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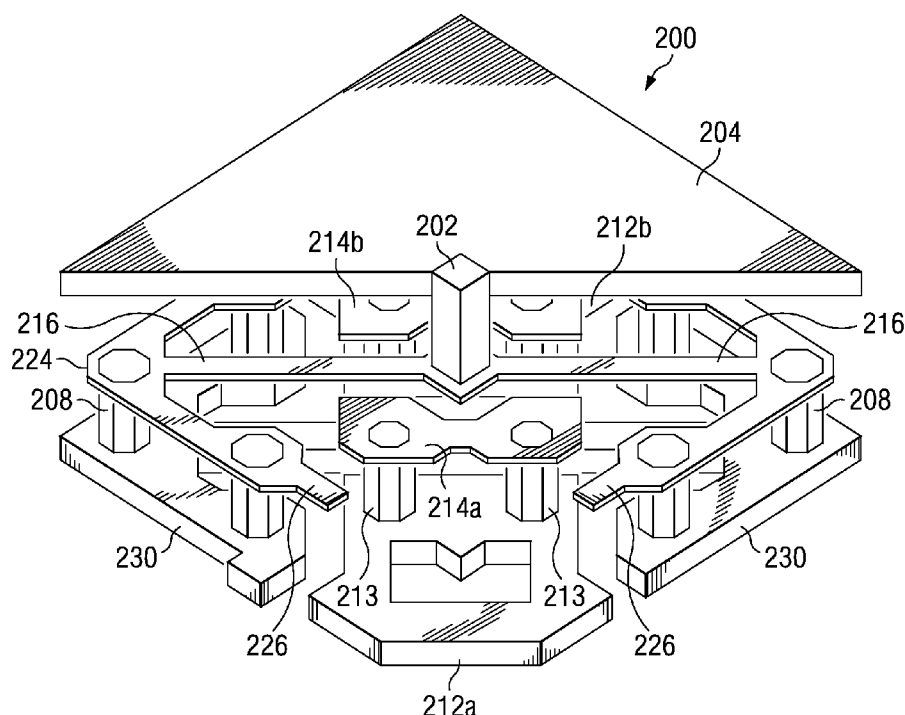
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(54) Title: MICRO-MIRROR HINGE



(57) Abstract: According to one embodiment of the invention a digital micro-mirror device (204) is taught that includes a pixel, occupying an area of the device, and a hinge (216) coupled to the pixel and positioned such that at least a portion of the hinge falls outside the area of the pixel.

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For two-letter codes and other abbreviations, refer to the "Guidance Notes on Codes and Abbreviations" appearing at the beginning of each regular issue of the PCT Gazette.

MICRO-MIRROR HINGE

This invention relates in general to image display systems, and more particularly to a hinge of a micro-mirror element.

BACKGROUND

5 Light processing systems often involve directing light towards a display such that an image is produced. One way of effecting such an image is through the use of digital micro-mirror devices (DMD) available from Texas Instruments. In general, light is shined on a DMD array having numerous micro-mirrors. Each micro-mirror is selectively controlled to reflect the light towards a particular portion of a display, such as a pixel. The angle of a
10 micro-mirror can be changed to switch a pixel to an "on" or "off" state. The micro-mirrors can maintain their "on" or "off" state for controlled display times.

 The micro-mirrors are able to change angles by turning on a hinge mounted beneath them. To increase the resolution provided by a DMD while maintaining the DMD's size, the micro-mirrors or pixels are reduced in size. These smaller pixels usually require shorter
15 hinges. Shorter hinges can cause the turn-on voltage to increase, as more work is required to twist a shorter hinge when changing the angle of the micro-mirror. Attempts to reduce the turn on voltage have included reducing the thickness of the hinge. However, thinner hinges are difficult to manufacture, producing smaller yields and are subject to parametric problems such as sagging.

