



JET AGE

AESTHETIC

**THE GLAMOUR
OF MEDIA IN
MOTION**

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Introduction

In May 1957, architect William Pereira addressed attendees at the Jet-Age Airport Conference in New York. He and his partner, Charles Luckman, had recently accepted the invitation to plan the renovation of Los Angeles International Airport. On this occasion, a gathering of leading civil engineers and urban planners, Pereira insisted that attendees were more than members of an industry going about their usual business. They were witnesses to the dawn of a new era: “At this very moment, history is classifying mankind in an age—the Jet Air Age. . . . Where, before it took hundreds, even thousands of years to progress on a universal basis with a device invented by man to move himself, today it takes a few months or years. In effect, we are realizing our future now almost as fast as we can visualize it. . . . We are moving people.”¹ The jet plane would speed people across the world, Pereira said, thereby accelerating time as well as the pace of progress itself. It was the kind of language that permeated forward-thinking views in the western world at mid-century.

Metaphors of speed, motion, and “going places” also were used to describe social change. Historian David Potter in his classic work *People of Plenty* noted that “the American measures his worth by the distance he has progressed from his point of departure rather than the position he occupies. . . . Mobility and change are natural by-products of his quest for success; departure from the patterns of the past is a matter of course.”² Pereira extended this vision beyond the nation to the entire planet, pointing to the role jets would play as agents of global change while “moving people as fast as could be visualized.” Speed and its visualization, Pereira said, would define an era—one named for the new transport vehicle that would simultaneously represent and convey it: the jet age.

This book defines the jet age and asks what it meant for the jet to have defined a period. Was it no more than indicating that objects had aerodynamic style? Was it just shorthand for the era of mass travel and the rise of tourism and leisure? Was it used to denote the arrival of the fastest form of commercial transport?

Pereira’s use of the term “jet age,” just as regular transatlantic commercial service by jet was to commence, suggested that the planes were so



Fig. 0.1 Plymouth advertisement. *Life*, December 26, 1956

significant that they not only could represent an era but also alter the very nature of time. Rather than focus on what would change if and when people could travel more quickly, Pereira pointed to something more complex. The speed of the jet promised to make time itself seem to move faster—or at least subjective experience of the passage of time would be fundamentally altered in an age when people would move as fast as “could be visualized.” Although by the mid-twentieth century it was becoming commonplace to understand the impact of technology and transportation as influencing social organization more generally—after all, a masterful synthesis of this point of view (Lewis Mumford’s *Technics and Civilization*) had been published in 1934—never had a means of transport named an age before the changes it promised were realized. The jet age seemed to change time by suggesting that the future had arrived in the present.

In the 1950s, the jet age could have been defined as a style, especially one associated with aerodynamic motion.³ But when used as an adjective, “jet age” described objects seen as on the technological cutting edge. Advertisers, for example, sold the 1956 Plymouth by promoting it as the “triumph of jet-age design.” Its fins deliberately evoked the wings of a jet (fig. 0.1). In a different mode, a 1955 advertisement for a General Electric transistor radio declared that the device “belongs in the jet age.” By using



Fig. 0.2 Scene from *The Jetsons* television program, 1962. Warner Brothers. DVD screen capture

Fig. 0.3 Pereira & Luckman, Theme Building, Los Angeles International Airport, 1962



the term “in” rather than “to,” the ad also emphasized the immanence of the moment—that the jet age, like the new radio, stood as the culmination of a future that had already arrived.⁴ This futuristic moment is evident in many aspects of the popular cartoon television series *The Jetsons*, which debuted in 1962. The Jetsons, a family of four, lived in a future in which homes were sky-high apartments that resembled the Theme Building, which had just opened at Los Angeles International Airport (figs. 0.2, 0.3). They and their neighbors traveled in flying vehicles that resembled the cars the show’s

viewers already drove. Thanks to the jet, people now lived in a world moving so fast that the future had caught up to the present, and such transitions, eased by technology, had become smoothly effortless.

The phrase “jet age” first appeared in the United States and England to refer to military aircraft that had entered service during World War II.⁵ The development of the jet engine had been heralded as the greatest technological advance in the history of aviation, especially if it could be applied to civil aviation. What difference did the jet’s speed make in ordinary travel time? Flying had already sped things along compared to other forms of travel, and it certainly defined long-distance voyages, especially those between continents. In 1946 it had taken twenty-four hours to fly from New York to Paris, and four and a half days crossing the sea by ocean liner. The Lockheed Starliner, a new passenger plane powered by four turbo-compound radial engines introduced in 1956, made the transatlantic journey in only fourteen hours. But in 1958 the Boeing 707, traveling 500 to 600 miles an hour, cut that journey in half, taking the seven or so hours it still more or less takes to get from New York to Paris. In its inaugural trip it refueled in Gander, Newfoundland, and thus it took eight hours and fourteen minutes to reach Le Bourget, where it received the sort of fanfare that recalled Charles Lindbergh’s New York-to-Paris flight in 1927.⁶ To imagine that only thirty-one years before, one man’s flight across the Atlantic had seemed like a heroic act.

