

# The disappearance of Flight MH370: conspiracy, concealment, bluff, and fiction

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The years 2014 and 2015 were particularly grim for aviation. The crashes of flights AH5017 of Air Algérie, MH370 and MH17 of Malaysian Airlines, QZ8501 of Air Asia, 9525 of Germanwings, 9268 of Kogalymavia and of the Antonov AN-12 cargo aircraft were all front-page stories in the international media, inciting numerous reactions on internet forums, blogs and social networks.

Difficult meteorological conditions, missile launches, human error, suicides, bombs, the poor condition of the aircraft: the various official causes put forward to explain these accidents have been numerous but have not always succeeded in convincing the wider public. In response to these catastrophes, certain experts and internet forum contributors have subsequently advanced alternative explanations. What stories do they propose and how credible might they be? How are imaginative explanations of an event which grabs the headlines but which has left few concrete traces constructed? These are questions which we will attempt to answer in this article.

Given the vast array of available material devoted to these subjects, we intend to concentrate on the imagined scenarios built around the disappearance of Malaysian Airlines Flight MH370, as expressed in articles randomly gathered from French e-media sources of various tendencies: lemonde.fr, lepoint.fr, l'express.fr, leparisien.fr, nouvelobs.com, linternaute.com, parismatch.com, 20minutes.fr, rue89, leJDD.fr, franceinter.fr, slate.fr, rfi.fr, vanityfair.fr, lefigaro.fr, usinenouvelle.com, fr.euronews.com, as well as from the internet comments posted in response to these articles, from the blogs of mh370france.com, nouvelordremondial.cc, stopmensonges.com, jumboroger.fr and on the Facebook page MH370-France.

## Description of the event

On 8 March 2014, 50 min after taking off from Kuala Lumpur, the Boeing 777 of flight MH370 to Beijing disappeared from radar screens with 239 persons on board (227 passengers and 12 crew) at the moment when it had just entered Vietnamese airspace. However, the secondary ACARS communication system between the aircraft and its maintenance centre would keep transmitting signals

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for several hours after the last communications from the flight deck, showing that the airplane must have continued flying during that period of time.

To locate the missing airplane, a co-operative operation bringing together a dozen countries undertook a vast search effort. If initially this was concentrated around the South China Sea, by 9 March it became evident from satellite and radar data that the aircraft had changed course for reasons unknown. It had begun heading towards Malaysia, the Straits of Malacca and the Indian Ocean, thus putting it on a completely different track from its flight plan. The searches were therefore diverted towards those zones, although unsuccessfully, despite the magnitude of the resources deployed by the governments and even by large numbers of people on the internet via the satellite images of the *Tomnod* interface.

On 24 March 2014 Malaysia declared that the aircraft was lost and that its occupants deceased. Nevertheless, the searches continued.

At the end of July, some debris from the Boeing was discovered on the shores of Réunion Island in the Indian Ocean. The Malaysian Prime Minister then officially confirmed the theory that an accident had occurred and that all the occupants of the aircraft had perished. The matter was still at this point in March 2016.

## The official and closely associated explanatory scenarios

After having suspected a terrorist attack<sup>1</sup> carried out either by Malay or Indonesian Muslims affiliated to Al-Qaida, or by Uyghurs, the authorities rapidly came to support the hypothesis of an accident, without producing any precise information or evidence to back this hypothesis up. Certain individuals following the events on the internet took up this idea and put forward various theories to explain the causes of the accident and how it may have unfolded.

The most favoured scenario was that a fire had broken out in the cockpit, destroying the communications systems and asphyxiating the crew. The aircraft would have continued flying on automatic pilot, then fallen into the ocean when the fuel was exhausted (Guégan, 2014).

The presence on board of highly inflammable lithium batteries served to give credence to this theory. Christian Roger (2014), an Air France captain and an expert on the 2004 Sharm El Sheikh accident, explained that these batteries were probably placed in the hold containing the aircraft's electronic systems monitoring boxes, whose electric cables could well have burned through. The Flight Management System, which in particular governs the automatic pilot, could have continued to operate, although perhaps with altered and only partial data, so explaining the Boeing's sudden course changes. According to Roger, whose observations would be taken up in the press and by numerous commentators on the internet, loading such batteries into the holds of an aircraft carrying passengers is prohibited. In actual fact the managing director of Malaysia Airlines concealed this information for four days.

