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PROPULSION SYSTEM ASSEMBLY

TECHNOLOGICAL FIELD

5 The presently disclose subject matter relates to propulsion systems, in particular for powering air vehicles.

BACKGROUND ART

References considered to be relevant as background to the presently disclosed
10 subject matter are listed below:

- US 8,317,126
- US 8,288, 916
- US 7,906,925
- US 7,377,876
- 15 - US 6,713,982
- US 2010/253168
- US 2008/006739
- WO 2011/107718
- WO 2010/071779
- 20 - WO 2014/033715
- WO 2014/033716
- DE 2134667

Acknowledgement of the above references herein is not to be inferred as
25 meaning that these are in any way relevant to the patentability of the presently disclosed subject matter.

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BACKGROUND

There are many classes of air vehicles that use one or more propulsion system for conventional aerodynamic flight and/or for vectored flight.

In at least some cases, electrically powered motors are used for powering the air vehicle and in any case the power requirements can vary significantly for different operating conditions as well as for different air vehicle designs.

For example, in at least some cases, for air vehicles in the vertical take-off and landing (VTOL) category, the power requirements for vectored flight, including vertical take-off (VTO), vertical landing (VL) and hover, are much higher, for example seven times higher, than the power requirements for aerodynamic flight.

It is known that when operating a VTOL type air vehicle in vectored thrust mode, using a propulsion system including a combination of "n" rotors (where "n" is an integer greater than 1), conventionally there often exists what is known as a "dead man's curve". This refers to a situation in which a problem can occur in the propulsion system in some stages of the vectored thrust flight that can result in an uncontrolled crash of the air vehicle. Such a situation is more dangerous in air vehicles that do not have helicopter type rotors that can otherwise mitigate the danger by providing the air vehicle with some gliding characteristics. In such helicopter type propulsion systems, some measure of gliding can be provided by the forced auto-rotation of the rotor, increasing the chances of survival of the air vehicle. An alternative approach to survivability in case of propulsion system failure in other types of VTOL type air vehicles (and sometimes implemented as an additional safety feature in some helicopters) is to provide redundancy in the thrust generation capability, and while several ways are known for creating the redundancy required to overcome this problem, conventionally this comes with a reduction in performance and a significant increase in cost of ownership.

It is also known that when designing an air vehicle, the requirements often change during the development stage and/or during the operational life cycle of the air vehicle. Such changes can arise, for example, from an increasing demand one or more of: payload weight, endurance and range. Correspondingly, the power demands on the propulsion system also need to change. Conventionally, such changes are sometimes

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achieved by redesigning the propulsion system to meet the new needs, though this solution can often require costly investment in time, effort and resources to implement.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

5 According to a first aspect of the presently disclose subject matter there is provided a propulsion system assembly comprising:

 a driveshaft rotatably mounted to a casing about a drive axis, the driveshaft comprising a first shaft end and an opposite facing second shaft end;

 a plurality of electric motor modules in axially stacked relationship with one
10 another with respect to the drive axis to define an electric motor module stack, said plurality being an integer greater than unity, each electric motor module being configured for transmitting a torque to the driveshaft when coupled thereto independently of at least one other said electric motor module;

 each electric motor module comprising a controllable clutch arrangement for
15 selectively coupling and decoupling the respective electric motor module with respect to the driveshaft to respectively enable and disable transmission of torque between the respective electric motor module and the driveshaft.

 For example, each said electric motor module comprises:

 a stator element;
20 a rotor element rotatably mounted with respect to the stator element, and configured for being reversibly coupled to the drive shaft via the respective clutch arrangement.

 For example, each electric motor module has a depth dimension parallel to the drive axis and a width dimension orthogonal to the drive axis, wherein said width
25 dimension is greater than said depth dimension. For example, a ratio of said width dimension to said depth dimension is between 5 and 20. For example, a ratio of said width dimension to said depth dimension is greater than 10.

 For example, each said electrical motor module is design to generate the same torque under the same operating conditions as one another.

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For example, each said electrical motor module is design to generate a module design shaft power of 40kW, or more than 40kW, or less than 40kW.

For example, said propulsion system assembly is configured to provide a design shaft power using all said electric motor modules, wherein said design shaft power is
5 greater than a required shaft power by a shaft power safety margin, wherein said shaft power safety margin is not less than a module design shaft power of at least one said electric motor module.

For example, for each electric motor module, the respective clutch arrangement comprises an electromechanical clutch independently actuatable with respect to the other
10 said clutch arrangements.

For example, for each electric motor module, the respective clutch arrangement comprises:

- a clutch rotor and a field coil concentrically provided on the rotor element,
and
- 15 - an armature affixed to the driveshaft

wherein responsive to actuation of the respective clutch arrangement the clutch rotor frictionally abuts the armature driveshaft to enable transmission of said torque between the respective electric motor module and the driveshaft.

For example, for each electric motor module, the respective clutch arrangement
20 is actuatable responsive to one or more of electric, electronic or digital signals.

For example, for each electric motor module, the respective clutch arrangement comprises an electromagnetic clutch independently actuatable with respect to the other said clutch arrangements.

For example, for each electric motor module, the respective clutch arrangement
25 comprises a mechanical clutch independently actuatable with respect to the other said clutch arrangements.

For example, for each electric motor module, the respective clutch arrangement is actuatable responsive to the clutch arrangement being subjected to a rotational

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resistance from the respective electric motor module greater than a predetermined threshold.

For example, the propulsion system assembly further comprising a first rotor element for aerodynamically generating a first thrust responsive to being turned about
5 said drive axis by the propulsion system assembly. For example, said first rotor element is affixed to said first shaft end. For example, said first rotor element comprises any one of a propeller, ducted fan, unducted fan.

