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(54) **METHOD FOR IMPLEMENTING
VIBRATION SUPPRESSION SYSTEM UNDER
CONTROL FROM A REMOTE SITE**

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A method of implementing vibration suppression at equipment residing at a local site is provided. The method comprises transmitting a prompt from a remote site to the local site, automatically sensing vibration response information from the equipment in response to the prompt, and transmitting the sensed vibration response information to the remote site. The method further comprises analyzing the sensed vibration response information at the remote site, and creating a vibration suppression algorithm based on the analyzed information. Another prompt is then transmitted from the remote site to the local site, and in response thereto, vibrations are induced within the equipment at the local site in accordance with the vibration suppression algorithm, and additional vibration response information from the equipment is sensed. The additional vibration response information is transmitted to, and analyzed at, the remote site, where a modified vibration suppression algorithm is created and transmitted to the local site for suppression of vibrations in the equipment.

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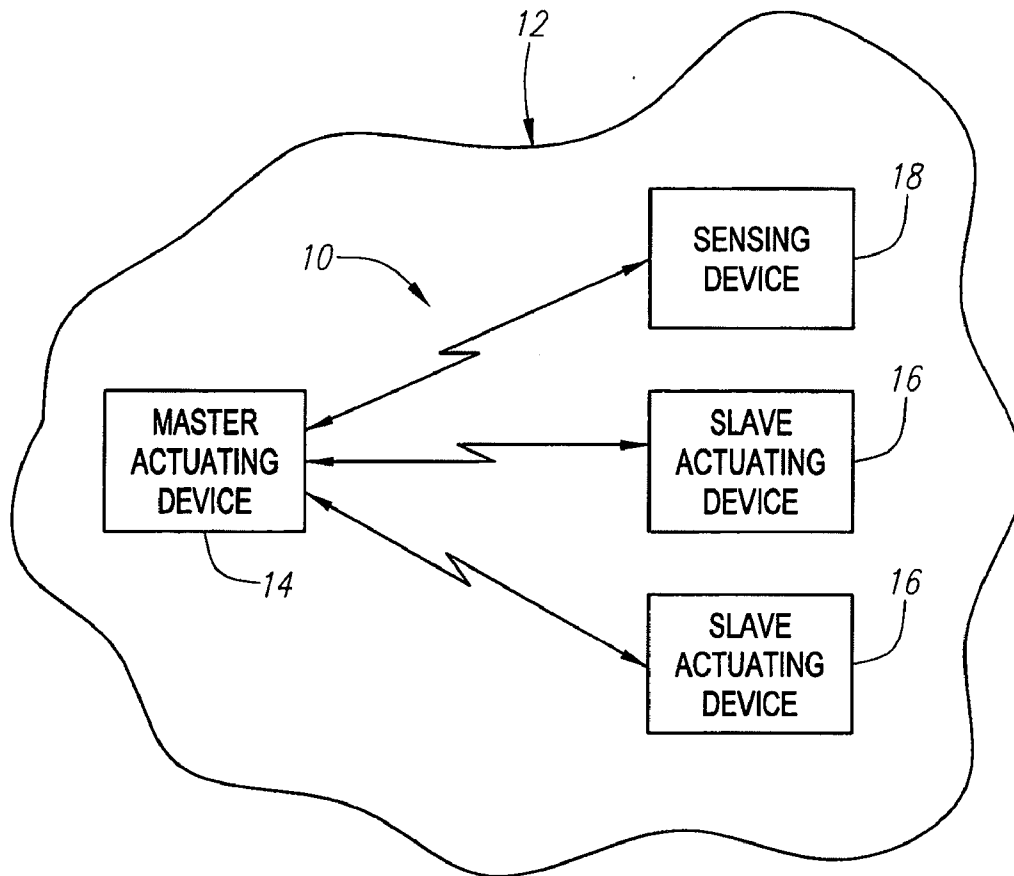
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(60) Provisional application No. 60/654,607, filed on Feb. 18, 2005.



