Guiding the Space Age from the ground up: Pan Am, Cold War and guided missiles

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Abstract
This article analyses the role of Pan American Airways (Pan Am) in the shaping of the ‘Space Age’. The study arises out of our interest in the role of the organization in the development of discourse (Foucault 1979). While much has been written on discourse (Phillips and Hardy 2002) there have been few applied studies, and they tend to focus on the reproduction of discourse (e.g. New Public Management) within organizations (Thomas and Davies 2004) rather than on the role of organizations in the production of discourses.

Pan Am was studied because of its role in the development of the US space program; its prominence as a major international company; and the availability of an extensive archive of company materials. Using critical hermeneutics (Prasad and Mir 2002), discourse analysis (Phillips and Hardy 2002), and archaeo-genealogical historiography (Rowlinson 2004), we examined the implications for organizational management and the study of organizational and management history. We conclude that the study of organizations as sites of discourse production is a fruitful area for further research; drawing attention to the implications for change by revealing the importance not only of the ‘localized’ aspects of discourse but also the discursive character of analyses of ‘the past’.

Key words • archaeo-genealogical historiography • Cold War • discursive condition • Pan American Airways • Space Age

The Space Age

History changed on October 4, 1957, when the Soviet Union successfully launched Sputnik 1 ... That launch ushered in new political, military, technological, and scientific developments. While the Sputnik launch was a single event, it marked the start of the space age and the U.S.–U.S.S.R space race. (NASA 2007)
It is interesting that the official website of the United States National Aeronautics and Space Agency (NASA) lists the political and military character of the space age before the technological and scientific elements. Indeed, while pointing out that the Sputnik launch was a ‘technical achievement’, the website points out that it ‘changed everything [by catching] the world’s attention and the American public off-guard ... In addition, the public feared that the Soviet’s ability to launch satellites also translated into the capability to launch ballistic missiles that could carry nuclear weapons from Europe to the U.S’ (NASA 2007). Edward Teller, one of the leading scientists in the USA, called the Sputnik launch a kind of ‘technological Pearl Harbor’ (Halberstam 1994, 625).

On the other hand, the NASA statement does manage to capture four of the key elements that constituted the space age – an accelerated arms race that was captured in the notion of the space race; heightened political tensions that were played out to its fullest in the Cuba Missile Crisis; technological developments that increasingly became associated with futurism and modernity – as exemplified, for example, by the television series *The Jetsons* – (Kennedy 2007), and a near worship of science as a method of research and ‘an ideological weapon’ for ensuring truth and the superiority of ‘the American way of life’ (Mickenberg 2006, 181).

There seems little question that the notion of a ‘Space Age’ captured the imagination and the energies of a large number of people in the late 1950s and 1960s (Clarke 1972; Cohen 1967; Parker 2008). In some ways it might be argued that it constituted a discourse (i.e. an interrelated set of ideas and practices broadly accepted as received knowledge across social groups) that shaped the way people felt and reacted at the time. However, as we shall argue, it was more plausibility a zeitgeist, a sense of being that had a number of variants and understandings that cut across various discourses – particularly that of the Cold War. In this article we seek to find the spaces of the age in which that atmosphere of zeitgeist was developed, reinforced and maintained, through a focus on the discourse of the Cold War, and the role of one prominent organization – Pan American Airways. We contend that seemingly global discourses, such as the Cold War, are rooted in a series of local practices that somehow cohere at points, and diverge at others (Mills and Helms Mills 2009). We explore the connects and disconnects through a study of Pan American Airways (Pan Am) that, we argue, played an important role in the construction of the Cold War and, largely through that lens, a major theme of the space age zeitgeist.

**Pan American Airways and the guided missile range**

The fact that Pan American’s motives to serve have stemmed mainly from patriotism and loyalty to our national mission has added a deserved luster to your record. – Commendation letter to Juan Trippe from the US Air Force, citing Guided Missiles Range Division for a decade of Achievement as prime contractor for the management, operation and maintenance of the Atlantic Missile range. (Pan American Airways 1962c)
Pan Am was ‘unique among airlines in having a long and active association with space research’ (Turner 1976, 158). It played a key role in the US space program from the first contracts for developing Cape Canaveral in 1953. The airline provided the infrastructure and support services for the missile test range at Cape Canaveral and other installations related to the space and missile programs, ‘forming a special Guided Missile Range division [GMRD] for the purpose’ (Turner 1976, 158). At its height the GMRD employed 7000 people and operated the ‘site of the most sophisticated aerospace test facilities’ in the west (Turner 1976, 158): in 1967 the division was renamed the Aerospace Services Division (ASD). Over the years Pan Am was an important constituent of the development of the US space program and the shaping of the space age.

