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(54) SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR LOCKING THE GAME PLAY OF GAMING MACHINES

(57) The present invention relates to a system and method for locking the gameplay of gaming machines applicable to gaming machines (M) comprising a control unit (2) connected with at least display means (21), operating means (22), and collecting means (23). The system further comprises locking means (1) associated with a timer (11) and with locking activation means (12), signaling means (13) signaling activated locking being linked to said locking means; the locking means (1) being connected with the control unit (2) such that in the method the locking means (1) actuate the control unit (2) to deactivate the operation of the gaming machine (M) for a predetermined time measured by the timer (11) and to reactivate the operation of the gaming machine (M) within the predetermined time period.

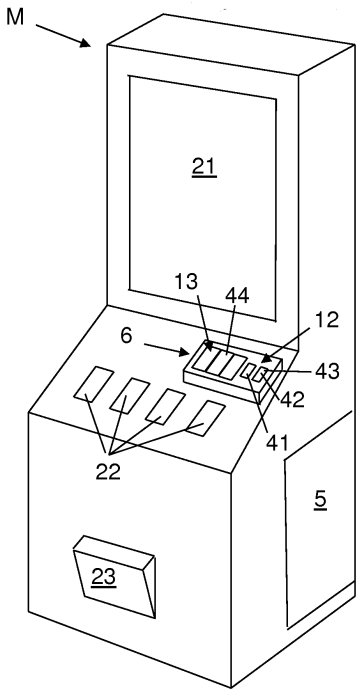

Fig 2a

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Description

Technical Field of the Invention

[0001] The present invention relates to a system and method for locking the gameplay of gaming machines enabling the user to lock and retain access to the gaming machine for a limited time to then resume the use thereof, applicable in the sector of manufacturing and developing gaming machines of any kind.

Background of the Invention

[0002] Gaming machines, especially game machines with a cash prize installed in bars, restaurants and public places, can be accessed freely and the users use them for different time periods.

[0003] According to some situations, a user who has been playing with a specific gaming machine for some time may want to take a break, for example, to smoke a cigarette outside the premises in which the gaming machine is installed, to go to the washroom or for any other reason, and does not want any other person to continue playing with said machine due to the question of habits, superstitions or because he thinks that the machine will very soon be giving out the prize belonging to him since he has been playing for a long time. In this situation, the user tends to ask the waiter or the person in charge of the premise to "safeguard" the gaming machine and to prevent another person from playing with it. This favor is difficult to be accomplished since the waiter or person in charge of the establishment is responsible for other customers to whom they must attend. If the establishment is filled with customers, it will be very difficult for this waiter to safeguard the machine. This situation entails constant disputes and confrontations between new users who, upon seeing that the gaming machine is free, approach it and the previous user who returns after his absence.

[0004] Gaming machines comprising additional systems other than the gaming and collecting means themselves are known. Spanish patent document P200900098, "Control system for identifying the personal data of the users of game machines, especially gaming machines which give away cash prizes or the like", of the company Abc Logic, S.L., for example, describes a system comprising optic reading means capable of interpreting the data of user identification means. It also comprises control means intended for processing the data optically read by means of suitable software. Said control means allow verifying the authenticity and validity of the user identification means, calculating the user's age to verify whether the user is of the minimum age allowed by law to use said game machines, and checking whether said user is included in a register prohibiting his access to the game. The system comprises means for transmitting a signal sent by the control means of the system to the game machine to allow or reject said user to/from accessing the game in the machine depending on said signal.

[0005] This system allows a centralized control system to lock the machine and reject the use of the gaming machine by people who cannot use it due to any previously established reason. However, this user does not enable a user to reserve access to same at will for a limited time.

[0006] Spanish patent document P200601685, "An electronic system for obtaining, storing and transmitting game statistics in gaming machines in a wireless manner", by the Universidad Politécnica de Cartagena describes a system envisaged to facilitate obtaining statistical data necessary for checking the integrity of the gaming machine for games of chance in which it is installed. It also confirms the absence of manipulation in its prize allocation mechanisms without interfering with the normal operation of the machine. To that end, the system is made up of a data acquisition module responsible for collecting data read from the coin and credit counters of the machine, as well as for sending said information to a programmable data retrieval and storage module which processes and stores said information in a non-volatile memory.

[0007] This system can be incorporated in the gaming machine for the purpose of studying the gaming habit of the users of a gaming machine as an independent system with respect to the course of the game, but integrated with the operating means for gathering the data generating the information sought.

[0008] The applicant of the present invention is unaware of the existence of any prior art documents which satisfactorily solve the mentioned drawback.

Disclosure of the Invention

[0009] The system for locking gaming machines object of this invention has the technical particularities intended for providing the user with the possibility of retaining the course of a game for a limited time so that he can rest, go to the washroom, smoke or perform any other short task without the gaming machine being occupied by another user.

[0010] According to the invention, the system for locking the gameplay is applicable to gaming machines comprising a control unit connected with at least display means, such as a screen or a set of windows which can light up, and operating means, such as a set of push buttons, through which the gameplay takes place and the interaction between the user and the gaming machine occurs. The gaming machine further comprises collecting means through which credits are obtained in the gaming machine to participate in the gameplay and the prizes accumulated during the gameplay are retrieved.