In some examples, the first rotor can be mounted to the driveshaft at a position intercalated between two otherwise adjacent said electric motor modules.

10 For example, the propulsion system assembly further comprises a second rotor element for aerodynamically generating a second thrust responsive to being turned about said drive axis by the propulsion system assembly. For example, said second rotor element is affixed to said second shaft end. For example, said second rotor element comprises any one of a propeller, ducted fan, unducted fan.

15 For example, the casing comprising a first casing bracket affixed to a first said electric motor module that is closest to said first shaft end, and a second casing bracket affixed to a second said electric motor module that is closest to said second shaft end, said first casing bracket comprising a first bearing arrangement and said second casing bracket comprising a second bearing arrangement, the driveshaft being rotatably
20 mounted with respect to said first bearing arrangement and said second bearing arrangement.

For example, in said axially stacked relationship, each pair of axially adjacent said electric motor modules are fixedly connected to one another.

For example, said electric motor modules are connected to the casing in fixed
25 spatial relationship in said axially stacked relationship.

For example, said casing comprises a plurality of spacer elements interconnecting each pair of axially adjacent electric motor modules in fixed spatial relationship in said axially stacked relationship.

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For example, the propulsion system assembly further comprises a housing member for enclosing therein at least said casing and said plurality of electric motor modules. For example, said housing member is configured for pivoting about a pivot axis different from the drive axis. For example, said pivot axis is orthogonal to the drive
5 axis.

For example, the propulsion system assembly further comprises a control system for controlling operation of each said electric motor module.

For example, said control system comprises a motor controller for each said electric motor module, each respective motor controller being configured for operating
10 the respective said clutch arrangement, wherein to cause the respective said clutch arrangement to selectively couple and decouple the respective said electric motor module with respect to the driveshaft.

For example, each said motor controller is configured for operating the respective said clutch arrangement to decouple the respective said electric motor
15 module with respect to the driveshaft responsive to a detectable fault being detected in the respective said electric motor module.

For example, said detectable fault comprises a significant reduction in the shaft power generated by the respective said electric motor module as compared with an expected shaft power level.

20 For example, the control system comprises a detector for detecting said detectable fault, said detector being operatively connected to the control system.

For example, said detector comprises at least one of Hall effect Sensors, Encoders, Resolvers.

For example, each said motor controller is configured for operating
25 independently of at least one other said motor controller.

For example, said control system comprises a master controller for controlling operation of the plurality of said motor controllers corresponding to said plurality of electric motor modules.

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According to a second aspect of the presently disclose subject matter there is provided an air vehicle comprising at least one propulsion system assembly as defined herein regarding the first aspect of the presently disclose subject matter.

For example, the air vehicle is a VTOL type air vehicle.

5 For example, the air vehicle is a manned air vehicle.

For example, the air vehicle is an unmanned air vehicle (UAV).

For example, said propulsion system assembly configured for selectively providing vertical thrust for vectored thrust flight and for selectively changing the thrust vector to provide horizontal thrust for aerodynamic flight.

10 For example, at least one said propulsion system assembly is reversibly tiltable between a horizontal angular disposition for providing horizontal thrust and a vertical angular disposition for providing vertical thrust.

For example, the air vehicle comprises three said propulsion system assemblies.

For example, said three propulsion system assemblies are in triangular
15 configuration when viewed in plan view.

For example, the air vehicle can be a fixed-wing vehicle.

For example, the air vehicle can be a rotary wing vehicle, for example a helicopter.

According to a third aspect of the presently disclose subject matter there is
20 provided a method for operating an air vehicle, comprising:

providing a shaft power requirement for driving a desired rotor at desired operating conditions;

providing a propulsion system assembly as defined herein regarding the first aspect of the presently disclose subject matter, wherein each said electric motor
25 module is designed to provide a module shaft power output at said desired operating conditions, wherein said integer is chosen such that a shaft power output of the stack, defined as a product of said integer and said module shaft power output, matches or exceeds said shaft power requirement.

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For example, the method comprises modifying said shaft power requirement and correspondingly modifying said integer by increasing or decreasing said plurality of said electric motor modules such that a modified product of said modified integer and said module shaft power output matches or exceeds said modified shaft power
5 requirement.

For example, the method comprises adding additional said electric motor modules to said electric motor module stack to thereby increase said shaft power output of the thus modified propulsion system assembly as compared with the unmodified said propulsion system assembly.

10 For example, the method comprises removing at least one said electric motor modules from said electric motor module stack to thereby decrease said shaft power output of the thus modified propulsion system assembly as compared with the unmodified said propulsion system assembly.

For example, the method comprises monitoring operation of each said electric
15 motor module and operating the respective said clutch arrangement thereof to decouple the respective said electric motor module from the driveshaft responsive to a detectable fault being detected in operation of the respective said electric motor module.

For example, the shaft power requirement is determined for vectored thrust flight, and further comprising operating the propulsion system assembly in aerodynamic
20 flight with a reduced number of electric motor modules coupled to the driveshaft, said reduced number being at least one less than said integer.

For example, each said electric motor module of said reduced number of electric motor modules operates at maximum efficiency during said aerodynamic flight.

For example, a ratio of said integer to said reduced number is between 5 and 10.

25 According to a fourth aspect of the presently disclosed subject matter there is provided an electric motor module, comprising

a stator element;

a rotor element rotatably mounted with respect to the stator element,

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a controllable clutch arrangement for selectively coupling and decoupling the electric motor module with respect to a driveshaft to respectively enable and disable transmission of torque between the electric motor module and the driveshaft.

5 For example, the clutch arrangement comprises an independently actuatable electromechanical clutch.

For example, the clutch arrangement comprises:

- a clutch rotor and a field coil concentrically provided on the rotor element,
and
- 10 - an armature affixed to the driveshaft

wherein responsive to actuation of the respective clutch arrangement the clutch rotor frictionally abuts the armature driveshaft to enable transmission of said torque between the respective electric motor module and the driveshaft.

