A temperature responsive sensor is located in the air-flow over the specified surface of a body and is maintained at a constant temperature. An active thermal isolator is located between this temperature responsive sensor and the specified surface of the body. The temperature of this isolator is controlled to reduce conductive heat flow from the temperature responsive sensor to the body. This temperature control includes (1) operating the isolator at the same temperature as the constant temperature of the sensor and (2) establishing a fixed boundary temperature which is either (a) less than or equal to or (b) slightly greater than the sensor constant temperature.
ACTIVE THERMAL ISOLATION FOR TEMPERATURE RESPONSIVE SENSORS

ORIGIN OF THE INVENTION

The invention described herein was made by employees of the United States Government and may be manufactured and used by or for the Government for governmental purposes without the payment of any royalties thereon or therefor.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates generally to detecting flow transition and stress or skin friction of airfoils and more particularly to an apparatus and method for achieving active thermal isolation of such detection devices.

Discussion of the Related Art

The detection of flow transition between laminar and turbulent flow and of shear stress or skin friction of airfoils is important in basic research for validation of airfoil theory and design. These values are conventionally measured using hot film nickel sensors deposited on a substrate of polyimide such as “Kapton®” brand polyimide produced by the E. I. DuPont de Nemours Company, which in turn is bonded to the surface of the aerodynamic body exposed to an airflow, e.g., an airfoil or wind tunnel model. The polyimide substrate provides sufficient electrical insulation to avoid shorts between the body surface and the resistance circuitry of the sensor. However, the polyimide substrate does not have sufficient thermal insulation characteristics. Substantial heat is accordingly lost via conductive heat transfer from the sensor to the intimately located body. This heat loss is of course worsened by the use of highly heat conductive materials to construct the aerodynamic body. This thermal loss affects both the sensor frequency response and resolution.

The thickness of the polyimide substrate may be increased in an attempt to provide better thermal insulation, i.e., passive thermal insulation. However, this increased thickness causes flow disturbances which contaminate the test environment.

Another proposal to thermally isolate the sensor from the model uses internal heat sources to heat the entire aerodynamic body surface. However, the thermal mass of the body is significantly larger than the sensor and the conductive heat transfer accordingly cannot be accurately controlled since the response time necessary for the body temperature change is significantly slower than the response time necessary for the hot film sensors. In addition, this proposal requires significant energy expenditures to heat the entire surface area as well as extensive modification of the interior region of the aerodynamic body, and especially that of a model, in order to house the heating system. Also, heating the entire test body may alter the basic flow state of the body under study.

OBJECTS

It is accordingly an object of the present invention to provide thermal isolation of a hot film or other type of temperature responsive anemometer from an underlying body.

...
causing the layer to cool, i.e., the electrical resistance changes. Measuring device 22 measures the amount of voltage required to maintain a constant temperature above the fluid flow temperature. This voltage requirement is indicative of localized shear stress, skin friction and flow transition.

Lower thermal isolation sensor 14 likewise comprises an upper metal layer 24 having a high temperature coefficient of resistance, e.g., nickel, platinum, etc., which is adhered to, via an appropriate glue, or suitably deposited onto a lower layer 26 having a high electrical resistance such as polyimide film, e.g., Kapton® film. Lower layer 26 of lower thermal isolation sensor 14 is bonded or adhered to an outer surface of aerodynamic body 28 whereas lower layer 18 of the upper hot film sensor 12 is bonded or adhered to metal layer of lower sensor 14 in a back-to-face orientation, wherein “back” refers to the electrical resistive layer of the upper sensor and “face” refers to the metal layer of the lower thermal isolator. The adhesion laminate (not shown) should be as thin as possible while maintaining an adequate bond, e.g., approximately 0.0005". The aerodynamic body is an airfoil, wind tunnel model, etc. which is exposed to an air flow. For convenience, the specific application of a wind tunnel model is used throughout. Metal layer 24 is connected via wires 28a and 28b to a controllable resistance developing circuit 30. Both lower layers 18 and 26 may extend past the metal layer in the upstream and downstream directions per conventional design.