Some postulated a sudden decompression of the cabin caused by a fissure, which could have led to a loss of control of the aircraft and deprived its occupants of oxygen. This situation had occurred in 2005 in an aircraft of Helios Airways, which had gone on flying for 4 h before crashing<sup>2</sup>.

However, security procedures anticipate this type of incident and on-board oxygen masks enable it to be managed. Furthermore, the trajectory followed by the airplane seems to have been manually controlled, and such scenarios do not explain what could have led to the transponder and primary ACARS systems being shut off (Bonnet, 2014).

Others then advanced the argument of pilot suicide. This scenario would be taken up afresh after the Germanwings crash in the French Alps on 24 March 2015, deliberately caused by the co-pilot Andreas Lubitz. Although this was a plausible explanation, investigations concerning the MH370

captain Zaharie Ahmad Shah and his co-pilot Fariq Abdul Hamid produced no plausible grounds for its confirmation.

These scenarios are often projected by committed people working in or around the aeronautical sphere (pilots, former pilots, aircraft captains, aeronautical experts and so on). Such people seek a rational and logical explanation for such events and base their opinions on similar situations drawn from the history of aviation or their own experiences. They brought greater precision or nuances to the contents of the reports and their commentaries were then picked up and passed on by the writers of other articles.

## Doubts and the emergence of alternative theories

Other experts, however, cast doubt upon the official version. In October 2014, the head of Emirates Airlines, Sir Tim Clark, declared: 'I will continue asking questions and creating problems for myself, even if others would prefer to bury this story<sup>3</sup>'. He thus associated himself with the suspicions of a number of the commentators and the families of the victims. Sarah Bajc, the wife of one of the passengers, stated: 'I think they are lying. The plane may well have suffered a crash. But there is no proof of this, and as long as there is no evidence that they are right, we won't be able to believe them<sup>4</sup>'. That is the reason alternative scenarios began circulating on the internet from March 2014, scenarios which were labelled by the press as 'conspiracy theories'.

The lack of evidence was not the only reason for their emergence. When other air disasters such as those of 9/11 or of flights 9525 of Germanwings or Malaysia Airlines MH17 had occurred, the official version was also held in doubt, despite, in these cases, the retrieval and analysis of the black boxes and the recovery of aircraft debris and bodies.

In the case of MH370, four major elements have favoured the appearance of these alternative theories.

First, the disappearance of an aircraft without any call for help being received is an extremely rare event<sup>5</sup>, and tends to create a feeling of helplessness and total incomprehension. Alternative theories allow their adherents to attribute a meaning to such a disturbing event.

Secondly, the communications from the authorities, especially those of Malaysia, were contradictory, terse and not very convincing. A week passed before there was any confirmation that the aircraft had changed course or that the plane's communication systems had been deliberately shut down (Jegathesan, 2014). There had been a denial that the secondary ACARS system had continued to function, before this declaration was then reversed. Then came the bald statement that an accident had occurred along with the deaths of all the passengers, even though no proof of this was produced. Finally, even before the results of the investigation into its discovery had been announced, authorities confirmed that the located flapéron did indeed belong to the lost Boeing<sup>6</sup>. The sound condition and the size of this part served to accredit, it is true, the hypothesis put forward by a 'Malaysian satellite expert' of a controlled ditching of the aircraft by the pilots into the sea, followed by its sinking more or less in one piece (de Changy, 2015). On the other hand, a lethal fire would have brought about the break-up of the airplane into numerous pieces of debris.

The adoption of these categorical positions, then their alteration, caused great annoyance to the public and even to the governments of other countries. Some attributed this uncertainty to incompetence, to a need to control the information released (Pomonti, 2014), to the wish to conceal the paucity of their radar cover, or even to problems relating to insurance cover (Siméon, 2015).

