and **612** and the light output waveguides **614**, **616**, **618**, **620** and **622** are internal to the waveguide section **600**.

[**0058**] In **FIG. 6B**, a waveguide section **624** includes a light output side **626** and a light input end **628**. The light output side **626** has a plurality of light output waveguides (channels) **630**, **632**, **634**, **636** and **638**. Each of the light output waveguides **630**, **632**, **634**, **636** and **638** corresponds to a respective one of the light receiving waveguides **612**, **610**, **608**, **606** and **604** of the waveguide section **600**. The light input end **628** of the waveguide section **624** is illustrated as having numerous light input waveguides (channels), of which light input waveguides **640**, **642**, **644**, **646** and **648** are illustrated. Each of the light input waveguides **640**, **642**, **644**, **646** and **648** has a corresponding light output waveguide **630**, **632**, **634**, **636** and **638**, respectively, at the light output side **626** of the waveguide section **624**. The light input waveguides **640**, **642**, **644**, **646** and **648** and the light output waveguides **630**, **632**, **634**, **636** and **638** are internal to the waveguide section **600**.

[**0059**] To keep the size of the waveguides sections small yet permit them to provide high resolution, the waveguide sections preferably include layers of waveguides. **FIG. 6C** is a diagram illustrating a structural construction for a waveguide section **650** according to an embodiment of the invention. The waveguide section **650** includes a first substrate **652** that supports waveguides **654** on an upper surface of the first substrate **652** and waveguides **656** on a lower surface of the first substrate **652**. The waveguide section **650** further includes a second substrate **658** that supports waveguides **660** on an upper surface of the second substrate **658** and waveguides **662** on a lower surface of the second substrate **658**. The height, width and shape of the waveguides **660**, **656** can vary widely. However, in one suitable embodiment, the height is about 5 micrometers, the width is about 10 micrometers, and the shape is rectangular. A layer of polyester **664** is then sandwiched between the first and second substrates **652** and **658** and their associated waveguides and holds the waveguide section **650** together with optical cement. The advantage of the layers of waveguides of the waveguide section **650** is to facilitate the providing of high resolution. The structural construction for the waveguide section **650** is also referred to as a waveguide sandwich. For ease of illustration, the waveguide section **650** depicted in **FIG. 6C** does not illustrate the curving of the channels shown in **FIGS. 6A** and **6B**. It is desirable to keep the assembly (housing) for the input device to a profile height of less than 2 mm. In one embodiment, an individual waveguide layer (i.e., glass plate with waveguides) is 760 microns thick, with the glass plate being about 0.7 mm thick and a bisbenzocyclobutene (BCB) layer being of varying thickness (e.g., in a range of about 0.5 to 50 micrometers thick). Hence, with two individual waveguide layers (i.e., glass plates with rows of individual waveguides on both sides) and a layer of polyester (e.g., about 5 mils thick) between the two waveguides layers, totals to a thickness of about 4 mm for a waveguide sandwich.

[**0060**] **FIG. 6D** is a flow diagram of fabrication procedures **670** for making the waveguide section **650** illustrated in **FIG. 6C** according to one embodiment of the invention. Initially, the fabrication procedures **670** obtain **672** a sheet of glass. The glass sheet operates as a supporting substrate for the construction of individual waveguides. Next, a layer of

BCB is applied **674** to a first side of the glass sheet and soft baked. BCB is a photosensitive material. Then, the photosensitive BCB is exposed and developed **676** to form channels. Next, the BCD layer is hard baked **678**. In other words, the channels are formed by a lithographic process. Thereafter, channels may be formed on the other side of the substrate by the following processing. The glass sheet is flipped **680**. A layer of BCB is applied **682** to a second side of the glass sheet and soft baked. Then, the photosensitive BCB is exposed and developed **683** to form channels. The BCD layer is then hard baked **684**. The glass sheet is then laser cut **685** into individual waveguides. The laser etching and cutting are standard industrial processes. Finally, two individual waveguides may be combined **686** together with a polyester strip and an optical cement (see **FIG. 6C**). The polyester strip serves to separate or isolate the individual waveguides being combined from one another. Following block **686**, the fabrication procedures **670** are complete and end.

