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TEXTE

- 1 By way of conclusion, and to provide a counterpoint to the historical and poetic changes in the imaginary of flight as seen by the media, as the introduction and the articles in this issues have traced out, here I would like to focus on the opposite: on the constants that, from the Ancien Régime to the 21st century, governed the way the media appropriated and gave form to flight. These continuities reveal the media's seduction and the reflexivity of this imaginary, and how it offered the media, at different times, a material conducive to the expression of the media's modern character. This is one main explanation at least (among others that could be advanced, with a more anthropological, mythological or spiritual bent)¹ for the lasting fascination that the "conquest of the sky" has exerted on contemporary societies and their media. In doing so, this conclusion is the final opportunity to present the contributions of the articles presented here, in emphasizing their points in common.
- 2 First, we can note the favourable coincidence that supported the emergence of the two great moments of popular interest in flight: the invention of the aerostat (1783-1784), and then that of aeronautical invention and the ability to drive or orient flying machines (whether balloons or aeroplanes) at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Indeed, these two moments, separated by more than a century, were also two periods of intense diversification of journalistic publications and innovation in the forms of media language, as shown in the history of the press' treatment of the adventure of flight over the long nineteenth century at the beginning of the this issue. Thus, at the end of the 19th century, aeronautics and aviation were established in sport, particularly through the birth of sports journalism, which was in fact diverse under the pressure of current events and reporting. Then, in the 1920s and 1930s, commercial aviation developed in tandem with the golden age of

great reporting, for which it was a prime subject and conducive to the development of the epic story, a great intercontinental adventure.²

- 3 These points of friction in superimposing flight and media chronologies were determinant for the fruitful encounter between the press and aeronautics, because they encouraged the rapid diffusion, among a variety of groups of people, of a culture of flight. They also constructed flight as a new mass spectacle and a current events subject, even if the modalities of that spectacle and its media coverage differ considerably according to the time point under consideration. More generally, each media innovation changed the categories of public understanding of flight; each new journalistic medium reshaped its representations according to specific aims, readerships, and processes. For example, within the matrimonial press studied by Claire-Lise Gaillard, flight became part of a seductive posture, in which the construction of the aviator as a modern Don Juan was influenced by young women. The particularities of the discourse of each type of press also traced out the contours of a slightly different aviator. As Dominique Faria and António Monteiro have clearly shown, the generalist press discourse of the 1930s – in its very syntax and in its editorial enunciation through playing with titles and subtitles – was particularly conducive to making the aviator a heroic subject, a leading media figure at the core of the aviation epic.
- 4 The papers by Guillaume Pinson and Florence Chiavassa reveal that in the niche media associated with major aeronautical and space companies, such as Air France or the European Space Agency, representations of travel are shaped by self-promotional editorial aims and lines. Finally, another type of displacement is explored by Marine Beccarelli, who found media specificities in radio representations of the adventure of flight: the importance of sound effects, musical illustrations, the polyphony of the intertwined voices of witnesses, pilots, passengers, scientists and writers, current or past, the intimacy of these naked voices, the increasing pressure for live coverage, breaking news and the exploit of in-flight reporting are all features that distinguish radio from the written press. In all, for Beccarelli, radio thus possessed a very particular capacity for “immersion in the present time” in the pioneering days of aviation.

