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On the air. Radio representations of the “Conquest of the Skies” Marine Beccarelli

Radio, audio-visual media without image, is a sound medium which enters into the intimacy of homes and solicits the listeners imagination, particularly because it is not based on anything visual¹. The French film-maker Jacques Tati himself used to say that he preferred radio to the cinema “because on the radio, the screen is bigger²”.

Since the creation of the first radio stations in the early 1920’s³, the radio medium constructed itself at the crossroads of existing formats: written press, drama, or cinema. Radio offered reports, radio plays, news or popular science broadcasts⁴. Radio appeared later than the first steps of the conquest of the air, but its creation took part in the technical innovations of modernity. From the balloon flights to the space conquest tale, how did French radio seize the conquest of the air? What did radio, as an imaginary medium, produced when dealing with aviation or astronautics? How could the words from witnesses, pilots, explorers, writers, scientists and even passengers cross each other in these broadcasts?

This paper deals with the imaginary of the conquest of the air in the radio, from historical to popular science broadcasts, through reports on board of airplanes or hot-air balloons.

The sample of broadcasts used in this study has been selected with researches inside the INA⁵ database, with several key-words related to the conquest of the air. The profusion of available archives was a difficulty: in fact, more than 15 000 results came up with the key-word “airplane”. Sometimes, however, occurrences were less numerous. For instance, only 222 archives responded to the request “hot-air balloon”, or even 107 to “conquest of the air”, to use the terms of the conference at the origins of this contribution.

In order to limit this profusion of archives, we chose to move back until the oldest sources, in order to detect the first traces of aerial conquest on the radio, concentrating on archives from the 1930’s, 1940’s and 1950’s, without going further than 1969, the year of the first human steps on the moon.

There are not many French radio archives available prior to the Second World War, but still, a few records from the 1930’s remain about this topic. They are only traces however, and if these elements have been preserved, it’s probably because these broadcasts were considered

¹ Michel Mathe: “We only need to switch on the radio to start seeing images”, in MATHE Michel, *La Radio*, Toulouse, Milan, 1995.

² Jacques Tati, quoted by CAVELIER Patrice and MOREL-MAROGER Olivier, *La Radio*, Paris, PUF, coll. “Que sais-je”, 2008, p. 121. Our translation. According to others, this sentence was pronounced by the american filmmaker Orson Welles.

³ About the beginning of radio in France: BROCHAND Christian, *Histoire générale de la radio et de la télévision en France, Tome I (1921-1944)*, Paris, La Documentation française, 1994 ; ULMANN-MAURIAT Caroline, *Naissance d'un média. Histoire politique de la radio en France (1921-1931)*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1999 ; MEADEL Cécile, *Histoire de la radio des années trente : du sans-filiste à l'auditeur*, Paris, Anthropos-Economica/INA, 1994. For a broader history of radio, see also JEANNENEY Jean-Noël (ed.), *L'Écho du siècle, Dictionnaire historique de la radio et de la télévision en France*, Paris, Pluriel, 2001.

⁴ About the history of media and mass culture: CAZENAVE Élisabeth and ULMANN-MAURIAT Caroline, *Presse, radio et télévision en France de 1631 à nos jours*, Paris, Hachette, 1995 ; D'ALMEIDA Fabrice and DELPORTE Christian, *Histoire des médias en France, de la Grande Guerre à nos jours*, Flammarion, collection Champs Université, 2003 ; RIOUX Jean-Pierre and SIRINELLI Jean-François (ed.), *La Culture de masse en France de la Belle Époque à aujourd'hui*, Paris, Fayard, 2002 et MOLLIER Jean-Yves, SIRINELLI Jean-François, VALLOTTON François (ed.), *Culture de masse et culture médiatique en Europe et dans les Amériques, 1860-1940*, Paris, PUF, 2006

⁵ Institut National de l'Audiovisuel – National Institute of Audiovisual.

particularly worthy of interest, whereas a huge majority of radio broadcasts made prior to 1940 has disappeared. This lack of archives is a recurrent problem for the historians studying radio, even if it's possible to fill this absence by crossing the lack of sources with other types of archives, such as radio schedule newspapers, for instance⁶.

At first, historiography about French radio built itself mainly in some political and institutional dimensions. After 1995 and the opening of the InaTHEQUE, a research centre giving access to the archives of French public radio and television⁷, the development of studies more specifically about the broadcasts and their contents became possible. Some works had then been done about the history of certain types of radio shows (detective plays⁸, radio games⁹, or news¹⁰), while some historians proposed monographic approaches about specific broadcasts¹¹. Radio is sometimes studied as an object of history, but it can also be used as a source for historians, next to other archives, written or audio-visual.

For this study, we listened to several available archives and grouped them between three main types of broadcasts related to the conquest of the air. These three groups were also used as a structure for this paper. First, there are some shows of history and memory, consisting in collecting the talks of the pioneers, witnesses and actors of the first flights. Then, some radio professionals have produced broadcasts enabling to follow the news of the conquest, close to the events themselves, sometimes even on reports on board. Finally, there are some shows less realistic, distant from the news, consisting of creative broadcasts: radio dramas. With the INA archives, it will be interesting to wonder if radio could create some particular poetics about flights in the sky and space, thanks especially to some radio processes, such as sound effects and musical illustrations. Overall, we will analyse how radio participated to construct the idea of a conquest of the air.

⁶ We can see some monographic studies about radio stations in particular. In these books, the authors use more written sources than sound sources: BERNARD Luc, *Europe 1, la grande histoire dans une grande radio*, Paris, Centurion, 1990; MARÉCHAL Denis, *RTL, histoire d'une radio populaire. De Radio Luxembourg à Rtl.fr*, Paris, Nouveau Monde Edition, 2010 and LEFEBVRE Thierry, *Carbone 14 : légende et histoire d'une radio pas comme les autres*, Paris, Bry-Sur-Marne, 2012.

⁷ Archives preserved by the National Institute of Audiovisual / l'Institut National de l'Audiovisuel.

⁸ BAUDOU Jacques, *Radio Mystères. Le théâtre radiophonique policier, fantastique et de science-fiction*, Paris, Encrage / Ina, 1997.

⁹ SCHMITT Marie-Paule, *Les Jeux radiophoniques entre 1944 et 1974*, Thèse de l'école des Chartes, 2005.

¹⁰ DONZELLE Béatrice, *Le Journal parlé de France Inter dans les années 1960 : journalisme de service public et propagande en démocratie*, thèse d'histoire contemporaine, sous la direction de Christian DELPORTE, Université de Versailles-Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines, 2013.

¹¹ For instance: BAUMGARTNER Thomas, *L'Oreille en coin*, Paris, Nouveau Monde Editions, 2007 et PERRIN Anne-Cécile, *L'Émission radiophonique Le Masque et la plume de Michel Polac et François-Régis Bastide à Jérôme Garcin (1954-...)*, mémoire de maîtrise d'histoire contemporaine sous la direction de Pascale GOETSCHER and Pascal ORY, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, 2003.

1. Broadcasts about history and memory

Radio didn't exist at the beginning of the conquest of the air – it was invented in the late 19th century¹² –, but it accompanied its rise and development. Wireless telegraphy was even widely used by the pioneers of this conquest, who equipped the airships since the beginning of the 20th century¹³, and soon the airplanes as well, a decade before radio stations destined to the public appeared. The first communication through a radio emitter between the ground and a plane occurred in the United States in 1910¹⁴. Even if the main concern for flights during those years was to manage to stay longer and longer in the air, finding the fastest way of transmission was essential. In France, the first experiences were led during spring 1911 by Captain Paul Brénot¹⁵. They were transmissions of 30 miles around Paris – The Eiffel tower was used as a reception antenna. The First World War considerably accelerated the diffusion of this technique, wireless telegraphy becoming the most efficient way of communication, while aviation was progressing very quickly during the conflict.

After the Great War, radio soon left the only spheres of army and radio amateurs to meet the general audience. The public station of Eiffel Tower started to broadcast daily from the 24th of December 1921, and the private station Radio took office in November 1922¹⁶.

The oldest sound French radio archives available are from the 1930's. According to these sources, French radio during that time regularly offered stories about the first exploits and first steps of the conquest of the air, recording afterwards tales from the pioneers, heroics figures of this story. Doing so, radio workers were collecting records of the people still alive. These sound archives now constitute a precious material for any researcher interested in aviation history.

These archives are usually short, and were generally broadcast during the news programs. For instance, in a record from May 1936, the first man who had flight above the Eiffel Tower in 1909¹⁷ – The Comte de Lambert –, is narrating his exploit and tells how he learned about aviation from the American pioneer Wilbur Wright¹⁸.

¹² The invention of transmission through radio or wireless telegraphy is attributed to Guglielmo Marconi in 1895. His work was inspired by discoveries from several people before him. BALK Alfred, *The Rise of Radio, From Marconi through the Golden Age*, Jefferson, McFarland & Company, 2006.

