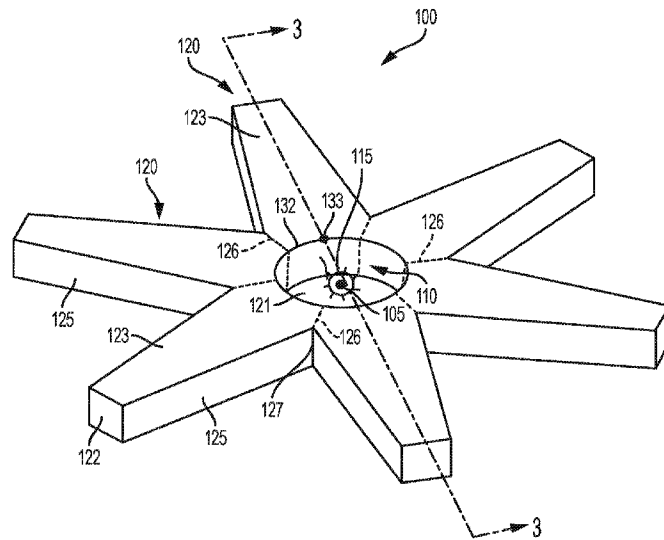




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(57) Abrégé/Abstract:

A stellate beam splitter includes a light cavity for receiving a light source and a plurality of radial arms oriented around the light cavity, the plurality of radial arms oriented to concentrate light entering each of the plurality of radial arms at an end proximate to the light cavity and provide concentrated light at an end distal to the light cavity.

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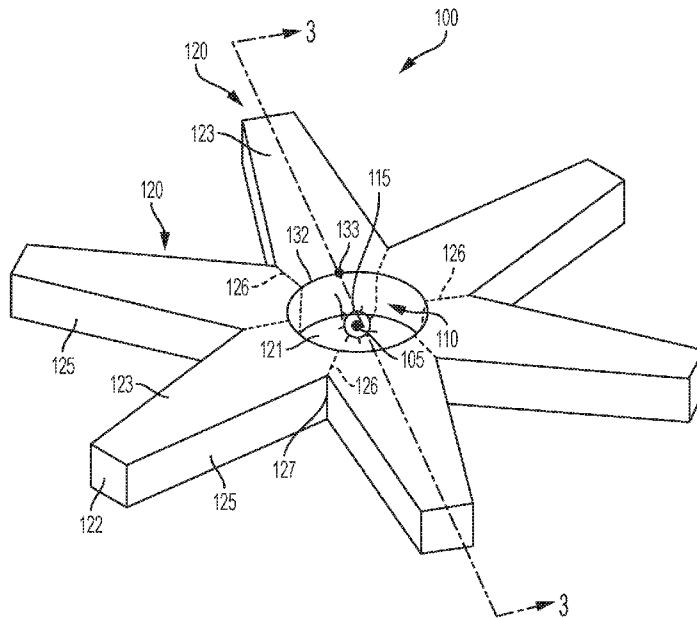


FIG. 1

(57) Abstract: A stellate beam splitter includes a light cavity for receiving a light source and a plurality of radial arms oriented around the light cavity, the plurality of radial arms oriented to concentrate light entering each of the plurality of radial arms at an end proximate to the light cavity and provide concentrated light at an end distal to the light cavity.



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SYSTEMS AND METHODS FOR A STELLATE BEAM SPLITTER

FIELD

[0001] This disclosure relates in general to transmission and broadcast of light, and more particularly to a compact optical apparatus for splitting a single light source into multiple radial beams.

BACKGROUND

[0002] The efficiency, reliability, and compact size of light emitting diodes (LEDs) make them increasingly attractive for use in lighting devices of all kinds. The isolated semiconductor die comprising the heart of an LED is essentially a point source of light that radiates in all directions. A number of designs exist that, when used in conjunction with an LED, can constrict, concentrate, diffuse, or redirect the multidirectional emission of the LED. These devices generally use a combination of masks, lenses, or reflectors integral or external to the capsuled dielectric housing of the LED in order to manipulate the direction and intensity of the consolidated output beam of light.