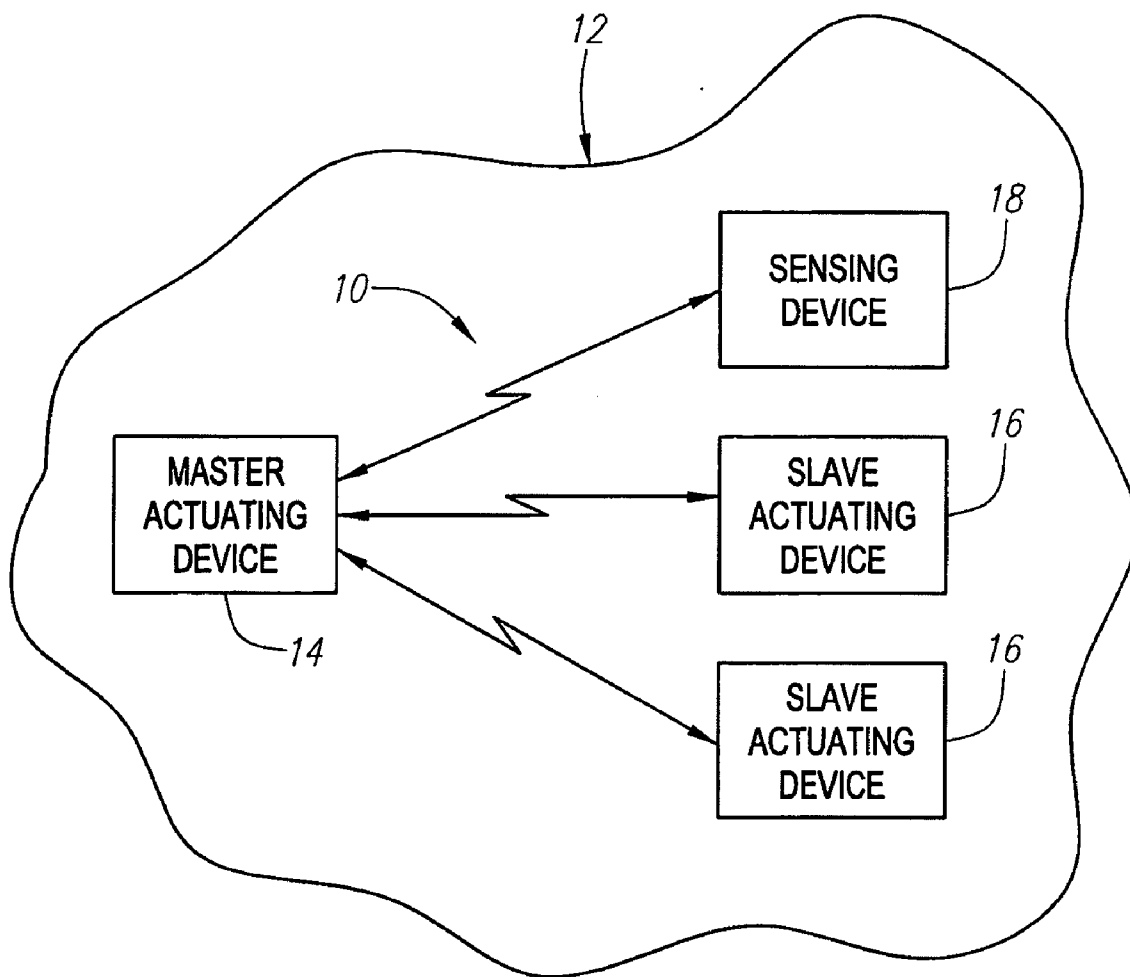


FIG. 1

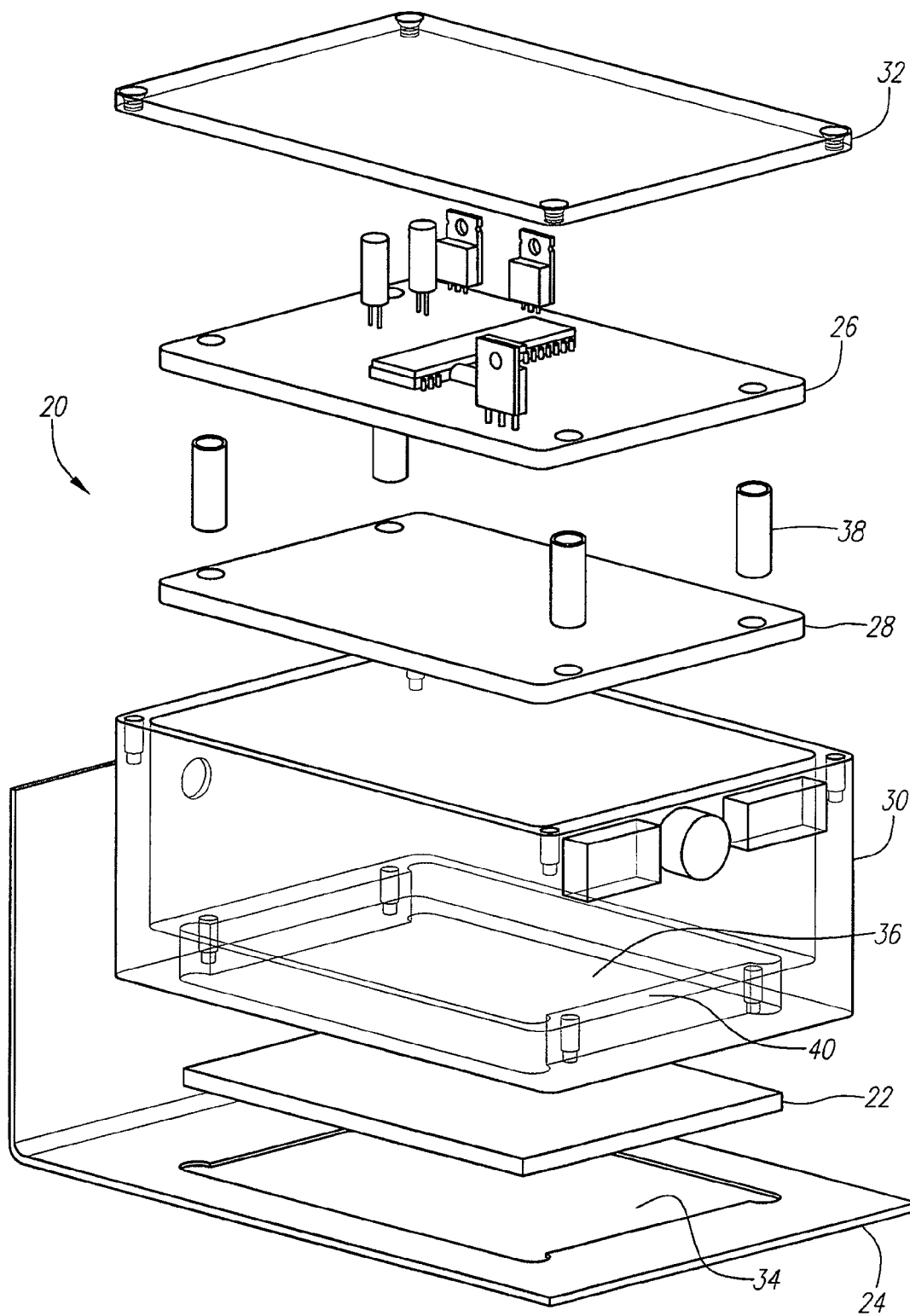


FIG. 2

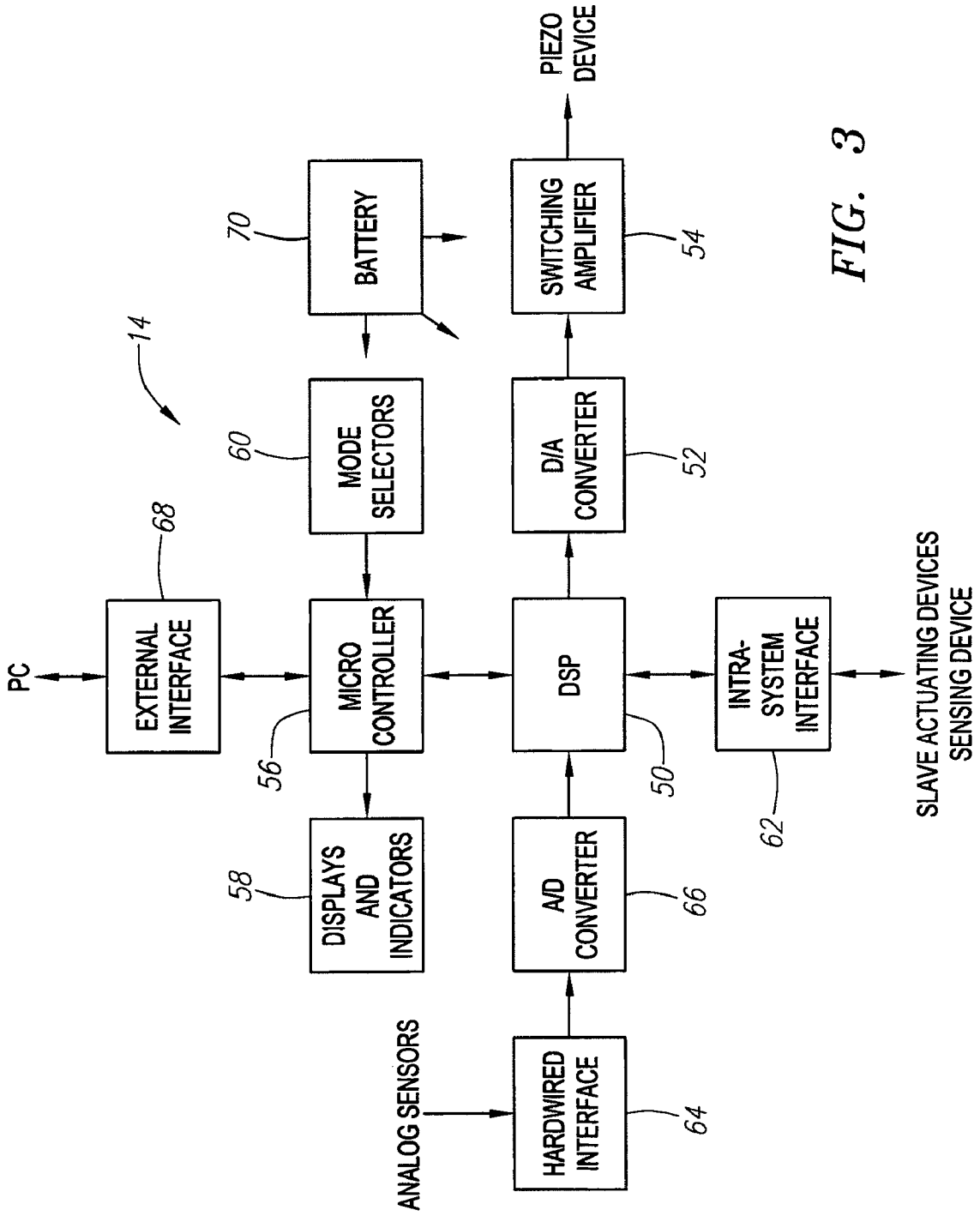


FIG. 3

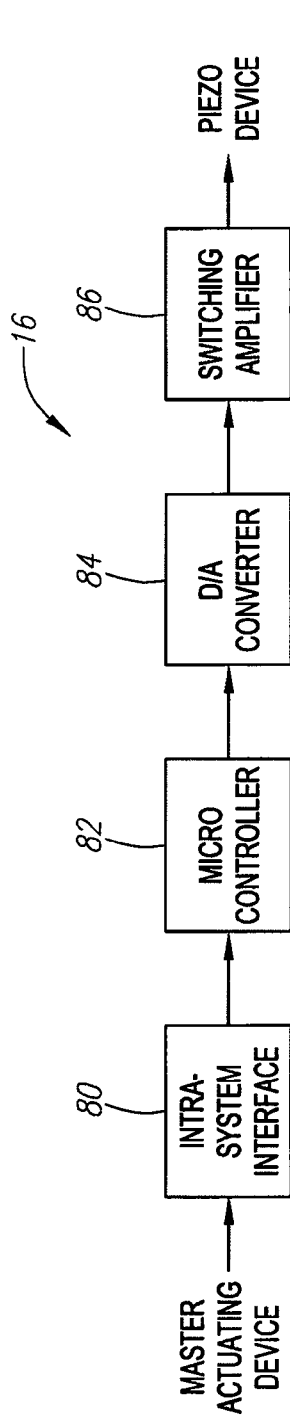


FIG. 4

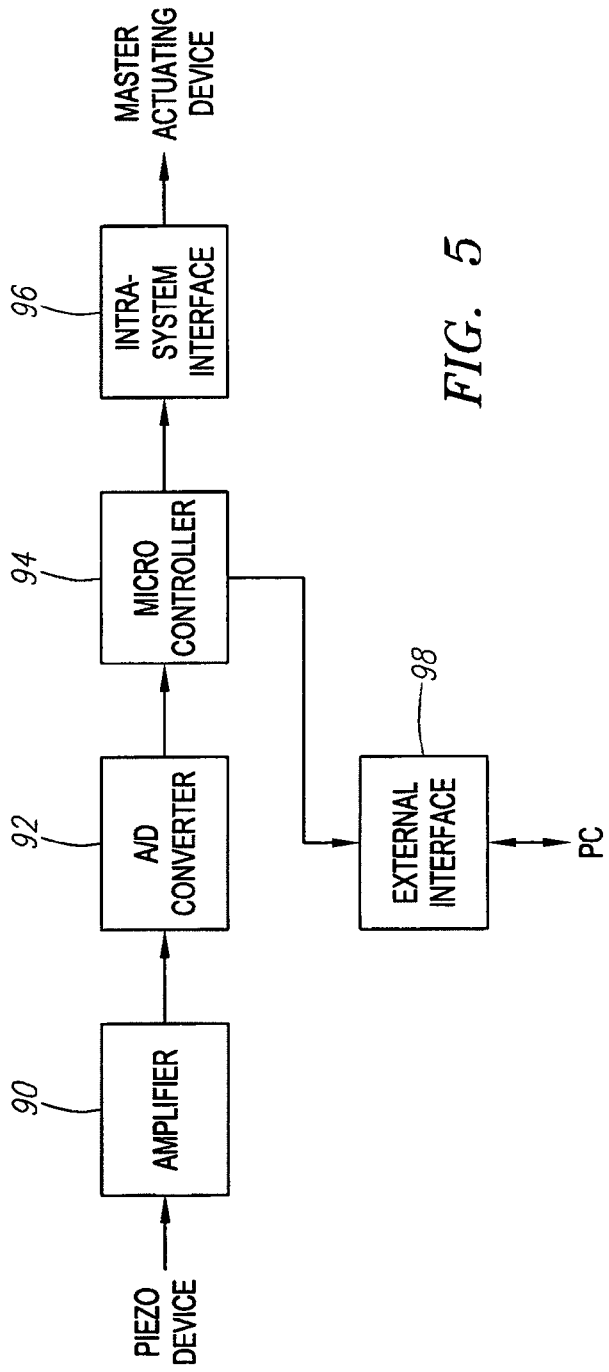


FIG. 5

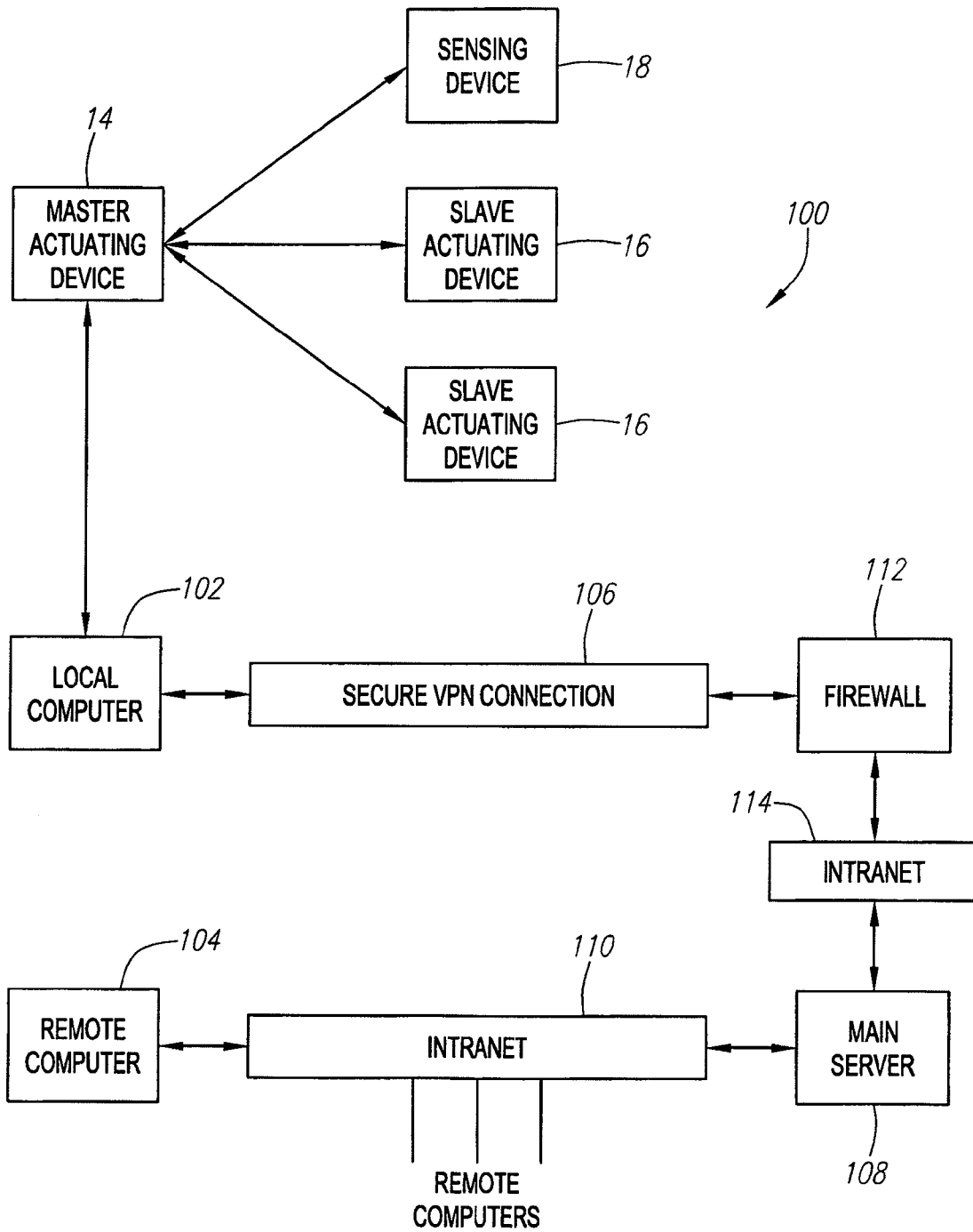


FIG. 6

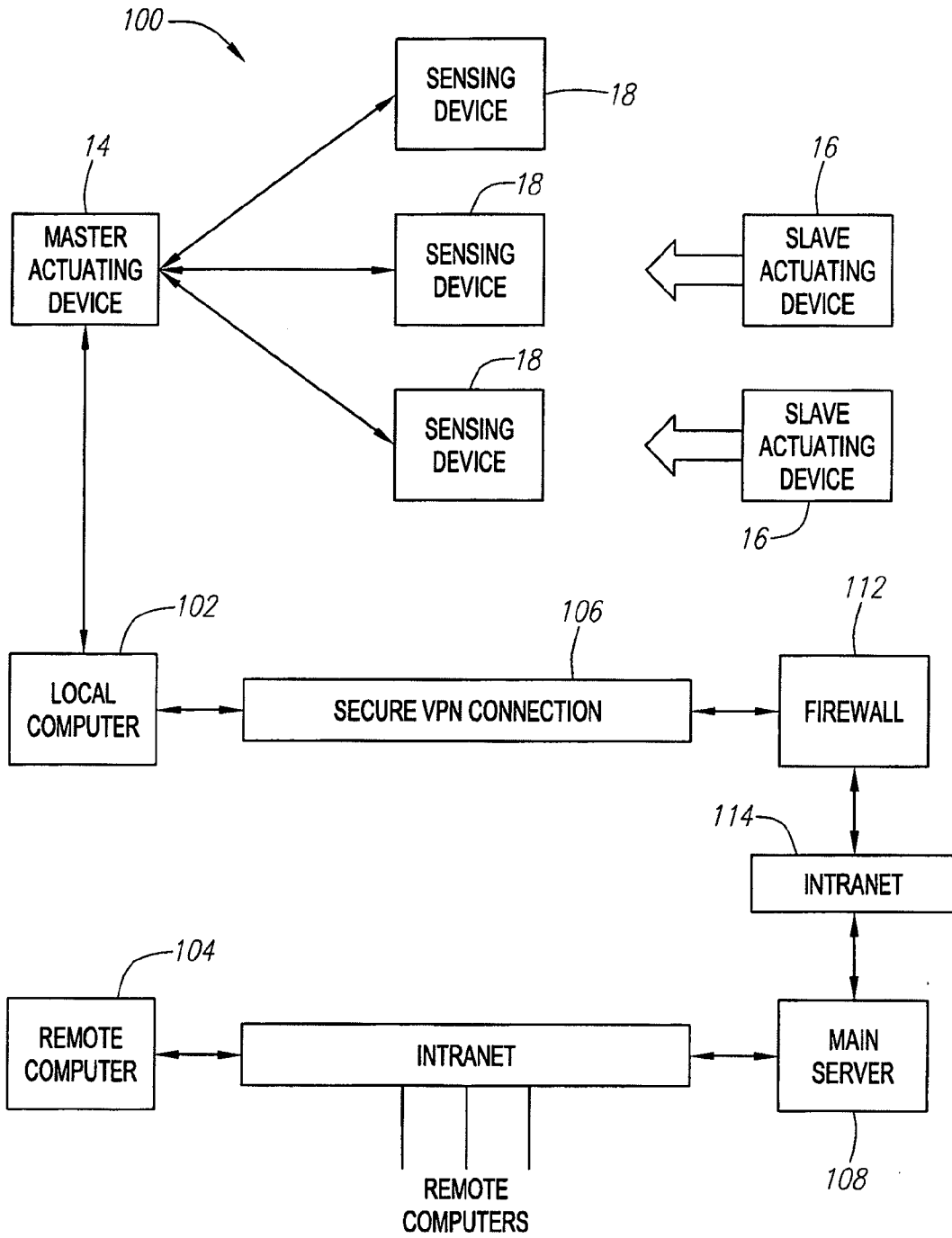


FIG. 7

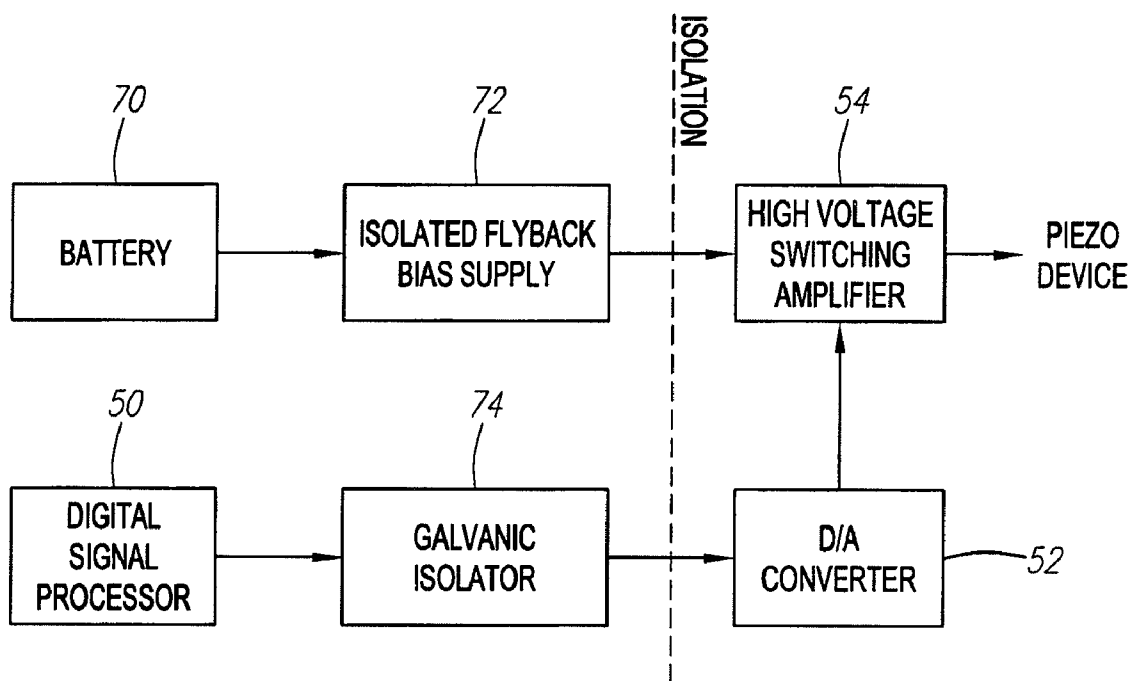


FIG. 8

METHOD FOR IMPLEMENTING VIBRATION SUPPRESSION SYSTEM UNDER CONTROL FROM A REMOTE SITE

CROSS-REFERENCES TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] The present application claims priority from U.S. Provisional Application Ser. No. 60/654,607, filed Feb. 18, 2005. This application is filed concurrently with U.S. patent application Ser. No. 11/_____ (Bingham Docket No. 3002884-7045162001), entitled "Distributed Vibration Analysis and Suppression System with Collocated Control Electronics", and U.S. patent application Ser. No. 11/_____ (Bingham Docket No. 3002884-7045162002), entitled "Kit and Method for Constructing Vibration Suppression and/or Sensing Units", which are expressly incorporated herein by reference.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The present inventions generally relate to the analysis and suppression of structural vibration in apparatus and systems.