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- (71) **Applicant:** CIRRUS LOGIC INTERNATIONAL SEMICONDUCTOR, LTD. [GB/GB]; Westfield House, 26 Westfield Road, Edinburgh Lothian EH11 2QB (GB).
- (72) **Inventor; and**
- (71) **Applicant (for US only):** HE, Zhaohui [CN/US]; 2301 S. MoPac, #1132, Austin, Texas 78746 (US).
- (72) **Inventors:** KING, Eric J.; 1050 Trail Head Circle, Dripping Springs, Texas 78620 (US). MARU, Siddharth; 3500 Greystone Drive #212, Austin, Texas 78731 (US). MELANSON, John L.; 901 W. 9th Street, #201, Austin, Texas 78703 (US).
- (74) **Agents:** PREWITT, Brian K. et al.; Jackson Walker L.L.P., 100 Congress Avenue, Suite 1100, Austin, Texas 78701 (US).
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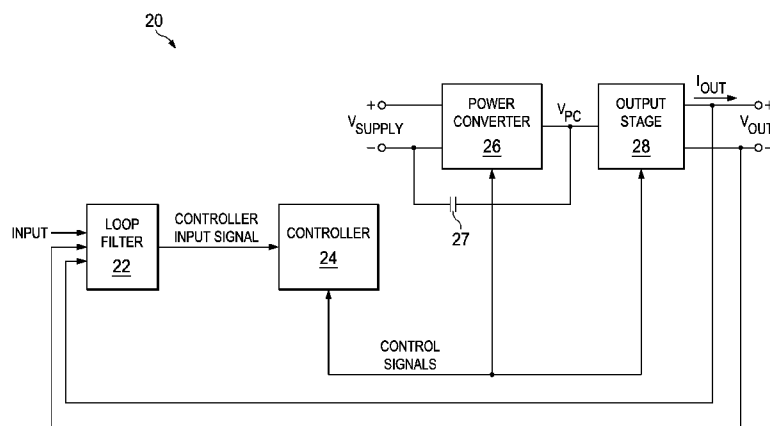
(54) **Title:** SWITCHED MODE CONVERTER WITH VARIABLE COMMON MODE VOLTAGE BUFFER

FIG. 3

(57) **Abstract:** A switching power stage for producing a load voltage at a load output of the switching power stage, wherein the load output comprises a first load terminal having a first load voltage and a second load terminal having a second load voltage such that the load voltage comprises a difference between the first and the second load voltages, that may include: a power converter comprising a power inductor and a plurality of switches, wherein the power converter is configured to drive a power converter output terminal; a linear amplifier configured to drive a linear amplifier output terminal; and a controller for controlling the plurality of switches and the linear amplifier in order to generate the load voltage as a function of an input signal to the controller such that energy delivered to the load output is supplied predominantly by the power converter.

## SWITCHED MODE CONVERTER WITH VARIABLE COMMON MODE VOLTAGE BUFFER

### RELATED APPLICATIONS

5           The present disclosure claims priority to United States Non-Provisional Patent Application Serial No. 15/168,680, filed May 31, 2016, which claims priority to United States Provisional Patent Application Serial No. 62/279,956, filed January 18, 2016, both of which are incorporated by reference herein in their entirety.

### 10   FIELD OF DISCLOSURE

          The present disclosure relates in general to circuits for audio devices, including without limitation personal audio devices such as wireless telephones and media players, and more specifically, to a switched mode amplifier including a switched mode converter for driving an audio transducer of an audio device.

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### BACKGROUND

          Personal audio devices, including wireless telephones, such as mobile/cellular telephones, cordless telephones, mp3 players, and other consumer audio devices, are in widespread use. Such personal audio devices may include circuitry for driving a pair of  
20   headphones or one or more speakers. Such circuitry often includes a speaker driver including a power amplifier for driving an audio output signal to headphones or speakers.

### SUMMARY

          In accordance with the teachings of the present disclosure, one or more  
25   disadvantages and problems associated with existing approaches to driving an audio output signal to an audio transducer may be reduced or eliminated.

          In accordance with embodiments of the present disclosure, a switching power stage for producing a load voltage at a load output of the switching power stage, the load output comprising a first load terminal having a first load voltage and a second load  
30   terminal having a second load voltage such that the load voltage comprises a difference between the first load voltage and the second load voltage, may include a power converter

comprising a power inductor and a first plurality of switches, wherein the power converter is configured to drive a power converter output terminal coupled to the first load terminal in order to drive the first load terminal, a linear amplifier configured to drive a linear amplifier output terminal coupled to the second load terminal in order to drive the second load terminal, a controller configured to control the first plurality of switches of the power converter and the linear amplifier in order to generate the load voltage as a function of an input signal to the controller such that energy delivered to the load output is supplied predominantly by the power converter.

In accordance with these and other embodiments of the present disclosure, a method may be provided for producing a load voltage at a load output of the switching power stage, the load output comprising a first load terminal having a first load voltage and a second load terminal having a second load voltage such that the load voltage comprises a difference between the first load voltage and the second load voltage, the switching power stage further comprising a power converter comprising a power inductor and a first plurality of switches, wherein the power converter is configured to drive a power converter output terminal coupled to the first load terminal in order to drive the first load terminal, and the switching power stage further comprising a linear amplifier configured to drive a linear amplifier output terminal coupled to the second load terminal in order to drive the second load terminal. The method may include controlling the first plurality of switches of the power converter and the linear amplifier in order to generate the load voltage as a function of an input signal to the controller such that energy delivered to the load output is supplied predominantly by the power converter.

Technical advantages of the present disclosure may be readily apparent to one skilled in the art from the figures, description and claims included herein. The objects and advantages of the embodiments will be realized and achieved at least by the elements, features, and combinations particularly pointed out in the claims.

It is to be understood that both the foregoing general description and the following detailed description are examples and explanatory and are not restrictive of the claims set forth in this disclosure.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

A more complete understanding of the present embodiments and advantages thereof may be acquired by referring to the following description taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, in which like reference numbers indicate like features,  
5 and wherein:

FIGURE 1 illustrates an example personal audio device, in accordance with embodiments of the present disclosure;

FIGURE 2 illustrates a block diagram of selected components of an example audio integrated circuit of a personal audio device, in accordance with embodiments of  
10 the present disclosure;

FIGURE 3 illustrates a block and circuit diagram of selected components of an example switched mode amplifier, in accordance with embodiments of the present disclosure;

FIGURE 4A illustrates a circuit diagram of selected components of an example  
15 boost converter that may be used to implement the power converter depicted in FIGURE 3, in accordance with embodiments of the present disclosure;

FIGURE 4B illustrates a circuit diagram of selected components of an example buck converter that may be used to implement the power converter depicted in FIGURE 3, in accordance with embodiments of the present disclosure;

FIGURE 4C illustrates a circuit diagram of selected components of another  
20 example non-inverting buck-boost converter that may be used to implement the power converter depicted in FIGURE 3, in accordance with embodiments of the present disclosure;

FIGURE 4D illustrates a circuit diagram of selected components of an example  
25 inverting buck-boost converter that may be used to implement the power converter depicted in FIGURE 3, in accordance with embodiments of the present disclosure;

FIGURE 5A illustrates a circuit diagram of selected components of an example output stage that may be used to implement the output stage depicted in FIGURE 3, in accordance with embodiments of the present disclosure;

FIGURE 5B illustrates a circuit diagram of selected components of another example output stage that may be used to implement the output stage depicted in FIGURE 3, in accordance with embodiments of the present disclosure;

FIGURE 5C illustrates a circuit diagram of selected components of another  
5 example output stage that may be used to implement the output stage depicted in FIGURE 3, in accordance with embodiments of the present disclosure;

FIGURE 5D illustrates a circuit diagram of selected components of another example output stage that may be used to implement the output stage depicted in FIGURE 3, in accordance with embodiments of the present disclosure;

10 FIGURE 5E illustrates a circuit diagram of selected components of another example output stage that may be used to implement the output stage depicted in FIGURE 3, in accordance with embodiments of the present disclosure;

FIGURE 6 illustrates a graph depicting the relationship of a voltage driven by the power converter depicted in FIGURE 3 and a voltage driven by a linear amplifier of the  
15 output stage depicted in FIGURE 3 as a function of a desired output voltage, in accordance with embodiments of the present disclosure; and

FIGURE 7 illustrates a circuit diagram of an example differential amplifier which may be used to implement portions of the example output stage depicted in FIGURE 5E, in accordance with embodiments of the present disclosure.

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#### DETAILED DESCRIPTION

FIGURE 1 illustrates an example personal audio device 1, in accordance with embodiments of the present disclosure. FIGURE 1 depicts personal audio device 1 coupled to a headset 3 in the form of a pair of earbud speakers 8A and 8B. Headset 3  
25 depicted in FIGURE 1 is merely an example, and it is understood that personal audio device 1 may be used in connection with a variety of audio transducers, including without limitation, headphones, earbuds, in-ear earphones, and external speakers. A plug 4 may provide for connection of headset 3 to an electrical terminal of personal audio device 1. Personal audio device 1 may provide a display to a user and receive user input using a  
30 touch screen 2, or alternatively, a standard liquid crystal display (LCD) may be combined with various buttons, sliders, and/or dials disposed on the face and/or sides of personal

audio device 1. As also shown in FIGURE 1, personal audio device 1 may include an audio integrated circuit (IC) 9 for generating an analog audio signal for transmission to headset 3 and/or another audio transducer.

FIGURE 2 illustrates a block diagram of selected components of an example audio IC 9 of a personal audio device, in accordance with embodiments of the present disclosure. As shown in FIGURE 2, a microcontroller core 18 may supply a digital audio input signal DIG\_IN to a digital-to-analog converter (DAC) 14, which may convert the digital audio input signal to an analog signal  $V_{IN}$ . DAC 14 may supply analog signal  $V_{IN}$  to an amplifier 16 which may amplify or attenuate audio input signal  $V_{IN}$  to provide a differential audio output signal  $V_{OUT}$ , which may operate a speaker, a headphone transducer, a line level signal output, and/or other suitable output. In some embodiments, DAC 14 may be an integral component of amplifier 16. A power supply 10 may provide the power supply rail inputs of amplifier 16. In some embodiments, power supply 10 may comprise a battery. Although FIGURES 1 and 2 contemplate that audio IC 9 resides in a personal audio device, systems and methods described herein may also be applied to electrical and electronic systems and devices other than a personal audio device, including audio systems for use in a computing device larger than a personal audio device, an automobile, a building, or other structure.

FIGURE 3 illustrates a block and circuit diagram of selected components of an example switched mode amplifier 20, in accordance with embodiments of the present disclosure. In some embodiments, switched mode amplifier 20 may implement all or a portion of amplifier 16 described with respect to FIGURE 2. As shown in FIGURE 3, switched mode amplifier 20 may comprise a loop filter 22, a controller 24, a power converter 26, and an output stage 28.