¹³ The airships could easily be equipped with wireless telegraphy transmitters, their weight was not an obstacle for these flying machines.

¹⁴ It was done close to New-York, at Sheepshead Bay, by a Canadian, John A. D. McCurdy. Other experiences were taking place at the same period in different places, and several countries claim the primacy of this event. HEDIN Arnaud, *Les Liaisons entre le sol et l'avion durant la Première Guerre mondiale : naissance et évolution*, mémoire de Master Histoire des techniques, sous la direction de Anne-Françoise GARÇON, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, 2016, p. 103.

¹⁵ See BRENOT Paul, *Le Siècle de la T.S.F.*, Paris, éditions de Minuit, 1959.

¹⁶ See BROCHAND Christian, *Histoire générale de la radio et de la télévision en France, t. I (1921-1944)*, *op. cit.*, pp. 48-49. Sur les débuts de la radio voir aussi ULMANN-MAURIAT Caroline, *Naissance d'un média. Histoire politique de la radio en France (1929-1931)*, *op. cit.*

¹⁷ *Le Petit Parisien*, 19th of October 1909.

¹⁸ About Wilbur Wright and his brother Orville, see D. CROUCH Tom, *The Bishop's Boys: A Life of Wilbur and Orville Wright*, New York, W. W. Norton, 1989 and CHAMPONNOIS Sylvain, « Les Wright et l'armée française : les débuts de l'aviation militaire (1900-1909) », *Revue historique des armées*, n° 255, Service historique de la Défense, 2009, pp. 108-121.

Anniversaries were often the occasion to record speech from aviation history actors. In 1938, for the 30th anniversary of the first kilometre in a plane by Henri Farman¹⁹, radio broadcast a tale from the aviator²⁰. Another example, in September 1946, thirty-six years after the Peruvian pioneer Geo Chavez²¹ had crossed the Alps by plane, before being killed at the end of this crossing, three of his friends evoked his memory on the national radio: Jean Bielovucic²², Raymond Saladin and Léon Bathiat, three French men who were also pioneers of aviation. In this record they were speaking about the different preparation phases of this crossing, as well as about the accident.

By collecting these tales after the Second World War, French then nationalized²³ radio was paying tribute to this generation of first conquerors of the air, recording voices of these elderly men. Radio participated to construct the imaginary of the conquest of the air memory²⁴, of a national history in which the role of French pilots was often exaggerated. As the historian of imaginary aviation pioneer François Lucbert and Stéphane Tison underlined it, every country involved in the course for aeronautic progress managed to build “an ideal tale around its national figures²⁵”. These speeches broadcast on the radio and collected decades after the events were necessarily oriented by these discourses, and distorted by the filter of memories and time.

Even if the majority of aviation pioneers were men, radio sometimes paid tribute to women engaged in the aviation beginnings. In May 1949, while the French pioneer Marie Marvingt just obtained the literary price from the Women’s Aeronautical Association of Los Angeles for her brochure “My crossing of the North Sea with a balloon”, she narrated at the radio microphone this episode from November 1909, forty years later:

I left from Nancy, crossed Alsace-Lorraine, Belgium, North Germany, Holland, and I left earth above Amsterdam. From there I crossed 200 kilometres in a middle of a November storm [...]. Around half past one in the morning I arrived in Southwold, south-west England. This trip had never been done again by any pilot. Afterwards I realised several raids above the Manche Sea, as many of my comrades, but it has never been done again above the North Sea. Trust me, this is a kind of memory which stays for ever²⁶!

This woman aviator, born in 1875, was then 74²⁷. Titular of the pilot’s licence for plane, balloon, and seaplane, she was also a nurse and an alpinist. This short interview – less than three minutes

¹⁹ Flight of one minute and 28 seconds completed above Issy-Les-Moulineaux, close to Paris, the 13th of January 1908.

²⁰ In this archive, his words are however almost inaudible.

²¹ His real name was Jorge Chavez Dartnell. He was yet born in Paris in 1887.

²² Jean Bielovucic realised the second aerial crossing of the Alps in 1913, after Geo Chavez.

²³ At the end of the summer 1944, the freed France installed a State monopole of radio (RN) which prohibited the existence of private radio stations. This monopole still existed until 1981, even if it was bypassed, with the phenomenon of peripheral radio, such as Radio Luxembourg and Europe n°1. Their transmitters were settled outside the French borders.

²⁴ About the imaginary of french aviation pioneers, see LUCBERT Françoise and TISON Stéphane (ed.), *L’imaginaire de l’aviation pionnière. Contribution à l’histoire des représentations de la conquête aérienne, 1903-1927*, Rennes, PUR, 2016.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

²⁶ « Marie Marvingt dit comment elle a traversé la mer en ballon », 15 mai 1949, archive Ina. Our translation.

²⁷ She will be decorated *Officier de la légion d’honneur* some months later, in December 1949.

long – constitutes one of the rare records of her voice. She was later interviewed three times for the television, in the mid' 1950's, when she was over 80²⁸. These television archives²⁹ show an old and very confident woman, enumerating in a rather automatic way the list of her records and distinctions.

According to one of her biographer Rosalie Maggio³⁰, “at the end of her life, some people were suspicious about everything she was telling. All these exploits, it was too much³¹ ”. It's interesting to see how, with the time, the advances of air pioneers were moving away from the reality as the technical progress was going on and the aviation becoming banal.

An archive particularly illustrates this phenomenon: a broadcast from June 1955 named *L'Avion a son histoire*³². In this thirty-minute programme, the journalist Georges Jouin narrates the history of flying machines and aviation pioneers, in order to remind their exploits to the listeners of the 1950's. At the beginning of this broadcast, the journalist insists on the fact that everyone finds then normal the aviation progresses:

We were almost not surprised the other day when Le Trident went through the sound barrier in ascending speed³³. We found it very natural as well when the Alouette helicopter beat the world speed record for helicopter by going largely above the altitude of 8000 meters. In fact, the 20th century man considers the plane as its thing, and aviation as a possibility with infinite techniques. And yet, it was not so long ago when nobody believed that the heavier than air could fly. Today, when a man is in a hurry he can choose between the plane and the car, and when he gets an ocean to cross he doesn't hesitate anymore, he rents his seats onboard the first plane leaving. He arrives on time, calm and rested, after having slept and eaten onboard. *Sounds of a plane engine*. When you hear the engine throbbing of a *Breguet deux ponts* named Provence, do you get the impression that 51 600 kilograms, 51 tonnes 600 are suspended above your head? No, we really don't think any more about the inventive genius of precise and methodical work needed by the plane crossing our sky so quickly.

Mysterious music. And yet, so much patience and perseverance were needed from Clement Ader when, after he had dissected a bat, he started to build the first mechanical engine which ever flight in the world, and which looked strangely like this bat. You can judge it by yourself if you go admire it at the Conservatoire des Arts et Métiers in Paris³⁴.

The relation to progress evoked in this archive is particularly interesting. Even if the nascent aviation has not been immediately perceived as an advance which could generalize³⁵, radio and

²⁸ In 1955, for her 80 years old birthday, she flied above Nancy onboard a US supersonic hunter, accompanied by an US Air Force officer. The same year, she passed her helicopter licence.

²⁹ See « Marie Marvingt, la fiancée de l'aventure », 1955/03/14, RTF ; « Réussir » 1957/01/01, RTF ; et « Magazine féminin », 1958/01/02, RTF, archives Ina.

³⁰ CORDIER Marcel, MAGGIO Rosalie, *Marie Marvingt, la femme d'un siècle*, Paris, Pierron, 1991.

³¹ Words collected by BAUDAIS Pierrick, « Aviation, cyclisme, alpinisme... Marie Marvingt, « la fiancée du danger » oubliée », *Ouest France*, 5th of January 2018. Yet, several articles from the early 20th century related the exploits of this pioneer. See for instance ARCHDEACON Ernest, « Mademoiselle Marvingt. Une sportswoman extraordinaire », *La Revue aérienne*, 25th of December 1910.

³² « L'avion a son histoire », *Le Monde comme il va*, Chaîne parisienne, 15 juin 1955, archive Ina.

³³ Piloted by Charles Goujon, the SO-9050 « Trident » was the first plane to pass the sound barrier, the 4th of June 1955.

³⁴ Georges Jouin, « L'avion a son histoire », *op. cit.* Our translation.