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0003] Structural vibration is one of the key performance limiting phenomena in many types of advanced machinery, such as space launch vehicle shrouds, all types of jet and turbine engines, robots, and many types of manufacturing equipment. For example, semiconductor manufacturing equipment and the equipment used to manufacture micro- and nano-devices are sensitive to structural vibration at ever increasing levels. The positioning accuracy requirements in the most advanced semiconductor manufacturing and test equipment in the market today are on the order of single-digit nanometers.

[0004] Because structural vibration depends on many factors that are not easily modeled, such as boundary and continuity conditions, as well as the disturbance environment, it is impossible to design a machine from the first prototype that will meet all vibration requirements. This means that the final steps in analyzing and suppressing vibration are accomplished after the actual production unit has been built. Unfortunately, this is precisely the time that any delay in shipment is the most costly in terms of lost revenue and competitive advantage.

[0005] To address this shortfall, it is known to incorporate vibration analysis and suppression systems into precision equipment. In general, a typical vibration analysis and suppression system includes a multitude of vibration sensors and vibration actuators that are installed on-board the precision equipment in selected locations. The system also includes a control system that transmits control signals in accordance with a vibration suppression algorithm to the actuators during normal operation of the precision equipment to mechanically suppress the vibrations. Using a feedback loop, the sensed vibration information is fed back to the control circuitry, which adjusts the control signals in response to dynamic conditions.

[0006] Using a combination of feedforward and feedback control theory, the vibration suppression algorithm used by the control circuitry to generate the control signals is

selected in accordance with vibration information acquired by the sensors during vibration testing of the precision equipment, preferably before the precision equipment is operated in the field.

[0007] The vibration analysis portion of this process is typically implemented during initial vibration testing. In particular, sensors are affixed to select locations on the precision equipment, and operated to sense the response of the precision equipment to artificially induced environmental vibrations. The sensed vibrations are then analyzed to ascertain the nature of the vibration suppression algorithm to be programmed into the control circuitry. Once the algorithm has been programmed, at least some of the sensors will then be replaced with the actuators that will be used to generate the control signals that suppress the environmental vibrations during the feedback control portion of the vibration testing process (to ascertain performance of the control algorithm), as well as during normal operation of the precision equipment in the field (to improve performance by suppressing vibrations at key locations).

