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GENDERED AIRS?

Gender Studies and Aeronautics

Damien Accoulon

Tom Dufour

The success of the *Top Gun*'s sequel reminds us of the appeal of the glorious, reckless, non-conformist, seductive aviator who rides ever-faster motorbikes and planes and is ready to go beyond the limits set by his contemporaries.¹ If a woman did slip into one of the cockpits, Tom Cruise and his peers once again demonstrate the triumph of muscular and seductive men wearing Ray-Bans and leather jackets when not at the controls of fighter planes.² In the meantime, a quick internet search using the key words “stewardesses” reveals numerous more or less sensationalist articles revolving around the theme of gender and associating these workers to the sexual potential of their bodies: an Air France stewardess accusing pilots of “verbalised rape”,³ an internal Transavia sex scandal in 2016, repeated sexual assaults on cabin crew members during a Frontier Airlines low-cost flight in 2021...⁴ The relationship between aircrew and the gender system is strikingly strong. A historical analysis provides an insight into the basis of this relationship. In fact, the entire aeronautical sector is articulated around gendered representations, which are particularly embodied in the emblematic figures of pilots – bastions of masculine

¹ We would like to thank Julia Ribeiro Thomaz for her editing and comments on an earlier version of this introduction.

² S. Mendelson, “‘Top Gun: Maverick’ Box Office: Tom Cruise Sequel Passes \$600 Million Worldwide”, *Forbes*, 8 June 2022, <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/scottmendelson/2022/06/08/movies-tom-cruise-top-gun-maverick-tops-600m-at-worldwide-box-office>> accessed 09/06/2022; J. Kosinski, *Top Gun: Maverick* (United States: Paramount Pictures, 2022).

³ “C’était un viol verbalisé: le témoignage d’une hôtesse qui accuse des pilotes d’Air France”, *RMC-BFM*, 24 May 2022, <https://rmc.bfmtv.com/actualites/societe/transports/c-etait-un-viol-verbalise-le-temoignage-d-une-hotesse-qui-accuse-des-pilotes-d-air-france_AV-202205240181.html> accessed 13/06/2022.

⁴ A. Domenech, “Deux hôtesse de l’air d’Aeroflot refusent de se soumettre aux diktats esthétiques et gagnent”, *TV5 Monde*, 20 September 2017, <<https://information.tv5monde.com/terriennes/deux-hotesses-de-l-air-d-aeroflot-refusent-de-se-soumettre-aux-diktats-esthetiques-et>> accessed 31/05/2022; “Scandale sexuel chez Transavia”, *La Dépêche*, 12 October 2016, <<https://www.ladepeche.fr/article/2016/10/12/2437884-scandale-sexuel-chez-transavia-hotesse-air-envoyait-air-cockpit-notait.html>> accessed 31/05/2022; M. Burke, “Passenger duct tape man to seat after in-air fight on Frontier Airline plane”, *NBC News*, 3 August 2021, <<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/passengers-duct-tape-man-seat-after-air-fight-frontier-airlines-n1275862>> accessed 31/05/2022.

heroism – on the one hand, and stewardesses – archetypes of a celebrated and fantasised femininity – on the other. The latter have already prompted a few works, particularly in the English-language literature, where socio-historical analyses through the prism of gender seem to be better established.⁵ This thematic issue of *Nacelles* aims to deepen this knowledge, without simply compiling data on the various professions that make up the world of aeronautics. It explores how a social object as massive as aviation is structurally linked to the gender system.

1.1 Flyers at the controls: climb and dominate

The historiographical renewal brought about by cultural studies allows for the balloon, then the aeroplane and the rocket, to be considered as the central artefacts of an aeronautical culture, which has been at the heart of the discursive apparatus that has been shaping modernity for over two centuries.⁶ A display of Western technological development, a mark of military and imperial power, a sign of the widening of the world and the shortening of distances: the flying machine has had a major influence on its socio-cultural environment, from the first aerostat in 1783 to the Airbus aircrafts being halted due to a global pandemic. The richness of this field of study explains the development of an academic literature that has gradually shifted away from strict economic or military history. The review *Nacelles: Past and Present of Aeronautics and Space* has therefore valued, since its foundation in 2016, the disciplinary and historiographic interplay in order to apprehend the air in a global perspective, as it is both source and recipient of the narratives that shape our current societies. Among the many studies focusing on these narratives, however, few are dedicated to the gendered dimension of the airspace, and even fewer draw on the conceptual tools provided by gender studies.