Loop filter 22 may comprise any system, device, or apparatus configured to receive an input signal (e.g., audio input signal  $V_{IN}$  or a derivative thereof) and a feedback signal (e.g., audio output signal  $V_{OUT}$ , a derivative thereof, or other signal indicative of audio output signal  $V_{OUT}$ ) and based on such input signal and feedback signal, generate a controller input signal to be communicated to converter controller 24. In some embodiments, such controller input signal may comprise a signal indicative of an integrated error between the input signal and the feedback signal. In other embodiments,

such controller input signal may comprise a signal indicative of a target current signal to be driven as an output current  $I_{OUT}$  or a target voltage signal to be driven as an output voltage  $V_{OUT}$  to a load coupled to the output terminals of output stage 28.

Controller 24 may comprise any system, device, or apparatus configured to, based  
5 on an input signal (e.g., input signal INPUT), output signal  $V_{OUT}$ , and/or other characteristics of switched mode amplifier 20, control switching of switches integral to power converter 26, switches integral to output stage 28, and/or one or more linear amplifiers integral to output stage 28, in order to transfer electrical energy from a power supply  $V_{SUPPLY}$  to the load of switched-mode amplifier 20 in accordance with the input  
10 signal.

Power converter 26 may receive at its input a voltage  $V_{SUPPLY}$  (e.g., provided by power supply 10), and may generate at its output a voltage  $V_{PC}$ . In some embodiments, voltage  $V_{SUPPLY}$  may be received via input terminals including a positive input terminal and a negative input terminal which may be coupled to a ground voltage. As described in  
15 greater detail in this disclosure (including, without limitation, in reference to FIGURES 4A-4D, below), power converter 26 may comprise a power inductor and a plurality of switches that are controlled by control signals received from controller 24 in order to convert voltage  $V_{SUPPLY}$  to voltage  $V_{PC}$ , such that audio output signal  $V_{OUT}$  generated from voltage  $V_{PC}$  is a function of the input signal to loop filter 22. Also as shown in  
20 FIGURE 3, a capacitor 27 may be coupled between a second supply terminal (which may in some embodiments be coupled to ground) and the power converter output terminal. However, in other embodiments, capacitor 27 may be coupled between a first supply terminal and the power converter output terminal.

Turning briefly to FIGURES 4A-4D, non-limiting examples of single-ended  
25 switching mode power supplies which may be used to implement power converter 26 are described.

FIGURE 4A illustrates a circuit diagram of selected components of an example boost converter 30 that may be used to implement power converter 26 depicted in FIGURE 3, in accordance with embodiments of the present disclosure. As shown in  
30 FIGURE 4A, boost converter 30 may include a power inductor 32, switches 34, 36, and capacitor 27 arranged as shown. In operation, controller 24 may be configured to, when

boost converter 30 is used to implement power converter 26, control switches 34 and 36 such that power converter output voltage  $V_{PC}$  is a function of the controller input signal provided to controller 24.

FIGURE 4B illustrates a circuit diagram of selected components of an example  
5 buck converter 40 that may be used to implement power converter 26 depicted in  
FIGURE 3, in accordance with embodiments of the present disclosure. As shown in  
FIGURE 4B, buck converter 40 may include a power inductor 42, switches 44, 46, and  
capacitor 27 arranged as shown. In operation, controller 24 may be configured to, when  
10 buck converter 40 is used to implement power converter 26, control switches 44 and 46  
such that power converter output voltage  $V_{PC}$  is a function of the controller input signal  
provided to controller 24.

FIGURE 4C illustrates a circuit diagram of selected components of an example  
non-inverting buck-boost converter 40A that may be used to implement power converter  
26 depicted in FIGURE 3, in accordance with embodiments of the present disclosure. As  
15 shown in FIGURE 4C, buck converter 40A may include a power inductor 42, switches  
44, 46, 47, and 49 and capacitor 27 arranged as shown. In operation, controller 24 may  
be configured to, when non-inverting buck-boost converter 40 is used to implement  
power converter 26, control switches 44, 46, 47, and 49 such that power converter output  
voltage  $V_{PC}$  is a function of the controller input signal provided to controller 24.

FIGURE 4D illustrates a circuit diagram of selected components of an example  
20 inverting buck-boost converter 50 that may be used to implement power converter 26  
depicted in FIGURE 3, in accordance with embodiments of the present disclosure. As  
shown in FIGURE 4D, buck-boost converter 50 may include a power inductor 52,  
switches 54, 56, and capacitor 27 arranged as shown. In operation, controller 24 may be  
25 configured to, when inverting buck-boost converter 50 is used to implement power  
converter 26, control switches 54 and 56 such that power converter output voltage  $V_{PC}$  is  
a function of the controller input signal provided to controller 24.

Turning again to FIGURE 3, output stage 28 may receive at its input the power  
converter output voltage  $V_{PC}$ , and may generate at its output a voltage  $V_{PC}$ . As described  
30 in greater detail in this disclosure (including, without limitation, in reference to FIGURES  
5A-5E, below), power converter 26 may comprise at least one linear amplifier and, in

some embodiments, a plurality of switches, wherein the at least one linear amplifier and the plurality of switches, if present, are controlled by control signals received from controller 24 in order to convert power converter output voltage  $V_{PC}$  to audio output signal  $V_{OUT}$ , such that audio output signal  $V_{OUT}$  is a function of the input signal to loop filter 22.

FIGURE 5A illustrates a circuit diagram of selected components of an example output stage 28A that may be used to implement output stage 28 depicted in FIGURE 3, in accordance with embodiments of the present disclosure. As shown in FIGURE 5A, power converter 26 may drive power converter output voltage  $V_{PC}$  to a first output terminal of output stage 28A and output stage 28A may include a linear amplifier 60 configured to drive a linear amplifier output voltage  $V_{AMP}$  to the second output terminal of output stage 28A, such that audio output signal  $V_{OUT}$  is equal to the difference between power converter output voltage  $V_{PC}$  and linear amplifier output voltage  $V_{AMP}$ . In operation, as a magnitude of power converter output voltage  $V_{PC}$  approaches zero, power converter 26 may demand a small duty cycle which approaches zero in order to maintain volt-second balance of its power inductor. This small duty cycle may be hard to achieve, thus leading to a lower saturation limit representing a minimum magnitude of voltage  $V_{SAT}$  that power converter 26 may be able to practically provide. Accordingly, to provide linearity of audio output signal  $V_{OUT}$  as a function of the input signal to controller 24, as power converter output voltage  $V_{PC}$  approaches the lower saturation limit, controller 24 may cause linear amplifier 60 to drive a non-zero linear amplifier output voltage  $V_{AMP}$  to the second output terminal in order to increase a common mode voltage between the first output terminal and the second output terminal, allowing audio output signal  $V_{OUT}$  to approach and cross zero. Above the lower saturation limit, controller 24 may cause linear amplifier 60 to drive a zero or approximately zero linear amplifier output voltage  $V_{AMP}$  to the second output terminal such that audio output signal  $V_{OUT}$  is equal to power converter output voltage  $V_{PC}$ . In other words, controller 24 may control power converter 26 and linear amplifier 60 to generate voltages in accordance with the following functions, which are graphically depicted in FIGURE 6, and wherein voltage  $V_{TGT}$  represents a target or desired voltage to be output as audio output signal  $V_{OUT}$  as indicated by the input signal to controller 24:

$$V_{PC} = V_{TGT}; \text{ for } |V_{TGT}| > V_{SAT}$$

$$V_{PC} = V_{SAT}; \text{ for } |V_{TGT}| \leq V_{SAT}$$

$$V_{AMP} = 0; \text{ for } |V_{TGT}| > V_{SAT}$$

$$V_{AMP} = V_{SAT} - V_{TGT}; \text{ for } |V_{TGT}| \leq V_{SAT}$$

In some embodiments, an offset voltage may be added to each of the output of power converter 26 and the output of linear amplifier 60, to ensure that the voltage  $V_{AMP}$   
 5  $> 0$  at all times.

Accordingly, presence of linear amplifier 60 and its ability to increase the common mode voltage of the output terminals in response to low magnitudes of the output signal  $V_{OUT}$  may minimize non-linearities of output signal  $V_{OUT}$  as a function of the input signal received by controller 24, and permit crossing a magnitude of zero by  
 10 audio output signal  $V_{OUT}$ .

FIGURE 5B illustrates a circuit diagram of selected components of an example output stage 28B that may be used to implement output stage 28 depicted in FIGURE 3, in accordance with embodiments of the present disclosure. As shown in FIGURE 5B, power converter 26 may drive power converter output voltage  $V_{PC}$ . Output stage 28B  
 15 may comprise a plurality of switches including switch 64 coupled between the power converter output and a first output terminal of output stage 28B and switch 66 coupled between the power converter output and a second output terminal of output stage 28B. In addition, output stage 28B may include a linear amplifier 60 configured to drive a linear amplifier output voltage  $V_{AMP}$  to the second output terminal of output stage 28B. As  
 20 shown in FIGURE 5B, output stage 28B may also include a capacitor 62 coupled between the first output terminal and the second output terminal. In some embodiments, capacitor 62 may not be present in switched mode amplifier 20. In other embodiments, capacitor 62 may be present in switched mode amplifier 20 in lieu of or in addition to capacitor 27.

In operation of output stage 28B, controller 24 may activate (e.g., enable, close, turn on) switch 64 and deactivate (e.g., disable, open, turn off) switch 66 for positive  
 25 values of audio output signal  $V_{OUT}$ . As in output stage 28A, in output stage 28B, controller 24 may, as power converter output voltage  $V_{PC}$  approaches the lower saturation limit, cause linear amplifier 60 to drive a non-zero linear amplifier output voltage  $V_{AMP}$  to the second output terminal in order to increase a common mode voltage between the first

output terminal and the second output terminal, allowing audio output signal  $V_{OUT}$  to approach and cross zero. Above the lower saturation limit, controller 24 may cause linear amplifier 60 to drive a zero linear amplifier output voltage  $V_{AMP}$  to the second output terminal such that audio output signal  $V_{OUT}$  is equal to power converter output voltage  $V_{PC}$ .

FIGURE 5C illustrates a circuit diagram of selected components of an example output stage 28C that may be used to implement output stage 28 depicted in FIGURE 3, in accordance with embodiments of the present disclosure. Output stage 28C of FIGURE 5C may be similar in many respects to output stage 28B of FIGURE 5B, and thus, only the main differences between output stage 28C and output stage 28B are discussed in detail. One main difference between output stage 28C and output stage 28B is that output stage 28C may include a linear amplifier 61 configured to drive a second linear amplifier output voltage  $V_{AMP'}$  to the first output terminal of output stage 28C. Accordingly, operation of output stage 28C may be similar to that of output stage 28B, except as noted below.