- 5 Second, it should be stressed that aeronautics, along with sport and certain other major topics of media discourse, activates a fundamental function (or even the main function) of the modern press, a function that grew stronger as the 19th century advanced, culminating in the news press and reporting of the 20th century: a democratic bringing of people together.³ While the press documents analysed in these articles targeted specific readership in some cases, such as the specialized scientific press of the Second Empire and the in-flight magazines of airlines, the aviation imaginary studied in this issue is mainly based on media whose main purpose is informative and communicational and aimed at a mass audience, such as the daily and weekly generalist press, radio, and social media. These media forms bring to light the forms of creating a common space and bringing people together around the imaginary of flight.
- 6 On the one hand, the gathering produced by flight was, above all, an actual gathering of crowds in space. From the spectacular the first balloons⁴ to the human tide waiting for Charles Lindbergh to land at Le Bourget in 1927 at the end of his transatlantic crossing, flight provided an exemplary crowd gathering experience in urban or peri-urban areas where demonstrations, tests, and later take-offs and landings of raid aviators took place, up to the broadcast of the take-off of space shuttles. These crowds were within reach of journalists, press agencies and photographers. The spectacle of flight, combined with that of the crowd watching the flight, was thus *mis en scène* by the media, which relayed it, described it through reporting, captured it through photographs or film clips, and conferred upon it a scope that was reflected in this mediated scene.
- 7 As a result, this gathering was also constituted, on the other hand, implicitly, around the media coverage of a mass spectacle and the episodes in an epic that appealed to the entire population, beyond social and political divisions. The consensus around aerial exploits propelled a writer and aviator like Antoine de Saint-Exupéry to the forefront of the media and literary scene, as Olivier Odaert has shown. The position of this aviator was a result of a construction by the media, which was started by a reporter (Joseph Kessel) who brought the men of the Aéropostale to light. It continued in the 1930s until Saint-Exupéry became overwhelmed by the proliferating media discourse about him. For Claire-Lise Gaillard, flight is so deeply

rooted in mass media culture, in addition to the press through cinema and literature, that it integrates the repertoire of identities deployed in the “dating market” of the matrimonial press – a rather unexpected use. As a mass spectacle, aviation in the inter-war period also had national and political resonance. In Portugal, as Isabel Morujão explains, the press organized subscriptions to finance the 1924 Sarmiento de Beires and Brito Paes raid, thereby bringing together a community of readers, which is also a national community, constituted as sponsors of air travel. The raid raised important historical and heritage issues, highlighting Portugal’s image in Europe to the point where subscription involved all social classes.

- 8 Another case studied, that of the Azorean press, was at the forefront of local, national and international news, and is therefore highly instructive with regard to the diversity of issues and scales affected by the aeronautical spectacle. By linking the isolated community of the archipelago to the progress of the transatlantic air adventure, the Azorean press created an effect of proximity in the media, as shown by Dominique Faria and António Monteiro: it staged the reactions and movements of distant Portuguese crowds, witnesses to the manoeuvres of the aviator Nomy and his team, and mentioned the shifts and variations of general emotion. In other words, the press gave an audience dispersed in the Atlantic area the opportunity to imagine the milestones and actors of adventure of flight, by building a narrative and giving it meaning and cohesion for a distant community of readers. This is how the press, as Marine Beccarelli rightly points out, has the same function of bringing people together and communication as aviation: it “abolishes distances and borders”, it connects the members of an imagined community (and by imagining aviation, also imagining oneself through aviation). The press could still strongly associate aviation with national character, making the former, for example, a “French brand”, as were in the inter-war period the immense ocean liners,⁵ and “emissaries of a culture”. This is also what happened with the *Air France Revue*: the magazine’s elegant format, combined with the contribution of famous writers and addressing topics such as fashion, art and luxury, maintained a prestigious image – as much that of the airline as of the nation. In this respect, from a democratic bringing people together to the withdrawal into a more nationalist frame, the slope of political

meanings of aviation was sometimes slippery. The very context of the national and ideological rivalries of the 1930s and 1940s was conducive to maintaining interest in aviation, which was sustained, in particular, by “national sentiment” as Olivier Odaert points out.

- 9 To continue to exist on the scale it had reached, the culture of flight therefore undoubtedly required the establishment of both kinds of coming together mentioned above; in other words, the presence of a dual public, a public of flesh and blood, but also a distant public of receivers and readers, for whom flight was made intelligible through the press, both as a media spectacle and as a modern sensorial experience, disrupting the relationship with time and space.⁶ Yet this uniting around aviation through the media was still based on the senses of the body, not national but individual. The reports of flights observed from the ground, as well as the testimonies of aeronauts, pilots and passengers in the air, recount an experience that was certainly extraordinary, but lived through the physical body. If, at the end of the Ancien Régime, seeing the spectacle with one's own eyes, being a physical witness to it was still an important springboard for the spectator's sense of belonging, according to contemporary philosophical conceptions,⁷ this was no longer true from the last third of the 19th century onwards. From that point, the mediatized sensory experiences had the same value of coming together and truth for readers (or the media spectator experiencing the flight). Whatever its medium, the sensory experience mediated was collectively understandable, because it is the same for everyone, whether “sound sensations,” the noises of the flight transmitted by the radio, or the notes about sensory experiences in the letters of aviators to their relatives, reprinted in the Portuguese press and studied by Isabel Morujão. In these letters, the difficulties of travel, the physical sensations, and the heat are mentioned. The experience of the human body, the feeling, is accepted as a pledge of a universal truth, intelligible through descriptions that appeal to the emotions as well as to the recording body of the enunciator. This subjective mode of narrative often constitutes the core of journalistic accounts about flight, one of the reasons for their power to convince.⁸ This mode also related to the way air passengers looked at the earth and their perception of space and travel.