In the article that follows we trace Space Age themes of the ‘space race,’ ‘futurism,’ and ‘scientivism’, through Pan Am’s involvement with the US space program and its contributions to Cold War thinking.

**Methodology**

I know that none of us is content to live in the past. So I prefer to think of the past only as proof positive that we have the ability to, and can, make the future equally bright. (Pan Am Vice President, Harold Gray 1952, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of Pan Am)

The methodological approach of this article involves three elements – critical hermeneutics (Prasad and Mir 2002), critical discourse analysis (Phillips and Hardy 2002), and archaeo-genealogical historiography (Rowlinson 2004). We base much of our account on a critical reading of the extensive archived materials in the Pan American Airways Collection (341, Series 1) at the Otto Richter Library, University of Miami. This was supplemented by analysis of various published and unpublished histories of the airline.

We employed critical hermeneutics to analyze texts ‘as abstracted formal entities but also [to analyze] the socio-historical contexts in which they are imbedded’ (Prasad and Mir 2004, 96). Expressions of patriotism, for example, are evident throughout the airline’s materials but analysis of those expressions reveals different contours and meanings at different points of time – appearing in the guise of pioneering, government service, warrior, and ideologue. In a congruent method we drew on critical discourse analysis to extract themes from the materials and assess the processes involved in the development of dominant senses of the organization. Here the process was iterative. We began by identifying of some of the central themes associated with the space age – scientivism, futurism, technologism, modernity, and politico-military conflict (Parker 2008). We then analyzed archival materials and existing histories of Pan Am to assess the extent to which those same themes were evident, what other themes emerge, and how these themes contributed to notions of the space age.

In using these methods we seek to construct an archaeo-genealogical account that roots the past in discursive conditions rather than objective representation.
MANAGEMENT & ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORY 4(3)

(Ermath 2007). What this means is that we are not seeking to make truth claims about the past by tracing incontrovertible facts and their causal relationship in the creation of something called the space age. Rather we are seeking to liberate the past from history (i.e. from the professionalization of history making) by exploring the conditions of possibility (Foucault 1979) in the creation of the space age zeitgeist.

In reading the texts of Pan Am we are looking for the discursive conditions (e.g. interpretations of the Sputnik launch), the semiotic systems in which interpretations occurred (e.g. the language of the Cold War) and the way those interpretations were enunciated (Ermath 2007) (e.g. expressions of fear rather than curiosity). Our focus of attention, thus, ‘shifts from the secondary picture of resemblance and moves to the primary arena of enunciation and practice ... to offer new ways to conceptualize time: for example, as rhythmic iteration... as punctuated equilibrium’ (Ermath 2007, 64).

The Patriot Game

A century ago the officers and men of our merchant marine carried the American flag over new seas and into strange ports ... So it is today that American flight crews are undertaking aerial voyages of exploration, carrying the American flag over the seas and into the airports of the world. (Leslie 1938)

American-Flag air transport abroad is part of our nation’s air power. World leadership for peace demands continued leadership by the Flag on the airways of the world. By making the finest air service available to more and more people, the men and women of Pan American, at home and abroad, are keeping the American Flag in first place on the air routes of the world. (Pan American Airways 1948, 17)

Histories of the space age era often focus on the launch of Sputnik and associated fears of a Soviet nuclear threat to the USA and its allies (Abella 2008; Jones 1982; Mickenberg 2006). The dominant sense of fear – rather than joy and excitement – that greeted Sputnik in the USA may be explained to some extent by the preceding language of the Cold War that formed a kind of syntax through which sense was made of events. Yet it was neither automatic nor inevitable. It relied, arguably, on enunciation. How certain fears where enunciated but also where and by whom we shall turn to next.