For example, the clutch arrangement is actuatable responsive to one or more of
15 electric, electronic or digital signals.

For example, the clutch arrangement is actuatable responsive to the clutch arrangement being subjected to a rotational resistance from the respective electric motor module greater than a predetermined threshold.

A feature of at least one example of the presently disclosed subject matter is that
20 the respective propulsion system assembly allows survival of the air vehicle and likewise continuation of the mission without changes in the form of flying of the air vehicle.

A feature of at least one example of the presently disclosed subject matter is that the respective propulsion system assembly does not require full engine shutdown in the
25 event that one or more electric engine module malfunctions. Rather, the remainder of the electric motor modules continue working to provide albeit reduced thrust for the respective propulsion system assembly. In turn, this reduced thrust avoids or minimizes the need to implement an aerodynamic plan that could otherwise be required for the

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purpose of compensating for the loss of an engine in the case of multi-engined aircraft in which there can be a significant thrust asymmetry as a result of such a loss.

A feature of at least one example of the presently disclosed subject matter is that the respective propulsion system assembly can provide weight saving and improved
5 performance, as compared to a conventional electrical engine having the same design power rating.

A feature of at least one example of the presently disclosed subject matter is that the respective propulsion system assembly can provide redundancy in thrust requirements in conventional air vehicles, and also in VTOL air vehicles particularly in
10 the critical phases of hover.

A feature of at least one example of the presently disclosed subject matter is that the respective propulsion system assembly can allow operation of the propulsion system assembly in the most efficient domain of performance of the propulsion system assembly, via selective operation of a different number of electric motor modules in
15 each phase of the flight, for example: hover (including vertical take-off (VTO) and/or vertical landing (VL)), cruise, climbing and descent.

A feature of at least one example of the presently disclosed subject matter is that it is possible to design a respective propulsion system assembly, and starting with a single electric motor module "layer", additional "layers" (each comprising a single
20 electric motor module) can be added to the driveshaft according to the requirements of the specific air vehicle. In turn, this replaces the need to develop each time a new engine specific for the needs of each air vehicle. Thus, in at least some cases, additional electric motor modules can be added to the driveshaft without the need for drastic changes in the air vehicle.

25 A feature of at least one example of the presently disclosed subject matter is that it is possible to operate the propulsion system assembly in vectored thrust using all the electric motor modules thereof at maximum efficiency, and then use the same propulsion system in aerodynamic flight, when the power requirements are much lower (for example $1/5^{\text{th}}$ to $1/10^{\text{th}}$ or $1/7^{\text{th}}$ to $1/10^{\text{th}}$ of the vectored thrust power requirements)
30 by decoupling most of the electric motor modules from the driveshaft, and only having

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a minimum number or a desired number of electric motor modules coupled to the driveshaft such as to provide the lower required power for aerodynamic flight, with each such coupled electric motor module operating at maximum efficiency. Accordingly, the propulsion system assembly can be operated in such a manner that
5 each electric motor module that is coupled to the driveshaft operates at maximum efficiency, providing the air vehicle with greater endurance and/or range, as compared with a propulsion system in the form of a single electric motor that provides the maximum power for vectored thrust, but needs to operate at the lower power ratings for aerodynamic flight at lower engine efficiency (with losses which could be at for
10 example 10% to 20% in efficiency) because the whole motor is being used each time.

A feature of at least one example of the presently disclosed subject matter is that the clutch arrangement allows the propulsion system assembly to continue operating even where there is a catastrophic failure of one of the electric motor modules (for example the coils burn out), by decoupling the electric motor module and thereby
15 eliminating an otherwise undesired load on the driveshaft, which thereby allow the remaining electric motor modules to provide shaft power to the propeller (or other rotor design), for example.

A feature of at least one example of the presently disclosed subject matter is that the stacked configuration of the electric motor modules, as well as the disc-like form
20 thereof, provide a compact design. In at least some cases, a compact design for the propulsion system assembly minimizes obscuring of the propeller (or other rotor design) by the propulsion system assembly, and thus maximizes the thrust produced by the propeller. In at least some cases, a compact design for the propulsion system assembly minimizes weight, for example by avoiding the need for a complex and heavy
25 transmission system including gears, for example, providing instead direct motor-to-driveshaft coupling.

A feature of at least one example of the presently disclosed subject matter is that there is provided a versatile and compact design for a propulsion system assembly, the design also being relatively easy to implement and to adapt to changing needs and
30 requirements, for a relatively low investment in time, effort and resources required for implementation.

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A feature of at least one example of the presently disclosed subject matter is that there is provided a modular design for a propulsion system assembly, configured for meeting changing power demands for the propulsion system.

5 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

In order to better understand the subject matter that is disclosed herein and to exemplify how it may be carried out in practice, examples will now be described, by way of non-limiting example only, with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

10 **Fig. 1** is an isometric view of a propulsion system assembly according to an example of the presently disclosed subject matter.

Fig. 2 is an isometric cross-sectional view of the example of Fig. 1.

Fig. 3 is an isometric exploded view of the example of Fig. 1.

15 **Fig. 4(a)** is side view of the example of Fig. 1; **Fig. 4(b)** is top view of the example of Fig. 1.

Fig. 5(a) schematically illustrates in side view an alternative variation of the example of Fig. 1 in horizontal thrust mode; **Fig. 5(b)** schematically illustrates in side view the example of Fig. 5(a) in vertical thrust mode.

20 **Fig. 6(a)** schematically illustrates in side view the example of Fig. 1 configured with a pusher propeller; **Fig. 6(b)** schematically illustrates in side view the example of Fig. 1 configured with a puller propeller; **Fig. 6(c)** schematically illustrates in side view an alternative variation of the example of Fig. 1 configured with a pusher propeller and a puller propeller.