Luc Robène's article in this thematic issue draws on more than twenty-five years of personal research, striving to analyse female balloonists from an intersectional perspective. It shows that women were not rare among balloonists in the early nineteenth century, before the spectacularisation and development of the practice as a sport transformed the way in which ballooning was perceived.⁷ After Gambetta's escape from Paris in a balloon made the aerostat a

⁵ See notably K. M. Barry, *Femininity in Flight: A History of Flight Attendants* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 304 p.

⁶ These include, in particular: R. Wohl, *A Passion for Wings: Aviation and the Western Imagination, 1908-1918* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 320 p.; C. Asendorf, *Super Constellation–Flugzeug und Raumrevolution: die Wirkung der Luftfahrt auf Kunst und Kultur der Moderne* (Wien: Springer, 1997), 371 p.; R. Wohl, *The Spectacle of Flight: Aviation and the Western Imagination, 1920-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 364 p.; N. Roseau and M. Thébaud-Sorger (eds.), *L'Emprise du vol. De l'invention à la massification, histoire d'une culture moderne* (Genève: MetisPresses, 2013), 202 p.

⁷ In addition to his article featured in this thematic issue, see in particular: L. Robène, "Vers la création d'un sport féminin: des filles de l'air aux aéronautes" in P. Arnaud and T. Terret (eds.), *Histoire du sport*

modern patriotic symbol in October 1870, the aeronauts of the last third of the century maintained a form of aristocratic distinction through this elitist practice, associating sport and adventure while asserting the control and channeling of their *élan vital* to serve a higher interest, that of Humanity, as Patrick de Oliveira's thesis has recently confirmed. At a time when aeronauts were considered heroes, adorned with virile virtues, ballooning was increasingly perceived through the lens of gender and the potential transgression of its injunctions by women who – when they entered aeronautical culture – were *a priori* confined to the role of (pro)creators of a new generation of male aeronauts.⁸ The same role was offered to female aviators during the consolidation of the Nazi regime in the second half of the 1930s.⁹ The advantage of the synthesis offered by this issue lies in highlighting these more or less striking continuities in Western aeronautical culture, from aeronauts to aviators, and to some extent even to astronauts.

As a sportsman whose figure became established in *fin de siècle* media culture, at a time of perceived crisis and potential challenge to male dominance, the aeronaut and then the airman updated the “image of the man” and provided new models of masculinity for the young Western elite.¹⁰ The control over body and machine, the taste for physical effort and the demonstration of power, and the mastery of his own destiny confirmed by the confrontation with dangers were all virile characteristics that the aviator demonstrated to his contemporaries. The image of the pilot thus appears as a particularly obvious avatar of the hegemonic masculinity theorised by Raewyn Connell to designate the dominant and prescriptive form of masculinity in the social space.¹¹ This masculinity is in relation with alternative forms of masculinities and femininities that are also defined in relation to this dominant system of representations and that can challenge it by claiming relative emancipation from patriarchal injunctions. Through their mechanical performance, the “women of the air” grouped under the La Stella association before 1914, and later the aviatrixes of the interwar period, are examples of this challenge and are examined at various levels in this issue by Luc Robène, Damien Accoulon and Laure Bouglé.

René Schilling was the first to draw on the figure of the famous German pilot Manfred von Richthofen to compare and contrast it with some earlier models of “heroic masculinity” in the

féminin, vol. 1 (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996), 165-184; L. Robène, *L'Homme à la conquête de l'air: des aristocrates éclairés aux sportifs bourgeois* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998), vol. 1: 378-390, and vol. 2: 168-185.

⁸ P. L. S. de Oliveira, *The Ascending Republic: Aeronautical Culture in France, 1860-1914*, PhD Dissertation (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 240-284.

⁹ E. Zegenhagen, *“Schneidige deutsche Mädel”: Fliegerinnen zwischen 1918 und 1945* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2007), 219-238.

¹⁰ G. L. Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 240 p.

¹¹ R. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2nd ed., 2005), 324 p.