20 SUMMARY

 According to one embodiment of the invention a digital micro-mirror device includes a pixel occupying an area of the device and a hinge coupled to the pixel and positioned such that at least a portion of the hinge falls outside the area of the pixel.
 Certain embodiments may provide a number of technical advantages. For example, a
25 technical advantage of one embodiment may include the capability to provide a decreased digital micro-mirror device (DMD) mirror size. Another technical advantage of other embodiments may include the capability to provide an increased DMD resolution. An advantage of another embodiment may include lower power consumption by the DMD.
 Certain embodiments of the invention can allow for decreased pixel size and increased
30 resolution without the manufacturing difficulties associated with reducing hinge length. In addition, some embodiments can allow thicker hinges and minimize sagging effects.

Although specific advantages have been enumerated above, various embodiments may include all, some, or none of the enumerated advantages. Additionally, other technical advantages may become readily apparent to one of ordinary skill in the art after review of the following figures, description, and claims.

5 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a block diagram of one embodiment of a portion of a display system;

FIG. 2 illustrates a conventional digital micro-mirror device (DMD) pixel element;
and

FIG. 3 shows a top functional view of pixel hinges traversing areas beyond the pixel
10 the hinge supports according to the teachings of the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE EMBODIMENTS

FIG. 1 is a block diagram of one embodiment of a portion of a display system 10. In this example, display system 10 includes a light source module 12 capable of generating illumination light beams 14. Light beams 14 are directed from light source module 12 to a
15 modulator 16. Modulator 16 may comprise any device capable of selectively communicating at least some of the received light beams along a projection light path 18. In the illustrated embodiment, modulator 16 comprises a digital micro-mirror device (DMD).

As will be described in more detail below, a DMD is a micro electro-mechanical device comprising an array of hundreds of thousands of tilting digital micro-mirrors. In a flat
20 state, each micro-mirror may be substantially parallel to projection lens 24. From the flat state, the micro-mirrors may be tilted, for example, to a positive or negative angle corresponding to an "on" state and an "off" state. For discussion purposes, the angle at which the mirrors may tilt will be measured from projection path 18 and may be designated as theta.

In particular embodiments, the micro-mirrors may tilt from +10 degrees to a -10
25 degrees. In other embodiments, micro-mirrors may tilt from a +12 degrees to a -12 degrees. To permit the micro-mirrors to tilt, each micro-mirror attaches to one or more hinges mounted on support posts, and spaced by means of an air gap over underlying control circuitry. The control circuitry provides the desired voltages to the respective layers, based at least in part on image data 20 received from a control module 22. In various embodiments,
30 modulator 16 is capable of generating various levels or shades for each color received.

The electrostatic forces cause each micro-mirror to selectively tilt. Incident illumination light on the micro-mirror array is reflected by the "on" micro-mirrors along projection path 18 for receipt by projection lens 24. Additionally, illumination light beams 14 are reflected by the "off" micro-mirrors and directed on off-state light path 26 toward light dump 28. The pattern of "on" versus "off" mirrors (e.g., light and dark mirrors) forms an image that is projected by projection lens 24. As used in this document, the terms "micro-mirrors" and "pixels" are used inter-changeably.

Light source module 12 includes one or more lamps or other light sources capable of generating and focusing an illumination light beam. Although display system 10 is described and illustrated as including a single light source module 12, it is generally recognized that display system 10 may include any suitable number of light sources modules appropriate for generating light beams for transmission to modulator 16.

As discussed above, display system 10 includes a control module 22 that receives and relays image data 20 to modulator 16 to effect the tilting of micro-mirrors in modulator 16. Specifically, control module 22 may relay image data 20 that identifies the appropriate tilt of the micro-mirrors of modulator 16. For example, control module 22 may send image data 20 to modulator 16 that indicates that the micro-mirrors of modulator 16 should be positioned in the "on" state.

FIG. 2 illustrates additional details of a conventional DMD pixel element 200, which may form a portion of modulator 16. The DMD pixel element 200 of FIG. 2 may include a hinge portion, an address portion, and a mirror portion. The hinge portion includes a hinge 216, supported on each side by hinge posts. Six bias vias 208 support spring tips 226 and hinge 216 above the lower layer 260. The bias vias 208 may also operate to relay a bias voltage to hinge 216. Micro-mirror 204 is supported above the hinge 216 upon a single mirror via 202. In addition to providing support for the micro-mirror 204, the mirror via 202 may conductively transfer the bias voltage to the micro-mirror 204. Accordingly, a bias voltage may be applied to the bias pad 220. The bias voltage may then be conductively transferred to the spring tips 226 and hinge 216 through the six bias vias 208. The bias voltage may be then further transferred from the hinge 216 to the micro-mirror 204 through the mirror via 202.