[0011] The system for locking the gameplay is essentially characterized in that it further comprises locking means associated with a timer and with locking activation means, signaling means signaling activated locking being linked to said locking means. The locking means are

connected with the control unit such that the locking means actuate the control unit through the operation of the locking activation means to deactivate the operation of the gaming machine for a predetermined time measured by the timer and to reactivate the operation of the gaming machine within a predetermined time period.

[0012] Therefore, the user can, at any time, stop the gameplay or the turn in the game such that he can leave and no other user can use the machine. To that end, the locking means comprise code input means for inputting a code chosen by the user, for example by means of the typical buttons for operating the gaming machine, and once said code is confirmed, the machine is locked and starts a locking timing or countdown. The user may leave in this time period. Once the user has returned, he actuates the locking activation means again, inputs the code chosen by him previously and confirms same, whereby machine is unlocked and returns to the previous operation state. If someone tries to access without knowing the code, the machine recognizes said situation and continues with the timed locking.

[0013] As mentioned, the locking is timed, i.e., it is only valid for a certain time to prevent a user from rendering a machine unused for a prolonged time period, with the consequent loss of income as the machine is stopped. The time estimated for the locking to end automatically, for example, 10 minutes, is enough for one to go to the washroom, to smoke a cigarette or to eat or drink something, although other different periods according to needs of the installation site of the gaming machine are not dismissed. Naturally other times such as 5 minutes, 1 hour or 24 hours can be pre-established. Even though this time can be pre-established in the locking means during the manufacture and programming thereof, it is possible that this time can be configured, both by the operator when installing the system and by the person in charge of the gaming machine, by means of inputting a master configuration code, for example, which will allow establishing the locking time. It is also possible that this locking time may be infinite, therefore the gaming machine could only be unlocked by the same user who has inputted the code or by a person in charge through a master unlocking code. To prevent the locking from being able to be cancelled by means of disconnecting the power supply from the gaming machine, the locking means can store the locking time in a non-volatile memory.

[0014] In one embodiment variant, the control unit is provided with a signal input the activation of which deactivates the operation of the gaming machine, the locking means being connected with the control unit at said signal input, such that it is possible to deactivate the operation of the gaming machine without having to modify or reprogram the control unit.

[0015] In another embodiment variant, the signal input of the control unit the activation of which deactivates the operation of the gaming machine is the signal input for opening the gate of the gaming machine which allows deactivating the operation of the gaming machine when it is activated and reactivating the operation of the machine again when it is deactivated, therefore taking advantage of said standard functionality of the control unit by simulating the opening of the gate to temporarily deactivate the gaming machine.

[0016] In another variant of interest, the gaming machine comprises a gate opening sensor for opening the gate of the gaming machine connected to the signal input of the control unit the activation of which deactivates the operation of the gaming machine, and the locking means are connected with the control unit through said gate opening sensor, the locking means being suitable for communicating the opening of the gate of the gaming machine to the control means. Alternatively, if the connection of the sensor is not to be modified, the locking means can communicate the opening of the gate of the gaming machine to the control means by acting directly on the connection between the control unit and the gate sensor, establishing a voltage or opening or closing the circuit, as appropriate, to simulate said opening of the gate.

[0017] Advantageously, when the control unit is not accessible since it is located in a sealed enclosure, the locking means are connected to the control unit through the gate opening sensor, the connection of which is usually accessible for a technician without needing to remove any enclosure.

[0018] In one embodiment, the locking activation means are completely or partially integrated in the operating means, such that they comprise a locking activation button which must be held down for a time to activate the locking and unlocking operations; code input means in the form of code input buttons, for example, the typical operating means of the gaming machine which can be the forward buttons of the cash prize gaming machine, such that the locking activation means use code input means to activate and deactivate the locking means; and a confirmation button for confirming the inputted code. Therefore, the activation button and the confirmation button are specific for the locking means, but the data input buttons are shared between said locking means and the control unit for the normal operation of the gaming machine.

[0019] The signaling means can be of many different kinds, they comprise on one hand boxes of numbers on the screen of the display means of the gaming machine itself, or the like, superimposed on the image of the game. Once the locking period is started, the timing is shown as a countdown on said screen of the display means. The signaling means signaling activated locking can also incorporate external designs or icons indicating the possibility of using the functionality of the system, and even indicating that the machine is locked at a specific moment.

[0020] In another embodiment variant, the locking activation means and the code input means are arranged in a separate box arranged outside the gaming machine and connected with the locking means, housed inside

the gaming machine, advantageously allowing the installation of said box provided with the locking activation means and the code input means on the surface of the gaming machine or adjacent to said machine so as to not interfere with the operating means of the gaming machine. Said box can also be provided with the signaling means signaling activated locking in which both the code as it is inputted and the remaining locking time can be seen.

[0021] In one embodiment, the locking means are connected with communication means by way of locking activation means. These communication means, such as a Bluetooth module, a mobile telephone module or any other module, enable locking the machine by means of an SMS or directly in a wireless manner.

