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Pour une histoire sociale et culturelle de l'aéronautique au XX^e siècle

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PLAN

Social and Cultural Issues Take a Back Seat
Social and Cultural Issues in Aeronautics
Ongoing Research: Conference on 10 October 2014

TEXTE

- 1 Since the passing of Emmanuel Chadeau and the retirement of Claude Carlier, historical research on the aviation and aerospace industry in France have somewhat faded into the background of researchers' favored topics. In 2012, a small group was created within the CNRS research group FRAMESPA (as part of the LABEX Project "Social Worlds" (SMS)) to revive the study of these subjects, to bring together dispersed initiatives, and to promote new approaches, particularly on the cultural and social history of actors in aeronautics and space.
- 2 With these goals in mind, this group has already published multiple studies, such as a volume on the history of the French Air Force¹ and an interdisciplinary special issue of the journal *Entreprises et Histoire*.² In October 2014, the group organized a one-day seminar at the University of Toulouse Jean Jaurès titled, "Pour une histoire sociale et culturelle de l'aéronautique au XX^e siècle [For A Social and Cultural History of Aeronautics in the Twentieth Century," which is the theme of this journal's first issue. This seminar not only provided a space for shared reflection on these subjects, but was also the occasion to create a network of researchers and to announce the launch of this interdisciplinary journal on space and aeronautics.

Social and Cultural Issues Take a Back Seat

- 3 In reviewing the literature on aviation and aerospace, we found that certain issues had already been the subject of detailed studies and interesting analyses.
- 4 Firstly, there are the aerospace actors, enthusiasts of "the conquest of the air", institutional actors, and journalists who have decided to tell their story or give their eyewitness accounts about specific events.³ For example, there are the publications by the *Groupement des Industries Françaises Aéronautiques et Spatiales* [Group of French Aeronautical and Space Industries] (GIFAS),⁴ the *Comité pour l'histoire de l'aéronautique* [aerospace history Committee] (COMAERO),⁵ and trade unions (especially the CGT⁶). Each in their own way and according to their own perspective inform us about the development of aviation and point to the great transformations in the industry, whether economic, industrial, social or cultural.
- 5 Starting in the 1970s, at least for Toulouse, geographers became interested in production aspects and the impact of this so-called high-tech industry on its local, national and even international environment. In particular, we should mention Guy Jalabert, whose industrial geography dissertation addressed the various sites of this industry and their impact on the territories in which they were established.⁷ More than thirty years later, in collaboration with Jean-Marc Zuliani, he analyzed the growth of aviation in Toulouse in its various dimensions, and provided tools for understanding the joint evolution of city and industry in a context of internationalization, offshore locations, and technological transformations.⁸
- 6 Economists and management and political science experts have also contributed to our knowledge on the history of aeronautics, in particular analyzing the changes in business rationales,⁹ the policies and strategies chosen in production,¹⁰ the role of State,¹¹ the regional economy,¹² the paths of innovation, management characteristics and organization of the industry, and its progressive globalization.¹³ Through their detailed studies of the stakes involved and rationales specific to this industry, they have studied the strategies developed

by the various social actors that contributed to the expansion of this industry.

- 7 Certain sociologists, especially Yvette Lucas, have rather extensively researched such subjects as the impact of technological change, changes in qualifications, and the ergonomics of work.¹⁴ These studies focus on the specifics of this industry, particularly job characteristics, training, and the changes that new technologies cause for social groups working in aircraft construction. Researchers have also examined the industry's relationships with research and training centers in a given region and their consequences for the main social actors (workers, researchers, businesspeople, etc.).¹⁵
- 8 Starting in the 1980s, historians began to have the necessary chronological distance for scholarly analysis of this industry.¹⁶ They began to study the development of military aircraft¹⁷ and provided fine-grained analyses of industrial,¹⁸ economic,¹⁹ and political²⁰ strategies employed by the social actors in aeronautics and space. A great deal has also been written about the pioneers and heroes of the 'conquest of the air'²¹ and the companies involved.²² Yet social issues, and to a lesser extent cultural ones, have lagged far behind²³ and have not been the object of precise and detailed studies, as if they were considered to be merely secondary subjects.
- 9 Yet, it is clear that it was not only technical developments and the paths traced out by the pioneers that shaped aviation, but also choices made by the many social actors involved in the 'conquest of flight,' both economically as well as socially and culturally. Thus, this field, which remains unexplored in comparison to the automotive sector²⁴ for example, must now assume its proper place in humanities and social science research, in particular history. The goal of this journal, therefore, is to help fill these lacunae and to promote new research approaches. If we do not analyze social issues, it is difficult to see how we can understand the issues, the politics, and the power relations that occurred throughout the twentieth century and greatly influenced the development of aviation.