[0003] A number of systems for concentrating or diffusing this multidirectional radiation in specific patterns useful for particular applications have been developed or improved. One approach is to mold the exterior surface of the dielectric casing which houses the semiconductor die in the form of a convex or concave lens. This method provides a means of transmitting a light emitted from the semiconductor die through the lens surface in a roughly conical beam collinear with the axis of the LED. US Patent No. 5,865,529 granted February 2, 1999, to Ellis Yan discloses such a device for diffusing light in a 360° viewing plane in both horizontal and vertical axes. However, this method cannot focus the dominant portion of emitted light at an angle substantially away (i.e., >45°) from the symmetric axis of the LED and lens while simultaneously excluding radiation at shallower angles to the symmetric axis (i.e., <45°).

[0004] Another approach is to provide a silvered or refractive reflector mechanically separate from the LED which is aligned to intercept light radiated along

the axis of the LED and reflect it in a pattern suitable for the particular application. Unlike the lens method, this approach allows for deflection of the dominate portion of the emitted light at significant angles away from the symmetric axis of the LED while excluding radiation at shallower angles. US Patent No. 5,769,532 granted June 23, 1998, to H. Sasaki; US Patent No. 6,364,506 B1 granted April 2, 2002, to M. Gallo; US Patent No. 6,447,155 B2 granted September 10, 2002, to T. Kondo and H. Okada; and US Patent No. 6,846,101 B2 granted January 25, 2005, to C. Choushaine all disclose devices employing such a mechanically separate reflector to redirect light from an LED. The mechanical arrangement of the LED and separate reflector increases the complexity, space required, alignment difficulty, and cost for this assembly.

[0005] A third approach is to mold the exterior surface of the dielectric casing of the LED in the form of a concave cone of faceted planes or approximating curves which, by means of total internal reflection, redirects light emitted by the LED die away from the axis of the LED. These methods allow diffusion of light at substantial angles from the axis of the LED. US Patent No. 3,774,021 granted November 20, 1973, to B. Johnson and US Patent No. 6,488,392 B1 granted December 3, 2002, to C. Lu both disclose devices using convex planar or curved surfaces to randomly diffuse light emitted from a semiconductor die in a roughly radial direction away from the symmetric axis of the LED. However, neither method produces a uniform dispersion of the reflected light consisting of parallel rays oriented at a precise angle relative to the symmetrical axis of the LED.

[0006] None of these existing approaches provide a compact apparatus for efficiently splitting the redirected planar output of a single LED into a multiplexed array of beams which can act as individual light sources suitable for optical coupling with light pipes or optical fibers.

SUMMARY

[0007] In one embodiment, a system for a stellate beam splitter includes a stellate optical beam splitter that, when coupled with a source of roughly planar light emission originating near its geometric center, concentrates the source radiation into a

radial array of output windows. Each output window can act as a separate re-radiating light source or can alternately be optically coupled to a light pipe or optical fiber. The number of potential radial output windows is dependent on the dimensional geometry of the light source and output window.

[0008] In one embodiment, a stellate beam splitter includes a light cavity for receiving a light source and a plurality of radial arms oriented around the light cavity, the plurality of radial arms oriented to concentrate light entering each of the plurality of radial arms at an end proximate to the light cavity and provide concentrated light at an end distal to the light cavity. Optionally, each of the plurality of radial arms is a light concentrator. Alternatively, each of the plurality of radial arms narrows from the end proximate to the light cavity to the end distal to the light cavity. In one configuration, each of the plurality of radial arms has an approximately triangular prism shape. In another configuration, each of the plurality of radial arms has a side surface, the side surface being a surface running along the length of the radial arm and perpendicularly vertical as compared to the primary direction of light exiting the radial arm. In one alternative, each of the plurality of radial arms has a joining plane, the joining plane being a plane extending radially from a center of the light cavity to the point where any two side surfaces of the plurality of radial arms intersect. In another alternative, the angle between the joining plane and the side surface is less than a critical angle for total internal reflection, based on an index of refraction for a material that the plurality of radial arms comprise and an index of refraction for air surrounding the plurality of radial arms. Alternatively, the material is a transparent material and the index of refraction for the material is greater than 1.4. Optionally, a conical or rotated concave curve reflector is oriented in the light cavity, the conical reflector positioned to be centered on the light source, such that light from the light source reflects in an approximately planar fashion.