In operation of output stage 28C, controller 24 may activate (e.g., enable, close, turn on) switch 64 and deactivate (e.g., disable, open, turn off) switch 66 for positive values of audio output signal  $V_{OUT}$  and activate switch 66 and deactivate switch 64 for negative values of audio output signal  $V_{OUT}$ . When audio output signal  $V_{OUT}$  is positive and as power converter output voltage  $V_{PC}$  approaches the lower saturation limit, controller 24 may cause linear amplifier 60 to drive a non-zero linear amplifier output voltage  $V_{AMP}$  to the second output terminal in order to increase a common mode voltage between the first output terminal and the second output terminal, allowing audio output signal  $V_{OUT}$  to approach and cross zero. Above the lower saturation limit power converter output voltage  $V_{PC}$  for positive values of audio output signal  $V_{OUT}$ , controller 24 may cause linear amplifier 60 to drive a zero or approximately zero linear amplifier output voltage  $V_{AMP}$  to the second output terminal such that audio output signal  $V_{OUT}$  is equal to power converter output voltage  $V_{PC}$ . Similarly, when audio output signal  $V_{OUT}$  is negative and as power converter output voltage  $V_{PC}$  approaches the lower saturation limit, controller 24 may cause linear amplifier 61 to drive a non-zero linear amplifier output voltage  $V_{AMP'}$  to the first output terminal in order to increase a common mode voltage

between the first output terminal and the second output terminal, allowing audio output signal  $V_{OUT}$  to approach and cross zero. Above the lower saturation limit of power converter output voltage  $V_{PC}$  for negative values of audio output signal  $V_{OUT}$ , controller 24 may cause linear amplifier 61 to drive a zero or approximately zero linear amplifier output voltage  $V_{AMP}'$  to the first output terminal such that audio output signal  $V_{OUT}$  is equal to the inverse of power converter output voltage  $V_{PC}$ . In addition, controller 24 may be configured such that for positive voltages of audio output signal  $V_{OUT}$ , it causes linear amplifier 61 to enter a high-impedance mode in which linear amplifier 61 does not drive any output voltage  $V_{AMP}'$ , and for negative voltages of audio output signal  $V_{OUT}$ , it causes linear amplifier 60 to enter a high-impedance mode in which linear amplifier 60 does not drive any output voltage  $V_{AMP}$ . In equation form:

$$\begin{aligned}
 V_{PC} &= V_{TGT}; \text{ for } |V_{TGT}| > V_{SAT} \\
 V_{PC} &= V_{SAT}; \text{ for } |V_{TGT}| \leq V_{SAT} \\
 V_{AMP} &= 0; \text{ for } V_{TGT} > V_{SAT} \\
 V_{AMP} &= V_{SAT} - V_{TGT}; \text{ for } 0 \leq V_{TGT} \leq V_{SAT} \\
 V_{AMP} &= \text{no drive}; \text{ for } V_{TGT} < 0 \\
 V_{AMP}' &= 0; \text{ for } V_{TGT} < -V_{SAT} \\
 V_{AMP}' &= V_{SAT} + V_{TGT}; \text{ for } -V_{SAT} \leq V_{TGT} \leq 0 \\
 V_{AMP}' &= \text{no drive}; \text{ for } V_{TGT} > 0
 \end{aligned}$$

FIGURE 5D illustrates a circuit diagram of selected components of an example output stage 28D that may be used to implement output stage 28 depicted in FIGURE 3, in accordance with embodiments of the present disclosure. Output stage 28D of FIGURE 5D may be similar in many respects to output stage 28C of FIGURE 5C, and thus, only the main differences between output stage 28D and output stage 28C are discussed in detail. One main difference between output stage 28D and output stage 28C is that output stage 28D may include a single linear amplifier 60 and a plurality of switches including switch 68 coupled between the output of linear amplifier 60 and a first output terminal of output stage 28D and switch 70 coupled between the output of linear amplifier 60 and a second output terminal of output stage 28D.

In operation of output stage 28D, controller 24 may activate switches 64 and 70 and deactivate switches 66 and 68 for positive values of audio output signal  $V_{OUT}$  and

activate switches 66 and 68 and deactivate switches 64 and 70 for negative values of audio output signal  $V_{OUT}$ . As in output stage 28B, in output stage 28D, controller 24 may, as power converter output voltage  $V_{PC}$  approaches the lower saturation limit, cause linear amplifier 60 to drive a non-zero linear amplifier output voltage  $V_{AMP}$  to the second output terminal in order to increase a common mode voltage between the first output terminal and the second output terminal, allowing audio output signal  $V_{OUT}$  to approach and cross zero. Above the lower saturation limit of power converter output voltage  $V_{PC}$ , controller 24 may cause linear amplifier 60 to drive a zero linear amplifier output voltage  $V_{AMP}$  to the second output terminal such that audio output signal  $V_{OUT}$  is equal to power converter output voltage  $V_{PC}$ .

FIGURE 5E illustrates a circuit diagram of selected components of an example output stage 28E that may be used to implement output stage 28 depicted in FIGURE 3, in accordance with embodiments of the present disclosure. Output stage 28E of FIGURE 5E may be similar in many respects to output stage 28D of FIGURE 5D, and thus, only the main differences between output stage 28E and output stage 28D are discussed in detail. One main difference between output stage 28E and output stage 28D is that in output stage 28E, linear amplifier 60, switch 64, switch 66, switch 68, and/or switch 70 may be integral to a final output stage of a differential amplifier 72. To further illustrate, FIGURE 7 illustrates a circuit diagram of an example two-stage, Miller, differential-input, differential-output operational amplifier 72 with push-pull output (as described in Philip E. Allen et al., *CMOS Analog Circuit Design*, 2d Ed, 387-388 (2002)), which may be used to implement portions of the example output stage depicted in FIGURE 5E, in accordance with embodiments of the present disclosure. Further, FIGURE 7 depicts transistors of operational amplifier 72 which may be equivalent to switches 64, 66, 68, and 70 of output stage 28E of FIGURE 5E. In some embodiments, additional circuitry may be present to cause the gate-to-source voltage of switch 66 and/or 64 to be at or greater than supply voltage(s) in order to operate as a switch (e.g., activate and deactivate). In these and other embodiments, switch 70 and/or 68 may operate in the linear region of such devices, wherein the gate-to-source voltage of such devices is less than the supply voltage.

In the foregoing discussion, embodiments are disclosed in which a capacitor 27 is coupled between the power converter output terminal and one of a first supply terminal having a first voltage and a second supply terminal having a second voltage, and embodiments are disclosed in which a capacitor 62 is coupled between the first load terminal and the second load terminal of switched mode amplifier 20. However, in these and other embodiments, a capacitor may be coupled between the first load terminal of switched mode amplifier 20 and one of the first supply terminal and the second supply terminal. In addition, in these and other embodiments, a capacitor may be coupled between the second load terminal of switched mode amplifier 20 and one of the first supply terminal and the second supply terminal.

As used herein, a “switch” may comprise any suitable device, system, or apparatus for making a connection in an electric circuit when the switch is enabled (e.g., activated, closed, or on) and breaking the connection when the switch is disabled (e.g., deactivated, open, or off) in response to a control signal received by the switch. For purposes of clarity and exposition, control signals for switches described herein are not depicted although such control signals would be present to selectively enable and disable such switches. In some embodiments, a switch may comprise a metal-oxide-semiconductor field-effect transistor (e.g., an n-type metal-oxide-semiconductor field-effect transistor).

As used herein, when two or more elements are referred to as “coupled” to one another, such term indicates that such two or more elements are in electronic communication or mechanical communication, as applicable, whether connected indirectly or directly, with or without intervening elements.

This disclosure encompasses all changes, substitutions, variations, alterations, and modifications to the exemplary embodiments herein that a person having ordinary skill in the art would comprehend. Similarly, where appropriate, the appended claims encompass all changes, substitutions, variations, alterations, and modifications to the exemplary embodiments herein that a person having ordinary skill in the art would comprehend. Moreover, reference in the appended claims to an apparatus or system or a component of an apparatus or system being adapted to, arranged to, capable of, configured to, enabled to, operable to, or operative to perform a particular function encompasses that apparatus,

system, or component, whether or not it or that particular function is activated, turned on, or unlocked, as long as that apparatus, system, or component is so adapted, arranged, capable, configured, enabled, operable, or operative.

5 All examples and conditional language recited herein are intended for pedagogical objects to aid the reader in understanding the invention and the concepts contributed by the inventor to furthering the art, and are construed as being without limitation to such specifically recited examples and conditions. Although embodiments of the present inventions have been described in detail, it should be understood that various changes, substitutions, and alterations could be made hereto without departing from the spirit and  
10 scope of the disclosure.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A switching power stage for producing a load voltage at a load output of the switching power stage, the load output comprising a first load terminal having a first  
5 load voltage and a second load terminal having a second load voltage such that the load voltage comprises a difference between the first load voltage and the second load voltage, the switching power stage comprising:

a power converter comprising a power inductor and a first plurality of switches, wherein the power converter is configured to drive a power converter output terminal  
10 coupled to the first load terminal in order to drive the first load terminal;

a linear amplifier configured to drive a linear amplifier output terminal coupled to the second load terminal in order to drive the second load terminal; and

a controller configured to control the first plurality of switches of the power converter and the linear amplifier in order to generate the load voltage as a function of an  
15 input signal to the controller such that energy delivered to the load output is supplied predominantly by the power converter.

2. The switching power stage of Claim 1, further comprising a capacitor coupled between the first load terminal and the second load terminal.  
20

3. The switching power stage of Claim 1, further comprising a capacitor coupled between the first load terminal and one of a first supply terminal having a first voltage and a second supply terminal having a second voltage.

25 4. The switching power stage of Claim 3, wherein a second terminal of the power inductor is coupled to the power converter output terminal.

5. The switching power stage of Claim 3, wherein the first plurality of switches comprises:

30 a first switch coupled between a second terminal of the power inductor and the power converter output terminal; and

a second switch coupled between the second terminal of the power inductor and the second supply terminal.

6. The switching power stage of Claim 1, further comprising:

5 a first capacitor coupled between the power converter output terminal and one of a first supply terminal having a first voltage and a second supply terminal having a second voltage; and

a second capacitor coupled between the second load terminal and one of the first supply terminal and the second supply terminal.

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7. The switching power stage of Claim 1, wherein the first plurality of switches comprises:

a first switch coupled between a first terminal of the power inductor and a first supply terminal having a first voltage; and

15 a second switch coupled between the first terminal of the power inductor and a second supply terminal having a second voltage.

8. The switching power stage of Claim 7, wherein the first plurality of switches further comprises:

20 a third switch coupled between a second terminal of the power inductor and the power converter output terminal; and

a fourth switch coupled between the second terminal of the power inductor and the second supply terminal.

25 9. The switching power stage of Claim 1, wherein the controller further controls the first plurality of switches to drive the first load voltage as a function of a target output voltage which is a function of the input signal.

30 10. The switching power stage of Claim 9, wherein the function of the target output voltage includes a magnitude of the target output voltage.

11. The switching power stage of Claim 9, wherein the function of the target output voltage includes a lower saturation limit of the power converter output terminal.

12. The switching power stage of Claim 9, wherein the controller further controls the linear amplifier to drive a non-zero voltage as the second load voltage in order to increase a common mode voltage of the first load terminal and the second load terminal when the power converter output terminal is driven to the lower saturation limit in order to produce the output voltage as a function of an input signal to the controller while minimizing non-linearities of the output voltage as a function of the input signal.

13. The switching power stage of Claim 1, wherein the controller further controls the linear amplifier to drive the second load voltage as a function of a target output voltage which is a function of the input signal.

14. The switching power stage of Claim 1, further comprising:  
a second plurality of switches, comprising at least a first switch coupled between the power converter output terminal and the first load terminal and a second switch coupled between the power converter output terminal and the second load terminal such that the power converter output terminal and the first load terminal are coupled via the first switch and the power converter output terminal and the second load terminal are coupled via the second switch; and

wherein the controller is configured to control the first plurality of switches, the second plurality of switches, and the linear amplifier in order to generate the load voltage as a function of an input signal to the controller such that energy delivered to the load output is supplied predominantly by the power converter.