The jet also increased load capacity, which made ticket prices drop, thereby expanding its passenger market. Its speed also appealed to time-conscious business users and tourists, who became part of a growing market of flyers. This led those in the burgeoning airline industry and expanding travel business to anticipate that transatlantic flight would become the preferred method of travel between the old and new worlds. They were right. By 1958, more people flew across the Atlantic than took the boat, contributing to the belief that the jet would have a major social impact.

Only a decade earlier this growth would have seemed unlikely. Fuel costs were prohibitive, and the jet had a limited flying range. Journalists questioned the viability of the jet age and, sensitive to the dangers of the new technology, asked whether such a moment had arrived prematurely. The remarkable technological promise heralded by advocates of civilian jet service had been dampened by several spectacular crashes of the first jet plane used in commercial flight: the De Havilland Comet, a British jet operated by BOAC and launched in 1952. In fact, five Comets out of the twenty-one flown had technical difficulties that challenged their status as safe for passenger flight. Journalists asked why anyone might use what still seemed an experimental technology, given that other fast-enough airplanes flew without unnecessary risk.⁷ Still, engineers insisted it was only a matter of time before these problems were sorted out.⁸

The jet’s disastrous start made the successful and steady debut of Pan Am’s Jet Clipper America, a Boeing 707, all the more cause for celebration



in 1958 (fig. 0.4). The promised dawn of the jet age finally seemed to have arrived. Although the boosters of the airline industry were prepared to convince people to do the unthinkable—hurtle through the atmosphere in a metal tube at more than 500 miles an hour—it turns out that people did not need all that much convincing. By the end of the 1960s, what had once been imagined as an activity reserved for a class of travel elites had become part of the lives of ordinary people.

At the start, jets moved people, mostly from Europe and the United States, to all parts of the world. The jet age was producing the anticipated expansion of air travel and inaugurating the era of mass tourism.⁹ Jets also moved some people from all parts of the world to other places, once and for all. Decolonization of the French, British, and Dutch Empires in particular coincided with the advent of the jet, and such emigration was served by the new planes.¹⁰ In short, people the world over flew for the first time in the 1960s. In 1959 in the United States, 56 million air passengers flew; by 1965, 92 million; and by 1970, 153 million. By the early 1970s, more than half of all Americans had flown. In fact, flying became so common that by the end of the jet's first decade of service, magazine articles, novels, and poems describing the experience of flight itself had all but disappeared, even though that experience once had been the decade's defining quality.¹¹

Fig. 0.4 Pan Am brochure, 1958. Image featuring Boeing 707

And yet the story of the jet covering those distances was not just about its speed. As a special issue of *Le Monde Economique* dedicated to air travel suggested, “Every aspect of our time is marked by movement . . . [and] the aircraft is the most eloquent symbol of this transformation.”¹² The jet alone did not cause the movement but embodied it, the periodical reported in 1959. It was not that the movement was fast (although it was); rather, it was the quality of the movement that struck people most. In one of the Boeing Company’s best-known ads of the period, we are presented with a mother and little boy in what amounts to a scene of domestic comfort in the new Boeing 707 (rather than glamorous, cutting-edge, high-tech luxury). Thanks to the jet’s ride, described as serene and vibrationless, passengers would be able to hear their watches tick and see a coin balance on a table. The altitude is “weatherless” (and seemingly viewless, from the peek of empty sky one can spy over the boy’s shoulder).¹³ A flower (a metaphor for Mom herself, no doubt) would remain fresh through the entire flight (fig. 0.5). This ad points to the aspect of traveling in a jet that observers often identified as most significant at the time, and entirely different from other forms of flight: that of going far and fast while seeming to go nowhere at all—fluid motion and sensationless travel.

The deprivation of experience became the jet’s characteristic quality, as important as its speed. As a 1954 *Newsweek* article noted, jet travel “will seem like slipping through space. No vibrations, no lurches, and no sense of speed.”¹⁴ Without the piston-operated engine, the ride inside the plane was quieter and the plane transmitted little of its characteristic vibration. In short, the ride itself made the trip less of a physical experience, and “less” experience became the value of jet travel. As a 1959 American Airlines brochure placed at every seat on their jet service explained, “There is no sensation of speed whatsoever in jet cruising. The flight is smooth beyond anything you have ever experienced. Vibration, the major cause of travel fatigue, is gone. Engine noise is so reduced you hear only the air flow passing the fuselage. It is a hard thing to describe the cushioned, insulated sense of comfort you will know in jet flight.”¹⁵ Even before passengers were instructed regarding the novelty of what they were about to experience, guidebooks such as *Fodor’s* had already made similar promises. After emphasizing the unprecedented 500- to 600-mile-per-hour pace that would allow the vehicle to speed from one place to another, the doxa of speed was replaced by an emphasis on smoothness: “You’ll find the jet takes off smoothly and climbs with a feeling of steadiness and certainty that piston engine and even turbo-prop planes don’t have. . . . You’ll be free from the fatiguing elements of vibration and noise.”¹⁶ There was, of course, noise emitted by the engines, and this noise became the basis for complaints about noise pollution in residential areas near airports, but the relative experience inside the jet plane, especially among those who had flown on piston-planes, was that the new planes were remarkably better because they were so quiet. As Milton Roberts of San Diego, California, explained,



The coin, the watch and the flower...

