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ADDITIVE MANUFACTURING OPTICAL INSPECTION SYSTEM

Abstract

A system for detecting a contaminant, which includes a light source directed to heat a layer of a material positioned in a location. The system further includes an infrared camera positioned aligned with the location to receive electromagnetic thermal radiation energy from the layer of the material in the location.

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Background/Summary

PRIORITY [0001] This application is a divisional of U.S. Ser. No. 17/501,078 filed on Oct. 14, 2021, which claims priority from U.S. Ser. No. 63/127,265 filed on Dec. 18, 2020. The entire contents of U.S. Ser. Nos. 17/501,078 and 63/127,265 are incorporated herein by reference.

FIELD

[0002] This disclosure relates to an inspection system and method for detecting contaminant in a material to determine whether the material is to be used for printing with an additive manufacturing assembly, and more particularly, a system and method to identify the presence of contaminant within a metal powder prior to commencing printing.

BACKGROUND

[0003] In additive manufacturing, with using an additive printer assembly, an intense laser beam is generally used to sinter metal powder for printing a part. The metal powder is either free from contaminant or if contaminant is present, the contaminant present needs to be at an acceptable level prior to allowing the metal powder to be used for printing the part. The presence of contaminant can compromise strength of the part being produced by the additive printing process. As a quality control measure, there is a need to identify and quantify the contaminant within the material, such as metal powder, to be sintered prior to deciding whether to permit the material to be sintered by the laser beam in the additive printing process.

[0004] Based on the particular part being fabricated by the additive printing process, the detection of contaminant within the material to be sintered provides the operator the opportunity to detect and quantify the contaminant. If there is an absence of contaminant in the material the operator of an additive printer assembly can proceed to use the material for printing. Should the operator detect and quantify contaminant contained within the material to be sintered, the operator can proceed with printing if the amount of contaminant present within the material to be sintered is acceptable to specifications for the part being manufactured. Should the amount of contaminant be unacceptable, the operator can choose to remove the contaminant from the material until the content is at an acceptable level or elect to remove the material containing the unacceptable content from the additive printing process.

[0005] In an example of additive printing, the material will contain metal powder and the contaminant, if present, will be a polymer fiber. Detection of contaminant, such as polymer fiber, is presently being carried out with the application of ultraviolet (“UV”) electromagnetic radiation onto a layer of material on a building tank of an additive printer assembly prior to printing the layer of material. Should a polymer fiber be present and absorbs the UV electromagnetic radiation, the polymer fiber will in turn emit a visible light. This emitting of visible light is referred to as a fluorescent occurrence, which in this example is a weak electromagnetic radiation emission and is difficult to visually differentiate between the polymer fiber contaminant the metal powder, intended to be printed. In order to enhance the visual contrast between the polymer fiber contaminant and the metal powder intended to be printed, the operator has to increase the power of the UV electromagnetic radiation. Enhancing the power of the UV electromagnetic transmission to enhance a visual contrast between the polymer fiber contaminant and the metal powder is a safety issue with respect to exposure to humans of the enhanced UV electromagnetic transmission.

[0006] As a result, there is a need to provide a detection system and method for detecting contaminant within material intended to be additively printed, for example, such as detecting the presence of a contaminant of polymer fiber within a metal powder used in additive manufacturing, which provides a visually readably detectable electromagnetic emission contrast between the metal powder and the polymer fiber contaminant and yet not create a safety or health issue to the operator and the operator's personnel who work within proximity to the additive printing process.

SUMMARY

[0007] An example includes a system for detecting a contaminant, which includes a light source directed to heat a layer of a material positioned in the location. The system further includes an infrared camera positioned aligned with the location to receive electromagnetic thermal radiation energy from the layer of the material in the location.

[0008] An example includes a method for detecting a contaminant, which includes heating a layer of a material positioned in a location with a light source directed to the material positioned in the location. The method further includes receiving electromagnetic thermal radiation energy from the layer of the material with an infrared camera aligned with the location.

[0009] An example includes a method for removing a layer of material from a build tank of an additive printer assembly. With a roller apparatus associated with a build tank of the additive printer assembly positioned at a first elevation relative to a first bottom portion of the build tank, moving the roller apparatus to a second elevation relative to the first bottom portion of the build tank, wherein the second elevation is closer to the first bottom portion of the build tank than the first elevation. The method further includes moving the roller apparatus across the build tank removing the layer of material from the build tank.

[0010] The features, functions, and advantages that have been discussed can be achieved independently in various embodiments or may be combined in yet other embodiments further details of which can be seen with reference to the following description and drawings.