Thirdly, the disabling of the transponder and the primary ACARS systems intrigued many commentators. 'For Rémi Jouty, director of the Bureau d'enquêtes et analyses (BEA) [*the French Air Accident and Investigation Bureau – trans.*], it is impossible to imagine 'a simple technical failure'

which could have provoked the deactivation of the entirety of the aircraft's transmission systems' (Bonnet, 2014). There was clearly an intention by someone to render the aircraft invisible.

Fourthly, this mysterious event occurred within a context of extreme geopolitical tension: conflict in Ukraine, an increase in the power of Isis, a growing fear of terrorist attacks a distrust among the populations of Western Europe, plunged into the depths of economic crisis, with respect to those governing them. This disappearance occurred also in a context in which communication technologies were considered to be all powerful. How, in such an ultra-technological world, could an aircraft and its passengers just disappear?

## Alternative explanatory scenarios

Very rapidly three principal categories of alternative explanations appeared on the web, which often reflected the contents of films, television series or well-known cartoon stories.

### 1. Theories involving natural or supernatural phenomena

Some commentators thought that the aircraft may have been carried off by aliens, as in Steven Spielberg's 1978 film *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*.

Others thought that the plane might also have been sucked into a black hole or a wormhole in time, as in an episode of television series *The Twilight Zone* or in the feature film *The Black Hole* (1979), in which a spaceship suffers damage after having come too close to a black hole. Another theory was that the aircraft may have been dragged off course by a mysterious force and then broke up above an undiscovered island, which echoes the story of the American TV series *Lost*, involving the fictional crash of an airliner on an island in the Pacific.

Others postulated that the airplane had flown over a new 'Bermuda Triangle'. This wild idea, originating from the website *nodisinfo.com* parodying the conspiracist theories, took up the myths associated with the zone of that name situated between Florida, Puerto Rico and Bermuda. This zone has been suspected since the 1950s as being an area of unexplained disappearances of ships and aircraft, beginning with those of Flight 19 of the US Navy, made up of five TBM Avenger torpedo bombers, on 5 December 1945, and of the flying boat sent to search for them. Investigators concluded that the flight had become lost and had probably been forced to ditch into rough seas when fuel had run out. As for the flying boat, it may have been the victim of mechanical failure. This official version was challenged and more extraordinary explanations (alien intervention, spatio-temporal distortion, supernatural magnetic fields, etc) arose. *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* took up this legend, as did the American film *The Final Countdown* (1980), which tells the story of an aircraft carrier caught in an electro-magnetic storm which carries it off on a journey through time.

Finally, on *AgoraVox*, the entrepreneur François de la Chevalerie put forward the theory that the Boeing had been destroyed by a falling satellite whose guidance systems may have been scrambled by a violent sunspot eruption which occurred in January 2014. The complete pulverization of the airplane under this impact could explain the absence of debris. But how could the loss of a satellite have gone unnoticed?

These theories drew upon the imaginative world of science fiction or of natural disasters, giving updated forms to the ancestral fears behind eschatological myths. Danger comes from the sky, simplistically extended to include outer space, with the falling satellite linked to fears about comet impacts. It could also come from the mysterious ocean, the swallower of so many ships. Initially restricted to the circles of believers in paranormal explanations, or those who enjoy spreading tall tales to take others in, these theories came to public attention through the press, which gave them

space in sensationalist articles. However, they were generally considered to be wacky and gradually dropped out of sight, even if they remained the object of numerous verbal jokes and parodies.

## 2. Theories relating to advanced technologies

The presence among the passengers of MH370 of 20 engineers from Freescale Semi-Conductors, a Texan company specializing in the manufacture of semiconductors, inspired more than one theory. According to the forum *4chan*, known for the propensity of its contributors to spread exaggerated stories, four Chinese employees of the company were the holders of a new patent. Since the firm would become, with their supposed deaths, the sole beneficiary of any future profits associated with the discovery, it might have brought about their murder...

However, none of the patent applicants figured on the passenger list. The patent in question simply covered an improvement in the efficiency of the manufacturing process, was only a minor innovation and would not in any case have generated enormous profits. In the event of the deaths of its inventors, any potential returns would go to their legal heirs unless, as is common practice, Freescale was already the owner of the innovation<sup>7</sup>.

