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DESCRIPTION

Description

TECHNICAL FIELD

[0001] The present invention relates to systems for determining the position of an object in 3D space and more particularly to such a system that can be used for the spatial positioning of offshore structures. The invention also relates to methods of positioning of objects and structures from a moving reference frame. The present document is a divisional from EP 15183617.

BACKGROUND ART

[0002] In various situations, a need may exist for determining the position of an object in 3D space. This requires the position of the object to be determined with six degrees of freedom, namely x-y-z co-ordinates and pitch-roll-yaw angular positions. The position may be determined in a local reference frame or in the Earth's reference frame, depending on the requirements of the situation. In the following, reference will be made to positioning within the Earth's geodetic reference frame unless otherwise stated, although the invention is equally applicable to any chosen reference frame.

[0003] Existing positioning systems are employed in robotic processes, space technology, surveying and the like. One system disclosed in US8798794 enables precise robotic positioning of an object having optically detectable features by means of a 3D image recording device. Benjamin Truskin: "VISION-BASED DECK STATE ESTIMATION FOR AUTONOMOUS SHIP-BOARD LANDING", 1 May 2013 (2013-05-01), XP055738019, discloses a system configured for automatically landing of a helicopter on a landing site of a ship.

[0004] In the offshore construction industries, positioning can be problematic for various reasons. In particular, surveying from a moving vessel means that a fixed datum level is not available. Determining the Z (vertical) co-ordinate is difficult due to tides, vessel ballast and waves, and the rolling or pitching motion of a vessel can lead to large angular movements. Furthermore, since the offshore location may be remote, satellite positioning may be less accurate or reliable than at onshore locations.

[0005] One situation where accurate positioning of structures is required is during the installation of offshore platforms. Such platforms generally comprise a jacket and a topside

supported by the jacket. Topsides range from simple small decks for supporting personnel and equipment to complete multi-storey oil and gas platforms. Before the jacket is secured to the sea floor, it must be positioned at the desired site. A jacket's desired installation position and heading is pre-determined prior to placement by a range of factors. Prevailing wind or water current direction may dictate a best heading to minimise structural loading. Likewise, a jacket location may be dictated by the requirement to drill into pre-determined subsea reserves or the need to connect a jacket to existing surface or subsea infrastructure.

[0006] Currently, methods for jacket placement rely on a pod of instruments installed on top of the jacket, including one or more Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) receivers, a gyrocompass, an inertial monitoring unit (IMU) and associated telemetry equipment. This technique generally requires access to the jacket by personnel in a man basket to install or remove the instruments. In addition, the jacket must often be equipped with additional temporary gangways for the safe movement of personnel for equipment installation or removal. This procedure typically requires at least two surveyors. These current techniques are costly, and subject personnel to increased risk of injury. After installation, much of this equipment must be removed, requiring still further operations.

[0007] Conventional surveying techniques used during placement of onshore engineering structures may use theodolites and laser ranging instruments. Such instruments and techniques are however not adapted for use offshore where the dynamic nature of the situation makes accurate readings difficult or impossible.

[0008] It would be desirable to provide an improved system and method for structure positioning from a moving reference frame that at least partially alleviates some of these disadvantages.

SUMMARY OF INVENTION

[0009] The invention is defined in the independent claims, whereas advantageous embodiments are defined in dependent claims. The remainder of the section "summary of the invention" comprises background information.

[0010] In the present document, there is explained a system for determining the position of an offshore structure in a fixed reference frame by observations from a moving reference frame, the system comprising a plurality of markers located at defined positions on the structure; an imaging device, arranged to view the markers and generate image data representative of the relative positions of the markers in the moving reference frame; a local positioning system, arranged to determine the position of the imaging device in the fixed reference frame and generate position data; a processing unit, arranged to receive the image data from the imaging device and the position data from the inertial positioning system and compute the position of the structure based on the defined positions of the markers.

[0011] Such a computer-vision based system allows the determination of the position of the structure without the requirement of actually engaging or otherwise physically interacting with the structure. For the offshore placement of large engineering structures, this greatly reduces the exposure of personnel to risk of injury and equipment to risk of damage. In the following, reference to position, unless otherwise stated, is intended to refer to 3-D position, including both x-y-z position and attitude or orientation (pitch, roll, and heading). The structure itself may be stationary i.e. with respect to the fixed reference frame or quasi-stationary i.e. moving relatively slowly compared to the imaging device.

[0012] The local positioning system may be any suitable system that can determine the instantaneous position of the imaging device. This may be provided by a positioning system of a vessel on which the imaging device is installed or may be a positioning device dedicated to the imaging device. It may also be a combination of systems, which together provide the necessary six degrees of freedom measurements for the imaging device. In one example, the local positioning system may comprise an IMU integrated with the imaging device as a portable survey unit. In this case, the IMU and the imaging device should be rigidly mechanically aligned to each other. The system or survey unit may also incorporate a calibration function to calibrate the local positioning system to the imaging device. When using the system for extended periods or in the event that the survey unit has been subject to shock, it may be desirable to have a simple self-test capability. This may be achieved by calibrating against the horizon, which, for offshore locations, provides an accurate horizontal reference. The calibration function may be partially local and partially remote e.g. with an image processing system being used to identify the horizon.

[0013] In a particular configuration, the system may comprise both a vessel's navigation equipment and a local IMU directly engaged with the imaging unit, with the local IMU providing only pitch and roll data and the vessel's navigation equipment providing x-y-z and heading data. In general, reliable and accurate heading data may only be available from expensive and complex equipment of the type that may already be present on board a survey vessel. Pitch and roll data may be provided to relatively high accuracy by less complex and costly equipment such as magnetometers. Integrating pitch and roll measurements with the imaging device can also avoid inaccuracy due to flexure or torsion of the vessel.

[0014] The term local positioning system is not intended to be restrictive on any particular principle of operation. In particular, the local positioning system may be based on technologies or techniques including: mechanical gyroscopes; fibre optic gyroscopes (FOG); laser ring gyroscopes (LRG); micro-electro-mechanical systems (MEMS) based technologies; accelerometers; magnetometers; pendulums; electrolytic inclinometers; liquid capacitive inclinometers or any combination of the above. The local IMU should preferably have a dynamic accuracy of better than 0.1° , more preferably better than 0.05° and most preferably better than 0.02° , in the pitch and roll directions. Preferably the local positioning system should be able to deliver pitch, roll and heading data at a frequency of at least 5 Hz and preferably at 20 Hz or above.

[0015] In the present document, the system may further comprise a clock arranged to time stamp the image data relative to the position data. To effectively process the image data and the position data, there must be close correlation in time between the respective measurements. For operation aboard a moving vessel, pitch and roll may change very rapidly and the position data should preferably be time stamped to an accuracy of at least 10 ms. Most preferably, the time stamp will be accurate to at least 1 ms. The required timing accuracy, including unaccounted processing and communication latencies, may be expressed as a function of the required measurement precision and the expected rate of change of the moving frame. For example aboard a vessel, it may be desirable that the timing accuracy should be better than the required pitch and roll measurement accuracy divided by the maximum expected angular rate of the vessel. The difference between capture time and transmission time may also need to be taken into account to ensure the data items are correctly associated. The clock may be a local clock applicable to the local positioning system and the imaging device. Most preferably, the clock is linked to a global timebase such as GNSS to allow readings to be correlated with other events such as a position measurement. Preferably the clock also issues a clock signal for synchronising the capture time of image data. The skilled person will be well aware of various options for ensuring image data and position data are accurately synchronised to such a clock signal.

[0016] The markers may be of any form suitable for achieving the desired position accuracy and may be adapted in number and position to specifically suit the structure to be positioned and the manner in which it is viewed. Markers as claimed in the independent claims are provided by parts of the structure itself and are, thus, virtual markers. Additionally, at least one of the markers may be removably affixed to the structure for the purpose of the position determination. This means that this marker can be removed after position determination is completed. For certain structures, the presence of markers after installation may be detrimental for various reasons, including aesthetic, safety, maintenance and weathering.

