

POWER CONVERTERS

Technical Field

The present invention relates to power converters, and in particular to power
5 converters that can be used to interface motors operating at variable voltage at
variable frequency to a power grid or supply network at nominally fixed voltage and
frequency. The present invention also includes features that allow the power
converters to remain connected to the supply network and retain control during
network fault and transient conditions. The power converters are particularly suitable
10 for use with, but not restricted to, marine propulsion systems.

Background Art

The propeller assembly of a marine vessel typically rotates at variable speed, both in
the forward and reverse directions. Where a marine vessel uses an electric power and
15 propulsion system then the motor driving the propeller assembly will also need to
operate at variable frequency (for the case where the propeller assembly is driven
directly by the rotor of the motor then the frequency will be approximately
proportional to the speed of rotation of the propeller assembly) and variable voltage
(approximately proportional to frequency). The power system of the marine vessel
20 will have a nominally fixed voltage and frequency and it is therefore necessary to
interface the motor to the power system using a power converter.

The power converter will typically consist of two parts: a network bridge that rectifies
the ac power from the power system to a nominally fixed dc voltage (the dc link), and
25 a motor bridge that inverts the dc voltage to the appropriate ac voltage for the motor.
The power systems of many marine vessels are often referred to as being “weak”
since the total generating capacity is closely matched to the total load. This means
that when large loads connected to the power and propulsion system are turned on,
significant transients (dips) may occur. Any dips or faults on the power system will
30 interfere with the network bridge and its operation to provide the dc voltage. It is
therefore normal for the power converter to be turned off to avoid damaging the

various components. For many marine applications this requirement to turn off the power converter, and hence the total loss of the associated propulsion equipment, is considered unacceptable.

- 5 There is therefore a need for an improved power converter that can remain connected to the power system in the event of a dip or a fault.

Summary of the invention

10 The present invention provides a power converter that can be used to interface a motor that requires variable voltage at variable frequency to a supply network providing a nominally fixed voltage and nominally fixed frequency, the power converter comprising:

 a first active rectifier/inverter electrically connected to the stator of the motor and including a plurality of semiconductor power switching devices;

15 a second active rectifier/inverter including a plurality of semiconductor power switching devices;

 a dc link connected between the first active rectifier/inverter and the second active rectifier/inverter;

20 a filter connected between the second active rectifier/inverter and the supply network, the filter including network terminals;

 a first controller for the first active rectifier/inverter; and

 a second controller for the second active rectifier/inverter;

25 wherein the first controller uses a dc link voltage demand signal indicative of a desired dc link voltage to control the semiconductor power switching devices of the first active rectifier/inverter to achieve the desired level of dc link voltage that corresponds to the dc link voltage demand signal; and

30 wherein the second controller uses a power demand signal indicative of the level of power to be transferred to the dc link from the supply network through the second active rectifier/inverter, and a voltage demand signal indicative of the voltage to be achieved at the network terminals of the filter to control the semiconductor

power switching devices of the second active rectifier/inverter to achieve the desired levels of power and voltage that correspond to the power and voltage demand signals.

The power converter can be used to interface the motor to the supply network during situations where the supply network is operating normally, but also includes features that allow it to operate in situations where the supply network voltage is varying due to faults or transients on the supply network. The second controller is also able to control the second active rectifier/inverter to provide voltage support to the supply network when the supply network voltage deviates from its nominal condition.

The motor can be a rotating or linear motor of any suitable type. Examples would include an induction motor or a synchronous motor (excited by any suitable means such as permanent magnets or conventional or superconducting windings). In the case of a rotating motor, the rotor can be connected to a propeller assembly or any other mechanical load requiring ride-through during transients or faults. However, the mechanical load must normally retain sufficient energy (in the form of inertia, momentum etc.) to maintain operation during the time when it is not possible to obtain electrical power from the supply network. A linear motor could be used in applications that require reciprocating motion.

In the case where the motor is an induction motor, the first controller preferably uses a flux demand signal indicative of a desired level of flux to be achieved in the motor to control the semiconductor power switching devices of the first active rectifier/inverter to produce stator electrical quantities that achieve the desired flux in the motor. The term “stator electrical quantities” is used herein to refer to any and all of the individual phase voltage magnitude individual phase current magnitude, phase and frequency in a multi-phase motor.

The operation of the semiconductor power switching devices in the first active rectifier/inverter can be controlled using gate drive control signals derived in accordance with a conventional pulse width modulation (PWM) strategy.

The first controller preferably compares the dc link voltage demand signal indicative of a desired dc link voltage to a dc link voltage feedback signal to determine a torque demand signal indicative of a desired level of torque to be achieved in the motor. The first controller can then control the semiconductor power switching devices of the first active rectifier/inverter to product stator electrical quantities that achieve the desired torque in the motor. The control implementation described in more detail below is based on vector control, which is a well-known and commonly used technique. However, it will be readily appreciated that any other suitable method of control implementation (such as discrete time field oriented control (DT-FOC) or direct torque control, for example) could be used instead.

The first controller preferably supplies a control signal that varies in accordance with the prevailing motor conditions to the second controller. This control signal can then be used by the second controller to limit the level of power that is transferred to the dc link from the supply network through the second active rectifier/inverter. The control signal therefore prevents any more power being imported into the dc link through the second active rectifier/inverter when the motor has reached its physical performance limits (i.e. when the motor is already operating at its maximum shaft speed or its maximum rate of acceleration, for example).