Others theorized that the Boeing may have been used as a full-scale test for an 'invisibility shield' (Guégan) created by the same firm, allowing the airplane to be undetectable by radar, or even by the human eye! This technology was supposedly intended for future secret operations of the American military and relates to the imagined view of the race for top-secret technological advances, a view notably grown out of the Cold War and the Roswell incident.

For its part, the conspiracist website *Le Nouvel Ordre Mondial* postulated that the Americans possessed a new type of technology which could bring about air crashes 'totally discreetly' [sic!].

Only the theory about the patent, which had appeared in mid-March 2014, gained much attention in the Francophone milieu, although it was still to be encountered in conversations in December 2015.

## 3. Theories about military and terrorist operations

Certain governments came under accusation. One theory held that the North Korean regime, whose leader Kim Jong Un is known for his frequent threats of nuclear war, had kidnapped the Freescale engineers in order to strengthen its military arsenal (Guégan). Another was that Mossad was behind the operation, supposedly carried out by two Iranian passengers travelling on false passports<sup>8</sup>. However, the investigation found that these passengers were simply clandestine migrants.

At the end of February 2015, the writer and pilot Jeff Wise accused Russia of hijacking the airplane and having forced it to land in Kazakhstan (Bonnet, 2014) in order to demonstrate the reach of its power to the Americans at the height of the Ukrainian crisis.

Other, considerably more numerous, commentators pointed to terrorists. In imitation of the screenplay of the film *Airport 77* (1977), these writers thought that the airplane could have been hijacked, to land later completely discreetly in Bermuda or, according to one American investigator, to be flown off to a secret destination<sup>9</sup>. Such speculations were declared to be 'inexact' (!) by the Malaysian authorities.

Issues around the identity of those considered responsible for such a hijack and the manner in which they put it into effect and their objectives then came to the fore.

Keith Ledgerwood, an aviation devotee, considered on his blog that Flight MH370 may have concealed itself beneath an airliner of Singapore Airlines in order to escape radar detection and to head for India or Pakistan. The Tintin comic-strip album *Flight 714 to Sydney* by Hergé had already presented this scenario of the intentional disappearance of an aircraft over the Indian Ocean

by flying at low altitude in order to avoid radar detection<sup>10</sup>. This theory was considered by experts as plausible, but impossible to carry out in reality because of the extreme precision necessary in piloting the aircraft (Davies, 2014).

Since investigations into the pilots' backgrounds yielded nothing, another theory suggested control of the airplane could have been remotely taken over by a hacker. This scenario was based on the fact that in 2013 a computer specialist managed to remotely pirate an aircraft by means of an application developed for an Android smartphone (Guégan, 2014). The plane's automatic pilot system may also have been capable of being controlled from a distance by government organizations using radio or satellite link technology existing since 2006 (Croft, 2006). Nevertheless, there is absolutely no evidence of this type of technology ever having been used in relation to an airliner (Marino, 2015).

Another theory was that passengers could have taken over the control of the airplane: according to Interpol<sup>11</sup> the presence of two Iranians on board, as well as the precedent established by the 9/11 terror hijackings, lent this hypothesis some credibility. On its blog (mh370france.com), its Facebook page (facebook.com/MH370-France) and in the media, the Support Committee set up by the families of the French victims called on France to appoint an investigating magistrate of the anti-terrorist hub of the Paris Judiciary to explore this avenue, a proposal equally supported by personalities associated with the aviation industry, such as the former airline captain Jean Serrat (Goron, 2015).

