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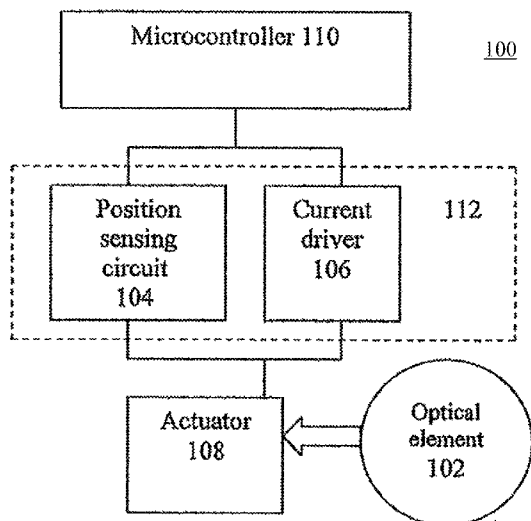


FIG. 1

(57) Abstract: Inductance-based sensing in a digital camera in which actuation of at least one electromagnetic (EM) actuator that includes at least one stationary ferromagnetic member associated with a large air gap causes a moving ferromagnetic member mechanically coupled to an optical element to by-pass or bridge the large air gap through at least one smaller air gap. The stationary member includes at least one ferromagnetic core surrounded at least partially by a coil. An inductance value correlated with a position of the optical element may be measured using the same coil as the one used for the actuation. In some embodiments, a single EM actuator includes two coils and the actuator is driven using both coils, while a regular or a mutual inductance is measured. In some camera embodiments that include two opposite EM actuators, one actuator is used to move the optical element while the other actuator is used to measure the inductance value.



INDUCTANCE-BASED POSITION SENSING IN A DIGITAL CAMERA ACTUATOR

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

5 This application is related to and claims priority from US Provisional Patent Application (PPA) No. 61/923,695 filed January 5, 2014, US PPA No. 61/984,749 filed April 26, 2014 and titled "Inductance-based position sensing in a digital camera actuator", and US PPA No. 61/900,442 filed November 6, 2013 and titled "Electromagnetic actuators for digital cameras", all of which applications are incorporated herein by reference in their entirety.

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FIELD

 Embodiments disclosed herein relate in general to electromagnetic (EM) actuators used in miniature digital cameras, and more particularly to apparatus and methods for sensing (or measuring) the position of a moving member of such actuators.

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BACKGROUND

 Actuators for miniature cameras (exemplarily as in smart phones) are used to shift and/or tilt optical elements in the camera to achieve focus, image stabilization or shutter movement. There are several methods to achieve the force needed for actuation. EM actuators use ferromagnetic materials, discussed herein, to provide a magnetic actuation force. Actuator structures are disclosed for example in co-invented and co-assigned PCT patent application PCT/IB2014/062836 filed July 3, 2014 and titled "Electromagnetic actuators for digital cameras", include at least one stationary ferromagnetic member and at least one moving ferromagnetic member, the stationary and moving members having operating surfaces, the operating surfaces facing each other across a small air gap. Each actuator structure has at least one large air gap in the magnetic circuit that includes all the stationary ferromagnetic members, which do not move during the actuation. Each large air gap is either by-passed or bridged through smaller air gaps by the moving ferromagnetic member. Such actuator structures are designed to pull the moving ferromagnetic member and reduce the magnetic reluctance of the actuator and thereby provide a large magnetic force. In most embodiments the reluctance changes significantly with movement in a first ("force/actuation") direction, while in the other two ("indifferent") directions, in-plane and orthogonal to the first direction, the reluctance is hardly changed or not changed at all with movement. As described in detail in PCT/IB2014/062836,

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the magnetic circuit always acts toward closing the large air gap, thus pulling the moving ferromagnetic member in one direction, e.g. +X. Pulling in the opposite direction (e.g. -X) can be achieved using one of two methods: forced-back-actuation ("method 1"), which uses a spring to retract the optical element to zero position, or dual-actuation ("method 2"), which uses an opposite actuator to create an opposite force.

A great improvement in control would be achieved if one knew the exact position of the moving member relative to the stationary member during the actuation process. For example, "A miniaturized low-power VCM actuator for auto-focusing applications", Optics Express, 16 (4), p. 2533, 2008 describes how an actuator with a known relative position of a stationary member vs. a moving permanent magnet, reduces the power consumption during actuation. In another example, US patent application 2013/0215511A1 describes position sensing (measurement) performed in conjunction with actuators to improve the accuracy of an optical image stabilization (OIS) system. Position sensing in these two cases is done using an additional sensing circuit, such as a Hall bar, which measures a magnetic field in space.

Position sensing based on a change in the inductance of a coil is known. Various schemes using inductance-based position sensing have been applied to cameras. However, in known designs, special coils are added to the camera just for the purpose of position sensing. This adds at least one component to the apparatus and complicates the design and operation. For example, US patent US 8,180,211 B2 describes a method for position and motion sensing in a miniature camera, using a magnetic circuit that includes a ferromagnetic part and a coil, while motion is done using a permanent magnet and a coil.

There is therefore a need for and it would be advantageous to have position measurement in a digital camera that does not require use of additional sensing circuits, such as additional coils, permanent magnets or Hall bar sensors.

SUMMARY

In some embodiments there is provided a method for sensing the position of an optical element in a digital camera comprising the steps of: providing a first electro-magnetic (EM) actuator that includes a first stationary ferromagnetic member having a first ferromagnetic core surrounded at least partially by a first coil, the first stationary member being part of a first magnetic circuit that includes a first large air gap; actuating the first EM actuator to move the optical element in a first direction, wherein the actuation causes a moving ferromagnetic member coupled mechanically to the optical element to by-pass or bridge the first large air gap through at least one air gap smaller than

the first large air gap; measuring an inductance value; and correlating the measured inductance related value with a position of the optical element.

In an embodiment, the step of actuating includes supplying a strong low frequency signal to the first coil and the step of measuring an inductance value includes measuring an inductance using a response to a weak high frequency signal or using a response to a current pulse supplied to the first coil.

In an embodiment, the first ferromagnetic core is further surrounded at least partially by a second coil and the step of measuring an inductance value includes measuring an inductance using a response to a weak high frequency signal or using a response to a current pulse supplied to both coils.

In an embodiment, the first actuator further includes a second ferromagnetic core surrounded at least partially by a second coil, the second ferromagnetic member being part of the first magnetic circuit that includes the first large air gap, and the step of measuring an inductance value includes measuring an inductance using a response to a weak high frequency signal or using a response to a current pulse supplied to both coils.

In an embodiment, the first ferromagnetic core is further surrounded at least partially by a second coil, the inductance value is a mutual inductance value, the step of actuating includes supplying a respective strong low frequency signal to each coil, and the step of measuring an inductance value includes supplying a weak high frequency signal or a current pulse to one coil and measuring a response in the other coil, the response correlated with the mutual inductance value.

In an embodiment, the first actuator further includes a second ferromagnetic core surrounded at least partially by a second coil, the inductance value is a mutual inductance value, the step of actuating includes supplying a respective strong low frequency signal to each coil, and the step of measuring an inductance value includes supplying a weak high frequency signal or a current pulse to one coil and measuring a response in the other coil, the response correlated with the mutual inductance value.

In an embodiment, a method further comprises the steps of providing a second EM actuator having a second stationary ferromagnetic member with a respective second ferromagnetic core surrounded at least partially by a second coil, the second stationary member being part of a second magnetic circuit that includes a second large air gap, the second EM actuator being configured to move the optical element in a second direction opposite to the first direction. Only one actuator is actuated at one time. Exemplarily, only the first actuator is actuated, the second EM actuator is not actuated, and the step of measuring an inductance value includes measuring the inductance value using the second actuator.

In some embodiments there is provided apparatus for sensing the position of an optical element in a digital camera comprising: a first EM actuator that includes a first stationary ferromagnetic member with a first ferromagnetic core surrounded at least partially by a first coil, the first stationary member being part of a first magnetic circuit that includes a first large air gap, the first EM actuator configured to move the optical element in a first direction when actuated, the actuation causing a first moving ferromagnetic member mechanically coupled to the optical element to by-pass or bridge the first large air gap through at least one smaller air gap; and an inductance-based position sensing module configured to drive the actuation and to measure an inductance value correlated with a given position of the optical element.

In an embodiment, the inductance-based position sensing module includes a driving circuit with a current driver operative to provide a low frequency high current signal and either a high frequency low current signal or a pulse current signal, and an inductance-based position sensing circuit operative to measure the inductance value. In an embodiment, the first ferromagnetic core is further surrounded at least partially by a second coil and the driving circuit and the inductance-based position sensing circuit are coupled electrically to both coils. In an embodiment with two coils, the inductance value is a mutual inductance value, the driving circuit is configured to provide the low frequency high current signal to both coils and to provide either the high frequency low current signal or the pulse current signal to one coil, and the inductance-based position sensing circuit is configured to measure the mutual inductance value based on a response to the high frequency low current signal or the pulse current signal obtained in the other coil.

In an embodiment, the first actuator further includes a second elongated ferromagnetic core surrounded at least partially by a second coil, the second ferromagnetic member being part of the first magnetic circuit that includes the first large air gap, and the driving circuit and the inductance-based position sensing circuit are coupled electrically to both coils. In an embodiment of an actuator with two cores and two coils, the driving circuit is configured to provide the low frequency high current signal and the high frequency low current signal or the pulse current signal to both coils. In an embodiment with two cores and two coils, the inductance value is a mutual inductance value, the driving circuit is configured to provide the low frequency high current signal to both coils and to provide either the high frequency low current signal or the pulse current signal to one coil, and the inductance-based position sensing circuit is configured to measure the mutual inductance value based on a response to the high frequency low current signal or to the pulse current signal obtained in the other coil.