The address portion of the DMD pixel element 200 includes two address pads 212a, 212b that each connect to raised address electrodes 214a, 214b, respectively. As illustrated in FIG. 2, address vias 212 support the raised address electrodes 214a, 214b above each address pad 212a, 212b. In addition to supporting the raised address electrodes 214a, 214b, the address vias 213 relay a control or address voltage from the address pads 212a, 212b to the raised address electrodes 214a, 214b. The address pads 212a, 212b may be in communication with a control circuitry, such as an SRAM cell or the like, which selectively applies a control or address voltage to one of the two address pads 212a, 212b to create an electrostatic force between the micro-mirror 204 and the raised address electrodes 214a, 214b. A similar electrostatic force may be created between the micro-mirror 204 and the address pads 212a, 212b.

The range of motion allowed to micro-mirrors 204 may be limited by spring tips 226. During operation of DMD pixel element 200, spring tips 226 provide a landing point for micro-mirror 204. For example, when micro-mirror 204 is tilted in the direction of the raised address electrode 214a and address pad 212a, one or more spring tips 226 positioned proximate these address elements may operate as a landing point for micro-mirror 204. Conversely, when micro-mirror 204 is tilted in the direction of the raised address electrode 214b and address pad 212b, one or more spring tips 226 positioned proximate these address elements may operate as a landing point for micro-mirror 204. Thus, micro-mirror 204 may be tilted in the positive or negative direction until the micro-mirror 204 contacts one or more spring tips 226.

In reference to FIG. 2, in accordance with the invention, instead of a hinge 216 occupying only the area beneath a pixel element 200, the hinge of a pixel element can traverse an area beyond the pixel element.

FIG. 3 shows one embodiment of this type of hinge. As opposed to beginning at one side of a pixel 200 and ending on the other side of the same pixel 200 as shown in FIG. 2, the hinges of FIG. 3 fall beneath at least a portion of micro-mirrors adjacent to the one that rotates about the hinge. For instance, in one embodiment, a micro-mirror 310 is mounted to a hinge 305 at a via 301. Hinge 305 is supported by vias 302 and 304. Vias 302 and 304 are located beneath adjacent pixels 306 and 307, and not beneath pixel 303. In this embodiment, vias 302 and 304 are located near the center of adjacent pixels 306 and 307. In this and other

embodiments, the hinges can traverse adjacent or non-adjacent pixels and the hinges can be supported by vias located beneath adjacent or non-adjacent pixels. Traversing at least a portion of multiple pixels allows the hinge to be of a sufficient length that minimizes length related manufacturing difficulties and minimizes the voltage required to angle the pixel and twist the hinge. Multiple pixel traversal also allows a sufficient hinge thickness to minimize sagging effects.

The hinge portion of the DMD pixel elements 303, 306, and 307, in the illustrated embodiment, includes one or more hinges 305, 316, and 317 mounted with beams. Hinge 305, for example, is supported by hinge posts or hinge vias 302 and 304. The hinges 305, 316, and 317 may be made of aluminum, titanium, tungsten, aluminum alloys, such as AlTiO, or other material suitable for supporting and manipulating micro-mirrors 310.

In operation, the one or more hinges 305, 316, and 317 may be used to tilt each micro-mirror 310, 312, and 313 such that the micro-mirrors 310, 312, and 313 may be alternated between an active "on" state or an active "off" state. For example, hinges 305 may operate to tilt micro-mirrors 310 from a plus ten degrees to a minus ten degrees (or other suitable angles) to alternate the micro-mirrors 310 between the active "on" state condition and the active "off" state condition, respectively. The pixels of the invention with hinges 305, 316, and 317 that can traverse adjacent and non-adjacent pixels can employ all, some, or none of the features or components within the hinge portion, the address portion, and the mirror portion discussed and illustrated in FIGS. 1-3.