- 10 In all these periods, the pioneers of flight, as well as the first leisure passengers, balloon travellers and commercial airline tourists whose testimonies were relayed by the media, insisted on the changes in the viewpoint permitted by technology, on the novelty of the sensory experience, sometimes wonderful, sometimes unpleasant, painful or dangerous. For the historian attentive to the evolution of these testimonies, a cultural and sensorial history of air travel emerges, analysed by Guillaume Pinson. His article retraces the transition from the representations of the raids of the 1920s as adventurous and dangerous to the 1930s in a safe, democratic, comfortable, “still” journey, within the enclosed environment of the cabin in the early days of commercial aviation (1930-1950). The media support that accompanied the air traveller makes it possible to retrace certain changes in the perception of travel during this period. The maps published by *Air France Revue* gradually shifted from a space represented by quantified distances (i.e. a space whose thickness, ever smaller, was made up of time periods) to a geography of points linked by curved lines (in other words, a material network, marking the return to a feeling of travel as a movement in space at the end of the 1950s, once the novelty of rapid travel had faded, and the beginning of a linear imaginary of globalized space). Dominique Faria and António Monteiro also noted the rupture of this pivotal moment in commercial aviation and the transition, between 1935 and 1949, from the heroic imaginary of pioneering aviation to a technical imaginary of flight, along with the mechanisation and automation of the pilot’s tasks. From now on, the new space to be conquered was that of a distant universe and, in the pursuit of this new technical imaginary, the task fell to a small robot that the press decided to humanize, as Florence Chiavassa has shown with the Rosetta mission.
- 11 Third, the multiplicity and importance of witness accounts of flight, regardless of the technical means or the historical context, indicate another feature that may have fostered convergence between the press and aeronautics: the reproducibility of the experience. This refers to its periodic repetition, in the serial publications of daily and weekly issues, unfolding like an endless series full of twists and turns, of the adventures of the “conquest of the sky”. This reproducibility can be seen from 1783-1784, in the series of experiments carried out in different French cities over a short period of time: it was their very

repetition that made them more visible in periodicals. At the dawn of the 20th century, this reproducibility was still the case, even though the definition of a media event was quite different: for example, the serial experiments of the aeronaut Santos-Dumont and his tests using numbered balloons (Santos-Dumont No. 1, No. 2, etc., up to Santos-Dumont No. 14 bis!) echoed the series of daily and periodical issues that reported them. A parallel was being established between the race for current events and that of technology, the one feeding the other and both eager to continue.

- 12 Similarly, in the inter-war period, raids were frequent and mediatized in an infinitely repetitive manner, accompanied by photographs, formulas and stereotypical epic intertexts. The international competition for records, inseparable from the media coverage and followed by multiple attempts, created a competition between pilots from different countries and a large number of raids, sometimes even simultaneous, forming an endless series on the front page of the newspapers. Each country wanted to be part of the race for technological innovation and the conquest of the world's airspace, as Isabel Morujão points out. No aviator, then, could completely distinguish himself in the series of exploits made by his counterparts; or rather, all the images and discourses on the heroes of aviation trace out the contours of an imaginary that individual aviator inherits, or from which he tries to distinguish himself, for better or for worse. René Fonck's case is an example of this tension between the reiteration or distancing of stereotypes created by the serial nature of flight, and of its possible pitfalls, as Damien Accoulon has shown. On the one hand, Fonck, in his representations from 1917 to 1926, had an "imaginary differentiated" from that of other French aces (such as Jean Navarre or Georges Guynemer). Fonck stood out from them for his more technical, tactical side, his composure, his speed of execution, his acuteness and his refusal of the dandyism of other aviators. In this, he prolonged the image of the pre-war sports aviator. However, on the other hand, this distinction created a tension between Fonck's own media image and the media figure of the raid aviator that became predominant in the inter-war period. This gap in representations, which Damien Accoulon explores through the journalistic commentary on Fonck, may have played a part in the failure of this pilot's changing to raid aviation in 1925-1926,

