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- (73) Patenthaver: **NUOVO PIGNONE TECNOLOGIE - S.R.L., Via Felice Matteucci 2, 50127 Florence, Italien**
- (72) Opfinder: **GERBI, Filippo, Via Felice Matteucci 2, 50127 Florence, Italien
RIZZO, Emanuele, Via Felice Matteucci 2, 50127 Florence, Italien
BERNOCCHI, Andrea, Via Felice Matteucci 2, 50127 Florence, Italien
MARRAZZO, Marco, Via Felice Matteucci 2, 50127 Florence, Italien
BALDASSARRE, Leonardo, Via Felice Matteucci 2, 50127 Florence, Italien
RICCHIUTI, Amelia Lavinia, Via Felice Matteucci 2, 50127 Florence, Italien**
- (74) Fuldmægtig i Danmark: **Novagraaf Brevets, Bâtiment O2, 2 rue Sarah Bernhardt CS90017, F-92665 Asnières-sur-
Seine cedex, Frankrig**
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**EP-A1- 3 139 072
US-A1- 2005 016 303
US-A1- 2012 112 416
US-A1- 2014 030 063
US-B1- 6 345 954**

DESCRIPTION

Description

BACKGROUND

[0001] Embodiments of the subject matter disclosed herein relate to dry gas seals to provide reliable shaft sealing on turbomachinery, particularly centrifugal compressors.

[0002] US 2005/016303 A1 discloses a double stationary mechanical seal with a seal face sensor arrangement. Force, torque or vibration transmitted from the sealing area to the stationary seal face and then to a spring plate is monitored by a displacement transducer.

[0003] US 2014/030063 A1 discloses a prior art dry gas seal with the features of the preamble of claim 1.

[0004] A compressor is a machine which accelerates the particles of a compressible fluid, e.g., a gas, through the use of mechanical energy to, ultimately, increase the pressure of that compressible fluid. Compressors are used in a number of different applications, including operating as an initial stage of a gas turbine engine. Among the various types of compressors are the so-called centrifugal compressors, in which the mechanical energy operates on gas input to the compressor by way of centrifugal acceleration which accelerates the gas particles, e.g., by rotating a centrifugal impeller through which the gas is passing. More generally, centrifugal compressors can be said to be part of a class of machinery known as "turbo machines" or "turbo rotating machines".

[0005] Centrifugal compressors can be fitted with a single impeller, i.e., a single stage configuration, or with a plurality of impellers in series, in which case they are frequently referred to as multistage compressors. Each of the stages of a centrifugal compressor typically includes an inlet conduit for gas to be accelerated, an impeller which is capable of providing kinetic energy to the input gas and a diffuser which converts the kinetic energy of the gas leaving the impeller into pressure energy. Various types of gases are used in centrifugal compressors, some of which are toxic or dangerous to the environment and/or to workers in the plants. Accordingly, centrifugal compressors employ sealing systems, usually placed on the ends of the shaft that supports the impeller(s), to prevent the gas from escaping from the compressor and contaminating the surrounding environment. Single rotor centrifugal compressors are usually provided with two separate seals as part of this sealing system, i.e., one for each end of the shaft, while in a overhung centrifugal compressor it is usually sufficient to seal the shaft end, located immediately downstream of the impeller.

[0006] Recently there has been an increase in the use of so-called "dry" gas seals in sealing systems for centrifugal compressors. Dry gas seals can be described as noncontacting, dry-running mechanical face seals which include a mating or rotating ring and a primary or stationary ring. In operation, grooves in the rotating ring generate a fluid-dynamic force causing the stationary ring to separate and create a gap between the two rings. These seals are referred to as "dry" since they do not require lubricating oil which, among other things, greatly reduces their maintenance requirements.

[0007] For centrifugal compressors, such dry gas seals are available in different configurations, e.g., so-called tandem configurations which are primarily used in compressors that employ toxic or flammable gases as the input or process gas. As shown in Figure 1, a tandem-type dry gas seal system includes a first seal 2 and a second seal 4, both contained in a single package. During normal operation of the compressor, the first seal 2 operates to contain the total pressure of gas processed, while the second seal 4 acts as a back-up which is designed to operate only if the first seal 2 fails or leaks excessively. Generally a conditioned gas flow coming from compressor discharge is injected upstream of seal 2 to isolate the dry gas seal from process gas. In the applications with highly toxic process gases (e.g., gas having high contents of H₂S) and high sealing pressure, an external sealing gas source having a low sulfur content, e.g., a so-called "sweet" gas is usually provided to isolate the process gas from the surroundings. Due to the high sealing pressure a dedicated reciprocating compressor 6 that operates independently of the centrifugal compressor is used to feed the sealing gas system. The second seal 4 in the tandem may receive a lower pressure (e.g., below 10 Bar) of nitrogen as secondary sealing gas via a source 8 to ensure that no toxic/flammable gas escapes to the surroundings. Centrifugal compressors equipped with these types of dry gas sealing systems thus also require additional compressors whose function is solely to provide the sealing gas, thus making the overall system more complex. In addition to simply adding complexity, reciprocating compressors 6 may have greater maintenance requirements than even the centrifugal compressors which they are intended to serve. Moreover, although the second seal 4 in the tandem configuration does provide a back-up capability, current dry gas seal systems are still not fault free, in which case they may undesirably release a certain amount of sealing gas into the atmosphere.