Description

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0011] FIG. 1 is a schematic view of an additive printer assembly, printing a part;

[0012] FIG. 2 is schematic view of the additive printer assembly of FIG. 1, without a light source for printing and with a roller apparatus for moving material from a feed tank toward and onto a build tank for printing;

[0013] FIG. 3 is the schematic view of the additive printer assembly of FIG. 2 with the roller apparatus applying a layer of the material on the build tank from the feed tank for printing;

[0014] FIG. 4 is the schematic view of the additive printer assembly of FIG. 3 with a light source heating the layer of the material on the build tank intended to be printed and the material reflecting electromagnetic energy originating from the light source and emitting electromagnetic thermal energy toward the optical filter and the infrared camera;

[0015] FIG. 5 is the schematic view of the additive printer assembly of FIG. 4 with the roller apparatus removing the layer of the material from the build tank of FIG. 4 which has been determined to contain an unacceptable amount of contaminant prior to starting a printing process;

[0016] FIG. 6 includes two schematic views, the bottom schematic view is a top plan view of the layer of material on the build tank of FIG. 3, which in this example includes a metal powder and a contaminant and the top schematic view is a cross section view of the layer of material along line 6-6 of the bottom schematic view, wherein the metal powder and the contaminant are at the same temperature;

[0017] FIG. 7 includes the two schematic views of FIG. 6, wherein in the top schematic cross section view includes a light beam impacting the layer of the material on the build tank with the contaminant within the layer of material heating more quickly than the metal powder within the layer of material and emitting electromagnetic thermal radiation energy;

[0018] FIG. 8 includes the two schematic views of FIG. 7, wherein more time has transpired with respect to the light beam impacting the layer of material of FIG. 7, such that emission of electromagnetic thermal radiation energy by the metal powder reaches an equilibrium with the emission of electromagnetic thermal radiation energy of the contaminant;

[0019] FIG. 9 is a graph which represents an example of the intensity and spectrum of the electromagnetic thermal radiation energy emission from a metal powder and of a polymer fiber contaminant within the layer of material within FIG. 6 with both the metal powder and the polymer fiber contaminant at a same temperature;

[0020] FIG. 10 is a graph which represents an example of the intensity and spectrum of the electromagnetic thermal radiation energy being emitted from the metal powder and from the polymer fiber contaminant within the layer of material with the layer of material being initially exposed to a light beam for heating the layer of material as seen in FIGS. 4 and 7;

[0021] FIG. 11 is a graph which represents the intensity and spectrum of the electromagnetic thermal radiation energy emission of the metal powder and the polymer fiber contaminant within the layer of material having reached thermal equilibrium, as seen in FIG. 8, after time has transpired with subjecting the material within the layer of material to continued exposure to the light beam from the initial exposure to the light beam of FIG. 7;

[0022] FIG. 12 represents a graph of heating of the polymer fiber contaminant and of the metal powder over time with being exposed to the light beam;

[0023] FIG. 13 is a method for detecting a contaminant, and

[0024] FIG. 14 is a method for removing a layer of material which includes a metal powder and a contaminant.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0025] In fabricating parts by way of additive printing, quality control is important with respect to the material being used for the printing so as to provide sufficient strength for the finished part. An amount of contaminant allowed to be present within the material to be printed may vary based on the specifications for the part. In some instances the specifications may permit the presence of some contaminant and in other instances the specifications may not permit the presence of any contaminant. In an example, to be discussed herein, of printing a part, the material used for printing is a metal powder and an example of a contaminant, which is sought to be detected within the metal powder and which may or may not be present within the metal powder is a polymer fiber. The material for printing can vary as to composition and the contaminant intended to be detected can also vary as to composition.

[0026] Since the composition of the material to be printed is different than the contaminant, such as a metal powder for printing, and knows the composition of the contaminant needed to be detected and a polymer fiber as the contaminant, the operator will understand the absorptance to thermal inertia ratio for each of these compositions will likely be different. Absorptance, a , is defined as the “ratio of the absorbed radiant or luminous flux to the incident flux under specified conditions.” Thermal inertia, I , is qualitatively defined as the “capacity of a material to store heat and to delay its transmission” and quantitatively defined as:

$I = \sqrt{kpc}$ [0027] k is thermal conductivity [0028] p is density [0029] c is specific heat capacity

[0030] In the example to be discussed herein, the absorptance to thermal inertia ratio for the metal powder, $(\alpha/I)_{\text{sub.m}}$, will not be equal to the absorptance to thermal inertia ratio for the polymer fiber, $(\alpha/I)_{\text{sub.p}}$, where the m and p subscripts stand for the metal powder and polymer fiber, respectively. This difference in absorptance to thermal inertia ratios for the different compositions can be expressed as:

$(\alpha/I)_{\text{sub.m}} \neq (\alpha/I)_{\text{sub.p}}$.

