

Aeroplanes and airships as national and collective symbols in Western Europe before the First World War (1908–1914)

Florian Schnürer

Justus-Liebig-University Giessen

Abstract: In Western Europe before the Great War aeroplanes and airships were charged with national symbolism because they displayed the technical superiority of particular nations. In addition the nations were represented as performative acts within big events like air shows and cross-country flights when crowds of people lined the flight route. This was especially the case when the German airship Zeppelin travelled along the Rhine bringing the nation together as it was viewed as an “imagined community” (Benedict Anderson). In France the big aviation meetings led to the unification of a nation that had been divided after the Dreyfus Affair. The aeroplane was regarded as a symbol of progress. In the United Kingdom in contrast the development in aeronautics was taken more sceptically. One again the Royal Navy asserted its position as a national symbol.

Keywords: Zeppelin, aeroplane, nation, symbol, media event, pre-war.

Resumen: En la Europa occidental anterior a la I Guerra Mundial, los aviones y los vehículos aéreos estaban llenos de simbolismo nacional, pues mostraban la superioridad técnica de cada nación. Además, se las representaba como actos performativos en exhibiciones aéreas y vuelos trans-nacionales con miles de personas situadas en la ruta que seguían los aviadores. Así ocurrió cuando el Zeppelin alemán viajó por el Rin uniendo a la nación en torno a una “comunidad imaginaria” (Benedict Anderson). En Francia los grandes encuentros aéreos condujeron a la unificación de una nación dividida tras el *affaire* Dreyfus. El avión se consideraba un símbolo del progreso. En el Reino Unido, en cambio, el desarrollo aeronáutico se vio con escepticismo, y de nuevo la Marina Real afirmó su posición como símbolo nacional.

Palabras clave: Zeppelin, avión, nación, símbolo, hecho mediático, pre-guerra.

1. Introduction

During the last few years cultural-historical research in Germany has focused on the visual expression of political acts and institutions in history. In this development of a *cultural history of politics* (*Kulturgeschichte der Politik*) in researching the Middle Ages as well as Modern Times, the question has arisen as to how authority and go-

[*Memoria y Civilización* (M&C), 12, 2009, 155-189]

vernment could express themselves in a symbolic way and how they were represented by performative acts. This includes, for example, the encounters of kings or coronation ceremonies, as well as attendance at funerals, or the question of how such an abstract thing as the constitution was embodied in the period of time between the Empire and the Federal Republic¹.

My purpose in the following remarks is to show to what extent a nation can express itself symbolically and how it is created. For this purpose the development of aeronautics before the First World War will be analyzed. Airships and aeroplanes will be understood as collective symbols that took on an important role in the construction of the nation especially by means of rituals². Thus I intend to link with Peter Fritzsche's seminal survey on Germany as "a nation of flyers" which showed the symbolic significance of the Zeppelin. Robert Wohl in his cultural-historical work *A Passion for Wings* also emphasized how aircraft were perceived before the First World War. The article

¹ Ute FREVERT and Heinz-Gerhard HAUPT, *Neue Politikgeschichte. Perspektiven einer historischen Politikforschung*, Frankfurt am Main/New York, Campus, 2005; Peter HOERES, "Die Symbolisierung der Verfassung vom Kaiserreich zur Bundesrepublik", in Rüdiger SCHMIDT, and Hans-Ulrich THAMER (eds.), *Symbolpolitik in der beginnenden Moderne*, in print; Thomas MERGEL, *Parlamentarische Kultur in der Weimarer Republik. Politische Kommunikation, symbolische Politik und Öffentlichkeit im Reichstag*, Düsseldorf, Droste, 2002; Florian SCHNÜRER, "'But in death he has found victory': the funeral ceremonies for the 'knights of the sky' during the Great War as transnational media events", *European Review of History—Revue européenne d'histoire*, 15, 2008, pp. 643-58; Gerald SCHWEDLER, *Herrscher-treffen des Spätmittelalters. Formen – Rituale – Wirkungen*, Ostfildern, Jan Thorbecke, 2008; Barbara STOLLBERG-RILINGER, *Des Kaisers alte Kleider. Verfassungsgeschichte und Symbolsprache des Alten Reiches*, Munich, Beck, 2008.

² Jürgen LINK, "Literaturanalyse als Interdiskursanalyse. Am Beispiel des Ursprungs literarischer Symbolik in der Kollektivsymbolik", in Jürgen FOHRMANN, and Harro MÜLLER (eds.), *Diskurstheorie und Literaturwissenschaft*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1988, pp. 284-307, esp. 286.

aims to broaden this perspective to other Western European states, in this case to France and the United Kingdom.

The assumption I want to develop is that aeroplanes and airships became national symbols because they had extraordinary theatricality. Newer research emphasizes the orientation of European societies to the theatre in these years during which it lost its image of being elitist³. The deeds of the early aviators, with either airships or aeroplanes, were a kind of performance. They were staged, had an area of action and an auditorium, and produced, as on the stage, heroes. At the same time there was something dramatic inherent to this performance because there was always the possibility that the flight could come to a disastrous end. Due to the rise in the numbers of aviators and their interpretation by the media it was possible to represent the nation performatively.

With the aid of mass media it was possible to attract the attention of a wider audience. Newspapers in particular were read and helped to perceive the world. It is assumed that the years before the First World War, which were characterized as a “mass media Sattelzeit” (*massenmediale Sattelzeit*)⁴, brought about the first growth in a process of mediatization (*Medialisierung*), which has continued up to the present. This process can be observed at the turn of the century in the United Kingdom as well as in France and the German Empire⁵. That

³ Cf. Peter W. MARX, *Ein theatralisches Zeitalter. Bürgerliche Selbstinszenierungen von 1870 bis 1933*, Tübingen, A. Francke, 2008; Charles S. MAIER, “Mahler’s Theater: The Performative and the Political in Central Europe, 1890-1910”, in Karen PAINTER (ed.), *Mahler and his World*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2002, pp. 55-85.

⁴ Habbo KNOCH, and Daniel MORAT, “Medienwandel und Gesellschaftsbilder 1880-1960. Zur historischen Kommunikologie der massenmedialen Sattelzeit” in Habbo KNOCH, and Daniel MORAT (eds.), *Kommunikation als Beobachtung. Medienwandel und Gesellschaftsbilder 1880-1960*, Munich, Fink, 2003, pp. 9-33.

⁵ Hans-Dieter KÜBLER, “Zwischen Parteilichkeit und Markt. Die Presse im Wilhelminischen Kaiserreich” in Werner FAULSTICH (ed.), *Das Erste Jahrzehnt*, München, Wilhelm Fink, 2006, pp. 23-46; Bob CLARKE,

means that, on the one hand, the development of the media and the society influenced each other, and, on the other, western European societies observed one another and themselves⁶.

Although significant research has been done on the meaning of symbols and rituals with reference to political communication⁷, the key concepts, such as “ritual” and “the symbolic”, are still remarkably vague⁸. According to Jan Andres and Matthias Schwengelbeck, rituals should be understood as “socially standardised symbolic procedures depending on iterability”⁹. All in all, rituals link the individual to so-

From Grub Street to Fleet Street. An Illustrated History of English Newspapers to 1899, Aldershot, and Burlington, Ashgate, 2004; Christophe CHARLE, *Le siècle de la presse, 1830-1939*, Paris, Éd. du Seuil, 2004.

⁶ Frank BÖSCH, and Norbert FREI, “Die Ambivalenz der Medialisierung. Eine Einführung”, in Frank BÖSCH, and Norbert FREI (eds.), *Medialisierung und Demokratie im 20. Jahrhundert*, Göttingen, Wallstein, 2006, pp. 7-23; and especially Winfried SCHULZ, “Reconstructing Mediatization as an Analytical Concept”, *European Journal of Communication*, 19/1, 2004, pp. 87-101.

⁷ Barbara STOLLBERG-RILLINGER, “Zeremoniell, Ritual, Symbol. Neue Forschungen zur symbolischen Kommunikation in Spätmittelalter und Früher Neuzeit”, *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung*, 27, 2000, pp. 389-405.

⁸ Cf. Jörg NEUHEISER, and Michael SCHAICH, “The Politics of Ritual and the Ritual of Politics: An Introduction”, in Jörg NEUHEISER, and Michael SCHAICH (eds.), *Political Rituals in Great Britain, 1700-2000*, Augsburg, Wißner-Verlag, 2006, p. 10.

⁹ Jan ANDRES, and Matthias SCHWENGELBECK, “Das Zeremoniell als politischer Kommunikationsraum: Inthronisationsfeiern in Preußen im ‘langen’ 19. Jahrhundert”, in Ute FREVERT, and Heinz-Gerhard HAUPT (eds.), *Neue Politikgeschichte: Perspektiven einer historischen Politikforschung*, Frankfurt am Main, and New York, Campus, 2005, p. 28 [translation by the author]; cf. Yves BIZEUL, “Theorien der politischen Mythen und Rituale” in Yves BIZEUL (ed.), *Politische Mythen und Rituale in Deutschland, Frankreich und Polen*, Berlin, Duncker&Humblot, 2000, pp. 15-39, and Rüdiger VOIGT, “Mythen, Rituale und Symbole in der Politik”, in Rüdiger VOIGT (ed.), *Politik der Symbole, Symbole der Politik*, Opladen, Leske+Budrich, 1989, pp. 9-37; David J. KERTZER, *Ritual, Politics, and Power*, New Haven,

ciety and make it possible to send a compacted form of political message. According to Ernst Cassirer, the human being is a creature that permanently uses symbols to orientate himself in his environment. Thereby symbols refer to each other and are thus able to give meaning to each other¹⁰. That does not mean that a ritual must always be sacred. In the words of Bobby C. Alexander, a ritual is “a performance, planned or improvised, that makes a transition away from the everyday world to an alternative context, within which the everyday is transformed”¹¹.