Within a few weeks you'll be able to board a luxurious Boeing 707. Your first flight in this great airplane will be one of the best highlights of your life. You'll cruise serenely through high, weather-free skies, so completely free from vibration you'll be able to stand a half-dollar on edge.

The 707 cabin, the most spacious afloat, will be so quiet you'll be able to hear the ticking of a

watch. The flower you brought along you'll be fresh when you arrive, for the 900-mile-an-hour Boeing jet will carry you across a continent in an hour to half the time required by a conventional airplane. Flight in the 707, even without pillow-top seats, will feel, to rest and eat—and even to sleep. This superb luxury liner is by Boeing, the most experienced builder of multi-jet aircraft in the world.

These additional details from selected Boeing airplanes: 707, 707-320, 707-420, 707-430, 707-440, 707-460, 707-480, 707-500, 707-520, 707-540, 707-560, 707-580, 707-600, 707-620, 707-640, 707-660, 707-680, 707-700, 707-720, 707-740, 707-760, 707-780, 707-800, 707-820, 707-840, 707-860, 707-880, 707-900, 707-920, 707-940, 707-960, 707-980, 707-1000, 707-1020, 707-1040, 707-1060, 707-1080, 707-1100, 707-1120, 707-1140, 707-1160, 707-1180, 707-1200, 707-1220, 707-1240, 707-1260, 707-1280, 707-1300, 707-1320, 707-1340, 707-1360, 707-1380, 707-1400, 707-1420, 707-1440, 707-1460, 707-1480, 707-1500, 707-1520, 707-1540, 707-1560, 707-1580, 707-1600, 707-1620, 707-1640, 707-1660, 707-1680, 707-1700, 707-1720, 707-1740, 707-1760, 707-1780, 707-1800, 707-1820, 707-1840, 707-1860, 707-1880, 707-1900, 707-1920, 707-1940, 707-1960, 707-1980, 707-2000, 707-2020, 707-2040, 707-2060, 707-2080, 707-2100, 707-2120, 707-2140, 707-2160, 707-2180, 707-2200, 707-2220, 707-2240, 707-2260, 707-2280, 707-2300, 707-2320, 707-2340, 707-2360, 707-2380, 707-2400, 707-2420, 707-2440, 707-2460, 707-2480, 707-2500, 707-2520, 707-2540, 707-2560, 707-2580, 707-2600, 707-2620, 707-2640, 707-2660, 707-2680, 707-2700, 707-2720, 707-2740, 707-2760, 707-2780, 707-2800, 707-2820, 707-2840, 707-2860, 707-2880, 707-2900, 707-2920, 707-2940, 707-2960, 707-2980, 707-3000, 707-3020, 707-3040, 707-3060, 707-3080, 707-3100, 707-3120, 707-3140, 707-3160, 707-3180, 707-3200, 707-3220, 707-3240, 707-3260, 707-3280, 707-3300, 707-3320, 707-3340, 707-3360, 707-3380, 707-3400, 707-3420, 707-3440, 707-3460, 707-3480, 707-3500, 707-3520, 707-3540, 707-3560, 707-3580, 707-3600, 707-3620, 707-3640, 707-3660, 707-3680, 707-3700, 707-3720, 707-3740, 707-3760, 707-3780, 707-3800, 707-3820, 707-3840, 707-3860, 707-3880, 707-3900, 707-3920, 707-3940, 707-3960, 707-3980, 707-4000, 707-4020, 707-4040, 707-4060, 707-4080, 707-4100, 707-4120, 707-4140, 707-4160, 707-4180, 707-4200, 707-4220, 707-4240, 707-4260, 707-4280, 707-4300, 707-4320, 707-4340, 707-4360, 