Social and Cultural Issues in Aeronautics

- 10 Therefore, researchers in social sciences now need to study these issues from a multidisciplinary perspective. Without a detailed examination of social and cultural aspects, we cannot have a deep understanding of this industry. We must give employees a space to speak about their living and working conditions, their suggestions and contributions to the development of aviation, and the interconnected and complex economic, social and cultural issues at the heart of this sector. Otherwise, we will only have a fragmented and incomplete understanding of work-related issues, both for the actors in aircraft construction, as well as for those involved in using and maintaining aircraft, and managing and orienting this industry.
- 11 Therefore, there is a real interest for researchers here. Indeed, the aviation industry, as well as the aircraft themselves, draw on advanced technologies and are spaces for incubation of ideas and social experimentation. The State, in its role ordering planes, as administrator and customer, has considerable importance in the evolution of the industry, at least in the French case. Moreover, we need to keep in mind that aviation (and space) are also indicators of a country's economic development and since the 1960s, a marker of European construction.²⁵ Finally, it is also a mode of transportation that has revolutionized travel, shortening time and space and contributing to a relative uniformization of the planet and the emergence of a 'global village'.
- 12 Future scholarship in the field of aviation history may take several paths. To cite a few examples, researchers could study airline staff and their working conditions; industrial growth strategies proposed by the actors themselves (trade unions, employers, politicians, the State, social actors, etc.) and their influence on the emergence of a unique industry; the long-term impact of the plane on mentalities and the collective imagination, with for example the role played by aviation in the abolition of borders and the leveling out of cultural practices and the sense of uniformity that results; a social history of aviation safety; an environmental history of aviation and consideration of the environment by stakeholders and the public; or finally, a

social and cultural history of the users of this kind of transportation. These are only a few suggestions for future research as the avenues opened up in this field are multiple and remain largely to be defined as well as studied.

Ongoing Research: Conference on 10 October 2014

- 13 This first issue published by the journal HEPAS presents some of the current research aviation issues, in particular social and cultural history.
- 14 The article by Andrea Seignier²⁶ (UMR FRAMESPA), a doctoral student in contemporary history at the University of Toulouse Jean Jaurès, offers methodological reflections on value of using sources from the private sphere. She examines correspondence among aviation pioneers to provide a social and cultural history of the airplane's inventors (here the Wright brothers) and thus to better understand the networks mobilized by actors and their importance in spreading aviation worldwide.
- 15 Luc Robène²⁷ (UMR THALIM), a sports historian and professor at the University of Bordeaux, analyzes the growth of aviation and the construction of a new imaginary through cultural representations that the press (here *La vie au Grand Air*) helped forge before 1914. These cultural images resulted in disseminating an image of aviation as a sport and its main representatives, the pilots, as sportsmen and figures of social modernity during the Belle Époque.
- 16 Claude Abzac-Epezy²⁸ (UMR IRICE), a teacher of history, geography and geopolitics at the Lycée Louis le Grand Preparatory School, is interested in the influence of storytelling on the positive and high-value image conveyed by the social actors involved. In particular, he focuses on the *résistencialiste* discourse that began at the end of the Second World War and still today largely covers over the Franco-German cooperation in aeronautics.
- 17 Marie-Madeleine Rotelli and Sophie Rousseau, who have just defended their Master's thesis in social history,²⁹ summarize their research conducted over two years on the changes in jobs and work in

aeronautics. Specifically, they highlight the influence of technological change on certain representative trades (loftsmen, sheet metal worker, turner, milling machine operator) and on the expertise needed, from the 1960s to 1980s.

- 18 Each of these studies creates new perspectives and a better knowledge of aviation. It is our strong hope that they may be followed by a great number of collective and interdisciplinary research initiatives.

NOTES

1 OLIVIER Jean-Marc (ed.), *Histoire de l'Armée de l'air et des forces aériennes françaises du XVIII^e siècle à nos jours*, Collection Aviation, Privat, Toulouse, 549 pages.

2 SEIFFERT Marc-Daniel, KECHIDI Med (eds.), *L'industrie aéronautique mondiale entre ancrage étatique et globalisation*, *Entreprises et histoire*, n° 73, Éditions ESKA, Paris, Décembre 2013, 192 pages.

3 Such as BÉNICHOU Michel, CARPENTIER Jean, CHAMBOST Germain, GALAN Robert, MARC Yves, MARCK Bernard, POLACCO Michel, and SPARACO Pierre, among others, who have greatly contributed to scholarship on aeronautics.

4 <https://www.gifas.asso.fr/content/publications>.

5 Publications by COMAERO are available in open access at: <http://www.3af.fr/article/comaero>.

6 Among many others, in particular we would mention BERNARD-ROIGT Martine (ed.), *L'aéronautique. Une histoire sociale en Midi-Pyrénées*, IRHS Midi-Pyrénées, Toulouse, 2010, 295 pages; BOUCHENY Serge, *Chronique ouvrière. Le moteur d'avion. Des hommes, des luttes*, Le temps des cerises, Paris, 2006, 183 pages.