The second controller preferably converts the power demand signal indicative of the level of power to be transferred to the dc link from the supply network through the second active rectifier/inverter to a quadrature axis current demand signal for the second active rectifier/inverter indicative of a desired quadrature axis current to be achieved in the supply network. The second controller can then control the semiconductor power switching devices of the second active rectifier/inverter to produce filter/supply network electrical quantities that achieve the desired quadrature axis current in the supply network. The term “filter/supply network electrical quantities” is used herein to refer to any and all of the individual phase voltage magnitude, individual phase current magnitude, phase and frequency in a multi-phase

active rectifier/inverter system. The term “multi-phase” typically refers to three-phase but can include other numbers of phases. The operation of the semiconductor power switching devices in the second active rectifier/inverter can also be controlled using gate drive control signals derived in accordance with a conventional PWM strategy.

The power demand signal can be converted into the quadrature axis current demand signal by dividing the power demand signal by a signal that is derived from the voltage at the network terminals of the filter. This signal is preferably the quadrature axis component of the ac voltage that is derived from three-phase voltage measurement on the network side of the filter and may optionally be a filtered version.

The second controller preferably uses a further dc link voltage demand signal indicative of a desired dc link voltage and compares the further dc link voltage demand signal to the dc link voltage feedback signal to determine a quadrature axis current demand signal for the second active rectifier/inverter indicative of a desired quadrature axis current to be achieved in the supply network. The second controller can then control the semiconductor power switching devices of the second active rectifier/inverter to produce filter/supply network electrical quantities that achieve the desired quadrature axis current in the supply network. The control implementation described in more detail below is based on vector control, which is a well-known and commonly used technique. However, it will be readily appreciated that any other suitable method of control implementation (such as discrete time field oriented control (DT-FOC) or direct torque control, for example) could be used instead.

A signal indicative of the supply network power is preferably supplied to the first controller from the second controller. The signal indicative of the supply network power can be added to the output of a dc link controller in the first controller and used to determine a desired level of torque in the motor. The signal effectively provides an advance warning to the first controller that more or less power is going to be imported

into the dc link through the second active rectifier/inverter. The first controller can then start to determine the desired level of torque in the motor before the change in the amount of imported power causes a corresponding change in the dc link voltage. This can be important for transient reasons.

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The second controller preferably compares the voltage demand signal indicative of the level of voltage to be achieved at the network terminals of the filter to a voltage feedback signal measured at the network terminals of the filter to determine a direct axis current demand signal for the second active rectifier/inverter. The second controller can then control the semiconductor power switching devices of the second active rectifier/inverter to produce filter/supply network electrical quantities that achieve the desired direct axis current in the supply network.

The second controller can modify the direct axis current demand signal in accordance with the prevailing supply network voltage conditions.

The power demand signal can be provided by a power controller.

The power converter preferably further comprises a speed sensor for deriving a speed signal indicative of the speed of a moving part of the motor (i.e. the rotor in the case of a rotating motor and the translator in the case of a linear motor). However, in some cases the speed sensor may be replaced by a speed observer system that uses internal signals to the first active rectifier/inverter to derive a speed signal. The power controller can then use the speed signal (derived from the speed sensor or the speed observer system) to derive the power demand signal using any suitable method. For example, the speed signal can be used as a pointer to a look-up table of power demand signal versus speed. The speed signal may be modified by one or more filter functions to dampen any shaft or drive train resonances if applicable.

The power controller preferably receives one or both of a power demand signal and a speed demand signal from a vessel control system (which may optionally incorporate

a dynamic positioning system). The power demand signal and/or the speed demand signal may also be provided directly from control levers of the marine vessel or the like.

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The present invention also provides an arrangement comprising a plurality of power converters as described above connected to a common supply bus of a supply network providing a nominally fixed voltage and nominally fixed frequency, wherein the voltage demand signal indicative of the voltage to be achieved at the network
10 terminals of the filter of each power converter is supplied to the second controller of each power converter from a power management system.

Each individual power converter preferably includes a step-down transformer electrically connected between the associated filter and the common supply bus.

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The power converter is particularly suitable for use in a propulsion unit for use in marine vessels. The present invention therefore also provides a propulsion unit comprising a motor having a stator and rotor, a propeller assembly including at least one blade rotated by the rotor of the motor, and a power converter as described above.
20 The propeller assembly can be integral with the rotor of the motor. Alternatively, the propeller assembly is mounted to a rotatable shaft and the rotor of the motor is coupled to the rotatable shaft either directly or indirectly through a gearbox.

A plurality of propulsion units may be used in a marine vessel. The present invention
25 therefore also provides a marine vessel comprising a supply network providing a nominally fixed voltage and nominally fixed frequency and having a common supply bus, and a plurality of propulsion units described above. The respective power converters of the plurality of propulsion units are connected to the common supply bus and wherein the voltage demand signal indicative of the voltage to be achieved at
30 the network terminals of the filter of each power converter is supplied by a power management system.