707-4380, 707-4400, 707-4420, 707-4440, 707-4460, 707-4480, 707-4500, 707-4520, 707-4540, 707-4560, 707-4580, 707-4600, 707-4620, 707-4640, 707-4660, 707-4680, 707-4700, 707-4720, 707-4740, 707-4760, 707-4780, 707-4800, 707-4820, 707-4840, 707-4860, 707-4880, 707-4900, 707-4920, 707-4940, 707-4960, 707-4980, 707-5000, 707-5020, 707-5040, 707-5060, 707-5080, 707-5100, 707-5120, 707-5140, 707-5160, 707-5180, 707-5200, 707-5220, 707-5240, 707-5260, 707-5280, 707-5300, 707-5320, 707-5340, 707-5360, 707-5380, 707-5400, 707-5420, 707-5440, 707-5460, 707-5480, 707-5500, 707-5520, 707-5540, 707-5560, 707-5580, 707-5600, 707-5620, 707-5640, 707-5660, 707-5680, 707-5700, 707-5720, 707-5740, 707-5760, 707-5780, 707-5800, 707-5820, 707-5840, 707-5860, 707-5880, 707-5900, 707-5920, 707-5940, 707-5960, 707-5980, 707-6000, 707-6020, 707-6040, 707-6060, 707-6080, 707-6100, 707-6120, 707-6140, 707-6160, 707-6180, 707-6200, 707-6220, 707-6240, 707-6260, 707-6280, 707-6300, 707-6320, 707-6340, 707-6360, 707-6380, 707-6400, 707-6420, 707-6440, 707-6460, 707-6480, 707-6500, 707-6520, 707-6540, 707-6560, 707-6580, 707-6600, 707-6620, 707-6640, 707-6660, 707-6680, 707-6700, 707-6720, 707-6740, 707-6760, 707-6780, 707-6800, 707-6820, 707-6840, 707-6860, 707-6880, 707-6900, 707-6920, 707-6940, 707-6960, 707-6980, 707-7000, 707-7020, 707-7040, 707-7060, 707-7080, 707-7100, 707-7120, 707-7140, 707-7160, 707-7180, 707-7200, 707-7220, 707-7240, 707-7260, 707-7280, 707-7300, 707-7320, 707-7340, 707-7360, 707-7380, 707-7400, 707-7420, 707-7440, 707-7460, 707-7480, 707-7500, 707-7520, 707-7540, 707-7560, 707-7580, 707-7600, 707-7620, 707-7640, 707-7660, 707-7680, 707-7700, 707-7720, 707-7740, 707-7760, 707-7780, 707-7800, 707-7820, 707-7840, 707-7860, 707-7880, 707-7900, 707-7920, 707-7940, 707-7960, 707-7980, 707-8000, 707-8020, 707-8040, 707-8060, 707-8080, 707-8100, 707-8120, 707-8140, 707-8160, 707-8180, 707-8200, 707-8220, 707-8240, 707-8260, 707-8280, 707-8300, 707-8320, 707-8340, 707-8360, 707-8380, 707-8400, 707-8420, 707-8440, 707-8460, 707-8480, 707-8500, 707-8520, 707-8540, 707-8560, 707-8580, 707-8600, 707-8620, 707-8640, 707-8660, 707-8680, 707-8700, 707-8720, 707-8740, 707-8760, 707-8780, 707-8800, 707-8820, 707-8840, 707-8860, 707-8880, 707-8900, 707-8920, 707-8940, 707-8960, 707-8980, 707-9000, 707-9020, 707-9040, 707-9060, 707-9080, 707-9100, 707-9120, 707-9140, 707-9160, 707-9180, 707-9200, 707-9220, 707-9240, 707-9260, 707-9280, 707-9300, 707-9320, 707-9340, 707-9360, 707-9380, 707-9400, 707-9420, 707-9440, 707-9460, 707-9480, 707-9500, 707-9520, 707-9540, 707-9560, 707-9580, 707-9600, 707-9620, 707-9640, 707-9660, 707-9680, 707-9700, 707-9720, 707-9740, 707-9760, 707-9780, 707-9800, 707-9820, 707-9840, 707-9860, 707-9880, 707-9900, 707-9920, 707-9940, 707-9960, 707-9980, 707-10000.