[0031] With one composition having a greater ratio than the other composition, the operator can apply a light beam to heat the material intended to be printed and the composition within the material with a greater absorptance to thermal inertia ratio will heat more quickly than another composition present within the material and will transmit electromagnetic thermal radiation energy

with a greater intensity and spectrum than the other composition.

[0032] The transmission of greater intensity and spectrum from the composition in the material with the greater absorptance to thermal inertia ratio will provide a visible contrast with use of an infrared camera to another composition within the material with a lower absorptance to thermal inertia ratio. The visual contrast with use of an infrared camera provides the operator the ability to visually detect contaminant within the material. For example, should no visual contrast appear with the infrared camera, the material heated has the same composition, such as metal powder, and will be used for printing having no contaminant. However, if visual contrast(s) appears with the infrared camera, the contrast indicates the presence and location of a contaminant regardless of whether the metal powder or the contaminant has the greater absorptance to thermal inertia ratio. At that point, with the infrared camera providing the appearance of visual contrast image(s) the operator can locate and quantify a contaminant and determine whether or not to proceed to use the material for printing.

[0033] An amount of contaminant permitted to be within the material intended to be printed can vary from no contaminant is permissible to some percentage of presence of the contaminant is permissible for printing. As a result, it would be beneficial to have a system and method for detecting the presence of a contaminant within the material prior to printing such that an operator of the additive printer device can quantify the presence of contaminant and decide whether the material to be printed meets the specifications for the part to be printed. Based on a detection and determination of an amount of presence of a contaminant, the operator of the additive printing process can proceed with the printing the layer of the material for building the part, with removing the contaminant or with removing the layer of material which has an unacceptable content of contaminant in the layer. Should the layer of material be removed, a replacement layer of material can be provided and the operator can proceed with again using the system and method for detecting the presence of a contaminant prior to printing.

[0034] In referring to FIG. 1, additive printer assembly **10** includes a light source **12**, which in this example includes laser light source, which generates light beam **14**, which in this example, includes a laser beam. Light beam or laser beam **14** is directed, in this example, to material **16** having an acceptable content as specified of contaminant in build tank **18**. In this example, material **16** is a metal powder which has an absence of or an acceptable amount of contaminant as specified for part **20** to be printed. Light beam or laser beam **14** is of sufficient energy so as to sinter material **16** to form part **20**.

[0035] Build tank **18** has first bottom portion **22**, which is movable so as to adjust a position of surface **24** of material **16** as needed in progressing through an additive printing of part **20**. Adjacent to build tank **18**, is feed tank **26**, which contains, in this example, material **16** which is fed into build tank **18** during the additive printing process. Feed tank **26** further includes second bottom portion **28**, which is also movable so as to adjust a position of surface **30** of material **16** as needed for facilitating feeding material **16** into build tank **18**, as will be discussed.

[0036] In referring to FIG. 2, first bottom portion **22** of build tank **18** has been lowered, in contrast to FIG. 1, after layer of part **20** has been printed. Lowering of first bottom portion **22** results in lowering surface **24** of material **16** or metal powder in build tank **18** with an acceptable content of contaminant, either none or an acceptable presence, for printing part **20**. Second bottom portion **28** of feed tank **26**, has been raised, relative to FIG. 1, so as to position surface **30** of material **16** within feed tank **26** to a higher elevation such that roller apparatus **32**, which is moved across feed tank **26**, scrapes a portion of material **16** out of feed tank **26** forming new surface **30'** of material **16** within feed tank **26**, as seen in FIGS. 3 and 4.

[0037] With first bottom portion **22**, which has been lowered, in FIG. 2, thereby lowering surface **24** of material **16** within build tank **18**, roller apparatus **32** pushes material **16** from feed tank **26** into build tank **18** forming layer **34** of material **16** overlying surface **24** of material **16** in build tank **18** and forming a new surface **24'**, as seen in FIG. 3. Layer **34** of material **16** overlies printed part

20 so as to provide additional material 16 to be sintered and added to part 20 with further application of light or laser source 12. As seen in FIG. 3, roller apparatus 32 completes spreading of material 16 across build tank 18 forming new surface 24' of material 16 in preparation for sintering material 16 within layer 34 of material 16, subject to an acceptable determination of contaminant within material 16 within layer 34.