In an embodiment, an apparatus further comprises a second EM actuator having a second stationary ferromagnetic member with a ferromagnetic core surrounded at least partially by a second

coil, the second stationary member being part of a second magnetic circuit that includes a second large air gap, the second EM actuator being configured to move the optical element in a second direction opposite to the first direction.

5 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Non-limiting embodiments are herein described, by way of example only, with reference to the accompanying drawings, wherein:

FIG. 1 shows schematically in a block diagram an embodiment of a camera subsystem for actuating an optical element in a digital camera and for sensing its position, as disclosed herein;

FIG. 2A shows schematically in a block diagram yet another embodiment of a camera subsystem for actuating an optical element in a digital camera and for sensing its position, as disclosed herein;

FIG. 2B shows schematically in a block diagram yet another embodiment of a camera subsystem for actuating an optical element in a digital camera and for sensing its position, as disclosed herein;

FIG. 3 shows an arrangement of two actuators used to move and sense a lateral motion of an optical element as disclosed herein: (a) isometric view and (a') top view of the actuator pair in a first position, (b) and (c) top views only in respectively second and third positions;

FIG. 4 shows another arrangement of two actuators used to move and sense a lateral motion of an optical element as disclosed herein: (a) isometric view and (a') top view of the actuator pair in a first position, (b) and (c) top views only in respectively second and third positions;

FIG. 5 shows simulation results for inductance vs. position, obtained using finite element method (FEM) software.

FIG. 6A shows a Maxwell bridge with an inductor sensing circuit used in a method disclosed herein;

FIG. 6B shows a Maxwell bridge with a capacitor sensing circuit used in a method disclosed herein;

FIG. 7 shows in (a) simulation results for finding the electrical resonance frequency for parallel (solid line) and serial (dashed line) RLC circuits, and in (b) simulation results for voltage reading as function of inductance change for parallel (solid line) and serial (dashed line) RLC circuits;

FIG. 8 shows a mutual inductance measurement circuit used in a coupled coil position sensing method disclosed herein;

FIG. 9 shows schematically in a block diagram yet another embodiment of a camera subsystem

for actuating an optical element in a digital camera and for sensing its position in a coupled coil configuration, as disclosed herein;

FIG. 10A shows an embodiment of an actuator in which a coupled coil position sensing method disclosed herein can be applied;

5 FIG. 10B shows another embodiment of an actuator in which a coupled coil position sensing method disclosed herein can be applied;

FIG. 10C shows another embodiment of an actuator in which a coupled coil position sensing method disclosed herein can be applied;

10 FIG. 11 shows experimental results of position vs. voltage using the subsystem of FIG. 2A and the voltages reading method described in FIG. 6A.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

FIG. 1 shows schematically in a block diagram an embodiment numbered **100** of an apparatus (or “subsystem”) for actuating an optical element **102** in a digital camera and for sensing its position, as disclosed herein, for the case where actuation is done with method 1 (forced-back-actuation). The actuated optical element may exemplarily be a lens, a camera module (lens and sensor), a camera sensor or a camera shutter. Subsystem **100** includes an inductance-based position sensing circuit **104** and a current driver **106**, both electrically connected to a coil (not shown) of an actuator **108**. The actuator types may be for example as disclosed in PCT patent application PCT/IB2014/062836, where retracting springs are shown for example in FIG. 12. As disclosed therein, each such actuator has at least one large air gap in a magnetic circuit that includes all stationary ferromagnetic members (which do not move during the actuation). During actuation, each large air gap is either by-passed or bridged through smaller air gaps by a moving ferromagnetic member. The actuator structure is designed to pull the moving ferromagnetic member and to reduce the magnetic reluctance of the actuator and thereby provide a large magnetic force. In an embodiment, the inductance-based position sensing circuit and the current driver may be combined into an inductance-based sensing module **112**. Subsystem **100** further includes a microcontroller **110** (which may be implemented in full or in part in a microcontroller of the camera) for controlling the actuation of the actuator, the position sensing circuit and associated current driver.

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In use, position sensing during actuation (which causes movement of a moving ferromagnetic member and an optical element attached thereto) is obtained by measuring an inductance change of an actuator coil and by correlating the inductance change with a position of the moving ferromagnetic member/optical element. The inductance measurement may be performed using any

known method. Exemplary methods are described in more detail below. In some embodiments, the same coil is used for actuation and for position sensing. Two actuation/sensing method embodiments may be used: in a first embodiment, a strong (for example 10-100mA) DC or low frequency AC "driving" signal (for example up to the mechanical resonance frequency with typical value of 100Hz) is used for actuation. Hereinafter, both DC and low frequency AC driving signals will be referred to as "low frequency" driving signals. The position measurement is obtained by measuring inductance in the actuation coil using a weak (for example 1-10mA) high frequency AC signal (for example 10 times or more of the mechanical resonance frequency with typical value of 100Hz) (see inductance measurement methods 2a, 2b, 3 and 4 below). In a second embodiment, a pulse signal on top of the driving signal is sent to the coil (see measurement method 1). Provided the pulse is much shorter (e.g. ≤ 1 msec) than a retracting spring resonance period (e.g. 10msec), the time multiplexing of signals does not interfere with the actuator motion.

FIG. 2A shows schematically in a block diagram another embodiment numbered **200** of a subsystem for actuating an optical element **202** in a digital camera and for sensing its position, as disclosed herein. The actuation in subsystem **200** is dual-actuation (involving two actuators). Subsystem **200** includes a first position sensing circuit **204** and a first current driver **206**, both electrically connected to a coil (not shown) of a first actuator **208**, and a second position sensing circuit **210** and a second current driver **212**, both electrically connected to a coil (not shown) of a second actuator **214**. As in subsystem **100**, the inductance-based position sensing circuit and the current driver may be combined into an inductance-based sensing module (not shown). The optical element is mechanically coupled to the moving ferromagnetic member. The two actuators form an actuator pair. Each actuator pair includes two identical actuators of the type disclosed for example in PCT patent application PCT/IB2014/062836. In an exemplary embodiment, the actuators may be of the type shown in FIGS. 3 and 4 herein and in FIGS. 10 and 13 of PCT/IB2014/062836. Subsystem **200** further includes a microcontroller (or simply "controller") **216** for controlling the actuation of the two actuators and the position sensing circuits and associated current drivers. The controller may be implemented in full or in part in a microcontroller of the camera.

In another embodiment **200'**, shown in FIG. 2B, the two position sensing circuits may be combined into a single position sensing circuit **204'**, and the two current drivers may be combined into a single current driver **206'**, with the controller switching the connection of the position sensing circuit and current driver between the two actuators through a switch **220**. As in subsystem **100**, the inductance-based position sensing circuit and the current driver may be combined into an inductance-based sensing module (not shown).

FIG. 3 shows an arrangement **300** of a pair of identical actuators numbered **300a** and **300b**,

used to sense a lateral position of an optical element such as a lens, a camera module, a camera sensor or a camera shutter. The X-Y-Z coordinate frame shown holds for all actuator drawings discussed below (i.e. for FIGS. 3 and 4). Actuators **300a** and **300b** are similar to an actuator **1000** in PCT patent application PCT/IB2014/062836. The actuators are not necessarily drawn to scale, and different parts therein may be scaled differently than shown. FIG. 3(a) shows an isometric view while FIG. 3(a') shows a top view of the actuator pair in a first position. Second and third positions are shown in top views only in FIGS. 3 (b) and 3(c).

Since the two actuators are identical, some parts are may be numbered in actuator **300a** while other parts may be numbered in actuator **300b**. Each actuator comprises a first ferromagnetic frame **302** and a second ferromagnetic frame **304**. Exemplarily, frame **302** may be stationary (fixed) and frame **304** may be moving. Fixed frame **302** includes an elongated ferromagnetic core **306** surrounded at least partially by a coil **308**, and two arms **310a** and **310b**. Arms **310a** and **310b** face each other across a large air gap **d₁**. Moving frame **306** has a hollow rectangular (ring) shape, with two base members **312a** and **312b** and two arms **314a** and **314b**. The ring has an internal opening **316** that may, in some embodiments, be scaled such that it accommodates the optical element inside it. In other embodiments, the optical element may be connected to a planar side of the ring. In this case the ring may be closed. Arms **314a** and **314b** are nested inside frame **302** in the X-Z plane. Pairs of arms **314a** and **310a** and **314b** and **310b** are substantially parallel and separated along a length dimension by a small air gap **d₂**. Each arm has an operative surface bordering the small air gap. More details may be found in PCT patent application PCT/IB2014/062836.

In operation, current passing through coil **308** induces a magnetic field through the magnetic circuit. Large gap **d₁** is bridged by moving frame **304** and through the small air gaps. The action by the coil induced magnetic force on moving frame **304** is a "pull" action. The symmetry of the structures ensures that side forces (in the X-Z plane) are inherently cancelled out.

In FIG. 3, the actuators are arranged as an "opposite" pair and the actuation is dual-actuation ("method 2"). The "opposite" label indicates that a "pull" action of one actuator pulls the optical element in an opposite direction to that of the other. One actuator (exemplarily actuator **300a**) drives the pull force to pull the optical element in one direction (as shown, +X) using a strong (for example 1-10mA) low frequency signal (for example up to the mechanical resonance frequency with typical value of 100Hz). Position measurement is obtained by measuring inductance in the coil of the opposite actuator (in this case in actuator **300b**), which is referred to as "sensing coil". That is, actuation is performed using one coil while inductance is measured using the other coil. An opposite movement of the lens is achieved by using actuator **300b** to pull the optical element in the opposite direction (-X). In this case, the inductance is measured using the coil of actuator **300a** as sensing coil.