[0017] In general, at least four markers are provided on the structure, rendering three vector values for subsequent analysis. Preferably, more markers will be made available to provide redundancy in cases where one or more of the markers may be obscured, or in order to check for the possible movement of a marker. The positioning of the markers is important to achieve optimised results. In particular, it may be desirable for offshore operation on engineering structures, that at least two markers are located more than 3 metres apart. In general, greater distances between markers allows more accurate position determination from greater distances. Preferably, the markers will be located at extremities of the structure where possible. Also, for open structures i.e. where it is possible to view through the structure, it is desirable to provide markers on a front-side of the structure and on a rear-side of the structure visible from the front-side.

[0018] Physical markers may be simple visual markers such as a dot or a cross, which allow the accurate position of the marker to be robustly identified. Markers may also be more complex to allow additional information to be conveyed. It will be understood that a marker that includes additional image data such as scale or direction can assist the processing unit to

compute the position of the structure. As a result, either fewer markers may be required or greater redundancy may be achieved. Preferably, at least one of the markers is a unique marker and the system is arranged to automatically identify the unique marker. It will be understood that all of the markers required to provide a determination of position may be unique markers. Physical markers may be affixed to the structure in advance and their positions relative to the structure determined by surveying techniques. During position determination of the structure, the first step may be to identify which marker is which. Automatic identification of unique markers by the system simplifies this process. In an alternative arrangement, an operator may be able to manually identify the respective markers to the processing unit.

[0019] According to a further aspect, at least one of the physical markers is a trackable marker and the system is arranged to automatically track the physical marker. In another embodiment, all of the physical markers may be trackable. For highly dynamic systems, automatic tracking of the marker or markers is advantageous. Tracking may be facilitated by knowing the geometry of the physical markers which are determined by surveying during marker installation and prior to jacket placement. If the system has "lost" a physical marker, with knowledge of the geometry of the physical markers, the system can determine where to look for the "lost" physical marker based on the position of "found" markers. Additionally, trackable markers eliminate the need for the operator to indicate the location of markers to the system. In this way the system may regularly provide updates to the determined position of the structure. The system may thus provide real-time position information for the structure. The physical markers may be high contrast images to facilitate automatic recognition, identification and trackability. High contrast images improve visibility of the physical markers. In one embodiment, each quadrant marker is a circular, black/white marker.

[0020] According to a still further aspect, the system may comprise a display, operatively connected to the processing unit and the processing unit may be arranged to display a representation of the position of the structure on the display. The display may be located at the processing unit or remotely. In one configuration the representation of the position may be overlaid onto a representation of a desired position of the structure. This allows a surveyor or crane operator to easily perceive the difference between the desired and the actual position of the structure and direct further action. In a still further embodiment the imaging device is located at a first location and the display is located at a second location and the representation of the position of the structure on the display is a representation as viewed from the second location. A number of displays may be provided at different locations. In that case, each display may depict the structure in a manner appropriate to the location of the display.

[0021] It will be further understood that various imaging devices may provide the desired function. These may include laser imaging devices, infra-red imaging or conventional camera based imaging devices. In one embodiment, the imaging device is a camera having automatic iris control, allowing use in varying lighting conditions. It will be understood that, throughout the day, the position of the sun will vary and it may be undesirable to re-locate the imaging device when the lighting condition from a particular imaging device locations prevents the acquisition

of useful images. Automatic lighting control can mitigate this difficulty, allowing the operator to continue measurements using an imaging device at the same location. Additional desirable characteristics of the camera include anti-smearing and anti-blooming correction to further improve image quality. The imaging device is most preferably a calibrated camera in which the camera image frame is calibrated and known with respect to reality such that measurement of a vector made within the image frame can be converted into a true representation of the vector in reality. Such calibrated cameras may also be referred to as photogrammetry cameras. Preferably, sensor distortion is known, as well as lens distortion. Furthermore, filter distortion should be known. In this way these distortions may be compensated for in the system, either on generation of the image data or on processing of the image data in the processing unit. In one embodiment, the camera should have a trigger input allowing external control of the timing of taking an image as will be further explained below.

[0022] In one embodiment the imaging device is mounted onboard a vessel. The vessel may be a heavy lift vessel from which the structure is being positioned. In the case of a heavy lift vessel, the imaging device may be directed downwardly towards the intended location of the structure. Alternatively, the vessel may be an auxiliary vessel deployed specifically for the purpose of surveying the structure. As indicated above, in the case of mounting onboard a vessel, the local positioning system may comprise the local positioning system or navigation equipment of the vessel. In this case, the position of the imaging device within the reference frame of the vessel must be determined. e.g. by surveying prior to commencing operation. Further calibration facilities may be provided to check the accuracy of placement of the imaging device with respect to the vessel during use. This may comprise a portion of the vessel or other datum point fixed with respect to the vessel and located within a field of view of the imaging device.

[0023] In another embodiment, the imaging device may be mounted on an unmanned vehicle such as a drone vessel or an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV). A wireless or wired communication link between the imaging device and the processing unit may be provided whereby image data and position data is sent over the link to the processing unit. In addition, control signals from the processing unit may be sent to the imaging device. Control signals may include a power on or wake-up signal.

[0024] The present invention makes possible the precise position determination of a structure from a remote location using a single imaging device. It will however be understood that the invention is not limited to a single imaging device and that further accuracy and redundancy may be achieved by providing at least two imaging devices arranged to view the structure from different perspectives. Improved accuracy may be achieved by directing first and second imaging devices to view the structure from angles generally perpendicular to each other. The first and second imaging devices may view one or more of the same markers. Alternatively, they may each view different markers. It will be understood that the positioning of the markers will generally be dependent upon whether they are to be viewed from a single location or from different locations, by one or more imaging devices. The first and second imaging devices may be located in the same moving frame of reference e.g. installed aboard the same vessel, or

may be located in different frames e.g. aboard different vessels.

[0025] In one particular embodiment, the structure is an offshore jacket to be secured by piles driven into the seabed. As a result of the proposed invention, it is not necessary for personnel to board the jacket during placement to install or remove measuring instruments. The open structure of such jackets also facilitates viewing from the same direction, markers placed at both the front and backsides of the jacket.

[0026] The present document explains a method of determining the position of an offshore structure in a fixed reference frame by observations from a moving reference frame, the structure comprising a plurality of markers positioned on the structure, the method comprising: determining the positions of the plurality of markers with respect to a reference frame of the structure; viewing the structure with an imaging device from a moving reference frame to generate image data representative of the relative positions of the markers in the moving frame; determining a position of the imaging device in the fixed frame of reference and generating position data; and processing the image data and the position data to compute the position of the structure based on the predetermined positions of the markers.

[0027] A, here not-claimed, method may comprise affixing a plurality of markers to the structure and surveying the structure to determine the positions of the markers in the reference frame of the structure prior to viewing the structure from the moving reference frame. The surveying of the structure may take place on land. In the case of an offshore jacket constructed on land, this may take place prior to placement offshore. After construction is complete, a surveyor may attach machine vision markers to the jacket structure. The markers are generally installed above the splash line as the markers must remain visible during placement. During surveying, the distances between markers are accurately measured. In this way, the geometry of the jacket with respect to its markers is known. This information is recorded and stored for later use in the system during jacket placement. Although surveying on land may be preferable, it will be understood that surveying onboard a barge or other vessel is also possible. In any case, surveying within a single reference frame, be it moving or fixed, is generally achievable using conventional measuring techniques.

[0028] As mentioned above, in one embodiment additional, physical markers are removable. Offshore jackets are subjected to harsh and hazardous environments. Such jackets are generally treated with anti-corrosion and fire protection coatings. A non-removable target may damage these coatings. The physical markers may, for example, be applied to thin metal or plastic sheets secured to jacket frame sections using a connection clamp. Jacket frame sections are generally cylindrical and have a diameter of about 0.5 to 1 metre. The dimensions of the jacket are application dependent but above waterline lengths of 10 metres to 50 metres or more are typical. The method may further include the removal of the physical markers subsequent to installation.

[0029] The claimed method comprises accessing an electronic file or other form of computer representation of the jacket which accurately describes the dimensions and mechanical

configuration of the jacket. This is used for positioning of virtual markers on the structure corresponding to structural members or parts thereof, which can be identified both visually on viewing the structure with the imaging device and in the electronic file. Identification may take place automatically by software or may be guided by a human operator. The method may thus take place without fixing of physical markers to the structure or with a mixture of physical and virtual markers.