Even after the discovery of the flaperon, doubt persisted. Internet commentators raised questions over the limited number of pieces of debris recovered. Following an article on the website *Monde.fr*, one such commentator, designated as E, developed an explanation:

1 – When flaperons are manufactured, some of them are rejected because of a manufacturing fault. 2 – A deranged person steals one of these rejects and posts it off to Réunion Island. 3 – He hires a boat and goes off to drop his flaperon into the water in an isolated spot. 4 – One year later he surreptitiously retrieves the flaperon and leaves it on a beach. *Voilà*: a Boeing 777 flaperon which is not from flight MH370 but which has definitely spent a year in the Indian Ocean with all its shellfish incrustations to prove it. (de Changy, 2015)

Others proposed explanations saying that aircraft can lose some of their parts in flight, referring to the loss of a metal panel of an Air France Boeing in mid-July 2015<sup>12</sup> and that they can even go on flying without such and such a part<sup>13</sup>. Yet had there been a hijacking for political or criminal reasons, this would have played out by the aircraft's being put on a definite course towards a landing ground. But where might one hide an aircraft given that landing grounds are generally found in well-populated zones? What would you do with the passengers and the airplane itself?

According to the press magnate Rupert Murdoch, the Boeing could have been hijacked by Islamists wanting to create tensions in China, and so may have landed in Pakistan (Bonnet, 2014). For other theorists, the plane could have been going to be used as a flying bomb during a terrorist attack. Commenting on an article on the *Lepoint.fr* website, the blogger pool82 proposed the following scenario:

The plane landed in an unpopulated place (Yemen, Somalia, an island), disembarked its passengers (of whom probably a certain part had already been eliminated, notably the younger men). Their mobile phones will have been scattered more or less everywhere to drive the secret services crazy and prevent precise detection ... The 777 will have been repainted in the colours of a Western airline for preference and crammed full of explosives. [...] In a few days maximum from now, because the terrorists have to work fast to avoid a chance detection, they will put some of the passengers back on board, and wham, take off for the chosen destination... [...] Any capital city or one with a large population will do, there will always



be sure to be Westerners there. [...] It will have to be on the coast so that the plane can approach it just above the water to avoid the radars and arrive at maximum speed. In a country with a poorly developed fighter air force (the passengers at the windows will be there to create a diversion and make the fighters hesitate, but they will still have to shoot it down...). (Guégan, 2014)

Such a hijack may perhaps have indeed been attempted, but went wrong and ended up in an accident through the intervention of the pilots or passengers, a hypothesis favoured by the aviation security expert Christophe Naudin, and by Jean-Paul Troadec, a former director of the BEA. This scenario is constructed around the story (though contested by conspiracist websites) of United Airlines Flight 93, which crashed in Pennsylvania on 11 September 2001, and which inspired a number of films, such as *United 93* (2006).

The hijacked aircraft could have been intercepted and destroyed by the powers involved. Marc Dugain, a former director of the company Proteus Airlines, put forward the theory that the airplane had been destroyed by the United States in order to prevent an attack on the island of Diego Garcia. Located in the Indian Ocean, this island houses an American military base. Since nuclear submarines armed with cruise missiles are on station there, its defences have been strengthened to counter the rise of Islamist terrorism. Dugain bases his claim on reports of the inhabitants of a neighbouring archipelago who supposedly saw an aircraft flying at a very low altitude. This scenario flared like a trail of gunpowder through French aeronautical circles, turning up in the commentaries of the great majority of the press articles, blogs and Facebook pages studied for this research.

Yet whether or not the disappearance of MH370 represented an intended terrorist incident that had gone awry, the deaths of 239 passengers ought to have been in itself a source of rejoicing for terrorists who would not have hesitated to claim responsibility, as Al Qaida did for 9/11 or as happened after the crash of Kogalymavia (Metrojet) Flight 9268 in the Sinai peninsula in October 2015. Yet no such claim was confirmed or corroborated as having been received by the authorities (EC, 2014). Or had this simply been suppressed? This latter theory was lent some credibility by the fact that the Russian and Egyptian authorities had refused, for a period of two weeks by the Russians and three months by the Egyptians, to acknowledge the claim by Isis that Kogalymavia Flight 9268 had been targeted.

Another notion put forward held that the United States had not communicated any information about their involvement in the plane's disappearance as they had been trying out a new and secret technology and/or they did not want to admit having killed civilians. But as was seen with 9/11, even when governments assume they have been the victims of a terrorist attack, their declarations are not always believed.