[**0061**] **FIG. 6E** is a diagram illustrating flared waveguides **690**, **692** and **694**. The flared waveguides may be used at an end of the transmitting and/or receiving waveguides. For example, the portions of the light output waveguides **630-638** near the light output side of the waveguide section **624** may be flared or tapered as illustrated in **FIG. 6E**. By flaring the light output waveguides light diffractive spreading of the light can be reduced. Similarly, flaring light input waveguides increases the area into which incident light couples.

[**0062**] **FIG. 6F** is a flow diagram of fabrication procedures **696** for making a waveguide structure according to another embodiment of the invention. In general, a waveguide structure includes a substrate, a low index of refraction layer, and a high index of refraction layer. In the embodiment discussed with reference to **FIG. 6D**, glass can serve as both the substrate and the low index of refraction layer, and a layer of BCB can serve as the high index of refraction layer.

[**0063**] In any case, the fabrication procedures **696** are as follows. Initially, a substrate material is obtained **696-1**. A decision block **696-2** then determines whether the index of refraction (IOR) for the substrate material is lower than the index of refraction of a waveguide material to be used. When the decision block **696-2** determines that the index of refraction for the substrate material is not lower than the index of refraction of the waveguide material, then a material with a low index of refraction (low IOR) is obtained **696-3**. The material is then applied **696-4** to both sides of the substrate. If the low IOR material requires baking or curing, then such an operation is performed. Accordingly, the substrate with the material on it has an index of refraction that is lower than the index of refraction of the waveguide material. On the other hand, when the decision block **696-2** determines that the index of refraction for the substrate material is lower than the index of refraction of the waveguide material, then blocks **696-3** and **696-4** are bypassed.

[**0064**] The desired characteristics for the substrate material include rigidity, low thermal coefficient of expansion, low water absorption, surface adherence to waveguide material of low IOR material, and low cost. Suitable substrate materials include glass, some plastics, ceramics. The desired

characteristics for the low IOR layer include lower IOR than waveguide material, optical clarity, adheres to substrate material and waveguide material, applied as a coating or grown as a thin film, low thermal coefficient of expansion, low water absorption, and low cost.

[0065] Following block 696-4 or following block 696-2 when the decision block 696-2 determines that the index of refraction for the substrate material is lower than the index of refraction of the waveguide material to be used, a sheet of waveguide material is obtained 696-5. The desired characteristics for the waveguide material include higher IOR than the low IOR material or the substrate material, optical clarity, adherence to substrate material and waveguide material, applied as a coating or grown as a thin film, low thermal coefficient of expansion, low water absorption, and low cost. A first side of the waveguide material is then coated 696-6. Once coated, the first side of the waveguide material can be lithographically patterned 696-7 to form individual waveguides. A second side of the waveguide material is then coated 696-8. Once coated, the second side of the waveguide can be patterned 696-9 to form individual waveguides. Hence, with this processing individual waveguides are fabricated on both sides of the substrate, thereby increasing density of pixels (i.e., resolution) the waveguides can provide and reducing both size requirements and costs (see FIG. 6C). Thereafter, waveguide sections are cut-out 696-10 from the fabricated substrate and waveguide material.

[0066] FIG. 7A is a diagram illustrating optical coupling of light into a waveguide section. As illustrated, the waveguide section is the waveguide section 624 illustrated in FIG. 6B. In particular, a light-emitting diode (LED) 700 includes a light output portion 702 from which light is output based on the electrical signals provided to terminals 704 and 706 of the LED 700. The light output portion 702 abuts (or nearly abuts) against an end 628 of the waveguide section 624 and thereby supplies light into the waveguide section 624. Preferably, the LED 700 has a relatively short wavelength such as a blue LED. More particularly, the LED 700 is a 430 nanometer (nm) blue gallium nitride LED and available from Stanley Corporation. The output light intensity for the Stanley blue gallium nitride LED is approximately 100 millicandelas. The LED comes in a T1 package which is a small package with a diameter of approximately 3.2 millimeters (mm).