The present invention further provides a method of operating a power converter that can be used to interface a motor that requires variable voltage at variable frequency to a supply network providing a nominally fixed voltage and nominally fixed frequency,
5 the power converter comprising:

a first active rectifier/inverter electrically connected to the stator of the motor and including a plurality of semiconductor power switching devices;

a second active rectifier/inverter including a plurality of semiconductor power switching devices;

10 a dc link connected between the first active rectifier/inverter and the second active rectifier/inverter;

a filter connected between the second active rectifier/inverter and the supply network, the filter including network terminals;

a first controller for the first active rectifier/inverter; and

15 a second controller for the second active rectifier/inverter;

wherein the method comprises the steps of:

the first controller using a dc link voltage demand signal indicative of a desired dc link voltage to control the semiconductor power switching devices of the first active rectifier/inverter to achieve the desired level of dc link voltage that
20 corresponds to the dc link voltage demand signal; and

the second controller using a power demand signal indicative of the level of power to be transferred to the dc link from the supply network through the second active rectifier/inverter, and a voltage demand signal indicative of the voltage to be achieved at the network terminals of the filter to control the semiconductor power
25 switching devices of the second active rectifier/inverter to achieve the desired levels of power and voltage that correspond to the power and voltage demand signals.

The method may include further steps as outlined below.

30 The first controller may use a flux demand signal indicative of a desired level of flux to be achieved in the motor to control the semiconductor power switching devices of

the first active rectifier/inverter to produce stator electrical quantities that achieve the desired flux in the motor.

5 The first controller may compare the dc link voltage demand signal indicative of a desired dc link voltage to a dc link voltage feedback signal to determine a torque demand signal indicative of a desired level of torque to be achieved in the motor, and control the semiconductor power switching devices of the first active rectifier/inverter to product stator electrical quantities that achieve the desired torque in the motor.

10 The first controller may supply a control signal that varies in accordance with the prevailing motor conditions to the second controller. The second controller can then use the control signal to limit the level of power that is transferred to the dc link from the supply network through the second active rectifier/inverter.

15 The second controller may convert the power demand signal indicative of the level of power to be transferred to the dc link from the supply network through the second active rectifier/inverter to a quadrature axis current demand signal for the second active rectifier/inverter indicative of a desired quadrature axis current to be achieved in the supply network, and control the semiconductor power switching devices of the
20 second active rectifier/inverter to produce filter/supply network electrical quantities that achieve the desired quadrature axis current in the supply network. The power demand signal can be converted into the quadrature axis current demand signal by dividing the power demand signal by a signal that is derived from the voltage at the network terminals of the filter.

25 The second controller may use a further dc link voltage demand signal indicative of a desired dc link voltage and compare the further dc link voltage demand signal to the dc link voltage feedback signal to determine a quadrature axis current demand signal for the second active rectifier/inverter indicative of a desired quadrature axis current
30 to be achieved in the supply network during a start-up condition. The second controller can then control the semiconductor power switching devices of the second

active rectifier/inverter to produce filter/supply network electrical quantities that achieve the desired quadrature axis current in the supply network.

5 The second controller may supply a signal indicative of the supply network power to the first controller. The signal indicative of the supply network power can be added to the output of a dc link controller in the first controller and used to determine a desired level of torque in the motor.

10 The second controller may compare the voltage demand signal indicative of the level of voltage to be achieved at the network terminals of the filter to a voltage feedback signal measured at the network terminals of the filter to determine a direct axis current demand signal for the second active rectifier/inverter, and control the semiconductor power switching devices of the second active rectifier/inverter to produce filter/supply network electrical quantities that achieve the desired direct axis current in the supply network during a during a supply network voltage dip situation.

20 The use of the word “dip” in this description in relation to supply network dip situations refers to a situation where the supply network voltage is reduced below its nominal value as a result of either symmetrical or asymmetrical network fault conditions, or simply through the switching of a large inductive component (such as a transformer or harmonic filter, for example) connected to the supply network.

25 The second controller may modify the direct axis current demand signal in accordance with the prevailing supply network voltage conditions during a supply network voltage dip situation.

The power demand signal can be provided by a power controller.

30 A speed signal indicative of the speed of a moving part of the motor may be derived and the power controller may use this to derive the power demand signal. The speed signal may be derived using any suitable method and may be modified by one or more

filter functions, which may also be used to provide damping of any shaft or drive train resonances.

5 The present invention also provides a method of operating a plurality of power converters as described above connected to a common supply bus of a supply network providing a nominally fixed voltage and nominally fixed frequency, the method comprising the step of supplying the voltage demand signal indicative of the voltage to be achieved at the network terminals of the filter of each power converter to the second controller of each power converter from a power management system.

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The present invention also provides a method of operating a propulsion unit comprising a motor that requires variable voltage at variable frequency and has a stator and rotor, a propeller assembly including at least one blade rotated by the rotor of the motor, and a power converter that interfaces the motor to a supply network
15 providing a nominally fixed voltage and nominally fixed frequency, the power converter comprising:

- a first active rectifier/inverter electrically connected to the stator of the motor and including a plurality of semiconductor power switching devices;

- a second active rectifier/inverter including a plurality of semiconductor power
20 switching devices;

- a dc link connected between the first active rectifier/inverter and the second active rectifier/inverter;

- a filter connected between the second active rectifier/inverter and the supply network, the filter including network terminals;

- a first controller for the first active rectifier/inverter; and
25 a second controller for the second active rectifier/inverter;

- wherein in response to a change in the desired thrust of the propulsion unit the method comprising the steps of:

- controlling the second active rectifier/inverter to change the level of power
30 imported into the dc link such that the dc link voltage changes from a desired level; and

controlling the first active rectifier/inverter to export sufficient current from the dc link through the first active rectifier/inverter to the motor to restore the dc link voltage to the desired level and achieve the desired thrust.