[0030] In a method, which is not claimed here, the imaging device provides an image of the jacket during placement. The operator or surveyor receives an image from the imaging device on a display. The surveyor manually clicks on the display using a conventional pointer device, indicating to the system that a marker is in that area of the image. In an embodiment where the markers are not unique, the surveyor can also identify the marker to the system. For example, the surveyor clicks on a marker and identifies it as "top left." This identification relates to the surveyed geometry of the jacket. Once all markers have been identified, the system can determine the position of the jacket with respect to the camera. In turn the position of the camera is known with respect to the vessel, and the vessel's position is known with respect to the Earth. In this way the position of the jacket can be determined with respect to the Earth.

[0031] Accordingly, the position of the jacket can be continuously monitored in real time. This is especially advantageous as regularly updating the determined position of the jacket allows the installation crew to take corrective action. For example, the crane operator or crew may perform adjustments to change the position of the jacket using the crane hook, taglines or tugger winches. The position of the jacket must be correct before securing the jacket with piles to the sea floor. While driving the piles into the sea floor it is generally no longer possible to take further corrective action.

[0032] A further aspect relates to a computer program product comprising instructions to perform the method described above and hereinafter when installed on a computer or processing device.

[0033] The computer program product may comprise appropriate modules to perform the above defined tasks including, but not limited to: an image acquisition software module for acquiring time-stamped image data; a position software module for acquiring time-stamped position data; a marker identification module for identifying individual markers within the image; a marker tracking module for actively tracking an identified marker; an image reconstruction module for transforming the image from the moving frame into the fixed frame of reference; and a GUI module that presents a display of the structure in the fixed frame of reference.

[0034] In one embodiment, the GUI module may be arranged to cause the display of the structure to be overlaid onto a desired position of the structure.

[0035] In another embodiment, the computer program product may further comprise a model importation module to import a computer representation of the jacket; and a structure recognition module which detects structure within the image data based on the computer

representation imported by the model importation module.

[0036] It will be appreciated that the present invention is not limited to jacket placement and that the system and method are applicable to other structures used in offshore applications, including but not limited to wind turbines, drilling platforms, bridges, pipelines and the like and parts thereof.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

[0037] The features and advantages of the invention will be appreciated upon reference to the following drawings, in which:

Figure 1 shows a perspective overview of a positioning system;

Figure 2 shows a detail of part of the jacket of Figure 1;

Figure 3 shows schematically the architecture of the system of Figure 1;

Figure 4 shows a depiction of image data displayed on the display of Figure 3;

Figure 5 shows a depiction of the jacket of Figure 1 on the display of Figure 3;

Figure 6 shows a schematic view of part of a non-claimed example of the system; and

Figure 7 shows a perspective overview of an example of the positioning system.

DESCRIPTION OF ILLUSTRATIVE EMBODIMENTS

[0038] Figure 1 shows a schematic view of a positioning system 1. The system 1 is to be used for determining the position of a structure, which in this embodiment is a jacket 10 for installation offshore. In Figure 1, the jacket 10 has been provided with a number of markers 12A-F, affixed to its legs 8 and calibrated with respect to a Jacket Common Reference Point JCRP in an onshore survey operation prior to shipping. The positioning system 1 is mounted onboard a heavy lift vessel 2 having a crane 3 and comprises a survey unit 4 having a camera 20 and vessel navigation equipment 5 including a geodetic grade GNSS antenna 21. Also shown in Figure 1 is a datum point 7 located within a field of view of camera 20. The datum point 7 may be located on any convenient immovable part of the vessel 2, such as a railing or the like. The vessel navigation equipment 5 is adapted to provide cm accurate x-y-z positioning and pitch-roll-heading data with dynamic accuracy of better than 0.5°, at least in the pitch and roll directions. The survey unit 4 is positioned on the vessel 2 at a known position with respect to the Vessel Common Reference Point VCRP and calibrated prior to use in order to determine accurately the direction A in which the camera 20 is pointing. Once calibrated, the position of

the datum point 7 within the field of view of the camera 20 can be observed to ensure no further changes have occurred. The survey unit 4 can also be calibrated against the horizon H. Although in Figure 1 a single survey unit 4 is shown, it will be understood that a number of similar survey units 4 may be mounted at different locations on the vessel 2, directed towards the jacket 10.

[0039] Figure 3 shows a schematic overview of the positioning system 1 showing the components in further detail. As can be seen, the survey unit 4 comprises, a local signal multiplexer 16, a local Ethernet switch 18, camera 20 and local IMU 22. The survey unit 4 comprises a frame 6 to which the camera 20 and the local IMU 22 are rigidly attached. The relative positions of these components are thus fixed with respect to each other. Once calibrated, the values can be used elsewhere in the system. In general the camera 20 and local IMU 22 will be factory calibrated together but it is not excluded that further calibration and checking can take place onboard the vessel 2 during installation and use of the system 1.

[0040] The vessel navigation equipment 5 includes the geodetic grade GNSS antenna 21, GNSS receiver 14 and vessel IMU \ Gyrocompass 23. The GNSS receiver 14 is arranged to receive positioning signals and correction data from satellite constellation 25 and generates vessel x-y-z co-ordinate data to centimetre accuracy. It also generates a pulse per second (PPS) clock signal 27 based on the GNSS signal, accurate to 1 mS. The vessel IMU will generally be a precision FOG, installed for the purpose of accurate survey and installation work and having, in conjunction with the further vessel navigation equipment 5, an accuracy of 0.5 degrees in the heading direction.

[0041] The positioning system 1 further includes a processing unit 24 having a display 26 and operator input 28 in the form of a conventional keyboard and pointer. The processing unit 24 is in this case a standard laptop computer located onboard the vessel and used by the surveyor. It will however be understood that it may also be a distributed processing arrangement with processing taking place at different locations. The display may also be remote from the processing capability. The processing unit 24 is connected to receive signals from the vessel navigation equipment 5 and the survey unit 4 via vessel Ethernet switch 19 and vessel network 17, to which other onboard equipment may be connected. It will be understood that although hard-wired connections have been shown, wireless signal transmission may equally be provided for some or all of the connections.

[0042] The positioning system 1 may comprise generally conventional components, interfaced together physically and electronically as will be further described below in order to achieve the desired functionality. In particular, the local signal multiplexer 16 is a FUGRO Starport™ multiplexer \ data concentrator \ terminal server, employed to trigger the camera 20 at a desired rate to perform image capture and to time stamp the multiplexed data from the local IMU 22 and the camera 20. The Ethernet switches 18 and 19 are typically Gigabit switches capable of operating at 1000 Mbits/s though slower speed operation is supported. The camera 20 is a high resolution digital camera operating according to GigE vision protocol and having automatic iris control and anti-smearing and anti-blooming correction. This allows it to

compensate for changing light conditions. The camera 20 is also triggerable, having a trigger port allowing it to be triggered by an appropriate trigger signal from the local signal multiplexer 16. Camera 20 also has an Ethernet connection to the local Ethernet switch 18. The local IMU 22 is a MEMS based IMU having dynamic accuracy of better than 0.05° in the pitch and roll directions. The local IMU 22 provides serial data to the local signal multiplexer 16.

[0043] Operation of the positioning system 1 will now be described with reference to Figures 1 to 3. Accordingly, in a preliminary phase, the jacket 10 with the markers 12 affixed at appropriate locations is surveyed while on land in order to determine the precise locations of the markers 12 with respect to the jacket geometry, in particular with respect to the Jacket Common Reference Point JCRP. In this context it may be noted that there are shown a total of six markers 12A-F located on the three legs 8 of the jacket. The placement of the markers 12 has been chosen to ensure all are visible from viewing direction A and also that they provide the maximum possible spread of readings when viewed from this direction. The rearmost markers 12B, 12E are positioned to be visible through the open structure of the jacket 10 from this intended viewing direction. The positions of the lowermost markers 12D, 12E and 12F are calculated to ensure that they remain above the highest expected water level during placement. Initial surveying of the jacket 10 and markers 12 can take place using any conventional surveying equipment and may also be based on the project's engineering drawings.