Others suggested the cover-up of a botched military operation: the fact that the aircraft had suddenly changed course may have provoked a military response by the United States, fearing, wrongly, that this threatened an imminent terrorist attack (Le Blevenec, 2015). Unless it was simply a military exercise which went wrong, a hypothesis which is backed by the writer Nigel Cawthorne in his book *Flight MH370: The Mystery*.

This hypothesis echoes the Ustica case of June 1980 when an Italian commercial airliner which crashed near the island of that name in the Mediterranean Sea may have been the victim of a botched military exercise which was covered up by the French government. The destruction of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 in July 2014 by a missile launched by the pro-Russian rebel forces in Eastern Ukraine who confused it with a military aircraft equally reinforces this hypothesis, as does the report of a British yachtswoman who declared to the authorities in June 2014 that she had seen an aircraft on fire above which four other aircrafts were flying<sup>14</sup> in the Indian Ocean on the night that the Boeing disappeared.

A year and a half after the disappearance of flight MH370, the theories around a military blunder and a hijack were those considered most likely by French people posting comments about it.

## The different types of alternative theories

As more and more information became published in the media or was supported by people judged to be credible, the different explanations put forward, many with often troubling resemblances to previous incidents or to the storylines of popular fiction, gradually became more developed and refined, shedding their least credible elements before diverging along different preferred paths. Some lapsed into oblivion, while others which echoed certain news events or previous happenings persisted and saw broad dissemination.

Although the media had tended to range these alternative explanations under the simplistic heading of ‘conspiracy theories’, we can in reality observe that most of them, including those gaining the most support, did not necessarily imply that the event was the result of an a priori plot on the part of the authorities. Pierre-André Taguieff (2006) defines a conspiracy theory as an explanatory narrative which casts doubt on the official version of an event and which postulates that certain historical or present-day events have been orchestrated in utmost secrecy by a group of very powerful individuals with the single objective of benefitting their own interests. In this case, although all the alternative scenarios cast doubt upon the official version, sometimes some of these simply attribute to the authorities the knowledge of certain facts which they have concealed *after the event*; or alternately, the lack of knowledge of certain facts but the desire to hide their incompetence or their ignorance; or else the refusal to take into account or to express in public possible paranormal explanations, which could significantly undermine a rational and scientific understanding of the world.

Under the general term ‘alternative theories’, we might therefore make a distinction between, on the one hand, the theories based on the presumption of a conspiracy, and on the other, those alleging concealment, those asserting a bluff or those pointing to paranormal causes. Such scenarios may well share a common base, then develop along different lines and pass from one type to another through the addition, modification or elimination of particular elements.

The scenarios that these theories put forward were also distorted in order to play upon the curiosity of internet users. Some were parodied or concocted in such a way as to take in the gullible. For example, in mid-March 2014, a photograph circulated on social media showing a ditched airliner surrounded by rescue boats<sup>15</sup>, giving the impression that the Boeing had been found. It was in fact a photo of US Airways Flight 1549, which made an emergency landing in the Hudson River on 15 January 2009 after a bird strike. Less believably, a parody website posted a black-and-white image with the following caption: ‘I have been taken hostage by unknown military personnel after my flight was hijacked (and I was blindfolded). I work for IBM and I managed to hide my mobile phone up my backside during the hijack. I was separated from the rest of the passengers and I am now in a cell. My name is Philip Wood. I think I was drugged and so I can’t think straight<sup>16</sup>’.

In even more extreme cases, images were ‘doctored’ to dupe the curious. A video circulating on the internet showed what was in reality a Boeing 737 which had crashed in the sea near Bali in April 2013, but which it claimed was Flight MH370, discovered in the ‘Bermuda Triangle’ with the passengers still alive<sup>17</sup>. This video was used as a hook to lure internet users to certain fraudulent websites.

Criminals even made use of the event to carry out a scam, the type of fraud in which someone contacts another on the internet, passing themselves off as a banker. The initiator of the fraud proposes to the person contacted that the latter should withdraw a considerable sum of money deposited in a dormant account belonging to a rich personality who is recently deceased, most



often along with all his family, in an air accident. To do this, the person contacted will have to present himself as a rightful heir and transfer the sum to his own account before remitting it back to the 'banker' in return for financial compensation (Van de Winkel, 2014). This type of scheme seemed to inspire a Malaysian banker of the HSBC bank who decided to extract the equivalent of 26,000 Euros from the bank accounts of four MH370 passengers to subsequently transfer them to the account of a foreign national (Vallereau, 2014). A fine case of life imitating fiction.