while others gained recognition in this at around the same time (such as Charles Lindbergh and Jean Mermoz).

- 13 On the other hand, the coherence (even forced) between the individual and the myth, and his successful inclusion in the serial gallery of aviation heroes, was decisive in Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's success. As Olivier Odaert shows, Saint-Exupéry's continued popularity in the mid-1930s was partly due to the mythical halo of the early days of the *Aéropostale*, which continued to accompany him, escorted by the fashionable image of the "knight of the heavens", the mystical hero escaping earthly gravity and having moral virtue. Saint-Exupéry embodied the persistence of a myth in a pivotal period. As has been said, this period was one of transition, in which the last heroic stories of raid aviation and the beginnings of passenger transport by commercial aviation are superimposed, combined with a discourse that seeks to reassure people about flight safety. Overall, whether at the end of the *Ancien Régime*, in the 1890s and 1900s or in the inter-war period, the serial nature of aerostatic and then aeronautical experiments and the dual patterns of emulation and distance among pilots were undoubtedly some of the bases necessary for the media's stereotype of flight. But that serial nature was also, in return, reinforced by this very stereotype, which generated the careers of so many airmen.
- 14 Ultimately, this other characteristic of the aeronautical media imaginary – the establishment of a stereotypical repertoire of images of flight – is the fourth reason for the association of the press and aeronautics. The imaginary of flight in Western culture was marked by the activation of myths (Icarus, Daedalus) and recurring intertexts (knightly romances and associated metaphors, in particular), and was motivated by the cultural producers' desire to demonstrate their classical culture. As one thing led to another, this original intertext was enriched; scenarios and topoi, and a gallery of aeronautical heroes and aviators with interchangeable characteristics were created in journalistic narratives, in relation to literature, cinema, politics and other vectors. This dynamic set of representations circulated and was reiterated by various cultural mediators. This issue has shown this by taking a wide variety of journalistic media as its corpus, including the French and Portuguese generalist press, the sports, specialised, regional and political press, as well as radio and

social networks. The cultural mediators studied were quite diverse: general reporters, sports journalists, aviators (remember that René Fonck or Antoine de Saint-Exupéry themselves were amateur journalists), not to mention readers (such as those who work in the sections of the matrimonial classifieds or whose names are listed when subscribing to support the raids). From whichever side we look, the press feed on the modern mythology of flight that provided a wealth of events accompanied by their narratives, which were both polymorphic (in the variety of sections, mediators, media and formats that support it) and expected.

- 15 These narratives were expected, certainly, when myth prevailed over truth, even if it meant modifying the facts such as when the press hid some of René Fonck's failures, as they were influenced by the heroic pilot's favourable imaginary. They were expected also when aviation participated in the seductive posture of readers of the matrimonial press, who drew on a shared heroic gallery featuring aviators, sailors, spahis and other figures of a contemporary male ideal, of an idealized literary and social type, "referring to the serial novels and film productions of the time," as Claire-Lise Gaillard writes. The myth of the aviator was then "internalized, questioned, reinvested or even used for one's own ends" by letter writers in order to intervene in the relational dynamics of seduction. This highlights the media and social prestige of the aviator, the power of stereotypes, and their potential performativity, here in the context of love letter exchanges. This heroic myth, woven from flattering representations, also found new territories for deployment as techniques and practices evolved. This is what Marine Beccarelli noted in the shift in the social prestige of the aviator towards jet pilots and air force pilots in the aftermath of the Second World War, as did Florence Chiavassa, when she examined the transfer into space of an imaginary of adventure, mixing new and old references in the registers of epic and exploration similar to the time of the *Aéropostale*. In the 20th and 21st centuries, space continues to trigger the fascination with the unknown, opening up a new field of conquest relayed by the media since the 1940s.
- 16 However, the press in return also nourished the mythology of flight and, sometimes, broke it up to produce unexpected versions that went against the *doxa*, the dominant configuration of the imaginary.