5 Drawings

Figure 1 is a schematic drawing showing how a power converter according to the present invention is used to interface between a motor and a supply bus of a fixed frequency supply network; and

Figure 2 is schematic drawing showing how a number of power converters according
10 to the present invention can be connected to the supply bus as part of a marine propulsion system.

Power converter topology

The basic topology of the power converter will be outlined with reference to Figures 1
15 and 2. Although the power converter is described below in the context of electric marine propulsion systems, it will be readily appreciated that other uses are possible. For example, the power converter can be used as part of a drive system for pumps, fans, compressors or other industrial type loads.

20 A propeller assembly 2 of an electric marine propulsion system is driven by the rotor (not shown) of a variable speed ac induction motor 4. The propeller assembly 2 will normally consist of a number of blades mounted on a rotating shaft with a fixed pitch. The rotating shaft may be directly connected to the rotor of the motor 4 or indirectly through a gearbox (not shown) that is used to adjust the shaft speed. The speed at
25 which the propeller assembly 2 must rotate will depend on the speed of the marine vessel and the level or direction of thrust required for propulsion. However, because the speed of rotation varies, the voltage and frequency applied to the terminals of the motor 4 must also vary.

30 The terminals of the motor 4 are connected to the ac terminals of a three-phase motor bridge 10 which in normal operation operates as an inverter to supply power to the

motor from a dc link 12. The motor bridge 10 has a conventional three-phase two-level topology with a series of semiconductor power switching devices fully controlled and regulated using a pulse width modulation (PWM) strategy. However, in practice the motor bridge 10 can have any suitable topology such as a three-level neutral point clamped topology or a multi-level topology. The derivation of the gate drive command signals that are used to control the semiconductor power switching devices of the motor bridge 10 is described in more detail below.

A supply network of the marine vessel (Figure 2) operates at a nominally fixed frequency and includes a common ac supply bus (labelled “bus”) that receives power from an ac generator 28. Power is supplied to the ac terminals of a network bridge 14 from the supply bus via a step-down transformer 6 and is filtered by inductors 16 (and other possible filters). Protective switchgear (not shown) can be included to provide a reliable connection to the supply bus and to isolate the propulsion system from the supply network for various operational and non-operational requirements.

The network bridge 14 in normal operation operates as an active rectifier to supply power from the supply bus to the dc link 12. The network bridge 14 has a similar three-phase two-level topology to the motor bridge 10 with a series of semiconductor power switching devices fully controlled and regulated using a PWM strategy. However, in practice the network bridge 14 can have any suitable topology as discussed above for the motor bridge 10. The principal control for the dc input voltage of the motor bridge 10 is achieved by controlling the motor bridge. The network bridge 14 is controlled to meet two principal objectives, namely active power and network voltage. A detailed description of how this control is achieved is provided below.

The derivation of the gate drive command signals that are used to control the semiconductor power switching devices of the network bridge 14 is also described in more detail below.

As described herein, active rectification (as the prime mode of operation of the network bridge 14) is the conversion of energy from the ac terminals of the three-phase network bridge to the dc link and inversion (as the prime mode of operation of the motor bridge 10) is the conversion of energy from the dc link of the three-phase motor bridge to its ac terminals. However, it will be readily appreciated that there may be times when it might be necessary or desirable to operate the motor bridge 10 as an active rectifier and the network bridge 14 as an inverter. For example, in a situation where the marine vessel is braking then the propulsion system may be adapted to support regeneration. In this case the motor 4 may be operated in a generating mode to provide power back to the supply network (or a dump resistor) through the motor bridge 10 operating as an active rectifier and the network bridge 14 operating as an inverter.

In situations where a supply network voltage dip occurs, the network bridge 14 may operate in either an active rectifier mode or in an inverter mode as required in order to provide reactive current into the supply network to counteract the cause of the voltage dip.

Marine propulsion system topology

As mentioned briefly above, a number of power converters can be connected to the common ac supply bus of the nominally fixed frequency supply network to define a marine propulsion system. This is shown schematically in Figure 2. Each power converter 1a to 1d includes an associated filter 16a to 16d and a step-down transformer 6a to 6d.

In a conventional marine propulsion system, the desired supply network voltage would typically be set by a power management system 26 and provided to the automatic voltage regulator (AVR) 30 of each generator 28. In the arrangement of Figure 2, the power management system 26 also supplies a voltage demand signal VBUS* to each of the power converters 1a to 1d. The voltage demand signal VBUS*

represents the desired voltage to be achieved at the network terminals of each filter 16a to 16d during normal operation of the power converter.

5 A large inductive component in the form of a transformer 32 is also connected to the common supply bus as shown in Figure 2.