[0044] In a second stage of the operation (which may take place at a time and place far removed from the preliminary phase), the jacket 10 is placed at its intended location by lowering from the vessel 2. Initial coarse positioning of the jacket 10 may take place by any appropriate means. Once the jacket 10 approaches its desired placement position, the positioning system 1 is implemented to determine precisely the momentary position of the jacket 10. To this end, the camera 20 is operated to produce an image of the jacket 10 from the direction A. For the avoidance of doubt, the direction A merely indicates a general direction of viewing, which will change during motion of the vessel 2 and jacket 10 and is not otherwise important for the following discussion.

[0045] Once operation commences, local IMU 22 generates a serial data stream of pitch-roll data for the local orientation of the survey unit 4 at a frequency of around 10 Hz. The pitch-roll data is produced asynchronously and delivered to the local signal multiplexer 16, which accurately timestamps it based on the PPS clock signal 27 and delivers it to the network 17 via the Ethernet switch 18. The local signal multiplexer 16 also generates trigger signals to camera 20, triggering the capture of images of the jacket 10 with the markers 12A to 12F at a chosen frequency. For the present purpose, a rate of 3 Hz has been found suitable. The trigger signals to the camera 20 are also read by the local signal multiplexer 16 and precisely time-stamped. This time-stamped event defines the precise moment of capture of the next packet of image data which is transmitted from the camera 20 to the network 17 via the local Ethernet switch 18. Simultaneously, the GNSS receiver 14 receives position and timing data, and position aiding data from satellites 25, allowing the precise position of the GNSS antenna 21 to be determined. It can then compute the x-y-z position of the vessel 2 based on the geometry of

the vessel 2 and the position of the GNSS antenna 21 with respect to the Vessel Common Reference Point VCRP. This x-y-z position data and heading data determined by the vessel IMU 23 is also put onto the network 17 and received by the processing unit 24. In general the GNSS receiver 14 delivers position data at a frequency of 10-20 Hz, while the vessel IMU delivers data at a rate of 50Hz or above. Given that the location of the survey unit 4 with respect to the Vessel Common Reference Point VCRP has been previously calibrated, the position of the camera 20 can thus also be determined. Since all readings and data are time-stamped to the same clock signal, the processing unit 24 can correlate the readings, either by interpolation between signals or otherwise. The position data determining the position of the camera 20 at the moment an image is produced is thus associated with the respective image data.

[0046] Figure 4 shows a depiction of the image data displayed on the display 26. The processing unit 24 runs software including a marker identification module, which automatically identifies the individual markers 12 within the image, based on their unique codes 36 (see Figure 2). It will be understood that such a module is optional and that manual identification of the markers 12 can also be implemented e.g. by an operator using the operator input 28 to mark and identify each marker 12 individually. Such operator input 28 may also be used to assist the automatic identification in cases of ambiguity. Identification of the markers 12 allows generation of appropriate vector representations *b-f*. By evaluating the image data with respect to the predefined survey data, the processing unit 24 can determine the relative positions of the markers 12 with respect to the moving frame of the camera 20. Once this is evaluated, the position of the jacket 10 can be converted into the fixed reference frame i.e. the Earth's geodetic reference frame, based on the camera position and the position data corresponding in time to the moment at which the image is taken.

[0047] Figure 5 shows a depiction of the jacket 10 in the fixed frame of reference i.e. the real-time position of the jacket 10 overlaid onto a depiction of the desired position of the jacket, which in this view is shown in broken lines as jacket 10'. It is noted that although only the upper portion of the jacket can be seen by the camera, the display 26 shows the whole jacket 10 including the bottoms of the legs 8. This assists a crane operator in determining how far the bottom of a leg 8 must be moved to approach the desired position.

[0048] Figure 6 shows a non-claimed example in which like features to the example of figures 1-5 are provided with like reference numerals preceded by 100. The positioning system 101 of Figure 6 comprises a survey unit 104 substantially the same as that of Figure 1 including signal multiplexer 116, Ethernet switch 118, camera 120 and IMU 122. The survey unit 104 is connected through the Ethernet switch 118 to processing unit 124 having display 126 and operator input 128. Details of the vessel navigation equipment are not shown in this view but it will be understood that this functions in the same manner as described in relation to Figure 3 above.

[0049] In Figure 6, the camera is shown in use during viewing of a jacket leg 108 having a centre line CL. Here, the processing unit 124 is provided with an additional structural

recognition module that operates to identify tubular structural members such as legs 108. The software module identifies the boundaries of the leg and applies software markers LE and LR to the left edge and the right edge respectively of the leg 108. This may be done automatically or with the assistance of manual pointers. These markers LE, RE are displayed on the display 126 and the structural recognition module then calculates a plane through the centre-line CL of the leg 108. This information can be calculated for all of the legs of a jacket or similar structure and can provide additional information to the positioning system 101 whereby the desired accuracy may be achieved with fewer applied markers. It will be understood that while the above has been explained in relation to the legs, other cylindrical and non-cylindrical structural members can be marked and the positioning of the structure can be undertaken relying only on these markers if desired. Also shown in Figure 6 is a second survey unit 104B, which may be provided for viewing the leg 108 at an angle to the first survey unit 104. This enables certain image ambiguities to be resolved without resort to externally applied markers.

[0050] Figure 7 shows an additional survey unit 204 mounted on an aerial drone 250. The survey unit 204 may be otherwise similar to that of Figure 1 except for the fact that in this case, all of the capabilities of the vessel navigation equipment are provided on the survey unit 204 or otherwise integrated onboard the drone 250 in order to be able to determine the local position (with six degrees of freedom) of the drone 250 and the viewing direction A. The drone 250 can move the survey unit 204 to view the jacket 210 from different viewing directions A. In this case, physical markers 212 may require affixing at different locations to support the different viewing directions. In the case of Figure 7, the survey unit 204 is provided with wireless connection to the processing unit 224 onboard the vessel 202. It may also work together with a survey unit 4 onboard the vessel 202. In this case too, irrespective of the direction of viewing A, the display 226 provides the operator with an image of the jacket 210 from the perspective of the vessel 202 such that the crane operator can immediately determine how to adjust the position as required to reach the final placement.

[0051] Thus, the invention has been described by reference to certain embodiments discussed above. It will be recognized that these embodiments are susceptible to various modifications and alternative forms well known to those of skill in the art without departing from the scope of the invention as defined by the attached claims.

REFERENCES CITED IN THE DESCRIPTION

Cited references

This list of references cited by the applicant is for the reader's convenience only. It does not form part of the European patent document. Even though great care has been taken in compiling the references, errors or omissions cannot be excluded and the EPO disclaims all

liability in this regard.

Patent documents cited in the description

- EP15183617A [0001]
- US8798794B [0003]

Non-patent literature cited in the description

- **BENJAMIN TRUSKIN** VISION-BASED DECK STATE ESTIMATION FOR AUTONOMOUS SHIP-BOARD LANDING, 2013, [0003]

PATENTKRAV

1. En fremgangsmåde til i realtid at bestemme en position for en offshorestruktur (10), for eksempel en offshore jacket, mens offshorestrukturen placeres ved en
5 forudbestemt installationsposition med seks frihedsgrader på en havbund eller på en eksisterende undersøisk infrastruktur ved hjælp af en kran (3) på et fartøj (2), offshorestrukturens position bestemmes i en fast referenceramme, for eksempel jordens referenceramme, ved observationer af offshorestrukturen med en billed-
dannelsesenhed (20) fra en bevægelig referenceramme, fremgangsmåden omfat-
10 tende de følgende trin:
- adgang til en elektronisk fil eller anden form for computerrepræsentation af offshorestrukturen, som nøjagtigt beskriver offshorestrukturens dimensioner og mekaniske konfiguration, og
 - 15 - brug af nævnte computerfil eller computerrepræsentation til at bestemme positionerne for en flerhed af virtuelle markører på offshorestrukturen, hvori nævnte virtuelle markører svarer til strukturelle elementer eller dele af offshorestrukturen, som kan identificeres både visuelt ved at betragte strukturen med billeddannelsesenheden og i den elektroniske fil, og lagring af positio-
20 nerne for nævnte flerhed af virtuelle markører,
- hvori placeringen af flerheden af virtuelle markører er blevet valgt for at sikre, at de alle er synlige fra en synsretning, og også at de tilvejebringer den størst mulige spredning af aflæsninger, når de ses fra denne
25 retning,
- hvori nævnte flerhed af virtuelle markører tilvejebringer positionsinfor-
mation om offshorestrukturen med seks frihedsgrader ved at betragte nævnte virtuelle markører;
- 30 - mens offshorestrukturen sænkes og placeres i den forudbestemte installationsposition af kranen (3) med seks frihedsgrader, der udfører handlingerne:
- betragtning af offshorestrukturen med billeddannelsesenheden (20) for at generere billeddata, der er repræsentative for de relative positio-
35 ner af flerheden af virtuelle markører i den bevægelige referenceramme;
 - bestemmelse af en øjeblikkelig position af billeddannelsesenheden i den faste referenceramme med et lokalt positioneringssystem (22, 23)