Fig. 7 schematically illustrates a control system for the example of Fig. 1.

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DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Referring to Figs. 1 to 3, a propulsion system assembly according to a first example of the presently disclosed subject matter, generally designated **100**, comprises a driveshaft **200**, casing **300**, and a plurality of electric motor modules (EMM) **400**.

5 Referring to Fig. 2 in particular, each EMM **400** comprises in this example a first rotor **410** and a second rotor **420** sandwiching a stator **430** therebetween, and thus the first rotor **410** and the second rotor **420** are disposed one each on opposite facing sides of the stator **430**.

The stator **430** is annular disc-shaped having a central opening **435**, and includes a
10 mounting ring **440** at the outer periphery thereof, the mounting ring **440** comprising a plurality of mounting points **442** as well as an electrical interface **444** including electrical inlet and/or outlet connection for providing electrical power to the EMM **400**. The electrical interface **444** can also provide control inputs for controlling the EMM **400** and/or sensor outputs.

15 The first rotor **410** and the second rotor **420** are each disc-shaped having a respective central opening **415**, **425** respectively, and are concentric with the stator **430**, being co-axially aligned with the drive axis **A** of the driveshaft **200**. Each one of said first rotor **410** and the second rotor **420** comprises a rotor mounting bracket, **411**, **421** respectively, that inwardly project into the respective central opening **415**, **425**, and axially
20 connect with one another via said central opening **435** to provide a rotor assembly **455**.

As best seen in Fig. 4(a) and Fig. 4(b), each EMM **400** is generally disc-shaped and has a depth dimension **t** (parallel to the drive axis **A**) and a width dimension **W** (orthogonal to the drive axis **A**). At least in the illustrated example, the width dimension **W** is greater than the depth dimension **t**, and while in the illustrated example, the ratio **R** of the width
25 dimension **W** to the depth dimension **t** is about 10, in alternative variations of this example the ratio **R** can have other suitable values, for example greater than 10, or within the range 5 to 20, for example.

In at least one implementation of this example, each EMM **400** can be a brushless coreless Axial-Flux motor, provided by Albus Technologies Ltd, of Israel, and/or an

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electric machine as disclosed in WO 2014/033715 or in WO 2014/033716 to Albus Technologies Ltd, for example.

Each EMM **400** comprises a respective controllable clutch arrangement **600** that is concentric with, and fixed to, the rotor assembly **415**. The clutch arrangement **600** is
5 configured for selectively coupling and decoupling the respective EMM **400** with respect to the driveshaft **200**, enabling and disabling, respectively the transmission of torque/shaft power between the respective EMM **400** and the driveshaft **200**, as will become clearer herein.

In this example, each clutch arrangement **600** is in the form of an
10 electromechanical clutch **610** that is independently actuatable with respect to the other clutch arrangements **600** of the other EMM **400** of the stack **450**. Referring to Fig. 2 in particular, each clutch arrangement **600** comprises an armature **630** rotationally fixed to the driveshaft **200**, and a clutch rotor **640** concentrically provided on the rotor assembly **455** and including a field coil (not shown). In
15 response to actuation of the clutch arrangement **600**, the clutch rotor **640** frictionally abuts the armature **630**, and thus becomes mechanically connected to the driveshaft **200**, thereby enabling transmission of torque/shaft power between the respective EMM **400** and the driveshaft **200**. In this example, for each EMM **400**, the respective clutch arrangement **600** is actuatable responsive to one or more of
20 electric, electronic or digital signals, as will become clearer herein. Thus, when the clutch arrangement is actuated, electrical current flows through the field coil, generating a magnetic field and magnetizing the clutch rotor **640**, which in turn magnetically attracts the armature, abutting the armature to the clutch rotor **630** and generating friction. Thus, as the rotor assembly **455** spins about drive axis A, the
25 drive shaft **200** becomes frictionally coupled via the armature, and thus shaft power is transmitted to the driveshaft **200** via the armature **630**. The clutch arrangement **600** decouples the rotor assembly **455** from the driveshaft **200** when electrical current to the clutch arrangement **600** is stopped – the armature **630** is free to turn with the driveshaft **200**, while the armature remains with the rotor assembly **455**.
30 Thus if a fault develops in the respective EMM **400** causing the EMM **400** to slow

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down or stop, the clutch arrangement **600** decouples that particular EMM **400** from the driveshaft **200**, which is driven by the remaining EMM **400** of the stack **450**.

In alternative variations of this example, other different clutch configurations can be used in place of the electromechanical clutch **610**, for example an
5 electromagnetic clutch arrangement or a mechanical clutch arrangement. For example, such a mechanical clutch arrangement can comprise a shaft clutch part rotationally fixed to the driveshaft **200**, and a clutch rotor **640** concentrically provided on the rotor assembly **455**, and including a release-type ball-detent type arrangement, in which
10 spring loaded balls keep the shaft clutch part engaged with the shaft clutch part until the clutch arrangement is subjected to a torque overload, for example as a result of malfunction of the respective EMM **400** which for some reason is not developing torque and is now being rotated by the driveshaft. At torque overload conditions, the springs that abut the balls to one or another of the shaft clutch part engaged or the shaft clutch part becomes compressed, bringing the balls into disengagement with the other one of
15 the shaft clutch part engaged or the shaft clutch part, respectively, allowing relative rotation between the driveshaft and the malfunctioning EMM **400**.