Morgan (2003) contends that the origins of the Cold War can be traced back to 1917 and the Russian Revolution. However, if we think of the Cold War as a gestalt, it can be argued that it is not the existence of the various individual pieces that constituted the idea of a Cold War but how those pieces were configured at a given time. The launch of Sputnik, for example, was three years after the US Senate had censured Senator Joseph McCarthy but was responded to by key politicians and military leaders in terms that McCarthy would have been proud of. The propaganda effect of Sputnik far outweighed its technical achievement as US political and military leaders cast the situation as a threat to democracy both in terms of the military (missile-carrying rockets) and the cultural (the potential attraction of communism as a superior educational
system) implications (Mickenberg 2006). Few ‘could have imagined the response to [Sputnik] ... would take the form not just of funding missile-armed submarines but new physics and math programs’ (Engelhardt 2007, 107). There were those whose response was not only renewed fears of the ‘Red Menace’ and calls for an accelerated space program but also anxieties about the educational deficiencies of Americans as compared to their Soviet counterparts (Mickenberg 2006).

As American lawmakers processed the changing realities in space exportation a new space agency, NASA, came into being – created on 1 October 1958 from a number of related government agencies that included the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics. Within US military and scientific circles prior to 1957 there had been innumerable arguments for the development of a space rocket program, and often these arguments were directly linked to the potential of the USSR. to develop its own space rocket (Halberstam 1994). The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) played no small role in encouraging these arguments and developing the idea of a ‘missile gap’ between the USSR and the USA, which suggested that the Soviets were far ahead of the USA in missile production. These ‘false’ claims were also perpetuated by the ‘air force, military contractors, and politicians of both [the Republican and Democratic] parties that the Soviets had a widening lead in nuclear weaponry’ (Weiner 2008, 183).

Some used the situation to breathe new life into the RAND Corporation, with the Sputnik launch becoming ‘a spigot of research funds for Rand, which conducted dozens of studies exploring the technical and political consequences of its launch’ (Abella 2008, 109). In March 1958, Life magazine published an article on ‘Russia’s conquest of space,’ which reported the results of a survey of ‘American attitudes about space exploration, defence spending, science research, and education’ (Mickenberg 2006, 178). The results indicated that the American public was moving away from progressive education, with its focus on developing the ‘whole child’ towards a system that provided students with a firm grounding in math and science (Mickenberg 2006, 178). One outcome was to raise science to the status of a ‘new religion’ that became ‘a fixation among business, the government, schools, the military, and the media, reinvigorating the sense of national purpose that had temporarily floundered with the censure of Senator Joseph McCarthy in 1954’ (Mickenberg 2006, 178). The National Defense Education Act (NDEA), passed into law in 1958, helped to support a changing emphasis in school curriculum towards science and math (Mickenberg 2006, 178). Such initiatives were designed to develop intellectual abilities to counter the Soviets, and within that ‘the scientific method itself was also seen as an ideological weapon, for it would enable children to distinguish more clearly the purity, innocence, and beneficence of the American way of life as opposed to life under Communist rule’ (Mickenberg 2006, 181).

**Pan Am: from pioneering to patriotism**

Analysis of Pan Am suggests that – through company leaders and opinion makers – it made its own dedicated contribution to Cold War fears that underwrote the Space Age.
Although the airline has always sought to associate its operations with patriotism its enunciation of patriotism varied significantly as discursive conditions changed. Its various iterations include its founding aims (in 1927) to establish a US airline to counter the growing influence of European airline operations on South America (Daley 1980). Under the leadership of Juan Trippe these fears were used to gain State Department support for the airline but were subsumed by the emergence of a powerful narrative of the ‘pioneering’ character of the airline and of its leader. Over time this became a carefully crafted myth that associated Pan Am’s ‘pioneering spirit’ with Americanism (Durepos et al. 2008b). As such, this particular sense of patriotism, while referencing Americanism, played no small part in defining modern Americanism in the first half of the 20th century (Durepos et al. 2008b). In the 1930s, national interests once again became a central issue, as the airline’s leadership capitalized on State Department concerns about South America, the Panama Canal, and the threat of German operations in the region (Durepos et al. 2008a). Simply put, Pan Am became the ‘chosen instrument’ of the US State Department’s global operations (Bender and Altschul 1982). With World War II came a new version of patriotism as the airline positioned itself as in the forefront in the fight for democracy, citing its various efforts to fight the Nazis (Durepos et al. 2008a) and, in the process, forgetting its initial opposition to the war (Whitney 1939).