BOEING 707 and 720



“This is just like sitting in an armchair; it’s wonderful. I really had no idea that the 707 tourist section was so comfortable.” Florence Vita of Los Angeles went further, saying, “This flight is fabulous. I just cannot get over the feeling that we’re standing still. Why, there doesn’t seem to be any motion at all in here!”¹⁷

Pereira’s predictions regarding the dawn of a new age were also proving correct in terms of the popular fascination with jet travel. A hit song in France in 1963, Gilbert Bécaud’s “Dimanche à Orly,” celebrates the novel ritual of the family outing to the airport. Although there had been plane watching before then, the jet age brought large numbers of families such as this one (fig. 0.6) to the airport in their Sunday best. It is an updated version of spending what in France used to be the ritual togetherness of passing a weekend day in the country. The older customs, such as relaxed lazing by a riverside, were replaced by riding escalators and using automated vending machines on the terrace of the newly redesigned airport—part of a high-

Fig. 0.5 “The coin, the watch and the flower.” Boeing advertisement, 1958

tech ritual of participating in what would become a circuit of people-moving. The Orly terrace is one of the jet age spaces we examine here.

“Dimanche à Orly” is not the only song inspired by the period’s novel passenger transport. When Pan Am began its regular jet service across the Atlantic in fall 1958, the association of flying with going far afield was already part of popular American consciousness.¹⁸ In January 1958, Frank Sinatra released what would become a Grammy-winning album, “Come Fly with Me,” whose cover prompted the singer to complain that it looked like a poster for TWA (fig. 0.7). The album featured travel-themed songs, including the title song with its repetitive referencing of far-flung places: Bombay, Acapulco, and Peru, while never mentioning the speed of travel.¹⁹ Instead, the song emphasizes the quality of the jet’s movement, promising that the lovers would “float down to Peru” and “just glide, starry-eyed.” While the jet’s speed may have made it the fastest form of commercial passenger travel available, if that were what defined the jet age, one could say we are still living in it, as no form of regular passenger transport can move any faster now than the jet did back then.²⁰

Fig. 0.6 Family visit to Orly Terrace, circa 1961–62. Aéroports de Paris





If popular culture characterized the experience this way, intellectuals and designers also seemed to concur. When Roland Barthes wrote about the jet test pilot in 1955 in his essay “Jet-Man,” he also underscored the lack of sensation one experienced: “The jet man is defined by a coenesthesia of motionlessness (at 2,000 km in flight no impression of speed whatever).”²¹ Industrial designer George Nelson described what was modern about the jet as its passengers’ encapsulation: “The prime characteristic of modern travel is that it tends to isolate one from experience. . . . In the move from open-cockpit planes to the noisy prop jobs to the near vibrationless and silent jets one has the impression of more and more layers of padding being applied. The old open elevators have become sealed tubes stuffed with Muzak. . . . Encapsulation is a good part of the price paid for speed.”²² The faster the vehicle went, the less the passenger experienced any sense of motion at all, thanks to the perfection of design that naturalized the jet’s mechanically powered motion, extending—or perhaps, one could say, finally seemingly “perfecting”—the relation between human and machine movement so that their differences grew increasingly imperceptible.

Before the jet, planes flying at a relatively lower altitude had offered an important new perspective on the world in a form of visual “distancing.” Aerial vision constructed and represented a God’s-eye view as well as created a perspective of the landscape as an abstracted grid.²³ As the aerial view became part of everyday life after a half century of flying, however, the jet introduced new qualities to that visual experience. Passengers saw very little by looking out of the window from the heights at which jet planes flew for most of the flight’s duration. Although at 30,000 feet one could hypothetically see a

Fig. 0.7 “Come Fly with Me,” Frank Sinatra album cover, 1958. Capitol Records Inc. Cover produced in cooperation with Trans World Airlines and featuring TWA Jetstream Superconstellation

horizon that was 142,000 square miles, in reality, there was less to see than ever before. Windows on jets were smaller because of pressurization, and there was an increasingly smaller number of windows per passenger. The Boeing 707 sat four people across, so most passengers were quite far from the window or from any “view from above.” In fact, the 707 offered the first airplane window with shades, and in 1961 TWA and United began to offer regular in-flight entertainment. The view on the jet was certainly turned toward the inside of the plane rather than outside it.

The jet defined an age because it was contributing to a transformation in subjective experience. On the one hand, its speed made the world that much smaller. On the other hand, the jet defined an age through the creation of a jet age aesthetic. That aesthetic addressed and managed the new subjective experience created by the circulation and mobility of the post-war world. The jet was not simply the new emblem of a complex transport infrastructure, but, in addition, its aesthetic situated it as a key element in a larger media culture that glamorized fluid motion. By navigating a combination of newly built spaces and contemporary media forms in the late 1950s to the late 1960s, jet age people learned to increasingly close the distances between physical space and time and also to toggle between the material and immaterial worlds, which is how globalization works on the level of subjective experience.

The moment became known as the dawn of an age in its own day because, like the motion of the jet, which promised to easily slip through space, jet age people did too, and to follow them, so did I. That jet age aesthetic does not simply consist of the familiar aspects of air culture, such as the decoration of jet interiors, the uniforms worn by flight attendants, the meals served on board, the ads promoting the new service, or the airport art. These constitute what one might call a design style because it generated symbolic meaning and value but is ultimately located in static forms and objects. This makes them not particularly well suited to explain how people traverse space and make sense of time in relation to technology and media forms.²⁴ To understand the jet’s quality of motion as part of a period phenomenon requires journeying outward from the plane and the discrete spaces of transport history, the history of technology and aviation; traversing the borders of architectural history, design, and urban planning; entering the airspace of mobility studies, globalization, and tourism and leisure studies; circling over film studies, communications, art history, and the history of photography; and then coming in for a landing. The study of the jet age traverses borders and boundaries as much as the jet plane did the open skies. For example, we will see how transport became a form of media, because it played a fundamental role in altering subjective experience.

