

CLAIMS

The embodiments of the invention in which an exclusive property or privilege is claimed are defined as follows:

1. An aerial vehicle, comprising:
an airframe;
a plurality of vertical propulsion units mounted to the airframe and including propellers oriented to provide vertical propulsion to the aerial vehicle, wherein the vertical propulsion units are physically organized in quadrants on the airframe with each of the quadrants including two or more of the vertical propulsion units; and
a controller coupled to the vertical propulsion units to control operation of the vertical propulsion units, wherein at least two of the vertical propulsion units in each of the quadrants are adapted to counter-rotate from each other during flight of the aerial vehicle under influence of the controller.
2. The aerial vehicle of claim 1, wherein the vertical propulsion units are organized into starboard propulsion units and port propulsion units and wherein each of the starboard propulsion units counter-rotates to a corresponding one of the port propulsion units that has a mirrored position about a fore-aft axis of the aerial vehicle.
3. The aerial vehicle of claim 2, wherein the vertical propulsion units are further organized into fore propulsion units and aft propulsion units and wherein each of the fore propulsion units counter-rotates to a corresponding one of the aft propulsion units that has a mirrored position about a port-starboard axis of the aerial vehicle.
4. The aerial vehicle of claim 1, wherein the plurality of vertical propulsion units consist of two propulsion units in each of the quadrants.
5. The aerial vehicle of claim 4, wherein the vertical propulsion units consist of eight vertical propulsion units organized into a fore-starboard quadrant (Q1), an aft-port quadrant (Q2), a fore-port quadrant (Q3), and an aft-starboard quadrant (Q4), wherein a first half of the vertical propulsion units are organized into an outer propulsion ring (R1) and a second half are organized into an inner propulsion ring (R2), and wherein the vertical propulsion units have the following rotational directions:

a first rotational direction for those of the vertical propulsion units in positions: Q1-R1, Q2-R1, Q3-R2, Q4-R2, and

a second rotational direction parallel to but opposite from the first rotational direction for those of the vertical propulsion units in positions: Q1-R2, Q2-R2, Q3-R1, Q4-R1.

6. The aerial vehicle of claim 1, wherein the plurality of vertical propulsion units consist of three propulsion units in each of the quadrants.

7. The aerial vehicle of claim 1, wherein the controller is coupled to independently control rotation rates of each of the vertical propulsion units within a given one of the quadrants.

8. The aerial vehicle of claim 1, wherein rotation directions of the vertical propulsion units are each selected such that a loss of a propeller reaction torque about a yaw axis due to a singular failure of any one of the vertical propulsion units is counter to, and at least partially offset by, a thrust vectoring torque about the yaw axis that is induced by twisting in the airframe due to thrust asymmetries from a remainder of the vertical propulsion units still functioning.

9. The aerial vehicle of claim 1, wherein the aerial vehicle comprises a fixed wing, vertical takeoff and landing (VTOL) unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV).

10. The aerial vehicle of claim 9, wherein the aerial vehicle further comprises horizontal propulsion units mounted to the airframe to provide horizontal propulsion.

11. A method of propelling an aerial vehicle, comprising:

vertically propelling the aerial vehicle with a plurality of vertical propulsion units mounted to an airframe of the aerial vehicle, wherein the vertical propulsion units are physically mounted into quadrants on the airframe with each of the quadrants including two or more of the vertical propulsion units;

rotating first propellers of a first portion of the vertical propulsion units in a first rotational direction while the aerial vehicle is flying; and

rotating second propellers of a second portion of the vertical propulsion units in a second rotational direction opposite from the first rotational direction while the aerial vehicle is flying,

wherein at least two of the vertical propulsion units in each of the quadrants contemporaneously counter-rotate from each other during the flying.

12. The method of claim 11, wherein the vertical propulsion units are organized into starboard propulsion units and port propulsion units and wherein rotating the first and second propellers further comprises:

counter-rotating each of the starboard propulsion units to a corresponding one of the port propulsion units that has a mirrored position about a fore-aft axis of the aerial vehicle.

13. The method of claim 12, wherein the vertical propulsion units are further organized into fore propulsion units and aft propulsion units and wherein rotating the first and second propellers further comprises:

counter-rotating each of the fore propulsion units to a corresponding one of the aft propulsion units that has a mirrored position about a port-starboard axis of the aerial vehicle.

14. The method of claim 11, wherein the plurality of vertical propulsion units consist of two propulsion units in each of the quadrants.

15. The method of claim 14, wherein the vertical propulsion units consist of eight vertical propulsion units organized into a fore-starboard quadrant (Q1), an aft-port quadrant (Q2), a fore-port quadrant (Q3), and an aft-starboard quadrant (Q4), wherein a first half of the vertical propulsion units are organized into an outer propulsion ring (R1) and a second half are organized into an inner propulsion ring (R2), and wherein the first propellers are mounted in positions Q1-R1, Q2-R1, Q3-R2, Q4-R2 and the second propellers are mounted in positions Q1-R2, Q2-R2, Q3-R1, Q4-R1.

16. The method of claim 11, wherein the plurality of vertical propulsion units consist of three propulsion units in each of the quadrants.

17. The method of claim 11, further comprising:

independently controlling rotation rates of each of the vertical propulsion units within a given one of the quadrants.

18. The method of claim 11, wherein rotation directions of the vertical propulsion units are each selected such that a loss of a propeller reaction torque about a yaw axis of the aerial vehicle due to a singular failure of any one of the vertical propulsion units is counter to and at least partially offset by a thrust vectoring torque about the yaw axis that is induced by twisting in the airframe due to thrust asymmetries from a remainder of the vertical propulsion units still functioning.

19. The method of claim 11, wherein the aerial vehicle comprises a fixed wing, vertical takeoff and landing (VTOL) unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV).

20. The method of claim 19, further comprising:

horizontally propelling the aerial vehicle with a plurality of horizontal propulsion units mounted to the airframe.