[0008] The feedback and feedforward control portions of the vibration suppression process are typically implemented both during vibration testing after the vibration suppression algorithm has been programmed into the control circuitry, as well as during normal operation of the precision equipment in the field. In particular, in response to the normal operating environment, the sensors feed back vibration information to the control circuitry, which in response, generates the vibration suppression control signals, the parameters of which are continually adjusted in real-time in response to the varying vibration conditions. In case of predictable and repeated disturbance, such as from cooling fans, etc., the disturbance information as measured by dedicated sensors can be fed forward to the controller to improve control performance even further. These control signals are transmitted to the actuators, which vibrate to suppress the environmental vibrations. Minor adjustments of the vibration suppression algorithm as previously designed can then be performed based on the actual performance of the vibration suppression system.

[0009] There are several unresolved issues that can be addressed during vibration testing. For example, because the sensors must be affixed to key locations in the precision equipment in a robust manner (typically using a bonding material, such as epoxy) to ensure the accuracy of the sensed vibration information during feedforward vibration testing, replacement of the sensors with actuators for feedback vibration testing and normal operation of the precision equipment can be a tedious process. In addition, the analysis of the sensed vibration information and programming of the vibration suppression algorithm may sometimes be accomplished by third parties that are remote from the equipment site, and who must, therefore, repeatedly interface with personnel on-site during the iterative vibration information acquisition and algorithm programming process.

[0010] There are also unresolved issues that can be addressed during normal operation of the precision equipment in the field. For example, control circuitry currently used in vibration analysis and suppression systems is located remotely from the vibrating part of the precision equipment, typically being hardwired to the on-board sensors and actua-

tors even during the normal operation of the precision equipment. There are several disadvantages to this architecture.

[0011] For example, the connecting cables extending from the precision equipment stationary parts, such as electronics cabinets, to the moving parts, such as stages and end effectors, often hinder its normal operation-especially in the case where the sensors and actuators are located on rotating or rapidly translating components. Such cables may in fact introduce unwanted vibrations, at least partially negating the benefits of the vibration suppression system. Significantly, because most vibration actuators, such as piezoceramics, voice coils and others, require a relatively large voltage (typically in the hundreds of volts), the cables are quite bulky, providing a further hindrance to normal operation of the equipment. In addition to the mechanical awkwardness, the use of cables (both from the sensors and to the actuators) also provides a long path through an environment rich in electromagnetic noise that can be injected into the analog signals transmitted between the sensors/actuators and the remotely located control circuitry. As a result, proper control of the actuators may be compromised due to corruption of either the control signals transmitted from the control circuitry to the actuators or the sensing signals transmitted to the control circuitry from the sensors, or both.

[0012] There thus remains a need for improved vibration analysis and suppression systems and methods for testing and implementing such systems.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0013] In accordance with a first aspect of the present inventions, a method of implementing vibration suppression on equipment (e.g., equipment having a normal operation that is highly sensitive to vibration) residing at a local site is provided. The method comprises transmitting a prompt from a remote site to the local site (e.g., over a Virtual Private Network (VPN) connection) to automatically cause vibration response information to be sensed from the equipment. In an optional method, the prompt additionally causes probe vibrations to be induced in the equipment.

[0014] The method further comprises analyzing the vibration response information, and creating a vibration suppression algorithm based on the analysis. In an optional method, the vibration response information is automatically acquired at the remote site in response to the prompt. In one method, the vibration response information is analyzed and the vibration suppression algorithm is created at the remote site from which the prompt was transmitted, although it should be appreciated that such functions can be performed at other remote sites. An optional method further comprises transmitting another prompt from the remote site to the local site to automatically cause the vibration suppression algorithm to be programmed into control circuitry residing at the local site.

[0015] Another optional method further comprises transmitting another prompt from the remote site to the local site to automatically cause vibrations to be induced in the equipment in accordance with the vibration suppression algorithm and to automatically cause additional vibration response information to be sensed from the equipment, analyzing the additional vibration response information, and modifying the vibration suppression algorithm based on the

additional analysis. The additional vibration response information may be acquired at the remote site in response to the other prompt. Still another prompt may be transmitted from the remote site to the local site to automatically program the modified vibration suppression algorithm into control circuitry residing at the local site.

[0016] While the present inventions should not be so limited in their broadest aspects, this method allows the control, operation, and data acquisition at the local site to be accomplished from a remote site without interaction, or with minimal interaction, with personnel at the local site.

[0017] In accordance with a second aspect of the present inventions, another method of implementing vibration suppression at equipment residing at a local site is provided. The method comprises receiving a prompt from a remote site (e.g., over a Virtual Private Network (VPN) connection), and automatically sensing vibration response information from the equipment in response to the prompt. An optional method comprises inducing probe vibrations in the equipment in response to the first prompt.

[0018] The method further comprises transmitting the sensed vibration response information to the remote site. In an optional method, the sensed vibration response information is transmitted to the remote site in response to the prompt. The method further comprises receiving a vibration suppression algorithm from the remote site, and inducing vibrations in the equipment in accordance with the vibration suppression algorithm. An optional method comprises receiving another prompt from the remote site, and automatically programming control circuitry at the local site with the vibration suppression algorithm in response to the other prompt.

[0019] Another optional method comprises receiving another prompt from the remote site, wherein the vibrations are automatically induced in the equipment in response to the other prompt. This optional method may further comprise automatically sensing additional vibration response information from the equipment in response to the other prompt, transmitting the additional sensed vibration response information to the remote site, receiving a modified vibration suppression algorithm from the remote site, and programming the modified vibration suppression algorithm into control circuitry residing at the local site. Still another prompt can be received from the remote site, wherein the control circuitry is automatically programmed with the modified vibration suppression algorithm in response to this other prompt.

[0020] Other and further aspects and features of the invention will be evident from reading the following detailed description of the preferred embodiments, which are intended to illustrate, not limit, the invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0021] The drawings illustrate the design and utility of preferred embodiments of the present invention, in which similar elements are referred to by common reference numerals. In order to better appreciate how the above-recited and other advantages and objects of the present inventions are obtained; a more particular description of the present inventions briefly described above will be rendered by reference to specific embodiments thereof, which are illus-

trated in the accompanying drawings. Understanding that these drawings depict only typical embodiments of the invention and are not therefore to be considered limiting of its scope, the invention will be described and explained with additional specificity and detail through the use of the accompanying drawings in which:

[0022] FIG. 1 is a functional block diagram of a vibration analysis and suppression system constructed in accordance with one preferred embodiment of the present inventions;

[0023] FIG. 2 is an exploded view of a self-contained unit that can be used to implement one of the master vibration actuating device, slave vibration actuating devices, or vibration sensing device used in the system of FIG. 1;

[0024] FIG. 3 is a functional block diagram of a master vibration actuating device used in the system of FIG. 1;

[0025] FIG. 4 is a functional block diagram of a slave vibration actuating device used in the system of FIG. 1;

[0026] FIG. 5 is a functional block diagram of a vibration sensing device used in the system of FIG. 1;

[0027] FIG. 6 is a functional block diagram of one preferred embodiment of a communications system used to remotely download environmental vibration information from a sensing device for analysis, upload vibration suppression algorithms to a master actuating device, and download closed-loop vibration information from the sensing device;

[0028] FIG. 7 is a functional block diagram of one preferred embodiment of a communications system used to remotely induce vibrations within the equipment, and download resulting vibration information from a plurality of sensing devices for analysis; and

[0029] FIG. 8 is a functional block diagram of an implementation that electrically isolates the high-voltage amplifier in the master actuating device of FIG. 3 from the remaining componentry of the master actuating device.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

[0030] Referring to FIG. 1, a vibration analysis and suppression system 10 constructed in accordance with one preferred embodiment of the present inventions is described. The system 10 is designed to be used on equipment 12 whose performance is highly sensitive to vibration. The system 10 utilizes a flexible distributed design concept that maximizes the equipment owner's return on investment and ease of implementation. The entire system 10 is designed to be affixed to key locations on the moving parts of the equipment 12, such as the end effector of a robotic arm. Thus, no cables, or at the least no large cables, need be installed between the stationary and moving parts of the equipment 12 during normal operation, thereby eliminating the mechanical awkwardness and electromagnetic interference (EMI) problems associated with prior art architectures. The components of the system 10 are also designed to be attached the equipment 12 in a distributed and modularized fashion, thereby providing maximum flexibility in implementing and testing the system 10.