To imagine the jet age as having an aesthetic is a way of envisioning the period’s creative and aesthetic force and drive. Fine art movements of the period such as kinetic art and spatialism also fit within its purview. But the footprint of the jet age aesthetic is far larger, shaping and encompassing the

more general sensory regime of postwar culture. In *Atlas of Emotion*, Giuliana Bruno considers “sensuous cognition” and notions of psychogeographic journeys across a vast range of media forms, practices, and spaces. I also consider the senses both aesthetically and historically to focus on the connection between transport and media but with a greater focus on a specific period. Homing in on the decade of the jet is not accidental. Having given its name to an age in its own day, the jet apparently was seen from the start as able to define its moment. What the jet was thought to be, whether what it appeared to herald at the time was what it became, and what its long-term impact might have been are what drew me to study this mid-century object.²⁵ Having spent so much time in jets myself, I wondered what jet travel must have been like at the beginning, especially since the speed of flight and the plane itself in many ways have not changed that much. Was my experience the same? And, conversely, when the ride was a new experience, did it actually change how people felt and experienced such things as time and space?

To answer these questions regarding the experience of what I call “fluid motion” to capture the impact of jet travel is not as straightforward as tracking growth in tourism or considering laws regarding the sovereignty of air space. People we might consider aesthetic stakeholders, such as architects and city planners, mass cultural entrepreneurs, designers, photographers, and filmmakers, all participated in the moment’s aesthetic of fluid motion by extending, promoting, and embedding the singular experience of the jet—as a value and as a sensory experience—to life on the ground. These people were in the business of mass media, so this is also a means to reach broad social experiences and the responses of ordinary people to these new spaces and cultural forms. Working on mainstream mass cultural production affords us a view into such popular reception, which is, in turn, also a form of cultural production.

Many media theorists—especially Georg Simmel, Walter Benjamin, and Marshall McLuhan—have correlated human sensory change to media technologies. I consider transport a medium and approach modern systems of mobility, transport, and mechanization as historical rather than autonomous forces.²⁶ I argue that transport and communication media did not just support each other; rather, they served the same end in one network by facilitating circulation. By connecting them to such commercial imagery as photographs, film, and television, and their distribution spaces, as well as to the built environment, such media formed a dense system that produced new forms of subjective experience. Although by the mid-nineteenth century the telegraph technically had separated transportation and communication (because information until then could travel only as fast as the messenger who carried it), there has been a continuing relation between communication and transportation, so much so that this connection suggests that they are virtually identical.²⁷

In fact, when McLuhan was preparing to write *Understanding Media* (1962) he noted that “I expect to add . . . several media like money,

railways, ships, and planes and cars—in fact, all of those externalizations of our bodily functions and perceptions which cause all human technology to exist in the ablative case.”²⁸ This observation combines transport and media as sharing a dedication to motion, suggesting that during the period under examination here, transport and media became newly reconnected. The period’s media ecology reconfigured both simultaneously, as well as perception itself—thanks to the central role played by the jet’s fluid motion—working to dissolve the boundaries not simply between forms but also between the material and immaterial worlds. As McLuhan noted, the photograph created a world of “accelerated transience,” and the age was one in which “travel differs little from going to a movie or turning the pages of a magazine.”²⁹ This study decodes the meaning of such observations by looking back at the decade of the jet age and at several key sites and intersecting forms that allow us to capture that culture of media in motion.

My list is not the same as McLuhan’s, but its impulse is. By examining certain paradigmatic jet age spaces that shared a dedication to fluid motion—such as new airports and the theme park in Anaheim built by Walt Disney that opened in 1955 and became known as Disneyland (the first obvious, the second I hope obvious after reading my description and analysis)—and through a careful examination of the period-specific history of the mass-media environment, the jet age aesthetic takes form in the pages of this book. The jet age was also the heyday of the photographic newsmagazine, and by considering new methods of making and taking pictures, and especially the explosion of color in photojournalism, I show how spaces and pictures worked in tandem and around a logic of circulation to mediate new subjective experiences of motion. Such experiences led observers not only to sense that they were living in a new era but also to feel the impact of new experiences of time and space. The pace had changed, and the future could be lived as fast as it could be visualized, as Pereira had noted. Translating such words into experience is what the jet age aesthetic did for ordinary people. This was significant in its own moment and also fundamental to the reconfiguration of how media shape our world, laying the groundwork, I argue, for the networked society we inhabit today.

Newsmagazines, often disparaged as vehicles of outdated consumerism, played an important role in the elaboration of the jet age aesthetic. They were never mere tools of such unfettered capitalism nor Cold War propaganda nor simple transmitters of such ideologies as the American Way of Life. These persistent scholarly views are caricatures that obscure their actual impact.³⁰ As art historian Shelley Rice observes: “Since its invention, photography has moved up and down the social hierarchy in all media-based cultures, and it has also substantially reorganized the relationship between the local and the global. The metamorphoses of objects and images are not by-products or accidents of communication; this mutability is photography’s *raison d’être*.”³¹ Such mutability of form also related to mobility in ways that made “press” and magazine-format photography particularly important in this period and

to this day (while its format has changed) as a part of a culture of media in motion. Such media, I believe, are the linchpin in discussions of modern experiences of motion, of experiences of speeding up of time and the collapsing of physical space. They also help us see how the jet can be thought to be a form of media in motion too. All that is treated in this book.