³⁵ GUILLEMAIN Hervé, « L'aéroplane fantôme. Fantômes, frayeurs et transferts dans les premières représentations de l'aviation », in LUCBERT Françoise and TISON Stéphane (ed.), *L'imaginaire de*

media finally participated to build an evidence of technical progress and its acceptance. Before the radio, newspapers³⁶ had widely contribute to trivalize this invention of aviation, which, until then, and for several generations, had only been a dream, supposedly inaccessible³⁷. Quickly, nascent aviation technical exploits had been treated and related as sportive exploits³⁸, while the notions of risk and danger constituted a background behind the development of this technique³⁹. Following the “aerial mythology” coined by the French historian Pascal Ory⁴⁰, after the era of the fulfilled dream at the beginning of the 20th century, aviation still got a fabulous dimension before the second World War, but it became, at the end of the conflict, a kind of “ordinary miracle”.

With this radio broadcast, the journalist Georges Jouin contributed to remind to the 1950s listeners what the aviation was at its beginnings, insisting on the extraordinary dimension of a miraculous phenomenon which had yet become ordinary, and on the fact that technical progress had never been something unalterable and inexorable. This journalist interviews Charles Dollfus, pilot and conservator of the Musée de l’Air⁴¹, as well as colonel Bellanger, pilot pioneer. It’s interesting to notice that the pilot Charles Dollfus had been one of the first French historian working about aerial history⁴². These two men are thus actors and authors of this history at the same time. At the end of the radio program, colonel Bellanger concludes by saying that with aviation progresses and the technical ameliorations, the “feeling of the bird” or the “aerial feeling” of the old days had disappeared. When becoming banal, an “ordinary miracle”, aviation had partly distended the link between the humans and the air itself.

Multiple aerial sound effects were used in this broadcast – plane engines, wind blowing –, as well as several music, some of them being particularly oneiric. Radio medium could here contribute to immerge the audience into sound and bodily lost sensations. In fact, one of the strengths of radio is this ability to plunge listeners into a particular sound universe, and to make them feel sensations again⁴³, because sound is intimately linked with emotion and imagination, as mentioned by Richard Hand, specialised in Britannic radio dramas:

Contrary to expectations, music or a particular voice or auditory ambience can conjure up a memory or a feeling more profoundly than a snapshot image – or object from – a time and place⁴⁴.

l'aviation pionnière, op. cit., pp. 211-220.

³⁶ LENOBLE Benoît, « L'aéroplane et le ballon vus par le journal. Technique aérienne et imaginaire médiatique en France (de 1906 au début des années 1920) », *Hypothèses*, 2006/1 (9), pp. 209-220.

³⁷ ROSEAU Nathalie and THÉBAUD-SORGER Marie (ed.), *L'Emprise du vol. De l'invention à la massification. Histoire d'une culture moderne*, Genève, Métis Presses, 2013.

³⁸ ROBÈNE Luc, « Exploits techniques, exploits sportifs ? Le traitement médiatique de l'aviation dans la revue *La Vie au Grand Air* (1900-1914) », in LUCBERT Françoise and TISON Stéphane (ed.), *L'imaginaire de l'aviation pionnière, op. cit.*, pp. 119-146.

³⁹ About the question of acceptance or refusal of technical progress, see JARRIGE François, *Techno-critiques. Du refus des machines à la contestation des technosciences*, Paris, La Découverte, 2014 and FRESSOZ Jean-Baptiste, *L'Apocalypse joyeuse : Une histoire du risque technologique*, Paris, Seuil, Coll. L'univers historique, 2012.

⁴⁰ ORY Pascal, *La Légende des airs, images et objets de l'aviation*, Paris, Hoëbeke, 1991, pp. 11-13.

⁴¹ Aerial Museum.

⁴² BOUCHÉ Henri, DOLLFUS Charles, *Histoire de l'aéronautique*, Paris, L'Illustration, 1932. The first historians of the aerial fact were often pilots themselves. The first experiences of flight had an impact on this history. See LUCBERT Françoise and TISON Stéphane (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 11-12.

⁴³ About the sensorial dimension of radio, we can read two studies about the radio imaginary in the United States: DOUGLAS Susan J., *Listening in. Radio and the american imagination*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press edition, 2004 and KEITH Michaël C. (ed.), *Radio Cultures, The sound medium in American life*, New York, Peter Lang, 2008.

⁴⁴ HAND Richard J., *Listen in terror. British horror radio from the advent of broadcasting to the digital age*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2014, p. 15.

Thanks to its evocative power, sound can act as a kind of “madeleine de Proust” for those who had known the nascent aviation, and can even create for the listeners majority, foreigner to the pioneer aviation, a feeling of nostalgia about a time they even didn’t lived in. We don’t have any access to sources which could help us to apprehend the reception of this particular broadcast, as well the radio archives studied for this paper. However, some listeners letters sent to other radio hosts⁴⁵ underline the emotional force of evocation provoked by radio sound, this ability to virtually transport to other times and spaces⁴⁶.

If French radio narrated and recalled exploits from the past, broadcasts tend also to deal with the most recent achievements, and to anticipate about the future.

2. Broadcasts about the current events of the conquest

Behind this historical and sometimes dreamy dimension of collecting pioneer’s words, the media radio tended to follow closely the different steps of the conquest of the air, and even to make them lived live. This ability of instantaneity was one of the advantages of radio compared to written press, because sound media could give almost immediately the floor to pilots, to heroes of new feats and records, shortly after their landing. This rapidity also allowed the unhappier stories about accidents. Sometimes, a journalist reporter was even on board of an engine, in order to live the experience from the inside, and to make it live, through the air, to his listeners. This ability of radio to immerge into present time had been synthetized by Pierre Schaeffer:

Cinema can say “I was there”, radio says “I am here”. The present tense belongs to radio.
[...] I could even say that this is not what is happening which interests us, but the naked fact that in this moment something is happening⁴⁷.

⁴⁵ For a PhD about the history of night-time radio in France, we studied deeply some letters from listeners, sent to José Artur and Macha Béranger, both radio hosts on public station France Inter in the second half of the 20th century. Privates archives of José Artur /Archives of Macha Béranger: CAC, AN, Radio France, Fonds Macha Béranger, 19980208, articles 1 to 7.

⁴⁶ See for instance the letter from a man incarcerated in prison, who listened to Macha Béranger’s show before his detention: “I find again every night with pleasure the Macha I listened to in 1978, around 2 or 3 am, I was free then... Now, between 10 pm and midnight, I just need to close my eyes to be free again. Thank you miss Macha », CAC, AN, 19980208/1, 1986, File A, Letter from Patrick C., Muret Jail, 18th of August 1986.

⁴⁷ SCHAEFFER Pierre, *Machines à communiquer*, Paris, Seuil, 1970, p. 85. Our translation.

2.1. Event's tales: words form the heroes of the time

As well as in the broadcasts memory previously evoked, event's tales broadcast live or shortly after their happening contributed to build legendary persons, national heroic figures. Pilots became heroes because the press and media followed them, being the voice for their adventures and misadventures, covering their records and accidents⁴⁸.

Writer and pilot Antoine de Saint-Exupéry was one of these national figures, particularly followed by the French press. In a radio archive from January 1936⁴⁹, he narrated the accident he just had in the Libyan desert, during a Paris-Saigon raid⁵⁰. Back in Marseille he told about the event in the radio microphone. If he saved the exclusivity of his words to the newspaper *L'Intransigeant*, in which he would publish in several episodes the tale of the accident and the days which followed in the desert⁵¹, he first narrated on the radio a condensed version of this story. Here is an extract of this seven minutes and a half radiophonic tale, which was first written by the writer-aviator and then read by him with a calm and serene voice:

I decided to let myself slide under the clouds after having tacked straight to the North, so that I could receive in my left window [...] the fires from the towns I supposed I had passed. During this manoeuvre and already outside the clouds, on the height 400 on my altimeter, on the real height around 300, that I crashed into the ground. Even if I was outside the cumulus, I didn't see anything. Yet I was busy, at this moment, to look under myself for some lights, but a light and low fog split on the desert created a false impression of depth. The night, overlooked by cumulus, was extremely opaque. The first crack, instead of ending with the definitive crash, prolonged in the cabin, as an earthquake. I was subjected to a continuing tremor, of an extreme violence, which extended for about six seconds. I didn't know how to interpret this phenomenon, when I suffered the stop tremor, which was stronger than the other, and destroyed the right aisle. [...] Prévot⁵² and I jumped outside the plane, fearing the fire. With an electric lamp, I inspected right away the ground, which was composed of sand, covered with black rocks. [...] Not any blade of grass, not any trace of vegetation. I made a long tour, with Prévot and his lamp as a landmark, and I finally admitted that I crashed in the desert⁵³.

⁴⁸ About the construction of legends and heroic figures, see LUCBERT Françoise and TISON Stéphane (ed.), *op. cit.*, 4th section « La création des légendes », pp. 247-293. See also TISON Stéphane, « Du sportsman au combattant : archéologie de la figure de l'as (1910-1916) », in ROBÈNE Luc (ed.), *Le Sport et la guerre XIX^e et XX^e siècle*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2012, pp. 345-355

⁴⁹ The date of this archive is the 1st of January 1936, but there is a mistake, because Saint-Exupéry and his mechanic and friend Prévot came back in the Cairo only the 3rd of January.