Lower active thermal isolation sensor 14 can be used in several modes. In one mode it is operated with the same response time, thereby having approximately the same temperature as, the upper flow detection sensor 12 to provide dynamic localized heating of the model 28. The respective temperatures of the two sensors would not be identical due to the temperature loss across the polyimide layer 18 and the adjoining glue layer. When the relative temperatures of a particular sensor is discussed, the relative temperature of the metal layer film is the quantity under discussion.

This localized heating can then be utilized to thermally isolate the upper detection sensor 12 from the thermal properties of the model. In a conventional single sensor configuration, the single hot film sensor provides all the power requirements to sustain both a conductive heat transfer to the model and a convective heat transfer to the air flow. In the present invention, lower sensor 14 operated in this first mode compensates for the model thermal properties by providing the model with the required amount of heat to sustain the conduction rate as in the conventional single sensor configuration to effectively thermally isolate the upper sensor, thereby allowing the upper sensor to respond solely to the air flow independently of any model thermal properties. In addition, the upper hot film sensor 12 requires less power than in a conventional single sensor configuration since the lower sensor 14 is performing the heating of the model.

When the two sensors are operated at the same temperature, the frequency response of the upper sensor 12 necessarily decreases. Specifically, data shows that the frequency response obtained with the standard square wave test is lower for a model or airfoil with thermally insulating properties, and higher for a model or airfoil with a thermally conductive layer. The two sensors operating at the same temperature have the same effect as if a single sensor were mounted on a model or airfoil having thermally insulating properties, i.e., very little conductive heat transfer. The resulting lower response frequency may be inadequate for a particular flow phenomena. Accordingly, a second mode of operation is provided which establishes an appropriate temperature difference between the upper and lower sensors to result in the desired upper sensor frequency response.

In this second mode, the lower active thermal isolation sensor 14 locally heats the model 28 to establish a fixed boundary temperature for the upper flow detection sensor 12. This fixed boundary temperature controls the amount of heat that is thermally conducted from the upper sensor 12 to the lower sensor 14. Since the lower sensor 14 is creating a fixed boundary temperature between the upper sensor 12 and the model, the amount of heat transfer from the upper sensor 12 to the lower sensor 14 can be calculated and subtracted from the total heat supplied by the upper flow detection sensor 12. The resulting difference is the heat loss from the upper sensor into the air flow via convection. As stated before, the voltage representing this convection loss is the quantity used to compute local, dynamic shear stress, skin friction and flow transition. All the necessary calculations and control can be implemented by the first and second devices 22 and 30 equipped with or connected to an appropriate microprocessor. This mode thus determines the quantity AT without the need for additional thermocouples while thermally isolating the upper sensor 12.

In most applications, the fixed boundary temperatures established by the lower sensor 14 is less than or equal to the temperature established by the upper sensor 12 for studying of the air flow. In the case of a highly thermally conductive test material, e.g., an aerodynamic body operated at cooler, high altitude conditions, this fixed boundary temperature can also be slightly greater, e.g., up to approximately 5% greater, than the temperature of the upper sensor.

The described sensor configuration and modes of operation effectively compensate for thermal losses to the model and thereby reduce power requirements of the upper flow detection sensor 12. The resulting height of the present configuration is still less than that of a conventional single sensor configuration having a polyimide layer which is thick enough to effectively thermally isolate the metal layer deposited thereon. In the present invention, any polyimide layer need only have sufficient thickness to ensure adequate electrical insulation to avoid shorting between the two metal layers with no regard for the additional thickness necessary to achieve thermal insulation. The thickness depicted is 0.001 inch or approximately 0.02 millimeters. Current fabrication techniques at NASA Langley Research Center, Hampton, Va. have reduced the polyimide layer to approximately 0.0005" while still providing the necessary electrical insulation. Further reductions in thickness may be possible while maintaining the necessary electrical insulation without departing from the teachings of the present invention.