[0038] Prior to sintering any portion of material 16 within layer 34 with laser source 12 so as to add another portion to part 20, system 36, as seen in FIG. 4 is employed for detecting absence of contaminant or presence of and location of contaminant, as seen in FIG. 6, within layer 34 of material 16. As mentioned earlier, an example of the material 16 to be sintered is a metal powder and an example of contaminant 40 which may or may not be present in material 16, is a polymer fiber.

[0039] Should an undesired amount of contaminant be detected within material 16 within layer 34, first bottom portion 22 of build tank 18 is raised, as seen in FIG. 5, to adequately rise bottom 38 of material 16 of layer 34, formerly designated surface 24 of FIG. 3, such that roller apparatus 32 has access to bottom 38 of material 16 of layer 34. With roller apparatus 32 having access to bottom 38, roller apparatus 32 can be moved across build tank 18 and remove layer 34 of material 16 containing an unacceptable content of contaminant 40, off of build tank 18, as seen in FIG. 5. With scraping off of layer 34, material 16 within build tank 18 remains contaminant free or at least at a contaminant level that is an acceptable level for fabrication reuse.

[0040] In referring to FIG. 4, system 36 for detecting contaminant within material 16 layer 34, includes light source 42 or in this example, a laser source, positioned, such that light beam 44 or in this example, laser beam emitted from light source 42 is directed to location 46 to heat layer 34 of material 16 positioned in location 46, which may or may not contain contaminant. System 36 further includes infrared camera 48 positioned aligned with location 46. Without optical filter 50 being present in FIG. 4 and with material 16 being heated by light or laser beam 44, material 16 emits electromagnetic thermal radiation energy 52 as a result of adsorptance to thermal inertia ratio of composition(s) within material 16. With infrared camera 48 aligned with location 46, infrared camera 48 receives electromagnetic thermal radiation energy from layer 34 of material 16 in location 46. As a result, optical contrasts can possibly be seen with two different compositions being present within layer 34 by infrared camera 48. With material 16 being all one composition, such as metal powder, the adsorptance to thermal inertia ratio of the single composition will transmit all the same or uniform electromagnetic thermal radiation energy to infrared camera 48 and infrared camera 48 will provide no visual contrast. With a single composition present in layer 34, infrared camera 48 will show a single color with no visual contrast.

[0041] However, as seen in FIG. 6, if there is presence of contaminant 40, such as a polymer fiber, along with metal powder 41, in layer 34 of material 16, each composition of metal powder 41 and polymer fiber contaminant 40 within layer 34 will have different absorptance to thermal inertia ratios. In this example, when heating of material 16 with light source 42, polymer fiber contaminant 40 will heat up more quickly than metal powder 41 within layer 34 of material 16 and will thereby commence transmitting electromagnetic thermal radiation energy earlier than metal powder 41 and providing a higher intensity at a common wavelength of the spectrum than that of metal powder 41.

[0042] In this example, light source 42, as seen in FIG. 4, includes a laser source, such as for example a carbon dioxide laser source, such as for example, variable linewidth high-power "Transversely Excited Atmospheric" or TEA CO₂ laser source which emits a laser light beam 44, as seen in FIG. 4. In this example, laser source 12 as seen in FIG. 1, for the sintering of material 16 in additive printer assembly 10, is a relatively short-wave laser in contrast to light source 42 in system 36 which utilizes a relatively long-wave laser. For example, light beam or laser beam 44 of light source or laser source 42, for system 36 for detecting contaminant, includes a wavelength within a wavelength range which includes a wavelength of four hundred nanometers (400 nm) up to and

including a wavelength of one hundred micrometers (100 urn).

[0043] As seen in FIG. 4, system 36 will operate on layer 34 of material 16, positioned on build tank 18 of additive printer assembly 10. As mentioned earlier in the present example, layer 34 of material 16 will include metal powder 41 absent of contaminant or will include metal powder 41 which has contaminant 40 of polymer fiber within layer 34, as seen in FIG. 6.