Note that the moving ferromagnetic members move in sync, being mechanically coupled to each other as well as to the optical element. The three positions shown are successive positions in the +X direction: in (a, a') the moving members are at the first position, in (b) they have moved along the +X axis to the second position and in (c) they have moved even further along the +X axis to the third position.

FIG. 4 shows another arrangement **400** of a pair of actuators numbered **400a** and **400b** used to sense a lateral motion of an optical element. FIG. 4(a) shows an isometric view while FIG. 4(a') shows a top view of the actuator pair in a first position. Second and third positions are shown in top views only in FIGS. 4(b) and 4(c). In contrast with the arrangement in FIG. 3, here the two actuators share a single moving ferromagnetic member **404**. Opposite actuators **400a** and **400b** have respective cores **406a** and **406b** surrounded at least partially by coils **408a** and **408b**. In operation, one actuator pulls the moving member **404** while inductance is measured in the coil of the opposite actuator, using the same moving member for causing a change in the inductance. As in FIG. 3, the three positions of moving ferromagnetic member **404** are increasing +X positions. Moving member **404** is mechanically coupled to an optical element, so its movement translates directly into a movement of the optical element.

Inductance measurement methods

1. Current charging time

There are several known methods for measuring inductance in magnetic reluctance actuators. One such method measures current charging time in a sensing coil. Assume that a coil of an actuator as in FIGS. 3 or 4 has typical values of inductance $L = 2mH$ and resistance, $R=20\Omega$. Exemplarily, the sensing coil may be charged using a voltage source that is part of a sensing circuit such as **104** or **110** with an external voltage V_{in} to obtain a first order response:

$$V_{in} = RI_L + L\dot{I}_L$$

where I_L is the current in the sensing coil and \dot{I}_L is the derivative of the current with respect to time. For an input $V_{in} = V_0u(t)$, where $u(t)$ is a Heaviside (unit) step function and V_0 is the step height in voltage, and with zero initial conditions $I_L(0) = 0$, the solution for $t > 0$ is

$$I_L = \left[1 - \exp\left(-\frac{t}{\tau}\right) \right] V_0$$

The rise time of the circuit is measured by measuring the current. The rise time is proportional to the inductance $\tau = \frac{L}{R}$. Once the inductance is known, it may be translated into position using inductance-position graphs such as the graph shown in FIG. 5 or 8. FIG. 5 shows simulation results for inductance vs. position (X), obtained using finite element method (FEM) software. The line interpolated between the simulated points.

2a. Maxwell Bridge with an inductor

Another method uses the circuit shown in FIG. 6A. AC current is inserted, and the voltage drop is measured as $V_{out} = V_{BD}$. A current divider provides

$$I_1 = \frac{Z_4 + R_3}{Z_1 + R_2 + Z_4 + R_3} I_{in}$$

$$I_4 = \frac{Z_1 + R_2}{Z_1 + R_2 + Z_4 + R_3} I_{in}$$

where “Z” stands for impedance $Z = R + j\omega L$. The Kirchhoff voltage law (KVL) provides:

$$V_{out} = I_1 R_2 - I_4 R_3 = \left(\frac{Z_4 + R_3}{Z_1 + R_2 + Z_4 + R_3} R_2 - \frac{Z_1 + R_2}{Z_1 + R_2 + Z_4 + R_3} R_3 \right) I_{in}$$

$$= \frac{Z_4 R_2 - Z_1 R_3}{Z_1 + R_2 + Z_4 + R_3} I_{in}$$

For $R = R_1 = R_2 = R_3 = R_4$, $L_{\star} = L_1 + \Delta L$, $R \gg \omega L$, $L \gg \Delta L$

$$V_{out} = \frac{j\omega \Delta L}{j\omega 2L_1 + j\omega \Delta L + 4R} R I_{in} \approx \frac{1}{4} j\omega \Delta L I_{in}$$

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hence the voltage read in the circuit is linearly proportional to the inductance.

2b. Maxwell Bridge with a capacitor

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Yet another method uses the circuit shown in FIG. 6B. AC current is inserted, and the voltage drop is measured as $V_{out} = V_{DB}$. Define:

$$Z_1 = R_1 + j\omega L_1, Z_3 = \left(\frac{1}{R_3} + j\omega C_3 \right)^{-1}$$

A current divider provides:

$$I_1 = \frac{Z_3 + R_4}{Z_1 + R_2 + Z_3 + R_4} I_{in}$$

$$I_4 = \frac{Z_1 + R_2}{Z_1 + R_2 + Z_3 + R_4} I_{in}$$

KVL provides:

$$V_{out} = I_1 Z_1 - I_4 R_4 = \left(\frac{Z_3 + R_4}{Z_1 + R_2 + Z_3 + R_4} Z_1 - \frac{Z_1 + R_2}{Z_1 + R_2 + Z_3 + R_4} R_4 \right) I_{in} = \frac{Z_1 Z_3 - R_2 R_4}{Z_1 + R_2 + Z_3 + R_4} I_{in}$$

For $R_1 = R_2 = R_3 = R_4 = R$:

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$$V_{out} = \frac{(R + j\omega L_1) \left(\frac{1}{R} + j\omega C_3 \right)^{-1} - R^2}{3R + j\omega L_1 + \left(\frac{1}{R} + j\omega C_3 \right)^{-1}} I_{in} = \frac{j\omega L_1 - j\omega C_3 R^2}{4 + \frac{j\omega L_1}{R} + 3j\omega C_3 R - \omega^2 L_1 C_3} I_{in}$$

Now assume $L_1 = L + \Delta L$ and $L \gg \Delta L$, where $L = C_3 R^2$:

$$V_{out} \approx \frac{j\omega \Delta L}{4 + 4 \frac{j\omega L}{R} - \frac{\omega^2 L^2}{R^2}} I_{in} \approx \frac{1}{4} j\omega \Delta L I_{in}$$

10 and again, the voltage in the output is linearly proportional to the inductance. Typical values: for $L = 2mH$, $R = 20\Omega$, the capacitance needed is $C = \frac{L}{R^2} = 5\mu F$. For $\omega = 1500 \frac{rad}{s}$, $\omega L = 3\Omega$, and $\frac{1}{\omega C} = 133\Omega$.

3. Measurement of coil impedance

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Yet another method for measuring the impedance $Z = R + \omega L$ of the sensing coil directly. For given sinusoidal current driving, one can measure the phase and amplitude of the output voltage. The driving frequency should be typically larger than $R/2\pi L$ to make the inductive part of the impedance dominant. With known I and V (as complex numbers), one can extract Z from $Z=V/I$.

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4. RLC circuit

In yet another measurement method, the sensing coil is connected to a capacitor to create a

RLC circuit. Measurement is performed around the resonance frequency, which should shift due to inductance change. Since the inductor and the resistor are in series, the capacitor may be connected in series or in parallel. The lumped input impedance for sinusoidal driving signal in each configuration is

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<i>RL parallel to C</i>	<i>Serial RLC</i>
$Z_{in} = \left(\frac{1}{R + j\omega L} + j\omega C \right)^{-1}$ $= \frac{j\omega L + R}{1 - \left(\frac{\omega}{\omega_0} \right)^2 + j\omega RC}$	$Z_{in} = R + j\omega L + \frac{1}{j\omega C}$ $= R \left(1 + j\omega_0 \frac{L}{R} \left(\frac{\omega}{\omega_0} - \frac{\omega_0}{\omega} \right) \right)$

where in both cases $\omega_0^2 = \frac{1}{LC}$. Assume that the RLC circuit has a current source, and the voltage drop is measured over the circuit. FIG. 7 shows in (a) simulation results for finding the electrical resonance frequency for parallel (solid line) and serial (dashed line) RLC circuits, and in (b) simulation results for voltage reading as function of inductance change for parallel (solid line) and serial (dashed line) RLC circuits. The voltage levels in the figures are the expected levels for a 10mA sinusoidal driving current. The voltage response is linear with the current. It can be seen that for low capacitance values (for example, in the figure C is on the order of 1uF and less) both graphs exhibit local extremum points: a maximum for the parallel RLC circuit and a minimum for the serial RLC circuit. These extrema appear near the resonance frequency, ω_0 . Near the extremum points, the change in output signal as a function of inductance change is maximal and is thus the desired working point.

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5. Coupled coil position measurement method

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The mutual inductance of two coils may be used to sense the position of a moving ferromagnetic member and an optical element attached thereto, using the subsystem described in FIG. 8 and any of the "coupled coil" actuator embodiments described below. The term "coupled coil" is defined below. Assume two coils A and B wound in the same magnetic circuit and having a constant respective number of windings N_A, N_B and resistances R_A, R_B , with exemplary values of $N_A = N_B = 200 - 1000$, $R_A = R_B = 5 - 20\Omega$. In addition the two coils are defined with L_A, L_B self-inductance, and M mutual inductance between the two coils. When the moving ferromagnetic

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part moves, the inductance value changes and is used to sense the position. In exemplary modules, the inductance values of the two inductors L_A, L_B are equal at start and change simultaneously in the range of $1 - 10mH$ during the actuation. The mutual inductance M changes in the range of $M = 0.1 - 5mH$. The two coils are connected in a circuit as shown in Figure 9. Coil A is connected to an AC current driver with angular frequency ω (typically 500-10000Hz), and coil B is connected in series with a load resistor R_L , which has a typical value of 100Ω or more.