**Patriotism and the Cold War**

In a 1948 speech to the company’s Management Club, John Leslie (1948, 6–7), a Pan Am Vice President, contrasted the American and ‘Russian’ systems, arguing that in the USA ‘it is possible to start a new business without risk capital’ but in the Soviet Union ‘the government makes the people work at whatever job the government selects and at whatever wages. The people can’t save anything to pass on to their children ... The only reason it works in Russia at all is that they have a lot of people (including millions of actual slave workers) – lots of raw materials – and some very tough gents in the Kremlin’. The linking contrasts been American democracy and Soviet dictatorship, and communist and ‘free enterprise’ became central themes in the speeches and editorials of Pan Am’s leadership. A prime example of this was an article in *The Yale Daily News* in 1952, in which Pan Am President, Juan Trippe wrote: ‘For the future, the American people can have faith in American industry. It has earned their faith. The American free enterprise system, under which our industry is operated, holds a great promise for mankind than any other system. It is the brightest beacon light in a world where half of the human race that lies behind the Iron Curtain has been plunged again into the Dark Ages’ (Trippe 1952).

This was not simply rhetoric on Leslie and Trippe’s part. At the time of Leslie’s speech in 1948 the airline was involved in the Berlin Airlift and saw itself as a ‘second line of national defense’ (Pan American Airways 1949, 2). It also became involved in numerous other Cold War conflicts, including – at the time of Trippe’s 1952 speech – the Korean War.
Managing the employee in the Cold War

The mantle of anti-communist champion of democracy and free enterprise was not simply meant as a political stance but rather an encouragement to employees to see the work they do as an integral part of the struggle against communism. In this regard much was made of those employees who regularly flew into West Berlin on Pan Am scheduled flights. In one of many stories, Willy Brandt, the Mayor of West Berlin, is quoted as speaking on 'behalf of the people of West Berlin [in thanking] Pan American and their civilian flight personnel whose skill and courage made possible this important lifeline to the Free World' (Pan American Airways 1961a). On the other hand, striking Pan Am flight engineers were castigated for snubbing Free Berlin because ‘it is vital to the U.S. cold war operations as well as the surrounded anti-Communist millions of Berliners that some 2000 persons fly in and out of the city each day’ (Riesel 1961). In a different but related vein, employees were praised by the airline’s top management for a myriad of involvements in the Korean War, from involvement in flying operations, blood donations, and serving directly in the armed forces (Pan American Airways 1951f; 1951g; 1951h). As the 1950 annual report expressed it: ‘As with Pearl Harbor, your Company was ready when the Korean invasion created an urgent military supply problem for our armed forces’ (Pan American Airways 1950, 3–4).

Employees were also expected to fight the cold war on a number of other fronts, including security, tourist travel, transport system development, politics, religion, labour relations and even the purchase of bonds. In the process the company developed a series of discursive practices that helped to constitute not only an era of freedom, democracy, and free enterprise but also served to construct ideas of the ideal employee. The good employee was ‘co-operative and alert’ in the face of strict security measures introduced by President Truman during the Korean War (Pan American Airways 1951e). They wore their identification badges at all times and deferred to the armed security guards now deployed across the company. They were told that they were fighting communism through their efforts to develop mass travel that would carry the US message of freedom into all the corners of the globe (Pan American Airways 1955); by publicly supporting anti-communist religious groups such as Moral Re-Armament (Pan American Airways 1951c; 1951d); in buying US Freedom Bonds for ‘love of country’ and to assure the ‘Security of Nation and Individual’ (Pan American Airways 1963a); and by supporting collaborative union-management relations and no-strike agreements. In the latter case, Juan Trippe applauded a 1959 seven union agreement to avoid strikes where Company operations involved ‘the movement of cargo and personnel essential to national defense’ regardless of ‘possible labor difficulties’ (Pan American Airways 1959a): the airline characterized this ‘pioneer’ agreement as illustrating ‘the ability of free men in a democratic nation to work voluntarily together’ (Pan American Airways 1959a).