This distance sometimes came from the actors of aviation themselves, such as Saint-Exupéry. In his written accounts and articles, he mostly refused the easy evocation of military courage, the activation of the epic or mystical register, which came so easily to Joseph Kessel or Jacques Mortane, and instead privileged reflection on goodwill among men. Similarly, work by Dominique Faria and António Monteiro shows that the figure of the aviator was neither homogeneous nor immutable over time. In short pivotal periods, such as the transition to commercial aviation in the 1930s and 1940s, we see the decline or mutation of the myth. From that point on, the commercial airline aviator was part of a team, with ground services, automation and technologies, thereby losing his central place in the press discourse to become a peripheral player in aeronautical events. The airplane itself came to overshadow the figure of the heroic pilot. In addition, each reactivation of the myth in a different context could be supported by other myths specific to the context. In Portugal, explains Isabel Morujão, journalists assimilated air raids to the great maritime discoveries of the 16th century and its leading figures, such as Fernão de Magalhães and Vasco da Gama, and recalled the stories of Luís Vaz de Camões, a famous Portuguese writer of the same period.

- 17 The distance with the French or, more broadly, Western imaginary of aviation was not radically great, since these references continued to make aviators mythical heroes, not unrelated to the usual epic and medieval references. However, they gave them a distinctly national brand and promoted cultural ownership by making them part of the country's history. Finally, sometimes the anachronistic reception of the memory aspect of myth, and of the series of testimonies and historical accounts it trails in its wake, produced a strange effect: the voices and memories of the pioneers, broadcast on the radio in the 1950s, were heard by an audience for whom the heroic aviation era was already the distant past, nearly mythical, because commercial aviation had become so common. This reception highlights the gap between two contexts: the change in the space of a few decades and the "construction of evidence of technological progress" in which radio and the press had themselves taken part, says Marine Beccarelli. Ultimately, media discourse informs us about the ruptures and shifts in the imaginary of aviation in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s,

and about the impression of a transition to a new era, whether through explicit testimonies or, implicitly, in the changes in the forms of press discourse--less in what was said than in the ways in which aviation was talked about.

- 18 Between the stereotype and its counterpart, between *doxa* and paradox, the persistence of and the change in representations, this functioning in a system is what creates the narrative and discursive richness of aviation as an object, as well as its cultural impact. The permeating force, resulting from both stereotypes and the diversity of media, fostered performative effects (as we have seen in the case of the matrimonial press), among which we can identify various forms of political manipulation. In all these periods, actors were able to take advantage of the social, political and symbolic capital acquired by aviation activities thanks to the imaginary and the ideological connotations associated with them. For example, René Fonck mobilized this capital to enter politics after the First World War, becoming a member of the French parliament, thanks to the prestige he acquired as an airman in the conflict, despite his youth (born in 1894, he was only twenty-five years old when he was elected in 1919). For Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, his pilot prestige played in his favour when becoming a writer. These are just two paths typical of those taken by a multitude of aviation actors, capitalizing on celebrity built by the media and conveyed by an imaginary that far exceeded each individual person.
- 19 In the end, this set of characteristics (technical convergences, the power to bring people together, reproducibility and stereotyping) made it possible for the imaginary of flight, propelled and formatted by modern journalism, to have lasted, to have adapted to different times, to new media configurations, and to have continued to feed the dreams of the masses. Moreover, these characteristics of the aeronautical imaginary are, in part, the product of the press that has driven and maintained them. In this sense, the press played a major role alongside the various actors (scientists, amateurs, sportsmen, engineers, entrepreneurs, spectators, passengers) in the “conquest of the air”: it helped invent the categories for understanding it and the ways in which it developed. Ultimately, the characteristics just described together determined the fact that flight had a particular role among all the possible objects of discourse for the media. Not