Numerous additions, deletions, substitutions, and other variations to the described example embodiments within the scope of the claimed invention will be evident to those skilled in the art to which the invention relates.

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A digital micro-mirror device comprising:
a pixel occupying an area of the device; and
a hinge coupled to the pixel and positioned such that at least a portion of the hinge falls outside the area of the pixel.
2. The device of Claim 1, wherein the hinge is supported by a first via that is located outside the area of the pixel and a second via that is located outside the area.
3. The device of Claim 1, wherein the hinge comprises a mounting that is connected to the center of the pixel.
4. The device of Claim 1, wherein the hinge comprises a material selected from the group consisting of aluminum, titanium, tungsten, aluminum alloys, and combinations thereof.
5. A micro-mirror element comprising a hinge traversing at least a portion of an adjacent micro-mirror element; wherein the hinge is supported by a first via that is located at an adjacent micro-mirror element and a second via that is located at an adjacent micro-mirror element; and wherein the hinge comprises a mounting that is connected to the center of the micro-mirror element.
6. An array of micro-mirrors comprising:
a first micro-mirror that is adjacent to both a second micro-mirror and a third micro-mirror;
wherein the first micro-mirror comprises a first hinge;
wherein the first hinge is supported by a first via and a second via, the first via being located beneath the second micro-mirror and the second via being located beneath the third micro-mirror; and
wherein the first hinge comprises a first mounting, said first mounting being connected to the center of said first micro-mirror.
7. The array of Claim 6, wherein:
the second micro-mirror comprises a second hinge, the second hinge being supported by a third via and a fourth via, the third via being located beneath the first micro-

mirror and the fourth via being located beneath a fourth micro-mirror adjacent to the second micro-mirror; and

the second hinge comprises a second mounting, said second mounting being connected to the center of said second micro-mirror.

8. The array of Claim 7, wherein:

the third micro-mirror comprises a third hinge supported by a fifth via and a sixth via, the fifth via being located beneath the first micromirror and the sixth via being located beneath a fifth micro-mirror adjacent to the third micro-mirror; and the third hinge comprises a third mounting, said third mounting being connected to the center of said third micro-mirror.

9. A method of reflecting light by:

selectively positioning light by tilting a plurality of micro-mirrors by twisting a plurality of hinges traversing at least a portion of multiple micro-mirrors.

10. The method of Claim 9, wherein the plurality of hinges traversing multiple micro-mirrors comprises a hinge supported by first and second vias located beneath respective mirrors adjacent the micro-mirror.

11. The method of Claim 9, wherein selectively positioning light by tilting a plurality of micro-mirrors by twisting hinges comprises selectively positioning light by tilting a plurality of micro-mirrors by twisting hinges that have a plurality of vias connected therewith.

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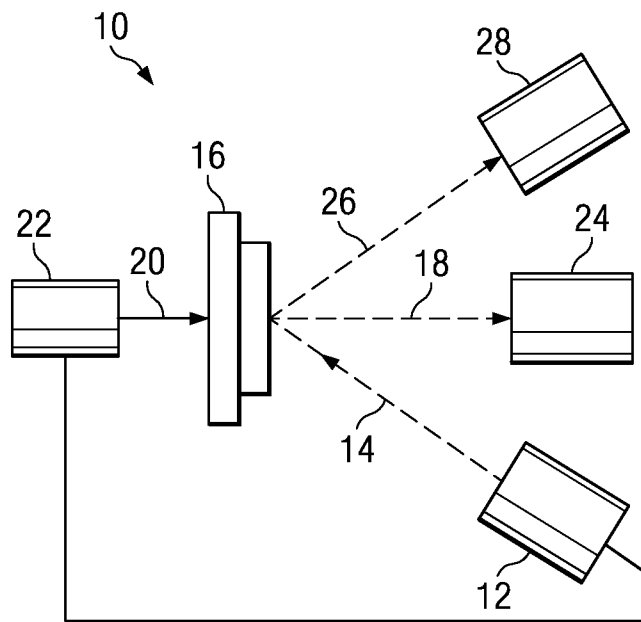