In this example, the plurality of electric motor modules (EMM) **400** comprises four EMM **400** in axially stacked relationship with one another respect to the drive axis A, thereby defining an electric motor module stack (EMMS) **450**. As will become clearer
20 herein, in alternative variations of this example, or indeed in at least some implementations of this example, the EMMS **450** can have more than one EMM **400**, i.e., two, three, five or more than five EMM **400**, in axially stacked relationship with one another respect to the drive axis A.

In this example, all the EMM **400** in the EMMS **450** are essentially identical to one
25 another, and each EMM **400** is designed to provide the same torque and same module design shaft power (DSP) for the EMM **400** as the other EMM **400**. For example, the module design shaft power for each EMM **400** can be 40kW or more than 40kW. In other examples, the module design shaft power for each EMM **400** can be less than 40kW, for example 10kW, 15kW, 20kW, 25kW, 30kW, or 35kW, or any power level in-between
30 these values.

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Each EMM **400** is configured for transmitting torque/shaft power to the driveshaft **200**, when coupled thereto via the respective clutch arrangement **600**, independently of at least one other EMM **400** or independently of operation of all the other EMM **400** of the stack **450**.

5 The driveshaft **200** is rotatably mounted to the casing **300** about drive axis A. The driveshaft comprises a first shaft end **210** and a second shaft end **220**, the first shaft end **210** and the second shaft end **220** being at opposite longitudinal ends of the driveshaft **200**.

Referring also to Fig. 3, the casing **300** comprises a first casing bracket **310** affixed to one longitudinal end of the stack **450**, and a second casing bracket **320** affixed to the
10 opposed longitudinal end of the stack **450**. More particularly, the first casing bracket **310** affixed to the EMM **400** that is closest to said first shaft end **210**, and the second casing bracket **320** is affixed to the EMM **400** that is closest to the second shaft end **220**.

The first casing bracket **310** comprises a first bearing arrangement **315**, and radial arms **316** outwardly project therefrom to an outer base element **317** which is fixed to the
15 uppermost EMM **400** as seen in Fig. 3.

The second casing bracket **320** comprises a second bearing arrangement **325**, and radial arms **326** outwardly project therefrom to an outer base element **327** which is fixed to the lowermost EMM **400** as seen in Fig. 3.

The driveshaft **200** is rotatably mounted with respect to the first bearing
20 arrangement **315** and the second bearing arrangement **325**.

In the aforementioned axially stacked relationship, each pair of axially adjacent EMM **400** are fixedly connected to one another via the casing **300**. For this purpose, the casing **300** further comprises a plurality of spacer elements **340** interconnecting each pair of axially adjacent EMM **400** in a fixed spatial relationship in stack **450**.

25 While in this example, the stack **450** is exposed to the external environment, in alternative variations of this example, and referring to Fig. 5(a) and Fig. 5(b), the propulsion system assembly **100** comprises a housing member **120** for enclosing therein at least the casing **300** and stack **450**. In the illustrated example, the housing member **120** is configured for pivoting about a pivot axis **B** different from the drive axis A; in particular,

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in this example the pivot axis **B** is orthogonal to the drive axis **A**, and thus in one mode of operation the example illustrated in Fig. 5(a) and Fig. 5(b) can be used for generating a vertical thrust and a horizontal thrust, respectively, as the housing **120** together with the propulsion system assembly **100** is pivoted 90° about pivot axis **B**.

5 The propulsion system assembly **100** further comprises a first rotor element **700** for aerodynamically generating a thrust **T1** responsive to being turned about the drive axis **A** by the EMM **400** of the propulsion system assembly **100**. The first rotor element **700** is affixed to the first shaft end **210**. While in this example the first rotor element **700** is in the form of a propeller, other forms of rotor can be provided
10 in alternative variations of this example, for example a ducted fan or an unducted fan.

Referring to Figs. 6(a) and 6(b), the rotor element **700** can be configured as a pusher propeller or a puller propeller, respectively, for example.

In yet other alternative variations of these examples, and referring to Fig.
15 6(c), the propulsion system assembly **100** further comprises a second rotor element **750** for aerodynamically generating a second thrust **T2** in the same direction as, and concurrently with, thrust **T1**, responsive to being turned about the drive axis **A** by the EMM **400** of the propulsion system assembly **100**, and thus the second rotor element **750** is affixed to the second shaft end **220**. The second rotor element **750**
20 can comprise any one of a propeller, ducted fan, unducted fan, for example.

Referring to Fig. 7, the propulsion system assembly **100** further comprises a control system **800** for controlling operation of each EMM **400**. The control system **800** comprises a motor controller **810** for each EMM **400**. Each respective motor controller **810** is configured for operating the respective clutch arrangement **600**, to
25 cause the respective clutch arrangement **600** to selectively couple or decouple the respective EMM **400** with respect to the driveshaft **200**, according to predetermined criteria. In this example, such criteria include decoupling the respective EMM **400** with respect to the driveshaft **200** responsive to a detectable fault being detected in the respective EMM **400**. For example, such a detectable fault can comprise a

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significant reduction in the shaft power generated by the respective EMM **400**, as compared with an expected or nominal shaft power level. The control system **800** comprises a detector **830** (only shown for one EMM **400**) for detecting such a detectable fault using suitable decision-making algorithms, the detector **830** being
5 operatively connected to the control system **800**, in particular to the respective motor controller **810**.

Such decision-making algorithms can provide control outputs, based on input received from one or more known sensors, for controlling operation of the respective EMM **400**. Such sensors can include, for example, one or more of Hall
10 effect Sensors, Encoders, Resolvers, or combination of part or all of these. Additionally or alternatively, such sensors can include temperature sensors. The sensors are configured for providing the required data at a sufficiently high frequencies that are high enough to detect abnormal behavior of the respective EMM **400**, and thus analyzing the data from those sensors by the respective motor
15 controller **810** can indicating a problem in a specific EMM **400**. Accordingly, the respective malfunctioning EMM **400** can be stopped, while concurrently allowing the other EMM **400** in the stack **450** to continue rotating the driveshaft at the required RPM. In at least some examples, this can require designing the propulsion system assembly **100** so that the power requirements for the total number of EMM
20 **400** will allow less than this number of EMM **400** (for example one less) to supply adequate power for the air vehicle (in which the propulsion system assembly **100** is installed) in all the stages of aerodynamic flight, as well in all stages of vectored flight for cases in which the air vehicle is a VTOL air vehicle.