[0008] Dry gas seal failures are mainly due to liquid or solid particles contamination, "hang up" of primary disc causing discs contact, or axial vibration of primary disk ("swashing"). All of them causing severe malfunctioning of the seal.

[0009] Accordingly, it would be desirable to design and provide a dry gas seal which overcomes the aforementioned drawbacks of existing sealing systems.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0010] The present invention is defined in the accompanying claims.

[0011] According to first exemplary embodiments, there is a dry gas seal for sealing the shaft of a turbomachinery, the seal comprising:

- a mating ring configured to be coupled to the shaft of the turbomachinery to rotate at shaft rotational speed;
- a primary ring that seals against the mating ring, the primary ring configured to be anti-rotationally coupled to a static part of the turbomachinery;
- one or more elastic elements preloaded to push the primary ring against the mating ring,

wherein one or more sensors are provided, adapted to measure strains and / or loads induced to the primary ring and/or to one or more of the elastic elements and/or displacements of the primary ring or of an element coupled to the primary ring for an early detection of failure of the seal.

[0012] This allows the continuous health monitoring of the dry gas seal, enabling main failures early detection capability and proactive maintenance actions.

[0013] Early detection of seals incipient failures could lead to unexpected machine stop avoidance, thus increasing production and creating opportunity for commercial tools related to increased reliability and availability of the machines.

[0014] According to second exemplary embodiments, there is a turbomachine, particularly a compressor, comprising:

- a rotor assembly including at least an impeller;
- a bearing connected to, and for rotatably supporting, the rotor assembly;
- a stator;
- a sealing mechanism disposed between the rotor assembly and the bearing, said sealing mechanism including a dry gas seal wherein the primary ring of the seal is coupled to a retainer through an anti-rotational system comprising one or more anti-rotational pin or lug and an intermediate element or carrier acting as a pusher sleeve to axially push the primary ring against the mating ring under the action of a preloaded elastic element. The sensor or sensors of the seal advantageously comprise one or more sensors belonging to the group consisting in: displacement sensors for the measurement of the axial displacement of the primary ring, displacement sensors for the measurement of the axial displacement of the intermediate ring, strain sensors for the measurement of the torque induced to the primary ring, load sensors for the measurement of static load acting on the carrier and/or the primary ring and/or vibrations of the carrier and/or the primary ring.

[0015] According to third exemplary embodiments, there is a method for monitoring the status of a dry gas seal in a turbomachine, the method comprising the operations of:

- providing sensors adapted to measure strains and/or loads induced to the primary ring

and/or displacements of the primary ring or of an element coupled to the primary ring of the dry gas seal;

- setting acceptance criteria for the values measured by the sensors;
- reading the output of the sensors;
- test the output with the acceptance criteria;
- activate an alarm and/or shut down the turbomachine if one or more values measured by the sensors do not follow the acceptance criteria.

[0016] According to fourth exemplary embodiments, there is a system for the monitoring and early detection of fault of dry gas seals of remotely located turbomachines, the system comprising:

- a collecting unit for collecting data from sensors located on the dry seals of the turbomachines;
- communication units to interface the turbomachines to the collecting unit;
- a software platform configured to read data from the collecting unit to perform analytics to do early detection and/or send notifications of potential damages or to perform condition based maintenance of the turbomachines.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0017] The present invention will become more apparent from the following description of exemplary embodiments to be considered in conjunction with accompanying drawings wherein:

Figure 1 illustrates a tandem sealing mechanism;

Figure 2 is a schematic view of a multistage-type centrifugal compressor, provided with sealing mechanisms according to exemplary embodiments;

Figure 3 is a partial sectional view of an exemplary dry gas seal used in sealing mechanisms according to exemplary embodiments;

Figure 4 schematically shows the mating ring and the primary ring of the seal of Figure 3 with outlined the sensors on the anti-rotation pin/lug coupling the primary ring to the static part of a turbomachinery according to embodiments herein;

Figure 5 schematically shows a section of a gas seal arrangement with circles indicating areas suitable for positioning one or more sensors for early detection of failures according to embodiments herein;

Figure 6 is a flowchart illustrating a method for monitoring a dry gas seal according to exemplary embodiments herein;

Figure 7 shows the block diagram of a system for the monitoring and early detection of fault of dry gas seals of remotely located turbomachines according to exemplary embodiments herein

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0018] The following description of exemplary embodiments refer to the accompanying drawings. The same reference numbers in different drawings identify the same or similar elements. The following detailed description does not limit the invention. Instead, the scope of the invention is defined by the appended claims.

[0019] Reference throughout the specification to "one embodiment" or "an embodiment" means that a particular feature, structure, or characteristic described in connection with an embodiment is included in at least one embodiment of the subject matter disclosed. Thus, the appearance of the phrases "in one embodiment" or "in an embodiment" in various places throughout the specification is not necessarily referring to the same embodiment. Further, the particular features, structures or characteristics may be combined in any suitable manner in one or more embodiments.

[0020] To provide some context for the subsequent discussion relating to sealing systems according to these exemplary embodiments, Figure 2 schematically illustrates a multistage, centrifugal compressor 10 in which such sealing systems may be employed. Therein, the compressor 10 includes a box or housing (stator) 12 within which is mounted a rotating compressor shaft 14 that is provided with a plurality of centrifugal impellers 16. The rotor assembly 18 includes the shaft 14 and impellers 16 and is supported radially and axially through bearings 20 which are disposed on either side of the rotor assembly 18.