[0044] In the present example, system 36 for detecting contaminant 40 further includes optical filter 50, as seen in FIG. 4. Optical filter 50 is positioned aligned with infrared camera 48 and positioned between infrared camera 48 and material 16 of layer 34 in location 46. Optical filter 50 in this example includes a band pass interference filter which allows a designated portion or band width of the spectrum to pass through the filter and rejects or blocks all other wavelengths. Optical filter 50, can be employed, in one example, to block reflecting electromagnetic energy that originates from light source 42, which in this example is a laser source which emits a light beam 44 or laser light beam onto material 16 of layer 34 and which reflects (not shown) toward optical filter 50. Removal of reflecting electromagnetic energy originating from light source 42 enhances visual resolution of electromagnetic thermal radiation energy 52, as seen in FIG. 7, received by infrared camera 48 from the heated composition, in layer 34, having a greater absorptance to thermal inertia ratio. In this example, polymer fiber contaminant 40 has a greater absorptance to thermal inertia ratio than that of metal powder 41 and heats up more quickly than metal powder 41. In an initial time period in which these compositions are exposed to laser or light beam 44 and the composition with a greater absorptance to thermal inertia ratio emits electromagnetic thermal radiation energy 52 in a greater intensity and spectrum than that of metal powder 41, providing a visual contrast with infrared camera 48 to that of metal powder 41 within layer 34.

[0045] Optical filter 50 can further be used to more selectively block electromagnetic energy spectrum from reaching infrared camera 48 so as to further enhance visual contrast of electromagnetic thermal radiation energy of the composition(s) being heated in material 16 in layer 34. In referring to FIGS. 9-11, various intensities and spectrums of electromagnetic thermal radiation energy is emitted from different compositions that can be present in material 16 of layer 34. As mentioned earlier, should material 16 not contain any contaminant 40, there is no visual contrast created and infrared camera 48 does not present any visual contrasts. However, in the present example, with a presence of polymer fiber contaminant 40, as seen in FIG. 6, present in layer 34 with metal powder 41, there would be presence of materials with different compositions having different absorptance to thermal inertia ratios.

[0046] Material 16, as seen in FIG. 6, has the presence of two compositions, metal powder 41 and polymer fiber contaminant 40, and both compositions are at the same temperature, which in this example would be room temperature. At the same temperature, both compositions are emitting a black body thermal radiation which are very similar in radiation intensity and in wavelength spectrum ("A."), as seen in FIG. 9. Under these circumstances, the electromagnetic thermal radiation energy from both compositions which reaches infrared camera 48 are very similar in spectrum and intensity. This similarity in spectrum and radiation intensity will not provide a sufficient readable visual contrast between metal powder 41 and the polymer fiber contaminant 40 by infrared camera 48. In this graphical representation, metal powder 41 composition is represented by the solid line in the graph and polymer fiber contaminant 40 composition is represented by the dashed line in the graph. Thus, at the same temperature condition each composition has a radiation intensity and spectrum ("A.") of emission of thermal electromagnetic radiation energy that is substantially in equilibrium with each other and as mentioned earlier does not provide sufficient visual contrast with infrared camera 48.

[0047] In FIG. 10, light source 42 is turned on and light beam 44, in this example a laser beam, begins to heat up material 16 in layer 34, as seen in FIG. 7. In this example, material 16 includes metal powder 41 and polymer fiber contaminant 40. Polymer fiber contaminant 40, in this example, such that as represented in FIG. 12 polymer fiber contaminant 40 with a greater absorptance to

thermal inertia ratio than that of metal powder **41**, heats up quicker than metal powder **41**. The absorptance to thermal inertia ratio for polymer fiber contaminant **40** is $0.75/601 \sim 0.001$ for example for polymethylacrylate composition, and is much greater than the absorptance to thermal inertia ratio for metal powder **41** is $0.59/7,017 \sim 0.0001$, for example for titanium powder. The properties of these compositions were obtained, for example, from Tolochko, Nikolay K., et al., "Absorptance of powder materials suitable for laser sintering" of Rapid Prototyping Journal (2000).