15. The switching power stage of Claim 14, further comprising a second linear amplifier configured to drive the first load terminal.

16. The switching power stage of Claim 15, wherein the controller is further configured to control the linear amplifier and the second linear amplifier such that:

when the linear amplifier drives the second load terminal, the second linear amplifier is prevented from driving the first load terminal; and

when the second linear amplifier drives the first load terminal, the linear amplifier is prevented from driving the second load terminal.

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17. The switching power stage of Claim 15, further comprising at least one of:  
a first capacitor coupled between the power converter output terminal and one of a first supply terminal having a first voltage and a second supply terminal having a second voltage;

10 a second capacitor coupled between the first load terminal and the second load terminal;

a third capacitor coupled between the first load terminal and one of the first supply terminal and the second supply; and

15 a fourth capacitor coupled between the first load terminal and one of the first supply terminal and the second supply terminal.

18. The switching power stage of Claim 15, wherein the controller further controls the second linear amplifier to drive a non-zero voltage as the first load voltage in order to increase a common mode voltage of the first load terminal and the second load terminal when the voltage of the power converter output terminal is driven to the lower saturation limit in order to produce the output voltage as a function of the input signal while minimizing non-linearities of the output voltage as a function of the input signal.

19. The switching power stage of Claim 14, further comprising:  
25 a third plurality of switches, comprising at least a third switch coupled between the linear amplifier output terminal and the first load terminal and a fourth switch coupled between the linear amplifier output terminal and the second load terminal such that the linear amplifier output terminal and the first load terminal are coupled via the third switch and the linear amplifier output terminal and the second load terminal are coupled via the  
30 fourth switch; and

wherein the controller is configured to control the first plurality of switches, the second plurality of switches, the third plurality of switches, and the linear amplifier in order to generate the load voltage as a function of an input signal to the controller.

5           20.     The switching power stage of Claim 19, wherein the controller is further configured to control the second plurality of switches and the third plurality of switches in order to generate a desired polarity of the load voltage.

          21.     The switching power stage of Claim 19, wherein the second plurality of  
10 switches are integral to a final output stage of a differential amplifier.

          22.     The switching power stage of Claim 19, wherein the third plurality of switches are integral to a final output stage of a differential amplifier.

15           23.     The switching power stage of Claim 19, wherein the second plurality of switches and the third plurality of switches are integral to a final output stage of a differential amplifier.

          24.     The switching power stage of Claim 19, wherein the controller further  
20 controls the linear amplifier to drive a non-zero voltage at the linear amplifier output terminal in order to increase a common mode voltage of the first load terminal and the second load terminal when the voltage of the power converter output terminal is driven to the lower saturation limit in order to produce the output voltage as a function of the input signal while minimizing non-linearities of the output voltage as a function of the input  
25 signal.

          25.     The switching power stage of Claim 19, wherein the controller further controls the linear amplifier to drive a voltage at the linear amplifier output terminal as a function of a target output voltage which is a function of the input signal.

26. A method for producing a load voltage at a load output of the switching power stage, the load output comprising a first load terminal having a first load voltage and a second load terminal having a second load voltage such that the load voltage comprises a difference between the first load voltage and the second load voltage, the  
5 switching power stage further comprising a power converter comprising a power inductor and a first plurality of switches, wherein the power converter is configured to drive a power converter output terminal coupled to the first load terminal in order to drive the first load terminal, and the switching power stage further comprising a linear amplifier configured to drive a linear amplifier output terminal coupled to the second load terminal  
10 in order to drive the second load terminal, the method comprising:

controlling the first plurality of switches of the power converter and the linear amplifier in order to generate the load voltage as a function of an input signal to the controller such that energy delivered to the load output is supplied predominantly by the power converter.

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27. The method of Claim 26, wherein a capacitor is coupled between the first load terminal and the second load terminal.

28. The method of Claim 26, wherein a capacitor is coupled between the first  
20 load terminal and one of a first supply terminal having a first voltage and a second supply terminal having a second voltage.

29. The method of Claim 28, wherein a second terminal of the power inductor is coupled to the power converter output terminal.

25

30. The method of Claim 28, wherein the first plurality of switches comprises:  
a first switch coupled between a second terminal of the power inductor and the power converter output terminal; and  
a second switch coupled between the second terminal of the power inductor and  
30 the second supply terminal.

31. The method of Claim 26, wherein:

a first capacitor is coupled between the power converter output terminal and one of a first supply terminal having a first voltage and a second supply terminal having a second voltage; and

5 a second capacitor is coupled between the second load terminal and one of the first supply terminal and the second supply terminal.

32. The method of Claim 26, wherein the first plurality of switches comprises:

10 a first switch coupled between a first terminal of the power inductor and a first supply terminal having a first voltage; and

a second switch coupled between the first terminal of the power inductor and a second supply terminal having a second voltage.

33. The method of Claim 32, wherein the first plurality of switches further  
15 comprises:

a third switch coupled between a second terminal of the power inductor and the power converter output terminal; and

a fourth switch coupled between the second terminal of the power inductor and the second supply terminal.

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34. The method of Claim 26, further comprising the first plurality of switches to drive the first load voltage as a function of a target output voltage which is a function of the input signal.

25 35. The method of Claim 34, wherein the function of the target output voltage includes a magnitude of the target output voltage.

36. The method of Claim 34, wherein the function of the target output voltage includes a lower saturation limit of the power converter output terminal.

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37. The method of Claim 34, further comprising controlling the linear amplifier to drive a non-zero voltage as the second load voltage in order to increase a common mode voltage of the first load terminal and the second load terminal when the power converter output terminal is driven to the lower saturation limit in order to produce the output voltage as a function of an input signal to the controller while minimizing non-linearities of the output voltage as a function of the input signal.

38. The method of Claim 26, further comprising controlling the linear amplifier to drive the second load voltage as a function of a target output voltage which is a function of the input signal.

39. The method of Claim 26, wherein the switching power stage comprises a second plurality of switches, comprising at least a first switch coupled between the power converter output terminal and the first load terminal and a second switch coupled between the power converter output terminal and the second load terminal such that the power converter output terminal and the first load terminal are coupled via the first switch and the power converter output terminal and the second load terminal are coupled via the second switch, and the method further comprises controlling the first plurality of switches, the second plurality of switches, and the linear amplifier in order to generate the load voltage as a function of an input signal to the controller such that energy delivered to the load output is supplied predominantly by the power converter.

40. The method of Claim 39, wherein the switching power stage further comprises a second linear amplifier configured to drive the first load terminal.

41. The method of Claim 40, further comprising controlling the linear amplifier and the second linear amplifier such that:

when the linear amplifier drives the second load terminal, the second linear amplifier is prevented from driving the first load terminal; and  
when the second linear amplifier drives the first load terminal, the linear amplifier is prevented from driving the second load terminal.

42. The method of Claim 40, wherein the switching power stage further comprises:

5 a first capacitor coupled between the power converter output terminal and one of a first supply terminal having a first voltage and a second supply terminal having a second voltage;

a second capacitor coupled between the first load terminal and the second load terminal;

10 a third capacitor coupled between the first load terminal and one of the first supply terminal and the second supply; and

a fourth capacitor coupled between the first load terminal and one of the first supply terminal and the second supply terminal.

43. The method of Claim 40, further comprising controlling the second linear  
15 amplifier to drive a non-zero voltage as the first load voltage in order to increase a common mode voltage of the first load terminal and the second load terminal when the voltage of the power converter output terminal is driven to the lower saturation limit in order to produce the output voltage as a function of the input signal while minimizing non-linearities of the output voltage as a function of the input signal.

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44. The method of Claim 39, wherein the switching power stage further comprises a third plurality of switches, comprising at least a third switch coupled between the linear amplifier output terminal and the first load terminal and a fourth switch coupled between the linear amplifier output terminal and the second load terminal such that the  
25 linear amplifier output terminal and the first load terminal are coupled via the third switch and the linear amplifier output terminal and the second load terminal are coupled via the fourth switch, further comprising controlling the first plurality of switches, the second plurality of switches, the third plurality of switches, and the linear amplifier in order to generate the load voltage as a function of an input signal to the controller.

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45. The method of Claim 44, further comprising controlling the second plurality of switches and the third plurality of switches in order to generate a desired polarity of the load voltage.

5 46. The method of Claim 44, wherein the second plurality of switches are integral to a final output stage of a differential amplifier.

47. The method of Claim 44, wherein the third plurality of switches are integral to a final output stage of a differential amplifier.

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48. The method of Claim 44, wherein the second plurality of switches and the third plurality of switches are integral to a final output stage of a differential amplifier.

49. The method of Claim 44, further comprising controlling the linear  
15 amplifier to drive a non-zero voltage at the linear amplifier output terminal in order to increase a common mode voltage of the first load terminal and the second load terminal when the voltage of the power converter output terminal is driven to the lower saturation limit in order to produce the output voltage as a function of the input signal while minimizing non-linearities of the output voltage as a function of the input signal.

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50. The method of Claim 44, further comprising controlling the linear amplifier to drive a voltage at the linear amplifier output terminal as a function of a target output voltage which is a function of the input signal.

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## AMENDED CLAIMS

received by the International Bureau on 14 November 2016 (14.11.2016)

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A switching power stage for producing a load voltage at a load output of the switching power stage, the load output comprising a first load terminal having a first  
5 load voltage and a second load terminal having a second load voltage such that the load voltage comprises a difference between the first load voltage and the second load voltage, the switching power stage comprising:

a power converter comprising a power inductor and a first plurality of switches, wherein the power converter is configured to drive a power converter output terminal  
10 coupled to the first load terminal in order to drive the first load terminal;

a linear amplifier configured to drive a linear amplifier output terminal coupled to the second load terminal in order to drive the second load terminal; and

a controller configured to control the first plurality of switches of the power converter and the linear amplifier in order to generate the load voltage as a function of an  
15 input signal to the controller such that energy delivered to the load output is supplied predominantly by the power converter and such that the linear amplifier drives the linear amplifier output terminal contemporaneously to the power converter driving the power converter output terminal.

20 2. The switching power stage of Claim 1, further comprising a capacitor coupled between the first load terminal and the second load terminal.

3. The switching power stage of Claim 1, further comprising a capacitor coupled between the first load terminal and one of a first supply terminal having a first  
25 voltage and a second supply terminal having a second voltage.

4. The switching power stage of Claim 3, wherein a second terminal of the power inductor is coupled to the power converter output terminal.

30 5. The switching power stage of Claim 3, wherein the first plurality of switches comprises:

a first switch coupled between a second terminal of the power inductor and the power converter output terminal; and

a second switch coupled between the second terminal of the power inductor and the second supply terminal.

5

6. The switching power stage of Claim 1, further comprising:

a first capacitor coupled between the power converter output terminal and one of a first supply terminal having a first voltage and a second supply terminal having a second voltage; and

10 a second capacitor coupled between the second load terminal and one of the first supply terminal and the second supply terminal.

7. The switching power stage of Claim 1, wherein the first plurality of switches comprises:

15 a first switch coupled between a first terminal of the power inductor and a first supply terminal having a first voltage; and

a second switch coupled between the first terminal of the power inductor and a second supply terminal having a second voltage.