The relation between the current in the coils and the voltage drop on them is given by:

$$\begin{pmatrix} V_{LA} \\ V_{LB} \end{pmatrix} = j\omega \begin{pmatrix} L_A & M \\ M & L_B \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} I_A \\ I_B \end{pmatrix} + \begin{pmatrix} R_A & 0 \\ 0 & R_B \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} I_A \\ I_B \end{pmatrix}$$

Since $I_A = I_{in}$ and $I_B = V_{LB}/R_L$

$$V_{LB} = j\omega M I_{in} + \frac{j\omega L_B}{R_L} V_{LB} + \frac{R_B}{R_L} V_{LB}$$

i.e.

$$V_{LB} = \frac{j\omega M}{1 - \frac{j\omega L_B + R_B}{R_L}} I_{in}$$

10 Since $R_L \gg R_B, \omega L_B$, we can approximate:

$$V_{LB} = j\omega M I_{in}$$

The output signal V_{LB} is defined as the voltage drop on coil B in the AC frequency and is proportional to the mutual inductance M of the two coils, which in turn depends on the position of the actuator, as explained below. Note that the output signal is also proportional to the input frequency ω , and hence the low frequency driving contribution of current drivers **904** and **910** (see FIG. 9, used for actuation) is practically cancelled out. Any addition of a low frequency current to the circuit will have little effect on the inductance measurement reading at the high frequency.

Coupled coil actuator embodiments

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FIG. 9 shows schematically in a block diagram another embodiment numbered **900** of a subsystem for actuating an optical element **920** in a digital camera and for sensing its position, as disclosed herein. Actuation and position sensing in subsystem **900** is essentially similar to that in subsystem **100**. That is, a single magnetic circuit (actuator) is used to actuate and sense the position of the optical element. However, subsystem **900** differs from subsystem **100** in that it has two distinct electrical circuits, each connected to one of two coils in the same magnetic circuit. This is referred to henceforth as a "coupled coil" configuration. Both coils are used for driving (actuation). In addition,

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a high frequency signal is sent to one of the coils, while the high frequency is measured in the other coil for position measurement using a "mutual" inductance change (see description of inductance measurement method 5 above). Single actuators having two ferromagnetic members with respective cores and coils in a single magnetic circuit are described exemplarily in FIGS. 1A, 1B, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7 8, and 9 of PCT patent application PCT/IB2014/062836. Exemplarily in FIG. 1 therein, the two coils are numbered **106** and **112**.

As shown in FIG. 9, subsystem **900** includes a first electrical circuit **902** with a first high current (for example 10-100mA) low frequency (for example typically 0-100Hz) current driver **904** and a low current (1-10mA) high frequency (for example 10 times or more of the mechanical resonance frequency with typical value of 100Hz) current driver **906**, and a second electrical circuit **908** with a second high current (for example 10-100mA) low frequency (for example typically 0-100Hz) current driver **910** and an inductance-based position sensing circuit **912**. First electrical circuit **902** is electrically connected to a first actuator coil **914** (also marked **A**). Second electrical circuit **908** is electrically connected to a second actuator coil **916** (also marked **B**). Both actuator coils **914** and **916** create a magnetic field in space, which actuates one or two moving ferromagnetic member(s) **918**. Each moving ferromagnetic member is mechanically coupled to optical element **920**. Subsystem **900** further includes a microcontroller **922** (which may be implemented in full or in part in a microcontroller of the camera) for controlling the actuation of the actuator, the electrical circuits and the associated current drivers and position measurement.

In use, as in subsystem **100**, a strong (for example 10-100mA) low frequency driving signal (for example up to the mechanical resonance frequency with typical value of 100Hz) is used for actuation. Microcontroller **922** sends a current command to both high current low frequency current driver **904** and to high current low frequency current driver **910** simultaneously, in such way that the currents output of both DC current drivers is equal and it is driven to coils **914** and **916** simultaneously. As mentioned above, in addition to the strong and low frequency driving signal, a weak (for example 1-10mA) high frequency position sensing signal (for example 10 times or more of the mechanical resonance frequency with typical value of 100Hz) is used for the position sensing. The high frequency position sensing signal is injected only into first coil **914** from current driver **906** and is mixed with current sourced from current driver **910**. Position sensing circuit **912** is used to measure the amplitude of the induced high frequency signal in second coil **916**, and thus the mutual inductance ("M") of the two coils **914** and **916** (see inductance measurement method 5 below).

FIG. 10A shows another embodiment of an actuator with a single stationary ferromagnetic member having two coils and numbered **1000**, in which a coupled coil position sensing method can be applied. Actuator **1000** is shown in a top (or bottom) view in the Z direction and includes a single

stationary ferromagnetic member **1002**. Member **1002** may have a partially closed rectangular or circular shape, having exemplarily a single opening with a large air gap d_1 between two edges **1004** and **1006** of, respectively, arm end members **1008** and **1010**. Two coils **1012** and **1014** are wound on stationary ferromagnetic member **1002** such that each coil may cover for example one section
5 ("arm") of the member (as shown, sections **1016** and **1018**). Actuator **1000** further includes a moving ferromagnetic member **1020** that overlaps parts of, and is separated from sections of arm end members **1008** and **1010** by a small air gap d_2 . During actuation, a magnetic circuit is formed by the stationary and moving ferromagnetic members, bridging the small air gaps. The actuation results in a movement of the moving ferromagnetic member (and optical element attached thereto) in the Z
10 direction, i.e. substantially perpendicular to the X-Y plane. In the embodiment shown in FIG. 10A, the coils are arranged on opposite arms of the stationary ferromagnetic member, the coils being "parallel and opposite" to each other.

FIG. 10B shows yet another embodiment of an actuator numbered **1030**, in which a coupled coil position sensing method disclosed herein can be applied. Actuator **1030** is similar to actuator
15 **1000** in that includes a single stationary ferromagnetic member **1032**. Stationary member **1032** may have a partially closed rectangular or circular shape, having exemplarily a single opening with a large air gap d_1 between two edges **1034** and **1036** of, respectively, arm end members **1038** and **1040**. However, unlike in actuator **1000**, two coils **1042** and **1044** are wound on stationary ferromagnetic member **1032** such that each coil is wound around a section (core) **1046** and aligned
20 along a common long symmetry axis **1048**. Thus, instead of being "parallel and opposite" as in actuator **1000**, here the two coils are "parallel and coaxial". Actuator **1000** further includes a moving ferromagnetic member **1050** that overlaps parts of, and is separated from sections of arm end members **1038** and **1040** by a small air gap d_2 . During actuation, a magnetic circuit is formed by the stationary and moving ferromagnetic members, bridging the small air gaps. The actuation results in a
25 movement of the moving ferromagnetic member (and optical element attached thereto) in the Z direction, i.e. substantially perpendicular to the X-Y plane.

FIG. 10C shows yet another embodiment of an actuator numbered **1060**, in which a coupled coil position sensing method disclosed herein can be applied. Similar to actuators **1000** and **1030**, actuator **1060** includes a single stationary ferromagnetic member **1062**, which, however, has a
30 partially closed rectangular shape and includes two elongated ferromagnetic cores **1064** and **1066** that form a 90 degree angle at one end of each core. Each core has at another end an L-shaped section with a respective end member (respectively **1068** and **1070**). End members **1068** and **1070** are separated at respective edges **1072** and **1074** by a large air gap d_1 . Two coils **1076** and **1078** are wound on, respectively, cores **1064** and **1066**. Actuator **1060** further includes a moving

ferromagnetic member **1080** that overlaps parts of, and is separated from end members **1068** and **1070** by a small air gap **d₂**. During actuation, a magnetic circuit is formed by the stationary and moving ferromagnetic members, bridging the small air gaps. The actuation results in a movement of the moving ferromagnetic member (and optical element attached thereto) in the Z direction, i.e. substantially perpendicular to the X-Y plane.

While FIGS. 10A-C show actuator embodiments show stationary ferromagnetic members having general rectangular shapes and straight moving ferromagnetic members, other "coupled coil" actuator may be possible. For example, the stationary ferromagnetic member may have (as mentioned) a round shape and the moving ferromagnetic member may have a rounded shape so as to keep a constant small gap from sections of the stationary member. In actuators with rounded members, the two coils will be positioned on the same radius of curvature of the stationary ferromagnetic members.

Inductance to position translation

The relation between inductance and position can be found by looking at the relation:

$$L = N^2 / (\mathcal{R}_{Metal} + \mathcal{R}_{Air})$$

where L is the coil inductance, N is the number of coil windings, \mathcal{R}_{Metal} is the magnetic reluctance of the metal and \mathcal{R}_{Air} is the magnetic reluctance of the air. \mathcal{R}_{Air} depends on the geometry of the air gap. The reluctance decreases and the inductance increases as the air gap decreases. The exact relation between \mathcal{R}_{Air} and the moving ferromagnetic member position depends on the geometry and cannot be calculated analytically in the general case. FIG. 11 shows experimental results of position vs. voltage readings using the subsystem of FIG. 2A and a Maxwell bridge with inductor measurement. Similar experimental results may be obtained for any of the other inductance based position measurement methods described above.

While this disclosure has been described in terms of certain embodiments and generally associated methods, alterations and permutations of the embodiments and methods will be apparent to those skilled in the art. The disclosure is to be understood as not limited by the specific embodiments described herein, but only by the scope of the appended claims.