[0048] As a result, in an initial period of time of exposing material **16** to heating by light or laser beam **44** polymer fiber contaminant **40** climbs in temperature more quickly than metal powder **41** of material **16** in layer **34**, as seen in FIG. **12** and emits electromagnetic thermal radiation energy with greater intensity at a similar spectrum as seen in FIG. **10**, and with an expanded shifted spectrum and with a greater intensity than that of metal powder **41** in the same initial period of time of being exposed to light or laser beam **44**. Based on the material composition of polymer fiber contaminant **40** and the known light source **42** energy imparted onto layer **34** of material **16**, the operator will be able to determine a peak thermal wavelength or lambda maximum ("A. max"), as seen in FIG. **10**, which is a wavelength of maximum intensity for this polymer fiber contaminant **40**. Calculation for peak thermal wavelength, in this example for polymer fiber contaminant **40** is derived using Wein's displacement Law: " $A. \max = b/T$ " wherein b is Wien's displacement constant and T is an absolute temperature of a black body. The operator will then have optical filter **50** block out all wavelengths of electromagnetic thermal radiation energy coming from material **16** of layer **34** except a band width which contains the peak thermal wavelength or A. max for, in this example, polymer fiber contaminant **40**, which has the greater absorptance to thermal inertia ratio to that of metal powder **41**. Bandwidth **39** permitted to pass through optical filter **50** is a bandwidth of approximately 200 nano meters (nm) in this example including wavelength 8.3 micrometers (μm) to and including wavelength 8.5 micrometers (μm) which includes the peak thermal wavelength or A. max of 8.4 micrometers (μm) for polymer fiber contaminant **40**, in this example, polymethylacrylate. Metal powder **41** or titanium powder in this example has a radiation intensity **43**, as seen in FIG. **10**, as represented by the shaded portion within bandwidth **39** positioned below the solid line in graph representing metal powder **41** and contaminant or polymer fiber **40** of polymethylacrylate in this example has a greater radiation intensity **45** as represented by the shaded portion within bandwidth **39** positioned below the dashed line in the graph representing polymer fiber contaminant **40**. The greater intensity of radiation intensity of polymer fiber or contaminant **40** to that of radiation intensity of titanium powder or metal powder **41** provides a visual contrast for infrared camera **48** thereby providing visual detection by the operator of contaminant or polymer fiber **40** in material **16** of layer **34**, in this example.

[0049] The filtering by optical filter **50** blocks electromagnetic thermal radiation energy exclusive of a bandwidth, as mentioned above, of electromagnetic thermal radiation energy spectrum transmitted to and otherwise reaches infrared camera **48** from the composition which contains the peak thermal wavelength or A max for that composition and which has a greater absorptance to thermal inertia ratio.

[0050] The filtered electromagnetic thermal radiation energy permitted through optical filter **50** to infrared camera **48**, which includes for example bandwidth **39** and peak thermal wavelength A max provides a higher visual contrast to, in this example, radiation intensity of the electromagnetic thermal energy emitted by metal powder **41** in the same spectrum. The differential in radiation intensity as discussed above for radiation intensity **45** to that of radiation intensity **43** provides the visual contrast image with infrared camera **48** providing detection and location of the polymer fiber contaminant **40**, in this example, with a higher contrast with respect to the electromagnetic thermal radiation energy of metal powder **41**. The operator with looking at infrared camera **48** is able to visually detect and identify the location of polymer fiber contaminant **40** within layer **34** of material **16** which also includes metal powder **41** by way of differential in radiation intensity.

[0051] It should be understood with respect to the absorptance to thermal inertia ratio of a

particular composition, the composition with a higher ratio could be the composition used in constructing the part, metal powder, for example, rather than that of in this example polymer fiber contaminant **40**. In that case, the visual imaging will be that of the composition of the higher absorptance to thermal inertia ratio visually showing in the infrared camera **48** the presence and location of the material used for example in the additive building of the part such as the metal powder. Thus, gaps in the visual image from the infrared camera **48** will be that of contaminant **40**. The positive visual imaging in the infrared camera **48** is dependent on the composition of material to be detected having a greater absorptance to thermal inertia ratio than another composition within material **16** in layer **34**. The operation of system **36**, in this example, operates positively imaging the composition within material **16** of layer **34** having a greater absorptance to thermal inertia ratio. The composition which has a greater absorptance to thermal inertia ratio emits electromagnetic thermal radiant energy which has a band width of such electromagnetic thermal radiant energy which includes the composition's peak thermal wavelength or A max pass through optical filter **50** to infrared camera **48** imaging that composition within layer **34** of the material.

[0052] In referring to FIGS. **8** and **11**, more time has transpired with respect to exposing material **16** to heating with light source **42**. As reflected in the graph of FIG. **12**, as time progresses with material **16** being exposed to heating with light source **42**, the temperature of metal powder **41**, for example, and polymer fiber contaminant **40**, for example, reach an equilibrium. As a result, as seen in FIGS. **8** and **11**, both metal powder **41** and polymer fiber contaminant **40** reach an equilibrium state of emitting a similar spectrum and intensity of electromagnetic thermal radiation energy as seen in FIG. **11** and emit a similar spectrum and intensity of electromagnetic thermal radiation energy **53**, as seen in FIG. **8**.

[0053] In the present example, with metal powder **41** and polymer fiber contaminant **40** reaching an equilibrium state of temperature an insufficient difference in intensity of a given wavelength in the spectrum between metal powder **41** and polymer fiber contaminant **40** does not provide a sufficient difference in intensity so as to provide visual contrast in infrared camera **48**. As a result, the visual contrast imaging for system **36** is time dependent on the compositions being exposed to light source **42** to be heated.

