

Editorial

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Our lives have been transformed by technology, and the transformation continues at an ever increasing pace. Ever since the first flight of the Wright brothers, aerospace technology has made the world ever smaller and outer space increasingly nearer. Thus we watched with excitement, the first moon landing and the launch of the deep space probes which brought us those wonderful pictures of the outer planets. On Earth, jet travel became routine, while Concorde, during its lifetime, took less time to make a transatlantic flight than that spent watching an average length Indian movie. Surely the pace of our lives is much more rapid than imaginable by previous generations. These changes have come about because of the vision and energy of a number of remarkable people with multifaceted capabilities.

A fine example of an individual who could perhaps be said to be ahead of his times, and who combined mathematical skills and technological insight was Theodore von Kármán, the scientist featured in this issue. Though the young Theodore wanted to make a career in mathematics, he was persuaded by his father to go into engineering. He is responsible for the founding of one of the most successful laboratories in the US, the Jet Propulsion Laboratories in California, where fundamental research goes hand in hand with technology, and which is a key centre for the planning of all deep space missions.

In this issue R Narasimha explores the diversity of fluid motion; Goverdhan and Ramesh dramatically illustrate the pervasiveness of the so called Kármán vortex street. Sharma and Vishwamittar describe the intricacies of Brownian motion, while Shweta Saxena explains the function of lung surfactant and the effect of abnormalities of this lipoprotein in lung physiology. The Classics item by von Kármán on the collapse of the Tacoma Narrows Bridge almost reads like a thriller, with the villain of course – the Kármán vortices!



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