[0067] FIG. 7B is a diagram illustrating optical coupling of a waveguide section to a receiver. As illustrated, the waveguide section is the waveguide section 600 illustrated in FIG. 6A. In particular, the waveguide section 600 that is receiving and directing light via its light receiving waveguides 604-612 to a receiver optically coupled to the waveguide section 600. In this illustrated embodiment, the light receiving waveguides 604-612 optically couple to a light detection region 708 of an integrated circuit device 710 that operates as the receiver. The integrated circuit device 710 can be affixed to (or proximate to) the waveguide section 600 in a variety of ways. For example, the housing for the input device (see FIG. 3), an adhesive or some other mechanical structure can provide the mechanical support of the integrated circuit device 710 with respect to the waveguide section 600 so as to provide the needed optical coupling.

[0068] FIG. 7C is a block diagram of an ASIC layout 720 for implementing a receiver according to an embodiment of

the invention. The ASIC layout 720 includes various functional logic blocks. A transmitter driver 722 supplies power (PWR) and ground (GND) signals to the transmitters (light sources) to cause them to emit light. A clock circuit 724 supplies a clock signal to the transmitter driver 722 to thereby control the operation of the transmitters in accordance with a duty cycle associated with the clock signal. The ASIC layout 720 also includes photodetectors and associated circuitry 726 that detect the light being received by the receiver. The output of the photodetectors and associated circuitry are signals indicating those of the pixels in an x and y directions that are dark. These output signals are then processed by processing circuitry 728. For example, the processing circuitry performs the shadow processing discussed below. The processing circuitry 728 includes a First-In-First-Out (FIFO) buffer 730 where data to be forwarded to a host computer is temporarily stored. Communications circuitry 732 retrieves the data stored in the FIFO buffer 730 and outputs the data to the host computer. The receiver 720 is electrically connected to the data (DATA) and ground (GND) signals. The processing circuitry 728 and the communications circuitry 732 also receive the clock signal from the clock circuit 724 for processing synchronized with the clock signal. The ASIC layout 720 further includes initialization circuitry 734 that is used to setup and initialize the photodetectors and associated circuitry 726 and the processing circuitry 728.

[0069] FIG. 8 is a flow diagram of initialization processing 800 according to an embodiment of the invention. The initialization processing 800 initially activates 802 light sources. For example, with respect to FIG. 4, the light sources 402 and 404 (transmitters) would be activated. Next, a light intensity value for each light sensing element is read 804. Namely, with respect to FIG. 4, the light sensing elements of the receivers 406 and 408 would operate to measure the incoming light intensity value at each of its light sensing elements. Thereafter, the light sensing elements that have a light intensity value that is less than a predetermined threshold value are disabled 806. The light sensing elements that are disabled are no longer utilized because they do not correspond to light receiving channels of the corresponding waveguide. In other words, the initialization processing 800 operates to effectively align the light receiving channels of a waveguide with the appropriate light sensing elements of the receivers 406 and 408. Typically, such processing is desirable because it facilitates manufacturing, design and assembly of the input device 400, particularly since the channels within the waveguides are very narrow and the receivers typically will include an area of light sensing elements that exceeds the size of the end of the waveguide. For example, in FIG. 7B, the light detection region 708 of the integrated circuit device 710 is larger than the end 603 of the waveguide 600. Following block 806, the initialization processing 800 is complete and ends.

[0070] FIG. 9 is a flow diagram of threshold adjustment processing 900 according to an embodiment of the invention. The threshold adjustment processing 900 initially reads 902 a light intensity value for each of the enabled light sensing elements at ambient light conditions. Then, an "on" threshold is determined 904 based on the light intensity values that have been read. Next, the "on" threshold is set 906 in the receivers. As an example, the "on" threshold can be set 906 by ambient current plus n(ambient current—dark

current), where n is an integer. Following block **906**, the threshold adjustment processing **900** is complete and ends.

[**0071**] The threshold adjustment processing **900** is used to periodically and frequently set the “on” threshold amount for the receivers so that the receivers are able to properly distinguish between an “on” and an “off” condition. By periodically and frequently updating the “on” threshold amount, the input device is able to compensate for changes in ambient light conditions that may effect the light intensity values measured by the light sensing elements. For example, if a user of a computer system having an input device according to the invention initially begins using the computer system in the dark, and then turns on a light (directing light towards the waveguides), the ambient light conditions change and the input device should not operate incorrectly due to such changes in ambient light conditions. Accordingly, the threshold adjustment processing **900** is able to compensate for changes in ambient light conditions so that the input device operates in a reliable manner without regard to ambient light conditions or changes thereto.