[0021] The multistage centrifugal compressor operates to take an input process gas from duct inlet 22, to accelerate the particles of the process gas through operation of the rotor assembly 18, and to subsequently deliver the process gas through outlet duct 24 at an output pressure which is higher than its input pressure. The process gas may, for example, be any one of carbon dioxide, hydrogen sulfide, butane, methane, ethane, propane, liquefied natural gas, or a combination thereof. Between the impellers 16 and the bearings 20, sealing systems 26 are provided to prevent the process gas from flowing to the bearings 20. The housing 12 is configured so as to cover both the bearings 20 and the sealing systems 26 to prevent the escape of gas from the centrifugal compressor 10. Also seen in Figure 2 is a balance drum 27 which compensates for axial thrust generated by the impellers 16, the balance drum's labyrinth seal 28 and a balance line 29 which maintains the pressure on the outboard side of the balance drum 27 at the same level as the pressure at which the process gas enters via duct 22.

[0022] According to exemplary embodiments, each of the sealing systems 26 includes one, two, three or more dry gas seals which together cooperate to seal the process gas from escaping toward the bearings 20. Generally speaking, the dry gas seal or seals in the sealing system 26 can be implemented as, for example, shown in Figure 3. Therein, a dry gas seal 30 is seated on the compressor shaft 14 to block the flow of the process gas along the gas path 32 from the inboard side to the outboard side of the centrifugal compressor 10. The dry gas seal 30 includes a rotating seat 34 which rotates with the compressor shaft and mates with a stationary ring 36. During operation, grooves formed in at least one of the rotating seat 34 and the stationary ring 36 have a pressurized fluid pumped therein which has the effect of generating a fluid dynamic force which causes the stationary ring 36 to separate from the rotating seat 34. This creates a gap between the two rings, the combination of which operates as a seal that generally prevents leakage of the process gas, without friction between the rotating seat 34 and the stationary ring 36. Examples of these types of dry gas seals can be found in U.S. Patent Nos. 5,492,341 and 5,529,315, the disclosures of which are incorporated here by reference.

[0023] When the compressor is stopped (not rotating), the primary ring is held against the mating ring with a series of springs. Because the grooves are not machined across the entire face of the mating ring, the two rings are in tight contact over the dam area and the running gap (and therefore seal leakage) is eliminated.

[0024] The existence of a running gap between the two rings results in gas leakage, which must be minimized. Ideally, a dry gas seal operates at a minimum running gap to minimize the leakage rate. However, a centrifugal compressor rotor is subject to axial movement during operation, which is restricted by a thrust bearing. During operation, the running gap between the two rings is self-regulating typically from 0 to 10 μm . If the running gap between the primary and mating seal rings increases during operation because of axial rotor movement, the pressure at the mating ring groove tips will be reduced as the volume increases. The gas forces acting on each side of the primary and mating seal rings will force the rings toward each other, thereby restoring the running gap to the desired value. Conversely, if the clearance between the seal rings decreases because of axial rotor movement, the pressure at the mating ring groove tips will increase as the volume decreases, overcoming the gas forces acting on the outside of the two rings, hence increasing the running gap to the desired value.

[0025] Dry gas seal failures are mainly due to liquid or solid particles contamination, "hang up" of primary disc causing discs contact, or axial vibration of primary disk ("swashing"). All of them causing catastrophic damages of seal surface.

[0026] Figure 4 schematically shows the mating ring 34 and the primary ring 36 in operation with the running gap indicated with reference number 35. The primary ring 36 is coupled to a static part of the turbomachine, particularly a retainer 100, through an anti-rotation system comprising one or more pin/lug 40.

[0027] By integrating a load sensor 41 in one or more of the pin/lug 40 of the anti-rotational

system, the torque transmitted to the primary ring 36 by the rotating gas force can be detected.

[0028] By integrating one or more load sensors on one or more springs or spring support, the axial vibration and/or the axial movement of the carrier and/or the primary ring can be effectively detected.

[0029] More complex configurations are possible. Fig. 5 schematically shows a section of a gas seal arrangement according to embodiments herein. The circles indicate areas suitable for positioning one or more sensors for early detection of failures of the seal as follows:

1. 1) Primary ring axial vibration measurement (swashing): ref. 70 and/or 80
2. 2) Torque measurement (anti-rotation pin/lug): ref. 70
3. 3) Carrier/retainer movement control (hung-up): ref. 90
4. 4) Flow measurement on the dry gas seal vent: ref. 60.

[0030] The primary ring 36 is capable of axial movement to float with the mating ring 34. To such extent one or more elastic elements 38 apply a uniformly distributed preload to push the primary ring 36 against the mating ring 34 through an intermediate element 50 acting as a pusher sleeve, also called carrier in the present description.

[0031] A displacement sensor can be used to measure axial movement of the carrier 50 and/or the retainer 100 to detect a fault situation due to carrier/retainer hang-up. Such a sensor can be typically positioned in the axial part of the carrier/retainer closed to the rotor where hang-up is more likely as shown by reference 90 in figure 5. This type of sensor can be also used for indirectly measuring primary ring swashing. Sensor 80 may advantageously be a load sensor for the measurement of vibrations or axial movement of the carrier and/or the primary ring. In an embodiment such sensor is integrated in one or more springs forming the elastic elements.