[0009] In another embodiment, a stellate beam splitter includes a light source in the light cavity, the light source projecting light in an approximately planar fashion, and a plurality of radial arms oriented around the light cavity, the plurality of radial arms oriented to concentrate light entering each of the plurality of radial arms at an end proximate to the light cavity and provide concentrated light at an end distal to the

light cavity. Optionally, each of the plurality of radial arms is a light concentrator and each of the plurality of radial arms narrows from the end proximate to the light cavity to the end distal to the light cavity. Alternatively, each of the plurality of radial arms has an approximately triangular prism shape, each of the plurality of radial arms has a side surface, the side surface being a surface running along the length of the radial arm and perpendicularly vertical as compared to the primary direction of light exiting the radial arm, and each of the plurality of radial arms has a joining plane, the joining plane being a plane extending radially from a center of the light cavity to the point where any two side surfaces of the plurality of radial arms intersect. Optionally, the radial arms have the form of a truncated cone. In one alternative, the angle between the joining plane and the side surface is less than a critical angle for total internal reflection, based on an index of refraction for a material that the plurality of radial arms comprise and an index of refraction for air surrounding the plurality of radial arms. In another alternative, the material is a transparent material and the index of refraction for the material is greater than 1.4. In yet another alternative, a conical reflector is oriented in the light cavity, the conical reflector positioned to be centered on the light source, such that light from the light source reflects in an approximately radial fashion. Optionally, the light source is in a removable lighting module. Alternatively, the removable lighting module includes an LED that projects light in a single primary direction. Optionally, the single primary direction is perpendicular to and towards the conical reflector.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0010] FIG. 1 is an isometric view of one embodiment of a stellate beam splitter;

[0011] FIG. 2 is a top view of the illustrated embodiment of Fig. 1; and

[0012] FIG. 3 is a longitudinal cross-sectional view of the embodiment as indicated in Figs. 1 and 2.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0013] Certain terminology is used herein for convenience only and is not to be taken as a limitation on the embodiments of the systems and methods for a stellate beam splitter. In the drawings, the same reference letters are employed for designating the same elements throughout the several figures. Generally, embodiments of a stellate beam splitter include a cavity for receiving a module having a light source. The module having a light source generally emits light in a planar fashion. The stellate beam splitter is designed to concentrate light emanating from the light source into two or more beams, while still providing for a translucent area in the middle of the beam splitter. In many embodiments, the stellate beam splitter accomplishes this by providing radial arms that concentrate light from the light source. In many embodiments, three or more radial arms are used. In the embodiment shown, six radial arms are used. The six radial arms are light concentrators. Each of the radial arms accepts light from the light source and concentrates the light as the radial arm narrows. The radial arms have an index of refraction greater than one and, therefore, tend to direct light down the radial arm with minimal loss of light in a direction perpendicular to the sides of the radial arms. In many embodiments, optical fibers may be positioned at the ends of the radial arms to further transmit light concentrated by the radial arms.

[0014] Fig. 1 illustrates an isometric view of an output window embodiment of beam splitter 100, including a light source cavity 110 that houses a light source 115 located at the approximate geometric center 105 of beam splitter 100; and six radial arms 120 which surround light source cavity 110. Each radial arm 120 includes a curved light input window 121, light output window 122, top/bottom surfaces 123, side surfaces 125, and joining planes 126. Each radial arm 120 essentially forms a truncated tetrahedral structure that narrows as the distance from the light source 115 increases. Joining planes 126 are oriented coplanar with side surface intersection 127 and geometric center 105. The orientation of planar light output from light source 115 is roughly parallel to top/bottom surfaces 123 of radial arm 120. The specific height and width of light output window 122 may be governed by the corresponding dimensions of a potential abutting light pipe or optical fiber. Other geometry of beam splitter 100 is