[0054] In referring to FIG. **12** the difference in the rate of heating of the compositions results in the differing in emitting of electromagnetic thermal radiation energy for each composition of metal powder **41** and the polymer fiber contaminant **40** used in this example. The quicker the composition heats up the quicker that composition emits electromagnetic thermal radiation energy **52** which, as described above provides a differential in intensity of the electromagnetic thermal radiation energy being emitted by the particular composition in contrast to the other composition present in layer **34**. Thus, polymer fiber contaminant **40** provides the emission of electromagnetic thermal radiation energy creating a differential in intensity of the electromagnetic thermal radiation energy of that of metal powder **41** as described above that results in providing an image in infrared camera **48** of that composition. Metal powder **41** and polymer fiber contaminant **40** start out within layer **34** at a common or room temperature, as mentioned earlier, with respect to FIGS. **6**, **9** and **12**. With heating these compositions within layer **34**, the differential of absorptance to thermal inertia ratios in the compositions results in the greater ratio value composition providing an image in infrared camera **48** as described above providing a visual image contrast between the compositions which provides the operator a visual image which detects the presence and location of polymer fiber contaminant **40** in layer **34**. As time progresses with respect to the application of light or laser beam **44** to layer **34**, temperatures of the compositions, metal powder **41** and polymer fiber contaminant **40**, reach equilibrium temperature as seen in FIG. **12**. As a result, the spectrum and intensity of their electromagnetic thermal radiation energy emission also reach equilibrium as seen in FIGS. **8** and **11** resulting in the diminishing of visual contrast provided by infrared camera **48**.

[0055] System **36** further includes roller apparatus **32** associated with build tank **18** of additive printer assembly **10** as seen in FIGS. **2**, **3** and **5**. Roller apparatus **32**, as earlier discussed, moves

material 16 from feed tank 26 to build tank 18. In addition, roller apparatus 32 is used to remove layer 34 from build tank 18 when system 36 detects an unacceptable presence of polymer fiber contaminant 40, in the present example, within for example, metal powder 41 of material 16.

[0056] Roller apparatus 32 is positioned at first elevation D1 relative to first bottom portion 22 of build tank 18, as seen in FIG. 3, and moved across build tank 18, resulting in layer 34 of material 16 being added on build tank 18 with material 16 from feed tank 26 as seen in FIG. 2. Alternatively, roller apparatus 32 positioned in second elevation D2, as seen in FIG. 5, relative to the first bottom portion 22 of build tank 18 and moved across build tank 18 layer 34 of material 16 is removed from build tank 18, which occurs with system 36 detecting in this example polymer fiber contaminant 40 content within metal powder 41 within layer 34 of material 16 which is unacceptable.

[0057] In referring to FIG. 13, method 54 for detecting contaminant 40 includes heating 56 layer 34 of material 16 positioned in location 46 with light source 42 directed to layer 34 of material 16 positioned in location 46 such that light beam 44 from light source 42 reaches layer 34 of material 16 in location 46. Method 54 further includes receiving 58 electromagnetic thermal radiation energy from layer 34 of material 16 positioned in location 46 with infrared camera 48 aligned with location 46. Method 54 further includes positioning layer 34 of material 16 on build tank 18 of additive printer assembly 10, wherein layer 34 of material 16 includes one of metal powder or the metal powder and polymer fiber, which is contaminant 40. Light source 42 includes a laser light source wherein light beam 44 emitted from the laser light source includes a laser light beam in this example.

[0058] Method 54 further includes positioning optical filter 50 aligned with infrared camera 48 and positioned between infrared camera 48 and material 16 of layer 34. Method 54 further includes filtering, with optical filter 50, electromagnetic radiation of light beam 44 from light source 42 which is reflected by material 16 of layer 34. As discussed earlier, method 54 further includes filtering, with optical filter 50, electromagnetic thermal radiation energy emitted from material 16 of layer 34, wherein material 16 includes a metal powder and a contaminant 40 polymer fiber, exclusive of a peak wavelength or A max from one of the metal powder or the polymer fiber, which ever has a greater absorptance to thermal inertia ratio allowing the peak wavelength or A max to be transmitted from material 16 to infrared camera 48.