- og generering af positionsdata for billeddannelsesenheden synkroniseret med nævnte billeddata, og
- 5 - behandling af billeddata og billeddannelsesenhedens positionsdata for at beregne offshorestrukturens position i den faste referenceramme med seks frihedsgrader ved hjælp af positionerne for flerheden af virtuelle markører i forhold til offshorestrukturens geometri samt de relative positioner for flerheden af virtuelle markører i den bevægelige referenceramme som afledt af billeddataene og den øjeblikkelige position for
- 10 billeddannelsesenheden.
2. Fremgangsmåden i krav 1 omfatter endvidere anbringelse af en flerhed af fysiske markører (12A-12F) på offshorestrukturen (10) og opmåling af offshorestrukturen for at bestemme de fysiske markørers positioner i en referenceramme for offshorestrukturen og lagring af opmålingsinformation om markørernes bestemte positioner i forhold til strukturens geometri, inden strukturen ses fra den bevægelige referenceramme.
- 15 3. Fremgangsmåden i krav 1 eller 2, hvori bestemmelse af den øjeblikkelige position af billeddannelsesenheden finder sted med et lokalt positioneringssystem, som sporer billeddannelsesenhedens momentane position.
- 20 4. Fremgangsmåden ifølge krav 3, hvori nævnte lokale positioneringssystem omfatter en IMU (22), forbundet med billeddannelsesenheden (20) og konfigureret til at tilvejebringe data om hældning og rulning, og fartøjet omfattende fartøjsnavigationsudstyr (5), der er konfigureret til at tilvejebringe x-y-z- og kursdata.
- 25 5. Fremgangsmåden ifølge et hvilket som helst af de foregående krav, hvori billedannelsesenheden er monteret på et ubemandet fartøj såsom en drone eller et ubemandet luftkøretøj.
- 30 6. Fremgangsmåden ifølge et hvilket som helst af de foregående krav, yderligere omfattende korrelering af måletiderne for de genererede billeddata og billeddannelsesenhedens positionsdata, involverende udstedelse af ursignaler for at synkronisere optagelsesudløsningstider for billeddataene og billeddannelsesenhedens positionsdata og/eller involverer tidsstempling af billeddataene og billeddannelsesenhedens positionsdata til et samme ursignal med en nøjagtighed på fortrinsvis mindst 10 ms, mere fortrinsvis mindst 1 ms;
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Nævnte ursignaler er fortrinsvis forbundet med en GNSS-tidsbase.

7. Fremgangsmåden ifølge et hvilket som helst af de foregående krav, omfattende:

- 5 - identificering af de strukturelle elementer eller dele af strukturen ved visuel inspektion af offshorestrukturen med billeddannelsesenheden og/eller i den elektroniske fil.

10 8. Fremgangsmåden ifølge et hvilket som helst af de foregående krav, yderligere omfattende nævnte placering af nævnte offshorestruktur på nævnte forudbestemte installationsposition udføres ved hjælp af kranen (3) på fartøjet (2) og:

- 15 - visning i realtid af en repræsentation af den beregnede position af offshorestrukturen (10) på et display på fartøjet, og
- overlejring af repræsentationen af den beregnede position af offshorestrukturen på en repræsentation af en ønsket position (10') af offshorestrukturen for at give en operatør af kranen (3) mulighed for at udføre kranjusteringer for at korrigere positionen af offshorestrukturen (10), f.eks. ved hjælp af en
- 20 krankrog, løfteliner eller trækspil.

9. Fremgangsmåden ifølge et hvilket som helst af de foregående krav, yderligere omfattende flytning af strukturen (10) på grundlag af den beregnede position af offshorestrukturen for at nærme sig til nævnte strukturs forudbestemte installationsposition og fastgørelse af offshorestrukturen ved nævnte forudbestemte installationsposition.

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10. Et system (1) til bestemmelse i realtid af en position med seks frihedsgrader for en offshorestruktur (10), for eksempel en offshore jacket, mens offshorestrukturen placeres i en forudbestemt installationsposition med seks frihedsgrader på havbunden eller på en eksisterende undersøisk infrastruktur ved hjælp af en kran (3) på et fartøj (2), offshorestrukturens position bestemmes i en fast referenceramme, for eksempel Jordens referenceramme, ved observationer af offshorestrukturen med en billeddannelsesenhed (20) fra en bevægelig referenceramme, systemet omfattende:

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- en behandlingsenhed (24) konfigureret til at:

- muliggøre adgang til en elektronisk fil eller anden form for computerrepræsentation af offshorestrukturen, som nøjagtigt beskriver offshorestrukturens dimensioner og mekaniske konfiguration, og
- muliggøre brugen af nævnte computerfil eller computerrepræsentation til bestemmelse af positionerne for en flerhed af virtuelle markører på offshorestrukturen, hvori nævnte virtuelle markører svarer til strukturelle elementer eller dele af offshorestrukturen, som kan identificeres både visuelt ved at betragte strukturen med billeddannelsesenheden og i den elektroniske fil, og lagre positionerne for nævnte flerhed af virtuelle markører,
- hvori placeringen af flerheden af virtuelle markører er blevet valgt for at sikre, at de alle er synlige fra en synsretning, og også at de tilvejebringer den størst mulige spredning af aflæsninger, når de ses fra denne retning,
- hvori nævnte flerhed af virtuelle markører tilvejebringer positionsinformation om offshorestrukturen med seks frihedsgrader ved at betragte nævnte virtuelle markører;
- en billeddannelsesenhed (20) konfigureret til at betragte offshorestrukturen og generere billeddata, der er repræsentative for de virtuelle markørers relative positioner i den bevægelige referenceramme;
- et lokalt positioneringssystem (22, 23) indrettet til at bestemme en øjeblikkelig position for billeddannelsesenheden i den faste referenceramme og generere positionsdata for billeddannelsesenheden synkroniseret med nævnte billeddata;
- Behandlingsenheden (24) er også konfigureret til:
 - behandle billeddataene og billeddannelsesenhedens positionsdata for at beregne offshorestrukturens position i den faste referenceramme med seks frihedsgrader ved at bruge positionerne for flerheden af virtuelle markører i forhold til offshorestrukturens geometri samt de relative positioner for flerheden af virtuelle markører i den bevægelige referenceramme som afledt af billeddataene og den øjeblikkelige position for billeddannelsesenheden.