FIG. 1

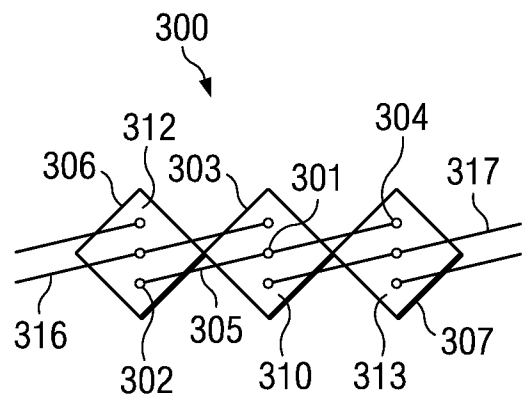


FIG. 3

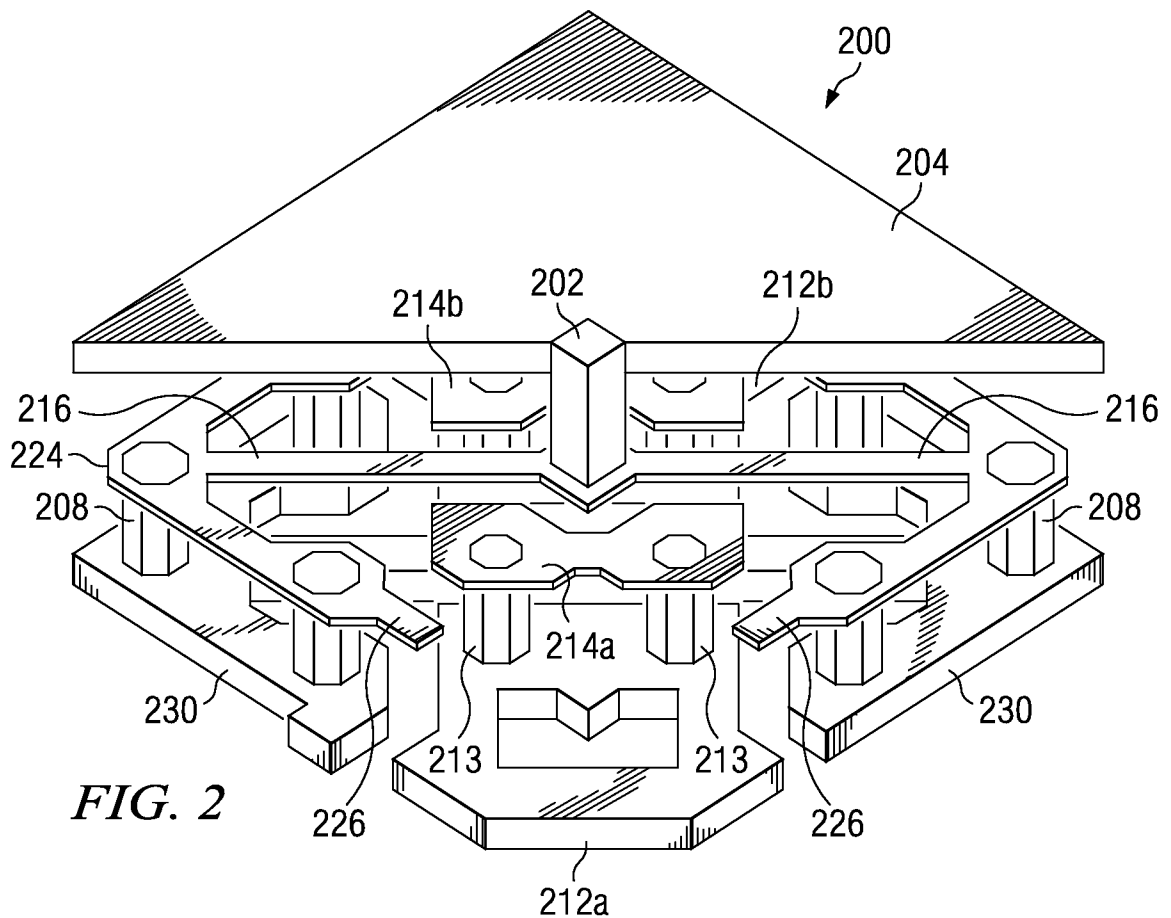


FIG. 2