Referring now to FIG. 2, another embodiment of the present invention is shown which is identical to that shown in FIG. 1 except for thermal isolator 14'. Thermal isolator 14' is disposed such that its metal layer 24' is contacting the model surface 28 and its electrical resistance layer is facing the electrical resistance layer 18 of hot film sensor 12. In other words, FIG. 2 shows a back-to-back arrangement of the isolator and sensor whereas FIG. 1 shows a back-to-face arrange-
ment, wherein "back" refers to the electrical resistance
adjoining surfaces of the sensor and the isolator (resis-
tive layers 18 and 26, respectively) are joined by an
appropriate adhesive laminate. This embodiment is op-
erated in the same two modes as discussed previously
with respect to FIG. 1.

Work done by one of the named applicants indicates
that this embodiment does not work well when oper-
ated to determine shear stress in the first mode wherein
the sensor and isolator are operated at an identical set
point temperature. The tests were conducted at a rela-
tively low effective frequency of approximately 1 Hz.
The present invention works best at flow frequencies
exceeding 1 KHz. The test results are discussed in
"Rise-Time Response of Nickel-Foil-on Kapton-Sub-
strate, Hot-Film Shear Stress Sensors", D. C. Reda,

The active thermal isolation of the present invention
is not limited to polyimide films/metal layers configura-
tions. For example, a hot wire anemometer 40 is shown
in FIG. 3 and comprises a sensing wire 42 soldered to
and extending between two branching supports 47a and
47b. Sensing wire 42 is electrically connected to a con-
stant temperature anemometer circuit, whereby a
change in the voltage supplied to the wire 42 to main-
tain a constant temperature is indicative of flow charac-
teristics, as described above. Thermal insulation wires
44a and 44b are respectively spiralled around opposite
ends of the sensing wire 42 and connected via respec-
tive lead wire pairs 46a and 46b to a controllable resis-
tance developing circuit 48.

The anemometer 40 is conventionally affixed to the
model such that the sensing wire 42 is located slightly
above the model surface and accordingly conduction to
the branching supports 47a and 47b occurs, increasing
the power necessary to maintain the specified tempera-
ture of the hot wire anemometer. To avoid this prob-
lem, wires 44a and 44b are heated and controlled as
described previously with respect to the lower sensor
14. Thus, the spiralled wires control conduction from
the wire 42 to the supports 47a and 47b, and not conduc-
tion to the model as in the previous embodiments. The
thermal isolation of this embodiment is not as effective
because it does not separate the wire 42 from the sup-
ports 47a, 47b. A hot wire is not usually used to measure
skin friction or shear stress because it is not in direct
contact with the surface of the model like a film.

Referring now to FIG. 4, an embodiment is shown
wherein a so-called "smart" semiconductor sensor 50 is
employed. Such a smart sensor is described in detail in
"The Use of Silicon Microsensors in Smart Skins for
Aerodynamic Research" by Debra A. Carraway, pres-
ented at the 14th International Conference on Instru-
a conventional configuration, the sensor 50 is affixed to
a silicon layer having an appropriately etched constant
temperature circuit, which in turn is affixed to the
model. In this conventional configuration the semicon-
ductor sensor 50 would heat the model surface via the
silicon layer, creating a power demand to maintain the
constant temperature. As shown in FIG. 4, an active
thermal isolation sandwich 54 is placed between
upper semiconductor sensor 50 and etched silicon layer
54. Lower sensor 52 is operated in the same two modes
as discussed previously to thermally isolate the upper
sensor 50. As before, the total thickness of the upper

sensor 50, lower sensor 52 and silicon layer 54 sandwich
is less than any thermal insulation necessary to ther-

mally isolate a conventional smart sensor configuration
from the model.

The present invention offers several advantages over
the prior art. Utilizing the first mode of operation, the
conductive heat transfer to the model from the lower
sensor or wires can be controlled with the same re-

sponse time, and therefore the same temperature, as the
upper hot film sensor or sensing wire in contact with the
air flow. Utilizing the second mode, a fixed boundary
temperature is established for the upper sensor or hot
wire to thermally isolate the upper sensor or hot wire.
This allows the response time of the upper sensor or hot
wire, which is significantly better than the response
time of an internally heated model, to be employed.
Both modes have resulted in significant reductions in
the power requirements necessary to maintain a given
temperature of the upper sensor. Since heating require-
ments for conduction are reduced, the upper sensor and
hot-wire can be operated at higher temperatures in
convective contact with the air flow within the operat-

ing limits of the particular system employed. These
higher operating temperatures correspond directly with
the ability to detect higher frequencies of boundary
layer turbulence. In addition, the thermal isolation of
the upper sensor and hot-wire results in the electronic
frequency response to a square wave input used in typi-

cal anemometer bridge tuning techniques being inde-
pendent of any model thermal properties.