[0032] Other sensors can be used to further improve monitoring of the status of the seal. As dry gas seals comprise a flowpath for a sealing gas to flow from an inlet 61 to an outlet 62 to cause the lift-off of the mating ring and the primary ring, a flow sensor can be provided in such flowpath to measure the flow of the sealing gas, for example in the outlet zone as indicated by reference 60 in fig. 5. Such flow sensor can be of any known type, such as hot wire or thermal mass type, to detect velocity, flow, pressure, differential pressure or the like parameters.

[0033] The output of all these sensors, or part of them, can be used to monitor the status of the seal. For example, an increase in the torque transmitted to the primary ring and/or axial displacements having a frequency of vibration above a threshold may be an index of liquid or solid particles contamination. Carrier/retainer lack of displacement or carrier/retainer displacements not following an expected path may be index of carrier/retainer blockage that may cause primary ring hang-up while an excessive flow of the sealing gas as detected by sensor 60 may be index of a leakage in the flowpath.

[0034] To such extent, embodiments provide for a control unit comprising memory storing program instructions and a processor configured to execute the program instructions to:

- read the output of the sensor or the sensors;
- compare the output with thresholds to determine a fault condition of the seal;
- provide an alarm indication and/or shut down the turbomachine if the output of the sensors are indicative of a severe fault condition of the seal.

[0035] The control unit may be part of a dedicated safety system or be part of the same system controlling the functioning of the turbomachine.

[0036] Measured values can be acquired by M&D systems; analytics can be applied in order to do early detection of failures, notify customer of potential damages, perform condition based maintenance.

[0037] Fig. 7 exemplary shows a system for the monitoring and early detection of fault of dry gas seals of remotely located turbomachines according to embodiments herein. The system comprises:

- a collecting unit (200) for collecting data from sensors located on the dry seals of the turbomachines;
- communication units (100) to interface the turbomachines to the collecting unit;
- a software platform (300) configured to read data from the collecting unit (200) to perform analytics to do early detection and/or send notifications of potential damages or to perform condition based maintenance of the turbomachines.

[0038] Embodiments also provide for a method for monitoring the status of a dry gas seal in a turbomachine, the method comprising the operations of:

- providing sensors to measure strains induced to the primary ring and/or displacements of the primary ring or of an element coupled to the primary ring of the dry gas seal;
- setting acceptance criteria for the values measured by the sensors;
- reading the output of the sensors;
- test the output with the acceptance criteria;
- activate an alarm and/or shut down the turbomachine if one or more values measured by the sensors do not follow the acceptance criteria.

[0039] The method may advantageously further comprise:

- sending the output of the sensors to a remote software platform capable to collect data from seals of different turbomachine to perform analytics to do early detection and/or
- sending notifications of potential damages or to perform condition based maintenance.

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

- US2005016303A1 [0002]
- US2014030063A1 [0003]
- US5492341A [0022]
- US5529315A [0022]

PATENTKRAV

1. Tørgastætning til tætning af en turbomaskines aksel, hvilken tætning omfatter:

- en parringsring (34), der er indrettet til at blive koblet til turbomaskinens aksel (14) for at rotere med akslens rotationshastighed;
- en primær ring (36), der tætner mod parringsringen (34), hvilken primær ring er indrettet til at blive koblet rotationssikkert til en statisk del på turbomaskinen;
- ét eller flere elastiske elementer (38), der er forspændt med henblik på skubning af den primære ring (36) mod parringsringen (34),

kendetegnet ved, at der er tilvejebragt én eller flere sensorer, hvilken én eller flere sensorer er indrettet til at måle træk og/eller belastninger, der induceres til den primære ring (36) og til ét eller flere af de elastiske elementer (38), eller forskydninger af den primære ring (36) eller af et element (50), der er koblet til den primære ring (36), med henblik på tidlig detektion af fejl på tætningen, og hvor den primære ring (36) er indrettet til at blive koblet rotationssikkert til en skål (100) via et rotationssikkert system, der omfatter én eller flere rotationssikre stifter eller næser (40), og den ene eller flere sensorer omfatter en aksial vibrationssensor (42) til detektion af den primære rings (36) og/eller skålens (100) aksiale bevægelser mod/fra parringsringen (34).

2. Tætning ifølge krav 1, hvor sensorerne omfatter en belastningssensor (41), der er koblet til én eller flere af de rotationssikre stifter eller næser (40) for at detektere drejningsmomenter induceret til den primære ring (36).

3. Tætning ifølge ét eller flere af krav 1 til 2, hvor de(t) elastiske element(er) (38) er koblet til den primære ring (36) via et mellemliggende element (50), der er i stand til at foretage en aksial bevægelse for at bevæge sig med den primære ring (36) ved parringsringens aksiale bevægelse, hvor sensorerne omfatter en forskydningssensor til detektion af det mellemliggende elements (50) aksiale bevægelse.

4. Tætning ifølge krav 3, hvor sensorerne omfatter aksiale vibrationssensorer eller belastningssensorer (80), der er koblet til, eller integreret i, ét eller flere af de elastiske elementer.