As Ronald L. Grimes emphasized, “media” and “ritual” were seen “as labels for separate cultural domains”. But within the last few years this perspective has changed: “The media, some claim, *are* ritual in contemporary form”¹². With Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* in mind, one can find that even the reading of the morning newspapers helps to create the nation or transforms the community into a nation. In this way the media, however, are not only printed “but also enacted”¹³.

For this reason the focus of this study is on the print media and their communication of aviation and the role it played in Western European societies in the last years of peace. In doing so two points will become clear. On the one hand, how the print media generally reported the advances in aviation, especially the advances in their own countries. On the other hand it should be made clear that the upsurge

and London, Yale University Press, 1988; and Victor TURNER *The Forest of Symbols*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1967.

¹⁰ Oswald SCHWEMMER, “Die Macht der Symbole”, *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 20, 2006, pp. 7-14.

¹¹ Bobby C. ALEXANDER, *Televangelism Reconsidered: Ritual in the Search for the Human Community*, Atlanta, GA, Scholars Press, 1994, p. 4.

¹² Cf. Ronald L. GRIMES, “Ritual and the Media”, in *Rite out of Place. Ritual, Media and the Arts*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 3-13. The citations on pages 3 and 4.

¹³ Ronald L. GRIMES, “Ritual and the Media”, p. 11. Cf. Benedict ANDERSON, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised Edition, London and New York, Verso, 1991, pp. 35f.

of airships and aeroplanes was reported in a transnational way and became transnational media events. “Transnational” is used here instead of “international”, a term which largely refers to the interaction at the level of the state. This research approach is concerned with interactions, connections, references, and overlapping across national borders¹⁴. The media describe and create an event in a particular way, and transmit it to the recipients; that is, they construct the event¹⁵. Newspaper reporting before the Great War created a transnational public sphere, because reporting about major events in foreign countries was common, especially the reporting of spectacular events.

Firstly, I want to show how the Zeppelin airship became a national symbol in Germany (2.). The German Empire will be compared with the Third Republic in France, which claimed to rule the technical development of aircraft (3.). Then the question as to why the development in the United Kingdom was completely different (4.), and finally, in the conclusion, the results will be summarized (5.).

2. Germany and Count Zeppelin's airship

Having the ability to fly is one of the humankind's oldest dreams. At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century it was still unthinkable or “utopian” as encyclopaedia entries suggested. In these entries flying was described as a property of birds and insects.

¹⁴ On the concept of “transnationality”, see Sebastian CONRAD, and Jürgen OSTERHAMMEL, “Einleitung”, in Sebastian CONRAD, and Jürgen OSTERHAMMEL (eds.), *Das Kaiserreich transnational: Deutschland in der Welt 1871-1914*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004, pp. 7-27; Kiran Klaus PATEL, “Überlegungen zu einer transnationalen Geschichte”, *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, 52/7, 2004, pp. 624-45; Patricia CLAVIN, “Introduction: Defining Transnationalism”, *Contemporary European History* 14/4, 2005, pp. 421-39.

¹⁵ Cf. Daniel DAYAN, and Elihu KATZ, *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History*, Cambridge, MA, and London, Harvard University Press, 1992. The book is criticised with a lot of good reasons by Andreas HEPP, and Friedrich KROTZ, “Media events, globalization and cultural change: An introduction to the special issue”, *Communications*, 33, 2008, pp. 265-72.

If men could ever take to the skies, he would have to copy their way of moving. Otherwise the only way to experience the miracle of flying is by using a balloon¹⁶.

The year 1908 was rightly characterized as the “annus mirabilis” of aviation. A lighter-than-air craft, the Zeppelin airship, was quickly followed by a heavier-than-air one, the Wright brothers’ flying machine. Both developments had been intensely observed by newspapers.

The first person to grab the headlines was a German former cavalry officer. Count Ferdinand Graf von Zeppelin had been experimenting with airships since 1891. But the hope of financing his experiments from the budget of the army was at first not achieved. He had to spend his own fortune and that of his wife for the building of airships¹⁷. In July 1908 a twelve-hour flight from Friedrichshafen on Lake Constance to Zurich took place, a flight that attracted international public interest¹⁸. The next cross-country flight carried out by Zeppelin on August 4 became a major event. No-one wanted to miss the flight route that followed the Rhine. Because of that journey, the airship, shortly after that named simply “Zeppelin”, emerged as a symbol for the German public and stood for the technical creativity of

¹⁶ Cf. the article by James Bell PETTIGREW, “Flight, Flying Machines”, in: *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 10th edition, London 1902 (<http://www.1902encyclopedia.com/F/FLI/flight-flying-machines.html>), and the articles “Fliegen“, in *Allgemeine deutsche Real-Encyklopädie für die gebildeten Stände, Conversations Lexikon*, 11., umgearb., verb. und vermehrte Ed. in 15 Vol., Vol 6., Leipzig, 1865, pp. 321-2; and “Flugmensch“, in *Meyers Großes Konversations-Lexikon*, 6th ed., Neuer Abdruck, Vol. 6, Leipzig, and Vienna, 1904, p. 724.

¹⁷ Cf. Thomas ROHKRÄMER, *Eine andere Moderne? Zivilisationskritik, Natur und Technik in Deutschland 1880-1993*, Paderborn et al., Schöningh, 1999, pp. 222f.; Alfred GOLLIN, *No Longer an Island. Britain and the Wright Brothers, 1902-1909*, London, William Heinemann Ltd., 1984, pp. 315ff.

¹⁸ Cf. *Times*, July 2, 1908, p. 7: “Count Zeppelin’s Long Flight”.

the Empire¹⁹. Amazingly a catastrophe marked the beginning of that development: due to a wind the anchored airship ripped its moorings and slipped to the ground. After a few moments it burst into flames. The long experiments, it seemed, ceased suddenly. Zeppelin was bankrupt. His airship did not meet the conditions for military purposes –an uninterrupted twenty-four hour flight– and now the government commissions, military evaluations and preliminary funding had finally come to an end. It was his third disaster in as many years²⁰.

The German public reacted with sheer horror; the disaster was seen as a major tragedy. Even in foreign countries voices of compassion were heard. The *Times* characterized the crash as “heart-breaking ill-fortune” and reported with avowed sympathy for the fate of the aviation pioneer. But same article also mentioned the possibility of using the airship as a weapon that could compensate for the British supremacy at sea²¹. From the beginning sympathy was mixed with distrust. This kind of reporting became characteristic over the following years.

Because of a patriotic outburst of massive generosity that occurred in the German Empire and could not be ignored by government, enough money was collected in one day to make the building of another airship possible. First of all newspapers called for donations. Moreover, papers such as the liberal *Frankfurter Zeitung* made donations themselves²². Within six weeks a total sum of five million Marks had

¹⁹ Cf. for the German enthusiasm in flying Peter FRITZSCHE, *A Nation of Fliers: German Aviation and the Popular Imagination*, Cambridge, MA, and London, Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. 10f and Thomas ROHKRÄMER, *Eine andere Moderne?*, p. 223.

²⁰ Cf. for example *Berliner Morgenpost*, August 6, 1908, p. 1: “Graf Zeppelins Luftschiff vernichtet”; Peter FRITZSCHE, *Nation of Fliers*, S. 14.

²¹ Cf. *Times*, August 7, 1908, p. 5: “Zeppelin Airship Disaster”.

²² Peter FRITZSCHE, *Nation of Fliers*, p. 15: “According to inflated press reports it was at Echterdingen that a broad, grass-roots nationalism revealed itself”. Cf. also Stephen BUDIANSKY, *Air Power: The Men, Machines, and Ideas that Revolutionized War: From Kitty Hawk to Gulf War II*, New York et al., Viking, 2004, p. 38.

been collected; in addition Count Zeppelin was presented with food and knitted socks. He became a national figure, a status that was underlined by the German Emperor, William II, through the bestowal of one of the highest decorations, the "Order of the Black Eagle". In his speech he characterized Zeppelin as the "greatest German of the twentieth century"²³. All in all, William observed the experiments of the old count with sympathy. It must be assumed that the Emperor wanted to profit from the reputation of Zeppelin²⁴, as his own public image was anything but good. *The Daily-Telegraph* "affair" and the "Hardenberg-Eulenburg scandal" had damaged his reputation²⁵. Thus the German parliament, the *Reichstag*, gained more influence because it was seen as an antidote to William's concept of government. Besides, the Zeppelin airship became more and more the symbol of the German nation. Very early on, the Emperor himself detected the symbolic effects of the airship, in particular for foreign countries. At the height of the euphoria in donation he wrote to the Imperial Chancellor: "The forthcoming airship is not only his [Zeppelin's – F.S.] own but belongs to the German nation that has taken Zeppelin's place. A backlash or failure must not happen. Now the whole world is watching us"²⁶. The Emperor was supported in his opinion by the media. So the *Berliner Morgenpost* called Count Zeppelin the "delegate of the nation" ("Beauftragte der Nation")²⁷. Thanks to this type of reporting,

²³ Cf. Peter FRITZSCHE, *Nation of Fliers*, 18: "Graf Zeppelin and his dirigibles had literally become Volksgut. The Graf had become that recognizable modern figure: a celebrity". For the citation cf. Thomas ROHKRÄMER, *Eine andere Moderne?*, p. 31.