The foregoing results are achieved without any modi-
fication of the model interior or invasive degradation of
the model surface. The proposed stack arrangement of
sensors can be bonded to most aerodynamic body sur-
faces including curved surfaces as known in the art and
can be removed after completion of the experiment.

Many improvements, modifications and substitutions
will be apparent to the skilled artisan without departing
from the spirit and scope of the present invention as
described in the present specification and defined in the
following claims.

What is claimed is:
1. An apparatus for monitoring airflow over a speci-
ified surface of a body comprising:
a temperature responsive sensor located in the air-
flow over the specified surface of the body;
means for maintaining said temperature responsive
sensor at a constant temperature;
an active thermal isolator located between said tem-
perature responsive sensor and the specified sur-
face of the body; and
means for controlling the temperature of said active
thermal isolator to reduce conductive heat flow
from said temperature responsive sensor to the
body, wherein said temperature controlling means
maintains a fixed boundary temperature of said
active thermal isolator between the body and said
temperature responsive sensor which is different
from the temperature of said sensor.
2. The airflow monitoring apparatus according to
claim 1, wherein the fixed boundary temperature of said
active thermal isolator is less than the maintained con-
stant temperature of said temperature responsive sensor.
3. The airflow monitoring apparatus according to
claim 1, wherein the fixed boundary temperature of said
active thermal isolator is greater than the maintained
constant temperature of said temperature responsive sensor.

claim 3. The airflow monitoring apparatus according to
claim 1, wherein the fixed boundary temperature of said
active thermal isolator is less than the maintained con-
stant temperature of said temperature responsive sensor.

claim 4. The airflow monitoring apparatus according to
claim 1, wherein the fixed boundary temperature of said
active thermal isolator is greater than the maintained
constant temperature of said temperature responsive sensor.
4. The airflow monitoring apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said active thermal isolator comprises a semiconductor.

5. The airflow monitoring apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said apparatus does not create flow disturbances of the fluid flow over said body.

6. An apparatus for thermally isolating a temperature responsive sensor having a maintained constant temperature for monitoring airflow over a specific area of a body, the apparatus comprising:
   - an active thermal isolator located between the temperature responsive sensor and the specific area of the body; and
   - means for controlling the temperature of said active thermal isolator to reduce conductive heat flow from the temperature responsive sensor to the body, wherein said temperature controlling means maintains a fixed boundary temperature of said active thermal isolator between the body and the temperature responsive sensor which is different from the temperature of said sensor.

7. The thermal isolating apparatus according to claim 6, wherein the fixed boundary temperature of said active thermal isolator is less than the constant temperature of the temperature responsive sensor.

8. The thermal isolating apparatus according to claim 6, wherein the fixed boundary temperature of said active thermal isolator is greater than the constant temperature of the temperature responsive sensor.

9. A method of monitoring airflow over a specified surface of a body, comprising the steps of:
   - exposing a temperature responsive sensor to the airflow over the specified surface of the body;
   - interposing an active thermal isolator between the temperature responsive sensor and the body;
   - maintaining the temperature responsive sensor at a constant temperature, wherein the amount of power necessary to maintain this constant temperature is indicative of the airflow over the specified area; and
   - controlling the temperature of the active thermal isolator to reduce conductive heat flow from the temperature responsive sensor to the body wherein said controlling step comprises maintaining the temperature of the interposed active thermal isolator at a fixed boundary temperature between the temperature responsive sensor and the body which is different from the temperature of said sensor.

10. The method according to claim 9, wherein the fixed boundary temperature is maintained at a value which is less than the constant temperature of the temperature responsive sensor.

11. The method according to claim 9, wherein the fixed boundary temperature is maintained at a value which is greater than the constant temperature of the temperature responsive sensor.

* * * * *