20 8. The switching power stage of Claim 7, wherein the first plurality of switches further comprises:

a third switch coupled between a second terminal of the power inductor and the power converter output terminal; and

25 a fourth switch coupled between the second terminal of the power inductor and the second supply terminal.

9. The switching power stage of Claim 1, wherein the controller further controls the first plurality of switches to drive the first load voltage as a function of a target output voltage which is a function of the input signal.

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10. The switching power stage of Claim 9, wherein the function of the target output voltage includes a magnitude of the target output voltage.

11. The switching power stage of Claim 9, wherein the function of the target output voltage includes a lower saturation limit of the power converter output terminal.

5 12. The switching power stage of Claim 9, wherein the controller further controls the linear amplifier to drive a non-zero voltage as the second load voltage in order to increase a common mode voltage of the first load terminal and the second load terminal when the power converter output terminal is driven to the lower saturation limit in order to produce the output voltage as a function of an input signal to the controller  
10 while minimizing non-linearities of the output voltage as a function of the input signal.

13. The switching power stage of Claim 1, wherein the controller further controls the linear amplifier to drive the second load voltage as a function of a target output voltage which is a function of the input signal.

15 14. The switching power stage of Claim 1, further comprising:  
a second plurality of switches, comprising at least a first switch coupled between the power converter output terminal and the first load terminal and a second switch coupled between the power converter output terminal and the second load terminal such  
20 that the power converter output terminal and the first load terminal are coupled via the first switch and the power converter output terminal and the second load terminal are coupled via the second switch; and

wherein the controller is configured to control the first plurality of switches, the second plurality of switches, and the linear amplifier in order to generate the load voltage  
25 as a function of an input signal to the controller such that energy delivered to the load output is supplied predominantly by the power converter.

15. The switching power stage of Claim 14, further comprising a second linear amplifier configured to drive the first load terminal.

30 16. The switching power stage of Claim 15, wherein the controller is further configured to control the linear amplifier and the second linear amplifier such that:

when the linear amplifier drives the second load terminal, the second linear amplifier is prevented from driving the first load terminal; and

when the second linear amplifier drives the first load terminal, the linear amplifier is prevented from driving the second load terminal.

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17. The switching power stage of Claim 15, further comprising at least one of:

a first capacitor coupled between the power converter output terminal and one of a first supply terminal having a first voltage and a second supply terminal having a second voltage;

10 a second capacitor coupled between the first load terminal and the second load terminal;

a third capacitor coupled between the first load terminal and one of the first supply terminal and the second supply; and

15 a fourth capacitor coupled between the first load terminal and one of the first supply terminal and the second supply terminal.

18. The switching power stage of Claim 15, wherein the controller further controls the second linear amplifier to drive a non-zero voltage as the first load voltage in order to increase a common mode voltage of the first load terminal and the second load  
20 terminal when the voltage of the power converter output terminal is driven to the lower saturation limit in order to produce the output voltage as a function of the input signal while minimizing non-linearities of the output voltage as a function of the input signal.

19. The switching power stage of Claim 14, further comprising:

25 a third plurality of switches, comprising at least a third switch coupled between the linear amplifier output terminal and the first load terminal and a fourth switch coupled between the linear amplifier output terminal and the second load terminal such that the linear amplifier output terminal and the first load terminal are coupled via the third switch and the linear amplifier output terminal and the second load terminal are coupled via the  
30 fourth switch; and

wherein the controller is configured to control the first plurality of switches, the second plurality of switches, the third plurality of switches, and the linear amplifier in order to generate the load voltage as a function of an input signal to the controller.

5           20.    The switching power stage of Claim 19, wherein the controller is further configured to control the second plurality of switches and the third plurality of switches in order to generate a desired polarity of the load voltage.

          21.    The switching power stage of Claim 19, wherein the second plurality of  
10 switches are integral to a final output stage of a differential amplifier.

          22.    The switching power stage of Claim 19, wherein the third plurality of switches are integral to a final output stage of a differential amplifier.

15           23.    The switching power stage of Claim 19, wherein the second plurality of switches and the third plurality of switches are integral to a final output stage of a differential amplifier.

          24.    The switching power stage of Claim 19, wherein the controller further  
20 controls the linear amplifier to drive a non-zero voltage at the linear amplifier output terminal in order to increase a common mode voltage of the first load terminal and the second load terminal when the voltage of the power converter output terminal is driven to the lower saturation limit in order to produce the output voltage as a function of the input signal while minimizing non-linearities of the output voltage as a function of the input  
25 signal.

          25.    The switching power stage of Claim 19, wherein the controller further controls the linear amplifier to drive a voltage at the linear amplifier output terminal as a function of a target output voltage which is a function of the input signal.

30

26. A method for producing a load voltage at a load output of the switching power stage, the load output comprising a first load terminal having a first load voltage and a second load terminal having a second load voltage such that the load voltage comprises a difference between the first load voltage and the second load voltage, the  
5 switching power stage further comprising a power converter comprising a power inductor and a first plurality of switches, wherein the power converter is configured to drive a power converter output terminal coupled to the first load terminal in order to drive the first load terminal, and the switching power stage further comprising a linear amplifier configured to drive a linear amplifier output terminal coupled to the second load terminal  
10 in order to drive the second load terminal, the method comprising:  
controlling the first plurality of switches of the power converter and the linear amplifier in order to generate the load voltage as a function of an input signal to the controller such that energy delivered to the load output is supplied predominantly by the power converter and such that the linear amplifier drives the linear amplifier output  
15 terminal contemporaneously to the power converter driving the power converter output terminal.

27. The method of Claim 26, wherein a capacitor is coupled between the first load terminal and the second load terminal.  
20

28. The method of Claim 26, wherein a capacitor is coupled between the first load terminal and one of a first supply terminal having a first voltage and a second supply terminal having a second voltage.

29. The method of Claim 28, wherein a second terminal of the power inductor is coupled to the power converter output terminal.  
25

30. The method of Claim 28, wherein the first plurality of switches comprises:  
a first switch coupled between a second terminal of the power inductor and the  
30 power converter output terminal; and  
a second switch coupled between the second terminal of the power inductor and the second supply terminal.

31. The method of Claim 26, wherein:  
a first capacitor is coupled between the power converter output terminal and one  
of a first supply terminal having a first voltage and a second supply terminal having a  
5 second voltage; and  
a second capacitor is coupled between the second load terminal and one of the  
first supply terminal and the second supply terminal.

32. The method of Claim 26, wherein the first plurality of switches comprises:  
10 a first switch coupled between a first terminal of the power inductor and a first  
supply terminal having a first voltage; and  
a second switch coupled between the first terminal of the power inductor and a  
second supply terminal having a second voltage.

33. The method of Claim 32, wherein the first plurality of switches further  
15 comprises:  
a third switch coupled between a second terminal of the power inductor and the  
power converter output terminal; and  
a fourth switch coupled between the second terminal of the power inductor and  
20 the second supply terminal.

34. The method of Claim 26, further comprising the first plurality of switches  
to drive the first load voltage as a function of a target output voltage which is a function  
of the input signal.  
25

35. The method of Claim 34, wherein the function of the target output voltage  
includes a magnitude of the target output voltage.

36. The method of Claim 34, wherein the function of the target output voltage  
30 includes a lower saturation limit of the power converter output terminal.

37. The method of Claim 34, further comprising controlling the linear amplifier to drive a non-zero voltage as the second load voltage in order to increase a common mode voltage of the first load terminal and the second load terminal when the power converter output terminal is driven to the lower saturation limit in order to produce the output voltage as a function of an input signal to the controller while minimizing non-linearities of the output voltage as a function of the input signal.

38. The method of Claim 26, further comprising controlling the linear amplifier to drive the second load voltage as a function of a target output voltage which is a function of the input signal.

39. The method of Claim 26, wherein the switching power stage comprises a second plurality of switches, comprising at least a first switch coupled between the power converter output terminal and the first load terminal and a second switch coupled between the power converter output terminal and the second load terminal such that the power converter output terminal and the first load terminal are coupled via the first switch and the power converter output terminal and the second load terminal are coupled via the second switch, and the method further comprises controlling the first plurality of switches, the second plurality of switches, and the linear amplifier in order to generate the load voltage as a function of an input signal to the controller such that energy delivered to the load output is supplied predominantly by the power converter.

40. The method of Claim 39, wherein the switching power stage further comprises a second linear amplifier configured to drive the first load terminal.

41. The method of Claim 40, further comprising controlling the linear amplifier and the second linear amplifier such that:

when the linear amplifier drives the second load terminal, the second linear amplifier is prevented from driving the first load terminal; and

when the second linear amplifier drives the first load terminal, the linear amplifier is prevented from driving the second load terminal.

42. The method of Claim 40, wherein the switching power stage further comprises:

a first capacitor coupled between the power converter output terminal and one of a first supply terminal having a first voltage and a second supply terminal having a second voltage;

a second capacitor coupled between the first load terminal and the second load terminal;

a third capacitor coupled between the first load terminal and one of the first supply terminal and the second supply; and

a fourth capacitor coupled between the first load terminal and one of the first supply terminal and the second supply terminal.

43. The method of Claim 40, further comprising controlling the second linear amplifier to drive a non-zero voltage as the first load voltage in order to increase a common mode voltage of the first load terminal and the second load terminal when the voltage of the power converter output terminal is driven to the lower saturation limit in order to produce the output voltage as a function of the input signal while minimizing non-linearities of the output voltage as a function of the input signal.

44. The method of Claim 39, wherein the switching power stage further comprises a third plurality of switches, comprising at least a third switch coupled between the linear amplifier output terminal and the first load terminal and a fourth switch coupled between the linear amplifier output terminal and the second load terminal such that the linear amplifier output terminal and the first load terminal are coupled via the third switch and the linear amplifier output terminal and the second load terminal are coupled via the fourth switch, further comprising controlling the first plurality of switches, the second plurality of switches, the third plurality of switches, and the linear amplifier in order to generate the load voltage as a function of an input signal to the controller.

45. The method of Claim 44, further comprising controlling the second plurality of switches and the third plurality of switches in order to generate a desired polarity of the load voltage.

46. The method of Claim 44, wherein the second plurality of switches are integral to a final output stage of a differential amplifier.

5 47. The method of Claim 44, wherein the third plurality of switches are integral to a final output stage of a differential amplifier.

48. The method of Claim 44, wherein the second plurality of switches and the third plurality of switches are integral to a final output stage of a differential amplifier.

10

49. The method of Claim 44, further comprising controlling the linear amplifier to drive a non-zero voltage at the linear amplifier output terminal in order to increase a common mode voltage of the first load terminal and the second load terminal when the voltage of the power converter output terminal is driven to the lower saturation  
15 limit in order to produce the output voltage as a function of the input signal while minimizing non-linearities of the output voltage as a function of the input signal.

50. The method of Claim 44, further comprising controlling the linear amplifier to drive a voltage at the linear amplifier output terminal as a function of a target  
20 output voltage which is a function of the input signal.