Motor bridge control

10 The motor bridge controller 18 supplies gate drive command signals to the motor bridge 10 which cause the semiconductor power switching devices to be switched on and off resulting in a particular voltage being applied to the terminals of the motor 4. The motor bridge controller 18 will select the voltage to be applied based on a flux demand signal Φ^* that represents a desired level of flux to be achieved in the motor 4,
15 a dc link voltage demand signal VDC_MOT* that represents a desired dc link voltage, a dc link voltage feedback signal VDC_FB that is indicative of the actual dc link voltage, one or more feedback signals derived from a measurement of the motor phase currents IU, IV and IW, and a power feedforward signal POWER_FF that represents an indication of the supply network power. The flux demand signal Φ^* and the dc
20 link voltage demand signal VDC_MOT* will usually be set constants for a particular drive configuration. The difference between the dc link voltage demand signal VDC_MOT* and the dc link voltage feedback signal VDC_FB is used to provide a torque demand signal for the motor 4. A suitable control implementation such as a vector control scheme can use the derived torque demand signal and the flux demand
25 signal Φ^* to generate the appropriate switching pattern for the semiconductor power switching devices of the motor bridge 10.

It will be readily appreciated that the flux demand signal Φ^* may be omitted if the ac motor 4 is a synchronous electrical machine. In this case, the switching pattern for
30 the semiconductor power switching devices of the motor bridge 10 will be generated solely on the basis of the derived torque demand signal.

Network bridge control

The network bridge controller 20 supplies gate drive command signals to the network bridge 14 which cause the semiconductor power switching devices to be switched on and off resulting in a particular voltage being applied to the filter terminals. The network bridge controller 20 will select the voltage to be applied based on a power demand signal P^* that represents the level of power to be transferred to the dc link 12 from the common supply bus through the generator bridge 14 and is provided by a speed/power controller 24, a voltage demand signal $VBUS^*$ that represents a desired voltage to be achieved at the network terminals of the filter 16 and is provided by the power management system 26, one or more feedback signals (V_{NET} and I_{NET}) derived from voltage measurements V_R , V_Y and V_B (that is the three-phase voltage measurements taken across the so-called red (R), yellow (Y) and blue (B) output lines that supply power to the network bridge 14 from the common supply bus) and current measurements of the network bridge phase currents I_R , I_Y and I_B , and a control signal IDC_LIM that is used to limit the level of power that is transferred to the dc link from the common supply bus. The power demand signal P^* is divided by the prevailing quadrature axis network voltage VQ_NET to obtain a quadrature axis current demand signal (i.e. a real current demand signal). The power demand signal P^* is also compared against the voltage demand signal $VBUS^*$ to derive a reactive current demand signal. A suitable control implementation such as a vector control scheme can use the derived real and reactive current demand signals to generate the appropriate switching pattern for the semiconductor power switching devices of the network bridge 14.

Operation of the marine propulsion system

One possible operational implementation of the above marine propulsion topology is as follows. At start up the shaft speed is zero and a dc link voltage demand signal VDC_NET^* supplied to the network bridge controller 20 is set to 950 volts. The dc link voltage demand signal VDC_NET^* is only used during start up and will usually be a set constant for a particular drive configuration. The semiconductor power

switching devices in the network bridge 14 are enabled and under control of the network bridge controller 20 bring the dc link voltage (VDC) up to 950 volts.

At the same time, the dc link voltage demand signal VDC_MOT* applied to the
5 motor bridge controller 18 is set to 1000 volts.

Assuming that the marine propulsion system has a requirement to provide thrust for propulsion of the marine vessel, the semiconductor power switching devices in the motor bridge 10 are enabled and the motor bridge controller 18 will control the direct axis current to achieve the necessary flux in the motor 4. While the dc link voltage is less than the dc link voltage demand signal VDC_MOT* a dc link controller (not shown) in the motor bridge controller 18 will request a negative quadrature axis current in the motor 4 (to return power to the dc link 12) but this will be blocked because the shaft of the propeller assembly 2 is not rotating and there is no shaft
15 power available.

When a thrust requirement is made to the marine propulsion system this will either be supplied directly as a power reference (i.e. the power demand signal P*) or as a speed reference (i.e. a speed demand signal N*). The power and speed references can be
20 provided to the speed/power control 24 directly from control levers on the bridge of the marine vessel or from a vessel control system and are labelled on Figure 1 as vessel control commands. A speed demand signal N* will be converted to a power demand signal P* by the speed/power controller 24 as part of a speed control loop with reference to the actual speed N of the motor 4 detected by a speed sensor 22.
25 Applying the power demand signal P* to the network bridge controller 20 will cause the dc link voltage to increase. Once the dc link voltage reaches the level set by the dc link voltage demand signal VDC_MOT*, the dc link controller of the motor bridge controller 18 will begin to request positive quadrature axis current in an attempt to limit the dc link voltage at the desired set level and will start to accelerate the shaft of
30 the propeller assembly 2.

While the dc link voltage is greater than the dc link voltage demand signal $V_{DC_NET}^*$ the voltage control in the network bridge controller 20 is disabled.

5 The magnitude of the power transfer through the network bridge 14 is limited by a signal derived from the power demand signal P^* .

