

surface of the panel 67 and the slot reels 68. The light valve 69 is described in greater detail below, but briefly, is coupled to a power source and is adapted to become substantially transparent when a first voltage is applied to the light valve 69 and adapted to become substantially opaque when a second voltage is applied to the light valve 69. When it is desired, a controller may cause the light valve 69 to become substantially transparent so that the mechanically rotatable slot reels 68 are visible through the light valve 69 to a player at the gaming unit 20.

[0046] In addition to the slot reels 68, the gaming apparatus 20 may also include an electronic display unit 70 for displaying images relating to the game or games provided by the gaming apparatus 20. The electronic display unit 70 may be disposed on the inside of the housing 50, behind the light valve 69, similar to the slot reels 68. It should be noted that more than one light valve 69 may be used, as well as more than one electronic display units 70 may be used. It should also be noted that the electronic display unit 70 may be located elsewhere on the gaming unit 20 or eliminated completely. Similarly, the mechanical reels 68 may be located elsewhere on the gaming unit 20. For example, the electronic display unit 70 may be enlarged to occupy the portion with the mechanical reels 68 on FIG. 2, and one or more mechanically rotatable members, such as a wheel (not shown) may be mounted on top of the gaming unit for use in a bonus game. Furthermore, if the mechanical wheel is located on top of the gaming unit 20, it may be encased behind a transparent panel and a light valve similar to the transparent panel 67 and the light valve 69.

[0047] The gaming unit 20 may also include a mechanically moveable member 71 that is disposed within the housing 50 behind the light valve 69. For example, mechanically moveable members, such as balls, donuts, wheels, etc., may spin in place within the housing 50 and behind the light valve 69 and panel 67. Other mechanically moveable members, such as "falling" tokens, "bouncing" balls, etc., may follow a predefined motion or predetermined path to give the appearance of movement, such as falling or bouncing.

[0048] FIG. 2A illustrates one possible embodiment of the control panel 66, which may be used where the gaming unit 20 is a slot machine having a plurality of mechanical or "virtual" reels. Referring to FIG. 2A, if the electronic display unit 70 is provided in the form of a video display unit, the control panel 66 may include a "See Pays" button 72 that, when activated, causes the electronic display unit 70 to generate one or more display screens showing the odds or payout information for the game or games provided by the gaming unit 20. As used herein, the term "button" is intended to encompass any device that allows a player to make an input, such as an input device that must be depressed to make an input selection or a display area that a player may simply touch. The control panel 66 may include a "Cash Out" button 74 that may be activated when a player decides to terminate play on the gaming unit 20, in which case the gaming unit 20 may return value to the player, such as by returning a number of coins to the player via the payout tray 64.

[0049] If the gaming unit 20 provides a slots game having a plurality of reels and a plurality of paylines which define winning combinations of reel symbols, the control panel 66 may be provided with a plurality of selection buttons 76,

each of which allows the player to select a different number of paylines prior to spinning the reels. For example, five buttons 76 may be provided, each of which may allow a player to select one, three, five, seven or nine paylines.

[0050] If the gaming unit 20 provides a slots game having a plurality of reels, the control panel 66 may be provided with a plurality of selection buttons 78 each of which allows a player to specify a wager amount for each payline selected. For example, if the smallest wager accepted by the gaming unit 20 is a quarter (\$0.25), the gaming unit 20 may be provided with five selection buttons 78, each of which may allow a player to select one, two, three, four or five quarters to wager for each payline selected. In that case, if a player were to activate the "5" button 76 (meaning that five paylines were to be played on the next spin of the reels) and then activate the "3" button 78 (meaning that three coins per payline were to be wagered), the total wager would be \$3.75 (assuming the minimum bet was \$0.25).

[0051] The control panel 66 may include a "Max Bet" button 80 to allow a player to make the maximum wager allowable for a game. In the above example, where up to nine paylines were provided and up to five quarters could be wagered for each payline selected, the maximum wager would be 45 quarters, or \$11.25. The control panel 66 may include a spin button 82 to allow the player to initiate spinning of the reels of a slots game after a wager has been made.

[0052] In FIG. 2A, a rectangle is shown around the buttons 72, 74, 76, 78, 80, 82. It should be understood that that rectangle simply designates, for ease of reference, an area in which the buttons 72, 74, 76, 78, 80, 82 may be located. Consequently, the term "control panel" should not be construed to imply that a panel or plate separate from the housing 50 of the gaming unit 20 is required, and the term "control panel" may encompass a plurality or grouping of player activatable buttons.

[0053] Although one possible control panel 66 is described above, it should be understood that different buttons could be utilized in the control panel 66, and that the particular buttons used may depend on the game or games that could be played on the gaming unit 20. If the electronic display unit 70 is provided as a video display unit, the control panel 66 could be generated by the electronic display unit 70. In that case, each of the buttons of the control panel 66 could be a colored area generated by the electronic display unit 70, and some type of mechanism may be associated with the electronic display unit 70 to detect when each of the buttons was touched, such as a touch-sensitive screen.

Light Valve Configuration

[0054] FIG. 3 is an exploded perspective view of an embodiment of the transparent panel 67, a light valve 69, and a plurality of mechanically rotatable slot reels 68. Referring to FIG. 3, the transparent panel 67 may have a number of non-transparent colored inks applied to the inner surface of the transparent panel 67. As shown in FIG. 3, a first ink 84 is used as a background and a second ink 85a and 85b are used as borders around a number of transparent openings 86a and 86b in the transparent panel 67. In addition, the panel 67 may be a touch-sensitive panel for control of the game routine by a player.