5. Tætning ifølge ét eller flere af krav 1 til 4, hvor tætningen omfatter en strømningsvej for en tætningsgas til strømning fra et indløb (61) til et udløb (62) for at få parringsringen (34) og den primære ring (36) til at hæves, hvor en strømningssensor er tilvejebragt i strømningsvejen (60) til måling af tætningsgassens strømning.

6. Turbomaskine omfattende:

- 10 - en rotorindretning (18) indbefattende mindst et skovlhjul (16);
- et leje (20), der er forbundet til, og til roterbar understøttelse af, rotorindretningen (18);
- en stator; og
- en tætningsmekanisme (26), der er anbragt mellem rotorindretningen og lejet, hvor tætningsmekanismen indbefatter en torgastætning ifølge ét eller flere af krav 1 til 5 med tætningens parringsring (34) og primære ring (36) henholdsvis koblet til rotorindretningen og statoren.

7. Turbomaskine ifølge krav 6, hvor tætningens primære ring er koblet til en skål (100) via et rotationssikkert system omfattende én eller flere rotationssikre stifter eller næser (40) og et/en mellemliggende element eller holder (50), der fungerer som en skubbemuffe til aksial skubning af den primære ring (36) mod parringsringen (34) under et forspændt elastisk elements (38) funktion, hvor tætningens sensor eller sensorer omfatter én eller flere sensorer, der hører til gruppen bestående af: forskydningssensor til måling af den primære rings (42, 80) aksiale forskydning, forskydningssensor (90) til måling af den mellemliggende rings (50) aksiale forskydning, træksensor (41) til måling af det drejningsmoment, der induceres til den primære ring (36), belastningssensorer (80) til måling af statisk belastning indvirkende på holderen og/eller den primære ring, belastningssensorer (80) til måling af holderens og/eller den primære rings vibrationer.

8. Turbomaskine ifølge ét eller flere af krav 6 til 7, yderligere omfattende en styreenhed, der er konfigureret til at:

- læse sensorens eller sensorernes output;
- sammenligne outputtet med tærskler for at fastslå en fejltilstand i tætningen;
- tilvejebringe en alarmangivelse.

9. Turbomaskine ifølge krav 8, hvor styreenheden yderligere er konfigureret til at afbryde turbomaskinen, hvis sensorernes output angiver en alvorlig fejltilstand i tætningen.

10. Fremgangsmåde til monitorering af status for en torgastætning i en turbomaskine ifølge et hvilket som helst af krav 6 til 9, hvilken fremgangsmåde omfatter følgende processer:

- tilvejebringelse af sensorerne til måling af træk/belastninger induceret til den primære ring (36) og/eller forskydninger af den primære ring (36) eller af et element, der er koblet til torgastætningens primære ring;
- fastsættelse af acceptkriterier for værdierne målt af sensorerne;
- læsning af sensorernes output;
- test af outputtet med acceptkriterierne;
- aktivering af en alarm og/eller afbrydelse af turbomaskinen, hvis én eller flere værdier målt af sensorerne ikke opfylder acceptkriterierne, hvor sensorerne omfatter en aksial vibrationssensor (42) til detektering af den primære rings (36) aksiale bevægelser.

11. Fremgangsmåde ifølge krav 10, hvilken fremgangsmåde yderligere omfatter:

- fremsendelse af sensorernes output til en fjernforbundet softwareplatform, der er i stand til at indsamle data fra tætninger i forskellige turbomaskiner for at udføre en analyse med henblik på tidlig detektion.

12. Fremgangsmåde ifølge krav 11, hvilken fremgangsmåde yderligere omfatter at sende notifikationer om potentielle skader eller at udføre tilstandsbaseret vedligeholdelse.

13. System til monitorering og tidlig detektion af fejl i torgastætninger i fjernforbundne turbomaskiner, hvilket system omfatter:

- en indsamlingsenhed (200) til indsamling af data fra sensorer i tørtætningerne i turbomaskinerne ifølge et hvilket som helst af krav 6 til 9;

- kommunikationsenheder (100), der er konfigureret til at forbinde turbomaskinerne til indsamlingsenheden (200);

10 - en softwareplatform (300), der er konfigureret til at læse data fra indsamlingsenheden (200) for at udføre en analyse med henblik på at foretage tidlig detektion og/eller sende notifikationer om potentielle skader eller at udføre tilstandsbaseret vedligeholdelse af turbomaskinerne.