All patents, patent applications and publications mentioned in this specification are herein incorporated in their entirety by reference into the specification, to the same extent as if each individual patent, patent application or publication was specifically and individually indicated to be

incorporated herein by reference. In addition, citation or identification of any reference in this application shall not be construed as an admission that such reference is available as prior art to the present application.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method for sensing the position of an optical element in a digital camera comprising the steps of:
 - a) providing a first electro-magnetic (EM) actuator that includes a first stationary ferromagnetic member having a first ferromagnetic core surrounded at least partially by a first coil, the first stationary member being part of a first magnetic circuit that includes a first large air gap;
 - b) actuating the first EM actuator to move the optical element in a first direction, wherein the actuation causes a moving ferromagnetic member coupled mechanically to the optical element to bypass or bridge the first large air gap through at least one air gap smaller than the first large air gap;
 - c) measuring an inductance value; and
 - d) correlating the measured inductance related value with a position of the optical element.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of actuating includes supplying a strong low frequency signal to the first coil and wherein the step of measuring an inductance value includes measuring an inductance using a response to a weak high frequency signal or using a response to a current pulse supplied to the first coil.
3. The method of claim 1, wherein the first ferromagnetic core is further surrounded at least partially by a second coil and wherein the step of measuring an inductance value includes measuring an inductance using a response to a weak high frequency signal or using a response to a current pulse supplied to both coils.
4. The method of claim 1, wherein the first actuator further includes a second ferromagnetic core surrounded at least partially by a second coil, the second ferromagnetic member being part of the first magnetic circuit that includes the first large air gap, and wherein the step of measuring an inductance value includes measuring an inductance using a response to a weak high frequency signal or using a response to a current pulse supplied to both coils.
5. The method of claim 1, wherein the first ferromagnetic core is further surrounded at least partially by a second coil, wherein the inductance value is a mutual inductance value, wherein the step

of actuating includes supplying a respective strong low frequency signal to each coil, and wherein the step of measuring an inductance value includes supplying a weak high frequency signal or a current pulse to one coil and measuring a response to the weak high frequency signal or to the current pulse in the other coil.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein the first actuator further includes a second ferromagnetic core surrounded at least partially by a second coil, wherein the inductance value is a mutual inductance value, wherein the step of actuating includes supplying a respective strong low frequency signal to each coil, and wherein the step of measuring an inductance value includes supplying a weak high frequency signal or a current pulse to one coil and measuring a response to the weak high frequency signal or to the current pulse in the other coil.

7. The method of claim 1, further comprising the steps of:

e) providing a second EM actuator having a second stationary ferromagnetic member with a respective second ferromagnetic core surrounded at least partially by a second coil, the second stationary member being part of a second magnetic circuit that includes a second large air gap, wherein the second EM actuator is configured to move the optical element in a second direction opposite to the first direction, wherein the step of actuating the first EM actuator includes actuating only one of the two actuators and wherein the step of measuring an inductance value includes measuring the inductance value using the other actuator.

8. Apparatus for sensing the position of an optical element in a digital camera comprising:

a) a first electro-magnetic (EM) actuator that includes a first stationary ferromagnetic member with a first ferromagnetic core surrounded at least partially by a first coil, the first stationary member being part of a first magnetic circuit that includes a first large air gap, the first EM actuator configured to move the optical element in a first direction when actuated, the actuation causing a first moving ferromagnetic member mechanically coupled to the optical element to by-pass or bridge the first large air gap through at least one smaller air gap; and

b) an inductance-based position sensing module configured to drive the actuation and to measure an inductance value correlated with a given position of the optical element.

9. The apparatus of claim 8, wherein the inductance-based position sensing module includes:
- i. a driving circuit with a current driver operative to provide a low frequency high current signal and a signal selected from the group consisting of a high frequency low current signal and a pulse current signal, and
 - ii. an inductance-based position sensing circuit operative to measure the inductance value.
10. The apparatus of claim 9, wherein the first ferromagnetic core is further surrounded at least partially by a second coil and wherein the driving circuit and the inductance-based position sensing circuit are coupled electrically to both coils.
11. The apparatus of claim 10, wherein the inductance value is a mutual inductance value, wherein the driving circuit is configured to provide the low frequency high current signal to both coils and to provide the high frequency low current signal or the pulse current signal to one coil, and wherein the inductance-based position sensing circuit is configured to measure the mutual inductance value based on a response to the high frequency low current signal or the pulse current signal obtained in the other coil.
12. The apparatus of claim 9, wherein the first actuator further includes a second elongated ferromagnetic core surrounded at least partially by a second coil, the second ferromagnetic member being part of the first magnetic circuit that includes the first large air gap, and wherein the driving circuit and the inductance-based position sensing circuit are coupled electrically to both coils.
13. The apparatus of claim 12, wherein the driving circuit is configured to provide to both coils the low frequency high current signal and either the high frequency low current signal or the pulse current signal.
14. The apparatus of claim 12, wherein the inductance value is a mutual inductance value, wherein the driving circuit is configured to provide the low frequency high current signal to both coils and to provide the high frequency low current signal or the pulse current signal to one coil, and wherein the inductance-based position sensing circuit is configured to measure the mutual inductance value based on a response to either the high frequency low current signal or to the pulse current signal, the response obtained in the other coil.

15. The apparatus of claim 8, further comprising a second EM actuator having a second stationary ferromagnetic member with a ferromagnetic core surrounded at least partially by a second coil, the second stationary member being part of a second magnetic circuit that includes a second large air gap, wherein the second EM actuator is configured to move the optical element in a second direction opposite to the first direction, wherein the inductance-based position sensing module is further configured to drive the actuation of one actuator and to measure the inductance value correlated with a given position of the optical element in the other actuator.

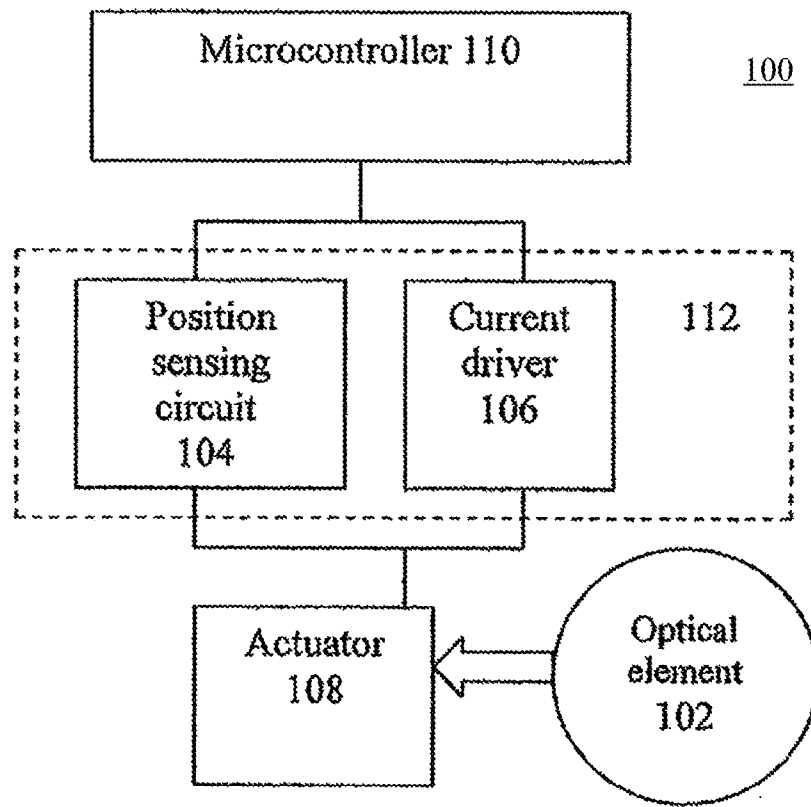
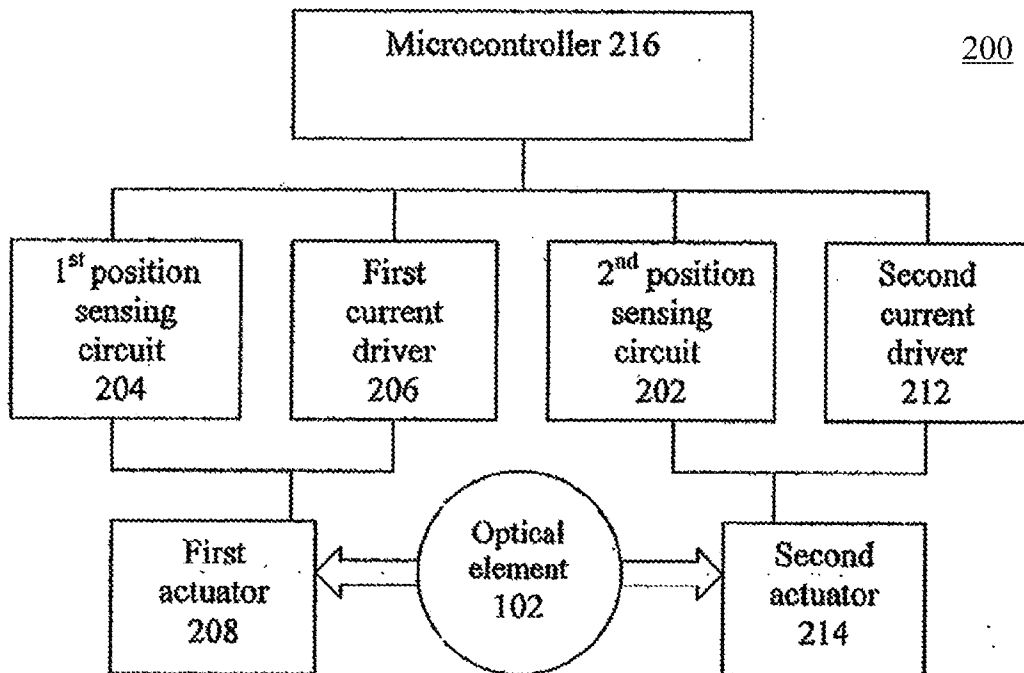