German-speaking world.¹² By combining ancient heroic models with technical modernity, the aviator provides a relatively stable model of heroic masculinity in a context of reconfigured gender structures. The autonomy displayed by the pilots in the skies of the Great War, an industrial that engaged the masses, maintained a distinction and a mystique of strong souls who seized their destiny, as Damien Accoulon develops in this issue. The study of the heroisation of the “knights of the air” (*Ritter der Luft*) and their mythification between the two World Wars highlights the evolution of the aviator’s masculinity according to the socio-political context, which was particularly apparent in the case of the Fascist and Nazi regimes, which made the airman an example of the “new man”.¹³ Through the intersection of civilian and military identities, the Great War was a decisive stage in cementing the gendered perception of aeronautical technology and mechanics, which, like other symbols of virility, quickly became an essentialized expression of masculinity.¹⁴ Air raids and airline pioneering during the interwar period thus helped to perpetuate this heroic masculinity by overcoming human and technical limits.¹⁵

While an archetypal aviator has been developed on a relatively similar basis in Western Europe, many nuances are observed by Martin Francis in his sophisticated analysis of representations of the Royal Air Force (RAF) “Flyer” in British society during the Second World War. Individualism and claimed independence, a sense of dandyism and alcohol consumption thus shaped the appeal of a homosocial male universe. The Second World War aviator therefore seems to be one of the (last?) avatars of the passion for flight before its depersonalisation and trivialisation in the context of post-war commercial aviation.¹⁶ While the control and piloting of modern machines occupied a central place in the construction of the airman’s masculinity, the

¹² R. Schilling, *“Kriegshelden”: Deutungsmuster heroischer Männlichkeit in Deutschland 1813-1945* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2002), 226f.

¹³ S. Schüler-Springorum, “Vom Fliegen und Töten. Militärische Männlichkeit in der deutschen Fliegerliteratur, 1914-1939”, in K. Hagemann and S. Schüler-Springorum (eds.), *Heimat-Front. Militär und Geschlechterverhältnisse in Zeitalter der Weltkriege* (Frankfurt am Main/New York: Campus, 2002), 208-233; M. Szczepaniak, “‘Ritter der Lüfte’: Der Kampfflieger als (post)heroische Männlichkeitskonstruktion”, in C. Glunz and T. F. Schneider (eds.), *Wahrheitsmaschinen: Der Einfluss technischer Innovationen auf die Darstellung und das Bild des Krieges in den Medien und Künsten* (Göttingen: V & R Unipress, 2010), 241-252. See also Katie Brown’s analysis of aeronautical rhetoric in her thesis, which she summarises in this thematic issue: K. L. Brown, *The End of Gentlemanly Warfare? Gendered Language and Great Britain’s Evolving Arguments for Strategic Bombing, 1920-1945* (PhD Thesis, University of Akron, Akron, 2021), 239 p.

¹⁴ C. d’Abzac-Épezy, “Les héros de l’air. Figures et nouveaux modèles de masculinité dans la première moitié du 20^e siècle”, in N. Roseau and M. Thébaud-Sorger (eds.), *L’Emprise du vol, op. cit.*, 31-42.

¹⁵ M. Cronin, “Richard Byrd, Technological Explorer: Polar Exploration, the Machine, and Heroic Masculinity in Interwar America”, *Technology and Culture*, 57/2 (2016), 322-352.

¹⁶ M. Francis, *The Flyer: British Culture and the Royal Air Force, 1939-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 287 p.

increasing automation of aircraft controls seems to participate, if not in a crisis of the pilots' virility as the American author Tom Wolfe suggested about the first astronauts, at least in a reconfiguration of this masculinity on the basis of other attributes of greater importance, such as technical mastery.¹⁷

1.2 Gender and power relations: empires and women

Several recent works have linked gender studies to British imperialism in the context of civil aviation during the interwar period. They analyse the place occupied by women within these non-Western spaces, perceived as peripheral. The marginalisation of women in aeronautical culture becomes all the more visible in that these marginal territories offer some interstices for relative emancipation, where gender issues intersect with those of race.¹⁸ However, this approach to studying the marginal figures of women aviators in aerial culture, based on gender studies, remains rather unique. Indeed, the series of books initiated by the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum at the end of the 1970s was innovative in its subject matter – women in aviation – and opened up a field on the particular case of the United States.¹⁹ Since then, English-language historiography has analysed women aviators from three major angles listed by Liz Millward.²⁰ The first builds on the seminal work of Joseph Corn who, while studying the relationship of North American society to aviation, showed that women had been employed by commercial aviation companies as a means of “domesticating” the aircraft and demonstrating its safety during the inter-war period.²¹ The second approach consists of studying “women in the air” by comparing aerial mobility with gender mobility. As they asserted themselves in the air, which was dominated

¹⁷ T. Wolfe, *The Right Stuff* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1979), 436 p.

