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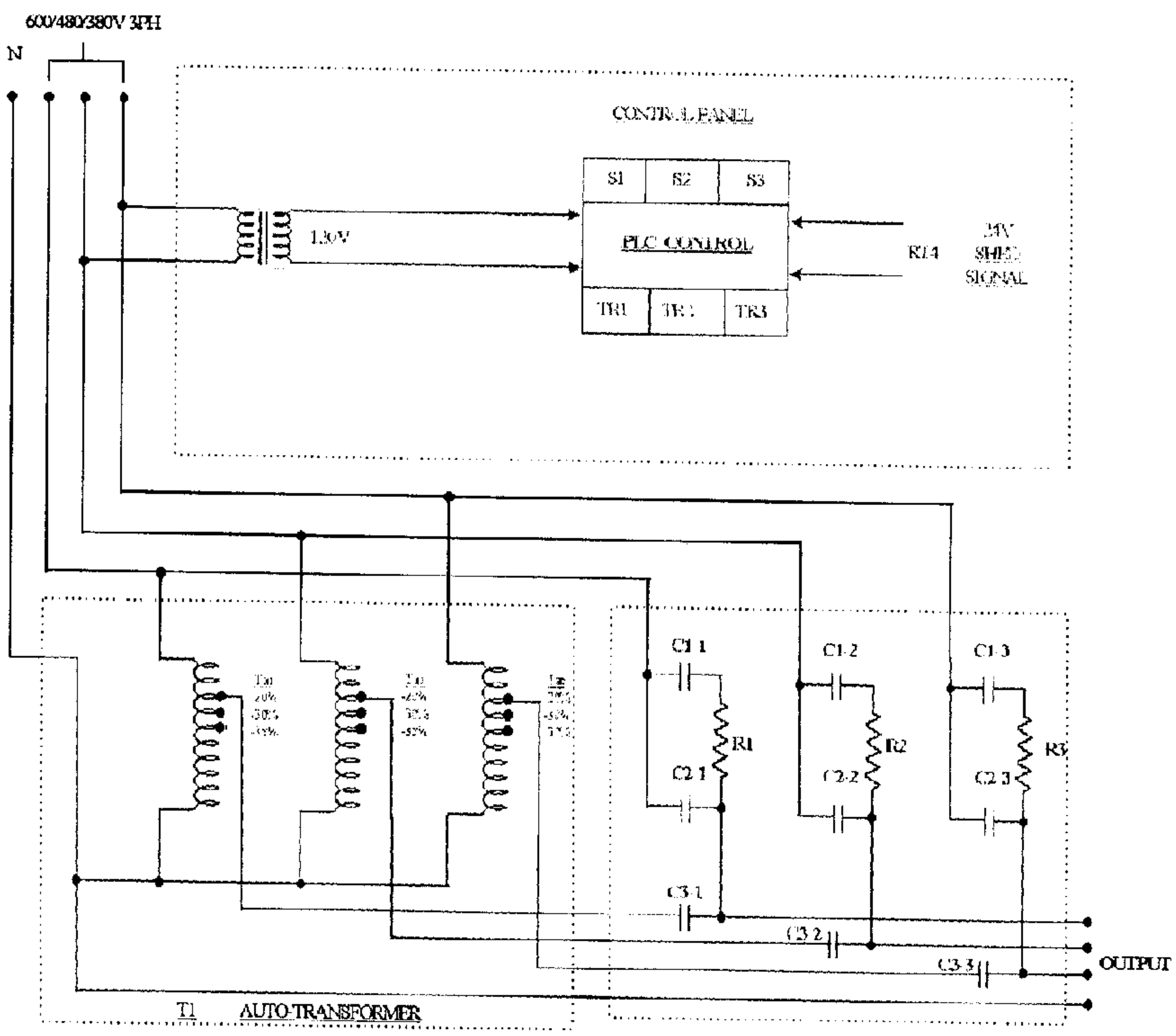


(57) Abrégé/Abstract:
A circuit and method for switching an output terminal from a first voltage level to a second voltage level through a buffered transition includes two voltage sources, a resistor and first switch connected in series and electrically coupled between the first voltage source and the output terminal for providing a suitable resistance for buffering a transition from a first voltage level to a second voltage level. A second switch is electrically coupled between the first voltage and the output terminal. A third switch is electrically coupled between the second voltage source and the output terminal. A programmable logic controller (PLC) controls the three switches in a predetermined sequence to allow switching a voltage source from the first source to the second source through a buffered transition provided by the resistor.

Abstract of the Disclosure

A circuit and method for switching an output terminal from a first voltage level to a second voltage level through a buffered transition includes two voltage sources, a resistor and first switch connected in series and electrically coupled between the first voltage source and the output terminal for providing a suitable resistance for buffering a transition from a first voltage level to a second voltage level. A second switch is electrically coupled between the first voltage and the output terminal. A third switch is electrically coupled between the second voltage source and the output terminal. A programmable logic controller (PLC) controls the three switches in a predetermined sequence to allow switching a voltage source from the first source to the second source through a buffered transition provided by the resistor.