It is notable that reference to free men was not a simple slip of the tongue or a generic reference to free people. As has been discussed at length elsewhere (Dye and Mills 2007; 2008), women played a very much secondary role throughout the airline
and would do so for another decade or so. For example, under the headline ‘Blood Means Life,’ the company’s employee newsletter applauded a blood drive for the Korean War. At the center of the story was a former airline steward serving as a marine sergeant in Korea who is reported as thanking ‘all blood donors [and appreciating] copies of the Clipper to see all the pretty girls and especially the stewardesses pictures’ (Pan American Airways 1951a). The story was even worse for black (or ‘negro’) employees. In New York, for example, less than 3.2 percent of airline employees were black and none of these were employed as flight or ground crew, or in any professional capacity, and very few were employed in sales and clerical positions. The vast majority were employed in ‘semi-skilled, service, an labor jobs’ (Urban League of Greater New York 1950). Even by the late 1950s Pan Am was resisting the hiring of black flight crew (New York Amsterdam News 1956; Pan American Airways 1956).

Less desirable employees were those involved in anything from ‘minor interruptions and slow-downs’ – (seen as evidence of ‘sabotage’) – and confrontational-style union activism, to a range of communist activities (Pan American Airways 1951b; 1954). Those suspected of ‘Un-American’ behaviours were reported to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) by Pan Am management (Pan American Airways 1952; 1954).

**Pan Am and the Space Age**

To the Men and Women of the Guided Missiles Range Division. We are a critical part of our country’s efforts to overtake the Communists in space. (Mitchell 1961, 3).

Pan Am’s direct entry into the space age was through its work in the development and maintenance of the missile test range at Cape Canaveral, and the establishment of the GMRD. Eventually it would become engaged, among other things, in the development of a Nuclear Rocket Development Station in Nevada, dedicating some 550 Pan Am employees to the task (Pan American Airways 1965a). In an early narrative of GMRD Pan Am tells of the military’s need for ‘a civilian contractor to overcome problems arising from the periodic turnover of Air Force technical personnel. Pan Am officials were informed of this possibility, in view of their experience in establishing air bases throughout the world’ and they were subsequently awarded the contract (Pan American Airways 1957b, 14). Drawing on its earliest tropes, the airline cast its involvement in missile development as ‘pioneering’ and ‘historic’ (Pan American Airways 1957b, 16).

Following the launch of Sputnik GMRD narratives shifted decisively towards the ‘Soviet threat’. For example, in the ‘Space and National Defence’ column of its internal newsletter the company described the ‘three-orbit flight of Astronaut John H. Glenn [as] a great triumph for the Free World and an event of particular pride for each Pan American employee’ (Pan American Airways 1961b). In its following Annual Report (1962b) the airline reported that the Sub-Committee of the U.S. Congressional Committee on Science and Astronautics had cited Pan Am’s operations at Cape
Canaveral as ‘an outstanding contribution to our nation’. And in a 1963 retrospective on its role in the space program Pan Am painted itself as having been ‘on the frontier of the space age’ for the past decade; ‘involved in each step into space taken by the Free World’ (Pan American Airways 1963c). But airline president Juan Trippe always made sure that developments in space were linked to other aviation developments. Thus, in a 1962 speech on Soviet success in rocket and missile technology Trippe reminded the audience of the importance of aviation firms in the American initiative (Pan American Airways 1962a). Indeed, the airline was also involved in various support roles in the Vietnam War and in airlifts during the Cuba Crisis of 1962.

**Beyond the Cold War: science, technology, modernity, futurism**

In addition to cold war themes, science, technology, modernism and futurism also constituted Pan Am’s own version of the Space Age. Futurism – by which we mean reflections on a radically changed future due to science and technology – was, if anything, focused on the potentialities of world travel by pre-war Pan Am image-makers. In this image the world would remain pretty much unchanged but would be more quickly accessible to Americans and other world travelers. In the immediate post-war era Juan Trippe began to imagine a future that had hitherto been in the realm of science fiction. As *Time* (1949, 89) magazine expressed it: ‘Juan Trippe [the President of Pan Am] is thinking about the next decade ... if anybody ever flies to the moon, the very next day Trippe will contact CAB [the Civil Aeronautics Board] to authorize regular service’. Less than a decade later, with the airline heavily engaged in the space program, the idea of moon travel was becoming more of a reality but was by now intertwined with cold war themes: ‘what does the future hold for GMRD? Employees feel confident. As long as America must test new and mightier missiles, as long as the race into space goes on, as long as scientists probe into the mysteries of weightlessness and dream of a landing on the moon – [Pan Am’ s] Guided Missiles Range Division will be ready to do its job’ (Pan American Airways 1958b). However, by the mid-1960s Pan Am was running an advertisement that asked: ‘Who’s the only airline with a waiting list for the moon?’, which tied in more with its core travel business than its missile work or cold war expressions.