Once an initial steady state has been achieved, the power converter operates in a dynamic manner to accommodate changing thrust requirements. For example, for an increasing thrust requirement (i.e. for an increasing power demand signal P^*) the network bridge controller 20 causes the network bridge 14 to import more power from the supply network to the dc link 12. Increasing the amount of power that is imported to the dc link 12 leads to an increase in the dc link voltage. The motor bridge controller 18 responds to this increase in the dc link voltage to cause the motor bridge 10 to draw more power out of the dc link 12 and provides this to the motor 4 until a new steady state is achieved (i.e. where the amount of power that is supplied from the supply network to the dc link 12 is equal to the amount of power that is supplied from the dc link to the motor 4). In this steady state, the dc link voltage has matched the dc link voltage demand signal $V_{DC_MOT}^*$. For a reducing thrust requirement then opposite control actions take place.

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The supply network shown in Figure 2 is a “weak network” since the total generating capacity is closely matched to the total load. In the event of a supply network voltage dip (caused, for example, by the turn-on of the transformer 32) the power converter will detect this reduced voltage, which is seen as a change in the feedback signal V_{NET} derived from three-phase voltage measurements V_R , V_Y and V_B and the network bridge controller 20 will set an appropriate reactive current demand signal to supply reactive current back into the common supply bus. This will help to compensate for the current that is being drawn by the transformer 32 and restore the voltage in the supply network.

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In the event of a severe fault somewhere on the common supply bus causing the supply network voltages to be severely reduced then the power converter will set the power demand signal P^* to zero and will supply reactive current back to the common supply bus until such time as the supply network voltage has recovered. (In practice, this can be achieved by the network bridge controller 20 effectively overriding the power demand signal P^* supplied by the speed/power controller 24 while the fault persists.) During this time, the dc link voltage is sustained by the motor bridge 10 and the kinetic energy in both the motion of the propeller assembly 2 and the momentum of the marine vessel.

In order to improve the transient response of the power converter, two control signals are passed between the motor bridge and network bridge controllers. More particularly, the network bridge controller 20 provides the motor bridge controller 18 with a power feedforward signal `POWER_FF` that represents an indication of the amount of power that is being transferred into the dc link 12 through the network bridge 14. The power feedforward signal `POWER_FF` therefore provides the motor bridge controller 18 with advance notice of a change in the level of power flow before the dc link voltage actually starts to increase or decrease. The motor bridge controller 18 provides a control signal `IDC_LIM` that specifies a dc link current limit. This control signal provides the network bridge controller 20 with a limit as to how much additional current the motor bridge 18 can accept based on the current shaft speed and acceleration limits of the motor 4.

Practical implementations of the marine propulsion topology

The marine propulsion topology arrangement can be implemented as follows. The motor bridge 18 and network bridge 14 can each be implemented using a MV3000 liquid cooled DELTA inverter module of suitable power rating. This is an IGBT-based voltage source inverter module suitable for operating with ac voltages up to 690 V. The motor bridge controller 18 and the network bridge controller 20 can each be implemented using a PEC controller. This is a microprocessor-based electronic programmable controller that can provide all the necessary control functions and

firing pattern generation needed to implement the power converter. The power management system can be implemented on an AMC controller. This is a microprocessor-based electronic controller designed for use in distributed control systems. All of these products are supplied by Converteam Ltd of Boughton Road,
5 Rugby, Warwickshire CV21 1BU, United Kingdom.

The controller arrangement proposes two independent controllers that are coordinated by means of control signals being sent from the motor bridge controller 18 to the network bridge controller 20 and *vice versa*. It would be equally suitable to integrate
10 the functionality of the controllers on to one physical controller. Similarly, the functionality could be spread across more than two controllers if this is convenient to the practical implementation of the power converter.

The proposed power converter could be used to interface the main propulsion drives
15 or the thruster drives of the marine vessel to the supply network. In either case, the power and speed references can be provided to the speed/power controller 24 by a vessel control system. In certain cases, the vessel control system may include a dynamic positioning system to provide references to the various propulsion units in order to control the heading and position of the marine vessel.

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CLAIMS

1. A power converter that can be used to interface a motor that requires variable voltage at variable frequency to a supply network providing a nominally fixed voltage and nominally fixed frequency, the power converter comprising:

5 a first active rectifier/inverter electrically connected to the stator of the motor and including a plurality of semiconductor power switching devices;

a second active rectifier/inverter including a plurality of semiconductor power switching devices;

10 a dc link connected between the first active rectifier/inverter and the second active rectifier/inverter;

a filter connected between the second active rectifier/inverter and the supply network, the filter including network terminals;

a first controller for the first active rectifier/inverter; and

a second controller for the second active rectifier/inverter;

15 wherein the first controller uses a dc link voltage demand signal indicative of a desired dc link voltage to control the semiconductor power switching devices of the first active rectifier/inverter to achieve the desired level of dc link voltage that corresponds to the dc link voltage demand signal; and

20 wherein the second controller uses a power demand signal indicative of the level of power to be transferred to the dc link from the supply network through the second active rectifier/inverter, and a voltage demand signal indicative of the voltage to be achieved at the network terminals of the filter to control the semiconductor power switching devices of the second active rectifier/inverter to achieve the desired levels of power and voltage that correspond to the power and voltage demand signals.