[0059] In referring to FIG. 14, method 60 for removing layer 34 of material 16 including metal powder and contaminant 40, such as seen in FIG. 6 includes with roller apparatus 32 associated with build tank 18 of additive printer assembly 10 positioned at a first elevation D1, as seen in FIG. 3, relative to first bottom portion 22 of build tank 18, moving 62 roller apparatus 32 to second elevation D2 relative to first bottom portion 22 of build tank 18, wherein second elevation D2 is closer to first bottom portion 22 of build tank 18 than first elevation D1 of FIG. 3 and moving 64 roller apparatus 32 across build tank 18, as seen in FIG. 5, removing layer 34 of material 16 from build tank 18. In this example, layer 34 of material 16 removed from build tank 18 includes metal powder and an unacceptable content within material 16 of layer 34 of contaminant 40, which in this example includes a polymer fiber. Once layer 34 is removed roller apparatus 32 can be used to add another layer 34 on build tank 18 wherein in this example, system 36 is employed for detecting presence of contaminant 40 within material 16 prior to determining whether to proceed with printing with additive printer assembly 10.

[0060] While various embodiments have been described above, this disclosure is not intended to be limited thereto. Variations can be made to the disclosed embodiments that are still within the scope of the appended claims.

Claims

- 1.** A method for detecting a contaminant, comprising: heating a layer of a material positioned in a location with a light source directed to the layer of material positioned in the location, and receiving electromagnetic thermal radiation energy from the layer of the material positioned in the location with an infrared camera aligned with the location.
- 2.** The method of claim 1, further comprising: positioning the layer of the material on a build tank of an additive printer assembly, wherein the layer of the material comprises one of a metal powder or the metal powder and a polymer fiber; and the light source comprising a laser light source, wherein a light beam emitted from the laser light source comprises a laser light beam.
- 3.** The method of claim 1, further including positioning an optical filter aligned with the infrared camera and positioned between the infrared camera and the material.
- 4.** The method of claim 3, further including filtering, with the optical filter, electromagnetic radiation energy of a light beam from the light source which is reflected by the material.
- 5.** The method of claim 3, further including filtering, with the optical filter, electromagnetic thermal radiation energy from the material, comprising a metal powder and a polymer fiber, exclusive of a peak wavelength from the metal powder or the polymer fiber.
- 6.** The method of claim 5, wherein the peak wavelength is transmitted from one of the metal powder or the polymer fiber which has a greater absorptance to thermal inertia ratio.
- 7.** A method for removing a layer of material from a build tank of an additive printer assembly, comprising: with a roller apparatus associated with the build tank of the additive printer assembly positioned at a first elevation relative to a first bottom portion of the build tank, moving the roller apparatus to a second elevation relative to the first bottom portion of the build tank, wherein the second elevation is closer to the first bottom portion of the build tank than the first elevation; and moving the roller apparatus across the build tank removing the layer of material from the build tank.
- 8.** The method of claim 7, wherein the layer of material removed from the build tank includes a metal powder and a contaminant comprising a polymer fiber.
- 9.** A method for manufacturing a part using an additive printer assembly, the method comprising: positioning a layer of material in a build tank of the additive printer assembly; directing a light beam from a light source onto the layer of material to heat the layer of material; receiving electromagnetic thermal radiation energy emitted from the layer of material with an infrared camera; and determining, based on the received electromagnetic thermal radiation energy, whether the layer of material includes a contaminant prior to building the part.
- 10.** The method of claim 9, wherein the light source comprises a laser light source configured to emit a laser light beam having a first wavelength.
- 11.** The method of claim 9, wherein the infrared camera is aligned with the layer of material to detect variations in electromagnetic thermal radiation energy indicative of one or more contaminants.
- 12.** The method of claim 9, further comprising positioning an optical filter between the infrared camera and the layer of material, wherein the optical filter is configured to block electromagnetic radiation at a wavelength of the light beam.
- 13.** The method of claim 12, wherein the optical filter comprises a bandpass filter configured to transmit a bandwidth including a peak thermal wavelength corresponding to a known contaminant.
- 14.** The method of claim 9, wherein determining whether the layer of material includes a contaminant comprises identifying a visual contrast in thermal emission intensity between two materials having different absorptance-to-thermal-inertia ratios.
- 15.** The method of claim 9, wherein the material comprises a metal powder and the contaminant comprises a polymer fiber.
- 16.** The method of claim 9, further comprising removing the layer of material from the build tank if the contaminant is determined to exceed a predefined threshold.

- 17.** The method of claim 16, wherein removing the layer of material from the build tank comprises using a roller apparatus to remove the layer from the build tank.
- 18.** The method of claim 9, further comprising removing the contaminant from the layer of material prior to proceeding with building the part.
- 19.** The method of claim 9, further comprising proceeding with sintering the layer of material in the build tank if the contaminant is determined to be within an acceptable range.
- 20.** The method of claim 9, wherein determining whether the layer includes a contaminant comprises quantifying the contaminant based on intensity differentials in thermal emission captured by the infrared camera.
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