¹⁸ L. Millward, *Women in British Imperial Airspace, 1922-1937* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008), 249 p.; R. Hemmings, “Modernity's Object: The Airplane, Masculinity, and Empire”, *Criticism*, 57/2 (2015), 283-308; A. Rea, “‘True Blue Heroines’: The 1930s Aviatrix and Eccentric Colonial Femininity”, in M. McCluskey and L. Seaber (eds.), *Aviation in the Literature and Culture of Interwar Britain* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 159-178.

¹⁹ C. M. Oakes, *United States Women in Aviation through World War I* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1978), 44 p.; K. L. Brooks-Pazmany, *United States women in aviation, 1919-1929* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 57 p.; C. M. Oakes, *United States women in aviation, 1930-1939* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1985), 70 p.; D. G. Douglas, *United States women in aviation, 1940-1985* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990), 142 p. The latter volume was, however, revised and substantially expanded a decade later: D. G. Douglas, *American Women and Flight since 1940* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 359 p. See Louise Francezon's review in this thematic issue.

²⁰ L. Millward, *Women in British Imperial Airspace*, *op. cit.*, 8-9.

²¹ J. J. Corn, “Making Flying ‘Thinkable’: Women Pilots and the Selling of Aviation, 1927-1940”, *American Quarterly*, 31/4 (1979), 71-90; J. J. Corn, “Making Flying ‘Thinkable’: Women Pilots and the Selling of Aviation”, in *The Winged Gospel: America's Romance with Aviation* (Baltimore/London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002, Rev. ed.), 71-90.

by men, women aviators demonstrated their abilities through their performance and participated in the gradual emancipation of the new woman during the interwar period.²² This kind of analysis, which was essentially based on representations, proved to be fruitful but seemed to overlook the practical nature of the situations in which the actors found themselves – in particular their socio-economic contexts. The third perspective examined women aviators for their spectacular dimension at a time of increased media coverage of flying. It highlighted the marginalisation of these few women, who were maintained in a situation of economic insecurity during the interwar period.

This final angle is the one Siân Reynolds chose to write her pioneering analysis of French women aviators during the interwar period, based in particular on a detailed study of the holdings of the *Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand* in Paris.²³ This chapter was complemented to some extent by contributions from Guillaume de Syon on civil aviation and Marie-Catherine Villatoux on military aviation. Nevertheless, it calls for a systematic and in-depth study of French women aviators beyond the inter-war period.²⁴ In this regard, the portraits composed outside academia, through their collection and comparison of a large number of sources, offer many possibilities for academic analysis.²⁵ Laure Bouglé therefore crosses published sources with Hélène Boucher's personal archives, offering a new and detailed case study of the career of the emblematic French aviatrix. Her paper shows the porosity between military representations, national identity and women's identity, and demonstrates that the articulation between the gender system and aeronautics operated at various levels in the early 1930s.

²² See for example D. DeLyser, "Flying: Feminisms and Mobilities – Crusading for Aviation in the 1920s", in T. Cresswell and P. Merriman (eds.), *Geographies of Mobilities: Practices, Spaces, Subjects* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 83-98; C. Blais, *Une route à soi: cyclistes, automobilistes et aviatrices, 1890-1940* (Montréal: Les Presses de l'université de Montréal, 2020), 321-445.

²³ Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand, Paris, DOS 629 Avi, "Femmes dans l'aviation", <<https://bibliotheques-specialisees.paris.fr/ark:/73873/pf0002219630.locale>> accessed 09/02/2022. S. Reynolds, "A slip of a girl can fly it': The false promises of aviation", in *France Between the Wars: Gender and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1996), 65-82.

²⁴ G. de Syon, "Engines of Emancipation? Women's Flying Clubs before World War II", in W. Meighörner, H. Vogel and B. Waibel (eds.), *Frau und Flug: die Schwestern des Ikarus* (Marburg: Jonas Verlag, 2004), 198-209; *Id.*, "The Female Flier as National Icon in Interwar France", in A. M. Moore (ed.), *Sexing Political Culture in the History of France* (Amherst/NY: Cambria Press, 2012), 205-220; M.-C. Villatoux, "Femmes et pilotes militaires dans l'armée de l'Air", *Revue Historique des Armées*, 272 (2013), 12-23.