As a cultural history of how media facilitate globalization, my book is aimed at grasping changes in subjective experience rather than at the structural level of economics and politics, where such globalization is most often studied. Histories of globalization have focused almost exclusively on the large-scale circulation of people and goods, the bedrock on which the history of capitalism sits. Historians of globalization have considered such topics as trade, migration, and how goods have been transported, contained, stored in an attempt to give larger structural and sociological narratives more historical precision, making the drive toward “connectedness” seem less inevitable.³² Such histories have been of recent interest because they help explain the neoliberal paradigm of the connection between globalization and the triumph of democracy and capitalism in the wake of the divisions of the Cold War. This offered a view of history with a “drive” not all that different from the old Marxist version of history, reinvented in the form of globalized or braided and connected forms of “world history,” with trade, economics, and money still making the world go round.³³

Although historians of transport have been attentive to how vehicles and infrastructure have altered physical spaces by studying, for example, changes in the landscape and urban morphology, they have been less interested in how such large projects have affected individual experience.³⁴ Although we associate globalization with the growth of travel and the history of the tourist industry, we have yet to pay enough attention to the process of journeying itself because we have been too preoccupied with its end: arrivals and departures.³⁵ Art history as a field has fortunately addressed questions of individual response or affect, but, in regard to globalization, the field has typically translated the primarily political and economic histories into the terms of visual and material culture with which it usually works: the objects of fine art, architecture, and the like. This has produced studies that treat subjects such as imperial iconography; the production of scientific knowledge through illustration; the iconography of plantation culture; human rights images; and the design and styling of transport—but often as reflections of such social forces more than their embodiment or as autonomous forces of creation.³⁶ Beyond the way such phenomena are represented in images, the field has also studied myriad topics related to mobility: the circulation of such images, the migration of art and artists, the influence of trade on style, and the rise of the art market. Such studies seek to show that visual and material culture are not mere byproducts or afterthoughts in global market culture but function as its driving forces as well. For example, entire cities can survive based on their status as art-fair hosts or because they are places where certain folk crafts or

artworks are produced and then sold around the world.³⁷ Attention to the materiality of objects and images and their production and circulation provides a way to study what culture produces rather than what it reflects, which is an important step in the right direction.

People and objects that travel and circulate can tell us a great deal about how transit and transportability shaped and tested communities that were challenged by physical distance in earlier periods or that were connected through quick and easy travel in the jet age.³⁸ In its aesthetic of fluid motion and communication on a planetary scale, the jet age aesthetic, which dematerialized experience into a system of circulating spaces, people, and images, produced the condition of the digital age if not its actual technologies. Putting systems of transport into alignment with image production and reception gives us new insights into the relation between individual perception and the ties between transport technology, media, and their aesthetic expression as key forces in shaping social formations. Culture does not just reflect underlying political and economic systems. It is why I do not want to simply locate a “jet style” that functions as the cultural reflection or symbolic vehicle of the more “real” interests of, say, the airline industry, or that sees the industry as a stand-in for the forces of the “Americanization of the world” or of global capitalism in neat and I would suggest reductive ways. Humans create and extend meaning through the technologies they make, and the consequences are often unanticipated and not even fully absorbed and assimilated in their own time. That is what historians can be good for.³⁹

Although transport history has served as a prism through which we have refracted the history of trade, state-building, nationality, and other such topics, it can also offer us an important source for the history of sensory experiences.⁴⁰ Wolfgang Schivelbusch, in his pathbreaking book *The Railway Journey* (1977/1986), blazed such a methodological trail when he turned to train travel to identify a new kind of vision in the nineteenth century. Using the view from the train window, he argued that the train’s speed and relationship to the landscape constructed something called panoramic vision. He argued that this new train-induced somatic experience served as a key vector for new cultures of time, space, and human perception.⁴¹ Schivelbusch’s research ranged across national histories (mostly of France, Britain, and the United States) to describe general transformations in the experience of geography wrought by the new mode of travel known as the iron horse—and in the standardization of time. He noted that as passengers rode they could no longer distinguish between foreground and background. This novel experience so influenced them that they began to see the world as though they were looking through the frame of a train window. Schivelbusch argued that passengers looked through the apparatus that moved them and thus, he says, they likened the experience to that of nineteenth-century optical devices, apprehending the train ride as among the transformations that turned them into spectators. The train, a mode of transport, also worked as a form of media.⁴²