11. Systemet (1) ifølge krav 10, hvori systemet også omfatter offshorestrukturen med flerheden af virtuelle markører på offshorestrukturen.
- 5 12. Systemet ifølge krav 11, hvori offshorestrukturen omfatter mindst en fysisk markør (12a-12F) med henblik på positionsbestemmelse, som fortrinsvis er fastgjort til strukturen på en aftagelig måde, systemet lagrer også undersøgelsesinformation om positionerne for den mindst ene fysiske markør i forhold til strukturens geometri.
- 10 13. Systemet (1) ifølge krav 12, hvori den mindst ene fysiske markør (12) er en unik markør, og systemet er indrettet til automatisk at identificere den unikke markør.
- 15 14. Systemet (1) ifølge et hvilket som helst af kravene 10-13, yderligere omfattende et fartøj (2) og en kran (3) på fartøjet (2), og omfattende et display (26) på fartøjet (2), displayet (26) er operativt forbundet med behandlingsenheden (24), og behandlingsenheden er indrettet til i realtid at vise en repræsentation af den beregnede position af offshorestrukturen (10) på displayet og til at overlejlre repræsentationen af den beregnede position af offshorestrukturen på en repræsentation af en ønsket position (10') af offshorestrukturen for at give en operatør af kranen (3) mulighed for at udføre kranjusteringer for at korrigere positionen af offshorestrukturen (10), f.eks., ved hjælp af en krankrog, løfteliner eller trækspil.
- 20 15. Systemet (1) ifølge krav 14, hvori billedannelsesenheden (20) er placeret på et første sted, og displayet (26) er placeret på et andet sted, og repræsentationen af strukturens (10) position på displayet er en repræsentation betragtet fra det andet sted.
- 25 16. Systemet ifølge et hvilket som helst af kravene 14-15, hvori nævnte lokale positioneringssystem omfatter en IMU (22), der er i forbindelse med billedannelsesenheden (20) og konfigureret til at tilvejebringe data om hældning og rulning, og fartøjet omfattende fartøjsnavigationsudstyr (5), konfigureret til at tilvejebringe x-y-z- og kursdata.
- 30 17. Systemet (1) ifølge et hvilket som helst af kravene 14-16, hvori billedannelsesenheden (20) er monteret om bord på fartøjet (2) eller et ubemandet køretøj (250), såsom en drone eller et ubemandet luftkøretøj.
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18. Systemet (1) ifølge et hvilket som helst af kravene 14-16, hvori billeddannelseheden (20) er monteret om bord på fartøjet (2), og fartøjet omfatter et nul-punkt (7), der er fastgjort med hensyn til fartøjet (2) og placeret inden for billed-dannelseseenhedens (20) synsfelt.

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19. Et computerprogramprodukt omfattende instruktioner, der gør det muligt for en behandlingsenhed at udføre behandlingsenhedens fremgangsmådetrin som de-fineret i krav 10, når det er installeret på behandlingsenheden, omfattende et mo-delimportmodul til at importere computerrepræsentationen, f.eks. i form af en elek-tronisk fil af offshorestrukturen, der beskriver dimensioner og en mekanisk konfi-guration af strukturen, og et strukturgenkendelsesmodul til positionering af de vir-tuelle markører på offshorestrukturen svarende til strukturelle elementer eller dele deraf ved hjælp af computerrepræsentationen.

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15 20. Computerprogramproduktet ifølge krav 19, omfattende:

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- et billedanskaffelsessoftwaremodul til at anskaffe tidsstemplede billeddata, der er repræsentative for de virtuelle markørers relative positioner i en be-vægelig referenceramme;

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- et positionssoftwaremodul til anskaffelse af tidsstemplede positionsdata for billeddannelseheden, der er synkroniseret med nævnte billeddata;
- et markøridentifikationsmodul til identificering af individuelle virtuelle mar-kører i billeddataene;

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- et markørspøringsmodul til aktiv sporing af de identificerede virtuelle mar-kører;
- et billedrekonstruktionsmodul til omdannelse af billeddataene fra den bevæ-gelige referenceramme til den faste referenceramme,
- et behandlingsmodul til behandling af billeddataene og positionsdataene for billeddannelseheden for at beregne offshorestrukturens position i den fa-ste referenceramme med seks frihedsgrader ved hjælp af positionerne for de virtuelle markører på offshorestrukturen samt markørpositionerne for de vir-tuelle markører som afledt af billeddataene og positionsdataene for billeddan-nelseheden, og

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- et GUI-modul, der forelægger visning af et display af strukturen i den faste referenceramme.