[0022] In one embodiment, the locking means and the control unit are integrated in a microprocessor or computer running software. This software allows integrating the system in a completely transparent manner in the functionalities of the gaming machine themselves. In another embodiment, the locking means are integrated in a separate device which is incorporated or added to the gaming machine with all the elements thereof to interact with the control unit by means of a suitable communication and a small modification in said control unit to implement the new function.

[0023] In another embodiment, with the gaming machine being provided with sound emitting means connected to the control unit, the locking means further comprise means for temporarily disconnecting said sound emitting means from the control unit, preventing any sound signal emitted by the control unit through the sound emitting means during the locking of the gaming machine from being transmitted by the sound emitting means. In addition to preventing the emission of warning sound signals associated with the signal of the control unit which is operated by the locking means, for example, as a warning when the gate opening signal is operated, emission of warning sounds alerting other users during the locking of the gaming machine is thus advantageously prevented.

[0024] The method for locking a gaming machine temporarily during operation is established in a gaming machine of those provided with a control unit to regulate its operation.

[0025] The method is essentially characterized in that, with the machine being provided with locking means connected to the control unit, and said locking means being associated with a timer and with locking activation means comprising code input means, the method comprises the steps of the user of the gaming machine operating the locking activation means to input and confirm a randomly chosen locking code in the locking means through the code input means during the operation of the gaming machine; the locking means triggering the emission of a signal to deactivate the gaming machine through the control means and to activate a timer, starting a locking period; the gaming machine being kept deactivated until the user re-inputs and reconfirms the correct previously chosen locking code in the locking means through the code input means or being kept deactivated automatically until reaching the end of the timer when the time of the timer runs out, after which the locking of the gaming machine ends. Therefore, the user himself temporarily locks the gaming machine with the intervention of a third party for a locking period controlled by the timer so that the user can rest with the confidence that during the mentioned locking period no one will be able to resume the gameplay, preventing another user from using it in that period.

[0026] In a variant of interest, the signal triggered by the locking means to deactivate the operation of the gaming machine through the control means is a gate opening signal for opening the gate of the gaming machine, said method being able to be easily incorporated in the existing gaming machines which are provided with a gate opening signal deactivating their operation.

[0027] It is also disclosed that the method further comprises the step of temporarily disconnecting the sound emitting means of the gaming machine from the control means during the deactivation of the gaming machine to prevent attracting other users while the gaming machine is temporarily deactivated and to prevent the emission of warning sound signals, for example, signals which can be associated with the gate opening signal.

[0028] In another variant, with the locking means being provided with a pre-established master unlocking code, cancelling the deactivation of the gaming machine is allowed by inputting said master unlocking code through the code input means when the gaming machine is deactivated by the locking means, advantageously allowing a person in charge to reactivate the gaming machine, preventing a user from being able to abuse the locking means by locking the gaming machine without using same repeatedly and for a prolonged time. Naturally, to prevent the person in charge from having to input said master unlocking code every time, the cancellation of the deactivation of the gaming machine could also be performed in a wireless manner by means of a remote control device which will transmit said master unlocking code or simply cancel the deactivation of the gaming machine by directly acting on the locking means.

Brief Description of the Drawings

[0029] To complement the description that is being made and for the purpose of aiding to better understand the features of the invention, a set of drawings is attached to the present specification in which the following has been depicted with an illustrative and non-limiting character:

Figure 1 shows a block diagram of the invention;
Figure 1a shows a block diagram of an embodiment variant of the invention:
Figure 2 shows the detail of a front view of a gaming

machine with the locking means;

Figure 2a shows a conventional gaming machine in which the locking means have been installed after manufacture; and

Figure 3 shows a flow chart of the operation of the system.

Detailed Description of the Drawings

[0030] As can be seen in the referenced drawings the system of the invention comprises locking means 1 associated with a timer 11 and locking activation means 12, signaling means 13 signaling activated locking being linked to said locking means 1, such signaling means 13 signaling activated locking can be both a counter indicating the time of the timer 11 and any light or acoustic signal which could be used so that other users know that the gaming machine M is temporarily locked. Naturally, the system could also lack the signaling means 13 signaling locking, although it is advisable to use them for warning other users of the locking of the gaming machine M.

[0031] The locking means 1 are connected with the control unit 2 of the gaming machine M so that the operation of said gaming machine M is disabled, for example connected to a signal input which causes the locking of the gaming machine M. In a known manner, the control unit 2 is associated with display means 21, such as a screen, and operating means 22, such as a set of push buttons, and collecting means 23 which are partially disabled, preventing gameplay from continuing, and thus reserving the gaming machine M.

[0032] In one embodiment, the locking means 1 are associated with communications means 14, such as a Bluetooth module, for activating the locking by means of a mobile telephone. Naturally, said communication means can also be associated with other devices, such as a remote control allowing the person in charge to disable the locking means 1.

[0033] Figure 1 a shows an embodiment variant in which the signal input 3 of the control unit 2, the activation of which deactivates the operation of the gaming machine M, causing the gaming machine M to be locked temporarily, is the gate opening signal input 5, which is connected to a gate opening sensor 4 for opening the gate 5 which is activated when opening the gate 5 of the gaming machine M. During the opening of the gate 5, said sensor 4 acts on the signal input 3 of the control unit 2 so that it temporarily deactivates the operation of the gaming machine M until the gate 5 is closed, at which time its operation is resumed.