Bi-Level Control System

Field of the Invention

This invention relates to a bi-level control system for operating high intensity discharge (HID) lamps at a first light output level and a second reduced light output level and more particularly, to providing an inexpensive efficient circuit and method for regulating power supplied to these lamps or other non-interruptible or similar type loads.

Background of the Invention

Lighting Controllers are important tools available in energy management. Through programmed time schedule and automatic variable dimming, significant energy savings can be achieved. Correctly designed and implemented, lighting controllers can achieve, in some instances, average savings of 10-15%. Lighting controllers are designed to provide high voltage supply to lighting panels under certain conditions and to provide low voltage supply to lighting panels under other conditions.

Complex, bulky, relatively expensive systems for controlling high intensity discharge (HID) lamps are known. For example, Falk in United States Patent number 5,221,877 teaches a system wherein two switches are actuated substantially simultaneously in each half-cycle of the A.C. power input, once for power reduction for a time interval T1-T2 and once for harmonic distortion reduction for a time T3-T4 that encompasses each A.C. power zero-crossing time TX. Another system is described in United States Patent number 5,327,048 in the name of Troy wherein a plurality of slave units are provided, each slave unit comprising a switched capacitor and a slave relay. Although these systems may perform their intended purpose, they are complex and relatively expensive to manufacture.

In accordance with this invention, a simple, relatively compact, light weight, inexpensive control system is provided for controlling HID lamps and other loads, wherein bi-level switching for dimming is required. The system comprises: a first voltage source for providing a first voltage level; a second voltage source for providing a second voltage level; resistive means and first switching means in series and electrically coupled between the first voltage source and the output terminal for providing a suitable resistance for buffering a transition from the first voltage level to the second voltage level; a second switching means electrically between the first voltage and the output terminal; a third switching means electrically between the second voltage source and the output terminal; control means for controlling the three switches in a predetermined sequence to allow switching a voltage source from the first source to the second source through a buffered transition provided by the resistive means.

In accordance with yet another aspect of the invention a method for switching an output terminal from a first voltage level to a second level through a buffered transition is provided, comprising the steps of:

a) providing a first voltage source for providing a first voltage level;

b) providing a second voltage source for providing a second voltage level;

c) electrically coupling the first voltage source to the output terminal to provide the first voltage level at the output terminal;

d) after a suitable duration for warming up a load, buffering a transition from the first voltage level to the second voltage level by switching resistive means into the circuit between the first voltage source and the output terminal, and allowing current to pass through the resistive means for a predetermined interval of time while decoupling the first voltage source from being directly coupled to the output terminal; and,

e) switching to electrically couple the second voltage source to the output terminal to provide the second voltage level at the output terminal.

Brief Description of the Drawings

Exemplary embodiments of the invention will now be described in accordance with the invention, in which:

Fig. 1 is a block circuit diagram of a bi-level lighting controller for a lamp operable at two voltage levels;

Fig. 2a is an alternative embodiment of a block circuit diagram of a bi-level lighting controller;

Fig. 2b is an alternative embodiment of a block circuit diagram of a bi-level lighting controller; and,

Fig. 3 is a block circuit diagram of an alternative embodiment of a bi-level lighting controller for HID lamps wherein three power-up input voltages are supplied.

Detailed Description of the Invention

Referring now to Fig.1, a circuit is shown comprising a voltage source **Vh** coupled to provide 600 volts to an input end of an auto-transformer **20**. The auto-transformer provides relatively efficient transformation from a higher voltage level to a lower one, and sustains a near perfect sine wave, thereby not inducing unwanted harmonics into the power system. An output of the auto-transformer **20** provides a second voltage level, for example, 80% of the 600 volts, to a switch **22** connected thereto. The switch in its closed position electrically couples the output of the auto-transformer **20** to an output terminal of the device **60** and allows current to flow therethrough. In its opened position, the switch **22** does not electrically couple the output of the auto-transformer to an output terminal of the device **60**

Two parallel circuits, **40** and **50,** have ends connected to the voltage source **10** and other ends electrically coupled with the output terminal **60**. The first circuit **40** has a controllable switch **42** intermediate its end for allowing or preventing current to flow therethrough dependent upon whether the switch is closed or open. The second circuit **50,** comprises a controllable switch **52** in series with a resistor **54.** Control means in the form of a programmable logic controller (PLC) **23** suitably programmed with timing information to open and close the switches **22, 42,** and **52** is coupled with a timing circuit **24** having an internal clock which determines when for example to dim, or to turn on or off a lighting load. This timing circuit automatically provides timing signals to the PLC at predetermined timed intervals. . Thus, this circuit functions to provide a relatively smooth voltage transition for controlling lighting or other loads. In an alternative embodiment, the timing circuit **24,** may be substituted with a remote energy management system comprising a circuit for receiving control commands to be provided to the PLC from a remote source, so that control of a lighting load can be remotely initiated. Alternatively, the internal clock of the timing circuit **24** may be bypassed and manual override of the timing circuit **24** may be initiated.