²⁴ Wolfgang KÖNIG, *Wilhelm II. und die Moderne. Der Kaiser und die technisch-industrielle Welt*, Paderborn, Schöningh, 2007, p. 76.

²⁵ Frank BÖSCH, *Öffentliche Geheimnisse. Skandal, Politik und Medien in Deutschland und Großbritannien 1880-1914*, Munich, Olden-bourg, 2009.

²⁶ "Das kommende Luftschiff ist nicht nur das seinige sondern das der deutschen Nation, die jetzt an die Stelle Zeppelin's getreten ist. Ein Rück- oder Fehlschlagen darf nicht eintreten. Die ganze Welt sieht jetzt auf uns". [Translation by the author – F.S.] Bundesarchiv, Berlin, R 43/1335, 52f. Cited after Wolfgang KÖNIG, *Wilhelm II.*, p. 77.

²⁷ "Der tosenden Meeresbrandung gleich, erhob sich ein Jubelsturm und erschütterte die Luft in einem gewaltigen Gleichklang aus hundert-

the count became a “quasi-mythic figure” and a “curious mixture of simple and heroic virtues”²⁸.

A flight in August 1909 to Berlin became also a big event²⁹. On a Saturday at the end of August, as the “*Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*” reported, nearly three million spectators were on the streets of Berlin, in the parks, on balconies and roofs³⁰. They waited for an airship that did not come because of technical problems with the airscrew. But on the Sunday the Zeppelin appeared for the first time above the German capital. The *Vossische Zeitung* described the situation in Berlin. At first the solemnity of the event predominated and no voice was heard. But after a short time tremendous cheers sounded through the streets of Berlin: “Like the crashing waves a storm of cheers raised and shook the air in an enormous accord out of hundred thousand throats”³¹. Even the *Daily Mail* wrote that “countless thousands of Berliners, in the last stage of Zeppelin dementia, cheered themselves hoarse”³². All in all, it was a new quality. Before that, in the capital of the German Empire, the public had always stood on the verge of an event and now it was at the centre. Afterwards, real worship of the old Count began; Zeppelin postcards and lockets were sold and a type of bread was even named after him.

This kind of excitement was part of the enthusiasm for aviation that could be found everywhere in Europe during this period³³. But the Zeppelin airship however, differed from other flying machines, above

tausend Kehlen” [Translation by the author – F.S.] *Berliner Morgenpost*, August 9, 1908, p. 1f.

²⁸ Guillaume DE SYON, *Zeppelin! Germany and the Airship, 1900-1939*, Baltimore and London, John Hopkins University Press, 2002, p. 47.

²⁹ Cf. Thomas LINDENBERGER, *Straßenpolitik. Zur Sozialgeschichte der öffentlichen Ordnung in Berlin 1900 bis 1914*, Bonn, J.H.W. Dietz Nachfolger, 1995, pp. 365ff.

³⁰ *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, August 29, 1909, p. 1.

³¹ *Vossische Zeitung*, August, 1909. Cited after Thomas LINDENBERGER, *Straßenpolitik*, p. 367.

³² *Daily Mail*, August 30, 1909, p. 7: “Zeppelin in Berlin”.

³³ Thomas LINDENBERGER, *Straßenpolitik*, pp. 21f.

all because of massive size and its slow gliding, seen as majestic. It seemed, as Fritzsche described in his study, supernatural and almost other-worldly. It was interpreted as a symbol of the superiority of civilization over nature. In fighting with nature some defeats were seen as possible, as had been seen in Echterdingen, but they made this triumph even more extraordinary³⁴. All things considered, overcoming nature was also interpreted as a sign of international recognition, even as superiority in comparison with other nations. Simultaneously this feeling went in a military direction³⁵. The enthusiasm for the Zeppelin airship is only understandable by not forgetting that the Germans wanted their “place in the sun”. In Germany it was proudly perceived that as a “young nation” in comparison with the “older nations” (France and the United Kingdom), it was at the peak of the civilization process. Because of that feeling all records of the Zeppelin had an enormous patriotic meaning. Peter Fritzsche saw three elements in the enthusiasm for Zeppelins that emphasized each other. First, idealism and national community; second, an element that was directed against the state and, lastly, a firm announcement of German ambitions in the world. However, national unity, as symbolized by the Zeppelin was more a construction of writers and newspaper editors. The flight of a Zeppelin was seen more frequently and more easily in the larger cities in the southern or south-western part of Germany, whereas the rural areas in the east of Prussia were excluded³⁶.

Until the beginning of the First World War over twenty Zeppelins were built. Most of them were intended for the navy or the army, but a few of them were used for commercial purposes. So 17,000 of the wealthiest Germans made trips by Zeppelin. The poorer part of the nation only had the possibility to take a ride in a zeppelin carousel. Besides, these enormous airships were still very unstable, which

³⁴ Cf. H.G. CASTLE, *Fire over England: The German Air Raids of World War I*, London, Seeker & Warburg, 1982, pp. 18f., and Peter FRITZSCHE, *Nation of Fliers*, p. 27.

³⁵ Cf. Peter FRITZSCHE, *Nation of Fliers*, pp. 28ff.

³⁶ Cf. Peter FRITZSCHE, *Nation of Fliers*, pp. 5f.

meant they had to be sent in for repairs frequently. Additionally some fatal accidents happened³⁷.

As already mentioned, the German development was observed with great scepticism in other countries. As will be shown later, reporters both in the United Kingdom and in France regarded the Zeppelin airship as a potential weapon. Simultaneously, the Zeppelin was seen as a symbol of German stolidity due to its lack of speed. In particular, Alphonse Berget, a French professor of oceanography, described it, even in the year 1909, as too slow in comparison with the aeroplane. Furthermore he interpreted the development of the Zeppelin only as a response to the progress of aeronautics in France and not as a self-developed invention³⁸. In France, however, everybody was fascinated by aeroplanes.

In Germany the usefulness of that invention was not denied. The German government contacted the Wright brothers very early on. But because of the high price no purchase of an aeroplane had come about. Compared to the Zeppelin, aeroplanes had less significance for the German public. Nonetheless, fund-raising campaigns were held to donate new aeroplanes to the army; these campaigns were supported by organizations like the *German Aerial League (Deutsche Luftflottenliga)*. After the Morocco crisis in 1911, Prince Henry of Prussia, a brother of the Emperor, called for a “national flying donation”. Within six months more than seven millions Marks were collected in the German Empire. From that year on, the German press accepted the superiority of this type of aviation. So newspapers collected money themselves to establish a German air fleet. The editorial offices of the *Posener Tageblatt* and the *Ostdeutsche Warte*, both in the eastern area of Prussia, asked the Emperor to accept the 25,000 marks they had had collected, and to give the name “Posen” to the aeroplane that

³⁷ Cf. with a lot of details H.G. CASTLE, *Fire Over England*, p. 21.

³⁸ Alphonse BERGET, *La route de l'air. Aéronautique, aviation, histoire – théorie – pratique*, Paris, Librairie Hachette, 1909, pp. 107f. On page 110 the Zeppelin is described as “le leviathan de l'aéronautique”.

could be bought for that sum³⁹. Until the First World War the Germans tried to catch up the French advance and linked experimental departments to the aeronautical chairs at Aachen, Charlottenburg and Hannover⁴⁰. In Prussia and Bavaria the armies had their own flight departments. But the General Staff was still focused on airships because it saw aeroplanes as untrustworthy⁴¹.

3. France – another “nation of flyers”

In France the heritage of the brothers Montgolfier, who invented the balloon in the 18th century, was maintained. But now the French public was more interested in another pair of brothers. The Wrights made their progress in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina at the turn of the century almost without publicity⁴². This was due because the enterprising brothers feared their invention might be copied. Particularly in France, which saw itself as the leading nation in aeronautics, the Wrights were described as “bluffeurs”⁴³. The two bicycle mechanics were not seen as serious rivals. The brothers had begun their flying experiments in 1899 and in December 1903 they had their first successful flight⁴⁴.

³⁹ Cf. wire for William II., April 13, 1911, in: Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz Berlin (GStA), I. HA Rep. 89, Geheimes Zivilkabinett, jüngere Periode, Nr. 21390, “Akten betreffend die Spende für die Luftschiffahrt und Fürsorge für die Luftfahrer”, 42-43.

⁴⁰ Cf. GStA I. HA Rep. 89, Geheimes Zivilkabinett, jüngere Periode, Nr. 21391 “Akten betreffend die deutsche Versuchsanstalt für Luftfahrt und Flugtechnik (1911–1916)”.

⁴¹ Cf. Karl KÖHLER, “Organisationsgeschichte der Luftwaffe von den Anfängen bis 1918“ in *Deutsche Militärgeschichte in sechs Bänden, 1648-1939*, Vol. 3, edited by MILITÄRGESCHICHTLICHES FORSCHUNGSMITTEL, Munich, Manfred Pawlak Verlagsgesellschaft, 1983, pp. 283-311, p. 288.