[0034] As can be seen in Figure 1a, the control unit 2 is provided in a known manner with a plurality of inputs and outputs for the different input and output signals used for controlling the gameplay of the gaming machine M, for example some outputs being connected to the display means 21 for transmitting the corresponding video signals and other outputs being connected to sound emitting means 24 for transmitting the gameplay and warning audio signals. The control unit 2 can be a microcontroller duly programmed with instructions for controlling the gameplay of the gaming machine M which will be different according to the type of gaming machine, further controlling the collecting means 23 for counting the accumulated credits or the awarding of prizes.

[0035] Figure 1 a shows that the locking means 1, which can be a microprocessor or an electronic board, are connected with the control unit 2 at the signal input 3 for opening the gate 5 through the sensor 4, although the connection could also be direct. The operation of the gaming machine M is thus locked when activating said signal input 3, simulating the opening of the gate 5 without having to modify the operation or reprogram the control unit 2. This can advantageously be done by simply acting on the signal input 3 of the control unit 2, for example establishing a voltage equivalent to a logic value '1', such that said control unit 2 deactivates the operation of the gaming machine M until the signal input 3 of the control unit 2 is re-established, for example establishing a voltage equivalent to a logic value '0', for notifying that the gate 5 is closed and that therefore the operation can be resumed. As can be seen, the gate opening sensor 4 for opening the gate 5 of the gaming machine M is connected to the signal input 3 of the control unit 2 the activation of which deactivates the operation of the gaming machine M, and the locking means 1 are connected with the control unit 2 through said gate opening sensor 4 for opening the gate 5, the locking means 1 being suitable for communicating the simulation of the opening of the gate 5 of the gaming machine M to the control means 2. Naturally, it is envisaged that other signal inputs of the control unit 2 the activation of which will deactivate the operation of the gaming machine M can be used, such as the supply signal or a code debugging signal, said inputs will vary according to the control unit 2. In another variant of the invention, it is possible that the locking means 1 are connected to the control unit 2 through other inputs such as the inputs of the operating means 22, forcing said operating means 22 to be rendered unused, for example temporarily disconnecting them from the control unit 2.

[0036] The gaming machine M shown in Figure 1a further comprises sound emitting means 24, such as a speaker or buzzer, connected to the control unit 2 so the locking means 1 further comprise means 25 for temporarily disconnecting said sound emitting means 24 from the control unit 2, such as for example a relay controlled by the locking means 1 such that when the gaming machine is locked, the emission of both sound alerts for attracting other users and warning sound alerts associated with, for example, the opening of the gate 5 is prevented. Similarly, it is possible that the display means 21 are also disconnected, for example to prevent debugging information or information on the status of the gaming machine M when it is locked from being shown. Naturally, in addition to the temporary disconnection, the locking means 1 could inject a characteristic video or audio signal in the display means 21 or sound emitting means 24, as

appropriate, to emphasize that the gaming machine M is temporarily locked.

[0037] It can further be seen in Figure 1 a that the locking activation means 12 and the means of signaling means 13 signaling activated locking have been arranged in a box 6, connected with the locking means 1, which can be placed outside the gaming machine M, as will be seen below. It is observed that the locking activation means 12 are formed by an activation and a confirmation button 41, 43, differentiating the functionality for example according to the held-down duration corresponding long activation and short confirmation, and code input buttons 42, which can be both a single button having the numbers to be input in a circle or a number pad. The signaling means 13 signaling activated locking can be three boxes of numbers 44 in which the code to be introduced is shown.

[0038] Figure 2 shows a schematic depiction of the front part of a gaming machine M, in which another embodiment of the system is shown. The gaming machine M of Figure 2 comprises display means 21 by way of a screen, an activation button 41 forming part of the locking activation means 12, code input buttons 42, which in this case correspond with the operating means 22 of the gaming machine M in its normal operation, and a confirmation button 43 for confirming the code input by means of using the code input buttons 42. A signal corresponding to the locking signaling means 13 which indicate the locking possibility and which also act as an activated locking icon, for example, by means of lighting up has been depicted in said front part of the gaming machine M. In one use of the locking means 1 the user presses the locking activation button 41 for more than 3 seconds, activating said locking means 1, making part of the locking signaling means 13 appear on the display means 21, in this case in the form of three boxes of numbers 44 in the screen of the display means 21, the user uses the three code input buttons 42 to input any code. Once the code which will allow the subsequent unlocking of the gaming machine M has been input, the user presses the confirmation button 43, the locking period 34 being started, and showing a timing counter on the display means 21. The operation for unlocking the gaming machine M is identical to the preceding method, operating the activation button 41, inputting the code previously determined by means of the code input buttons 42, and confirming the operation by operating the confirmation button 43.

[0039] Although in the variant described in Figure 2 the locking activation means 12 are completely integrated in the operating means 22, said locking means 12 could also only be partly integrated.