only was the media, like aviation, an integral part of modern technological innovations, and not only was it one of the tools for the development of aviation at different stages in its history (from the wireless telegraphy used on board airships at the beginning of the 20th century to the magazines for commercial airline passengers), but this reflexivity is significant in the sense that flight enabled the media to express their own modernity. Being an artefact produced by modern technology, playing a role bringing people together, being reproducible, and calling on stereotypes – all are characteristics that apply to both experiences and representations of flight and journalistic media. Like flight, modern journalism is the result of 19th century technological innovations, such as the electric rotary presses and microwave technology, telegraphic wires and the revolution in transport.⁹

- 20 If flight federated people, then the press orchestrated the gathering around a mass show. It was up to the serial nature of journalistic production to reproduce these aviator heroes day after day, and the media's desire for first-hand accounts, that reporters were transformed into pilots, and pilots into reporters. Like airmen, journalists are among the great heroes of modernity. It was not by chance that the former took pleasure in talking about the latter, in participating in their adventure. This fact results from the same mimicry that made the series of aeronautical experiments and raids read like a serial novel. The press made aviation one of the great stories of modernity because it provided it with a "manna from heaven" of adventures with twists and turns and because it spoke the same language: that of a world getting smaller, carved up and connected by the technologies that link people together. This is undoubtedly the seduction of the imaginary of flight: to have been able to reflect, give back to cultural producers a striking way of expressing "modern life", technological progress, the gathering of the imagined community, the serial manufacture of media heroes, the fascination of limitless borders and new communications – the shared obsessions of the media and the aeronautical imaginary.¹⁰

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NOTES

1 Flight has long been a theme of representation, dreams, and technical invention, and the sky occupies a special place in several aesthetic, mythological and religious systems. The cultural producers of the contemporary era – writers, and journalists in particular – thus liked to recall the ancient myths of Icarus and Daedalus as illustrations of the age-old dream of flight. In general, however, this reminder was less an anthropological reflection than a discursive *topos*, insofar as the mythological intertext emphasizes the classical culture of the speaker and was a rhetorical expectation. An analysis of the spiritual, religious, moral and mythological meanings of “ascension” in the 18th and 19th centuries can also be found in A. Montandon, *La Plume et le Ballon* (Paris: Éditions Orizons, Universités / Comparaisons, 2014), 19-37 / 88-97.

2 On inter-war reporting, see M. Boucharenc, *L'Écrivain-reporter au cœur des années trente* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2004); and M. Simard-Houde, *Le reporter et ses fictions. Poétique historique d'un imaginaire* (Limoges: Presses universitaires de Limoges, Mediatextes, 2017).

3 On the information journalist as an “ambassador-witness” and vector for “bringing together” audiences through his perspective, serving both as objects for his discourse and his investigations, see the essential work of G. Mulhmann, *Une histoire politique du journalisme. XIX^e-XX^e siècle* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, Points, 2004).

4 M. Thébaud-Sorger, *L'Aérostation au temps des Lumières* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2009), 233-259.

5 A. Corbin, “Du loisir cultivé à la classe de loisir” in A. Corbin (dir.), *L'Avènement des loisirs, 1850-1960* (Paris: Aubier, Champs / histoire, 1995), 103.

6 The feeling of significant upheaval and the notes related to bodily sensation emerge in the testimonies of aeronauts as early as the Ancien Régime, as pointed out in A. Montandon, *La plume et le ballon*, *op. cit.*, 10-14/129-136.

7 *Ibid.*, 237.

8 These issues are addressed in M. Simard-Houde, *Le reporter et ses fictions. Poétique historique d'un imaginaire*, op. cit.

9 C. Studeny, *L'Invention de la vitesse. France, XVIII^e-XX^e siècle* (Paris: Gallimard / nrf, Bibliothèque des Histoires, 1995).

10 About the media imaginary (as all the representations a society have about the media, in other words the reflexive speech held by and about the media, that give contemporary sensibilities about media), see G. Pinson, *L'Imaginaire médiatique. Histoire et fiction du journal au XIX^e siècle* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, Études romantiques et dix-neuviémistes, 2012).

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