⁴² Cf. Stephen BUDIAISKY, *Air Power*, pp. 12ff., and Alfred GOLLIN, *No Longer an Island*, pp. 5ff.

⁴³ Cf. Stephen BUDIAISKY, *Air Power*, p. 12.

⁴⁴ Stephen BUDIAISKY, *Air Power*, pp. 22f.

In France the development was watched with great interest. The Wrights, who had been not able to sell their invention to their own government, were also interested in business with France. A French delegation, among them the flying enthusiast Captain Ferber, contacted them⁴⁵. In 1905, Ferber, an artillerist and member of the Aéro-Club de France, had already urged the French War Ministry to buy a Wright Flyer. “But Ferber was a voice crying in the wilderness”⁴⁶. His ambitions were supported by Henri Letellier, son of the proprietor of the newspaper *Le Journal* who grasped the potential of the Wright story. To force the French government into action he dispatched his secretary to Dayton where the Wrights were living. The secretary presented himself as the agent of a syndicate of patriotic French investors (which did not exist) and signed a preliminary agreement. But Letellier failed to put pressure on the French government. Finally, the agreement failed, as had happened with the German and American government, because of the high prize. The brothers demanded the sum of \$200,000 for their invention, and would only show their machine in flight after they had received this sum⁴⁷.

It seemed that the development in France corroborated the negative approach of the French government. On October 23, 1906 the French-Brazilian aviator Alberto Santos-Dumont succeeded in flying 60 metres and reached an altitude of three metres⁴⁸. The Parisian newspapers turned Santos-Dumont and other pilots into national heroes. Likewise the aeroplane became a symbol of progress. Finally the country found new heroes after the turn-of-the-century Dreyfus affair

⁴⁵ Cf. Claude CARLIER, “Ferdinand Ferber et l’aviation”, *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, 209, 2003, pp. 7-23.

⁴⁶ Robert WOHL, *A Passion for Wings: Aviation and the Western Imagination, 1908-1918*, New Haven, and London, Yale University Press, 1994, p. 18.

⁴⁷ Cf. with a lot of details Claude CARLIER, “Le ministère français de la guerre face à l’invention des frères Wright (1905-1906)”, *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, 233, 2009, pp. 7-20; and Alfred GOLLIN, *No Longer an Island*, pp. 63ff.

⁴⁸ Cf. Stephen BUDIANSKY, *Air Power*, pp. 28f., and Robert WOHL, *Passion*, pp. 41f.

which had meant “a crisis for French manhood”⁴⁹. In those days, those who were pro- and anti-Dreyfusards fought for the same stake, the survival of the French nation, which they equated with French manhood. The success of the aviators was beneficial for both sides and assisted in re-unifying the nation.

To attract attention, the Wrights decided to demonstrate their aeroplane in Paris. On August 8, 1908, Wilbur flew on the airfield near Paris, performed some manoeuvres and reached an altitude of 30 metres. Now the spell was broken; flight became a sensation because of the enormous manoeuvrability of the aeroplane. *The Times* wrote: “In consequence, the army of sceptics, with the exception of a few doubting Thomases, went over to the camp of the believers”⁵⁰. And *Le Matin* judged: “The legend disappeared. The mystery that seemed to be inextricable and inexplicable is now destroyed”⁵¹. But that flight meant also a defeat for the French aviators. Léon Delagrangé, the previous record holder, commented the event with the statement: “We are beaten” (“Nous sommes battus”). In France that demonstration simultaneously meant great provocation and important stimulus for the development of their own aeronautics⁵².

In October 1908 at the latest, France again saw itself gaining the lead. The French aviators Henri Farman and Louis Blériot had started the first long cross-country flights and were seen as the first

⁴⁹ Christopher E. FORTH, *The Dreyfus Affair and the Crisis of French Manhood*, Baltimore, and London, John Hopkins University Press, 2004.

⁵⁰ Cf. the report about the first flight in *Times*, August 10, 1908, p. 5. Cf. also with a lot of details Robert WOHL, *Passion*, pp. 5ff., and Stephen BUDIANSKY, *Air Power*, p. 29.

⁵¹ *Le Matin*, August 8, 1908, p. 1: “Wright a volé”: “La légende disparaît. Le mystère qui paraissait inextricable et inexplicable est maintenant dissipé”.

⁵² Cited after Robert WOHL, *Passion*, p. 33. Cf. also Stephen BUDIANSKY, *Air Power*, p. 31.

“touristes de l’air”⁵³. The above-mentioned Professor Berget considered the French aeroplanes superior to the American ones. The aeroplane of the Wright brothers, Berget wrote, was unstable in its flying qualities. But “our aviators, however, worked quietly on the solution to the problem, its *complete* solution that means the achievement of an *autonomous* aeroplane.” That was an allusion to the fact that the aeroplane of the Wright brothers was not able to start of its own accord⁵⁴.

In those early days, public enthusiasm for flying in Western Europe was sometimes directed towards a more peaceful and better linked world. Aeroplanes and airships, so many of the contemporary witnesses hoped, could have a share in international understanding. But the optimism of these people was only momentary and not the settled conviction of a majority, as can be seen in future development⁵⁵. For this reason, the big aviation meetings can be seen as an example. First of all the French press stylized these meetings as competitive exhibitions. It was imperative to defend the leadership of France. The Wrights had shown what could happen after progress in one’s own country had come to an end.

In the year 1909 industrialists and the military tried to encourage the individual efforts of the aviators by granting cash prizes. Aviation meetings were conducted that represented the relative stage of development and were used to find out if the machines performing were useful for military purposes. The first big international aviation meeting took place in August 1909 in Reims and had an audience of 200.000 spectators daily. Here, politicians, diplomats and industrialists met up. The President of France, Armand Fallières, accompanied

⁵³ Alphonse BERGET, *La route de l’air*, pp. 239f.; cf. *Le Matin*, October 31, 1908, p. 1: “Le premier voyage en aéroplane” and *Le Journal*, October 31, 1908, p. 1: “Henri Farman va de Châlons à Reims”.

⁵⁴ Cf. Alphonse BERGET, *La route de l’air*, p. 255: “[n]os aviateurs, cependant, travaillaient tranquillement à la solution de problème, et à sa solution *complète*, c’est-à-dire à la réalisation d’un aéroplane *autonome*”.

⁵⁵ Felix Philipp INGOLD, *Literatur und Aviatik. Europäische Flugdichtung 1909-1927. Mit einem Exkurs über die Flugidee in der modernen Malerei und Architektur*, Basel, and Stuttgart, Birkhäuser, 1978, p. 216.

by leading members of the government, visited the meeting. Also among the spectators were foreign politicians, such as David Lloyd George and Winston Churchill⁵⁶. Three miles to the north of Reims the plain of Bétheny was selected for the meeting. To transport the spectators to the field a train track had been laid. Parisian society drank champagne; their poorer countrymen brought their food and wine in their picnic baskets. Society was brought together by collective waiting for the beginning of the flights and the collective watching of the activity in the air. Already weeks before, the people of France looked forward feverishly to the event: "For days, the main topic in cafés and houses, in the street and in the factories, had been flying and the forthcoming meeting"⁵⁷. During the meeting record after record was broken. The French newspapers reported in detail, mainly referring to the French pilots⁵⁸. The pilot Farman won the Grand Prix de la Champagne et la ville de Reims with a 180-kilometre flight in three hours and five minutes. All in all, he won 63,000 Francs in the contests. Due to the newspaper reporting, "Reims became a national event and one that had a stupendous effect on the entire world"⁵⁹.

The miracle of flying was explained to the newspaper readers by reporters who had flown with aviators⁶⁰. During the following years it became more and more popular in newspapers to report on flying experiences. For example, the writer Hermann Hesse flew in a Zeppelin and reported on the trip in the *Neue Wiener Tageblatt*. Almost two years later, he was permitted to board an aeroplane and des-

⁵⁶ Cf. with a lot of details Robert WOHL, *Passion*, pp. 100ff.; Alfred GOLLIN, *The Impact of Air Power on the British People and their Government, 1909-1914*, Basingstoke, and London, Macmillan Press, 1989, pp. 89ff., and Stephen BUDIANSKY, *Air Power*, p. 38.

⁵⁷ Owen S. LIEBERG, *The First Air Race. The International Competition at Reims, 1909*, New York, Doubleday & Company, 1974, p. 5.

⁵⁸ Cf. for example *Le Petit Parisien*, August 29, 1909, pp. 1f.: "L'Américain Curtiss gagne la Coupe Gordon-Bennett"; *ibid.*, August 30, 1909, pp. 1f.: "La journée de clôture a été très mouvementée".

⁵⁹ Owen S. LIEBERG, *The First Air Race*, p. 27.

⁶⁰ Cf. for example *Daily Mail*, August 30, 1909, p. 7: "Flying with Mr. Farman".

cribed his adventure in the *Kölnische Zeitung* as a frenzy of happiness⁶¹. Franz Kafka reported on the meeting at the Italian city of Brescia, near Milan, which was held only a short time after Reims. In a newspaper article he described the atmosphere within the huge crowd that shared in the event⁶². Whereas in Reims representatives of the French Republic played the leading role in the audience, at Brescia it was the Italian higher nobility. As Kafka described, the spectators did not want to see an optimal performance, such as the flight of the American aviator Glenn Hammond Curtiss, who won the prize of the meeting. His flight was too perfect for the audience. Although together with Curtiss and Blériot, other widely-known aviators took part, the audience was not really curious about the flights. In contrast to Reims this meeting was of little value for the French press⁶³.