Science and technology were also important elements of Pan Am’s changing notion of modernity. In the era before World War II airline narratives often used the airplane as a symbol of modernity in contrast to other more ‘primitive cultures’, such as the ‘friendly Indians [of South America] to whom the airplane was an incomprehensible element of an unknown world’ (Van Dusen n.d., 15). After the war, modernity took on an air of scientific, technological, and cultural advancement expressed in, what Pan Am called, the ‘air age’. In his 1946 ‘Christmas Greetings’ to employees, Juan Trippe looked to moving ‘forward rapidly in the new Air Age. [With the airline making progress] in the “tradition of pioneering new routes and developing new
refinements of travel service’’ (Trippe 1946, 1). This was solidified the following year when Pan Am developed an ‘Air Age Education’ program for schools, to prepare ‘today’s boys and girls for tomorrow’s world ... [though the provision of] information and materials on international air transport and countries served by PAA’ (Pan American Airways 1947). In the late 1950s, this would morph into a more technologically driven notion of modernity that bordered on futurism as the airline moved into what it called the ‘jet age’.

From time to time, science and technology were referenced as the modern bedrock of the airline’s operations, as in the claim that the ‘modern salesman is a technician in the science of human relations’ (Pan American Airways 1946). Passengers were informed: ‘Your flight on a Pan American Clipper is “flown” in precise detail from start to destination, before you board the plane. The first step is the preparation of a Flight Plan based on weather data collected from the international Weather Stations that blanket the world, Weather Ships at sea and hundreds of airliners in flight. Twenty four hours a day, up-to-the-minute information is funneled by radio and tele-type to flight and weather experts at Pan American terminal points in all parts of the world. With this precise data, meteorologists plot weather maps’ (Pan American Airways 1950, back cover). We note that these descriptions are as much about planning as scientific method. But times were changing with the growing phenomenon of the Cold War. Pre-war associations of science and technology with modernism were increasingly problematic in a world where the Soviets had not only proven capable of developing its own Atom Bomb but of putting a rocket into space. The conflation of science, technology and progress was no longer quite so plausible. This much was recognized, at least at a subconscious level, in a 1954 speech by Juan Trippe to the Aero Club meeting in Washington, DC. In a paradoxical fusion of old and new story lines, Trippe argued that ‘American aviation could be of enormous help on the economic front by building up transportation systems in underdeveloped countries which are battle grounds of the cold war. He made the point that many of these countries have to make the jump from oxcart to airplane, and here is a chance for American aviation, in partnership with local interests, to serve the cause of freedom and free enterprise’ (Milwaukee Sentinel Editor 1954). The storyline now was not so much the significance of science and technology but their socio-political use value.

Sometime later, in celebration of 10 years of the GMRD, Trippe argued that the period was ‘probably the most significant decade in the history of science’ but the GMRD’s achievements ‘stemmed mainly from patriotism and loyalty to our national mission’ (Pan American Airways 1965c). Similar themes were evident a few years earlier when Pan Am embarked on the ‘Jet Age’.