[**0072**] **FIG. 10A** is a flow diagram of shadow detection processing **1000** according to an embodiment of the invention. The shadow being detected is associated with a user’s touch or stylus touch to the input device according to the invention. The touching of a finger or stylus to a display device having the input device according to the invention mounted thereto causes a shadow to be produced because certain of the light beams produced by the input device will be blocked. The shadow results because certain of the light beams that crisscross (i.e., grid of light) over the surface of the screen area are blocked (or interrupted) and therefore the receivers measure very low intensities for these light sensing elements. The receivers will thus detect that these certain light beams as being “off” because they are blocked.

[**0073**] The shadow detection processing **1000** initially reads **1002** a light intensity value for each of the enabled light sensing elements. Then, for those of the enabled light sensing elements that are determined to be “off”, identifiers are stored **1004**. Next, a slave receiver forwards **1006** the identifiers for the enabled light sensing elements that are “off” to a master receiver. The master receiver then determines **1008** the smallest shadow from the identifiers. By the determining **1008** of the smallest shadow, the input device is able to distinguish a stylus or pen input from a user’s hand simultaneously touching the screen. After the smallest shadow is determined **1008**, the coordinate location of the smallest shadow is forwarded **1010** to the host computer. Following block **1010**, the shadow detection processing **1000** is complete and ends.

[**0074**] An example of the shadow detection processing **1000** is described with reference to **FIGS. 10B and 10C**. In **FIGS. 10B and 10C**, light detection cells are numbered **0,1,2,3, . . . n**. In these examples, it is assumed that only those light detection cells not receiving light (e.g., dark cells) output a signal. In processing, the address of each dark cell is input to a logic array in order. The logic array then preferably first throws out all but first and last pixels of any shadows that may be present, which leaves a pattern first, last; first, last . . . in storage in a first-in-first-out (FIFO) buffer. For example, with respect to **FIG. 10B**, the FIFO would contain: **3,6; 12, 12**. The processing then selects the smallest shadow and outputs its center and width. In this

example, **12, 1** would be sent to a host computer. In another example, with respect to **FIG. 10C**, the FIFO would contain **12, 16**, and thereafter **14, 5** would be sent to the host computer.

[**0075**] By selecting the smallest shadow to forward to the host computer, the shadow detection processing **1000** is able to filter out situations in which two objects simultaneously touch the screen, such as a stylus and a hand. By identifying and selecting the smallest shadow, the shadow detection processing **1000** is able to distinguish between the two objects and select the one appearing to be the one that is desired. However, this technique would not work when the shadow from the hand covers the shadow from the stylus, but usually this would not occur. The width of the shadow is sent because that gives the width of the stylus. This is useful for calligraphy on a pen screen, and it is potentially useful for measuring applications .

[**0076**] Additionally, as noted above, the input device according to the invention may optionally further include lenses (e.g., diffractive lenses) to collimate the light being output by the transmitting waveguide towards the receiving waveguide. The lenses could be individual lenses or an array of lenses. Given that the waveguides are small (e.g., 3-6 micrometers), the lenses are often referred to as micro lenses. Further, the reception side of the input device may also include lenses (e.g., diffractive lenses) to focus the light into the receiving waveguides.

[**0077**] **FIGS. 11A and 11B** are schematic diagrams illustrating placement of a microlens proximate to waveguides to mitigate spreading of the light transmitted from a waveguide. In **FIG. 11A**, an optical arrangement **1000** places a microlens **1102** proximate to an output end of a waveguide **1104**. The microlens **1104** operates to collimate the light emanating from the waveguide **1104**. Hence, the light beam that traverses an input area is a collimated light beam **1106**. A waveguide **1108** having a flared-open portion receives the collimated light beam after traversing the input area. The waveguide then directs the received light to a receiver. In **FIG. 11B**, an optical arrangement **1110** is similar to the optical arrangement **1000** on a transmission side, but differs on a receive side. In particular, a lens **1112** receives the collimated light after traversing the input area. The lens **1112** focuses the received collimated light beam on a waveguide **1114**.