In general, artists and writers were inspired by euphoric newspaper reports of aviation meetings. On the other hand, they themselves made a contribution to that phenomenon through their reports in newspapers. Overall these meetings resembled vast fairs or, better still, circuses. Social borders and conventions were overridden by watching the event in common, even though the grandstand divided the spectators into the richer and the poorer. The possibility of the aviators failing or crashing contributed greatly to the success of the meeting. The aviators could be compared to acrobats on a high wire, but

⁶¹ Hermann HESSE, "Spazierfahrt in der Luft", *Neues Wiener Tageblatt*, 30.07.1911, reprinted in Hermann HESSE, *Luftreisen. Betrachtungen, Gedichte und Bilder über das Fliegen*, Frankfurt am Main, and Leipzig, Insel, 1994, pp. 9-11; and Hermann HESSE, "Im Flugzeug", *Kölnische Zeitung*, 21.03.1913, reprinted in Hermann HESSE, *Luftreisen. Betrachtungen, Gedichte und Bilder über das Fliegen*, Frankfurt am Main, and Leipzig, Insel, 1994, pp. 27-42.

⁶² Franz KAFKA, "Die Aeroplane in Brescia", *Deutsche Zeitschrift Bohemia*, 29.09.1909, URL: <http://de.wikisource.org/wiki/Die_Aeroplane_in_Brescia>. Cf. to the meeting at Brescia with a lot of details Paul DEMETZ, *The Brescia Air Show 1909*, New York, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2002.

⁶³ Cf. for example *Le Matin*, September 13, 1909, p. 3: "Les Hommes de l'air".

their performance however, was even more dangerous⁶⁴. Pilots and their flying machines became subjects on postcards⁶⁵. Many aviators paid for the danger of flying with their lives. Between September 1908 and November 1910, about 100 aviators died as the result of accidents. And because this almost always happened at demonstration flights and meetings, the circumstances attracted large audiences. But the audience itself was always in danger. In May 1911, at the take-off of the contestants in the Paris-Madrid race, one of the machines went out of control and killed the French Minister of War and severely injured the Prime Minister. Because of these dangers pilots were considered extraordinary heroes who could control the powers of nature⁶⁶.

In Germany the newspaper reporting about air meetings was not as enthusiastic as in France. Compared with Reims and Brescia, the first German aviation meeting in Frankfurt am Main was less spectacular. The fame of Count Zeppelin, who participated as well, overshadowed the other German pilots⁶⁷. At the “International Flying Week” (“Internationale Flugwoche”) at Johannisthal near Berlin in September 1909, the famous French pilot Hubert Latham participated. His flight at the meeting has become famous not so much because of the course record he established in Germany, but because his unapproved flight was fined 150 Marks as a “public nuisance” (“grober Unfug”). In the Empire, aviation meetings were always seen as competitions to improve the development of German aeroplanes and motors. At the same time their inferiority in comparison to France was to be minimized⁶⁸. All in all the aviation meetings were no great success. In a letter to the Emperor in 1913, the “Flying and Sportground Society Berlin Johan-

⁶⁴ Cf. Robert WOHL, *Passion*, p. 257.

⁶⁵ Cf. with a lot of examples Stefan BLUMENTHAL, *Grüße aus der Luft. 100 Jahre Luftfahrt auf alten Postkarten*, Stuttgart, Motorbuch Verlag, 1991; cf. also Alphonse BERGET, *La route de l'air*, p. 261.

⁶⁶ Cf. Felix Philipp INGOLD, *Literatur und Aviatik*, p. 146.

⁶⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 111.

⁶⁸ Cf. Letter from June 18, 1910, in: GStA I. HA Rep. 89, Geheimes Zivilkabinett, jüngere Periode, Nr. 21390 “Akten betreffend die Spende für die Luftschiffahrt und Fürsorge für die Luftfahrer (1911–1914)”, pp. 47-48.

nisthal" ("Flug- und Sportplatzgesellschaft m.b.H., Berlin Johannis-thal") asked him for money because they had not made enough from the entrance fees due to an insufficient audience⁶⁹.

These circumstances were impossible in France where the enthusiasm in aeroplanes and pilots was always kept up by newspaper reporting. But not only newspapers argued for the further development of aeroplanes. Aviation enthusiasts like Clément Ader publicized the same ideals. Ader, who had worked close to the Ministry of War before 1900, but had had no success with his own flying machine, became one of the most eager advocates of the use of aeroplanes in a future war. But although his book *L'aviation militaire* reached six editions he did not have a wide influence on the French armed forces⁷⁰. Nevertheless the French army, with a long tradition in aviation, had, within a short period, built up an air force⁷¹. At Reims, the French Minister of War, General Brun, also participated in order to understand the possibilities of the use of aeroplanes. In September 1910, aeroplanes were used on manoeuvres in Picardie and were found to be acceptable. Already in October the "Inspection Permanente de l'Aéronautique" was established. It was only subordinate to the Minister of War and therefore had an eminent position⁷². This development was supported by the French public that regarded the aeroplane as the "fourth weapon" and as a real chance of winning the next war against Germa-

⁶⁹ Letter from February 4, 1913, in: GStA I. HA, Rep. 89 Geh. Zivilkabinett, jüngere Periode, Nr. 21392, "Akten betreffend die Vereine und Verbände in Flugsachen, sowie deren Flugveranstaltungen und Ausstellungen", pp. 70-73.

⁷⁰ Cf. C. ADER, *L'aviation militaire*, Paris, and Nancy, Berger-Levrault et Cie, 1909; C. ADER, *La première étape de l'Aviation Militaire en France*, Paris, J. Bosc et Cie, 1907, and Claude D'ABZAC-ÉPEZY, "Clément Ader, précurseur ou prophète?", *Revue Historique des Armées*, 3, 1991, pp. 65-77.

⁷¹ Luc THOMASSIN, "L'aérostation militaire et navale (1888-1904)", *Revue Historique des Armées*, 4, 2003, pp. 4-14.

⁷² Marie-Catherine VILLATOUX, "De l'inspection permanente de l'aéronautique à la direction de l'aéronautique. Histoire d'une institutionnalisation 1910-1914", *Revue Historique des Armées*, 4, 2003, pp. 15-26.

ny. The newspapers encouraged that way of thinking through their reporting and commentaries. So the newspaper *Le Matin* reported on Reims under the headline: “The battles and victories in the air” (“Les batailles et les victoires de l’air”)⁷³. Simultaneously, in another article, the author wrote, “the party is over: let’s go to work” (“la fête est finie: Au travail maintenant”). France, he wrote, “reine de l’air” has to defend its leading position “at all costs” (“à tout prix”)⁷⁴. Compared with the Zeppelin, which was seen only as a typical bomber, the aeroplane had been developed into a universal weapon. Its main function, as had been tested in manoeuvres, was the observation of enemy forces⁷⁵. Furthermore, it had been discovered that aeroplanes could destroy military-related facilities such as bridges or railways. It was seen as useful even to discover the position of enemy artillery. A combat mission against the communications of the enemy behind the front lines was also discussed. Behind the enemy lines, towns were seen as targets that it was impossible not to hit⁷⁶. Up to the outbreak of the Great War more than 650 military pilots were trained and about 1,250 aeroplanes were bought; 300 of them were available in August 1914⁷⁷.

In the year 1911 the new weapon was used for the first time in the war between Italy and the Ottoman Empire in Libya, “and although the impact of air power during the conflict was somewhere between negligible and nonexistent, aviation enthusiasts took it as a momentous affirmation of everything they had been saying”⁷⁸. But the first flights in war also proved the sceptics right. Too few of the dropped bombs, that were too small, had exploded, and too many of them had missed their targets. And the airships used in this war were ridd-

⁷³ *Le Matin*, August 30, 1909, S. 1.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Stephen BUDIANSKY, *Air Power*, p. 32.

⁷⁶ Cf. for these plans Stephen BUDIANSKY, *Air Power*, p. 48.

⁷⁷ Cf. Claude CARLIER, “L’aéronautique militaire”, pp. 203-14, especially p. 214: “L’aviation devant un outil destiné à exalter la puissance française et la supériorité sur l’Allemagne”.

⁷⁸ Cf. *Daily Mail*, October 30, 1911, p. 7: “Aeroplanes in War”; *ibid.*, November 1, 1911, “Bombs dropped by airman”; and the citation in Stephen BUDIANSKY, *Air Power*, p. 45.

led by the guns of the Ottoman infantry⁷⁹. Nevertheless the missions were celebrated by the newspapers as a revolution in war. And so the gap between fiction and reality was not closed until August 1914. On the one hand, part of the European public, and even the armed forces, believed in the possibilities of the new weapon. But the General Staff officers remained sceptical, still believing that aeroplanes were unreliable weapons⁸⁰.

Nevertheless, systematic bombing and aerial photography from the flying aeroplane was practiced. In France the Michelin brothers, factory owners and flying enthusiasts, promoted the military use of aeroplanes by offering prizes, mainly for bombing ability⁸¹. They were members of the “Ligue nationale aérienne” which consistently emphasized how important aeroplanes would be in a future war. This League became a highly influential pressure group in France with offices in all French regions. In the eyes of the Michelins it was a patriotic duty to create an air force. Even in February 1912 they demanded 5,000 pilots and the same number of aeroplanes for the French army⁸². In Germany bombing was also practiced. In August 1912, an “Aeroplane Tournament” (“Aeroplan-Turnier”) was held, organized by the “German Aviation Association”. In this contest, targets at ground level had to be hit. The highest award could be gained by an airdrop from a height of more than 600 meters. It was also the aim to take pictures from the same height. But, with the exception of the engines, only German-built aeroplanes were permitted⁸³.