In 1951, the British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC) inaugurated the world’s first commercial jet service but a series of notable crashes grounded the (de Havilland Comet) airplane for many years. This opened the door to Pan Am who worked with Boeing to develop a new generation of jet liners. By April 1957, just six months before Sputnik, Pan Am was predicting that the ‘commercial jet age [would] soon be a reality’ (Pan American Airways 1957a). It was, in fact, one year after the launch of Sputnik that
Pan Am’s dream was realized when its first commercial flight (of its Boeing 707 airplane) took place on 27 October 1958. Christening the plane, Juan Trippe paid tribute to ‘the origins of this achievement’ as a combination of ‘the skills and the spirit that brought it into being’ (Pan American Airways 1958a). He saw ‘this latest Clipper [as], in itself, a witness to the American tradition, and a triumph of that tradition. It speaks for the clearest and simplest characteristics of all things American. It is swift. It is large. It is efficient. It is imaginative. It is a credit to the minds and wills and hands that engineered it’. He also saw it as ‘an instrument of peace ... [And] an instrument of the people ... [As well] as a characteristic triumph of the American free economy’ (Pan American Airways 1958a). In some ways the new Jet Age was an extension of the modernism of the earlier Air Age, seeing jet travel as having the potential to transform ‘underdeveloped’ nations and anti-American attitudes in the face of superior technology and way of life. In other ways, the Jet Age presaged a form of futurism as Pan Am’s leaders began to envision the possibility of more advanced earthly uses of the jet (from corporate jets to the type of life style represented in the Jetsons) and of space travel itself. New airport buildings and facilities were described in modern and futuristic terms and flight attendant uniforms came to take on a space travel look as befitting the age, with a new look that combined ‘Superjet blue and Galaxy Gold’ (Sweeney 1969). In 1968, the theme of science, technology, modernism and travel all came together in Stanley Kubrick’s movie 2001: A Space Odyssey, which featured a Pan Am Space Clipper, The Orion III Spaceplane: a model kit of the plane was marketed to children (see http://www.boingboing.net/2007/06/18/excellent-pan-am-spa.html).

Making sense of the imagery of the Space Age were a multitude of Pan Am employees who faced increasing security requirements, continued expectations of conformity to a particular (anti-communist) form of Americanism, and compliance with a labor relations system that still continued to operate primarily in the company’s defined interests of national security. Few of those employees were black, and few employees of rank were women (Dye and Mills 2007). Far from being incorporated into positive images of the Space Age many employees – especially militant trade unionist, blacks and women – were further marginalized. While blacks were almost completely absent from the company’s Space Age imagery women served to highlight the (masculine) achievements of the era. Like the Jetsons, Pan Am cast men as the inventors of the Space Age and women as the recipients. A ‘Jet Age Booklet focused on women’, for example, concentrates on buying and make up tips, pointing out jet travel requires the reduced use of make-up for women (Pan American Airways 1959b). But while the Jetsons was airing on television the Vietnam War was increasing in intensity. By the end of the 1960s, Pan Am employees had engaged in a series of high profile strikes, Pan Am flight attendants were to the fore of the women’s liberation movement (Whitelegg 2007), and broad civil rights and anti-war demonstrations rocked the streets of the USA and across the globe. Reminding us that discursive conditions are not wholly the prerogative of powerful managers but provide opportunities for choice in action and associated imagery.
Conclusions: From front to back

Our study indicates that Pan American Airways made an important contribution to the discourse of the Cold War and, through that, the contours of the Space Age; that it did so through a series of heroic and progressive narratives about the character of the company over time; and through direct involvement in the 'US commercial-military-political complex' (Westwood and Jack 2008, 367) and associated activities (e.g. the Berlin airlift, the Korean War, acting the ‘chosen instrument’ of state policy, the establishment of the GMRD). In combination the ‘emplotment’ (White 1985) of company narratives helped to create a cold war discourse that tied the role of the company to a series of activities and associated subject positions (e.g. the anti-communist, the freedom fighter, the free enterpriser).

Though clearly the discourse of the Cold War had roots elsewhere in military, religious, and political organizations (Whitfield 1991), with ideas existing prior to and alongside the Pan Am’s own narratives, our research suggests that Pan Am was not simply translating an extant discourse. It was grounding many of the ideas of a Cold War in a series of practices and narratives that helped to transform the original ideas into a discourse, or particular knowledge of the world. Faced with peculiar discursive conditions (that included not only prominent ideas, behaviors, and beliefs but with the company’s own tropes), Pan Am management made a series of decisions on the ‘enunciation’ (Ermath 2007) of the choices they faced. In the process, they continued to position the company as a central player in ‘unfolding’ events rather than craft the company as an at-length commercial enterprise, more interested in carrying passengers to exotic destinations than undermining the political systems of Eastern Europe.