FIG. 1

FIG. 2A



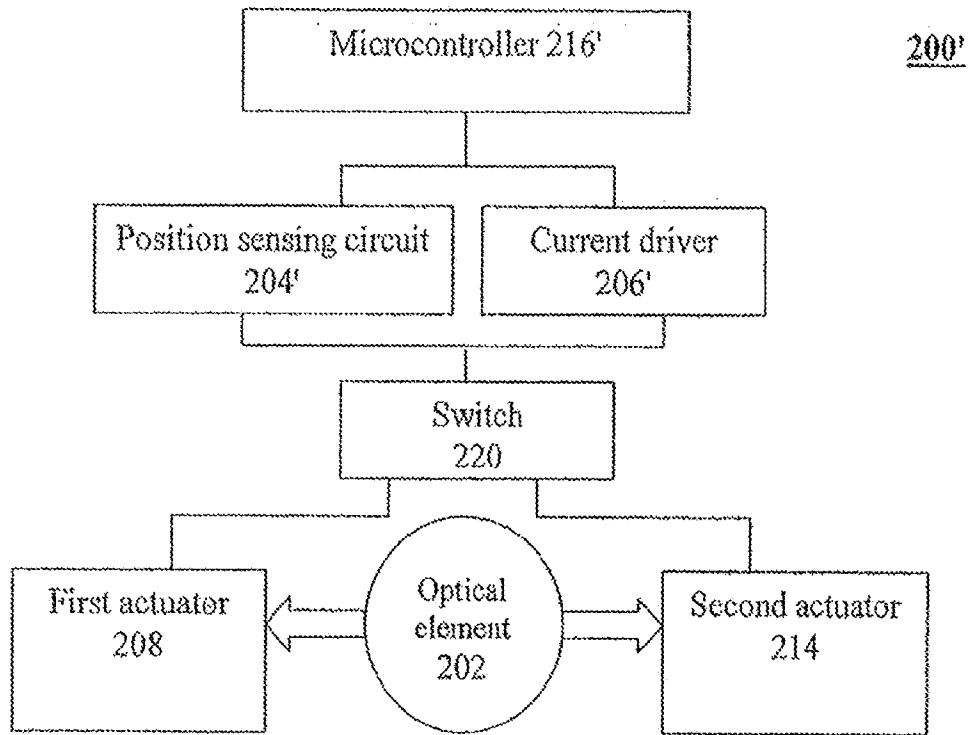


FIG. 2B

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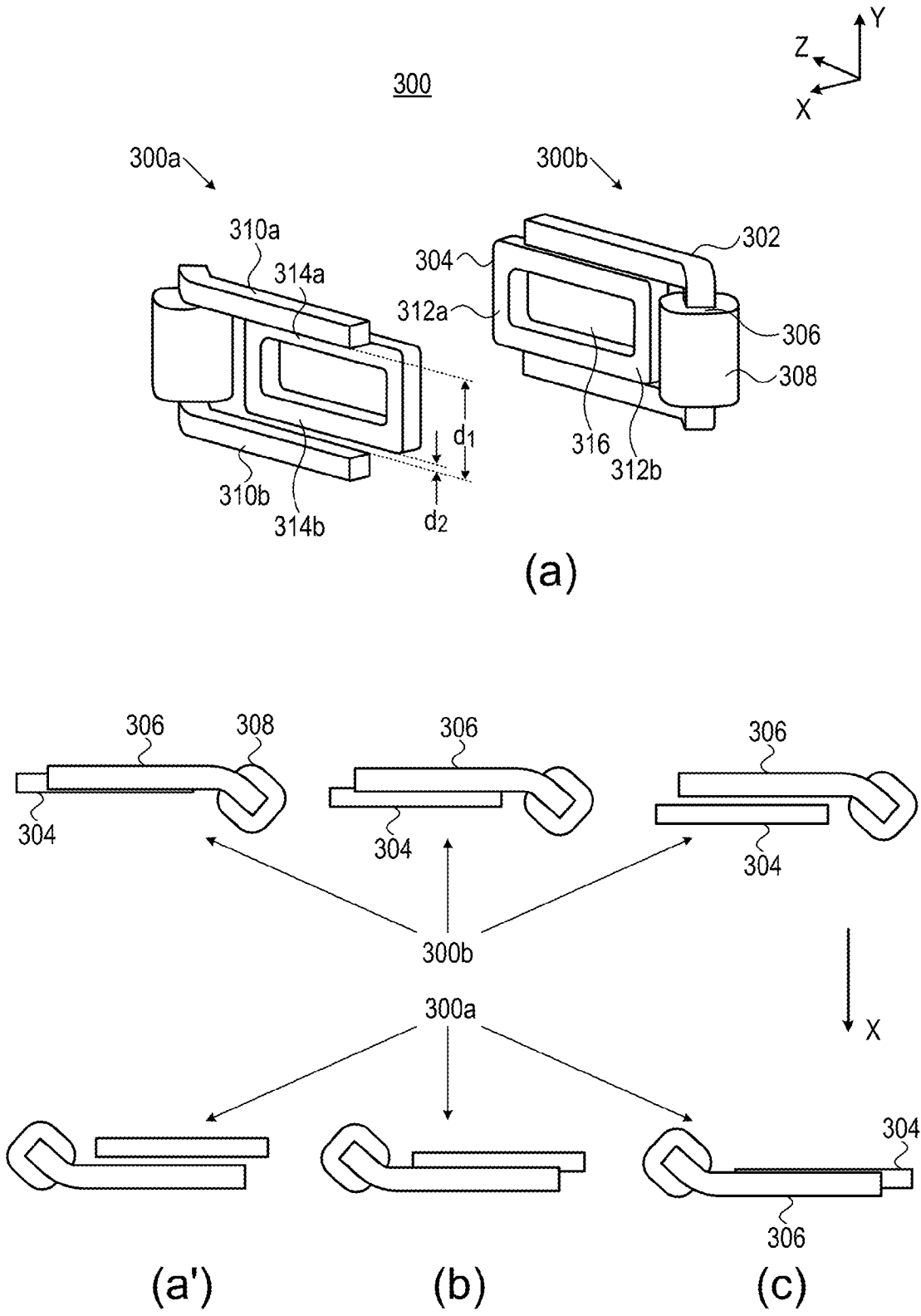


FIG. 3

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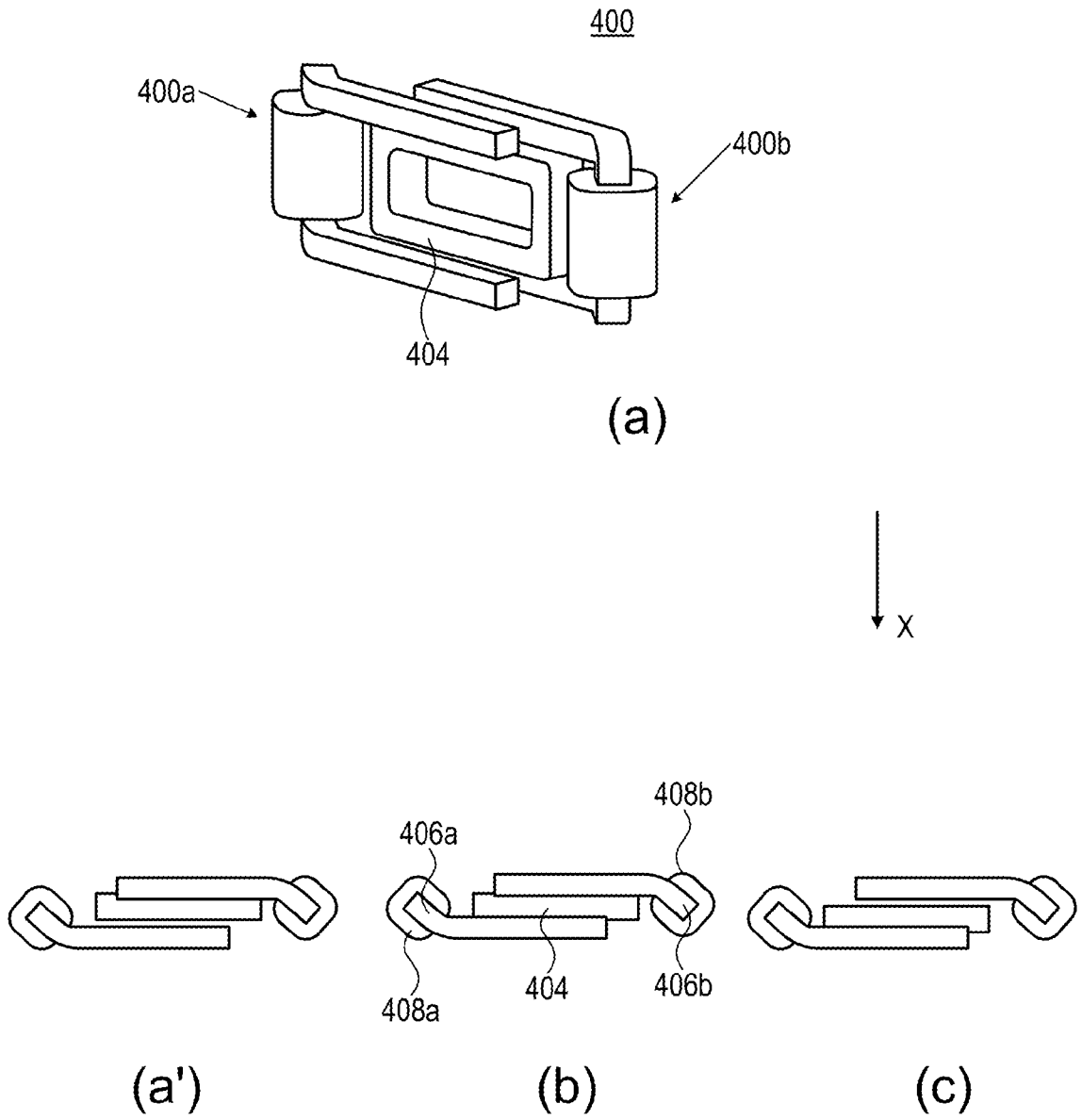