In order to power-up the lamps (not shown), switch **42** is closed, while switches **52** and **22** are open, thereby bypassing the auto-transformer **20**; Vh (600 volts) is present at the output terminal **60**. In this mode, after approximately 25 minutes lamps connected to the output terminal **60** are warmed-up. Once the initial warm-up is completed, the lamps are dimmed when desirable in the following manner. A low light command is issued by the timer **24** and the system executes transition from high to low voltage; the following sequence is executed: after the switch **52** closes the switch **42** opens; the switch **22** closes, and after about 300 ms the switch **52** opens. At this point, the auto-transformer **20** feeds the lighting load at a reduced voltage. A similar concept is applied in the transition from low to high voltage but in reverse order. Switch **52** closes, then switch **22** opens; switch **42** is then closed and switch **52** opens. Once again the full voltage is applied to the lighting load, wherein the closing of the switch **42** effects bypassing the transformer. Each step from high to low and low to high are controlled precisely by the PLC. The timing sequence of instructions executed by the PLC **23** is used to protect the resistor **54** from extensive heat and potential damage, preventing switch **52** from staying on longer then 2 seconds. The value of the resistor **54** is selected in such a manner as to cushion the transition from high to low or low to high voltage. In an exemplary embodiment a resistor value of between 1 and 2 ohms is selected. Functionally, the resistor protects the transformer and the contacts of the switches from an extensive inrush of current during the switch over. In addition, the resistor **54** plays an important role in limiting power to the lighting load before the reduced voltage supply from the transformer **20** is applied to the lighting load.

Turning now to Figs. 2a and 2b, alternative embodiments of the invention are shown wherein the switch **52** is disposed along either along the path between the voltage source Vh and the parallel circuits **40** and **50** or alternatively between the parallel circuits **40** and **50** and the output terminal **60**. In both of these embodiments upon power up of the device for a transition from high to low, switches **42** and **52** are closed and after the predetermined warm-up interval, switch **42** opens and the current passes through the resistor **54.** Similarly, to the aforementioned embodiment, switch **22** is subsequently closed, and after approximately 300 ms, switch **52** is opened. In the embodiments of Figs. 2a and 2b, the default state of the switches **42** and **52** may be such that the switches are closed and the switches are opened sequentially as described hereinabove as required to switch from high to low voltage.

Referring now to Fig. 3, an alternative embodiment of the invention is shown based on the embodiment shown in Fig. 1, wherein three input voltage levels 600, 480, and 380 volts are reduced through a buffered or cushioned transition to 80% of their voltage levels.

The circuit shown is generally controlled by a programmable logic controller (PLC) **22** and a timing circuit **24.** The basic circuit is essentially the same as that shown in Fig. 1, however three contactor circuits each comprising a resistor three contactors **C1**, **C2**, and **C3**, and an auto-transformer are provided to yield three output voltages. Alternatively, switching means in the form of contactors **C1, C2,** and **C3**, can be replaced with semiconductor switches such as TRIACs or semi-controller rectifiers.

In operation, the lighting system is initialized by the switch **S1** and shut off by the switch **S2**. At start-up (**TR2** on), a full three-phase voltage (600,480,380 or any another three phase nominal voltage), is applied via contactor **C2** to a lighting load. Contactor **C2** is comprised of three switches **C2-1**, **C2-2**, and **C2-3**. The auto-transformer circuit (**T1**) is by-passed during this mode. After approximately 25 minutes the lamps (not shown) are warmed-up. Once the initial warm-up is completed, the system is ready for dimming lights. Upon issuance of a low light command by the main timer, indicated by **TR3** being on, or manual switch **S3** being on, or energy management interface wherein **RT4** is on , the system executes a transition from high to low voltage. The sequence is as follows: **Cl (C1-1, C1-2, C1-3)** closes then **C2 (C2-1, C2-2, and C2-3)** opens then **C3 (C3-1, C3-2, C3-3)** closes and eventually **Cl** opens. At this point, the transformer **(TI)** feeds the lighting load at a reduced voltage from one of the sets of taps. Similarly, however in reverse order, in the transition from Low to High **TR3** is off and **S3** is off and **RT4** is off, **Cl** closes then **C3** opens then **C2** closes and last **Cl** opens. Once again the full voltage is applied to the lighting load and **C2** bypasses the transformer. Each step from High to Low or Low to High are controlled precisely by the PLC. **TR1** is used to protect the resistors **R1**, **R2** and **R3** from extensive heat and potential damage caused when **C1** stays on longer than, for example, 300 ms. The resistors **R1**, **R2** and **R3** are selected in such a way that they cushion the transition from high to low or low to high. The resistors protect the transformer and the contactor contacts from an extensive inrush of current during the switch over. In addition, the resistors play a crucial role in limiting power to the lighting load before the reduced voltage supply from the transformer is applied to the lighting load; selection of resistors is such that lighting functions are not impeded during a transition from high voltage to low voltage and such that power dissipation by the resistors is limited. It is preferred that no current flows through the resistors **R1, R2**, and **R3** for 2 minutes or more so thereby preventing the resistors from overheating. Thus, a duration of 2 minutes or greater should pass in a high or low state, prior to a transition to the other state.