By making the choices they did, Pan Am helped to turn a set of disparate ideas into a discourse. In the process, and through various iterations, Pan Am ‘localized’ understandings of a Cold War, turning it into a discourse of the Cold War. Pan Am was an influential organization in terms of its international reach, political connections, and involvement in the space program and served to enact a sense (Weick 1988) of the Cold War for a wide audience including and beyond the realm of its employees. The company’s influence can be seen in such actions as the willingness of employees to donate blood to various US war efforts, subscribe to Moral Re-Armament, and sign no-strike agreements. Clearly, such actions were influenced by broader concerns but Pan Am provided a discursive environment where such concerns were encouraged and facilitated. Nonetheless, a range of other employee activities, including a series of strikes and high profile engagement with the women’s liberation movement, indicate the limits of discursive influences – especially where the links between ideas (e.g. free enterprise; women’s rights) and practices (e.g. involvement in the Vietnam War; employment equity) become disconnected.

Interestingly enough, Pan Am’s own telling of the Space Age was more about a military space race connected to Cold War concerns, and less about futuristic transformations of social life through science and technology. Here Pan Am opinion
makers chose to emphasize the military rather than the social uses of space research. It was left to others to contribute the futuristic visions of the space age, although Pan Am did begin to utilize the notion of moon travel in advertising in the approaching era of détente.

Finally, to return to the underlying historiography that informs and is embedded in our storyline. We can reveal that Pan American Airways is an important fiction in the telling of our story. Clearly, there was a legal entity that existed for 64 years, operating out of a series of buildings that contained various personnel. However, even as a legal entity the (so-called) company went through various legal and even name changes (Mills 2006). Our research indicates that the idea of Pan American Airways varied considerably, as a sense of organization (Weick 1995) was developed out of different discursive situations at different points in time. Thus, we would argue that our story is really more about different Pan Am’s and how the central players at the time (i.e. Juan Trippe, Harold Gray) played a role in creating not only powerful discourses but, in the process, an ontological existence for the ‘organization’. This is more in line with Ermath’s ‘(2007, 64) notion of time as ‘punctuated equilibrium,’ than conventional histories of organizations.

Notes

1. The Library of Congress lists 397 books that include ‘space age’ in their title.
2. This research was made possible by grants 410 2004 1551 and 410 2007 0241 from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.
3. Of the four military officers who established one of Pan Am’s founding airlines two played important roles in the shaping of the space age. General Spaatz gave the direct order to drop the Atomic Bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Mets 1988), and General Hap Arnold went on to play a founding role in the establishment of the Rand Corporation (Abella 2008).
4. A 1963 report on Pan Am’s Space Program indicated that the airline’s ‘personnel requirements [included] a uniformed police force larger than that of the City of Jacksonville’ (Pan American Airways 1963d), Florida’s largest city and one of the largest in the USA.
5. In the 1960s, the Vietnam War replaced Korea and Berlin as the airline’s rallying point for shows of patriotism. The point was dramatically brought home to employees with the announcement that the son of airline President Harold Gray had been killed in Vietnam (Pan American Airways 1965b). By the mid-1960s, Pan Am was running Rest and Recuperation (R&R) flights for the US military in Vietnam (Pan American Airways 1967c). By 1967 Pan Am provided ‘the major portion of the civil airlift of medical supplies, mail, material and personnel across the Pacific in support of our armed services in South East Asia,’ with 20 percent of the airline’s long-range jet fleet ‘assigned to military support missions’ (Pan American Airways 1967a, 10).
6. In a 1963 agreement, hailed as ‘in the national interest’, the Company signed a no-strike agreement with three of its major unions – who agreed to ‘eliminate the possibility of a strike on any issue between [themselves] and Pan Am’ (Pan American Airways 1963b).
7. For example, a 1967 memo from Pan Am’s Director of Public Relations indicated that the company employed as few as 1538 ‘negroes’ (or just over 4% of Pan Am employees), of whom only 2 were co-pilots, 2 pilot-engineers, 1 fight engineer, and 12 stewardesses (Pan American Airways 1967b).
8. The company went bankrupt in 1991.
References


Pan American Airways. 1951h. Armed forces call up 63 employees from PAD. *Clipper: Pacific Alaska Division* 7(7): 8.


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