Each motor controller **810** is configured for operating independently of at
25 least one other motor controller **810**, and in this example independently of all the other motor controllers **810** of the control system **800**.

The control system **800** also comprises a master controller **850** for controlling operation of the plurality of motor controllers **810**, corresponding to the plurality of EMM **400**. Essentially, the master controller **850** operates to monitor

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the behavior of all the EMM **400**, to analyze the performance of each EMM **400**, to analyze the operation of each motor controller **810**, and to compare the performance and operation of all the EMM **400**. The master controller **850** further operates to determine, from the information gathered in this manner, whether any
5 particular EMM **400** in the stack **450** is behaving in a different or abnormal manner from the other EMM **400** in the stack **450**. In such a case the master controller **850** can operate to stop or start EMM **400** directly, even if the respective motor controller **810** fails. In such cases where one EMM **400** no longer generates torque and is decoupled from the driveshaft **200**, the remaining coupled EMM **400**
10 compensate for the decoupled EMM **400** and will attempt to meet the required RPM for the driveshaft, wherein each respective motor controller **810** will operate to increase the demand for current and thus enable the coupled EMM **400** to operate at an increased power rating to develop the required shaft power.

For example, if a malfunction causes a particular EMM **400** to run at a
15 higher RPM than the other EMM **400** in the stack, the motor controller **810** will attempt to match the RPM to that of the other EMM **400**, and if not possible then will shut down the particular EMM **400**, and the respective clutch arrangement **600** decouples the malfunctioning EMM **400** from the driveshaft.

For example, if a malfunction causes particular EMM **400** to run at a lower
20 RPM than the other EMM **400** in the stack, the motor controller **810** or the master controller **850** will attempt to match the RPM to that of the other EMM **400**, and if not possible then will shut down the particular EMM **400**, and the respective clutch arrangement **600** decouples the malfunctioning EMM **400** from the driveshaft. Alternatively, even if the respective motor controller **810** fails, and/or the master
25 controller **850** fails, the clutch arrangement **600** will automatically decouple the malfunctioning EMM **400** from the driveshaft **200** when the RPM is sufficiently lower than that of the driveshaft **200**.

Thus, for example, the control system **800** can be operated to monitor operation of each EMM **400** and to actuate each the respective clutch arrangement

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600 to selectively decouple the respective EMM **400** from the driveshaft **200** responsive to a detectable fault being detected in operation of the respective EMM **200**.

The above example of the propulsion system assembly **100** can be used, by
5 itself or in addition to other propulsion system assemblies **100** and/or other propulsion units, to power an air vehicle (e.g., a fixed wing air vehicle or a rotary wing air vehicle, for example a helicopter), or indeed other types of vehicles, including for example any one of: a hovercraft, land vehicle, sea surface vehicle, undersea vehicle. For example, the air vehicle can be a conventional air vehicle or a
10 VTOL type air vehicle, and furthermore, the air vehicle can be a manned air vehicle or an unmanned air vehicle (UAV).

For example the air vehicle can be configured with three tiltable propulsion system assemblies **100** in triangular configuration in plan view.

The design aggregate shaft power generated by the propulsion system
15 assembly **100** is essentially the sum of the module design shaft powers generated by each of the EMM **400** (minus some losses as a result of coupling the EMM **400** to the driveshaft **200**). Thus, to meet the requirement of providing a particular design aggregate shaft power, the propulsion system assembly **100** comprises at least the appropriate number of EMM **400** which together can provide or exceed this design
20 aggregate shaft power. In this example, the stack **450** comprises at least one additional EMM **400** than is required to provide the design aggregate shaft power, so as to provide a safety margin in case correspondingly one or more EMM **400** fail, so that the remaining operating EMM **400** can together provide the design aggregate shaft power. At the same time, it is to be noted that by disengaging the
25 EMM **400** that develop a fault, the driveshaft does not turn the malfunctioning EMM **400**, and thus there are no significant power losses that would otherwise be incurred for turning the malfunctioning EMM **400**.

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It is also readily evident that the propulsion system assembly **100** provides a very versatile propulsion system that can be modified for different air vehicles and even for different mission requirements for the same air vehicle.

For example, starting with propulsion system assembly **100** including a particular number of EMM **400** developing a particular a design aggregate shaft power, such a propulsion system assembly **100** can be modified when the design aggregate shaft power needs to be modified. For example, if the design aggregate shaft power needs to be increased or decreased, the number of EMM **400** provided in the stack **450** is correspondingly increased or decreased. Thus the sum of the module design shaft powers of the new number of EMM **400** matches or exceeds the modified design aggregate shaft requirement.

Thus, by adding additional EMM **400** to the stack **450**, the shaft power output of the thus modified propulsion system assembly **100** is increased as compared with the unmodified said propulsion system assembly **100**. Conversely, by removing at least one EMM **400** from stack **450** thereby decreases the shaft power output of the thus modified propulsion system assembly **100** as compared with the unmodified propulsion system assembly **100**.

In this manner, the power output of the propulsion system assembly **100** can be changed dramatically in a simple manner, and optimizes every time the weight of the propulsion system assembly **100** by not having to carry additional engine weight when less power output is required.

According to an aspect of the presently disclosed subject matter, the propulsion system assembly **100** provides a very versatile propulsion system that can be modified for different power requirements of the air vehicle even during a particular mission while operating at maximum efficiency.