**STATEMENT UNDER ARTICLE 19(1)****No Waiver**

All of Applicant's arguments herein are without prejudice or disclaimer. Thus, by not responding specifically to specific allegations or statements of the Authority in the International Search Report/Written Opinion, Applicant does not acquiesce to any such allegations or statements, and reserves the right to refute such allegations or statements in response to correspondence received from any patent office or similar authority of any country in which the Applicant may file a corresponding application. Also, Applicant does not acquiesce to any determination by the Authority of the status of any reference as "prior art" that may be cited against the claims of the present application in one or more particular countries in which the Applicant may file a corresponding application.

**Claims 1-50**

In the International Search Report/Written Opinion, at Re Item V 1-2, the Authority asserts that the subject matter of Claims 1 and 26 is not new and novel over each of reference D1, European Patent Application Publication 1,367,704 by Skinner *et al.* (hereinafter "D1") and reference D2, International Patent Application Publication WO 2007/136800 by Mazda *et al.* (hereinafter "D2"). Applicant respectfully traverses these findings, and submits that Claims 1-50 are new and novel over D1 and D2 (collectively, "the references"), at least because the references fail to teach "a controller configured to control the first plurality of switches of the power converter and the linear amplifier in order to generate the load voltage as a function of an input signal to the controller such that energy delivered to the load output is supplied predominantly by the power converter and such that the linear amplifier drives the linear amplifier output terminal contemporaneously to the power converter driving the power converter output terminal" as recited in Claim 1 and as similarly recited in Claim 26.

For at least these reasons, Claims 1 and 26 are new and novel. Given that Claims 2-25 depend from Claim 1 and Claims 27-50 depend from Claim 26, Applicant submits that Claims 2-25 and 27-50 are also new and novel.

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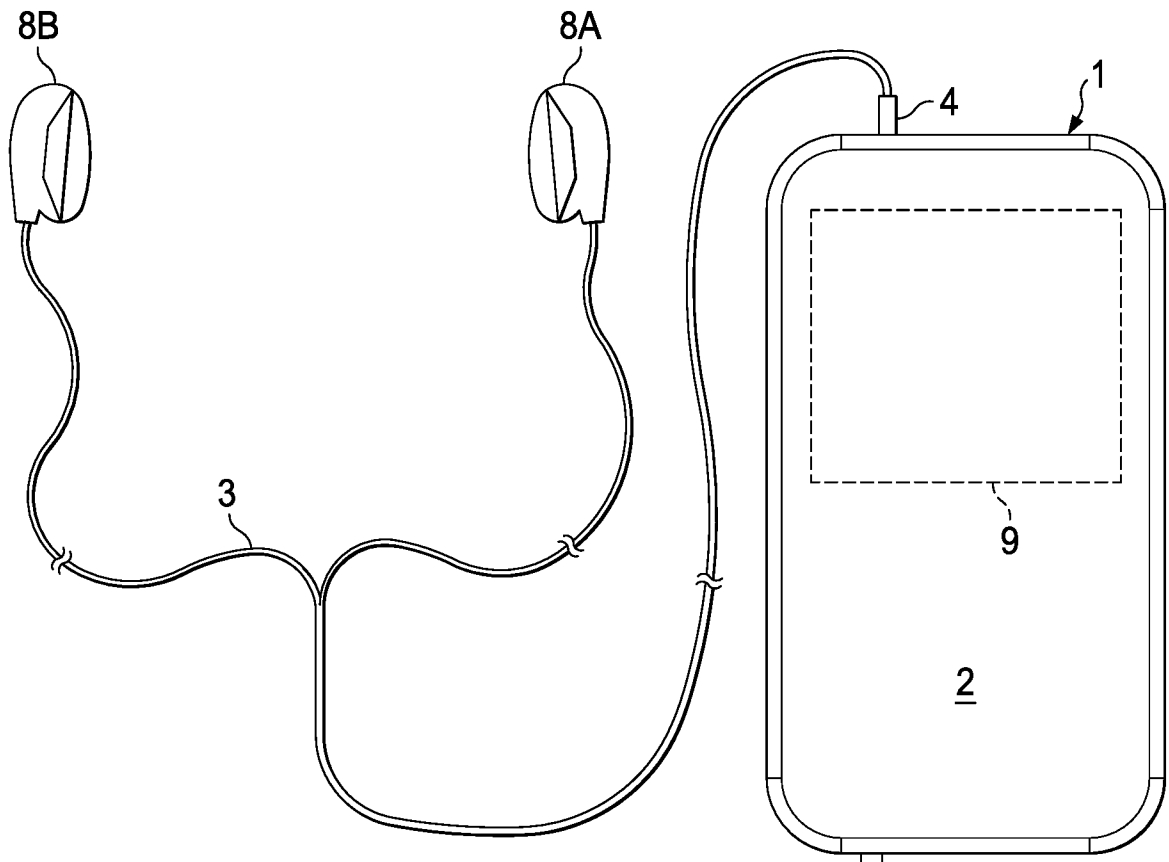


FIG. 1

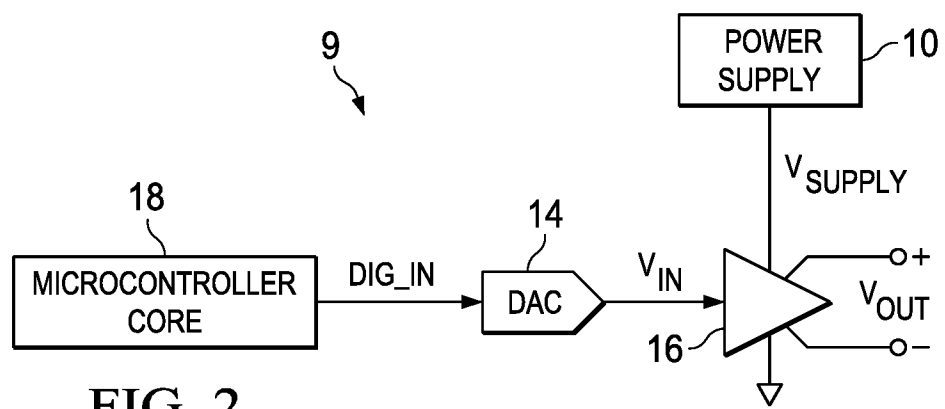


FIG. 2

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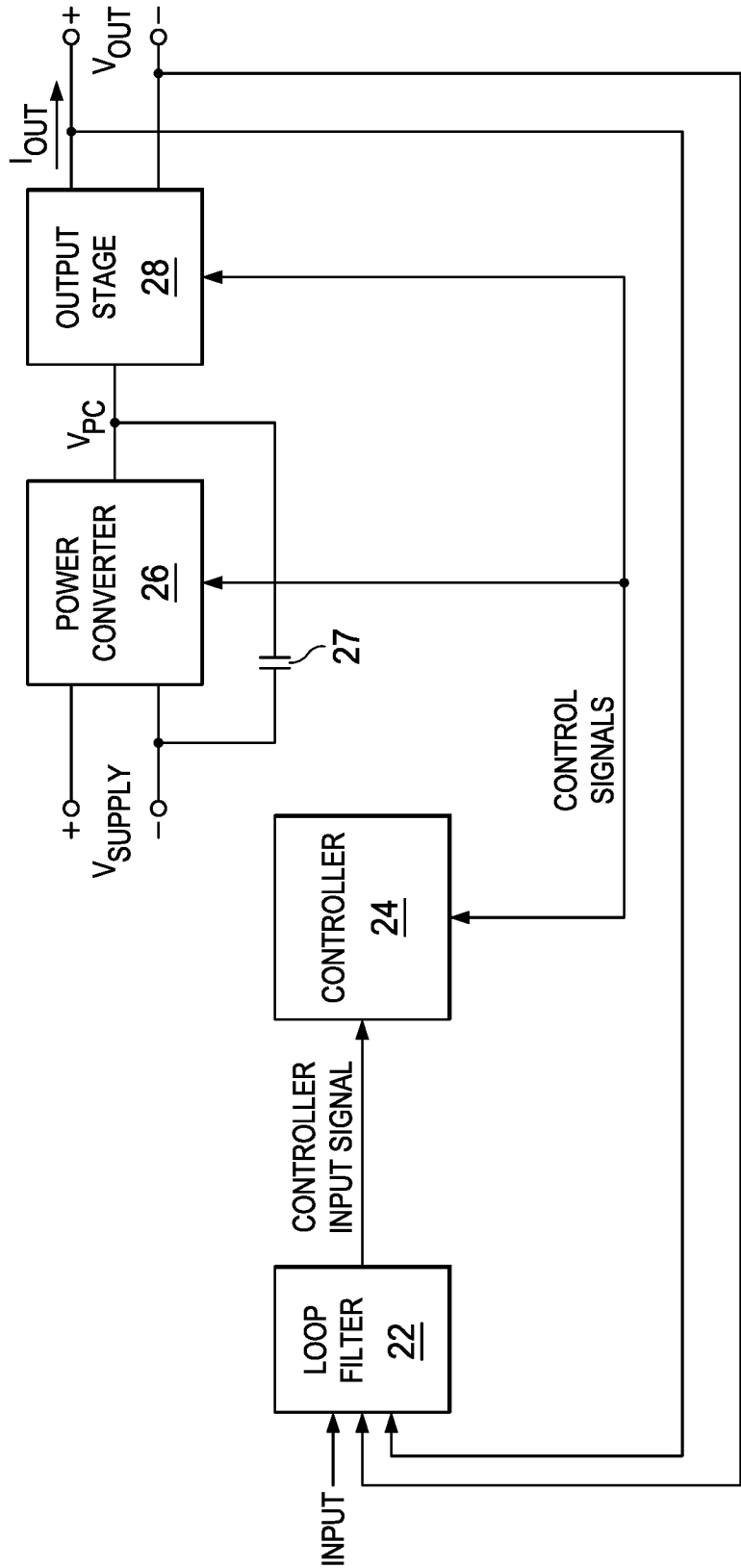