⁵⁰ The 29th of December 1935, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry and his mechanic and André Prévot were victim from a forced landing in the desert. They would pass three days in the desert, suffering from thirst and hunger, before being found by a Bedouins caravan.

⁵¹ This story, entitled « Le Vol brisé. Prison de sable » (The broken flight. Prison of sand) was published daily in episodes, from the 30th of January 1936.

⁵² André Prévot, his mechanic.

⁵³ « Antoine de Saint Exupéry à propos de son atterrissage forcé en Tripolitaine », recorded in Marseille, 1st of January 1936, archive Ina. Our translation.

This story, very detailed from a technical point of view, is also particularly literary, with an epic dimension. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry describes the landscapes, the material, the indication numbers given by the different dials in his plane, and tells about the physical difficulties endured, particularly during the last 85 kilometres walk through the desert, before André Prévot and him were saved by a caravan. He describes hunger, thirst, tiredness, nausea, tactical changes. The grain of this sound archive and the sobriety of his voice contribute to give to this tale a particularly strong emotional load. The mental images might enter easier into the listener's mind, because this story is narrated with the first person, and even by the aviator's voice himself. Without any archive allowing us to apprehend the reception of this tale, we can suppose that this broadcast of a legendary figure's voice on the radio⁵⁴ could create a particular emotion, the feeling, for the listeners, to be a privileged interlocutor of the survived pilot. Researchers working on radio agree to say that radio is an intimate media⁵⁵, with which the listener often get the impression that the person speaking on the radio is "addressing to oneself⁵⁶". Contrary to a broadcast as *L'Avion a son histoire*, there is no sound effects and no music there, only the aviator's naked voice, the voice of a man who risked his life to realise a new raid and narrates, after the event, how he survived from this accident.

This broadcast contributes to consolidate the heroic and even mythic figure of Antoine de Saint Exupéry⁵⁷. If this accident actually happened, Saint-Exupéry necessarily staged a little bit his experience for the radio. This broadcast echoes with the travel tales shows, some radio programs of stories narrated to the listeners, with dimensions of exotic and change of scene.

The aerial raids of the interwar period were spectacular and particularly well adapted to the media. Shaped for mediatic tales, cut in episodes, these raids could keep the audience in suspense for days. Moreover, the tales of accidents, insisting on the dangers and the risks, contributed to straighten the mythic stature of the air heroes.

Sometimes, radio gives floor to the aviation heroes for happier episodes, particularly for records. For example, in June 1951, the radio broadcast a speech from Jacqueline Auriol, "fastest woman pilot in the world" who just beat a speed record with a jet aeroplane. With an hesitant voice, she incidentally said that she was "very intimidated⁵⁸".

This archive contributed also to shape the figures of heroes and heroines of the air, whereas Jacqueline Auriol had been victim of a serious accident two years earlier. By insisting on her embarrassment with the microphone, this female aviator showed that in spite of her aerial abilities, she stayed a rather ordinary woman, not prepared to express herself for the radio.

⁵⁴ In the 1930's, radio was still quite a heavy dispositive. Radio receivers were a sort of furniture, large and massive, which stayed in the middle of the living room, and around which family gathered to take the programs, collectively.

⁵⁵ See for instance MOUANDJO Bionbi, LEWIS Pierre, MBIANDA Patrice, *Théorie et pratique de la communication*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2010, p. 689. See also CRISELL Andrew, *Understanding Radio*, London, Routledge, 1994 and STARKEY Guy, « La bande sonore de nos vies », *Médiamorphoses*, n°28, 2008. About the reception of media: GOETSCHER Pascale, JOST François, TSIKOUNAS Myriam (ed.), *Lire, voir, entendre : la réception des objets médiatiques*, Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne, 2010.

⁵⁶ CAVELIER Patrice, MOREL-MAROGER Olivier, *La Radio*, op. cit., p. 99.

⁵⁷ At that time, he was already an almost legendary figure. His disappearance during three days kept the press and media in suspense.

⁵⁸ « Jacqueline Auriol, femme pilote la plus rapide du monde », *Le ciel est à vous : Magazine de l'aviation*, 27th of June 1951, archive Ina.

Even if the figure of plane pilot became more and more common, it still benefited with time from a great social prestige, and some radio broadcasts insisted on this status, particularly after the Second World War. Sometimes, pilots were interviewed after having tested new aeroplanes⁵⁹, some other times the merit and stature of the pilots were analysed and enhanced for themselves, especially air force pilots. In a chronic from September 1945 name “the new race of aviation pilots”, commandant Jules Roy explained, in a poetic and literary way, that the souls of pilots had been brutally transformed by the violence of the war. He opposed the idealised figure of the “prince⁶⁰” of the air, filling the imagination, to the reality of the men who served during the conflict:

This prince who gets out of his cabin, the hair full of wind, only gets a kingdom of illusion. He passes, as the wind blows in the trees, he slams the doors, wrinkles the waters. [...] He doesn't know any dream, neither any rest. He is the wind. When he disappears [...] it's because he felt asleep some hours in a port of call room. Then he goes back on the road, always uncatchable, acid or tender, unleashing its gusts, or landing in the sweetness of a summer night, with an aureole of legend.

But he didn't embrace anything. Nothing from his victory remains, because he won them on enemies he is the only one to meet. Mist, blocked pass, flight without visibility, fire, icing, mountains hidden under the clouds, radio breakdown, fear. He didn't keep anything for himself, and yet he is here. He passed the anxiety river, blindfolded. [...] He is his own victory as he is his own fight, but he is the only one to know it. Not prince anymore, but conductor of a train launched at 400 kilometres per hour in the fog with a loading of bombs, and risks of derailment. To escape, he should leave his own envelope of habits and flesh, as a city encircled by the enemy. [...] Men observe him discretely, looking for his reactions. They think he's strong, and he is, in fact, but he knows his weaknesses, and he analyses them constantly, trying to defeat them. When it's his turn to be beaten, and that a judgement error or a treason for the engine crashes him against a hill, he is the gladiator that a knee tackles on the ground, and who waits for the grace of an indifferent king⁶¹.

With this column the commandant pays homage to the deceased pilots during the Second World War, insisting on the gap between dreams of ideal flights and the use of military aviation, as the aerial dimension was particularly important during the conflict⁶².

In the same spirit, several radio reports were broadcast about the aerial school of Salon-de-Provence during the years following the war, bringing at the foreground the military aviation and its future recruits. For instance, a report broadcast in April 1947 dealt with the role of these school promotions during the last war, about the important losses endured, as well as about the recruitment of line pilots formed by the air force. In another broadcast from 1948, several

⁵⁹ See, for instance, « Interview d'un pilote d'un avion ». Chaîne nationale, 1st of June 1946, archive Ina.

⁶⁰ This use of the word « prince » is also probably a reference to “The Little Prince”, and then to Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, disappeared in the Mediterranean Sea with his plane in July 1944, while he was effecting a mission of photographic reconnaissance in order to prepare the landing of Provence.

⁶¹ « La race nouvelle des pilotes d'aviation », *Paris vous parle*, Chaîne nationale, 2nd of September 1945, archive Ina. Our translation.

⁶² About the aviation during the Second World War, see: GARRAUD Philippe, « L'action de l'armée de l'air en 1939-1940 : facteurs structurels et conjoncturels d'une défaite », *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, 2001/2 (n° 202-203), pp. 7-31.

aspirants of the school were invited to express themselves in the show from André Gillois⁶³ *Vous avez la parole*, to speak about their preoccupations. The first of them is speaking about the marital status of the officers, saying that despite the inherent difficulties of the profession, it is better for them to be able to get married and create a family if they want to⁶⁴.

2.2. A point about the technical progresses: creation of desire

Outside a strictly heroic and epic story of the events, pilots or scientists were regularly taking stock of the situation about the last technical progresses on aviation – those recently realised, and those which remained unaccomplished.

For instance, in 1937, the aviator Paul Codos⁶⁵ confided to the radio the difficulties of crossing the North Atlantic, which made then impossible the establishment of a regular liaison. The ideal of technical progress is underlining this report, calling to always go upper and upper, to beat records, and to improve continuously the material in order to be more performant. The journalist found itself dreaming about a future regular plane liaison between Europe and the United States, invited the audience to join him in his reverie.

Journalist: As pathetic settled men, let's go further and even upper, with the pilot Codos who just comes back from a 27 000 kilometres journey. Tell me, can we speak a little bit about the North Atlantic?

Paul Codos: It's very delicate to speak about it. There, the problem remains entire. We can obviously make some short-live demonstration flight, but if we really want to get some result, we need a very wide politic of material. Notice that if this material wouldn't work on the North Atlantic, it would be still useful on the South Atlantic.