25 2. A power converter according to claim 1, wherein the first controller uses a flux demand signal indicative of a desired level of flux to be achieved in the motor to control the semiconductor power switching devices of the first active rectifier/inverter to produce stator electrical quantities that achieve the desired flux in the motor.

3. A power converter according to claim 1 or claim 2, wherein the first controller compares the dc link voltage demand signal indicative of a desired dc link voltage to a dc link voltage feedback signal to determine a torque demand signal indicative of a desired level of torque to be achieved in the motor, and controls the semiconductor power switching devices of the first active rectifier/inverter to product stator electrical quantities that achieve the desired torque in the motor.
4. A power converter according to any preceding claim, wherein the first controller supplies a control signal that varies in accordance with the prevailing motor conditions to the second controller and the second controller uses the control signal to limit the level of power that is transferred to the dc link from the supply network through the second active rectifier/inverter.
5. A power converter according to any preceding claim, wherein the second controller converts the power demand signal indicative of the level of power to be transferred to the dc link from the supply network through the second active rectifier/inverter to a quadrature axis current demand signal for the second active rectifier/inverter indicative of a desired quadrature axis current to be achieved in the supply network, and controls the semiconductor power switching devices of the second active rectifier/inverter to produce filter/supply network electrical quantities that achieve the desired quadrature axis current in the supply network.
6. A power converter according to claim 5, wherein the power demand signal is converted into the quadrature axis current demand signal by dividing the power demand signal by a signal that is derived from the voltage at the network terminals of the filter.
7. A power converter according to claim 3, wherein the second controller uses a further dc link voltage demand signal indicative of a desired dc link voltage, and compares the further dc link voltage demand signal to the dc link voltage feedback signal to determine a quadrature axis current demand signal for the second active

rectifier/inverter indicative of a desired quadrature axis current to be achieved in the supply network.

8. A power converter according to claim 7, wherein the second controller
5 controls the semiconductor power switching devices of the second active rectifier/inverter to produce filter/supply network electrical quantities that achieve the desired quadrature axis current in the supply network.

9. A power converter according to any preceding claim, wherein a signal
10 indicative of the supply network power is supplied to the first controller from the second controller.

10. A power converter according to claim 9, wherein the signal indicative of the supply network power is added to the output of a dc link controller in the first
15 controller and used to determine a desired level of torque in the motor.

11. A power converter according to any preceding claim, wherein the second controller compares the voltage demand signal indicative of the level of voltage to be achieved at the network terminals of the filter to a voltage feedback signal measured
20 at the network terminals of the filter to determine a direct axis current demand signal for the second active rectifier/inverter, and controls the semiconductor power switching devices of the second active rectifier/inverter to produce filter/supply network electrical quantities that achieve the desired direct axis current in the supply network.

25

12. A power converter according to claim 11, wherein the second controller modifies the direct axis current demand signal in accordance with the prevailing supply network voltage conditions.

30 13. A power converter according to any preceding claim, wherein the power demand signal is provided by a power controller.

14. A power converter according to claim 13, further comprising a speed sensor or speed observer for deriving a speed signal indicative of the speed of a moving part of the motor and wherein the power controller uses the speed signal to derive the power demand signal.

15. A power converter according to claim 13 or claim 14, wherein the power controller receives one or both of a power demand signal and a speed demand signal from a vessel control system.

16. An arrangement comprising a plurality of power converters according to any preceding claim connected to a common supply bus of a supply network providing a nominally fixed voltage and nominally fixed frequency, wherein the voltage demand signal indicative of the voltage to be achieved at the network terminals of the filter of each power converter is supplied to the second controller of each power converter from a power management system.

17. An arrangement according to claim 16, wherein each individual power converter includes a step-down transformer electrically connected between the associated filter and the common supply bus.

18. A propulsion unit comprising:
a motor having a stator and rotor;
a propeller assembly including at least one blade rotated by the rotor of the motor; and
a power converter according to any of claims 1 to 15.

19. A marine vessel comprising:
a supply network providing a nominally fixed voltage and nominally fixed frequency and having a common supply bus; and
a plurality of propulsion units according to claim 18;

wherein the respective power converters of the plurality of propulsion units are connected to the common supply bus and wherein the voltage demand signal indicative of the voltage to be achieved at the network terminals of the filter of each power converter is supplied by a power management system.

5

20. A method of operating a power converter that can be used to interface a motor that requires variable voltage at variable frequency to a supply network providing a nominally fixed voltage and nominally fixed frequency, the power converter comprising:

10 a first active rectifier/inverter electrically connected to the stator of the motor and including a plurality of semiconductor power switching devices;

a second active rectifier/inverter including a plurality of semiconductor power switching devices;

15 a dc link connected between the first active rectifier/inverter and the second active rectifier/inverter;

a filter connected between the second active rectifier/inverter and the supply network, the filter including network terminals;

a first controller for the first active rectifier/inverter; and

a second controller for the second active rectifier/inverter;

20 wherein the method comprises the steps of:

the first controller using a dc link voltage demand signal indicative of a desired dc link voltage to control the semiconductor power switching devices of the first active rectifier/inverter to achieve the desired level of dc link voltage that corresponds to the dc link voltage demand signal; and

25 the second controller using a power demand signal indicative of the level of power to be transferred to the dc link from the supply network through the second active rectifier/inverter, and a voltage demand signal indicative of the voltage to be achieved at the network terminals of the filter to control the semiconductor power switching devices of the second active rectifier/inverter to achieve the desired levels
30 of power and voltage that correspond to the power and voltage demand signals.