DRAWINGS

Drawing

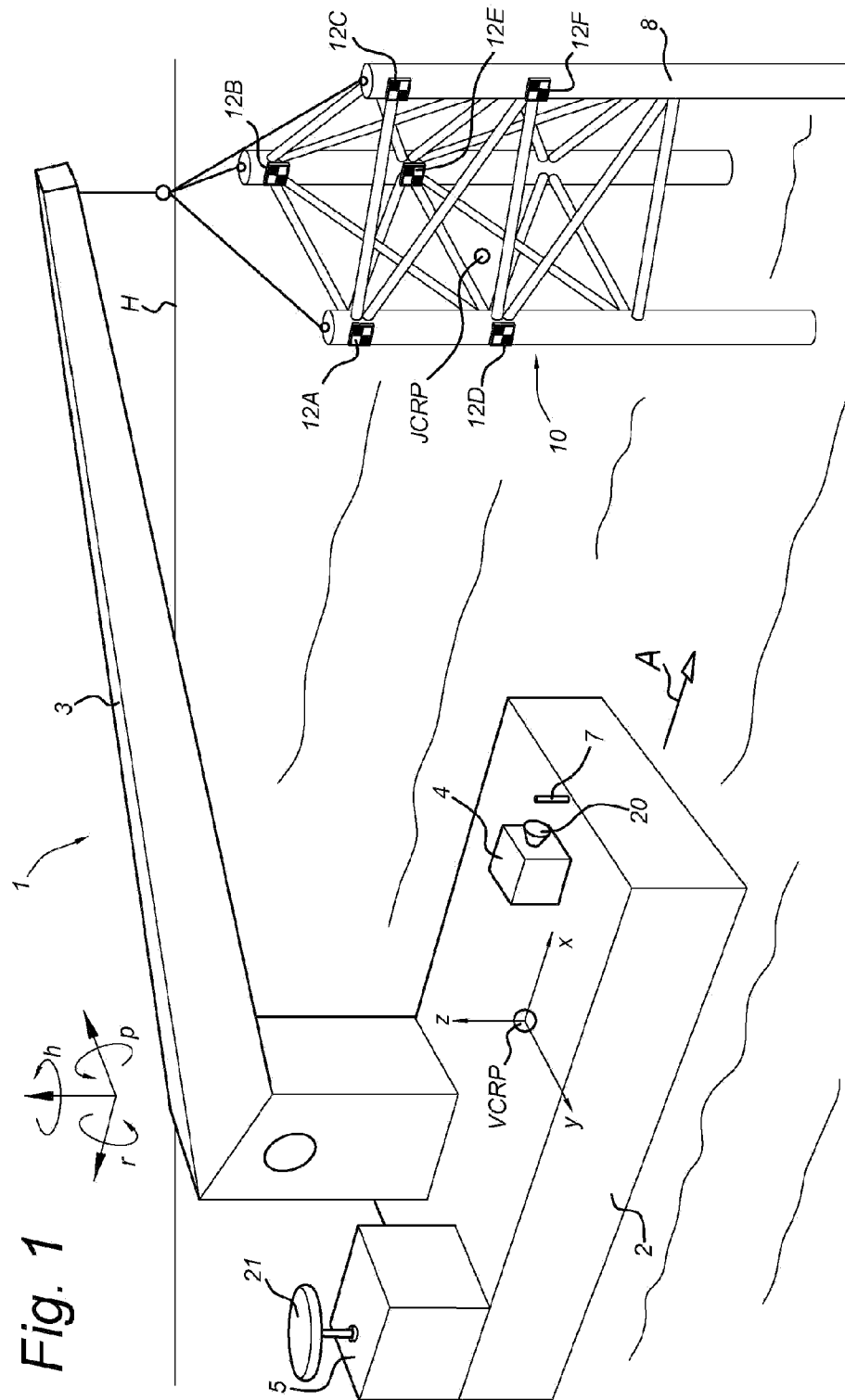


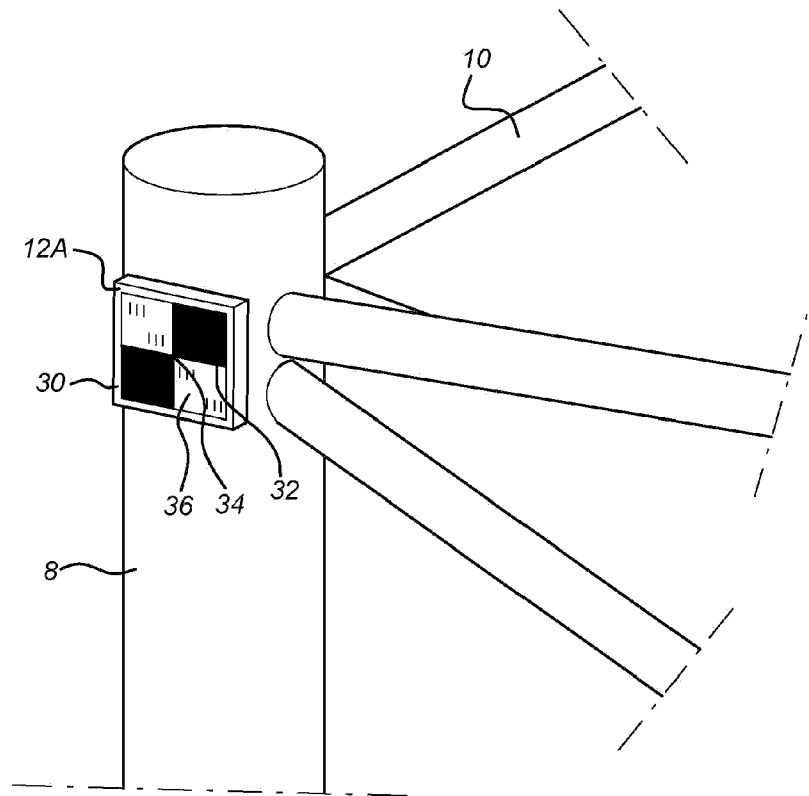
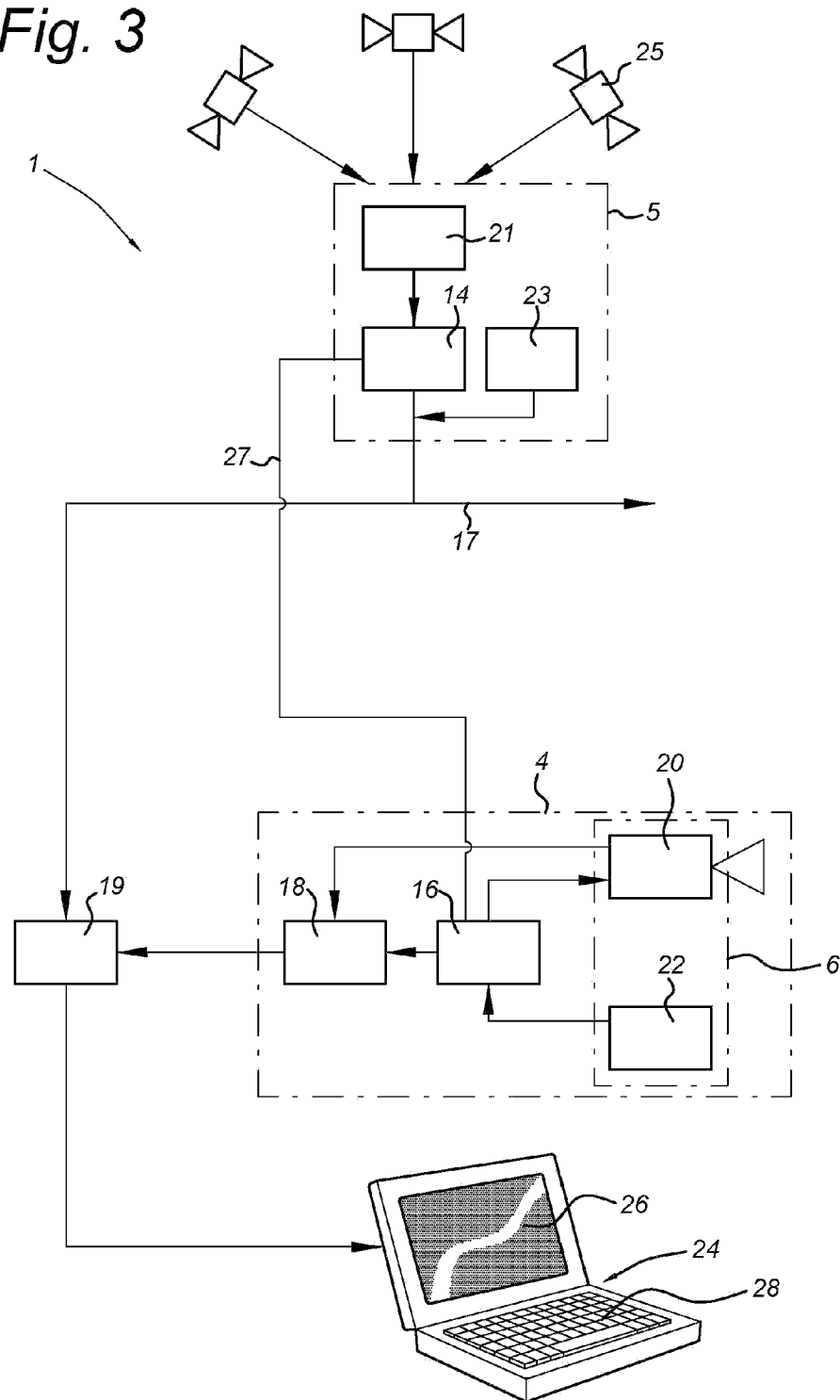
Fig. 2