Sounds of engine.

Journalist: Thanks to the patient heroism and reasonable recklessness of these men, the regular liaison Europe-America will soon be a comfortable reality. To when, dear listeners, weekends in New-York⁶⁶?

This broadcast might have contributed to arouse the audience desire and solicit its imagination⁶⁷. In the same way, it was notably from the press that the imaginary of aeroplane had finally beaten the desire of balloon, at the early 20th, as showed by the historian Benoît Lenoble⁶⁸.

This regular liaison between Europe and the United States, dreamed in 1937, was then set up almost 10 years later, in 1946. The 6th of December 1946, day of the inauguration of this first commercial line between New-York and Paris, a journalist from the national radio was present

⁶³ André Gillois, from his real name Maurice Diamant-Berger was one of the voice of the BBC French service during the war. After the war, he was one major figure of the national French radio.

⁶⁴ « École de l'air de Salon de Provence », *Vous avez la parole*, Chaîne parisienne, 3 septembre 1948

⁶⁵ Some years earlier, the 7th of August 1933, the aviator had beaten the world record of distance in a straight line. He took off in New York and landed in Rayak, Lebanon, after 55 hours and 9104 kilometres without any stop.

⁶⁶ « Paul Codos à propos de la traversée de l'Atlantique Nord », *Actualités*, 18th of December 1937, archive Ina. Our translation.

⁶⁷ About desires provoked by the media, see: CITTON Yves (ed.), « Envôtements médiatiques », *Multitudes* 2012/4 (n° 51), pp. 56-64; ZIELINSKI Siegfried, *Deep Time of the Media*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2006.

⁶⁸ LENOBLE Benoît, « L'aéroplane et le ballon vus par le journal. Technique aérienne et imaginaire médiatique en France (de 1906 au début des années 1920) », *Hypothèses*, 2006/1 (9), pp. 209-220.

in the Orly tarmac for the landing. He collected opinions from passengers and people there to assist to this inauguration. The journalist insisted on several occasions on the fact that with this new line, French people were entering in a new era. In fact, this step of the aerial conquest opened the door to a new way of traveling and apprehending the north-American continent, creating a proximity link more obvious. This new possibility arrived just after the Second World War, at a time when the United States still benefited from a positive image in France, the image of Allies who played an important role during the landings and the outcome of the conflict. With this report, listeners from a wide part of France⁶⁹ could be witnesses of this historical time, and have the feeling to be part of the event, almost on the airport ground too. While aviation reduces geographic distances with foreign countries, radio, since its creation, abolishes also distances and frontiers. Radio immerses listeners from geographic and social origins different into the same bath, making them live the event, and linking them between each other, creating an “imagined community” of listeners, as developed by Benedict Anderson⁷⁰.

Apart the mythic and idealistic figure of pilots described earlier, to pilot oneself a private plane became even progressively a hobby almost accessible. In a broadcast from 1956, named “Aerial tourists”, the journalist Georges Jouin invite the audience to get on a little private plane in order to leave the terrestrial and noisy world, and then to see things from above.

Sounds from horns, noisy rumble of a big city.

Oh! no, no. What a noise, what a hullabaloo! Oh! Where’s the bird song and the sound of the wind in the trees? Is that true that we have to hear all of this to walk on the surface of the earth? This cacophony kills me! And you? Would you mind a change of atmosphere?

Do you want to take a plane? A small little private plane, and I can lead you to Brussels, Dijon, Nice! You don’t want to? Of course, planes make some noise too, but it’s a regular noise, at least. And when you’re on a plane you can see things from so much above! Come on, make a little effort! I take you!

Sound of a starting engine⁷¹.

In this broadcast, Georges Jouin was pretending to plan a trip with a private plane – checking the condition of the aeroplane and the weather forecast, before visiting a flying club from the Touring Club de France, where he interviewed some members. Listening to this report, we can at first get the impression that it has become easy and accessible to flight some private plane. In reality, it’s necessary to qualify this archive: such a practice remained then a hobby for a happy few. This show was realised by the French public radio, around ten years after the end of the Second World War, when the government was willing to develop aerial sport activities and formation of young pilots. However, this broadcast insisted on the problem of the price, which remained a problematic obstacle for the development of this practice, despite a tax reduction on petrol for aviation.

Moreover, several radio broadcasts contributed to fuel the dream of always pursuing further the

⁶⁹ Even if, at that moment, the web of radio transmitters, which had been widely destroyed during the war, is still not repaired.

⁷⁰ ANDERSON Benedict, *Imagined communities*, London, Verso, 1983.

⁷¹ « Touristes de l’air », *Documents*, 9th of January 1956, archive Ina. Our translation.

aerial conquest, until the hope to reach one day outer space. For instance, in a broadcast from November 1945 called “Jet engines and the future of aeronautics”, an engineer from the Minister of the Air⁷² was interviewed about the functioning of jet engines, while a speed record of 980 kilometres per hour had just been accomplished by an American pilot. This engineer affirmed that the sound barrier would be passed soon, hoping that after that, “the quest for progress would be able to continue⁷³”.

In 1948, the journalist Stéphane Pizella hosted a show called “The future of artificial satellites”, in which he interviewed the physician Albert Ducrocq, who wrote a book about interplanetary navigation⁷⁴. This scientist described future possibilities to launch orbital artificial satellites around the earth, imagining a “flying island” which could be “an inestimable place for studies”.

2.3. On board broadcasts: immersive reports to live the event

Radio also offered onboard broadcasts, in order to make the audience experience flights from the inside.

In November 1946, some days after the inaugural flight of the first French jet aeroplane⁷⁵, and in the context of the International Aviation fair in Paris⁷⁶, a report was broadcast onboard of an English jet engine. For the armies of the industrial great powers, the afterwar corresponded to the transition to propulsion aviation to jet aviation.

The journalist Raymond Marcillac embarked on board a modified Avro Lancastrian⁷⁷, behind a Royal Air Force captain Thomas Sheperd, for a demonstration flight. The day before⁷⁸, this pilot realised the trip London-Le Bourget with this plane equipped with two piston engines and two jet engines, in order to get to the international aviation fair. It was the first time that a jet plane did a civil flight from one country to another with passengers⁷⁹. That is how the 18th of November 1946, French listeners could listen to a distant and elusive voice on their radio for some minutes:

Hello, hello! Raymond Marcillac speaking, who is onboard an English Lancastrian plane, which is a plane with mixed propulsion, meaning it has got two piston engines and two jet engines. These two engines develop for each of them 3500 horsepower. We took off some moments ago from the aerodrome of Villacoublay. Now that we're flying, we cut the piston engines, and we only function with our two jet engines. The take off went very well, and even much faster than with any other aeroplane, because the four engines were functioning and developing, at that moment, a power of 10 000

⁷² Created in 1928, this Ministry would be dissolved in 1947.

⁷³ See for instance the reflections in the broadcast « Les moteurs à réaction et l'avenir de l'aéronautique », 8th of November 1945, archive Ina.

⁷⁴ DUCROCQ Albert, *L'Humanité devant la navigation interplanétaire*, Paris, Le Club des éditeurs, 1948.

⁷⁵ The first French jet plane, the SO 6000 Triton, created by Lucien Servanty, completed its first flight in November 1946.

⁷⁶ This fair opened its door the 15th of November.

⁷⁷ Avro Lancastrian C.1 VH742.

⁷⁸ The 17th of November 1946.

⁷⁹ “The Nene-Lanc, Flies to Paris”, *Flight and aircraft engineer*, No. 1978. Vol. L., Thursday, November 21st, 1946, p. 561.

horsepower. I am behind the pilot, Captain Sheperd from the Royal Air Force. He piloted this plane from London to Paris and doing so he beat the distance record London-Paris, without looking to do so. We are now performing a curve above a loop of the river Seine. We are overlooking the Eiffel Tower, which is blurring behind a light mist. [...] The pilot just started the two other piston engines, that's why you heard a supplementary sound. [...] We are about to land on the Villacoublay ground [...] and we will again make functioning the four engines, because for the landing, these four are necessary⁸⁰.

To realise this broadcast was also a technical exploit for this media, because the reporter was connected to a radio car on the ground. The two technical performances respond to each other. Once again, radio allowed listeners to live from the distance an extraordinary event, and to feel involved into the race for the aerial conquest.

Sometimes onboard reports were first realised to make the audience experience some sorts of sound travels, before to testify of a scientific progress. For instance, in June 1950, French radio broadcast an immersive report during a test of an airship balloon. In this fifteen minutes report, we can notably hear the professional jargon between the pilot and the operators:

Hello 3SC Santiago Canada, here is F8OF Oceania Florida on the microphone of 4 CD Canada calling. Ok old boy, I can hear you admirably well, it works very well, we will now proceed to take off old boy, under a splendid weather, magnificent. We have a slightly cloudy sky but with a radiant sun, and we will be able to take off and hear you admirably. Then be careful, I'm giving you back the tablet old boy, let's go⁸¹!