[0040] Figure 2a describes another embodiment variant in a conventional gaming machine M based on the block diagram shown in Figure 1a, in which the locking activation means 12 and the code input means 42 are arranged in a separate box 6 and arranged outside of the gaming machine M and duly connected with the locking means 1, housed inside of the gaming machine M, not visible in Figure 2a. In this case, it can be seen that the timing counter is displayed on a screen where the three boxes of numbers 44 are displayed. Alternatively, the three boxes of numbers 44 can be of another type, such as seven segment electronic displays, or said boxes of numbers 44 could be simply disregarded, requiring a smaller box 6 and showing for example the time remaining on the timing counter based on the light from other elements of the gaming machine M, such as flashes in the display means 21.

[0041] The box 6 can be fixed to a sheet metal part having a cavity suitable for being installed in the frame of any of the push-buttons acting as operating means 22 of the machine, such that for installing it in the gaming machine M it is only necessary to couple the frame in any of the push-buttons and connect the components of said aforementioned box 6 to the locking means 1 duly installed inside the gaming machine M, where they can not be handled by the users.

[0042] It is also possible that said box 6 has the shape of a push-button of the gaming machine, such that an operator can replace one of the push-buttons with the box 6, obtaining a better aesthetic finish in the gaming machine M. Naturally, it is envisaged that in this case the box 6 also incorporates a push-button compatible with that being replaced and through which the same functionality can be achieved, for example dedicating half the surface of the box 6 to said compatible push-button and positioning the locking activation means 12 comprising the code input means 42 in the other half.

[0043] As depicted in Figure 3, with the gaming machine M in operation 31 the user proceeds to operate 32 the locking activation means 12 at any time, the input and confirmation of the code 33 is then performed, the locking period 34 being started.

[0044] During this locking period 34, the user may leave the gaming machine M with the gameplay interrupted with the access restricted to other users who do not know the input code. The user interrupts said locking period 34 when he starts the unlocking 35, operating the locking activation means 12 again, and inputting and confirming the correct code 36 corresponding to the previously input code when the locking was started. If the input and confirmed code is correct, the locking 37 ends and the operation 31 of the gaming machine M resumes.

[0045] In the event that the locking period 34 reaches the end of the timer 38 the locking means 1 automatically ends the locking 37, returning to the operating mode 31 of the gaming machine M.

[0046] Therefore, for temporarily blocking the gaming machine M during operation, said gaming machine being provided with a control unit 2 to regulate its operation and the machine being further provided with locking means 1 connected to the control unit 2, and said locking means 1 being associated with a timer 11 and with locking activation means 12 comprising code input means 42, a method must be performed comprising the steps of the gaming machine user operating 32 the locking activation

means 12 to introduce and confirm a randomly chosen locking code 33 in the locking means 1 through the code input means 42 during the operation 31 of the gaming machine M; whereby the locking means 1 trigger the emission of a signal to deactivate the gaming machine M through the control means 2, such as for example a gate opening signal for opening the gate of the gaming machine M and a timer 11 is activated, starting a locking period 34 of the gaming machine in which the user can rest. The gaming machine M being kept locked until the user re-inputs and reconfirms the correct previously chosen locking code 36 in the locking means 1 through the code input means 42 or being kept locked automatically until reaching the end of the timer 38 when the time of the timer 11 runs out.

[0047] Additionally, the method further comprises the step of temporarily disconnecting the sound emitting means 24 of the gaming machine M from the control means 2 during the deactivation of the gaming machine M.

[0048] Advantageously it is further envisaged that the locking means 1 can be provided with a pre-established master unlocking code which allows cancelling the deactivation of the gaming machine M by inputting said master unlocking code through the code input means 42 when the gaming machine is deactivated by the locking means 1. This functionality can be suitable so that the person in charge of the gaming machine M prevents abuse in the locking system of the gaming machine M, for example, when a user constantly blocks it.

[0049] Having sufficiently described the nature of the invention as well as a preferred embodiment, it must be stated, where appropriate, that the materials, shape, size and arrangement of the elements described could be modified provided that it does not entail an alteration on the essential features of the invention claimed below.

Claims

1. A system for locking the gameplay of gaming machines, said gaming machines (M) comprising a control unit (2) connected with at least display means (21), operating means (22), and collecting means (23), **characterized in that** it comprises locking means (1) associated with a timer (11) and with locking activation means (12), signaling means (13) signaling activated locking being linked to said locking means; the locking means (1) being connected with the control unit (2) such that the locking means (1) actuate the control unit (2) through the operation of the locking activation means (12) to deactivate the operation of the gaming machine (M) for a predetermined time measured by the timer (11), and to reactivate the operation of the gaming machine (M) within the predetermined time period.

2. The system according to the preceding claim, **characterized in that** with the control unit (2) being provided with a signal input (3) the activation of which deactivates the operation of the gaming machine (M), the locking means (1) are connected with the control unit (2) at said signal input.

3. The system according to the preceding claim, **characterized in that** the signal input (3) of the control unit (2) the activation of which deactivates the operation of the gaming machine (M) is the signal input for opening the gate of the gaming machine.