FIG. 4

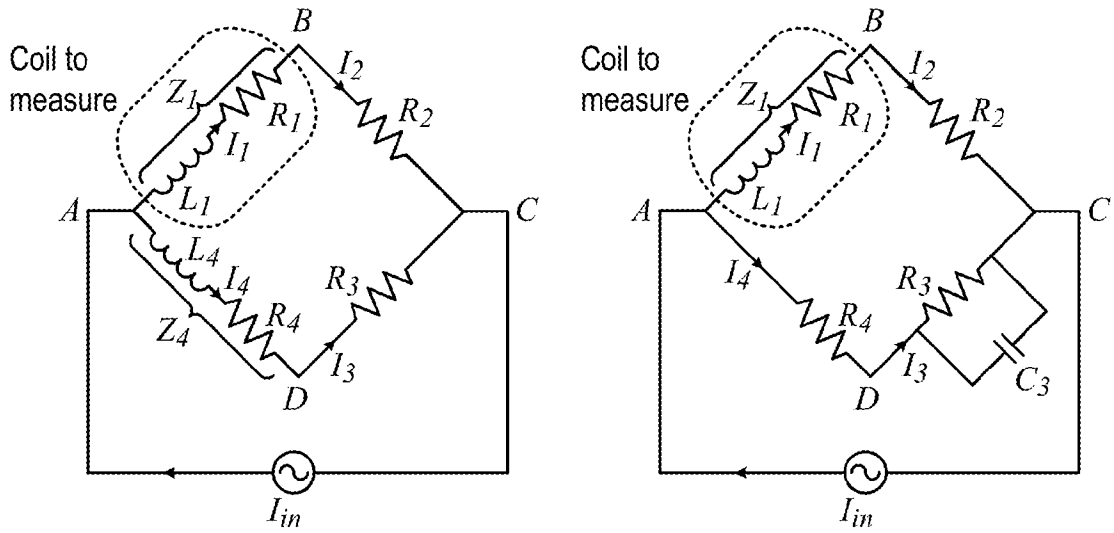


FIG. 5

Inductance [mH]

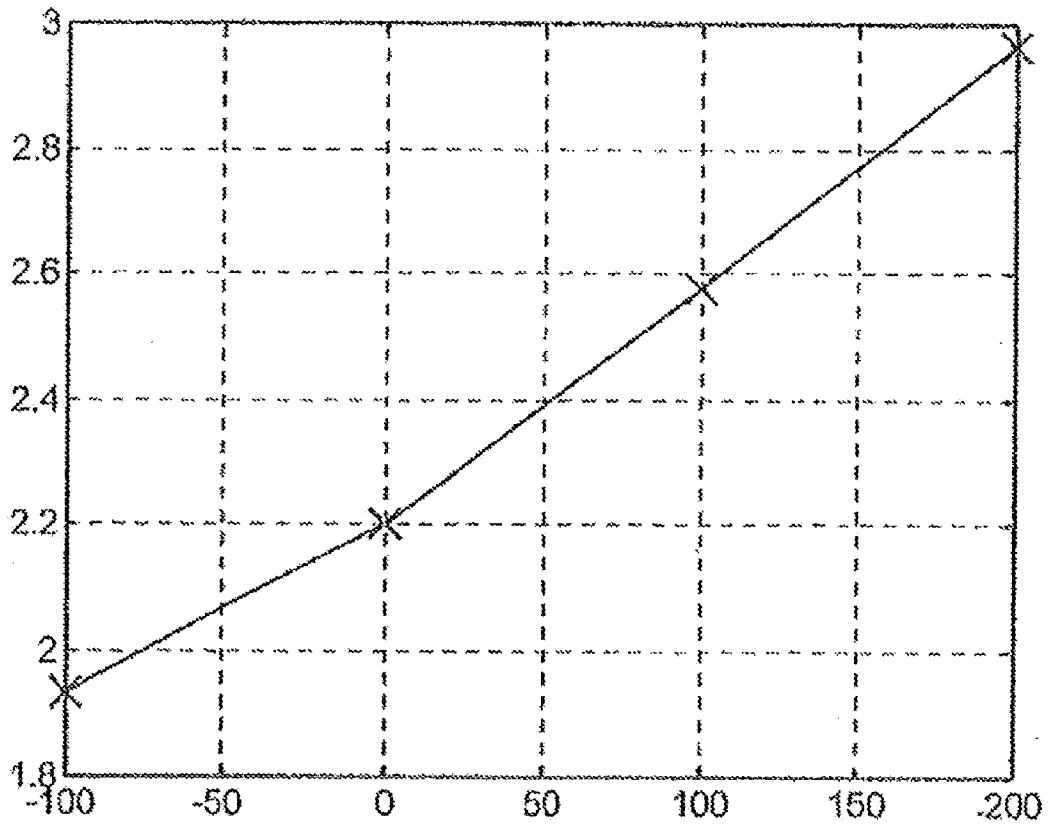


FIG. 6

Position [μm]

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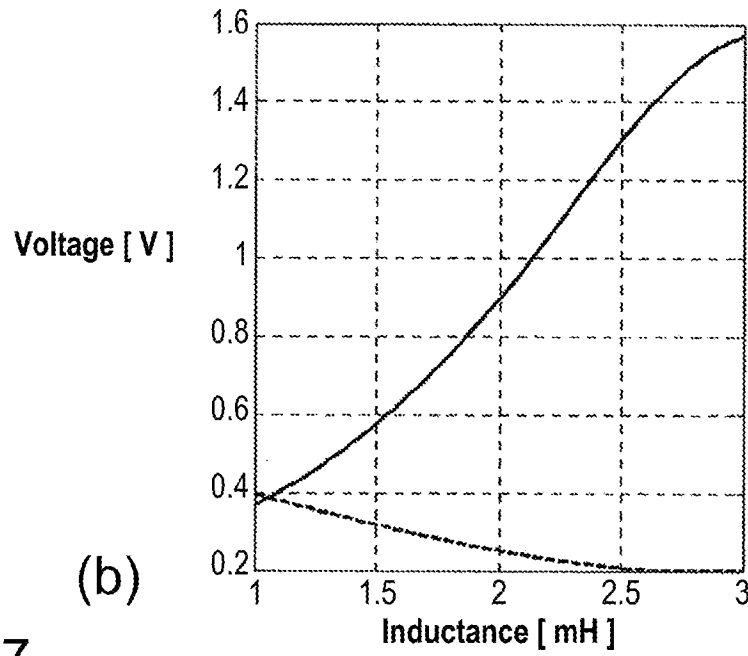
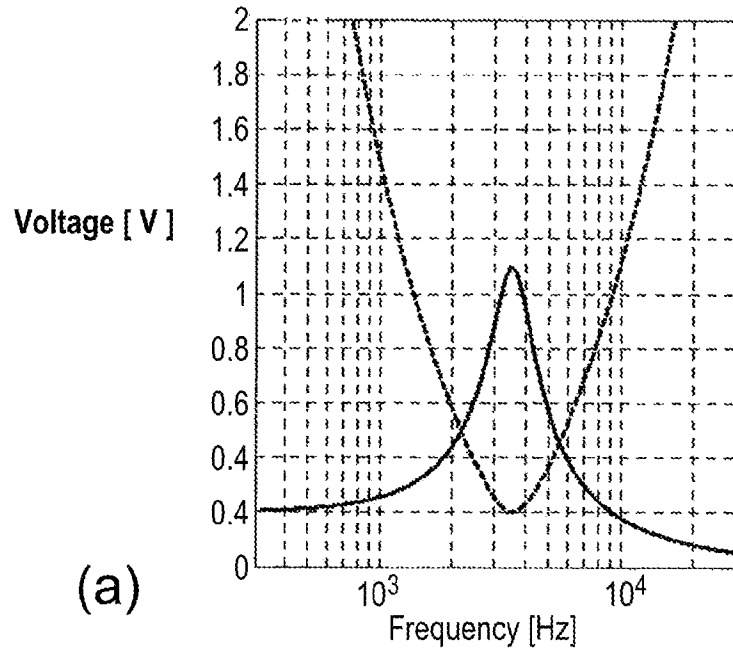


