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**À la recherche de l'Espace**

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## Letter from the Editor

**Isabelle Sourbès-Verger**

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# Letter from the Editor

Isabelle Sourbès-Verger

## TEXT

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- 1 This second issue of *Nacelles* gives tangible form to the ambitions of the journal's founders. It meets their goal of creating an interdisciplinary zone for addressing aeronautics and space in their various aspects, both from a historical perspective and to present the state of the question. These articles were written after a colloquium organized by the CNRS research group FRAMESPA in 2015, which brought together young new researchers working on the theme of space exploration.
- 2 One guiding question runs through this issue: the meaning of space exploration, independently of its accomplishments. A large share of the research focuses on methodology and describing the factors that triggered the interest in space shown by the public, humanities and social sciences researchers, and political actors. The notion of exploration is not treated per se, but rather in how it reveals other rationales at work, analysed through the lens of the history of science as well as political science and the history of knowledge. Here we find some of the major strands of space research today, to which we must add sociology, anthropology, law and geography.
- 3 The body of historical research on space is beginning to be rich enough to enable new studies: in October 2017, Sputnik will be 60 years old while in December 2018, we will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the first manned Apollo flight around the Moon. As for Europe, in 2019 it will celebrate the 30th anniversary of the first launch of the Ariane rocket. While NASA is unquestionably the institutional actor funding the largest number of studies in American (and other regions') history, the European Space Agency is also keen to preserve the written sources deposited at the European Institute of Florence and is also conducting a major project to safeguard oral archives. The first history project led by ESA from 1990 to 2000 retraced the construction of European space from its beginnings in 1958 to 1987 through 24 reports - known as the History Study Report

- and a book in 2 volumes. Other national studies have then supplemented this broad vision, published from 2000 to the present.
- 4 The new History Project, which ESA will officially launch in Padua, Italy in November 2017, sets in motion the goal of making new researchers aware of space issues. Space is now part of everyday life and many students see the beginning of the space age, that of a heroic age, as contemporary with the memory of their grandparents more than their parents. But this change in perspective does not only affect the perception of human activity in space; the historical discipline has also evolved. As early as the 1970s, historians of the 3rd generation of the *Annales* School suggested breaking with "total history," predominantly economic and social, and turning toward "New Objects," "New Approaches," and "New Problems." One of the concepts emphasized by Pierre Nora, the event,<sup>1</sup> offers us the opportunity to see how the past re-emerges in the present. Indeed, in its national histories, space does not escape the trilogy: memory-identity-heritage. We can also enrich our understanding of the major dates in space history by thinking in terms of "regimes of historicity." In this concept, introduced by François Hartog, the current system is "presentism," that of giving value to the present, which extends in the direction of the future as well as the past.<sup>2</sup> Publications on the future of the conquest of space here find a resonance that deserves to be studied further.
  - 5 Today history is global, local and interconnected. Research is expected to be even more interdisciplinary and open to a variety of objects, and to highlight the circulations between space communities around the world, with research cooperation being one of its essential vectors.
  - 6 The vision of fragile, random and incomplete history that takes shape thanks to the narrative of the historian is quite conducive to new research that is ready to integrate contributions from other humanities and social sciences disciplines. The histories of space must also be enriched by multidisciplinary approaches, which are in themselves a challenge. It is, however, the multiplying of viewpoints that fosters understanding of a domain as diverse as 'space'. This second issue of the journal *Nacelles*, giving the floor to new young researchers, opens

up new avenues. Let us hope that it will create new vocations for the exploration not only of space itself but also of its histories.

## NOTES

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- 1 Pierre Nora, *Les lieux de mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984-1992).
- 2 François Hartog, *Régimes d'historicité. Présentisme et expériences du temps* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2003).

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