Of course, numerous other embodiments may be envisaged without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention.

Claims

What is claimed is:

1. A circuit for switching an output terminal from a first voltage level to a second voltage level through a buffered transition, the circuit comprising:

a) a first voltage source for providing a first voltage level;

b) a second voltage source for providing a second voltage level;

c) resistive means and first switching means connected in series and electrically coupled between the first voltage source and the output terminal for providing a suitable resistance for buffering a transition from the first voltage level to the second voltage level or the second voltage level to the first voltage level;

d) a second switching means electrically between the first voltage and the output terminal;

e) a third switching means electrically between the second voltage source and the output terminal;

f) control means for controlling the three switches in a predetermined sequence to allow switching from the first source to the second source through a buffered transition provided by the resistive means.

2. A circuit as defined in claim 1, wherein the second voltage source is coupled with the first voltage source for receiving the first voltage level and for transforming it to the second voltage level.

3. A circuit as defined in claim 1, further comprising stored executable instructions for providing timing information to the control means, to effect the execution of the predetermined sequence..

4. A circuit as defined in claim 1, wherein the control means is for closing the first switching means prior to a transition between the first voltage source and the second voltage source and for opening the first switching means upon completion of the transition.

5. A circuit as defined in claim 4, further comprising timing means for providing timing information to the control means, said timing information corresponding to the switching on, switching off, and dimming of a load being or to be powered by the circuit..

6. A circuit as defined in claim 3 wherein the execution of the stored executable instructions effect a series of indications at timed intervals to the control means and wherein opening and closing of first, second, and third switching means is actuated in dependence upon the indications and in a predetermined order.

7. A circuit as defined in claim 6, wherein the control means are responsive to commands received from a remote source.

8. A method for switching an output terminal from a first voltage level to a second level through a buffered transition, comprising the steps of:

a) providing a first voltage source for providing a first voltage level;

b) providing a second voltage source for providing a second voltage level;

c) electrically coupling the first voltage source to the output terminal to provide the first voltage level at the output terminal;

d) after a suitable duration for warming up a load, buffering a transition from the first voltage level to the second voltage level by switching resistive means into the circuit between the first voltage source and the output terminal, and allowing current to pass through the resistive means for a predetermined interval of time while decoupling the first voltage source from being directly coupled to the output terminal; and,

e) switching to electrically couple the second voltage source to the output terminal to provide the second voltage level at the output terminal.

9. A method as defined in claim 8, wherein the switching of the output terminal from a first voltage level to a second voltage level is performed only after substantially no current has passed through the resistive means for approximately 2 minutes or more.

10. A method for switching an output terminal from a first voltage level to a second level through a buffered transition, comprising the steps of:

a) providing a first voltage source for providing a first voltage level;

b) providing a second voltage source for providing a second voltage level;

c) electrically coupling the first voltage source to the output terminal to provide the first voltage level at the output terminal;

d) after a suitable duration for warming up a load, buffering a transition from the first voltage level to the second voltage level by changing the state of a switch to allow current provided by the first voltage source to flow through resistive means between the first voltage source and the output terminal, and allowing the current to pass through the resistive means for a predetermined interval of time while decoupling the first voltage source from being directly coupled to the output terminal; and,

e)switching to electrically couple the second voltage source to the output terminal to provide the second voltage level at the output terminal.