²⁵ Several works are particularly rich in documentation and iconography. They are a tool for further research, for example on a prosopographical basis. In French, for example: S. Nicolaou and E. Mismes-Thomas, *Aviatrices: un siècle d'aviation féminine française* (Levallois-Perret: Altipresse, 2004), 189 p.; A. Pelletier, *Les filles d'Icare: histoire mondiale des aviatrices* (Antony : E-T-A-I, 2011), 191 p.; B. Marck, *Les aviatrices: Des pionnières aux cosmonautes* (Paris: L'Archipel, 1993), 387 p.; *Id.*, *Elles ont conquis le ciel: 100 femmes qui ont fait l'histoire de l'aviation et de l'espace* (Paris: Arthaud, 2009).

Evelyn Zegenhagen-Crellin's thesis identified, on similar grounds, the situations of some 180 airwomen that were active in Germany between 1918 and 1945 – a number far higher than estimated in previous studies.²⁶ The comparison and dialogue between historiographies should enrich the analysis of aeronautical history according to context. There are, for example, many inspirations to be drawn from reading the collective work conducted by the Friedrichshafen Zeppelin Museum in 2004 on the “sisters of Icarus”, which is rich in innovative contributions and outlines a socio-cultural history of women in aeronautics.²⁷ The conceptual tools of gender studies allow for a deepening and development of these perspectives into the wider universe of a gendered aviation culture.

1.3 In the cabin: users and professionals in the jet age

As the airplane became the privileged means of transport of post-war globalisation, the stewardess occupied a significant part of the media space by becoming the commercial muse of most of the major airlines. She therefore contributed to reinforcing the glamour of jet aviation in the 1960s, becoming a key vector of the “Jet Sex” imagination, whose symbols spread well beyond the narrow circle of aircraft consumers.²⁸ The pilot and stewardess duo still form part of the aviation imagination, as recent film productions show. For example, the moderately successful television series *Pan Am* reinvests the sexy image of the stewardess of the 1960s, while the *Top Gun* franchise (1986, 2022) and, on a different scale, *Sky Fighters* (2005), continue the line opened by *Wings* (1927), enshrining the heroism of the pilots with breathtaking aerial scenes, which combine speed, danger and control.²⁹ The media centrality of these two characters also tends to make all the other professions that form the large and diverse world of aeronautics invisible, particularly those of women.³⁰ One of the fundamental challenges of gender history is to rehabilitate the existence of extraordinary female figures – such as the female pilots of the early

²⁶ G. Pfister, *Fliegen – ihr Leben: die ersten Pilotinnen* (Berlin: Orlanda-Frauenverl, 1989), 240 p.; K. Dorothea Fell, “Im Flug: Neue Perspektiven?”, in *Kalkuliertes Abenteuer: Reiseberichte deutschsprachiger Frauen 1920–1945* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 1998), 203-246; E. Zegenhagen, “Schneidige deutsche Mädels”, *op. cit.*

²⁷ W. Meighörner, H. Vogel and B. Waibel (eds.), *Frau und Flug: die Schwestern des Ikarus* (Marburg: Jonas Verlag, 2004), 261 p.

²⁸ V. Vantoch, *The Jet Sex: Airline Stewardesses and the Making of an American Icon* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 287 p.

²⁹ *Pan Am*, United States, ABC, 2011; T. Scott, *Top Gun* (United States, Paramount Pictures, 1986); J. Kosinski, *Top Gun: Maverick*, *op. cit.*; G. Pirès, *Les Chevaliers du ciel* (France, Mandarin Films, 2005); W. A. Wellman, *Wings* (United States, Paramount Pictures, 1927).

³⁰ The female expert Charlie, a doctor in astrophysics, is an important part of the plot of the first *Top Gun*, but she eventually gives in – figuratively and literally – to the airman. See for a more general study in the aerospace sector: M. A. Weitekamp, *Right Stuff, Wrong Sex: America's First Women in Space Program* (Baltimore Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 232 p.

twentieth century – as well as all ordinary female employees, whose absence from the historical narrative is often compounded by the silence of the archives.³¹ Nathalie Lapeyre's recent book also shows that the feminisation of the Airbus workforce, despite being on the company's political agenda, contributes to the gendered essentialisation of professional qualities and thus confines women to predefined productive roles: women are more present in mid-level management and human resources jobs.³² Some of this gender bias is partly rooted in aviation culture, which can be reduced to the following statement: "If women were meant to fly, the sky would be pink."³³