[0031] To this end, the system 10 generally comprises a plurality of vibration actuating devices for mechanically

inducing vibrations within the structure of the equipment 12 to suppress the environmental vibrations. These actuating devices can be functionally divided into two types: (1) a single master actuating device 14, which includes all of the necessary control circuitry required to generate vibration control signals in accordance with an on-board vibration suppression algorithm; and (2) a plurality of vibration slave devices 16 controlled by the master actuating device 14. That is, the master actuating device 14 generates and transmits vibration control signals to the slave actuating devices 16, which respond by inducing vibrations within the structure of the equipment 12. Thus, it can be appreciated that, in contrast to prior art architectures wherein the control circuitry was remotely connected to the actuators via cables, the control circuitry is located in the master actuating device 12. The system 10 further comprises a vibration sensing device 18 for sensing vibrations within the equipment 12 and feeding vibration response information back to the master actuating device 14, which generates the vibration control signals in response thereto. Although only one sensing device 18 is illustrated, the system 10 can include additional sensing devices, so that the vibrations in the equipment 12 can be analyzed in a more robust and thorough manner.

[0032] Significantly, communication between the master actuating device 14, slave actuating device 16, and sensing device 18 is preferably performed using digital means in order to minimize EMI. As will be described in further detail below, each of these devices is packaged in a self-contained EMI shielding unit, altogether eliminating exposure of analog signals to EMI during operation of the system 10. Also, communication between the devices is preferably accomplished wirelessly, so that cables, which may otherwise limit the placement of the devices at key locations, are eliminated. As will be described in detail below, vibration analysis and programming of the master actuating device 14 can be accomplished remotely through the use of a specialized communications means.

[0033] Referring now to FIG. 2, a self-contained unit 20, which can be interchangeably used as a master actuating device 14, a slave actuating device 16, or a sensing device 18, will now be described. The unit 20 comprises a thin plate of piezo material (in particular, lead zirconium titanate (PZT)) 22, which, depending on the interfacing electronic circuitry, can either function as a strain actuator to induce planar strains in the carrier structure (i.e., the portion of the equipment to which the actuator 12 is affixed) or a strain sensor to sense plane strains within the carrier structure. The piezo plate 22 may be formed of a single PZT layer, but preferably is formed of multiple PZT layers (e.g., two or four layers). The piezo plate 22 mechanically interfaces with the carrier structure via a thin stainless steel base plate 24 that is permanently mounted to the carrier structure.

[0034] The unit 20 also comprises a printed circuit board (PCB) 26 that carries the electronic circuitry used to interface with the piezo plate 22 to perform either of the vibration actuating or sensing functions. In the embodiment illustrated in FIG. 2, the PCB 26 is shown carrying the electronic circuitry that enables the unit 20 to perform the functions of the master actuating device 14. However, as will be described in further detail below, the PCB 26 can easily be replaced with another PCB (not shown) that will enable the unit 20 to perform the functions of the slave actuating device

16 or the sensing device 18. To ensure that the unit 20 can effectively be used in electronically dense manufacturing environments, the unit 20 further comprises a stainless steel EMI shield 28 to reduce EMI interference with adjacent electronic devices.

[0035] The unit 20 further comprises a protective case 30 and associated cover 32, which are preferably composed of an electrically insulative material, such as clear acrylic, thereby reducing the risk that the electronic circuitry contained in the PCB 26 will be damaged by electrostatic or other stray electrical current events. The case 30, which when mounted to the base plate 24, also facilitates firm contact between the piezo plate 22 and base plate 24, while providing full protection from accidental impacts that may otherwise damage the fragile piezo plate 22, thereby allowing the unit 20 to be shipped and stored with little risk of breakage.

[0036] In particular, the piezo plate 22 is suitably bonded within a recess 34 formed in the lower section of the base plate 24. This recess 34 serves to both properly seat the piezo plate 22 relative to the case 30, which will be suitably bonded onto the base plate 24, and to make the portion of the base plate 24 through which the piezo plate 22 interfaces with the carrier structure thinner, thereby maximizing the mechanical transfer function between the piezo plate 22 and the carrier structure. An aperture 36 is formed at the bottom of the case 30 for receiving the piezo plate 22, thereby encasing the piezo plate 22 between the base plate 24 and case 30 when bonded together. This robust mechanical packaging feature also eliminates the need to encase the piezo plate 22 in polyimide, thereby improving strain transfer characteristics with the carrier structure and increasing electromechanical efficiency.

[0037] It should be noted that, while the case piezo plate 22 and case 30 are irreversibly bonded to the base plate 24, there should be no need for field removal of the piezo plate 22, and in fact, it would be undesirable to handle the piezo plate 22 that is not bonded to the base plate 24 due to its fragility. Thus, once the piezo plate 22, base plate 24, and case 30 are integrated into a permanent unit, it is not anticipated that the unit 20 will be removed from the equipment 12. However, should it become necessary to de-bond the unit 20 from the equipment 12, the unit 20 is designed, such that the PCB 26, which is the highest-cost component of the unit 20, can be easily removed from the unit 20 to protect it. Thus, although the piezo plate 22, base plate 24, and case 30 will likely be destroyed during the de-bonding process, the loss to the owner will be limited.

[0038] To this end, the PCB 26 is mounted within the case 30 in an easily removable manner. In particular, the PCB 26 and EMI shield 28, which are separated from each other by spacers 38, are mounted to the top surface of a ledge 40 located at the bottom of the case 30 via bolts (not shown) above the piezo plate 22. The EMI shield 28 comprises a small aperture (not shown) through which a cable (such as flexible connecting ribbon) (not shown) can be threaded between the PCB 26 and the piezo plate 22. One end of the ribbon is hardwired to the appropriate location on the piezo plate 22, and its free end is removably mated with a pin connector (not shown) on the PCB 26. Thus, it can be appreciated that the PCB 26 can be removed from the unit 20 simply by removing the cover 32 from the case 30,

removing the bolts from the PCB/EMI shield assembly, and disconnecting the ribbon from the pin connector. In the case where it is desired to replace the PCB 26 with another PCB, either because it is damaged or faulty, or because it is desired to transform the functionality of unit 20 between a master actuating device 14, slave actuating device 16, and sensing device 18, the new PCB can be reinstalled into the unit 20 simply by mounting the PCB/EMI assembly within the case 30 using the bolts, reconnecting the connecting ribbon to the pin connector of the new PCB, and placing the cover 32 back onto the case 30.

[0039] Referring now to FIGS. 3-5, the detailed electronic componentry of each of the master actuating device 14, slave actuating device 16, and sensing device 18 will be described. As discussed above, this electronic componentry will be carried by a PCB, such as the PCB 26 illustrated in FIG. 2.

[0040] Referring first to FIG. 3, the master actuating device 14 comprises a digital signal processor 50, which includes programmable memory, such as flash memory, for storing a vibration suppression algorithm in the form of embedded software and for collecting data, such as test vector data and sensing data that will be used by the digital signal processor 50 to perform feedforward and feedback control. The digital signal processor 50 is configured for generating digital control signals in accordance with the vibration suppression algorithm, which signals will ultimately be used by the master actuating device 14, as well as the slave actuating devices 16, to induce vibrations in the structure. In the embodiment illustrated in FIG. 3, the digital control signals are used to control a high-voltage amplifier. In particular, the master actuating device 14 further includes a digital-to-analog (D/A) converter 52 for converting the digital control signals into low voltage analog control signals, and a high voltage switching amplifier 54 (e.g., 50-100V), for converting the low voltage analog control signals into high-voltage low current analog signals (e.g., a sine sweep or band-limited white noise) used to stimulate the on-board piezo device (i.e., the piezo plate 22 illustrated in FIG. 2). It should be appreciated that other types of high-voltage amplifiers other than switching amplifiers can be used. For example, a high-voltage linear amplifier can be used, in which case, a pulse-width-modulating (PWM) element, instead of the D/A converter 52, can be used between the digital signal processor 50 and the high-voltage amplifier.

[0041] The master actuating device 14 comprise an optional microcontroller 56, which when combined with the digital signal processor 50, allows the master actuating device 14 to implement more advanced control techniques, such as non-linear and adaptive control. The microcontroller 56 also provides a means for controlling the functioning of the digital signal processor 50, e.g., uploading vibration suppression algorithms or other control data. The master actuating device 14 may also include displays and indicators 58 to allow the microcontroller 56 to provide status, such as proper operation and faults, and mode selectors 60, such as buttons or contacts, to control the modes of the master actuating device 14 via the microcontroller 56.