⁷⁹ Cf. Stephen BUDIANSKY, *Air Power*, pp. 45f.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁸¹ Cf. Antoine CHAMPEAUX, *Michelin et l'aviation, 1896-1945. Patriotisme industriel et innovation*, Paris, Lavauzelle, 2006, Chapter 2 “Les prix et coupes Michelin d'aviation avant la première Guerre Mondiale, 1908-1914”, pp. 45-111.

⁸² Cf. *Le Matin*, July 12, 1911, p. 1: “Pour que nous ayons des aéroplanes”; Antoine CHAMPEAUX, *Michelin*, pp. 97f.

⁸³ Cf. the catalogue “Aeroplan-Turnier veranstaltet vom Deutschen Fliegerbund (Kartell von Flugvereinen des Deutschen Luftfahrer-Verbands) unter Mitwirkung des Reichsflugvereins Bezirksverein Gotha, zu Gotha am 17., 18. und 19. August 1912 auf dem Rennplatz des mitteldeutschen Renn-

In France, aeroplanes in general were in the spotlight as symbols of national progress, but the newspapers reported on French airships, too. The excellent reputation these airships had can be seen by looking at their names. The most famous was the military airship “République” which was to participate in autumn manoeuvres in 1909. But some days earlier, it collided with a tree after an engine breakdown⁸⁴. Nevertheless, it was possible to repair the airship and so it participated in the manoeuvres. Only a few days later another accident happened. A rotor blade disconnected and tore into the envelope. The airship crashed and four soldiers, the crew of the airship, were killed. The newspaper *Le Matin* called it a “national catastrophe” (“catastrophe nationale”). Important representatives of the French Republic attended the funeral ceremonies in Versailles. The dead obtained the cross of the Legion of Honour⁸⁵.

4. The United Kingdom – “No longer an island!”

In the United Kingdom the enterprising brothers Wright also offered their flying machine to the government. But like the Americans, the Germans and the French, the British government declined also because of the high price⁸⁶.

It remained sceptical with regard to the creation of an air force. In the year 1908, an “Aerial Navigation Subcommittee” categorized

vereins, Frankfurt a. M. 1912”, in: GStA I. HA, Rep. 89 Geh. Zivilkabinett, jüngere Periode, Nr. 21392, 44-51.

⁸⁴ *Le Matin*, September 4, 1909, p. 1: “Le “République” est victime d’une grave accident”; *ibid.*, September 5, 1909, p. 1: “Le “République” n’est pas perdu”.

⁸⁵ *Le Matin*, September 26, 1909, p. 1: “Catastrophe Nationale”; *ibid.*, September 29, 1909, p. 1: “Morts au champ d’honneur”; *Le Journal*, September 26, 1909, p. 1: “Le Dirigeable “République” éclate dans les airs”; *ibid.*, September 27, 1909, p. 1: “L’Enquête établit les causes de la terrible catastrophe”.

⁸⁶ Cf. with a lot of details Alfred GOLLIN, *No Longer an Island*. Cf. *Times*, June 10, 1908, p. 7; and also Stephen BUDIANSKY, *Air Power*, pp. 25ff.

the danger caused by airships or aeroplanes as insignificant. The creation of a flight section within the army or navy was regarded as unnecessary⁸⁷. So in the United Kingdom the development happened outside the armed forces. On October 16th 1908, the American aviator Samuel F. Cody succeeded in flying almost 500 metres with a self-constructed aeroplane before crashing⁸⁸. It was the first flight in Great Britain with an aircraft heavier-than-air. Richard Burdon Haldane, British Secretary of State for War, then set up an “Advisory Committee for Aeronautics” that must have impressed the British with its scientific approach⁸⁹. At the beginning of the year 1911 in Great Britain, an “Air Battalion” was established that had to test airships as well as aeroplanes⁹⁰. In the same year four officers of the Royal Navy were trained as pilots. This was possible because of the allocation of instructors and aeroplanes by the “Royal Aero Club”⁹¹. In the year 1912, a “Royal Flying Corps” was established. From its “Naval Wing” the “Royal Naval Air Service” evolved in 1914⁹². But until the First World War, no noteworthy British aircraft industry existed. Most of the aeroplanes that were sent to France in 1914 were not developed in the United Kingdom and all of them had French motors⁹³. Whereas the invention of Count Zeppelin in Germany and aeroplanes in France were continuously being improved, in the United Kingdom the lack of develop-

⁸⁷ Cf. with a lot of details Alfred GOLLIN, *No Longer an Island*, pp. 396ff., Alfred GOLLIN, *Impact of Air Power*, pp. 17ff., and Stephen BUDIANSKY, *Air Power*, pp. 32ff.

⁸⁸ Cf. Stephen BUDIANSKY, *Air Power*, p. 34; and Alfred GOLLIN, *No Longer an Island*, pp. 83f.

⁸⁹ Cf. for the establishing of the “Advisory Committee for Aeronautics”, Alfred GOLLIN, *Impact of Air Power*, pp. 24ff., and Stephen BUDIANSKY, *Air Power*, p. 37.

⁹⁰ Alfred GOLLIN, *Impact of Air Power*, pp. 163f.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

⁹² Cf. Stephen BUDIANSKY, *Air Power*, pp. 47f.; Alfred GOLLIN, *Impact of Air Power*, pp. 197ff., and Malcolm COOPER, *The Birth of Independent Air Power. British Air Policy in the First World War*, London, Routledge, 1986, p. 8.

⁹³ Malcolm COOPER, *Birth of Independent Air Power*, p. 9.

ment was seen as unworthy for such a developed and proud nation⁹⁴. David Lloyd George, who was among the spectators of the aviation meeting in Reims, said in an interview with the *Daily Mail*: “How hopelessly behind we are in these great and historic experiments. I really felt, as a ‘Britisher’, rather ashamed that we were so completely out of it”⁹⁵.

More important for the treatment of flying in the United Kingdom was the fear of being vulnerable. Although very early on the Wright brothers had given their opinion that, because of their invention, wars would become more and more improbable because surprise attacks would be impossible, in Great Britain the dangers of a flying machine first and foremost as a weapon were discussed⁹⁶. Already in 1901 the writer H. G. Wells had published several articles in the *North American Review* in which he prophesied that flying machines would be used as weapons in a not too distant future⁹⁷. His theory became more public thanks to his novel “War in the Air” (1908) in which he described a war between Germany and the USA where German airships destroyed New York⁹⁸. After that the whole civilization collapsed; London, Berlin and other capitals were destroyed by bombs.

Because of the progress of the German airships during that time, fiction became possibility. And all that in a society that had been discussing the possibilities and dangers of future war since the turn of

⁹⁴ Alfred GOLLIN, *Impact of Air Power*, p. 3: “The British always liked to believe themselves in the van of technological advances. With respect to aeronautics they could no longer comfort themselves with this reassuring notion. The distress about the air blended in with other negative themes that afflicted British opinion in the later Edwardian period”.

⁹⁵ *Daily Mail*, August 25, 1909, p. 5: “Races in the air”.

⁹⁶ Cf. Alfred GOLLIN, *No Longer an Island*, p. 250; and Stephen BUDIANSKY, *Air Power*, p. 32.

⁹⁷ Cf. for Wells “Prophecy” Stephen BUDIANSKY, *Air Power*, pp. 6ff.

⁹⁸ H. G. WELLS, *The War in the Air, and Particularly How Mr. Bert Smallways Fared While it Lasted*, London, George Bell & Sons, 1908, especially pp. 144f.

the century⁹⁹. Accordingly, the effect of Wells' novel in public was extraordinary: "Wells wrote his science fiction with a serious purpose, and to considerable extent that was how his readers took it"¹⁰⁰. So Wells was also very involved in convincing the British politicians to take the new development seriously. He was supported by Lord Northcliffe, the owner of the influential newspapers *The Times* and *Daily Mail*. Northcliffe had already reprehended the chief editor of his *Daily Mail* because of the reporting of the first flight of Santos-Dumont in 1906. In his eyes the message was not that the aviator had flown a short distance but the quintessence of the event was rather "England is no longer an island [...]. It means the aerial chariots of a foe descending on British soil if war comes"¹⁰¹.

In the following years Northcliffe observed the international development and appealed to the public again and again because of this British backwardness. In a letter to the chief editor of the *The Times* written in February 1909 in the French town Pau, where he had watched an aeroplane, he wrote: "Our national middle-headedness has rarely been seen to worse disadvantage than in this particular matter, aviation. Here some seven hundred and fifty miles from London is a machine which can fly perfectly at forty miles an hour at any height up to about a mile. It is stated by the German and French officers here to be practical unhittable. [...] Despite the fact that this machine is only twenty-two hours distant, nobody has been here from the War Office". Furthermore the British development in aviation was solely represented by an American who knows nothing about aviation and only about kites. "I might as well attempt to produce my newspapers

⁹⁹ In the centre of the discussion was the book of Jean DE BLOCH, *The Future of War in Its Technical, Economic and Political Relations*, Boston, Ginn & Company, 1899, URL: <http://www.archive.org/details/futureofwarinits00blochrich>. His statement was that in a future war the advantage was not on the side of the attacker because of faster and stronger weapons. So the advantage, de Bloch wrote, was on the side of the defender. But both sides would have high casualties.