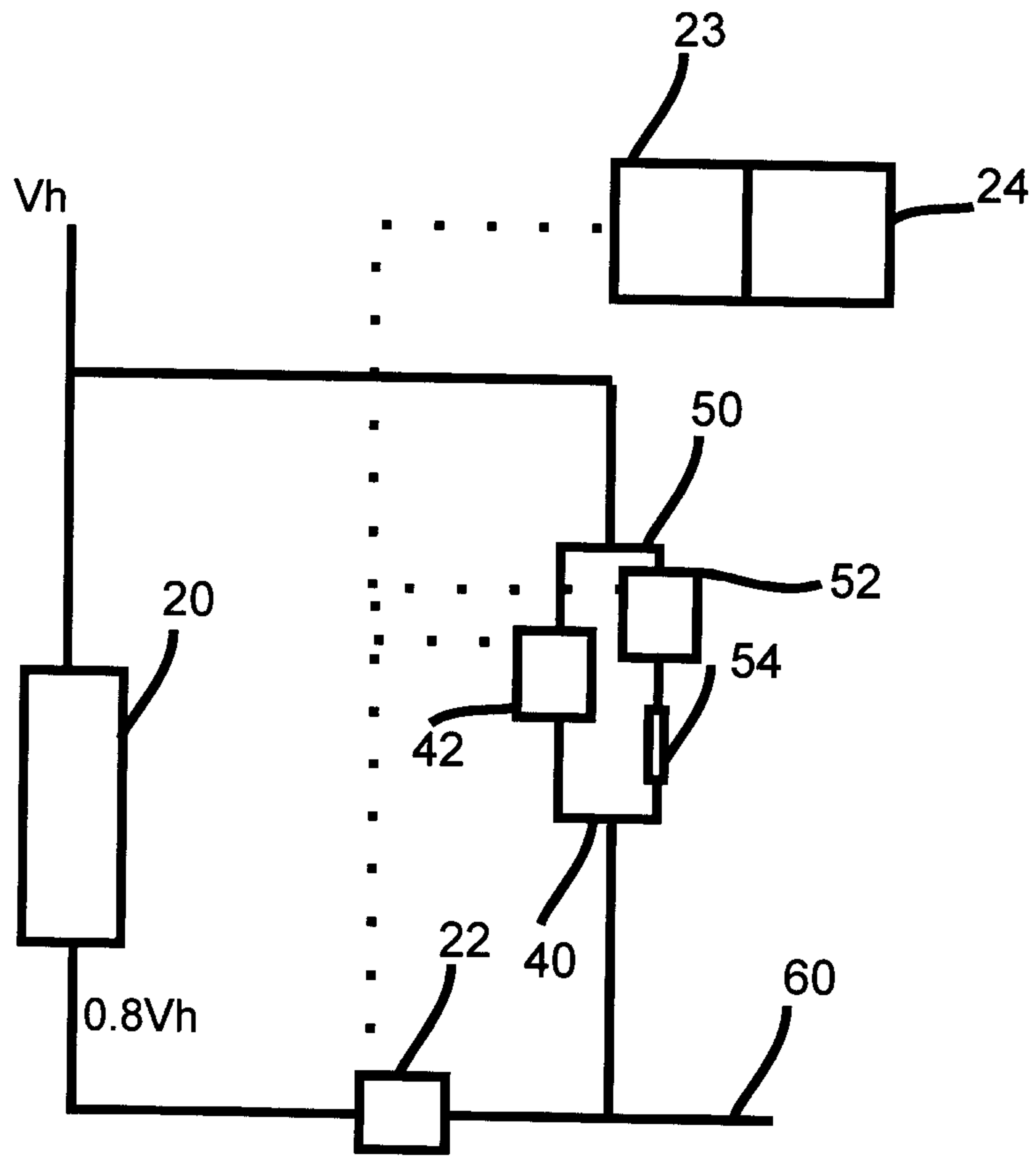


Fig. 1

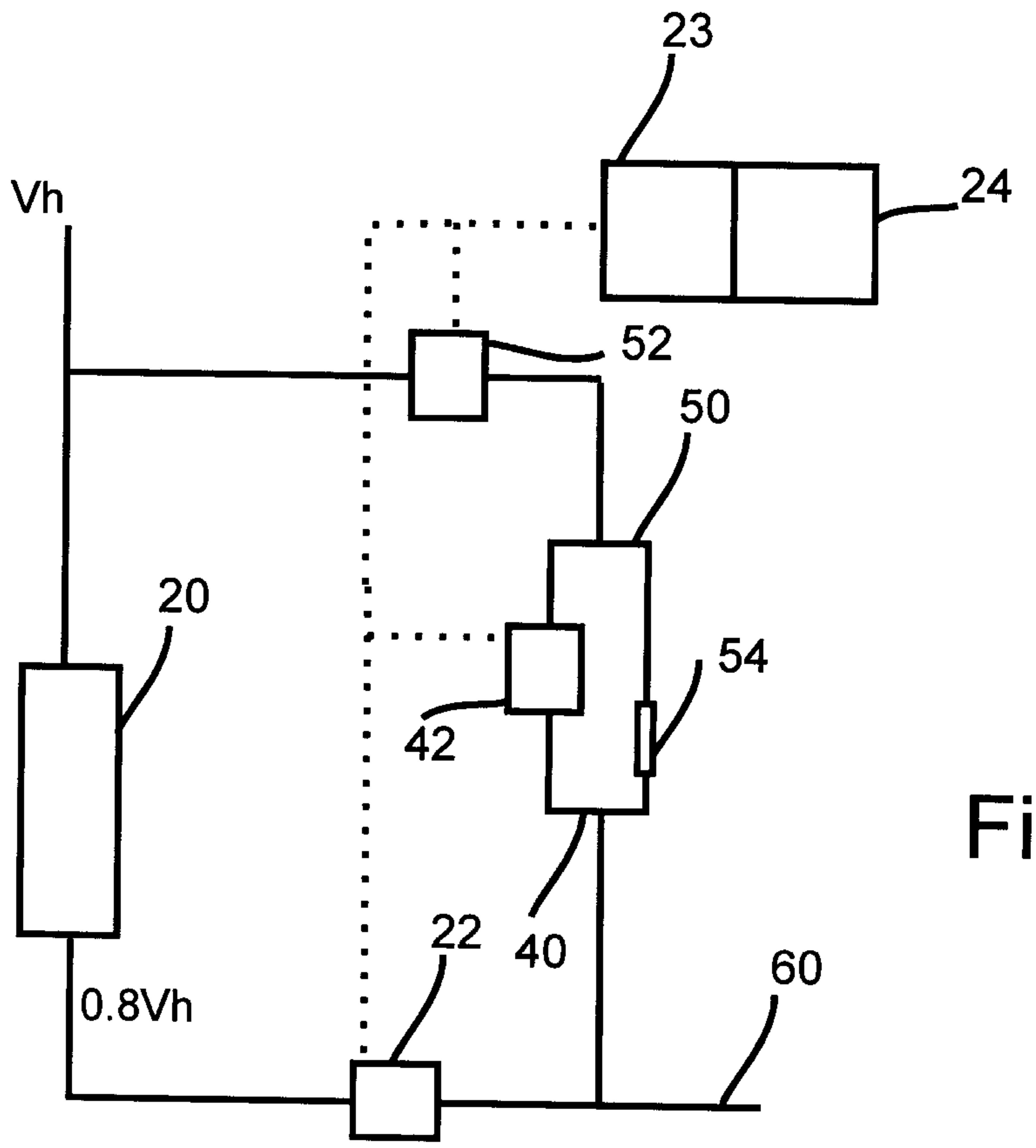

23
24
Vh
52
50
20
54
42
40
22
60
0.8Vh

Fig. 2a

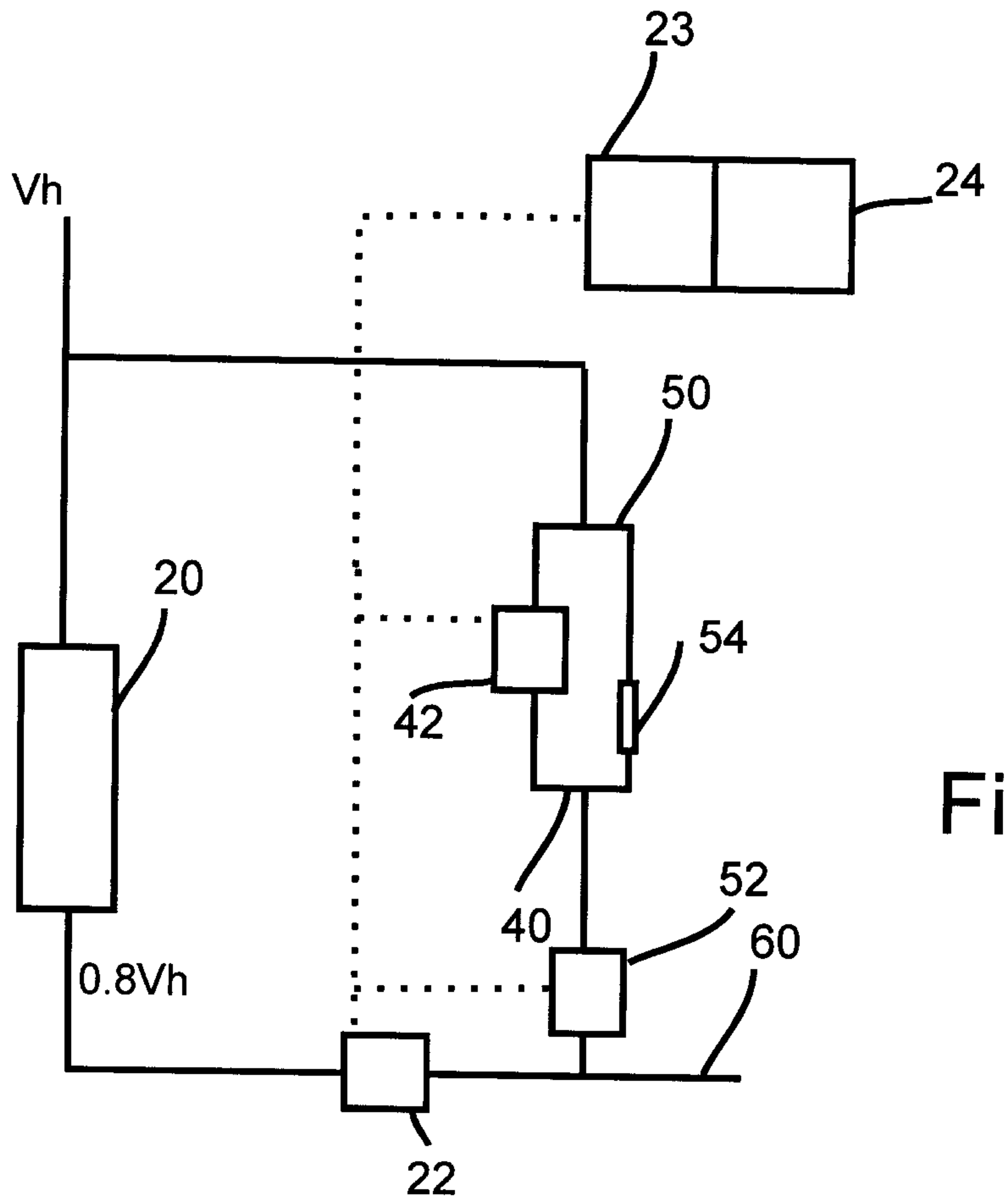