4. The system according to the preceding claim, **characterized in that** the gaming machine (M) comprises a gate opening sensor (4) for opening the gate of the gaming machine connected to the signal input (3) of the control unit (2) the activation of which deactivates the operation of the gaming machine (M) and the locking means (1) are connected with the control unit (2) through said gate opening sensor, the locking means (1) being suitable for communicating the opening of the gate (5) of the gaming machine to the control means (2).

5. The system according to any one of the preceding claims, **characterized in that** the locking activation means (12) are completely or partially integrated in the operating means (22).

6. The system according to any one of the preceding claims, **characterized in that** the locking activation means (12) use code input means (42) to activate and deactivate the locking means (1).

7. The system according to the preceding claim, **characterized in that** the code input means (42) are the operating means (22) of the gaming machine (M).

8. The system according to the preceding claim, **characterized in that** the locking activation means (12) and the code input means (42) are arranged in a separate box arranged outside the gaming machine (M) and connected with the locking means (1), housed inside the gaming machine (M).

9. The system according to any one of the preceding claims, **characterized in that** the locking means (1) are connected with communication means (14) by way of locking activation means.

10. The system according to any one of the preceding claims, **characterized in that** the locking means (1) and the control unit (2) are integrated in a microprocessor or computer running software.

11. The system according to any one of the preceding claims, **characterized in that**, being the gaming machine (M) provided with sound emitting means con-

nected to the control unit (2), the locking means (1) further comprise means for temporarily disconnecting said sound emitting means from the control unit (2).

12. A method for locking a gaming machine (M) temporarily during operation, said gaming machine being provided with a control unit (2) to regulate its operation, **characterized in that**, being the machine further provided with locking means (1) connected to the control unit (2), and being said locking means (1) associated with a timer (11) and with locking activation means (12) comprising code input means (42), the method comprises the steps of:

- the user of the gaming machine operating (32) the locking activation means to input and confirm a randomly chosen locking code (33) in the locking means (1) through the code input means (42) during the operation (31) of the gaming machine (M);
- the locking means (1) triggering the emission of a signal to deactivate the gaming machine (M) through the control means (2) and to activate a timer (11), starting a locking period (34) of the gaming machine;
- the gaming machine (M) being kept locked until the user re-inputs and reconfirms the correct previously chosen locking code (36) in the locking means (1) through the code input means (42) or being kept locked automatically until reaching the end of the timer (38) when the time of the timer (11) runs out.

13. The method according to the preceding claim, **characterized in that** the signal triggered by the locking means (1) to deactivate the operation of the gaming machine (M) through the control means (2) is a gate opening signal for opening the gate of the gaming machine (M).

14. The method according to any one of claims 12 to 13, **characterized in that** it further comprises the step of temporarily disconnecting the sound emitting means of the gaming machine (M) from the control means (2) during the deactivation of the gaming machine (M).

15. The method according to any one of claims 12 to 14, **characterized in that**, being provided the locking means (1) with a pre-established master unlocking code, cancelling the deactivation of the gaming machine (M) is allowed by inputting said master unlocking code through the code input means (42) when the gaming machine is deactivated by the locking means (1).