adaptable within the constraints that acute angle 130, measured between the extended plane of side surface 125 and joining plane 126 (see Fig. 2), and acute angle 131, measured between the extended plane of top/bottom surface 123 and line 135 extending from geometric center 105 and terminating at midpoint 133 of top edge 132 of light input window 121 (see Fig. 3) are both less than the limiting angle θ_c for total internal reflection as expressed by Snell's Law in the form of:

$$\cos\theta_c = n_1/n_2 \quad (\text{Equation 1})$$

where θ_c is the acute angle between the incoming light ray and the reflecting surface, n_1 is the index of refraction of air and n_2 is the index of refraction of the optically transparent material forming the beam splitter 100 (note: Equation 1 is an identical corollary of Snell's Law often expressed as: $\sin\theta_c = n_1/n_2$, where θ_c represents the acute angle between the incoming light ray and a line perpendicular to the reflecting surface).

[0015] Air has a nominal index of refraction of 1.00 and, preferably, beam splitter 100 is a transparent material having an index of refraction greater than 1.42. In many embodiments, the material is a clear polymer. Substituting and solving Equation 1 for θ_c results in a maximum limiting angle of 45.24° for acute angles 130 and 131. Geometries of radial arm 120 which meet this criteria for acute angles 130 and 131 thus will provide total internal reflection for efficient transmission of light ray 140 entering light input window 121 from light source 115 to and through light output window 122 (see Figs. 2 and 3).

[0016] The stellate beam splitter provides a simple, compact, and flexible solution to the problem of multiplex splitting and directional control of light when incorporated with LED devices or other similar sources of light.

[0017] As shown, the radial arms have an approximately triangular prism shape (with the vertex distal from the light source chopped off). Alternatively, the radial arms may have a parabolic prism shape, which may enhance the transmission of light to the end of the radial arm; however, it may be more difficult to form.

[0018] Additionally, in some embodiments, the light source may be an LED light source that directs light primarily in a single direction at a very close range to the LED light source. In this configuration, the single direction LED light source may be converted to project light in a 360° radial direction (essentially forming a plane of light) using a conical or orated concave curve reflector, with the tip of the conical or rotated concave curve reflector oriented in the center of the LED light source. In operation, the conical reflector may be formed as part of the stellate beam splitter, such that the tip of the conical reflector points to the center of the LED light source.

[0019] There has been described a novel optical beam splitter. It should be understood that the specific formulations and methods described herein are exemplary and should not be construed to limit the claims below. Further, it is evident that those skilled in the art may now make numerous uses and modifications of the specific embodiments described without departing from the inventive concepts. For example: coatings may be applied to surfaces to enhance reflection, parallel surfaces may be tapered, or rectangular intersections of planes may be rounded. Consequently, the stellate beam splitter is to be construed as embracing each and every novel feature and novel combination of features present in and/or possessed by the compositions and methods described and by their equivalents.

REPLACEMENT SHEET

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CLAIMS

1. A stellate beam splitter, comprising:

a light cavity for receiving a light source;

a plurality of radial arms oriented around the light cavity, [[the]] each of the plurality of radial arms sharing two joining planes with two of the plurality of radial arms, the two joining planes oriented coplanar with a side surface intersection of corresponding arms of the plurality of radial arms, the two joining planes between corresponding arms of the plurality of radial arms, and oriented to intersect at a geometric center of the light cavity, the plurality of radial arms oriented to concentrate light emanating from the light source, the light being a planar light output from an LED, the light cavity sized such that there is an air interface between the LED and each of the plurality of radial arms, the planar light output roughly parallel to a top and a bottom surface of each of the plurality of radial arms, entering each of the plurality of radial arms at an end proximate to the light cavity and provide concentrated light at an end distal to the light cavity, wherein each of the plurality of radial arms is a light concentrator and forms a truncated tetrahedral structure, a side of the truncated tetrahedral structure each forming a portion of an edge of the light cavity; a plurality of light receivers selected from a group consisting of a light pipe and an optical fiber, oriented at the end distal to the light cavity receiving the concentrated light.