DRAWINGS

Drawing

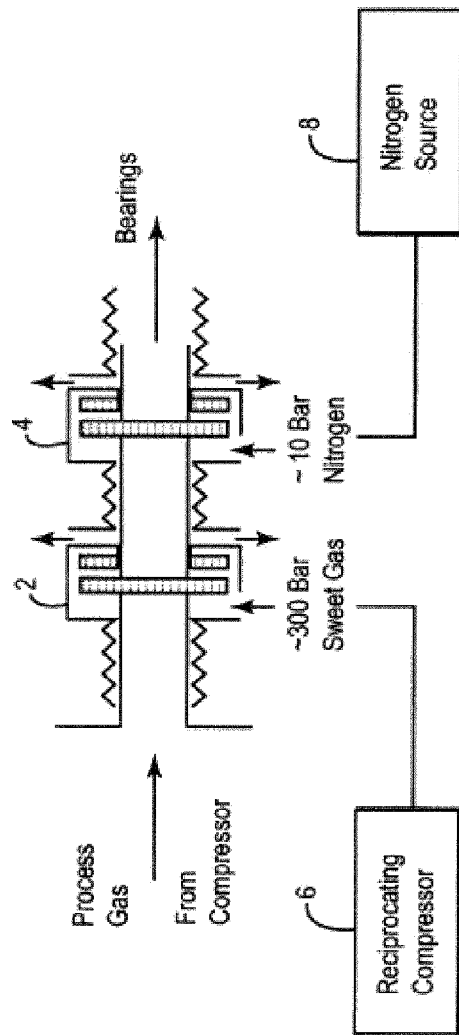


Fig. 1

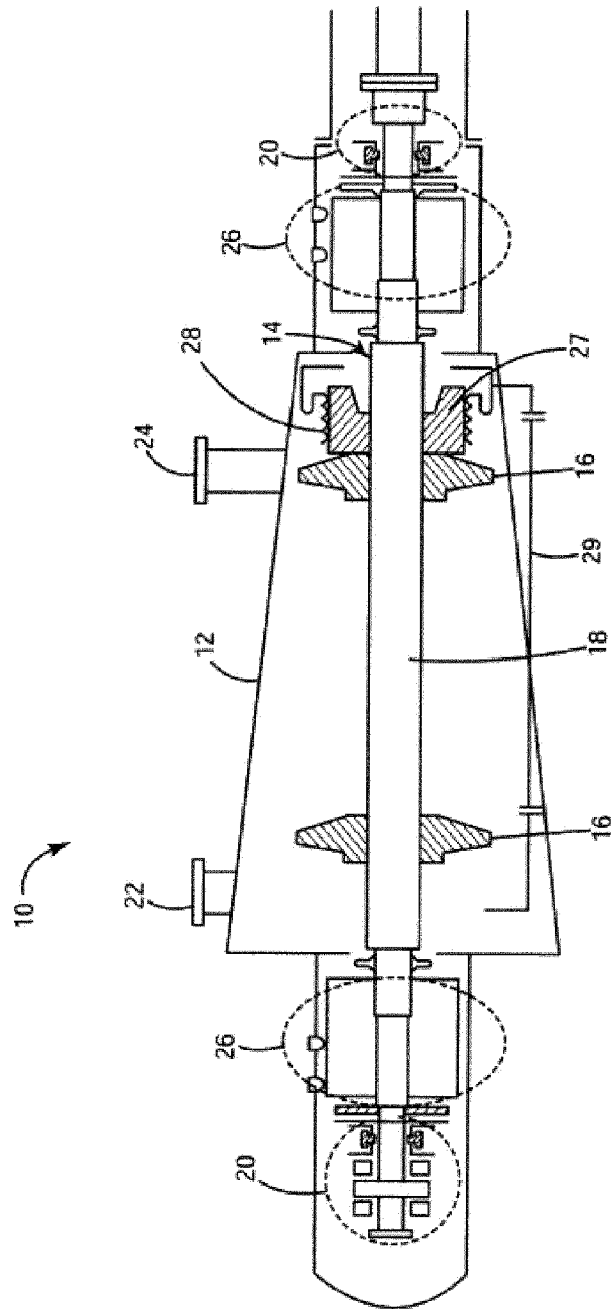


Fig. 2