However, gender-scanning the history of aviation is not just about bringing women's work out of invisibility. Joan W. Scott made clear that "established as an objective set of references, concepts of gender structure perception and the concrete and symbolic organization of all social life."³⁴ The dynamic relationship between the feminine and the masculine is superimposed on other social interactions, particularly in the hierarchical relationships that shape the work environment. From this perspective, the limited universe of the cabin becomes an original field for social history: the professional ethos that develops there during the second half of the twentieth century is largely invested by culturally influenced gender identities, interconnected and reconfigured in relation to each other. Raewyn Connell's theory is enhanced by an examination of the relationships between pilots, stewardesses and stewards, as it is impossible to understand the formation of an avatar of hegemonic masculinity such as the pilot without taking into account the professional realities that connect him – or, as a matter of fact but to a lesser extent, her – to the other members of the crew and to the clientele (the relationship of command over the stewardess and steward, who is responsible for the safety of passengers, etc.). This analytical approach has not yet been fully explored, but various studies have already provided a significant historical framework, particularly when considering cabin crew. Phil Tiemeyer, for example, analyses the situation of American airline stewards from a queer studies perspective in a profession that has been identified as homosexual since its formalisation in the 1930s. The reactions to the alternative masculinity of these stewards and their struggles highlight the

³¹ N. Lapeyre and T. Dufour, "Femmes au travail dans l'industrie aéronautique", *Le Patrimoine. Histoire, Culture et Créations de l'Occitanie*, 58 (spring 2020), 52-59.

³² In 2018, 8 per cent of Air France Industries' technical staff were women. N. Lapeyre, *Le Nouvel Âge des femmes au travail* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2019), 207 p.; B. Pourcher, "Les Elles d'Air France", *Le Blog Gallica*, 21 September 2018, <<https://gallica.bnf.fr/blog/21092018/les-elles-dair-france>> accessed 10/06/2022.

³³ Survey response, quoted in: "Introduction", in D. Bridges, J. Neal-Smith and A. J. Mills (eds.), *Absent Aviators: Gender Issues in Aviation* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2014), 2.

³⁴ J. W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis", *The American Historical Review*, 91/5 (December 1986), 1069.

dynamics of a heteronormative aeronautical culture and provide a better understanding of the sexual and racial discrimination at work in the United States in the second half of the twentieth century.³⁵ In the current thematic issue, Tom Dufour's article discusses the *savoir-être* of the Air France stewardess from the perspective of rational corporate action. It shows that the commercial diffusion of the myth of the stewardess – based on caring, availability and eroticism – is the result of a historical process of selection, training and supervision.

In a professional environment that has been progressively deteriorated by the emergence of low-cost airlines, the commercialisation of the image of flight attendants provokes some resistance.³⁶ The work of Louis-Marie Barnier has revealed the inherent tension in the professional group of cabin crew, whose function structurally oscillates between a security imperative (valued skills) and a commercial agent role, which tends to downgrade their status in the eyes of the unions. Therefore, his article in this issue reassesses the place of the hostess's body in this evolution, whose excessive publicity impacts her professional environment.

This issue provides a reflective and in-depth follow-up to the discussions that took place during the workshop held on 22 October 2020 at the Maison de Recherche of the *Université Toulouse-Jean Jaurès*. Unfortunately, the initial parity of the colleagues invited to contribute to a publication on gender did not withstand the double-blind peer-reviews, which – to the regret of the coordinators of the issue – left a clearly unbalanced male/female ratio. However, as most of the contributors are at the beginning of their research career, we hope that similar initiatives will flourish and, in the long run, that the production of scientific knowledge will progress. It should be remembered that the analytical tools provided by gender studies are not intended to be limited to specific fields of application, and that deploying them in new fields of study will renew our understanding of the broader issue. Thus, with this issue on gender, from aeronauts to stewardesses, a whole side of aeronautical culture is now on display.

³⁵ P. J. Tiemeyer, *Plane Queer: Labor, Sexuality, and AIDS in the History of Male Flight Attendants* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 288 p.

³⁶ L.-M. Barnier, C. Calame and J. Vandewattyne, "Le low cost dans le secteur aérien: Vers une reconfiguration systémique de la production?", *Nouvelle Revue du Travail*, 12 (May 2018), <<https://doi.org/10.4000/nrt.3527>> accessed 31/05/2022.