Fig. 3



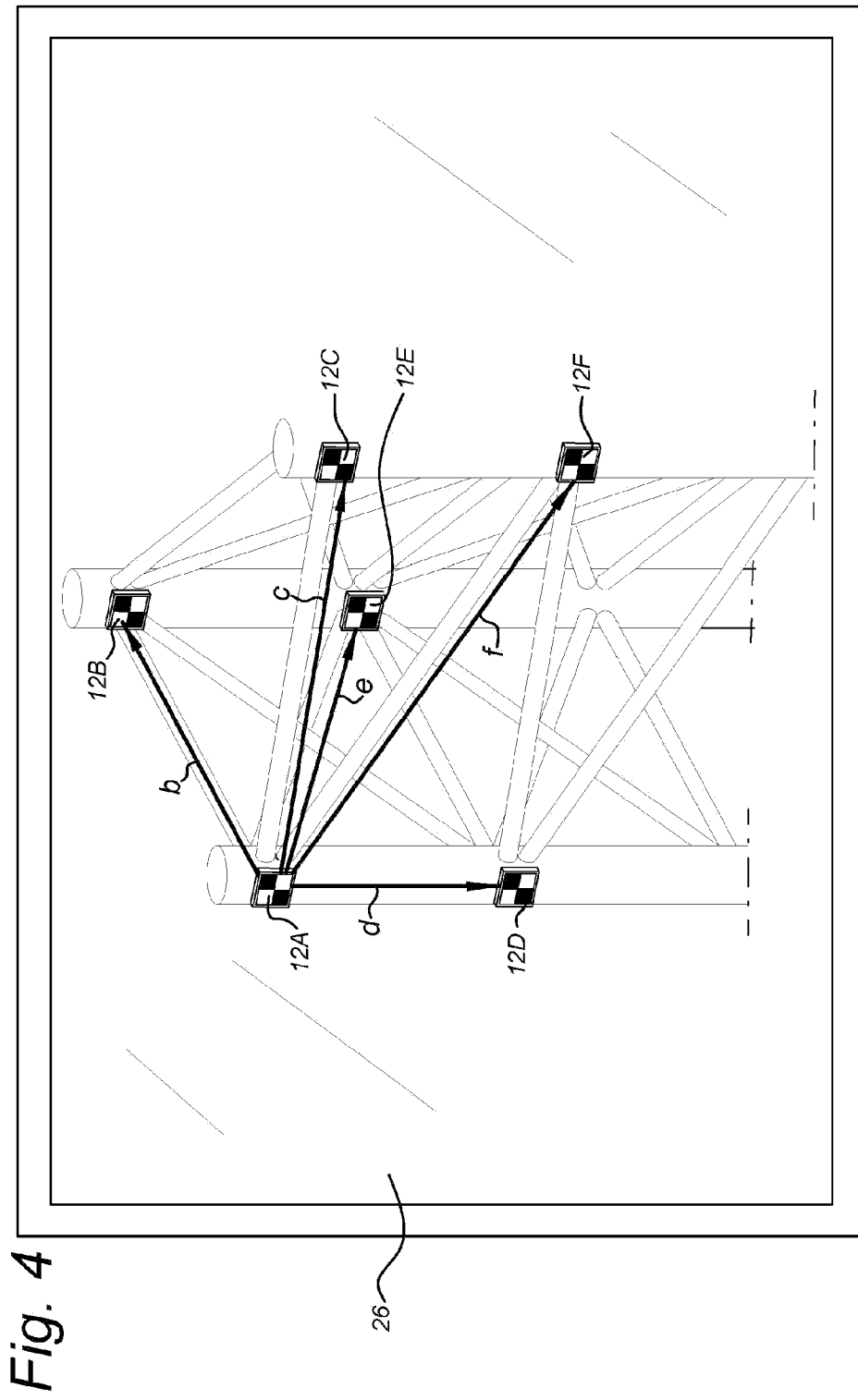


Fig. 5

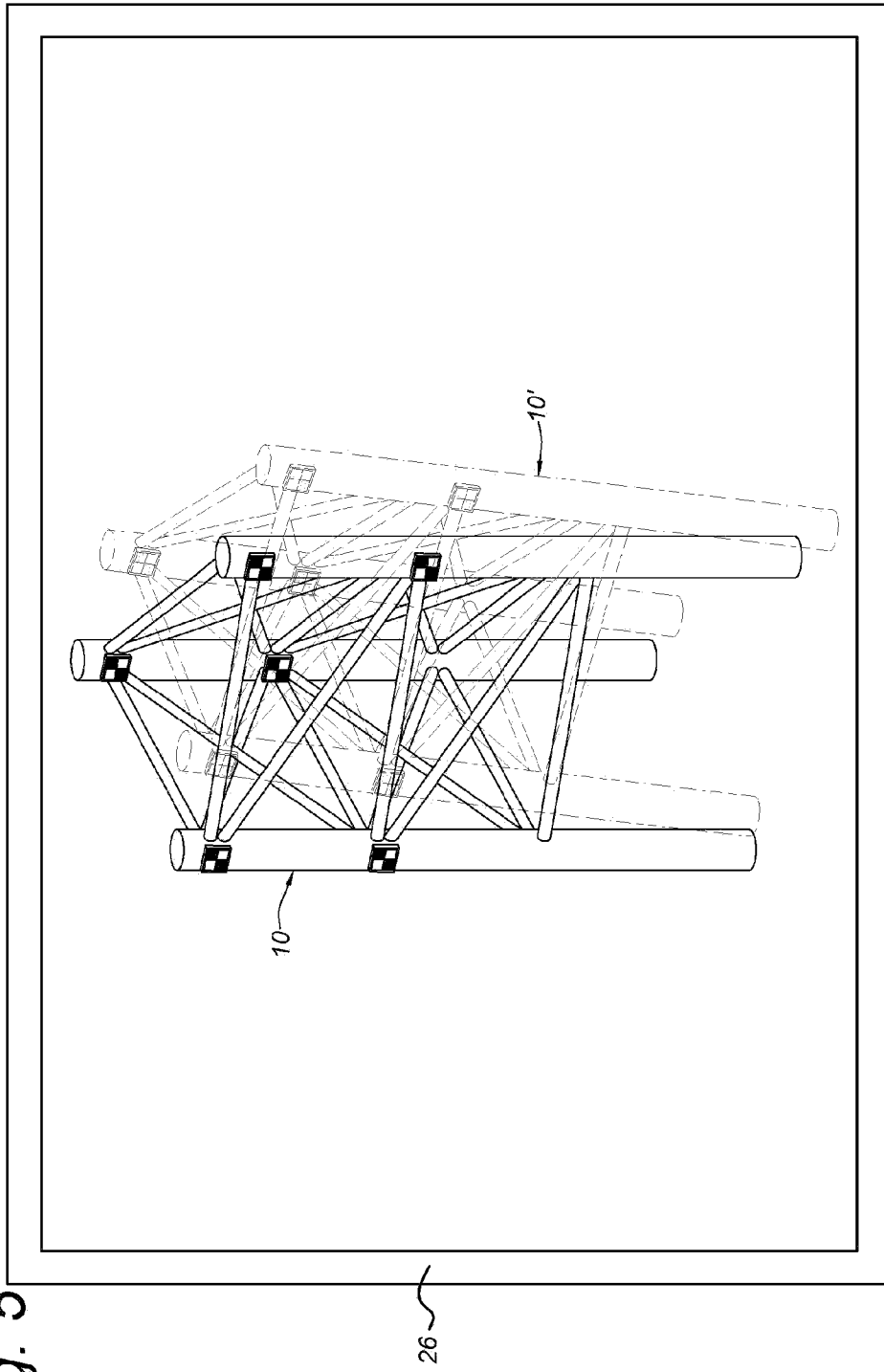


Fig. 6

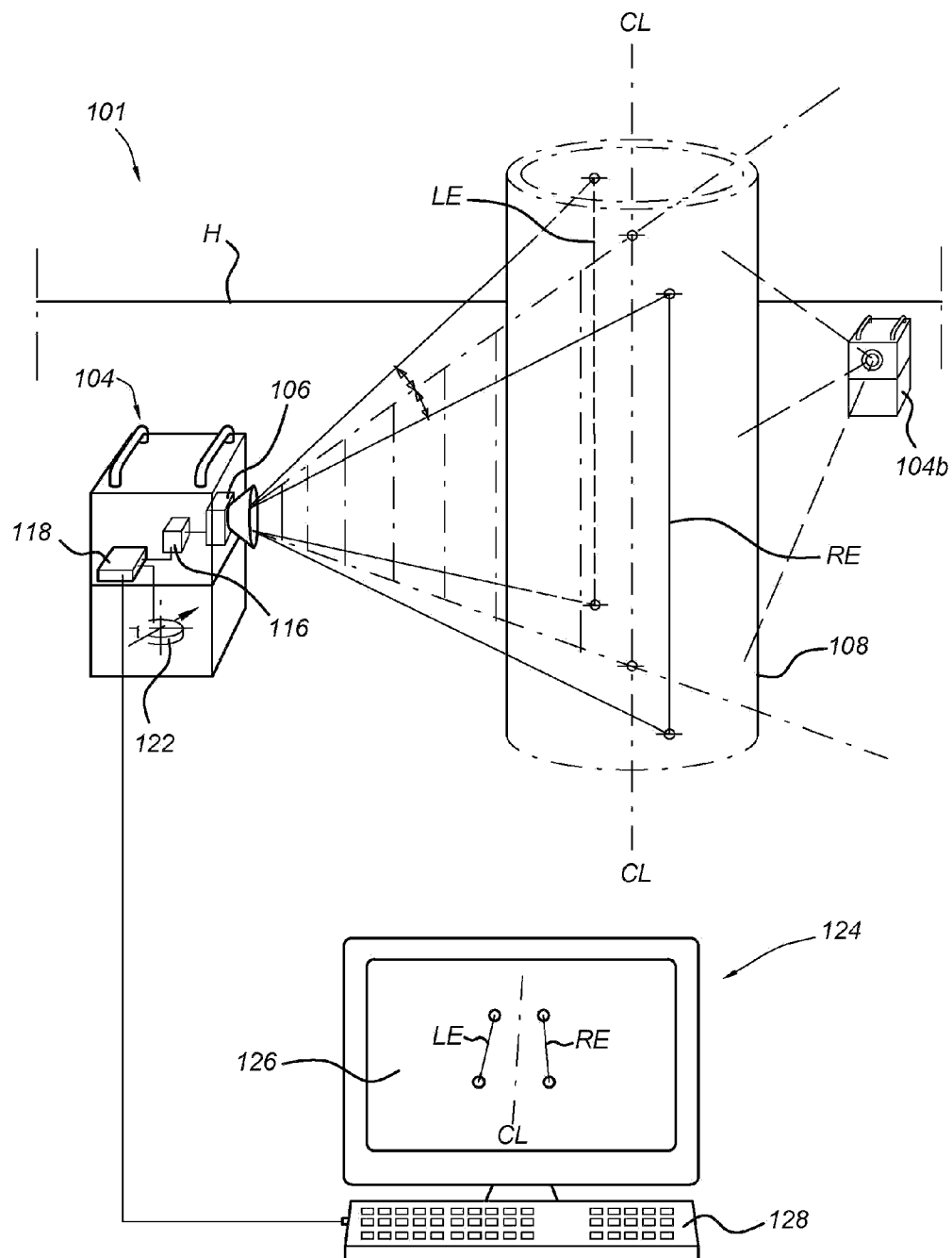


Fig. 7