[0042] The master actuating device 14 includes various means for communicating with other devices. In particular, the master actuating device 14 includes an intra-system communications interface 62 for transmitting the digital control signals to the slave actuating devices 16 and receiving digital sensing signals from the sensing device 18. In the illustrated embodiment, the communications interface 62 is a wireless high-speed digital communications interface, such as CAN or I2C. However, an analog interface can be used to communicate with the other devices primarily for self test and other utility purposes. In actual operation, such an interface would not be as desirable, since it will expose the analog signals to EMI. In any event, the communications interface 62 may be bidirectional to allow for Multi-Input/Multi-Output system identification. The master actuating device 16 optionally includes a hardwired interface 64 for receiving analog vibration response information from prior art sensing devices, and an analog-to-digital (A/D) converter 66 for converting the analog information into digital information for use by the digital signal processor 50. The master actuating device 14 also includes an external interface 68 for communicating with an external personal computer (PC), e.g., to facilitate uploading of the vibration suppression algorithm and other information from the PC to the master actuating device 14, and downloading of vibration response information from the master actuating device 16 to the PC. The external interface 68 may be wired, e.g., a USB port, or wireless, utilizing industry standard protocols, such as Bluetooth or Zigby.

[0043] In the illustrated embodiment, the master actuating device 14 comprises a low voltage, preferably rechargeable, battery 70 (e.g., 12 volts) that supplies the electronics with the required direct current (DC) power. In this manner, the master actuating device 14 need not be connected to an external power source, thereby eliminating the need for external cables altogether. To the extent that the use of a battery is not desirable, power can be supplied from an external source via a slip ring, thereby obviating the need for cables. It should be noted, however, that even if a cable is used, it will typically be much smaller than the high voltage cables required in prior art architectures.

[0044] In an optional embodiment, the high-voltage switching amplifier 54 is electrically isolated from the remaining circuitry of the master actuating device 14 to prevent ground loops from occurring when some of the voltage applied to the piezo device leaks into the master actuating device 14. In particular, if the output of the high-voltage switching amplifier 54 uses the same ground as the remaining circuitry within the master actuating device 14, the master actuating device 14 can experience a current or voltage spike, thereby causing it to at least temporarily malfunction and potentially trigger a system wide shutdown.

[0045] For example, FIG. 8 illustrates an optional embodiment wherein the high-voltage switching amplifier 54 is electrically isolated from various other components of the master actuating device 14. Both the power lines and the control lines are electrically isolated between the amplifier 54 and other components of the master actuating device 14. In particular, DC power is supplied from the battery 70 (or other power source) to the switching amplifier 54 through an isolated flyback bias supply 72, which in the illustrated embodiment, transforms a 48V supply into 120V supplied to the switching amplifier 54, and 5V supplied to the circuitry

of the master actuating device 14, including the switching amplifier 54. Control signals are supplied from the digital signal processor 50 to the D/A converter 52, and thus, the switching amplifier 54, through a galvanic (magnetic) coupler 74. It can be appreciated that other types of non-electrical couplers can be used, e.g., optocouplers, to transmit signals from the digital signal processor 50 to the switching amplifier 54. Thus, because the power and control lines connected to the switching amplifier 54 are electrically isolated from the components of the master actuating device 14, any voltage leakage from the piezo element will not result in a ground loop.

[0046] Referring now to FIG. 4, the slave actuating device 16 is similar to the master actuating device 14, with the exception that the slave actuating device 16 only comprises the circuitry needed to transform the digital control signal into the high voltage low current analog signal. That is, the slave actuating device 16 only includes an intra-system communications interface 80 (similar to the one used by the master actuating device 14) for receiving the digital control signals transmitted by the master actuating device 14, a microcontroller 82 for controlling the data received on the communications interface 80, a D/A converter 84 for converting the digital control signals from the microcontroller 82 into low voltage analog control-signals, and a high-voltage switching amplifier 86 for converting the low voltage analog control signals into high voltage low current analog signals used to stimulate the on-board piezo device. Like the master actuating device 14 illustrated in FIG. 8, the high-voltage switching amplifier 86 may be electrically isolated from various components within the slave actuating device 16 to prevent or minimize the adverse effects caused by voltage or current spikes at the piezo device.

[0047] Referring now to FIG. 5, the sensing device 18 comprises a high impedance charge amplifier 90 for sensing the charge induced in the on-board piezo device by the strain exerted on the piezo device by the structural vibrations, and converting it to a low voltage analog signal. The sensing device 18 further comprises an A/D converter 92 for converting the low voltage analog signal into a digital signal representative of the magnitude and phase of the piezo strain. The sensing device 18 further includes a microcontroller 94 for controlling the sensing data from the A/D converter 92, and an intra-system communications interface 96 (similar to the one used by the master actuating device 14) for transmitting the sensing data to the master actuating device 14. The sensing device 18 may optionally include an external communications interface 98 (similar to the one used in the master actuating device 14) for communicating with an external PC, e.g., to facilitate downloading of vibration response information from the sensing device 18 to the PC. This feature may be useful when it is merely desired to acquire vibration response information for subsequent analysis, or when the master actuating device 14, which is configured for downloading vibration response information to the PC, is otherwise not installed or operational.

[0048] In the afore-described embodiments of the slave actuating device 16 and sensing device 18, power is provided either using a battery or a wired connection from the master actuating device 14. In the case where it is desirable to supply both power and communications from the master actuating device 14 to the slave actuating devices 16 and sensing device 18 through a wired connection, or both power

and communications from an external device to the master actuating device **14**, a Power over Ethernet (POE) methodology can be used in accordance with IEEE 802.3af to deliver the power/communications signals. IEEE 802.3af provides the capability of deliver both power and data over standard Ethernet cabling, such as CAT5 or CAT6 cable. This eliminates the need for separate signal and power cables and enables the use of commonly available standard CAT5 cable equipped with a standard RJ45 plug.

[0049] Referring to FIG. 6, a communications system **100** can be used to facilitate analysis of the structural dynamics of the equipment **12**, implementation of the control aspects of the system **10** based on this analysis, and evaluation of the performance of the system **10**, all from a remote site. In particular, the communications system **100** comprises a local computer **102** (such as a personal computer (PC)) residing at the customer or local site (i.e., the site at which the equipment **12** is located), and a remote computer **104** (such as a PC) located at a vibration analysis laboratory, such as IPTRADE Inc, located in Newton, Mass. The local computer **102** is connected to the master actuating device **14** via the external communications interface **68** (shown in FIG. 3), and is connected to the remote computer **104** via a secure Virtual Private Network (VPN) connection **106**. If multiple computers are located at the remote site, the communications system **100** may optionally include a main server **108** connected to the computers via an intranet **110** to facilitate communication between the local computer **102** and one or more of the remotes computer **104**. To provide further data security, the communications system **100** may include a firewall **112** connected between the secure VPN connection **106** and the main server **108** via an intranet **114**.

[0050] A specialized software package is installed on the local computer **102** to facilitate communications between the master actuating device **14** and the remote computer **104**. In particular, the software package enables a secure link between the local computer **102** and the remote computer **104**, establishes a direct and secure communications link between the remote computer **104** and the master actuating device **14**, and enables control engineers at the remote site to control the master actuating device **14** to perform such tasks as system identification, control design, control implementation, and performance evaluation. Thus, it can be appreciated that, with the exception of physically installing the system **10** onto the equipment **12**, a control engineer physically located at the remote site can operate the system **10** in the same manner as if he or she were present at the local site.

[0051] Referring still to FIG. 6, one scenario for implementing the system **10** will be described. In this scenario, it is determined that a structural component on the equipment **12**, such as a robotic end effector, has an unacceptable vibration level. Using finite element analysis, it is determined that the areas of high strain arising from the structural vibrations can be accurately covered using three actuating devices: a master actuating device **14** and two slave actuating devices **16**. The sensing device **18** is used to sense vibrations in the equipment **12**. Alternatively, a third party sensor, such as an accelerometer or capacitive distance probe, can be used to sense the vibrations, or more alternatively, both types of sensors can be used. After deploying the sensing device **18**, as well as the master actuating device **14** in the case where the sensing device **18** is not capable of

directly communicating with the local computer **102**, an engineer at the local site activates the specialized software package installed on the local computer **102** to establish a secure link to the main server **108**, and thus, the remote computer **104**.