7 JALABERT Guy, *Les industries aéronautiques et spatiales en France*, Privat, Toulouse, 1974, 520 pages.

8 JALABERT Guy, ZULIANI Jean-Marc, *Toulouse, l'avion et la ville*, Collection Aviation, Privat, Toulouse, 2009, 349 pages.

9 GORMAND Claude, *L'industrie aéronautique et spatiale*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 1993, 236 pages.

- 10 SEIFFERT Marc-Daniel, *Apprentissages, stratégies et compétitivité sur la longue durée : l'étonnante histoire d'Eurocopter* ; MULLER Pierre, *Airbus : l'ambition européenne : logique d'État, logique de marché*, Logiques sociales, Commissariat général du Plan, L'Harmattan, Paris, 1989, 254 pages.
- 11 SULEIMAN Ezra, COURTY Guillaume, *L'âge d'or de l'État : une métamorphose annoncée*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1997, 334 pages.
- 12 BECKOUCHE Pierre, *La nouvelle géographie de l'industrie aéronautique européenne*, Géographies en liberté, L'Harmattan, Paris, 1996, 222 pages.
- 13 FRIGANT Vincent, KECHIDI Med, TALBOT Damien, *Les territoires de l'aéronautique*, Géographies en liberté, L'Harmattan, Paris, 2006, 250 pages.
- 14 See LUCAS Yvette, BESLAY Christophe, DIHOUANTESSA Jérôme, *Le vol du savoir, Mutations/sociologie*, Presse Universitaires de Lille, Lille, 1989, 256 pages ; LUCAS Yvette, *L'automation*, Le Sociologue, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1982, 232 pages.
- 15 See GROSSETTI Michel, *Sciences, Industries et Territoires*, PUM, Toulouse, 1995, 310 pages. (version HAL SHS : <https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00719731>)
- 16 FRIDENSON Patrick, *La France et l'aéronautique*, Le Mouvement Social, Éditions Ouvrières, Paris, 1988, 150 pages.
- 17 Voir par exemple FACON Patrick, *Histoire de l'Armée de l'air*, La Documentation française, Paris, 2009, 558 pages.
- 18 CARLIER Claude, *L'aéronautique française (1945-1975)*, Histoire/documents, Lavauzelle, Paris, 1983, 647 pages
- 19 CHADEAU Emmanuel, *L'industrie aéronautique en France (1900-1950)*, Éditions Fayard, Paris, 1987, 553 pages.
- 20 CHAPMAN Herrick, *L'aéronautique. Salariés et patrons d'une industrie française (1928-1950)* [trans. MULLIÉ Bernard], Collection Histoire, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, Rennes, 2011, 430 pages.
- 21 For example, see CHADEAU Emmanuel, *Mermoz*, Éditions Perrin, Paris, 200, 365 pages ; CARLIER Claude, *Marcel Dassault : la légende d'un siècle*, Éditions Perrin, Paris, 2002, 582 pages.
- 22 See CARLIER Claude, SCIACCO Gaëtan, *La passion de la conquête d'Aérospatiale à EADS (1970-2000)*, Éditions du chêne, Paris, 2001, 304 pages.
- 23 Hey are not entirely absent, however; a multidisciplinary collective volume dealing with the cultural history of aviation was published in 2013:

THÉBAUD-SORGER Marie, ROSEAU Nathalie, *L'emprise du vol. De l'invention à la massification : histoire d'une culture moderne*, Vues D'ensembles, Éditions MétisPresses, Genève, 2013, 208 pages.

24 Although many such works exists, here we refer to BEAUD Stéphane, FRIDENSON Patrick, HATZFELD Nicolas, LOUBET Jean-Louis, PIALOUX Michel, TOURAINE Alain.

25 BURIGANA David, DELOGE Pascal (eds.), *L'Europe des coopérations aéronautiques*, Histoire, Économie et Société, Armand Colin, Paris, 2010/4, 128 pages.

26 SEIGNIER Andréa is completing a Ph.D. in contemporary history at the University of Toulouse-Jean Jaurès directed by OLIVIER Jean-Marc: *Micro histoire sociale des pionniers de l'aviation (1890-1914)*.

27 ROBENE Luc, *L'homme à la conquête de l'air: des aristocrates éclairés aux sportifs bourgeois*, 2 tomes, L'Harmattan, Paris, 1998, 495 pages.

28 D'ABZAC-EPEZY Claude, *L'armée de l'air des années noires: Vichy. 1940-1944*, Campagnes et stratégies, Economica, Paris, 1998, 412 pages.

29 ROTELLI Marie-Madeleine, ROUSSEAU Sophie, *L'évolution du travail dans l'industrie aéronautique du début des années 1960 au début des années 1980*, Mémoire de Master II, directed by BOSCUS Alain, UFR HAA, UT2J, Toulouse, September 2014, 732 pages.

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