FIG. 3

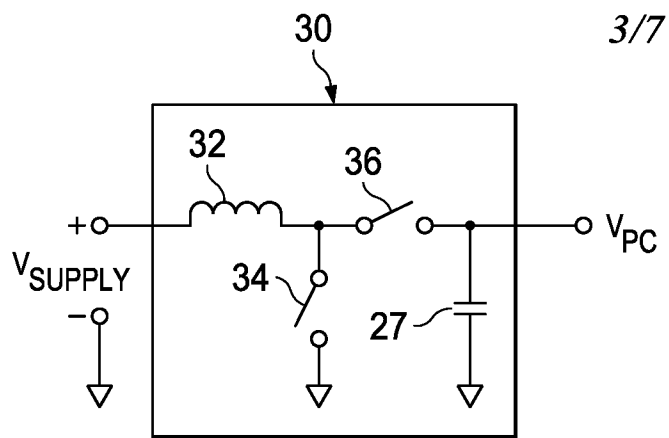


FIG. 4A

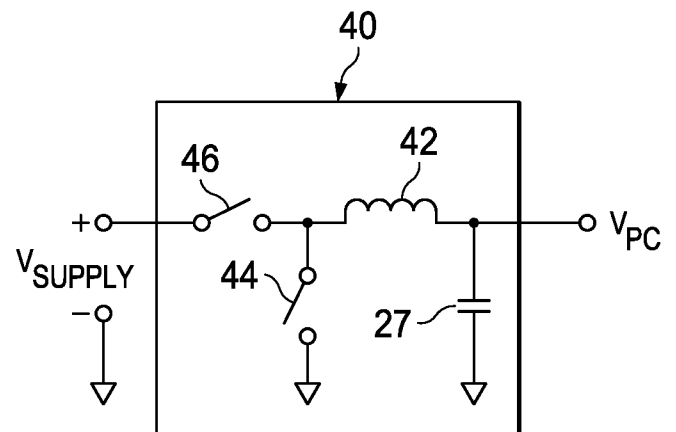


FIG. 4B

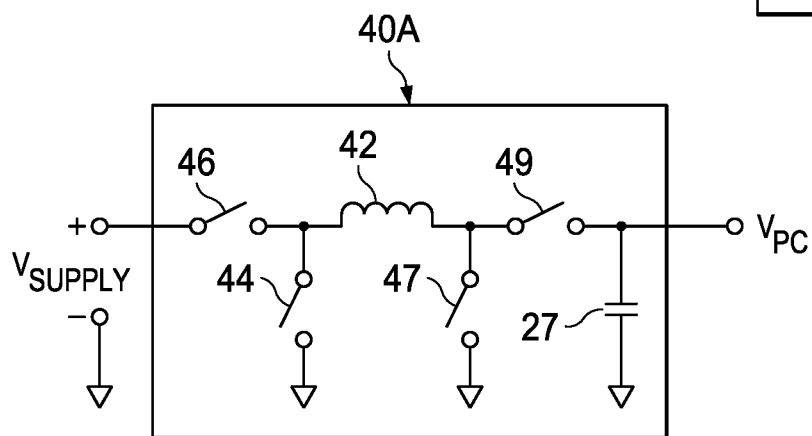


FIG. 4C

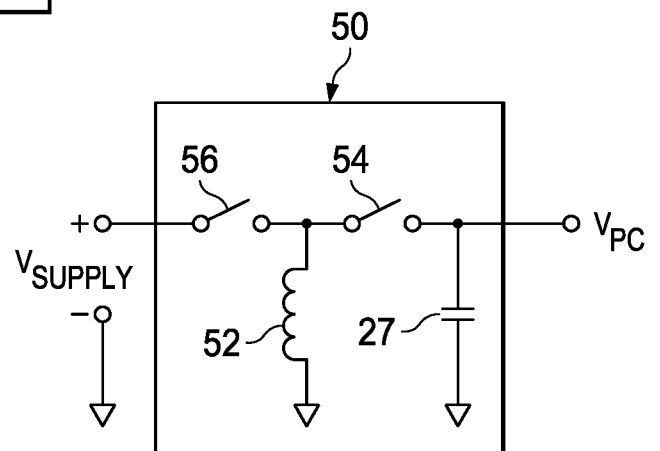


FIG. 4D

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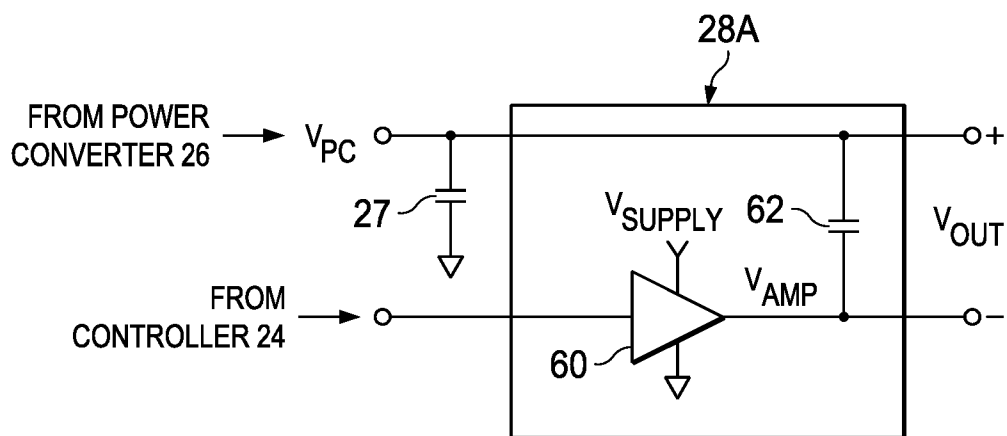