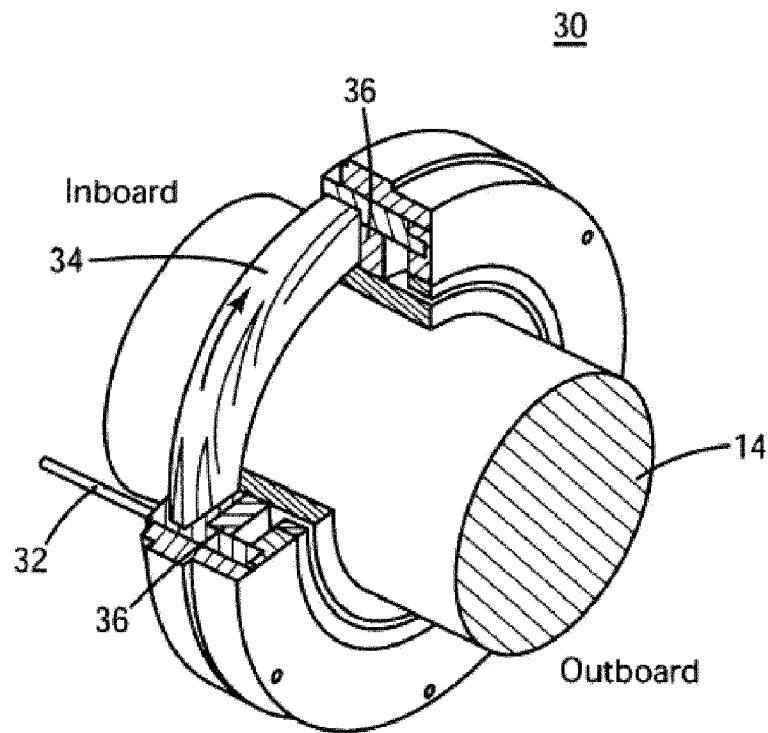


Fig. 3

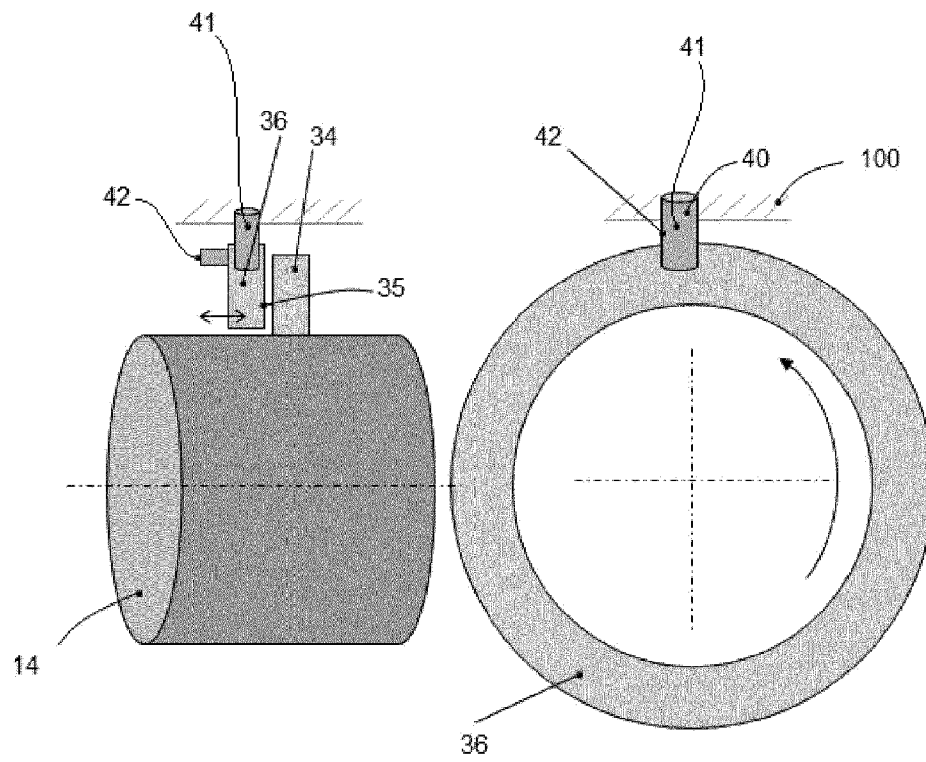


Fig. 4

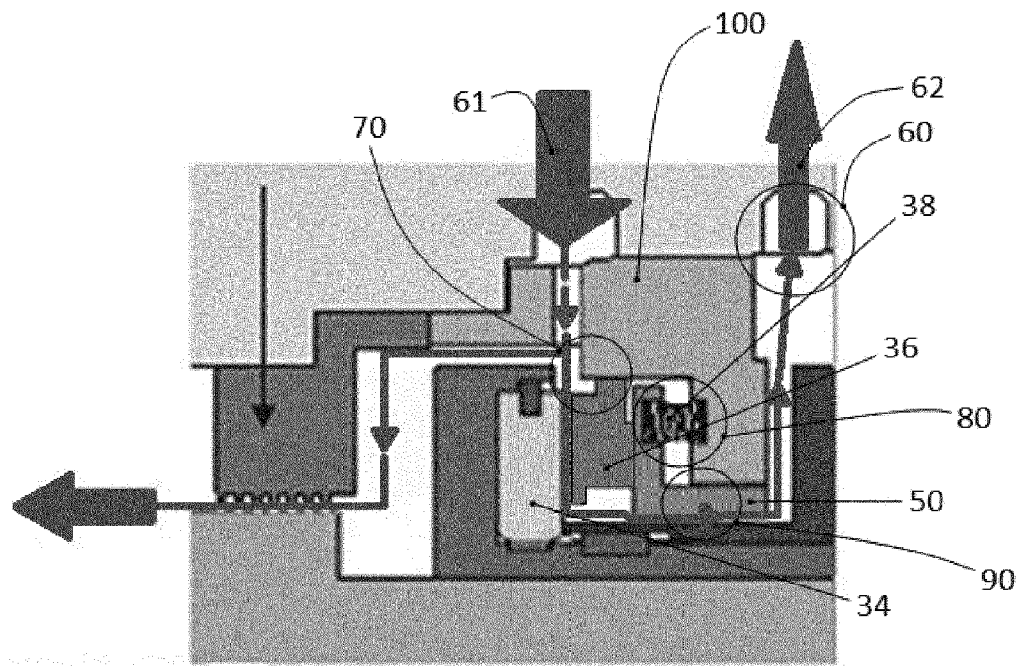