For example, starting with propulsion system assembly **100** including a fixed number of EMM **400** developing a particular a design aggregate shaft power, this aggregate shaft power can be chosen as that required for vectored thrust flight

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while operating all the EMM **400** of the stack **450** at maximum efficiency. Operation of such a propulsion system assembly **100** can be modified when the design aggregate shaft power needs to be changed. For example, the design aggregate shaft power needs to be significantly decreased when in aerodynamic
5 flight such as for example cruising. In such a case, the number of EMM **400** in the stack **450** that are coupled to the driveshaft is correspondingly decreased, such that the sum of the module design shaft powers (each corresponding to maximum efficiency) of the EMM **400** that remained coupled to the driveshaft **200** matches or exceeds the modified design aggregate shaft requirement for aerodynamic flight.

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In the method claims that follow, alphanumeric characters and Roman numerals used to designate claim steps are provided for convenience only and do not imply any particular order of performing the steps.

Finally, it should be noted that the word “comprising” as used throughout the
15 appended claims is to be interpreted to mean “including but not limited to”.

While there has been shown and disclosed examples in accordance with the presently disclosed subject matter, it will be appreciated that many changes may be made therein without departing from the spirit of the presently disclosed subject matter.

CLAIMS:

1. Propulsion system assembly comprising:
 - a driveshaft rotatably mounted to a casing about a drive axis, the driveshaft comprising a first shaft end and an opposite facing second shaft end;
 - 5 a plurality of electric motor modules in axially stacked relationship with one another with respect to the drive axis to define an electric motor module stack, said plurality being an integer greater than unity, each electric motor module being configured for transmitting a torque to the driveshaft when coupled thereto independently of at least one other said electric motor module;
 - 10 each electric motor module comprising a controllable clutch arrangement for selectively coupling and decoupling the respective electric motor module with respect to the driveshaft to respectively enable and disable transmission of torque between the respective electric motor module and the driveshaft.
- 15 2. The propulsion system assembly according to claim 1, wherein each said electric motor module comprises:
 - a stator element;
 - a rotor element rotatably mounted with respect to the stator element, and configured for being reversibly coupled to the drive shaft via the
 - 20 respective clutch arrangement.
3. The propulsion system assembly according to claim 1 or claim 2, wherein each electric motor module has a depth dimension parallel to the drive axis and a width dimension orthogonal to the drive axis, wherein said width dimension is greater than said depth dimension.
- 25 4. The propulsion system assembly according to claim 3, wherein a ratio of said width dimension to said depth dimension is between 5 and 20.
5. The propulsion system assembly according to claim 3, wherein a ratio of said width dimension to said depth dimension is greater than 10.
6. The propulsion system assembly according to any one of claims 1 to 5, wherein
- 30 each said electrical motor module is design to generate the same torque under the same operating conditions as one another.

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7. The propulsion system assembly according to any one of claims 1 to 6, wherein each said electrical motor module is design to generate a module design shaft power of 40kW or more than 40kW.
8. The propulsion system assembly according to any one of claims 1 to 7, wherein
5 said propulsion system assembly is configured to provide a design shaft power using all said electric motor modules, wherein said design shaft power is greater than a required shaft power by a shaft power safety margin, wherein said shaft power safety margin is not less than a module design shaft power of at least one said electric motor module.
9. The propulsion system assembly according to any one of claims 1 to 8, wherein
10 for each electric motor module, the respective clutch arrangement comprises an electromechanical clutch independently actuatable with respect to the other said clutch arrangements.
10. The propulsion system assembly according to any one of claims 2 to 8, wherein for each electric motor module, the respective clutch arrangement comprises:
- 15 - a clutch rotor and a field coil concentrically provided on the rotor element, and
- an armature affixed to the driveshaft,
wherein responsive to actuation of the respective clutch arrangement the clutch rotor frictionally abuts the armature driveshaft to enable transmission of said torque
20 between the respective electric motor module and the driveshaft.
11. The propulsion system assembly according to any one of claims 1 to 10, wherein for each electric motor module, the respective clutch arrangement is actuatable responsive to one or more of electric, electronic or digital signals.
12. The propulsion system assembly according to any one of claims 1 to 11, wherein
25 for each electric motor module, the respective clutch arrangement is actuatable responsive to the clutch arrangement being subjected to a rotational resistance from the respective electric motor module greater than a predetermined threshold.
13. The propulsion system assembly according to any one of claims 1 to 12, further comprising a first rotor element for aerodynamically generating a first thrust responsive
30 to being turned about said drive axis by the propulsion system assembly.
14. The propulsion system assembly according to claim 13, wherein said first rotor element is affixed to said first shaft end.

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15. The propulsion system assembly according to claim 13 or claim 14, wherein said first rotor element comprises any one of a propeller, ducted fan, unducted fan.
16. The propulsion system assembly according to any one of claims 1 to 12, further comprising a second rotor element for aerodynamically generating a second thrust
5 responsive to being turned about said drive axis by the propulsion system assembly.
17. The propulsion system assembly according to claim 16, wherein said second rotor element is affixed to said second shaft end.
18. The propulsion system assembly according to claim 16 or claim 17, wherein said second rotor element comprises any one of a propeller, ducted fan, unducted fan.
- 10 19. The propulsion system assembly according to any one of claims 1 to 18, the casing comprising a first casing bracket affixed to a first said electric motor module that is closest to said first shaft end, and a second casing bracket affixed to a second said electric motor module that is closest to said second shaft end, said first casing bracket comprising a first bearing arrangement and said second casing bracket comprising a
15 second bearing arrangement, the driveshaft being rotatably mounted with respect to said first bearing arrangement and said second bearing arrangement.
20. The propulsion system assembly according to any one of claims 1 to 19, wherein in said axially stacked relationship, each pair of axially adjacent said electric motor modules are fixedly connected to one another.
- 20 21. The propulsion system assembly according to any one of claims 1 to 20, wherein said electric motor modules are connected to the casing in fixed spatial relationship in said axially stacked relationship.
22. The propulsion system assembly according to any one of claims 1 to 21, wherein said casing comprises a plurality of spacer elements interconnecting each pair of axially
25 adjacent electric motor modules in fixed spatial relationship in said axially stacked relationship.
23. The propulsion system assembly according to any one of claims 1 to 22, further comprising a housing member for enclosing therein at least said casing and said plurality of electric motor modules.
- 30 24. The propulsion system assembly according to claim 23, wherein said housing member is configured for pivoting about a pivot axis different from the drive axis.
25. The propulsion system assembly according to claim 24, wherein said pivot axis is orthogonal to the drive axis.