21. A method according to claim 20, further comprising the step of the first controller using a flux demand signal indicative of a desired level of flux to be achieved in the motor to control the semiconductor power switching devices of the first active rectifier/inverter to produce stator electrical quantities that achieve the desired flux in the motor.

22. A method according to claim 20 or claim 21, further comprising the step of first controller comparing the dc link voltage demand signal indicative of a desired dc link voltage to a dc link voltage feedback signal to determine a torque demand signal indicative of a desired level of torque to be achieved in the motor, and controlling the semiconductor power switching devices of the first active rectifier/inverter to produce stator electrical quantities that achieve the desired torque in the motor.

23. A method according to any of claim 20 to 22, further comprising the steps of the first controller supplying a control signal that varies in accordance with the prevailing motor conditions to the second controller and the second controller using the control signal to limit the level of power that is transferred to the dc link from the supply network through the second active rectifier/inverter.

24. A method according to any of claims 20 to 23, further comprising the step of the second controller converting the power demand signal indicative of the level of power to be transferred to the dc link from the supply network through the second active rectifier/inverter to a quadrature axis current demand signal for the second active rectifier/inverter indicative of a desired quadrature axis current to be achieved in the supply network, and controlling the semiconductor power switching devices of the second active rectifier/inverter to produce filter/supply network electrical quantities that achieve the desired quadrature axis current in the supply network.

25. A method according to claim 24, wherein the power demand signal is converted into the quadrature axis current demand signal by dividing the power

demand signal by a signal that is derived from the voltage at the network terminals of the filter.

26. A method according to claim 22, further comprising the step of the second
5 controller using a further dc link voltage demand signal indicative of a desired dc link voltage, and comparing the further dc link voltage demand signal to the dc link voltage feedback signal to determine a quadrature axis current demand signal for the second active rectifier/inverter indicative of a desired quadrature axis current to be achieved in the supply network during a start-up condition.

10

27. A method according to claim 26, further comprising the step of the second controller controlling the semiconductor power switching devices of the second active rectifier/inverter to produce filter/supply network electrical quantities that achieve the desired quadrature axis current in the supply network.

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28. A method according to any of claims 20 to 27, further comprising the step of supplying a signal indicative of the supply network power to the first controller from the second controller.

20 29. A method according to claim 28, wherein the signal indicative of the supply network power is added to the output of a dc link controller in the first controller and used to determine a desired level of torque in the motor.

30. A method according to any of claims 20 to 29, further comprising the step of
25 the second controller comparing the voltage demand signal indicative of the level of voltage to be achieved at the network terminals of the filter to a voltage feedback signal measured at the network terminals of the filter to determine a direct axis current demand signal for the second active rectifier/inverter, and controlling the semiconductor power switching devices of the second active rectifier/inverter to
30 produce filter/supply network electrical quantities that achieve the desired direct axis current in the supply network during a supply network voltage dip situation.

31. A method according to claim 30, wherein the second controller modifies the direct axis current demand signal in accordance with the prevailing supply network voltage conditions during a supply network voltage dip situation.
- 5
32. A method according any of claims 20 to 31, wherein the power demand signal is provided by a power controller.
33. A method according to claim 32, further comprising the step of deriving a speed signal indicative of the speed of a moving part of the motor and the power controller using the speed to derive the power demand signal.
- 10
34. A method according to claim 32 or claim 33, further comprising the step of the power controller receiving one or both of a power demand signal and a speed demand signal from a vessel control system.
- 15
35. A method of operating a plurality of power converters according to any of claims 1 to 15 connected to a common supply bus of a supply network providing a nominally fixed voltage and nominally fixed frequency, the method comprising the step of supplying the voltage demand signal indicative of the voltage to be achieved at the network terminals of the filter of each power converter to the second controller of each power converter from a power management system.
- 20
36. A method of operating a propulsion unit comprising a motor that requires variable voltage at variable frequency and has a stator and rotor, a propeller assembly including at least one blade rotated by the rotor of the motor, and a power converter that interfaces the motor to a supply network providing a nominally fixed voltage and nominally fixed frequency, the power converter comprising:
- 25
- a first active rectifier/inverter electrically connected to the stator of the motor
- 30 and including a plurality of semiconductor power switching devices;

a second active rectifier/inverter including a plurality of semiconductor power switching devices;

a dc link connected between the first active rectifier/inverter and the second active rectifier/inverter;

5 a filter connected between the second active rectifier/inverter and the supply network, the filter including network terminals;

a first controller for the first active rectifier/inverter; and

a second controller for the second active rectifier/inverter;

wherein in response to a change in the desired thrust of the propulsion unit the
10 method comprising the steps of:

controlling the second active rectifier/inverter to change the level of power imported into the dc link such that the dc link voltage changes from a desired level; and

controlling the first active rectifier/inverter to export sufficient current from
15 the dc link through the first active rectifier/inverter to the motor to restore the dc link voltage to the desired level and achieve the desired thrust.