2. The stellate beam splitter of claim 1, wherein each of the plurality of radial arms has a side surface, the side surface being a surface running along a length of the radial arm and perpendicularly vertical as compared to a primary direction of light exiting the radial arm.

3. The stellate beam splitter of claim 1, wherein each of the plurality of radial arms has a joining plane, the joining plane being a plane extending radially from a center of the light cavity to the point where any two side surfaces of the plurality of radial arms intersect.

4. The stellate beam splitter of claim 1, wherein the angle between the joining plane and the side surface is less than a critical angle for total internal reflection, based on an index of refraction for a material that the plurality of radial arms comprise and an index of refraction for air surrounding the plurality of radial arms.

5. The stellate beam splitter of claim 1, wherein the material is a transparent material and the index of refraction for the material is greater than 1.

REPLACEMENT SHEET

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6. The stellate beam splitter of claim 1, wherein a conical or rotated curve reflector is oriented in the light cavity, the reflector positioned to be centered on the light source, such that light from the light source reflects in an approximately planar fashion.

7. A stellate beam splitter, comprising:

a light cavity;

a light source in the light cavity, the light source projecting light in an approximately planar fashion; and

a plurality of radial arms oriented around the light cavity, each of the plurality of radial arms sharing two joining planes with two of the plurality of radial arms, the two joining planes oriented coplanar with a side surface intersection of corresponding arms of the plurality of radial arms, the two joining planes between corresponding arms of the plurality of radial arms, and oriented to intersect at a geometric center of the light cavity, the plurality of radial arms oriented to concentrate light emanating from the light source, the light being a planar light output from an LED, the light cavity sized such that there is an air interface between the LED and each of the plurality of radial arms, the planar light output roughly parallel to a top and a bottom surface of each of the plurality of radial arms, entering each of the plurality of radial arms at an end proximate to the light cavity and provide concentrated light at an end distal to the light cavity, wherein each of the plurality of radial arms is a light concentrator and forms a truncated tetrahedral structure, a side of the truncated tetrahedral structure each forming a portion of an edge of the light cavity; a plurality of light receivers selected from a group consisting of a light pipe and an optical fiber, oriented at the end distal to the light cavity receiving the concentrated light.