Listeners also get the chance to live the moment of take-off live, meticulously described, including in the technical aspects.

Drop!... Catch again!... Be careful behind the ballasts. Drop!... The balloon just emptied its first water ballasts. [...] The balloon is already going up for some centimetres. The balloon just made a little static test and everything is ok now, we can start the engine. Contact!... Cut!... The engine is a little bit cut despite the good temperature, some petrol injections are now useful. Keep going old boy, keep going! Contact!... *Sounds of an engine starting*. Here is the small 40 horsepower engine which just started. I recall this is not a very big airship as the ones we used to see before the war, but a moto-balloon type which is activated with a very small engine. Here is the machine raising, two meters, three meters... five meters, he's raising almost vertically and goes toward Paris. [...] Good bye old boy and see you later. We are taking off, we are taking off⁸²!

Another example, in January 1950, when the journalist Fernand Pelatan was speaking from the distance with Marcelle Choynet, who was onboard a glider, and who was beating, at this occasion the world duration record aboard a glider in a closed circuit⁸³. She spoke about the flight conditions and described what she saw. This kind of broadcasts give the audience the feeling to be at the heart of the event, almost to be embarked on board, thanks to the evocation

⁸⁰ Raymond Marcillac, « A bord d'un avion à réaction », 12nd of November 1945. Our translation.

⁸¹ « Essai de ballon dirigeable à Toussus Le Noble », *Ainsi va le monde*, 9th of June 1950, archive Ina. Our translation.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ « Record de durée en planeur de Mademoiselle Choynet », 4th of January 1950, archive Ina.

power of the sound medium. Indeed, these broadcasts largely solicit the imagination of the listeners, with accurate descriptions and sound of engines – here they are not sound effects created in studio, but actual sounds from flying planes. In these programs, the terms and technical aspects are not concealed, because the professional of aerial conquest don't hesitate to use technical terms or jargon. This kind of reports contribute then to popularize the progress of aerial conquest⁸⁴.

2.4. Broadcasts of debates and reflections

A fourth type of radio broadcasts focused on the current events of aerial conquest can be listed: broadcasts with several voices of specialists invited to debate and to comment the technical or regulatory evolutions of aviation. The best example of this kind of program is *La Tribune de Paris*, created in 1946 and broadcast every night on the National channel. Paul Guimard, host of this show, narrated later the origins of this program:

One day, Arno Charles Brun – a radio producer I really liked – told me: we will try to launch a new show. *La Tribune de Paris* will be every night a discussion between people from different opinions but representing the best level, each one in their specialty, and we thought you might be the good person to present this program. At first, the ambition was really simple: every morning, we tried to explore all the questions of the current affairs, and we managed to organise a debate every night⁸⁵.

People invited to the *Tribune de Paris* were scientists, but also journalists, politicians, and for what concerns us, actors of aerial conquest and aviation. This daily broadcast offered a first stone to the construction of media expert figure⁸⁶.

In this twenty minutes program, specialists usually set aside the spectacular or sensational dimension. They dealt with technical or problematic themes related to aviation, and try to convey some messages. For instance, the 21st of February 1947, after several Air France flights catastrophes (two crashes in 1946 and one in February 1947), the show *La Tribune de Paris* was about the question of security in the aerial transports, a theme which was then debated at the National Assembly. The specialist invited that night were Louis Hauten Sozert⁸⁷, former commandant from the Free French Air Force and then director of the Air Transport Company; Paul Bigart, general director of the South-West aerial lines; Gabriel Monet, representative in

⁸⁴ About reception of mass media: POELS Géraldine, *Les Trente Glorieuses du téléspectateur. Une histoire de la réception télévisuelle des années 1950 aux années 1980*, Bry-Sur-Marne, Ina, 2015. See also RIOUX Jean-Pierre and SIRINELLI Jean-François (ed.), *La Culture de masse en France de la Belle Époque à aujourd'hui*, op. cit. and MOLLIER Jean-Yves, SIRINELLI Jean-François, VALLOTTON François (ed.), *Culture de masse et culture médiatique en Europe et dans les Amériques, 1860-1940*, op. cit.

⁸⁵ Story broadcast in the show « La Radio dans la vie politique française / 1944 et 1958, une liberté surveillée », by Bruno Leroux and Janine Antoine, France Culture, 21th of November 1985, archive Ina.

⁸⁶ About media experts: CHEVALIER Yves, *L'« expert » à la télévision. Traditions électorales et légitimités médiatiques*, Paris, CNRS Editions, 1999 ; LENSING-HEBBEN Caroline, *Les Experts cathodiques. Chercheurs face à la tentation médiatique*, Le Bord de l'eau, coll. « Penser les médias », 2008 et BANTIGNY Ludivine, « Usages, mésusages et contre-usages de l'expertise. Une perspective historique », *Histoire@Politique*, 2011/2 (n°14), pp. 3-13.

⁸⁷ We are not sure of this name spelling.

Paris of the newspaper *Dépêche de l'air* from Lausanne, and Raymond Saladin, journalist for the French radio, who was also pilot and a former aviation pioneer.

This debate is interesting to apprehend the idea of progress and risk, even if this is not really a debate, because all the guests were also actors of aviation, and thereby ardent partisans of this kind of transport. Whereas the journalist evoked the public fear provoked by the “black series”⁸⁸ of aerial accidents, the specialists were unanimous to minimize the importance of these crashes, and to condemn the press for the large place they gave to these tragic events. For instance, Paul Guimard regretted that plane accidents systematically made the headlines of the newspapers, while coach accidents, even when responsible of dozens of deaths, were relegated in the fourth or fifth page. According to the different participants, a panic for the plane accident had been created which has nothing to see with real proportion of insecurity – they recalled that a civil plane took off every second, while there were around fifteen plane accidents for the last six months. In this broadcast, the guests tended more to reassure the audience, with discourses full of confidence about the reality of aerial security and the weak proportion of risk⁸⁹, than to rationally explain the accidents⁹⁰. Thus, after the Second World War, national French radio broadcast messages which were openly in favour of the aerial transport’s development.

While aviation was developing, banalizing, and trying to improve itself in order to reduce the risks of accidents, there was another theme which aroused media debates: the question of space exploration. In November 1947, the *Tribune de Paris* consecrated one of its editions to the question “Is interplanetary travel possible?”⁹¹, while the newspapers just echoed an American experience of little space rocket launched by V2 planes. Five specialists were invited that night: Gérard Lefebvre, from the journal *Sciences et avenir*; Albert Ducrocq, professor of electric physics, Georges Jabert, doctor in medicine, André Cléry, scientific redactor for the newspaper *France Libre*, and Alexandre Ananoff, director of the astronomic section of the aeroclubs in France. If the discussion was very technical – the host Paul Guimard even asked his guest to “go down on earth” and to talk to the audience level –, Alexandre Ananoff concluded the broadcast by affirming that a resolution of engines problems would allow the travel to the moon. Thus, radio broadcast some speeches tight toward the advent of space conquest, which represented a new step in the dream of aerial conquest. In his memoirs published in 1978, Alexandre Ananoff paid incidentally tribute to the journalists for their action in spreading such ideas: “We owe a lot to journalists, who, since the beginning, broadcast our ideas and astronautic aspirations through the world”⁹².

⁸⁸ The term “black series” was used by the press to describe the succession of plane accidents.

⁸⁹ About the history of risk, in the history of sciences and techniques; JARRIGE François, *Techno-critiques. Du refus des machines à la contestation des technosciences*, Paris, La Découverte, 2014 and FRESSOZ Jean-Baptiste, *L'Apocalypse joyeuse : Une histoire du risque technologique*, Paris, Seuil, Coll. L'univers historique, 2012.

⁹⁰ According to these guests, plane accidents are mostly due to atmospheric conditions.

⁹¹ « Le voyage interplanétaire est-il possible ? », *Tribune de Paris*, Chaîne parisienne, 12th of November 1947, archive Ina.

⁹² ANANOFF Alexandre, *Les Mémoires d'un astronaute ou L'aéronautique française*, Paris, Albert Blanchard, 1978, p. 115.

In 1956 a program called “The conquest of the air” was broadcast⁹³. Several scientists and professionals appeared in this show to relate the history of aviation, but also to evoke space conquest and space rockets. They explained the steps of development of the satellites and referred to science fiction.