FIG. 7

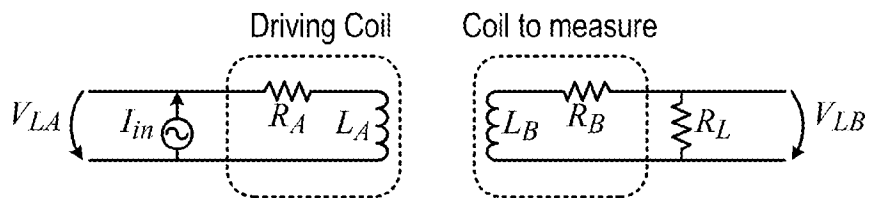


FIG. 8

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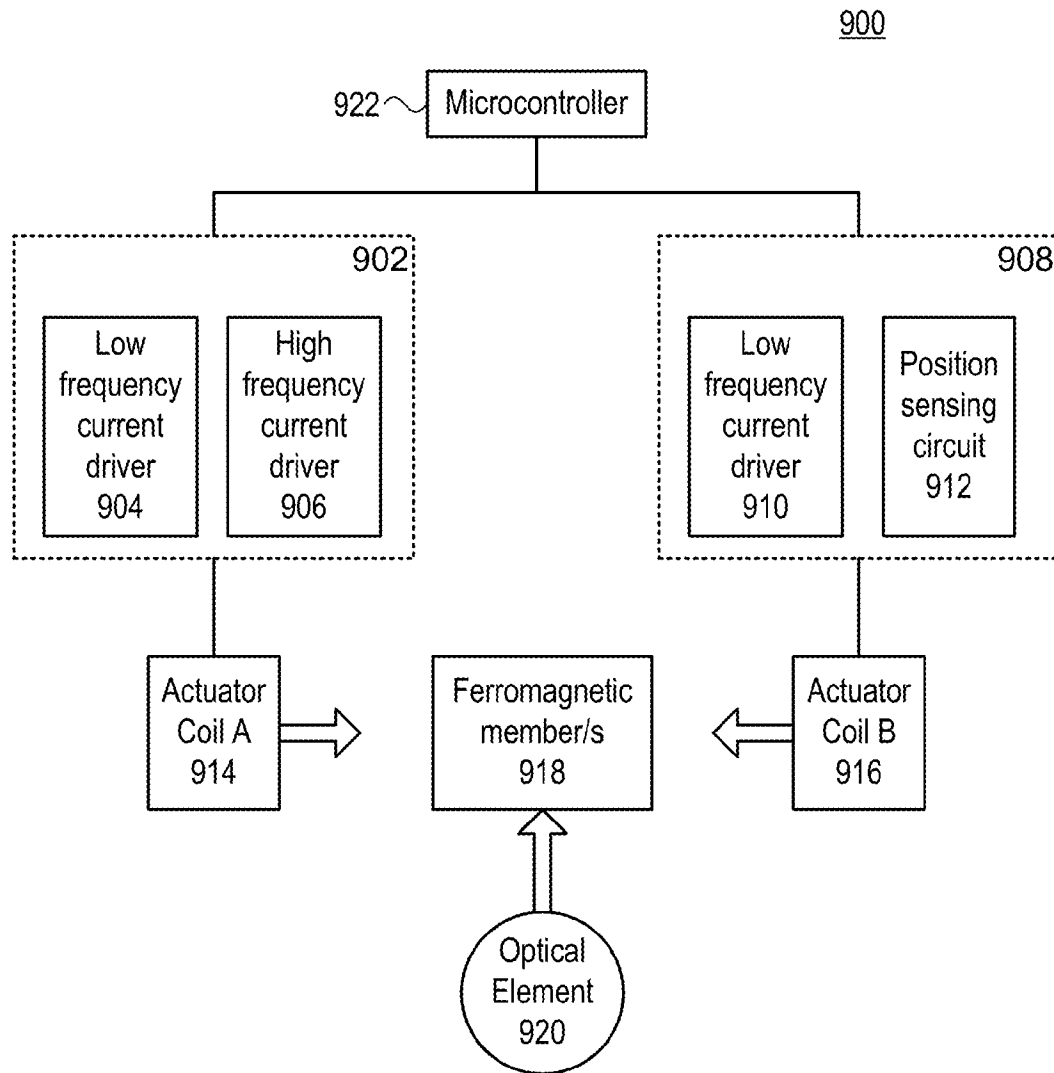


FIG. 9

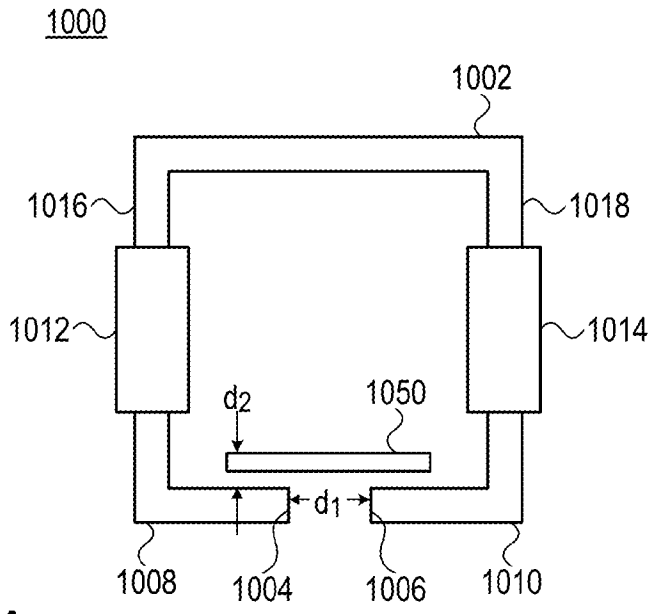
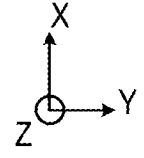


FIG. 10A

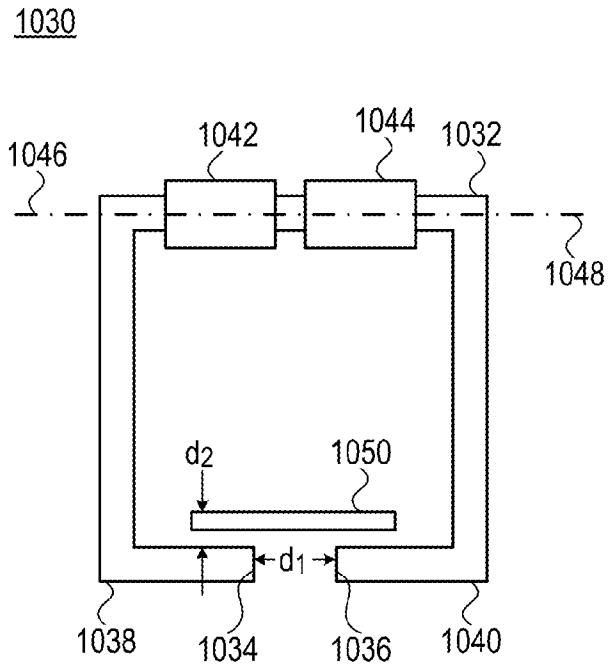


FIG. 10B

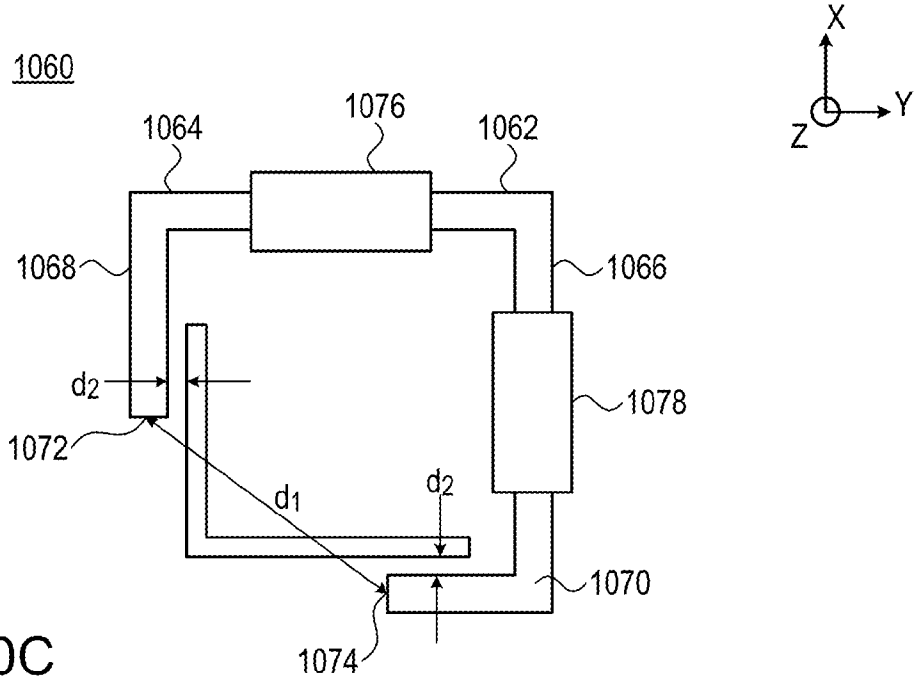


FIG. 10C

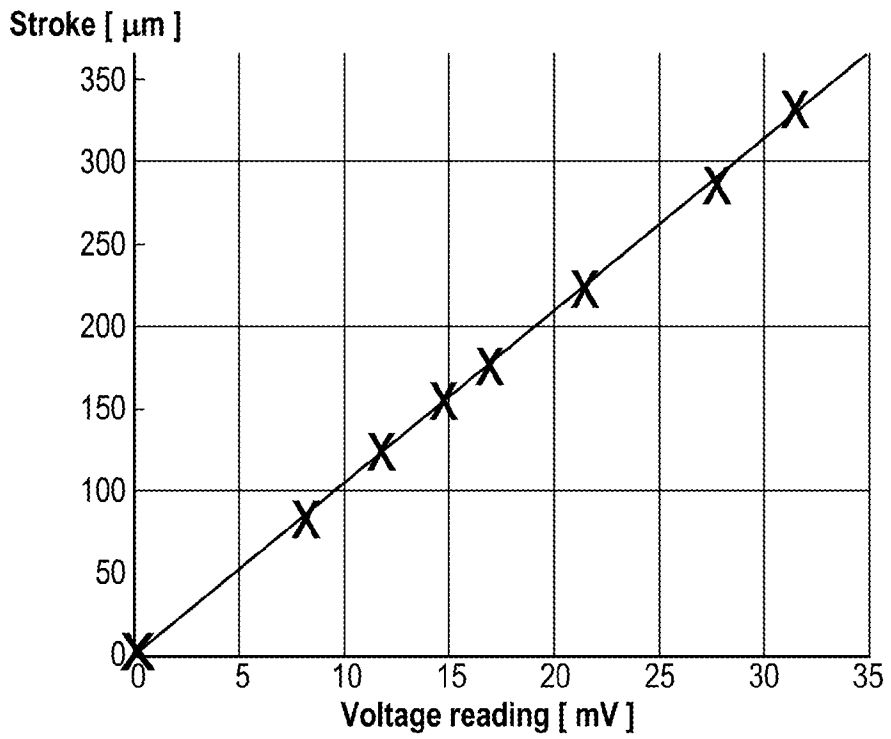


FIG. 11