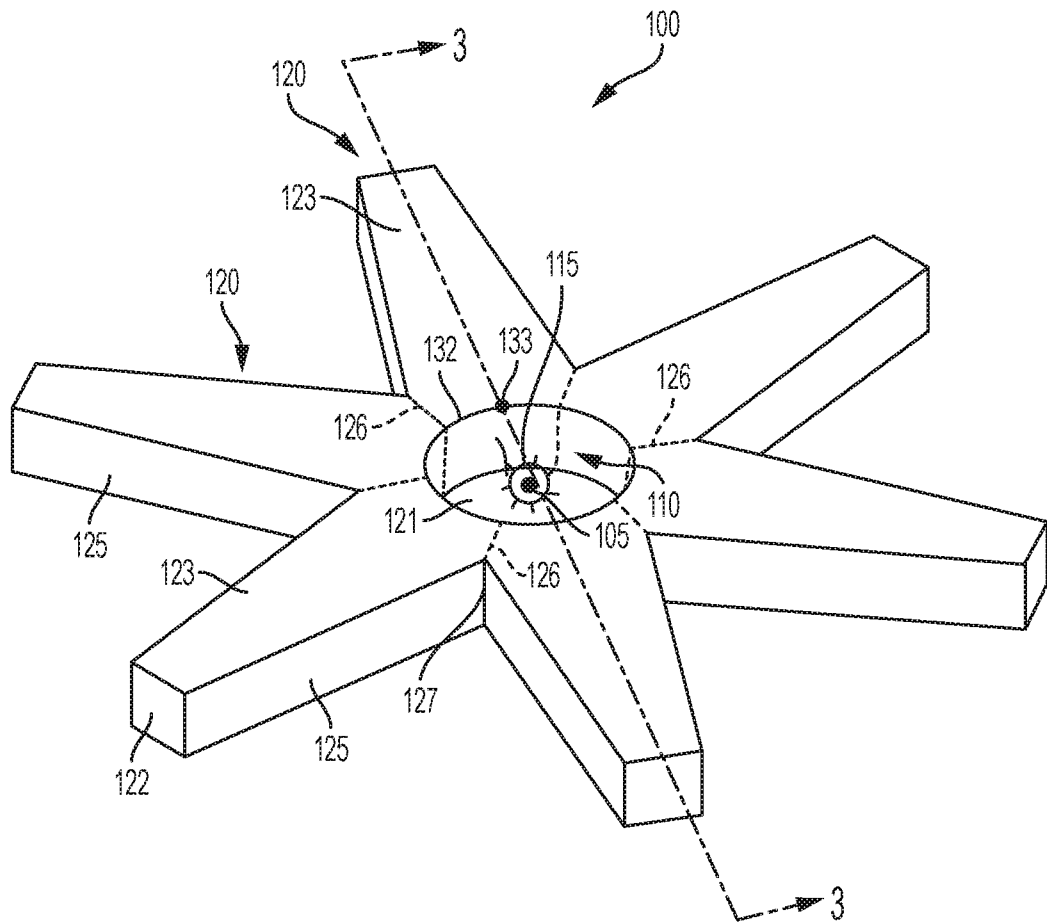


FIG. 1

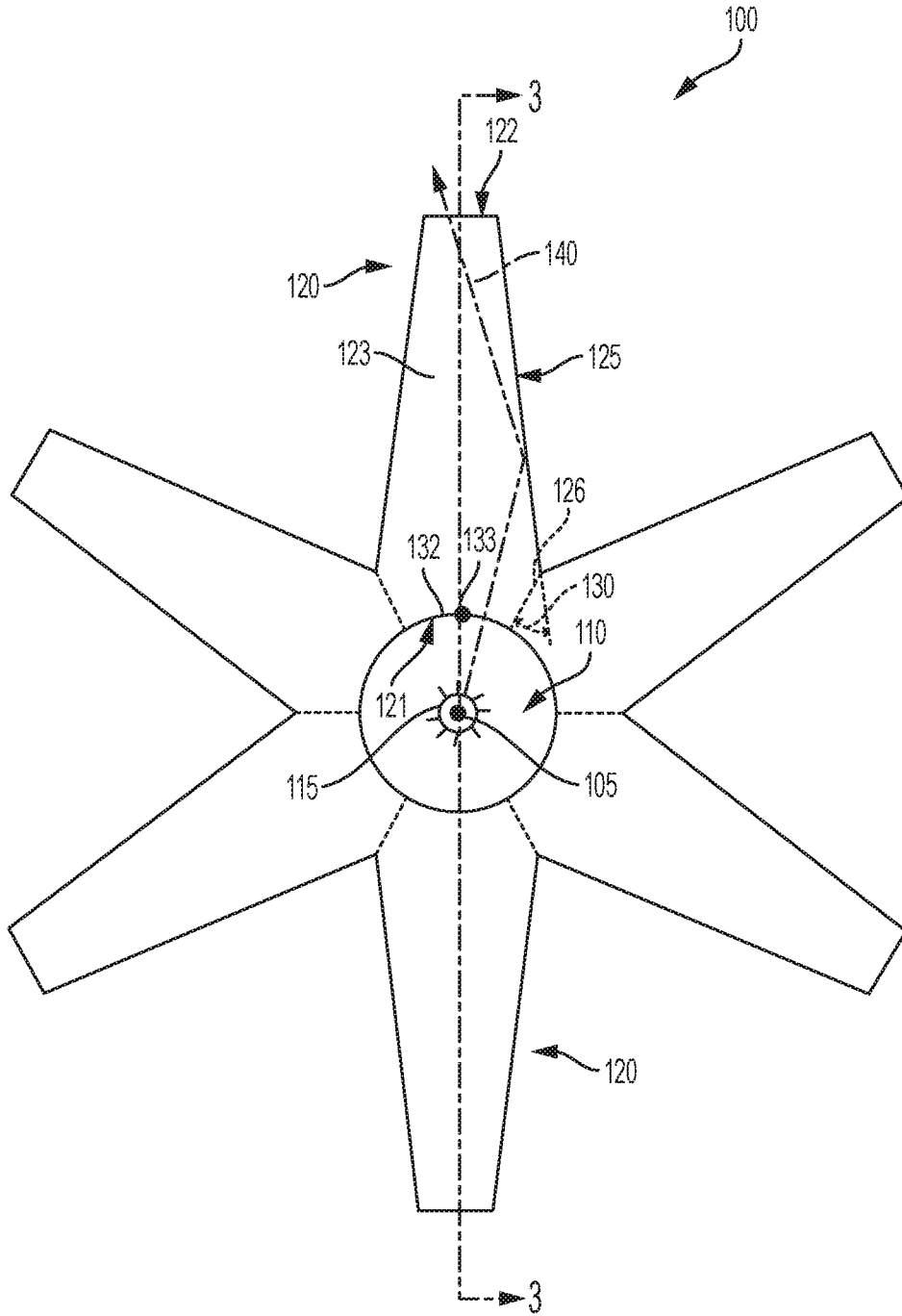