23
24
Vh
50
20
54
42
40
52
60
0.8Vh
22

Fig. 2b

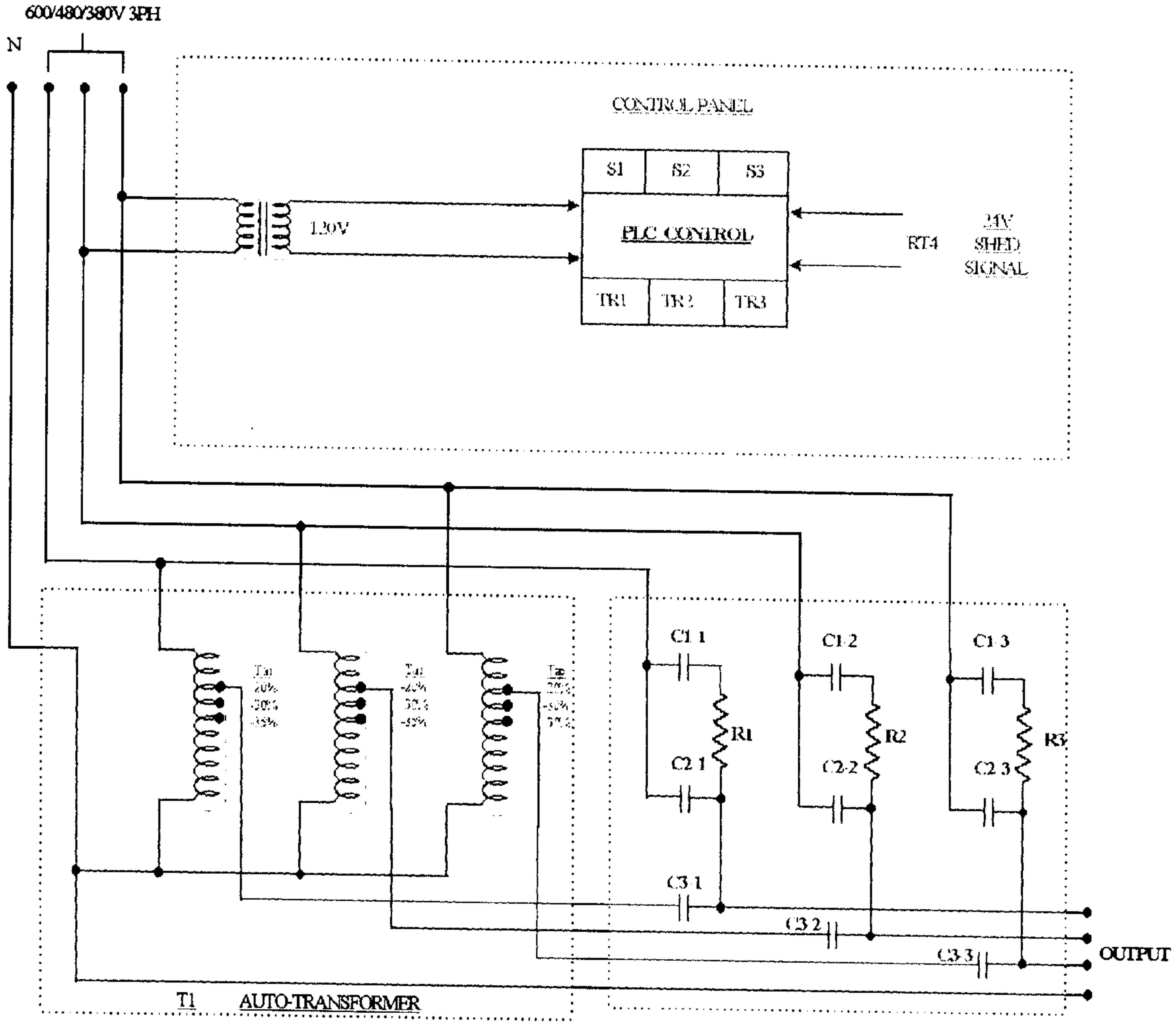
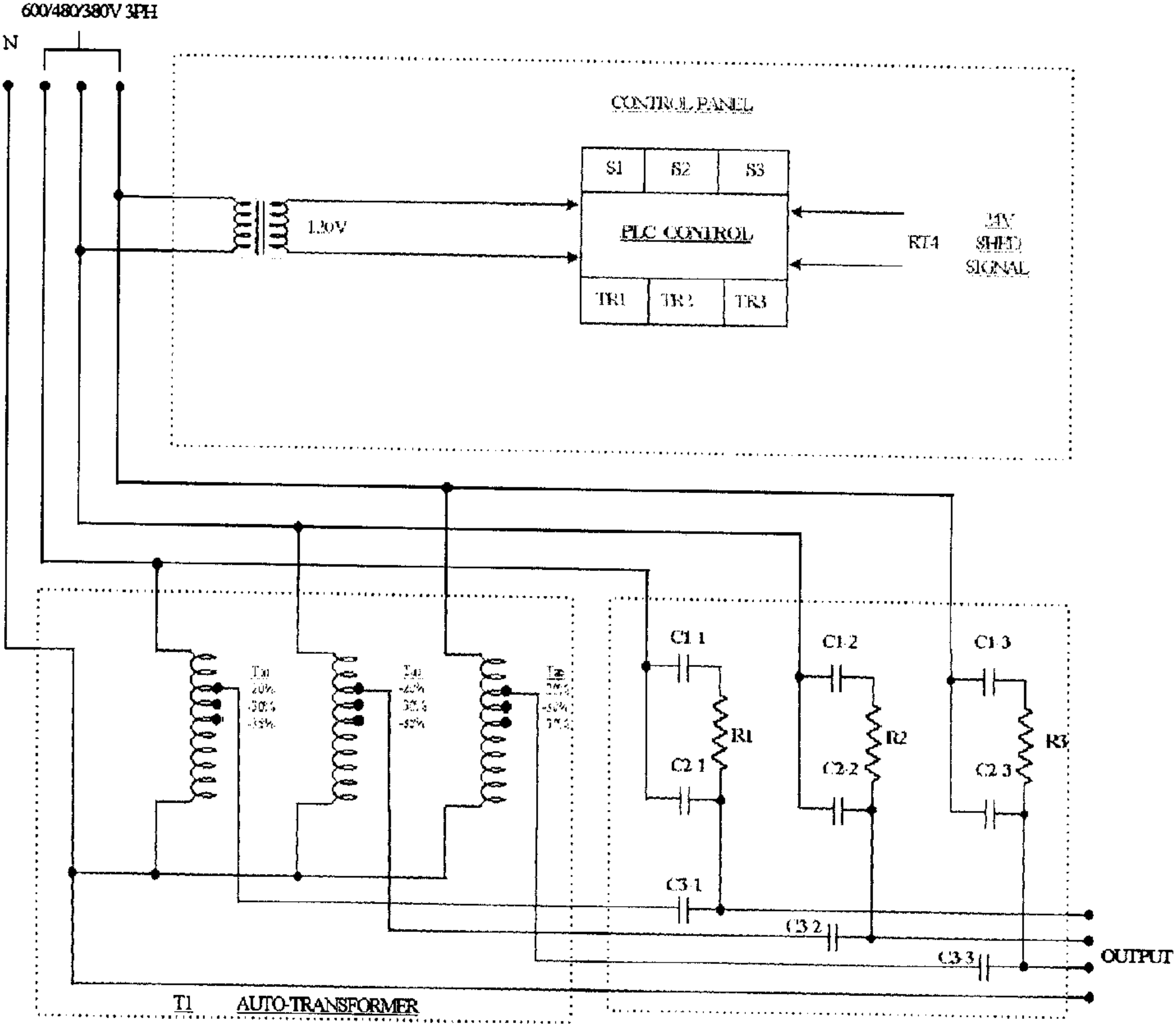

600/480/380V 3PH
N
CONTROL PANEL
S1
S2
S3
120V
PLC CONTROL
RT4
24V
SHED
SIGNAL
TR1
TR2
TR3
C1 1
C1 2
C1 3
R1
R2
C2 1
C2 2
C2 3
C3 1
C3 2
C3 3
OUTPUT
T1
AUTO-TRANSFORMER

Fig. 3



600/480/380V 3PH
N
CONTROL PANEL
S1
S2
S3
120V
PLC CONTROL
RT4
24V
(SHED)
SIGNAL
TR1
TR2
TR3
C1-1
C1-2
C1-3
R1
R2
R3
C2-1
C2-2
C2-3
C3-1
C3-2
C3-3
OUTPUT
T1
AUTO-TRANSFORMER