[0052] The control engineer at the remote site can then implement a data acquisition protocol to acquire vibration response information from the sensing device **18**. In particular, a first prompt is transmitted from the remote computer **104** to the local computer **102** via the secure VPN connection **106**, which prompts the sensing device **18** to automatically collect and download vibration response information to the local computer **102** via the master actuating device **14**. In response to the first prompt, or alternatively in response to another prompt from the remote computer **104**, the vibration response information is then acquired at the remote computer **104** from the local computer **102** via the secure VPN connection **106**, thereby allowing the control engineer to obtain an accurate picture of the structural dynamics of the equipment **10**. Alternatively, although requiring more coordination between the remote and local sites, personnel at the remote site can remotely prompt the sensing device **18** to automatically collect and download vibration response information to the local computer **102**, and the downloaded information is then transmitted from the local computer **102** to the remote computer **104** under control of personnel at the local site. In either event, once the vibration response information is acquired at the remote site, the control engineer can create and simulate a vibration suppression algorithm, and predict the key locations on the equipment **12** where the actuating devices should be mounted.

[0053] After the slave actuating devices **16**, and if not installed yet, the master actuating device **14**, are deployed at the key locations, a second prompt, along with the vibration suppression algorithm, is transmitted from the remote computer **104** to the local computer **102** via the secure VPN connection **106**, where it is automatically uploaded to the master actuating device **14**. The slave actuating devices **16**, and if not installed yet, the master actuating device **14**, are then installed at the most advantageous locations on the equipment **12** based on the analysis performed by the remote control engineer.

[0054] Next, a third prompt is transmitted from the remote computer **104** to the local computer **102**, thereby operating the master actuating device **14**, along with the slave actuating devices **16**, and collecting closed-loop vibration response information at the sensing device **18**, which is then downloaded to the local computer **102** via the master actuating device **14**. In response to the third prompt, or alternatively another prompt from the remote computer **104**, the sensed closed-loop vibration response information is then acquired at the remote computer **104** from the local computer **102** via the secure VPN connection **106**. Alternatively, although requiring more coordination between the remote and local sites, personnel at the remote site can remotely prompt operation of the actuating devices and collection and downloading of the vibration response information, and the downloaded information can then be transmitted from the local computer **102** to the remote computer **104** under control of personnel at the local site. In either case, the control engineer at the remote site compares the vibration response information to the simulated perfor-

mance, and based on this comparison, fine-tunes the vibration suppression algorithm. A fourth prompt, along with the modified vibration suppression algorithm, is then transmitted from the remote computer **104** to the local computer **102** via the secure VPN connection **106**, where it is automatically uploaded and “burned” onto the flash memory within the master actuating device **14**. If using a wired connection, the local computer **102** is disconnected from the master actuating device **14**, allowing the devices to be operated as a stand-alone system **10**.

[0055] While the physical implementation of hardware during the data acquisition and testing phase of the system **10** must still be accomplished by personnel at the local site, it should be appreciated that the methodology described with respect to FIG. 6 allows the control, operation, and data acquisition at the local site to be accomplished from the remote site without interaction, or with minimal interaction, with personnel at the local site.

[0056] Referring now to FIG. 7, another scenario for implementing the system **10** will be described. In this scenario, a reliable model of the structure of the equipment **12** in question does not exist or is not considered reliable, thereby requiring an experimental determination of the structural dynamics and high strain areas of the vibration mode shapes. In this case, the engineer at the local site deploys a master actuating device **14** in conjunction with a plurality of sensing devices **18** (in this case, three). As in the other scenario, third party sensors can be used alone or in combination with one or more sensing devices **18**. The control engineer at the remote site then transmits a prompt from the remote computer **104** to the local computer **102** via the VPN connection **106**, which prompts the master actuating device **14** to generate a probing signal, such as a sine wave sweep, thereby causing the on-board piezo device to induce the probe signal into the structure. The sensing devices **18** collect and download vibration response information to the local computer **102** via the master actuating device **14**. The response information is then acquired at the remote computer **104** from the local computer **102** via the secure VPN connection **106**, where the control engineer uses the information to implement the system **10** in the same manner described above. Notably, if the sensing devices **18** are physically located at key actuating locations, at least some of them can be replaced with slave actuating devices **16**, as illustrated in FIG. 6. This can be easily accomplished, e.g., by exchanging the PCBs, while keeping the collocated piezo devices attached to the carrier structure, thus avoiding any time consuming and mechanically difficult removal and attachment operations, as discussed above with respect to FIG. 2.

[0057] It should be appreciated that the methodologies discussed with respect to FIGS. 6 and 7 can be implemented in computer software that can be executed in the local computer **102** to perform the functions at the local site, and implemented in computer software that can be executed in the remote computer **104** to perform the functions at the remote site.

[0058] Although particular embodiments of the present invention have been shown and described, it should be understood that the above discussion is not intended to limit the present invention to these embodiments. It will be obvious to those skilled in the art that various changes and

modifications may be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the present invention. Thus, the present invention is intended to cover alternatives, modifications, and equivalents that may fall within the spirit and scope of the present invention as defined by the claims.

1. A method of implementing vibration suppression on equipment residing at a local site, comprising:

transmitting a prompt from a remote site to the local site to automatically cause vibration response information to be sensed from the equipment;

analyzing the vibration response information; creating a vibration suppression algorithm based on the analysis; and storing the vibration suppression algorithm in software for use at the local site.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein normal operation of the equipment is highly sensitive to vibration.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein the prompt is transmitted from the remote site to the local site over a Virtual Private Network (VPN) connection.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein the vibration response information is analyzed and the vibration suppression algorithm is created at the remote site.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein the prompt causes probe vibrations to be induced at equipment.

6. The method of claim 1, further comprising automatically acquiring the vibration response information at the remote site in response to the prompt.

7. The method of claim 1, further comprising transmitting another prompt from the remote site to the local site to automatically cause the vibration suppression algorithm to be programmed into control circuitry residing at the local site.

8. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

transmitting another prompt from the remote site to the local site to automatically cause vibrations to be induced at equipment in accordance with the vibration suppression algorithm and to automatically cause additional vibration response information to be sensed from the equipment;

analyzing the additional vibration response information; and

modifying the vibration suppression algorithm based on the additional analysis.

9. The method of claim 8, further comprising automatically acquiring the additional vibration response information at the remote site in response to the other prompt.

10. The method of claim 8, further comprising transmitting still another prompt from the remote site to the local site to automatically program the modified vibration suppression algorithm into control circuitry residing at the local site.

11. A method of implementing vibration suppression at equipment residing at a local site, comprising:

receiving a prompt from a remote site;

automatically sensing vibration response information from the equipment in response to the prompt;

transmitting the sensed vibration response information to the remote site;

receiving a vibration suppression algorithm from the remote site; and

inducing vibrations in the equipment in accordance with the vibration suppression algorithm.

12. The method of claim 11, wherein normal operation of the equipment is highly sensitive to vibration.

13. The method of claim 11, wherein the prompt is received from the remote site over a Virtual Private Network (VPN) connection.

14. The method of claim 11, further comprising inducing probe vibrations in the equipment in response to the first prompt.

15. The method of claim 11, wherein the sensed vibration response information is automatically transmitted to the remote site in response to the prompt.

16. (canceled)

17. The method of claim 11, further comprising receiving another prompt from the remote site, wherein the vibrations are automatically induced in the equipment in response to the other prompt.

18. The method of claim 17, further comprising:

automatically sensing additional vibration response information from the equipment in response to the other prompt;

transmitting the additional sensed vibration response information to the remote site;

receiving a modified vibration suppression algorithm from the remote site; and

programming the modified vibration suppression algorithm into control circuitry residing at the local site.

19. The method of claim 18, further comprising receiving still another prompt from the remote site, wherein the control circuitry is automatically programmed with the modified vibration suppression algorithm in response to the still other prompt.

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