[**0078**] The use of lenses serves to simplify the construction of the waveguides because it is difficult and time-consuming to etch a thick coating for the waveguides. For example, one might consider $5\ \mu\text{m}$ to be mid-range, $10\ \mu\text{m}$ to be a little thick, $20\ \mu\text{m}$ to be quite thick. The amount of light spreading in the waveguide is inversely proportional to the size of the waveguide in that dimension, so a thicker coating means a deeper waveguide which means less spreading. Hence, with lenses, a thinner coating (e.g., 5 micrometers) can be used for the waveguides. Another advantage of using lenses is that the power required by the transmitters (i.e., intensity of light) can be reduced.

[**0079**] The lenses are generally made of plastic. The lenses can be made in several different ways. One method is to deposit droplets of resin on a substrate through a syringe apparatus which controls the characteristics and position of a droplet. This process provides high quality but is expensive. It is therefore best used for mastering. Another method

involves lithographically etching, then melting and resolidifying plastic on a substrate. Traditional methods such as high quality molding and embossing are also available and less expensive. Lenses can be obtained from numerous suppliers (e.g., TR Labs of Alberta, Canada) that produce microlens arrays.

[0080] The embodiment of the input device illustrated in FIG. 4 and discussed above is possibly a preferred embodiment of the invention. However, it should be recognized that other embodiments of the invention may also be used. In these embodiments, the number of waveguides section, transmitters and receivers vary. Generally, the fewer the components the less expensive, though for larger perimeter input areas more components may be needed as fabrication of the components may also provide practical limits. FIGS. 12A-12D are schematic diagrams of input devices according to other embodiments of the invention. These embodiments depict different arrangements for the input device according to the invention in the same manner as FIG. 4. In each embodiment, the dotted lines indicate the light paths from a transmitter (light source), through the waveguides, across an input area, and into waveguides. Further, although not illustrated, these embodiments may include lenses in a manner similar to that illustrated in FIG. 4. FIG. 12A is a schematic diagram of a two transmitter (T1, T2), two receiver (R1, R2) embodiment with a waveguide structure having four sections. FIG. 12B is a schematic diagram of a one transmitter (T1), one receiver (R1) embodiment with a waveguide structure have two sections. FIG. 12C is a schematic diagram of a one transmitter (T1), one receiver (R1) embodiment with a waveguide structure having a single section. By having only a single section, alignment of opposing optical waveguide sections is avoided, though fabrication costs may be higher. FIG. 12D is a schematic diagram of a one transmitter (T1), four receiver (R1, R2, R3, R4) embodiment with a waveguide structure having a single section. With the embodiment illustrated in FIG. 12D, large input areas can be covered. Since the receivers have a limit on the number of waveguides or pixels that they can provide light detection for, the invention uses additional receivers to be able to scale to larger perimeter input devices.

[0081] The many features and advantages of the present invention are apparent from the written description, and thus, it is intended by the appended claims to cover all such features and advantages of the invention. Further, since numerous modifications and changes will readily occur to those skilled in the art, it is not desired to limit the invention to the exact construction and operation as illustrated and described. Hence, all suitable modifications and equivalents may be resorted to as falling within the scope of the invention.

What is claimed is:

1. An apparatus, comprising:

a light source;

a transmission waveguide portion optically coupled to receive light from said light source, said transmission waveguide portion including a plurality of light transmission waveguides that produce a first set of light beams in response to the light received from said light source, and said first set of light beams emanate from said light transmission waveguides in a first direction;

a reception waveguide portion spaced apart from said transmission waveguide in the first direction, said reception waveguide portion including a plurality of light reception waveguides for receiving said first set of light beams emanating from said light transmission waveguides; and

a light detector optically coupled to said reception waveguide portion to receive the light from the light reception waveguides of said reception waveguide portion, said light detector measures light intensity of the light from the light reception waveguides of said reception waveguide portion.

2. An apparatus as recited in claim 1, wherein said apparatus is an input device for an electronic device.

3. An apparatus as recited in claim 2, wherein between said transmission waveguide portion and said reception waveguide portion an input area is produced.

4. An apparatus as recited in claim 3, wherein a user can provide input to the electronic device by interacting with the input area.

5. An apparatus as recited in claim 4, wherein the user interacts with the input area with a finger or a stylus.

6. An apparatus as recited in claim 3, wherein said apparatus is a user input apparatus for a computer system by interacting with the input area.