Fig. 5

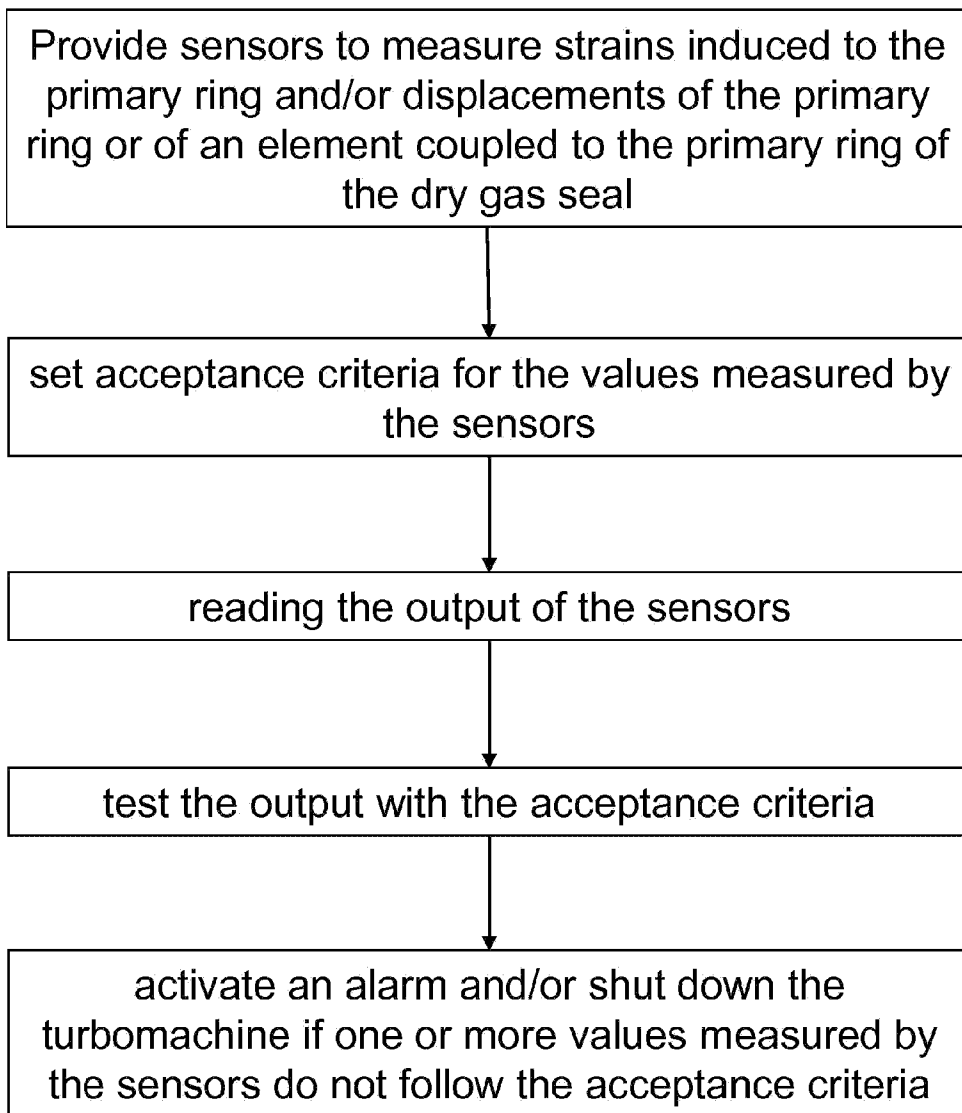


Fig. 6

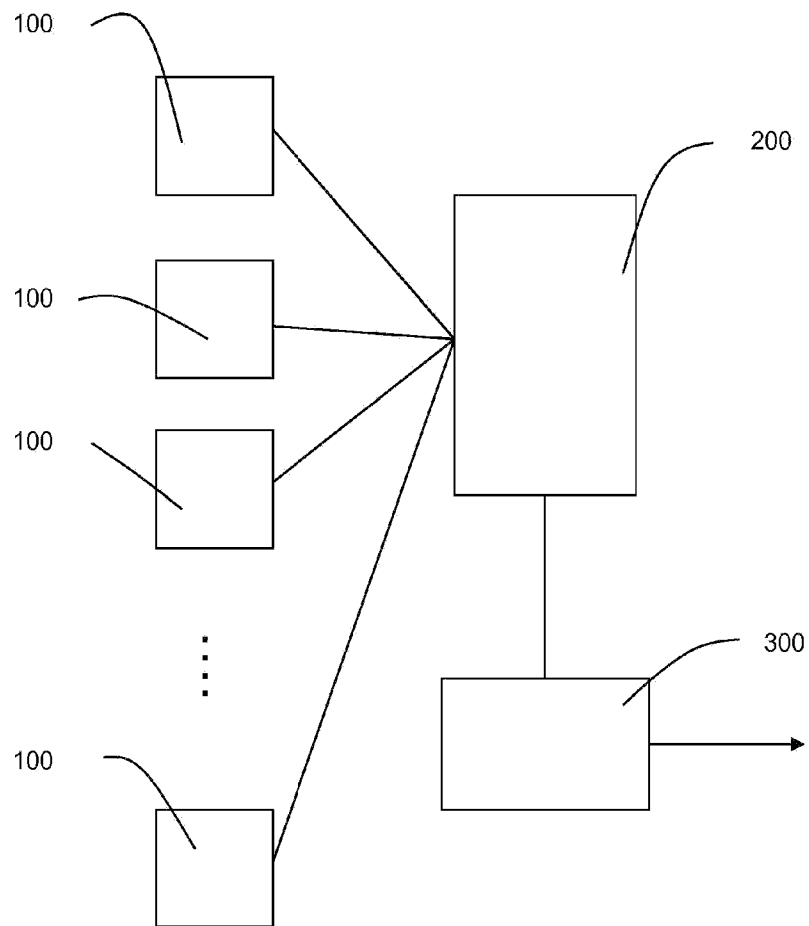


Fig. 7