Sometimes, some intellectuals who were not specialist of these topics expressed themselves on the radio to give their point of view about space conquest. In October 1957, a debate show was entitled “At the age of astronautics conquest”. The three co-presenters of this broadcast were a comedian (Anne-Marie Carrière⁹⁴), and two writers (Max-Pol Fouchet⁹⁵ and Paul Guth⁹⁶). They discussed about space exploration, some days after the launch of the first artificial missile in space – Spoutnik 1 – who took place on the 4th of October 1957. During this discussion, free words flied, meandering. The three speakers all said that they were pretty sad and nostalgic when they thought about the space conquest, particularly about the moon which would lose its mystery, according to them. They asked themselves if the notions of impossible, inaccessible and human imagination would disappear with this conquest. They also wonder about the interest of a future travel to the moon and engaged in metaphysical reflections about the condition and place of mankind in this new astronautic era.

Max-Pol Fouchet – We can’t escape from the shock produced in ourselves to know that tomorrow we might be able to go to the moon, I mean, it’s important. And in the same time, I rather feel a kind of sadness, of melancholia...

Anne-Marie Carrière – Aw, I think we will all agree about this!

Max-Pol Fouchet – A kind of melancholia, of lunar melancholia...!

Paul Guth – [...] The day we learnt that we will be able to go to the moon, [...] I had the feeling I was living my last terrestrial day⁹⁷.

This particularly interesting archive echoes to a text published in the newspaper *Le Matin* in 1908, at the beginning of the aerial conquest. In this writing, the journalist was regretting the fact that technical achievement of flight put an end to the dream, the “fairy tale”:

The fairy tale will soon no longer exist: we’ll need to find something else. We now move in the air, and the admirable saga we are experiencing now will be at the end a very natural thing, that our children and grandchildren will find very simple: the fact of flying and gliding in the space. And yet the kids who will receive gifts or unkind sticks will no be surprised that the honest and good man could cross the air like this, with his full sack: they will imagine that Father Christmas would naturally use an airship or an aeroplane. And one of these children will say at loud to his mummy, showing her *la Ville-de-Bordeaux* [an airship]: “Then, Santa came to our chimney with that⁹⁸?”

The kind of discourse held during the 1956 broadcast “The conquest of the air” was then not unique, neither isolated. The advent of aerial conquest could lead to a sort of deceived

⁹³ « La Conquête de l’air », *Voici le monde*, Chaîne Nationale, 15th of April 1956, archive Ina. Our translation.

⁹⁴ Anne-Marie Carrière is a comedian, singer and radio host.

⁹⁵ Poet and writer, Max-Pol Fouchet was a resistance fighter.

⁹⁶ Paul Guth was a novelist and essayist. He also wrote some books for children.

⁹⁷ « À l’ère de la conquête astronautique », *Propos en l’air*, Paris Inter, 30th of October 1957, archive Ina. Our translation.

⁹⁸ « Le Salon prodige », *Le Matin*, n° 9068, 25th of December 1908, p. 2. Our translation.

fascination, the sky and the stars losing their magic as humanity was getting closer to them. But while this dreamy dimension tended to move away as the technical development was progressing, radio kept its own creative and oneiric ability, which would contribute to reintroduce reverie inside the race of aerial conquest, with specific creative broadcasts.

3. Radio creation and the aerial conquest

Beyond broadcasts of tales and reflections, the imaginary conveyed by the aerial conquest inspired the literature, as well as radio literature, with the creation of radio dramas dealing with this subject. We will quote here two examples which seem to be particularly representative of this kind of program, both contributing to reinject dream and mystery inside an object which became more accessible. One of these broadcasts dealt with aviation and the other one with space conquest.

3.1. “Les Conquérants de l’air”, 12th of October 1951

In October 1951 “Les Conquérants de l’air” was broadcast, as part of the *Roman de la science*⁹⁹ program. The radio presenter relates, in the first twenty minutes, the history of this conquest, thanks to an imaginary movie, a supposed documentary allegedly directed by Jules Verne. Here is the introduction of this creative “sound movie”:

Man voice: Suppose, dear listeners from the *Roman de la science*, that you are seated in an obscure room, in front of a cinema screen (*sound of reel, of projection*). The movie starts as a little music, more or less appropriated, rises.

Music: Queen Hall light orchestra & Robert Farnon, « Mountain Grandeur »

The 19th century movies present: The Aviator, a documentary from Jules Verne, with the exceptional cooperation of Robur, American engineer, known as Robur the conqueror... Since humans don't walk on all fours anymore, they don't have their eyes naturally fixed on the ground, they look at the sky, the wonderful sky where clouds are soaring, the magical sky where birds are flying, and they envy the lightness of the clouds, and they are jealous of the aerial power...

Since humans don't walk on all fours anymore, they dream about gliding, and flying. They dream about the conquest of the air¹⁰⁰!

This creative broadcast leaned on the potentialities of radio art, by using music and sound effects to a great extent. During the fifties, French public radio was by the way particularly elaborated and creative, mostly made by writers and poets¹⁰¹ – between 1946 and 1963 French public radio was managed by the poet Paul Gilson. With the “Conquérants de l’air” broadcast, the journalist entirely created a “false” imaginary and sound movie, in order to narrate the

⁹⁹ *The Science Novel*.

¹⁰⁰ « Les Conquérants de l’air », *Le Roman de la Science*, Chaîne Parisienne, 12nd of October 1951, archive Ina. Our translation.

¹⁰¹ About French writers and radio, see HÉRON Pierre-Marie (ed.), *Les écrivains hommes de radio (1940-1970)*, Montpellier, Publications de Montpellier III, 2001 and HÉRON Pierre-Marie (ed.), *Les écrivains et la radio*, Montpellier, Publication de Montpellier III, 2003. About after war radio, see also ECK Hélène, *La Radiodiffusion française sous la IV^e République, monopole et service public*, août 1944 – décembre 1953, thèse de doctorat d'histoire, sous la direction de Jean-Jacques Becker, Université Paris 10 Nanterre, 1997.

history of aerial conquest. The different technical progresses are described step by step, in a mix between reality and fiction. We cross paths with the great names of this saga: Icare, the brothers Montgolfier and their balloons, Henri Giffard, the brothers Tissandier, but also Robur the Conqueror, hero of the anticipation novel from Jules Verne. The choice of the different characters took part to the creation of a national and linear history of progress – the importance given to the French participants is overestimated –, but also to the construction and rebuilding of legends, with some mythological and oneiric elements – the presence of Icare as well as the one of Robur the Conqueror, who became a character on his own in this story.

By interlocking closely fiction and reality, memories and legends, this program constituted an atypical and dreamy radio broadcast. It provided another way to narrate aerial conquest, by reintroducing a part of dream into the ordinary miracle, at a time when civil aviation tended to banalize.

If the space conquest seemed to stay inaccessible and distant for some more years, a quite similar kind of broadcast would be created when the man walked on the moon.

3.1. “Il y a mille ans des hommes sur la lune”, 21st of July 1969

Several radio dramas of science fiction were broadcast in the 1950’s and 1960’s, and the space conquest constituted for their authors a major inspiration. For instance, during the year 1956, the Parisian Channel offered the series *Astral Cruise*, a radio creation of science fiction¹⁰² in 25 episodes, created by the journalist and polemist Jean Nocher¹⁰³, and produced by Bernard Gandrey Rety¹⁰⁴. This short program of fifteen minutes was broadcast every Saturday night at 20:45. This time of broadcasting implied a generally familial listening. In fact, it corresponded to the time of the show or amusement in the evening, a moment when the radio listeners or television viewers wanted to relax by listening to some stories¹⁰⁵.

The list of the “Croisière Astrale” episodes is referenced in the INA archives database, but unfortunately none of these broadcasts can be consulted. We only have the titles – “Martians have landed”, “Meeting with those from elsewhere”, “SOS to the stars”, “Celest mysteries”, or “We are capturing a flying saucer”. Even if we can’t listen to these archives, we can notice that these titles are largely oriented toward the question of a meeting with aliens, more than the only space conquest in itself. The progresses about this conquest fed in fact an imaginary about the possibility of life outside the earth, and about a way to enter in contact with these other forms

¹⁰² About science-fiction radio, see BAUDOU Jacques, *Radio Mystères. Le théâtre radiophonique policier, fantastique et de science-fiction*, Paris, Encrage / Ina, 1997.

¹⁰³ Jean Nocher, from his real name Gaston Charon, was a member of the resistance.

¹⁰⁴ Composer and radio producer. Cf. « Bernard Gandrey Rety », *Cahiers d'histoire de la radiodiffusion*, n° 48, mars-mai 1996.

¹⁰⁵ About the reception of radio during the evening: BECCARELLI Marine, *Micros de nuit. Histoire de la radio nocturne en France, 1945-2012*, thèse en histoire contemporaine sous la direction de Myriam Tsikounas, Université Paris 1, 2016. See also STARKEY Guy, « La bande sonore de nos vies », *Médiamorphoses*, n°28, 2008 ; GLEVAREC Hervé, *Libre Antenne, La réception de la radio par les adolescents*, Paris, Armand Collin, 2005 ; GLEVAREC Hervé, Michel Pinet, « Les deux écoutes de la radio : fréquence et présence au média radiophonique », *Quaderni*, n°65, 2007, pp. 111-119 ; CHEVAL Jean-Jacques, (ed.), *Audiences, publics et pratiques radiophoniques*, Bordeaux, Maison des sciences de l'homme d'Aquitaine, 2003.

of lives. In the 1950's and 1960's, while several filmmakers directed movies of fantasy and science fiction about space conquest and aliens¹⁰⁶, with a backdrop of cold war and race for the stars, French radio took also possession of this imaginary.