7. An apparatus as recited in claim 1, wherein said light detector is an integrated circuit having a light sensing area optically coupled to said reception waveguide portion to receive the light from the light reception waveguides of said reception waveguide portion.

8. An apparatus as recited in claim 1, wherein said apparatus further comprises:

lenses optically positioned proximate to said transmission waveguide portion to collimate said first set of light beams emanating from the light transmission waveguides towards the corresponding light reception waveguides of said reception waveguide portion.

9. An apparatus as recited in claim 1, wherein the light transmission waveguides and the light reception waveguides are lithographically defined waveguides.

10. An apparatus as recited in claim 9, wherein the light transmission waveguides and the light reception waveguides are formed on a substrate material.

11. An apparatus as recited in claim 8, wherein said apparatus is an input device for providing user input to a computer system, and

wherein said light detector is an integrated circuit having a light sensing area optically coupled to said reception waveguide portion to receive the light from the light channels of said reception waveguide.

12. An input device for an electronic device, comprising:

at least one light source;

a light detector to detect light intensity at a plurality of light detecting elements; and

a lithographically defined waveguide structure including a plurality of waveguides,

wherein said light source couples light into a first set of the waveguides of said waveguide structure and said waveguide structure produces a grid of light beams from the light coupling into the waveguides, the grid of light beams traverse an input area and are then

directed to said light detector by a second set of the waveguides of said waveguide structure.

13. An input device as recited in claim 12, wherein the first set of waveguides send beams of light across the input area towards corresponding waveguides of the second set of waveguides.

14. An input device as recited in claim 13, wherein said input device further comprises:

lenses optically positioned proximate to said waveguide structure to collimate the light beams emanating from the first set of waveguides.

15. An input device as recited in claim 12, wherein said input device further comprises:

lenses optically positioned proximate to said waveguide structure to collimate the light beams emanating from the first set of waveguides.

16. An input device as recited in claim 15, wherein said lenses are micro lenses formed in a strip of material that is placed proximate to a light exit side of the first set of waveguides where the light beams emanate.

17. An input device as recited in claim 12, wherein the light transmission waveguides and the light reception waveguides are lithographically defined waveguides.

18. An input device as recited in claim 17, wherein the light transmission waveguides and the light reception waveguides are formed on a substrate material.

19. An input device as recited in claim 12, wherein said input device provides user input to a computer system, and

wherein said light detector is an integrated circuit having a light sensing area optically coupled to said reception waveguide portion to receive the light from the light channels of said reception waveguide.

20. An input device as recited in claim 19, wherein the light sensing area of the integrated circuit includes a plurality of photosensitive cells.

21. An input device as recited in claim 12, wherein said waveguide structure includes a plurality of sections.

23. An input device as recited in claim 22, wherein, a first of the waveguide sections produces horizontal light beams, a second of the waveguide sections produces vertical light beams, a third of the waveguide sections disposed opposite

to the first of the waveguide sections across the input area receives the horizontal light beams from the first of the waveguide sections, and a fourth of the waveguide sections disposed opposite to the third of the waveguide sections across the input area receives the vertical light beams from the second of the waveguide sections.

24. An input device as recited in claim 12, wherein said waveguide structure is a unitary structure.

25. An input device as recited in claim 12, wherein the electronic device is a computer system having a display device, the display device includes a screen area and a peripheral portion, and wherein said input device is affixed to the peripheral portion of the display device, with the input area of said input device being placed over the screen area of the display device.

26. A method for determining a user's input with respect to an input device, said method comprising:

- (a) providing a source of light;
- (b) producing a plurality of parallel light beams from the source of light;
- (c) simultaneously directing the parallel light beams across an input area of the input device, the input area being positioned with respect to the input device;
- (d) simultaneously receiving certain of the parallel light beams after having crossed the input area;
- (e) determining light intensity for each of the parallel light beams received; and
- (f) determining whether there is a user's input with respect to the input area based on the determined light intensity values.

27. A method as recited in claim 26, wherein said method determines a position of the user's input with respect to the input device, and

wherein said method further comprises:

- (g) determining a position of the user's input with respect to the input device based on the determined light intensity values.

* * * * *