FIG. 5A

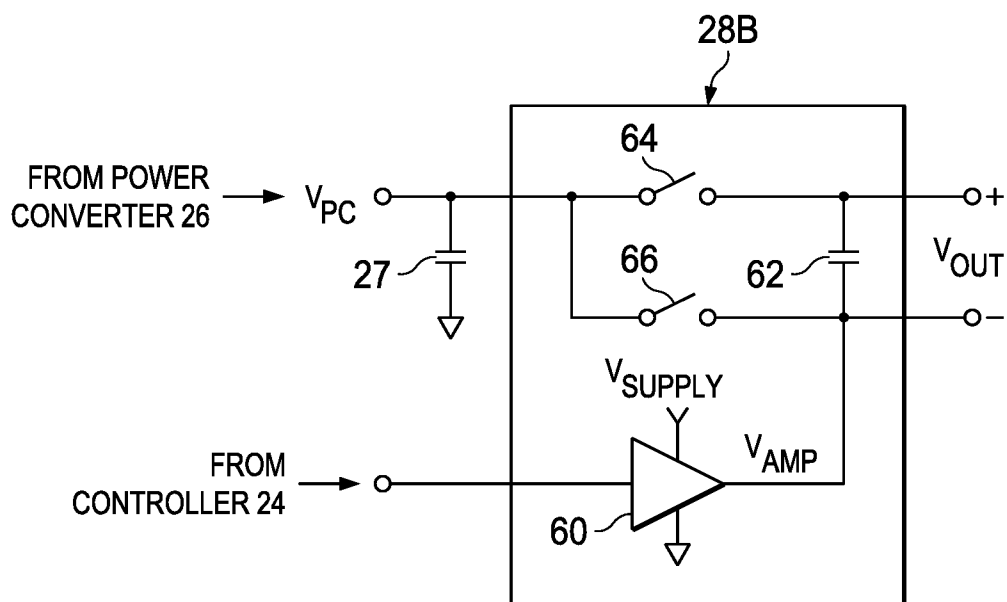


FIG. 5B

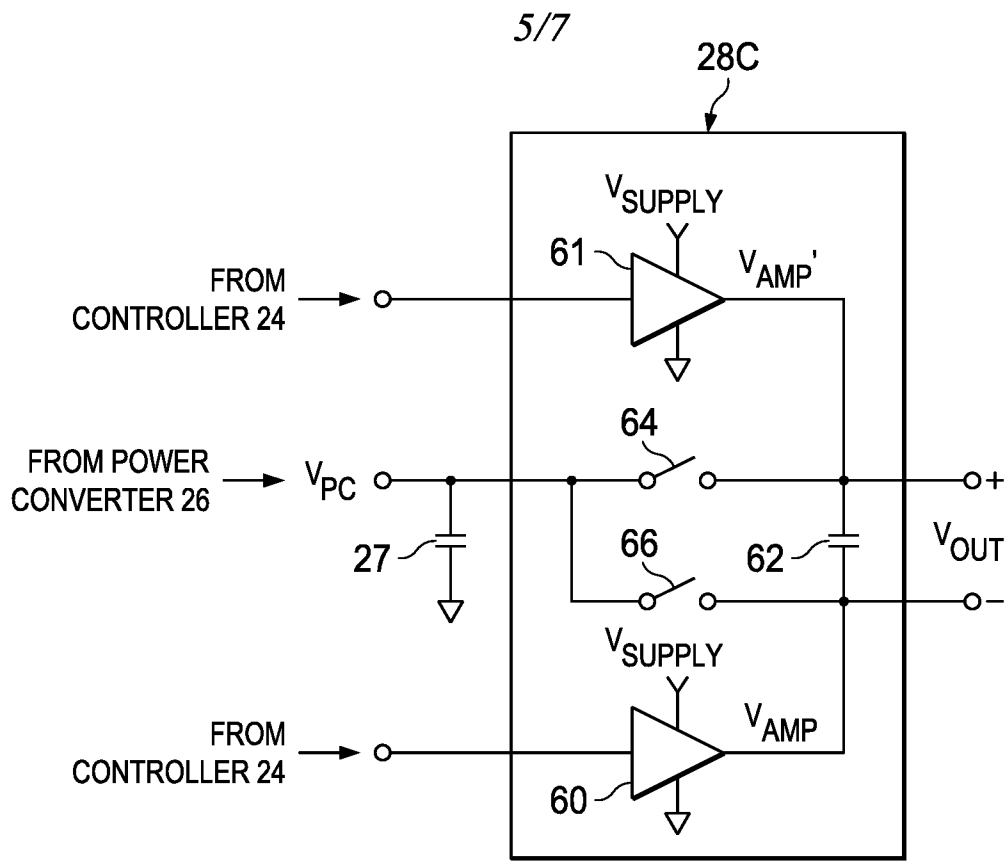


FIG. 5C

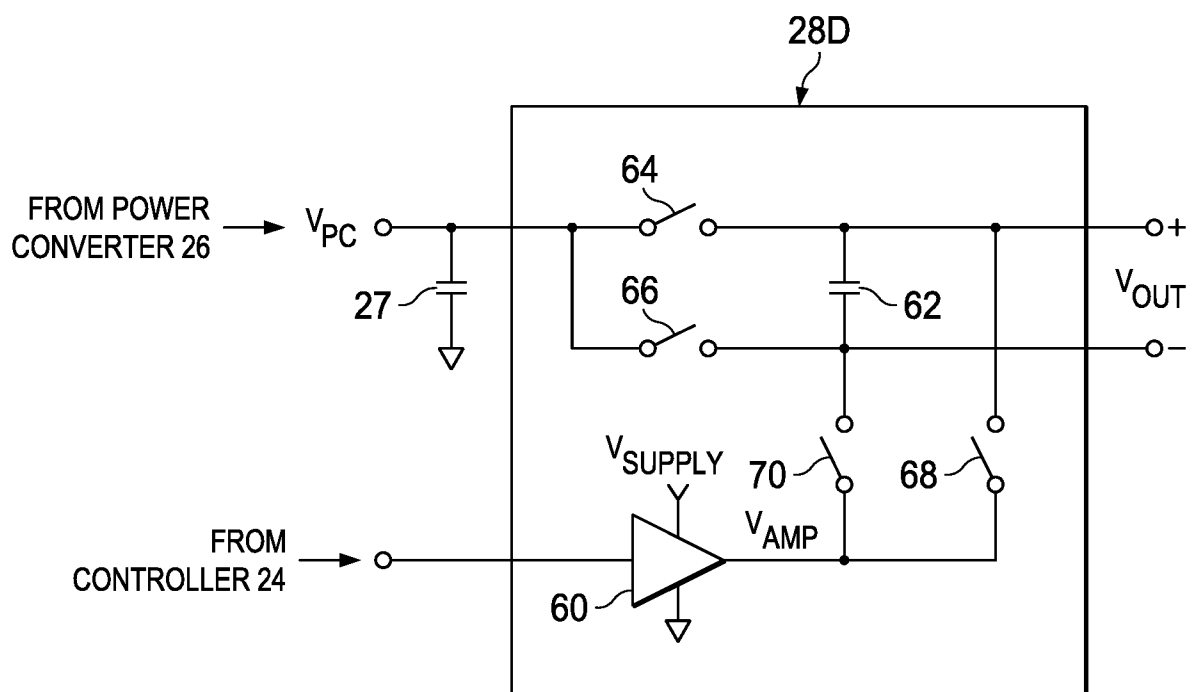


FIG. 5D

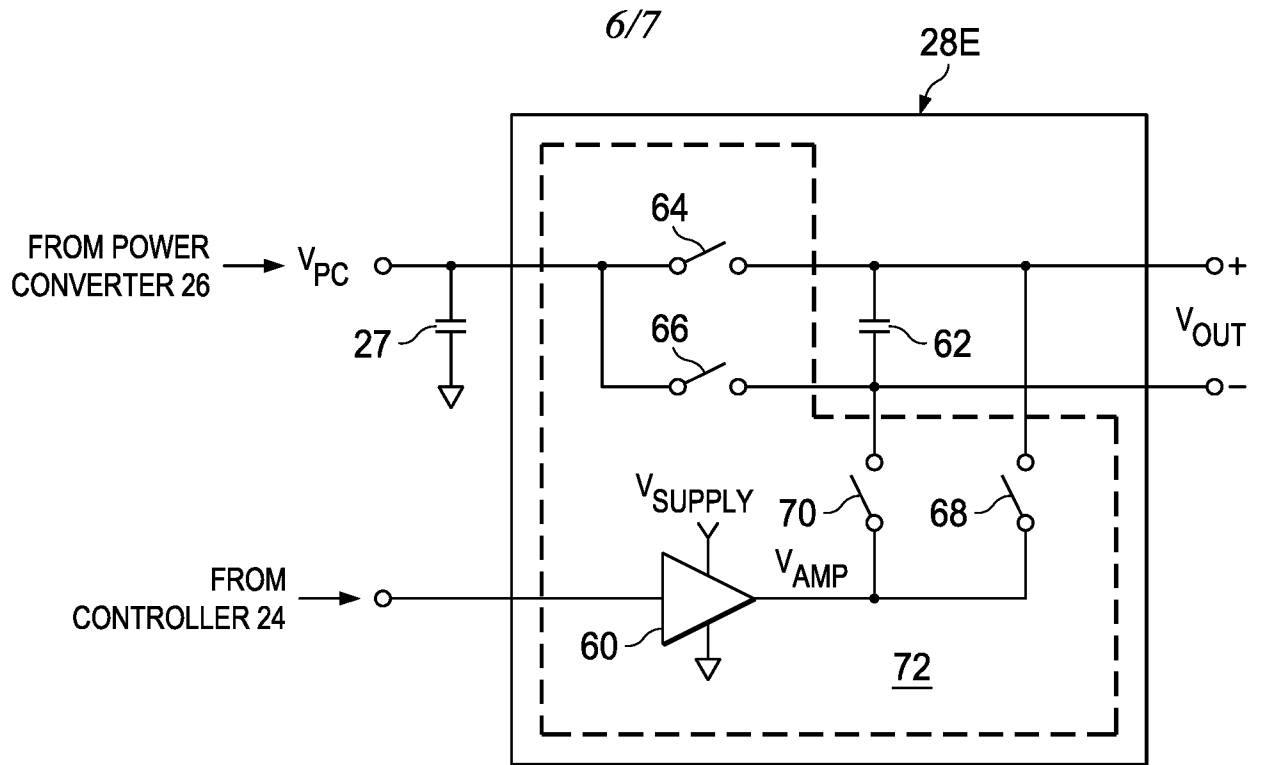


FIG. 5E

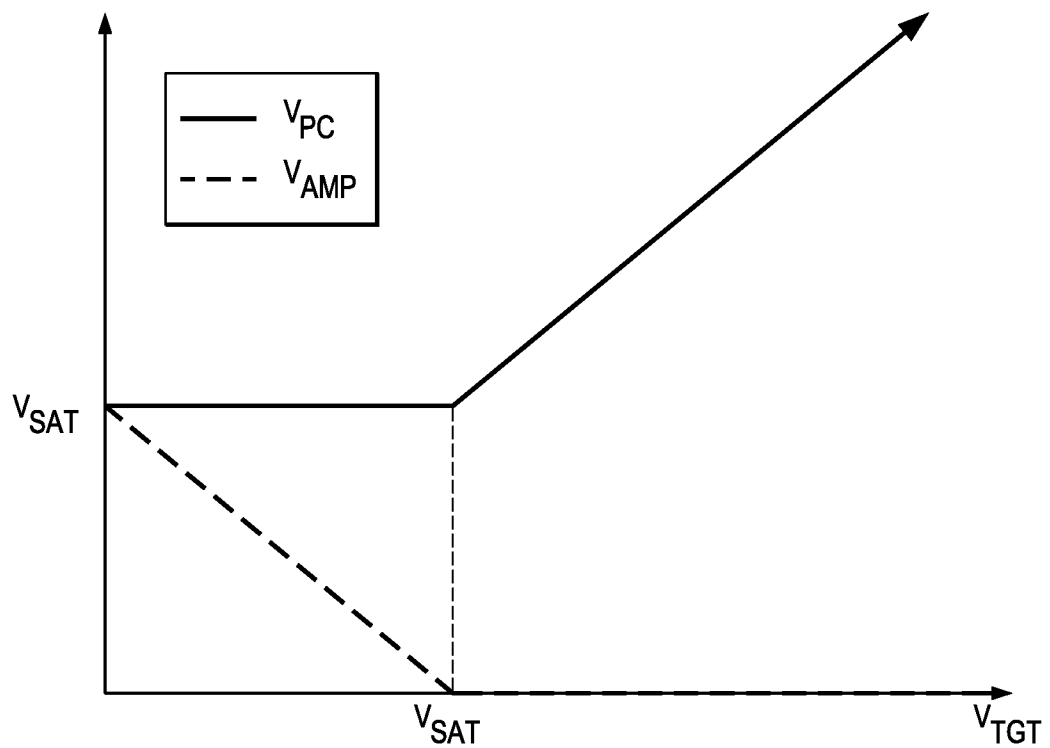


FIG. 6

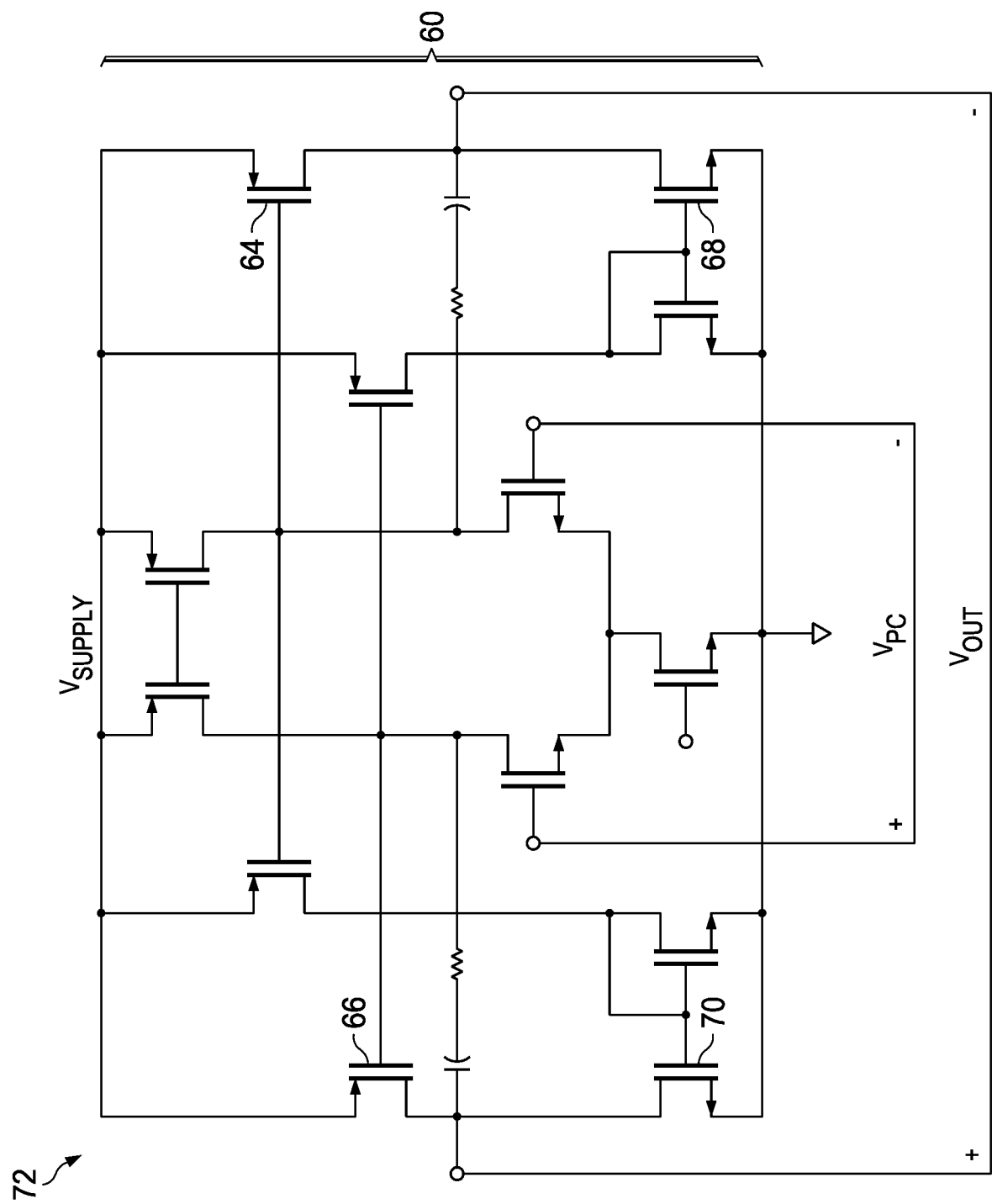


FIG. 7

## INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No

PCT/US2016/040072

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER  
 INV. H03F3/217  
 ADD.

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

## B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)  
 H03F

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

EPO-Internal, WPI Data

## C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

| Category* | Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages                                                                                                                  | Relevant to claim No.                           |
|-----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
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| X         | WO 2007/136800 A2 (CIRRAS LOGIC INC [US];<br>MAZDA BABAK [US]; SHINKRE RAHUL [US];<br>SAHANDIES) 29 November 2007 (2007-11-29)<br><br>paragraph [0010] - paragraph [0015];<br>figure 1<br><br>----- | 1-4,6,9,<br>10,13,<br>26-29,<br>31,34,<br>35,38 |
| A         | US 2015/222184 A1 (MELANSON JOHN L [US] ET<br>AL) 6 August 2015 (2015-08-06)<br>paragraph [0064] - paragraph [0069];<br>figure 12<br><br>-----                                                      | 1-50                                            |



Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.



See patent family annex.

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Date of the actual completion of the international search

7 September 2016

Date of mailing of the international search report

16/09/2016

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European Patent Office, P.B. 5818 Patentlaan 2  
 NL - 2280 HV Rijswijk  
 Tel. (+31-70) 340-2040,  
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Lorenzo, Carlos

# INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

International application No

PCT/US2016/040072

| Patent document<br>cited in search report |    | Publication<br>date |    | Patent family<br>member(s) |    | Publication<br>date |
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