¹⁰⁰ Stephen BUDIANSKY, *Air Power*, p. 9.

¹⁰¹ Cited after Stephen BUDIANSKY, *Air Power*, p. 39. Cf. also Alfred GOLLIN, *No Longer an Island*, pp. 2, and 186f.

by the aid of a man who confessedly knew nothing of printing, having carefully chosen old-fashioned machines to begin with”¹⁰². The American here described by Northcliffe was the aviator Cody as mentioned above.

Northcliffe was definitely a flying enthusiast. But he also registered that fear of an enemy, who had the ability to fly over Britain and drop bombs, was also useful in increasing the sales of his newspapers. That happened because that fear was linked to a fear that had been developed by the so-called “invasion novels” since the 1880s¹⁰³. These novels must be read in the context of the constantly worsening relationship between the United Kingdom and the German Empire. After the Boer War the relationship was bad because the British government and public saw the German battle fleet as a menace¹⁰⁴. In addition this new danger out of the air had appeared. In the “invasion novels” Britain was always described as unprepared against invasion troops. This case was depicted by British as well as by German authors¹⁰⁵. At first

¹⁰² Northcliffe to Buckle, February 26, 1909, in: British Library, Northcliffe Papers, 62243.

¹⁰³ Cf. for the personality of Northcliffe Alfred GOLLIN, *No Longer an Island*, p. 192; Alfred GOLLIN, *Impact of Air Power*, pp. 4ff.; Robert WOHL, *Passion*, p. 37. Cf. for the “invasion novels” Stephen BUDIANSKY, *Air Power*, pp. 39f.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Mark HEWITSON, *Germany and the Causes of the First World War*, Oxford, and New York, Berg, 2004, p. 52. For the perception of the Boer War in Germany cf. Steffen BENDER, *Der Burenkrieg und die deutschsprachige Presse. Wahrnehmung und Deutung zwischen Bureneuphorie und Anglophobie*, 1899-1902, Paderborn, Ferdinand Schöningh, 2009. Cf. for the relationship between the German and the British Empire in the years before the First World War also Peter ALTER, “Herausforderer der Weltmacht. Das Deutsche Reich im britischen Urteil”, in Klaus HILDEBRAND (ed.), *Das Deutsche Reich im Urteil der großen Mächte und europäischen Nachbarn (1871-1945)*, Munich, Oldenbourg, 1995, pp. 159-77; and Robert K. MASSIE, *Dreadnought. Britain, Germany, and the Coming of the Great War*, New York, Random House, 1991.

¹⁰⁵ Henning FRANKE, *Der politisch-militärische Zukunftsroman in Deutschland 1904-14. Ein populäres Genre in seinem populären Umfeld*, Frankfurt am Main, Berne, and New York, P. Lang, 1985, 1 und 3. A good

in these novels, the war at sea was at the centre of development, but after 1908 writers like the German civil servant Rudolf Martin moved the war into the air. In his novel *Weltkrieg in den Lüften* (*World War in the Airs*) Great Britain was conquered by an airship fleet and the centre of Paris was totally destroyed by bombs¹⁰⁶. In an interview with the *Daily Mail* in July 1908 Martin considered as possible that more than 350.000 soldiers could be transported by airships for the capture of the United Kingdom¹⁰⁷.

The already established “Aerial League of the British Empire” tried to counteract these developments and was supported by Lord Northcliffe and his *Daily Mail*. Over and over, British vulnerability was evoked and it was noted that London was one of the nearest targets for an air fleet. It was the aim of the League to capture “aerial supremacy” as an equivalent to the supremacy of the Royal Navy at sea. Through aerial supremacy an enemy attack on the island should be prevented¹⁰⁸. The public as well as the members of Parliament should be galvanized through the agitation of the League. This opinion was shared by leading figures such as Winston Churchill and H. G. Wells. Members of the House of Commons established a “Parliamentary Aerial Defence Committee” to force the government to construct and buy aeroplanes¹⁰⁹. In this heated atmosphere a literal “phantom airship scare” happened in the United Kingdom¹¹⁰. In spring 1909

example for a German invasion novel is August NIEMANN, *Der Weltkrieg. Deutsche Träume*, Berlin, and Leipzig, Vobach, 1904.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. for the content of MARTIN's novel (Rudolf MARTIN, *Der Weltkrieg in den Lüften*, Leipzig, Volger, 1909) with a lot of details Peter FRITZSCHE, *Nation of Fliers*, pp. 39ff.; and Robert WOHL, *Passion*, pp. 76ff.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Alfred GOLLIN, *No Longer an Island*, p. 337, where the article is printed in parts.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. for the aims of the “Aerial League” Alfred GOLLIN, *No Longer an Island*, pp. 454ff.; Alfred GOLLIN, *Impact of Air Power*, pp. 6ff., and Stephen BUDIANSKY, *Air Power*, pp. 40f.

¹⁰⁹ Siehe Stephen BUDIANSKY, *Air Power*, p. 41.

¹¹⁰ Cf. for example *Daily Express*, May 13, 1909, p. 1: “The Airship Mystery” and *ibid.*, May 25, 1909, p. 4: “We are scaremongering again”; cf.

airships were seen at different locations. The German press commented on this hysteria with sarcastic articles¹¹¹. Lord Northcliffe, who visited Germany during this period, tried to dampen the hysteria down. He advised his fellow countrymen of the impression in foreign countries. Great Britain, he wrote in an article in the *Daily Mail* was now seen as a “home of mere nervous degenerates”¹¹². And he wrote also to his close friend Buckle: “These ridiculous balloon and other scares make English people look very foolish in Germany just now”¹¹³.

In the summer, the fear of Zeppelins abated, but now the evidence was presented that England was in fact no island anymore. The *Daily Mail* had offered a prize for the first aviator crossing the British Channel. In the summer of 1909 the two French aviators Hubert Latham and Louis Blériot attempted this feat. After they had waited for weeks because of bad weather near Calais, Blériot succeeded on July 25th¹¹⁴. In a flight of less than 40 minutes he reached Dover with a self-constructed aeroplane and won the sum of £1,000. Blériot became a popular hero around the world; he received over 100 orders for his aeroplane. In Paris it was the newspaper *Le Matin* in particular that paid tribute to the aviator. The editor of *Le Matin*, Henry de Jouvenel, gave

with a lot of other examples Chapter 3: “The Phantom Airship Scare of 1909” in Alfred GOLLIN, *Impact of Air Power*, pp. 49ff.

¹¹¹ Cf. *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, April 6, 1909, Mittagsblatt, p. 1: “Die Furcht vor Zeppelin”; *ibid.*, May 13, 1909, Morgenblatt, p. 3: “Die englischen Invasionsphantasien”, and *ibid.*, May 17, 1909, Mittagsblatt, p. 1: “Der Holländer fliegt wieder”.

¹¹² Cited after Stephen BUDIANSKY, *Air Power*, p. 41. Cf. also Alfred GOLLIN, *Impact of Air Power*, pp. 58ff. So the “airship scare” went down after Northcliffe article in the *Daily Mail*. Cf. John DAVIS, *A History of Britain 1885-1939*, London, and New York, St. Martin’s Press, 1999, pp. 89ff., and Alfred GOLLIN, *Impact of Air Power*, pp. 50ff.

¹¹³ Northcliffe to Buckle, May 20, 1909, in: British Library, Northcliffe Papers, Add. 62243.

¹¹⁴ Cf. *Flight*, July 17, 1909, pp. 432f.: “Knights of the Channel”, and *Flight*, July 31, 1909, pp. 457-461: “Blériot’s Cross-Channel Flight”; for France: *Le Matin*, July 12, 1909, p. 1: “Latham est prêt – Mais le temps ne l’est pas”.

a banquet in his honour and Blériot's aeroplane hung outside the windows of the newspaper headquarter for some days¹¹⁵.

The Times welcomed the achievement with "hearty congratulations"¹¹⁶ for the aviator, but the *Daily Mail* voiced its comments in a harsher tone. The following day a longer article by H. G. Wells appeared that described the backwardness of Great Britain. It was a French and not a British aviator who crossed the channel for the first time. The anticipated danger that aeroplanes could fly from Calais to England had become reality¹¹⁷. While the British public, which seemed to have forgotten the "airship scare", celebrated the exploit, this flight meant a problem for the British government.

Because of this development Haldane was forced into a defensive position. He had aimed for a scientific consideration of aviation. But in view of the fact that other European nations possessed military airships and aeroplanes his position was misplaced¹¹⁸. In the public view, the British Empire was after the lost battles in the Boer War and because of domestic policy problems in a period of degeneration and decay. For many reasons David Powell characterized this period as an age of "Edwardian Crisis"¹¹⁹.

¹¹⁵ Cf. *Le Matin*, July 26, 1909, pp. 1f.: "Un grand Français, Blériot, franchit la Manche en aéroplane", and 3: "L'Angleterre n'est plus une île"; *ibid.*, July 27, 1909, p. 3: "Londres fait à Blériot un accueil triomphal"; *ibid.*, July 29, 1909, pp. 1f.: "Paris fait à Blériot un retour triomphal"; *ibid.*, July 31, 1909, p. 1: "Blériot reçoit au "Matin" le drapeau qui salua son triomphe; and *ibid.*, August 1, 1909, p. 1: "Le "Matin" donne à la France l'aéroplane de Blériot".