What the train was to the nineteenth century, the car and the plane may be to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Scholars of the history of aviation, in particular, have written extensively about the early “heroic” period of flight, concentrating on what we might consider the powers and problems of Icarus, who was triumphant in flight but ultimately burned by the sun due to his hubris. At the same time, a growing body of literature about motion and mobility has extended the visual paradigm developed in *The Railway Journey*.⁴³ The impact of flight on visual perception ushered in a new perspective—the “view from above”—that had previously been derived only from standing on mountaintops or towers. Planes also afforded new kinds of surveillance that could aid military operations, promote commercial exchange, and expand scientific knowledge, which is why the vehicles are also associated with social control. Everything from the deployment of aerial bombs to drone warfare suggests how strategically important the view from above has been. For many cultural critics, most notably Paul Virilio, who associated the airplane with an entire apparatus of militarized technoculture whose logic has been speed, there could be no good associated with air culture.⁴⁴ Everything has functioned as a camouflage for the essentially nefarious goals of the view from above. Yet looking out the window of low-flying planes has prompted reflections on new forms of planetary consciousness. Some have located in that view a growing vision and awareness of urban infrastructure and argued that it afforded viewers abstracted and more structural views of the landscape. As we went farther into outer space, we could see the earth itself in photographs such as *Earthrise* and *The Blue Marble*, which have even been seen as encouraging environmental consciousness.⁴⁵ But no matter how many Stewart Brands and *Whole Earth Catalogues* emerged from manned flight, for Virilio, flight is a fundamentally destructive force.⁴⁶

The aerial view surely provided new forms of command and mastery, but the jet also flew so high that people mostly remarked that they could see nothing at all.⁴⁷ Why negatively essentialize the meaning of jet culture when there was hardly any view from above for most ordinary people during the ride in a jet? Further, I wanted to make sense of what people like this passenger, interviewed about flying in a jet in 1966, said: “The plane is really yourself, it is you, with wings.”⁴⁸ This observation expresses the experience of fluid motion that defined the jet age aesthetic. Man and machine had become one. If Virilio condemned the jet and the cinema as well, as machines of war, I wanted to know why so many people fly and go to the movies. They must not feel that aerial culture is only about war and death.

Life pulses through systems of circulation. Understanding aerial culture through the aesthetic of the glamour of media in motion, we can see how the jet’s quiet and smooth ride would be valued more than its speed. An airport artifact, from a decade before the arrival of the jet plane into service, heralded the promise of what the jet age aesthetic would create: subjects who interacted with technologies that traversed time and space



Fig. 0.8 The *Time* magazine
3D Airport Diorama, *FYI*, July
16, 1948

in new ways to dissolve the distinctions between the material and mediated worlds.

In the late 1940s, *Time* magazine created the 3D Airport Diorama, which hung in airports throughout the United States.⁴⁹ It measured four feet wide and seven feet high and was suspended with a hemispheric globe that curved out twenty-four inches at its central point (fig. 0.8). It was lighted from within. The display consisted of *Time* magazine covers made from thick Lucite and fanned outward and downward toward the observer. But instead of an actual magazine cover subject, the Lucite *Time* had a large curved mirror that reflected the terminal's moving crowds. The traveling sign beneath the globe read, "3.3 million travelers like yourself travel through time each week."⁵⁰ Mirrors were among the first media known to humankind. They taught people that their actual material bodies could be immaterially represented as pure image.⁵¹ The Airport Diorama transformed magazine readers and flyers on the go into the subjects of world news. It also suggested that by being on the move they became spectators—not just of their own lives, but of the world that was also in motion. The *Time* display was an ad that collapsed transport and magazines and passengers into one system of circulation: from plane to airport to magazine but in a continuous loop. Magazines anticipated before the advent of jet travel what the jet would later accomplish, and the jet and magazines worked together to shape new experiences that allowed people to embrace the pleasures of such circulation and to see themselves, literally, in its mirror.

It is no surprise that images from and re-creations of the jet age kept appearing in twenty-first-century contemporary popular culture, in films and television series such as *Catch Me If You Can* and *Mad Men*, or that the TWA terminal is being turned into a luxury hotel. This is not just out of a nostalgia for the sleek look and optimism of another time, when the future seemed better and brighter. Rather, the presence of such cultural references reminds us that they are anchored in our own history, pointing to the world we came from. In an episode of *Mad Men* called “The Wheel,” when protagonist Don Draper introduces an object that his client (a photography equipment manufacturer standing in for Kodak), calls “the wheel,” his pitch begins by matching sentimental attachment and glittering technology. Although he speaks of nostalgia and calls the device a “time machine,” the gadget he eventually dubs “the carousel” does not just go backward, as the nostalgic are compelled to do. It circulates, going “around and around.” The device creates flow, a system of passing images that change seemingly automatically in an endless circle rather than being cast back in time.⁵² *Mad Men*, the television series about the jet age, is no nostalgia trip. Today, we can still feel its flow. The internet is the most remarkable media form of sensationless fluid motion. It exemplifies the impact of the jet age and helps us understand why it makes sense to us that we can “surf” the internet and physically go nowhere at all. But for now, let’s circle back to the jet age, and the creation of a glamorous experience of media in motion where we learned to navigate spaces on the ground as if we were still flying high in the jet.