FIG. 2

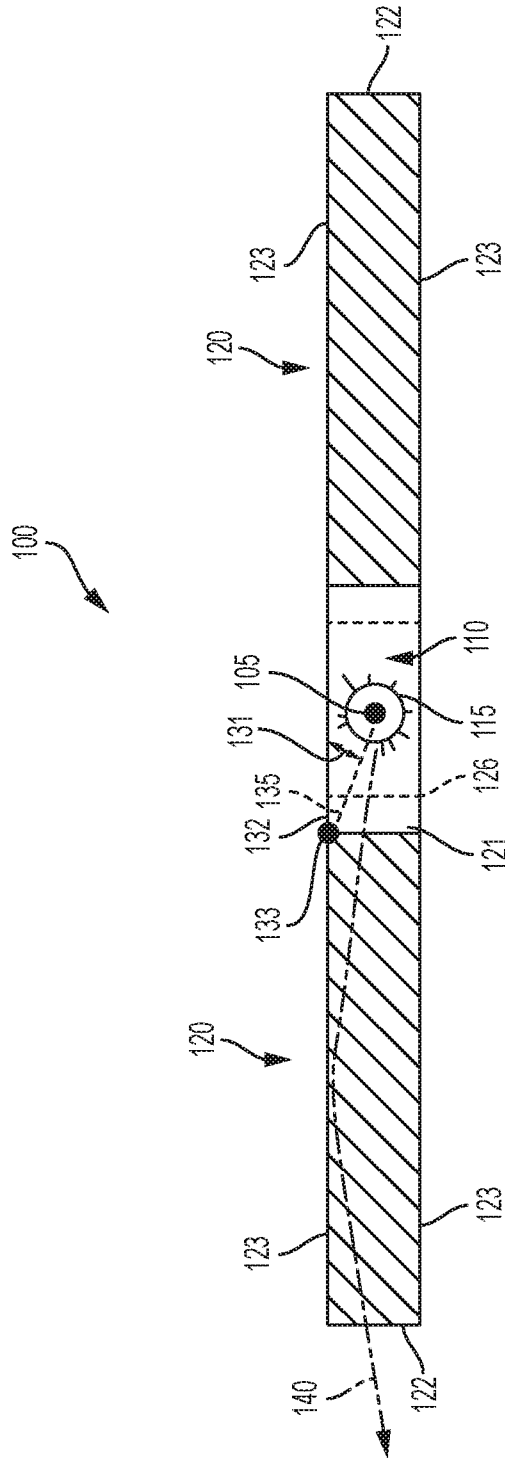


FIG. 3

