

On Being Relevant

INCREASINGLY fashionable in contemporary society is the concept that the past is irrelevant. This philosophy holds that one need only look around at what exists today, accept what is good, discard what is bad, and create a future according to some vague and unformed ideals.

Although we cannot accept this approach in its entirety, it can hardly be denied that the community of science and technology has contributed to its development. The changes in basic scientific theory as well as in engineering applications during the two or three most recent decades could well lead to the conclusion that much of what we learned prior to that time was not only irrelevant but restrictive to further progress. "New Math," new theories of structures and materials, new relationships of aerodynamics and thermodynamics, and similar advances in other disciplines, discarding traditional guidelines, have given the engineer and scientist increased freedom to explore realms which only a few years ago would have been considered utter fantasy.

It is the purpose of this Journal to provide a moving base from which communication of ideas and knowledge related to the technology of the air can progress. Much of what we printed four years ago may now be viewed as obsolete. Yet this material has served as valuable background for continued advancement of the engineering art, and, without it, the contemporary practitioner would have been severely handicapped. Our problem is to keep relevant at a time when the rate of change is increasing rapidly—an age of technological acceleration.

To accomplish this purpose, it is necessary for the character of the Journal itself to change. Although still described as an "archive" publication, the *Journal of Aircraft* today is less a repository of fundamental theory and practice than a record of recent developments. During the past year there has been a trend toward publication of papers dealing with specific problems which may be broadly classed as "operational" in nature. These have included flight characteristics and control systems, atmospheric environment, noise, performance monitoring, reliability, and economics. New applications of computers in design, operations, and performance analysis also have been described. Several new developments in materials and structural design have been presented, as well as advanced ideas in propulsion, aerodynamics, and related fields. All of these papers are intended for immediate use, either in direct application to hardware or in finding solutions to current problems.

In attempting to keep abreast of the accelerating technology, editors are constantly challenged to maintain perspective—both historical and current. The complaint about the irrelevance of history is based at least partially on the bias, inaccuracy, or incompleteness frequently exhibited in accounts of historical events. Reporters of the contemporary scene are subjected to the same criticism. In the technical field, we must strive to provide the members of our community with broad coverage and interpretation of the most significant occurrences and developments, keeping a proper balance among the various disciplines and assuring the highest possible degree of accuracy without unduly sacrificing timeliness.

The system used by AIAA to achieve this sometimes appears cumbersome, but no substitute has yet been conceived or suggested which, in our opinion, will retain the necessary safeguards against inaccuracy and distortion. This system involves screening of a manuscript submitted for publication by the editor-in-chief, an associate editor, and a minimum of two reviewers who have special competence in the specific field covered by the paper. The reviewers submit their comments and recommendations to the associate editor who, in turn, passes his views on to the editor-in-chief for final judgment regarding publication. All of this takes time, and this worries us not a little. We are continually seeking ways to shorten the span between receipt of a paper and its appearance in print—so that it will have the greatest possible *relevance* in the age of acceleration.

Authors can assist us in keeping our readers up to date by 1) assuring themselves that they meet the criteria of accuracy, completeness, conciseness, and readability before submitting a manuscript; 2) conscientiously following the guidelines for manuscript form, style, and preparation of illustrations, as set forth on the inside back cover of the Journal, and 3) responding without delay when a paper is returned to them for revision, correction, or comment.

The most effective efforts to achieve these goals are being expended by the publications staff of AIAA, and it is again a pleasure to acknowledge the sincerity and devotion which they have displayed during the past year. Ruth Bryans, as Director of Technical Publications, continues to provide sound and progressive leadership to the Institute's publications program. This is especially important to editors, who confidently and consistently rely on her experience and judgment in matters related to policy and procedure. Anne Huth, our new Managing Editor, has brought her special expertise to the harrowing job of producing the Journal despite the stubbornness, recalcitrance, and procrastination of editors, reviewers, and authors, and for this we are most grateful. Our thanks also go to Anne's assistant, Cynthia Insolio, and the many other members of the publications staff who contribute conscientiously and effectively to make the Journal meet the standards of quality toward which we aim.

We take this occasion to express our gratitude to Susan Slesinger (nee Gritz) who served us so ably as Managing Editor until last August, when she opted for matrimony. We wish her a lifetime of happiness in this new career.

Finally, we are glad to acknowledge with sincere thanks the time, effort, and talents devoted to the *Journal of Aircraft* by the members of the scientific and engineering community who have served us as reviewers during the past year. They constitute the most important element in keeping our publication relevant. Although necessarily anonymous when they perform these services, we are pleased to have this opportunity to give them recognition.

Carl F. Schmidt
Editor-in-Chief