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- 26.** The propulsion system assembly according to any one of claims 1 to 25, further comprising a control system for controlling operation of each said electric motor module.
- 27.** The propulsion system assembly according to claim 26, wherein said control
5 system comprises a motor controller for each said electric motor module, each respective motor controller being configured for operating the respective said clutch arrangement, wherein to cause the respective said clutch arrangement to selectively couple and decouple the respective said electric motor module with respect to the driveshaft.
- 10 **28.** The propulsion system according to claim 27, wherein each said motor controller is configured for operating the respective said clutch arrangement to decouple the respective said electric motor module with respect to the driveshaft responsive to a detectable fault being detected in the respective said electric motor module.
- 29.** The propulsion system according to claim 28, wherein said detectable fault
15 comprises a significant reduction in the shaft power generated by the respective said electric motor module as compared with an expected shaft power level.
- 30.** The propulsion system according to claim 28 or claim 29, comprising a detector for detecting said detectable fault, said detector being operatively connected to the control system.
- 20 **31.** The propulsion system according to claim 30, wherein said detector comprises at least one of Hall effect Sensors, Encoders, Resolvers.
- 32.** The propulsion system according to any one of claims 27 to 31, wherein each said motor controller is configured for operating independently of at least one other said motor controller.
- 25 **33.** The propulsion system according to any one of claims 27 to 32, wherein said control system comprises a master controller for controlling operation of the plurality of said motor controllers corresponding to said plurality of electric motor modules.
- 34.** An air vehicle comprising at least one propulsion system assembly as defined in any one of claims 1 to 33.
- 30 **35.** The air vehicle according to claim 34, wherein the air vehicle is a VTOL type air vehicle.
- 36.** The air vehicle according to claim 34 or claim 35, wherein the air vehicle is a manned air vehicle.

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37. The air vehicle according to claim 34 or claim 35, wherein the air vehicle is an unmanned air vehicle (UAV).
38. The air vehicle according to any one of claims 34 to 37, each said propulsion system assembly configured for selectively providing vertical thrust for vectored thrust
5 flight and for selectively changing the thrust vector to provide horizontal thrust for aerodynamic flight.
39. The air vehicle according to claim 38, wherein at least one said propulsion system assembly is reversibly tiltable between a horizontal angular disposition for providing horizontal thrust and a vertical angular disposition for providing vertical
10 thrust.
40. The air vehicle according to any one of claims 34 to 39, comprising three said propulsion system assemblies.
41. The air vehicle according to claim 34, wherein said three propulsion system assemblies are in triangular configuration when viewed in plan view.
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42. Method for operating an air vehicle, comprising
(a) providing a shaft power requirement for driving a desired rotor at desired operating conditions;
(b) providing a propulsion system assembly as defined in any one of claims 1 to 33,
20 wherein each said electric motor module is designed to provide a module shaft power output at said desired operating conditions, wherein said integer is chosen such that a shaft power output of the stack, defined as a product of said integer and said module shaft power output, matches or exceeds said shaft power requirement.
- 25 43. Method according to claim 42, comprising modifying said shaft power requirement and correspondingly modifying said integer by increasing or decreasing said plurality of said electric motor modules such that a modified product of said modified integer and said module shaft power output matches or exceeds said modified shaft power requirement.
- 30 44. Method according to claim 42 or claim 43, comprising adding additional said electric motor modules to said electric motor module stack to thereby increase said shaft power output of the thus modified propulsion system assembly as compared with the unmodified said propulsion system assembly.

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- 45.** Method according to claim 42 or claim 43, comprising removing at least one said electric motor modules from said electric motor module stack to thereby decrease said shaft power output of the thus modified propulsion system assembly as compared with the unmodified said propulsion system assembly.
- 5 **46.** Method according to any one of claims 42 to 45, comprising monitoring operation of each said electric motor module and operating the respective said clutch arrangement thereof to decouple the respective said electric motor module from the driveshaft responsive to a detectable fault being detected in operation of the respective said electric motor module.
- 10 **47.** Method according to any one of claims 42 to 46, wherein said shaft power requirement is determined for vectored thrust flight, and further comprising operating the propulsion system assembly in aerodynamic flight with a reduced number of electric motor modules coupled to the driveshaft, said reduced number being at least one less than said integer.
- 15 **48.** Method according to claim 47, wherein each said electric motor module of said reduced number of electric motor modules operates at maximum efficiency during said aerodynamic flight.
- 49.** Method according to claim 47 or claim 48 wherein a ratio of said integer to said reduced number is between 5 and 10.
- 20 **50.** An electric motor module, comprising
a stator element;
a rotor element rotatably mounted with respect to the stator element,
a controllable clutch arrangement for selectively coupling and decoupling the
electric motor module with respect to a driveshaft to respectively enable and disable
25 transmission of torque between the electric motor module and the driveshaft.