¹¹⁶ Cf. *Times*, July 26, 1909, p. 9: "The Cross-Channel Flight".

¹¹⁷ Cf. for the crossing of the channel with a lot of details Alfred GOLLIN, *Impact of Air Power*, pp. 70ff., Stephen BUDIANSKY, *Air Power*, p. 42, WOHL, *Passion*, pp. 53ff., and Felix Philipp INGOLD, *Literatur und Aviatik*, pp. 95f.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Stephen BUDIANSKY, *Air Power*, pp. 42f.; and Alfred GOLLIN, *Impact of Air Power*, pp. 76ff.

¹¹⁹ Cf. David POWELL, *The Edwardian Crisis. Britain 1901-14*, Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan, 1996.

In addition, the question as to what constituted the British nation was increasingly posed. For the first time in centuries national movements arose. Great Britain was dominated by England but in Wales, Scotland and especially in Ireland, nationalism was becoming stronger and stronger¹²⁰. The symbols that had always unified the United Kingdom were the royal dynasty as an embodiment of the Empire, as the Golden and Diamond Jubilees of Queen Victoria (1887 and 1897) had shown. But because of the atmosphere in Great Britain, it came as no surprise that in the year 1913 another “air panic” happened¹²¹. Thus aeroplanes were never seen as positive symbols and so it was impossible to create their use as national symbols for the United Kingdom. Despite national tendencies within the United Kingdom, the Royal Navy remained a symbol of the whole of Britannia. So the Navy’s share of the budget rose from 22,7 (1906) to 24,1 per cent (1914)¹²².

5. Conclusion

As should by now be clear, in Western Europe there were different ways of dealing with the phenomenon of flying. Its possibilities and dangers had been discussed publicly since the first flights by Count Zeppelin and the Wright brothers. The newspaper reporting played an important role in turning flying machines into objects with high prestige and collective symbols. Flight meetings, such those in Reims or Brescia, or demonstration flights, were very important for the public imagination. These meetings followed a more or less set ritual that addressed different sections of the public sphere: both a “public assembly” [*Versammlungsöffentlichkeit*] and a “mass media

¹²⁰ Cf. Adrian HASTINGS, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 64 and G.R. SEARLE, *A New England? Peace and War, 1886-1918*, Oxford, Clarendon, 2004, pp. 8-15.

¹²¹ Cf. with a lot of details Alfred GOLLIN, *Impact of Air Power*, Chapter 11: “The Air Panic of 1913”, pp. 230ff.

¹²² G.R. SEARLE, *A New England?*, p. 392.

public” [*massenmediale Öffentlichkeit*]¹²³. The public gathered in person for the event was directly addressed through the theatricality and performativity of the flights themselves¹²⁴, whereas a broader public could be reached by the mass media. In these years the media possessed the “role of intensifiers and multipliers of political discourses” and therefore not only played a mediating and passive role, but were politically active themselves: “[T]hey do not only represent, but they also intervene performatively through their own decisions in selection and framing”¹²⁵. Dayan and Katz emphasise to what extent the mass media affect media events: “Such performances [...] must not be considered mere ‘alterations’ or ‘additions’ to the original. Rather, they should be perceived as qualitative transformations of the very nature of public events”¹²⁶. In Dayan and Katz’ terms, every flight seen by

¹²³ Jürgen GERHARDS, and Friedhelm NEIDHARDT, “Strukturen und Funktionen moderner Öffentlichkeit: Fragestellungen und Ansätze”, in Stefan MÜLLER-DOHM (ed.), *Öffentlichkeit, Kultur, Massenkommunikation: Beiträge zur Medien- und Kommunikationssoziologie*, Oldenburg, BIS-Verlag, 1991, pp. 31-90; Jeffrey WIMMER, *(Gegen-)Öffentlichkeit in der Mediengesellschaft. Analyse eines medialen Spannungsverhältnisses*, Wiesbaden, VS Verl. für Sozialwissenschaften, 2007, especially p. 243.

¹²⁴ Erika FISCHER-LICHTE, “Performance, Inszenierung, Ritual: Zur Klärung kulturwissenschaftlicher Schlüsselbegriffe” in Jürgen MARTSCHUKAT, and Steffen PATZOLD (eds.), *Geschichtswissenschaft und “performative turn”: Ritual, Inszenierung und Performanz vom Mittelalter bis zur Neuzeit*, Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna, Böhlau, 2003, pp. 34-54; Jürgen MARTSCHUKAT, and Steffen PATZOLD, “Geschichtswissenschaft und ‘performative turn’: Eine Einführung in Fragestellungen, Konzepte und Literatur”, in Jürgen MARTSCHUKAT, and Steffen PATZOLD (eds.), *Geschichtswissenschaft und “performative turn”: Ritual, Inszenierung und Performanz vom Mittelalter bis zur Neuzeit*, Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna, Böhlau, 2003, pp. 1-31.

¹²⁵ Ute FREVERT and Heinz-Gerhard HAUPT, “Neue Politikgeschichte”, p. 19 [translation by the author]; cf. Clemens ZIMMERMANN, “Politischer Journalismus, Öffentlichkeiten und Medien im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert”, in Clemens ZIMMERMANN (ed.), *Politischer Journalismus, Öffentlichkeiten und Medien im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, Ostfildern, Jan Thorbecke, 2006, pp. 9-23.

¹²⁶ Daniel DAYAN, and Elihu KATZ, *Media Events*, p. 78.

the spectators was a kind of “contest”, because every single flight meant also the possibility of failure.

In the last quarter of the 19th century a “transformation of the definition and programme of nationalism” happened¹²⁷. Increasingly, a nation was no longer defined by the people included but by the people excluded. Rightly, Sebastian Conrad speaks of an “interconnectedness and interdependence of political and social changes across the world”, which means a globalization in which every kind of nationalism was integrated¹²⁸. On the one hand the public flights were events that found supporters beyond national borders. On the other hand they were simultaneously a contest that was nationalistically charged. A nation, therefore, was created in a performative manner in the terms of Benedict Anderson.

Thereby differences existed. In Germany, the Zeppelin became “a unifying symbol that could represent the German nation without excluding other identities”¹²⁹. As a collective symbol the Zeppelin airship connected the progress of the German nation to the progress of technology and modern society. By looking simultaneously towards the sky the people and their government became one. In addition both sides acted jointly in financing the airships. Finally, the Zeppelin was a very special flying machine. Its majestic size astonished the public. Its long-standing cross-country flights were seen as signs of technical superiority. In Germany the Zeppelin had a healthy advantage over every other flying machine which could not reach such popularity. The German aeroplanes were only built because of German-French antagonism. In contrast to the United Kingdom, Germany was tremen-

¹²⁷ Eric HOBSEBAWM, *The Age of Empire, 1875-1914*, New York, Vintage Books, 1989, p. 146.

¹²⁸ C.A. BAYLY, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914. Global Connections and Comparisons*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2004, p. 1. Cf. Sebastian CONRAD, “Globalization effects: mobility and nation in Imperial Germany, 1880-1914”, *Journal of Global History*, 3, 2008, pp. 43-66, p. 44: “[...] globalization and nationalization were not pitted against each other, but were rather complementary, if not symbiotic”.

¹²⁹ Guillaume DE SYON, *Zeppelin!*, p. 41.

dously interested in its own developments as it was not dependent on French inventions.

In France the speedy aeroplane was contrasted with the stolid Zeppelin. In addition the plane could be used as a universal weapon. For France, and especially for its newspapers, the leading role in the advancement of this type of aviation was a question of prestige. Simultaneously, the aeroplane as a national symbol had the power to weld the Third Republic together again. So Robert Wohl wrote, “[d]uring the years before 1914 the French identified themselves and were identified by others as the ‘winged nation’ par excellence”¹³⁰.

In the United Kingdom aeroplanes and airships could not become national symbols or the embodiment of the nation. On the one hand, greater backwardness in aviation continued up to the first years of the Great War. In addition doubt was felt that the United Kingdom really was one nation. Only the Royal Navy or the Empire had the power to unify the British people. Even a mighty newspaper mogul like Lord Northcliffe could make a stand against these tendencies.

In his influential book *Society of the Spectacle*, Guy Debord pointed out that the spectacle “presents itself simultaneously as society itself, as a part of society, and as a means of unification”. It has, at the same time, elements of separation or “it is in reality the domain of delusion and false consciousness: the unification it achieves is nothing but an official language of universal separation”¹³¹. The development in aviation and its adoption in Western Europe is a good example of that apparent awkwardness. Sometimes it was possible to celebrate the heroes of the air or “hommes oiseaux” beyond all borders. But the race between nations as a contest could not be denied. Finally the flying machines became basic national symbols. “To see an aviator in the sky was to receive a powerful political message [and] a sign of national vitality”¹³². As the use of aircraft in the Great War and afterwards

¹³⁰ Robert WOHL, *Passion*, p. 2.

¹³¹ DEBORD, *Society of the Spectacle*, p. 7.

¹³² Robert WOHL, *Passion*, p. 259.

has shown, the dream of an airship or aeroplane bringing peace, as some contemporaries expected, was but a pipedream.

Varia