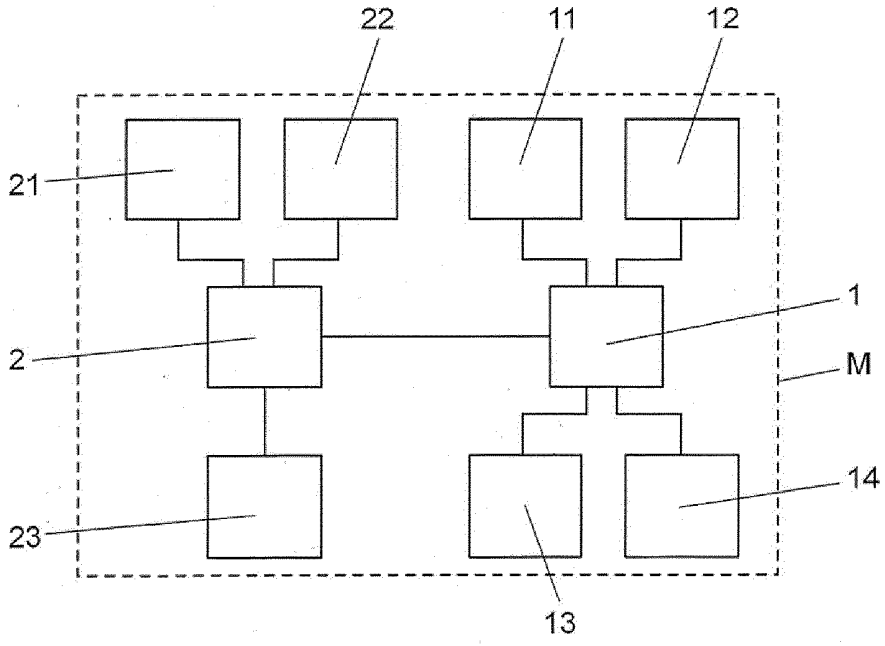

Fig. 1

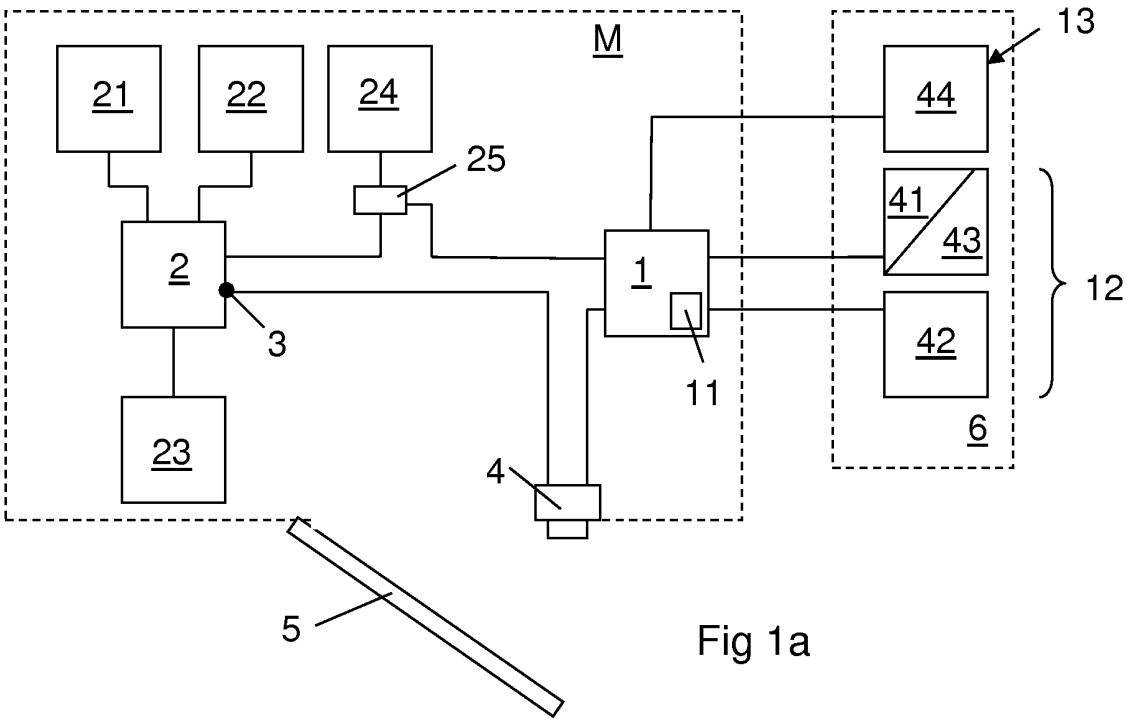

Fig 1a

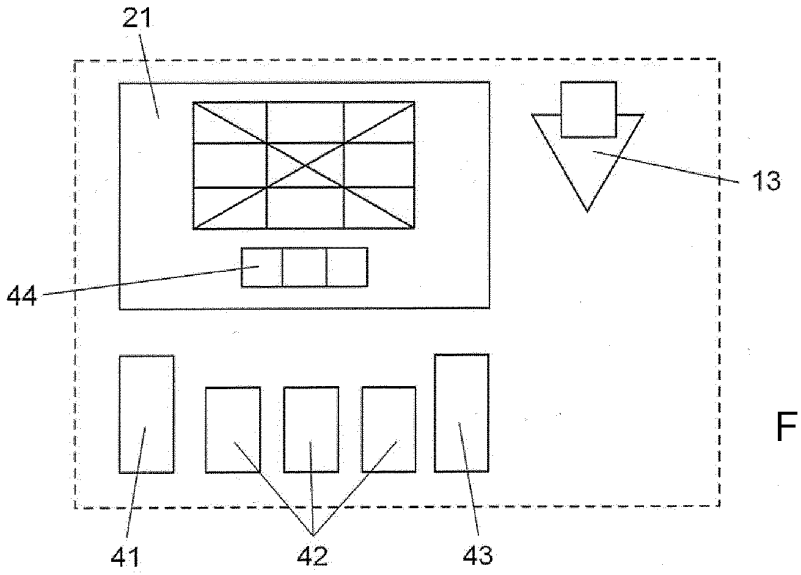

Fig 2

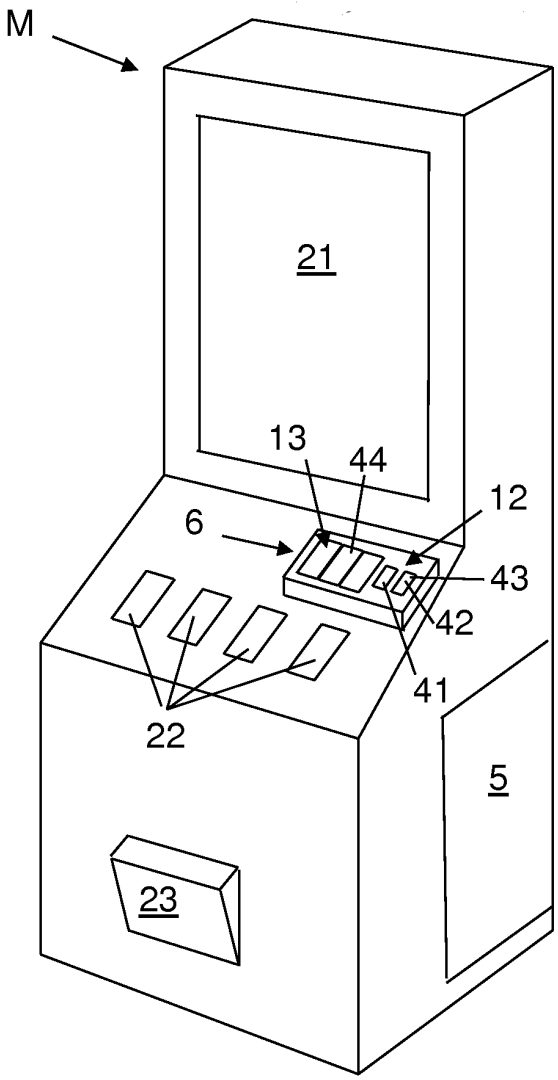

Fig 2a

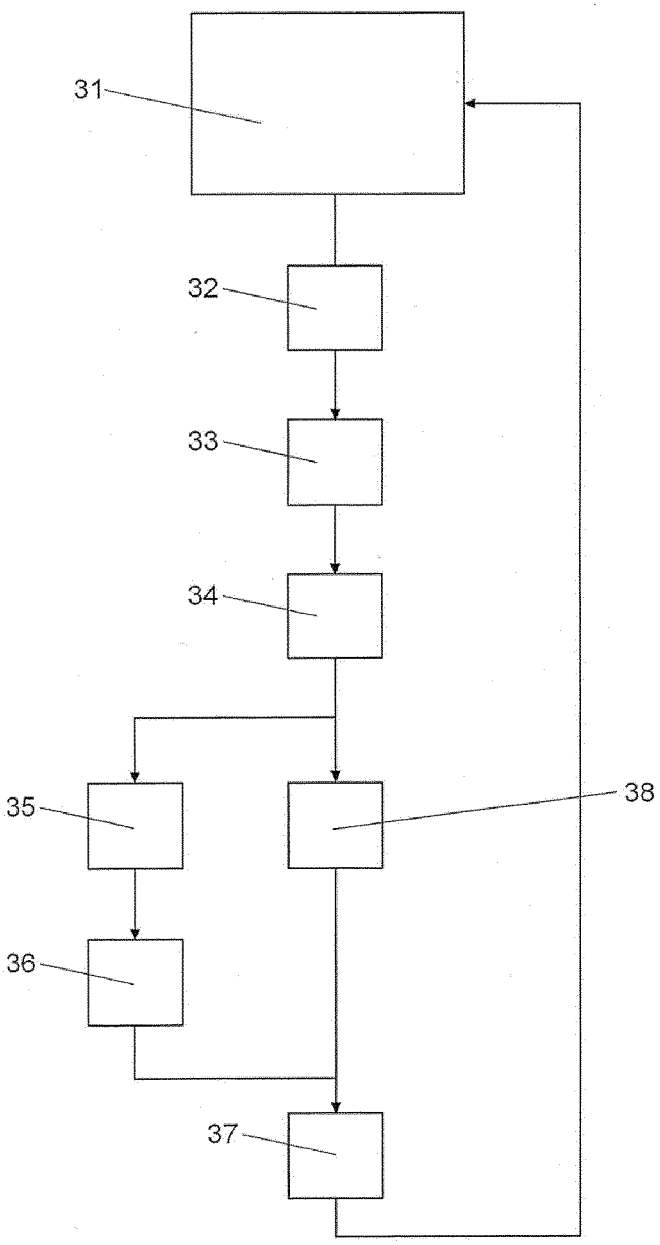

Fig. 3

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No
PCT/ES2012/070510

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
INV. G07F17/32
ADD.

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)
G07F

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)
EPO-Internal, WPI Data

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	US 2007/191090 A1 (O'HALLORAN TERRY [AU] ET AL) 16 August 2007 (2007-08-16) the whole document	1-15
X	WO 2008/127870 A2 (IGT RENO NEV [US]; PETERS COLIN GRAHAM [AU]) 23 October 2008 (2008-10-23) abstract; figures page 2, line 14 - page 3, line 12 page 6, line 13 - page 9, line 24 page 12, line 18 - page 16, line 12	1-15
X	EP 0 534 718 A2 (BALLY MFG CORP [US] BALLY GAMING INT INC [US]) 31 March 1993 (1993-03-31) abstract; figures page 2, lines 18-21 page 2, line 54 - page 3, line 29 page 8, lines 33-44	1-15

☐ Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.

☒ See patent family annex.

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Date of the actual completion of the international search	Date of mailing of the international search report
8 October 2012	24/10/2012

Name and mailing address of the ISA/	Authorized officer
European Patent Office, P.B. 5818 Patentlaan 2 NL - 2280 HV Rijswijk Tel. (+31-70) 340-2040, Fax: (+31-70) 340-3016	Breugelmans, Jan

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

International application No
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REFERENCES CITED IN THE DESCRIPTION

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- ES P200601685 **[0006]**