The 21st of July 1969, just after the first human steps on the moon, French public radio proposed a particular radio drama. Entitled "A thousand years ago, some men on the moon", this radio play had been written based on the current events of Appolo XI mission. The science fiction plot was located in 2969, a thousand year after the first men steps on the moon, when an historian rediscovers this event, which had been forgotten, in all probability because of inadequate computer archives.

Sound effects. High-pitched and "space sound". Concrete music.

Man 1 (*interpreted by José Artur*) – But, come on, this can't be true! A thousand years ago, some men on the moon! No, no!

Man 2 (*interpreted by Jean-Pierre Joris*) – Yes, my dear friend. I am in a position to prove that a thousand years ago, ten centuries ago if you prefer, some men from the planet earth landed on the moon and walked on it, with their big shoes, their spacesuit, which made their move clumsily.

Man 1 – Who do you want to convince with this story?

Man 2 – Well, you!

Man 1 – A thousand years ago, men in the moon...

Man 2 – Yes, yes... Do you want an additional precision? The event took place exactly a thousand years ago to the day, it was a 21st of July. Don't you think this coincidence is extraordinary?

Man 1 – But more too extraordinary precisely, that's why this is extraordinary! A serious historian like you must be wary of such coincidences, come on!

Man 2 – But, come on, my dear colleague, would you put in doubt my professional abilities? You can imagine that before saying such a statement, which revolutionises the official science, I surrounded myself with certain guarantees...

Man 1 – Well, I hope for you, because as soon as this news will spread amongst the public, you will be the object of everyone's laughing stock¹⁰⁷!

As indicated by the presenter in introduction, this radio drama constituted an "exceptional adventure". In fact, this kind of radio play, based on an improvisation on the event itself, had never been done before. Real technical and scientific data from the Apollo XI mission, then still going, had been used to write this play of fiction. Just before its live production, the presenter indicated that if Houston called, the show would be suspended.

This way of staging a rediscovery of the man on the moon in a distant future contributed to underline the nonstandard and exceptional nature of this crucial step of space exploration.

¹⁰⁶ See: *The Thing from another world*, from Howard Hawks and Christian Nyby, 1951 ; *The Day the Earth stood still* from Robert Wise, 1952 ; *The Island Earth* from Joseph Newman and Jack Arnold, 1955, *Forbidden Planet* from Fred Wilcox, 1957 ; *First spaceship on Venus*, from Kurt Maetzig, 1960 ; *Ikarie XB 1* from Jindrich Pólak, 1963 ; *Atragon* de Ishirô Honda, 1963 ; *Voyage to the Prehistoric Planet*, from Curtis Harrington and Pavel Klushantsev, 1965 ; *Planet of the Apes*, from Stanley Kubrick, 1968.

¹⁰⁷ « Il y a mille ans des hommes sur la lune », Radio-Terre, ORTF, 21st of July 1969, archive Ina. Our translation.

Moreover, this broadcast tended to point out a specificity of radio: its evocative and imaginary power. The absence of images in radio broadcasts constituted an obstacle to report this space mission. To follow this event, public from all over the world needed to actually see these men walking on the lunar ground, that's why they widely abandoned radio in favour of television – they were 700 million of TV viewers in the world¹⁰⁸. Here, however, this radio dramatization allowed to put away this fascinating event, by making it happen in a future when it seemed unreal.

While the idea to send some men to the moon had provoked a lot of debates, fantasies and reflections in literature¹⁰⁹, media¹¹⁰ and society¹¹¹, this fruit of millenary human imagination just happened to realise during the summer 1969. Doing so, the dream of moon and space explorations seemed to vanish, to lose a part of its magic. With this radio drama, the radio professionals contributed to create a new oneiric universe, by reintroducing a part of dream, or even of doubt about this extraordinary event. Essentially, the question underpinning this radio drama could be: did we really walk on the moon? Do we have to believe in the unbelievable? That is in fact on the imaginary ground that radio can stand out, its strength being its ability of creating dreamy and fictive atmospheres, particularly with the use of sound effects and music. When television shows and gives to see; radio suggests.

CONCLUSION

If radio didn't exist at the beginning of the aerial conquest, it accompanied however its rise and development. Radio collected the voices of the first pioneers, offering stories of exploits and catastrophes, compiling memories and contributing to build heroic and legendary aviation figures. Radio was also following and broadcasting the current events of this conquest, provoking the listeners desire by arousing their imagination, by immersing them inside onboard reports, or making them dream with radio dramas inspired by aviation and astronautics. Radio created a particular poetic about the conquest of the air, using the evocative power of sound, potential of reverie and invitations to travels. Because there's no image, the descriptions are detailed, full of imagery and particularly evocative, in turns precise and meticulous, or abstract and fictional. In several programs there are sound effects and music – sound of engines inviting to take off, melodies suggesting flights and dreams.

¹⁰⁸ « 1969 : en direct de la lune », *Mystères d'archives*, Arte, 20th of July 2009, archive Ina.

¹⁰⁹ LUMINET Jean-Pierre, *Les Poètes et l'univers*, Paris, Le Cherche midi, 2012, AZIZA Claude (coord.), *Le Roman de la lune*, Paris, Omnibus, 2009.

¹¹⁰ See the examples developed in this paper.

¹¹¹ See, for the United States: DUBOST Thomas, « Exploration spatiale et imaginaire populaire américain, 1957-2009 », *Bulletin de l'Institut Pierre Renouvin*, n° 31, printemps 2010 ; MCCURDY Howard E., *Space and the American Imagination*, Washington, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997; 2e éd. Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011 ; LAUNIUS Roger D., *Frontiers of Space Exploration, Wesport*, Greenwich Press, 2004 et COURTWRIGHT David T., *Sky as Frontier: Adventure, Aviation and Empire*, College Station, Texas A&M University Press, 2005.

This paper constitutes a first immersion through French radio sources related to aerial conquest. Only a small part of the available broadcasts has been used. Historians working on the history of aviation or aeronautics should take an interest in sound archives in general, and radio sources in particular, which can be very rich and complementary with the written press. The radio archives participated to the construction of the idea of aerial conquest itself, and played a role in the creation or the maintenance of aerial or spatial imaginaries.

For what we know, this field of research combining radio and aeronautics remains unexplored, including on an international scale.

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« Comte de Lambert, témoignage sur le premier survol de la Tour Eiffel », 27th of May 1936.

« La traversée des Alpes en avion par l'aviateur péruvien Géo Chavez », 23rd of September 1946.

« Marie Marvingt dit comment elle a traversé la mer du Nord en ballon », 15th of May 1949.

« L'avion a son histoire », *Le Monde comme il va*, Chaîne parisienne, 15th of June 1955.

« Antoine de Saint Exupéry à propos de son atterrissage forcé en Tripolitaine », 1st of January 1936.

« Jacqueline Auriol, femme pilote la plus rapide du monde », *Le ciel est à vous : Magazine de l'aviation*, 27th of June 1951.

« La race nouvelle des pilotes d'aviation », *Paris vous parle*, Chaîne nationale, 2nd of September 1945, archive Ina.

« L'école de l'air de Salon de Provence », 11st of April 1947.

« École de l'air de Salon de Provence », *Vous avez la parole*, Chaîne parisienne, 3rd of September 1948.

« Paul Codos à propos de la traversée de l'Atlantique Nord », *Actualités*, 18th of December 1937.

« Inauguration de la première ligne commerciale Paris-New York », 6th of December 1946.

« Touristes de l'air », *Documents*, 9th of January 1956.

« À bord d'un avion à réaction », 12th of November 1945.

« Essai de ballon dirigeable à Toussus Le Noble », *Ainsi va le monde*, 9th of June 1950

« Record de durée en planeur de Mademoiselle Choynet », 4th of January 1950.

« La sécurité dans les transports aériens », *La Tribune de Paris*, Chaîne parisienne, 21st of February 1947.

« Le voyage interplanétaire est-il possible ? », *La Tribune de Paris*, Chaîne parisienne, 12nd of November 1947.

« À l'ère de la conquête astronautique », *Propos en l'air*, Paris Inter, 30th of October 1957.

« Les Conquistadors de l'air », *Le Roman de la Science*, Chaîne Parisienne, 12th of October 1951.

« Il y a mille ans des hommes sur la lune », Radio-Terre, ORTF, 21st of July 1969.