## Conclusion

The disappearance of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370 gave birth to numerous accounts, whether carefully constructed or confused, credible or fantastical, succinct or extensive, which tried to explain what happened to that flight on 8 March 2014. Certain of these backed up the version advanced by the Malaysian authorities, but these hypotheses were unable to convince many commentators on the internet, which led to other scenarios being put forward, some more convincing than others. The hypotheses concerning the aircraft's disappearance covered both natural and supernatural causes, fierce industrial competition and military or terrorist undertakings, among others, some preferring conspiracy theories, others involving concealment, bluff and the paranormal. Starting out from factual accounts, experiences or personal reports, these scenarios derived much of their inspiration from popular fiction, and in their turn came to inspire parodied treatments or frauds intended to be believed. Propagated by experts and authorities as well as a miscellany of internet users, these theories have persisted, even though undergoing adaptations according to the latest news or the progress of the official investigations, to the point where they have constructed a complex imaginative sphere infused with intertextuality, which will both influence and be influenced by the explanatory narratives of future air accidents. If the analysis and comparison of the explanatory narratives of future aviation accidents will assist us in better understanding this sphere of the imagination, this particular case has already allowed us to reflect on the variety of alternative explanatory scenarios, on the way they are put together, on their permeability and their relation to fiction. It has also allowed us to bring attention to the variety of their characteristics, which can be taken into account in the future study of such narratives, narratives that are too frequently reduced to conspiracy theories alone.

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Translated from the French by Colin Anderson

## Notes

1. 'Flight MH370: possible debris spotted, a terrorism investigation launched' AFP, 9 March 2014, [Ici.tf1.fr/mopnde/asiae/vol-mh370-piste-de-l-attentat-envisagee-quatre-passagers-suspectes-8379056.html](http://ici.tf1.fr/mopnde/asiae/vol-mh370-piste-de-l-attentat-envisagee-quatre-passagers-suspectes-8379056.html)
2. 'MH370: doubts in the hunt for signals from the black boxes', AFP, 29 May 2014, [lesoir.be/557873/article/actualite/monde/2014-05-29/mh370-doutes-sur-piste-des-signaux-boites-noires](http://lesoir.be/557873/article/actualite/monde/2014-05-29/mh370-doutes-sur-piste-des-signaux-boites-noires)
3. 'Flight MH370: Emirates boss doubts official version of the plane's disappearance', 12 October 2014, [metronews.fr/info/vol-mh370-le-patron-d'emirates-doute-de-la-version-officielle-sur-la-disparition-de-l-avion/mnj!xcarscoxcjtg](http://metronews.fr/info/vol-mh370-le-patron-d'emirates-doute-de-la-version-officielle-sur-la-disparition-de-l-avion/mnj!xcarscoxcjtg)
4. 'Malaysia: disappearance of flight MH370 considered an "accident", families angry', AFP, 29 January 2015, [tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/monde/20150129.AFP6991/malaisie-la-disparition-du-vol-mh370-officiellement-declaree-accident.html](http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/monde/20150129.AFP6991/malaisie-la-disparition-du-vol-mh370-officiellement-declaree-accident.html)
5. Nevertheless, the disappearance in 1962 of military flight 739 of the Flying Tiger Line between Guam and the Philippines should not be overlooked. Significant search measures had also been initiated at the time, but without success.

6. 'Flight MH370; the recovered aircraft debris definitely from the Malaysian Airlines plane', AFP, 5 August 2015, [huffingtonpost.fr/2015/08/05/vol-mh370-avion-enquete-debris-malaysian-airlines\\_n\\_7941874.html?utm\\_hp\\_ref=France](http://huffingtonpost.fr/2015/08/05/vol-mh370-avion-enquete-debris-malaysian-airlines_n_7941874.html?utm_hp_ref=France)
7. 'Patent Pending', 13 March 2014, [snopes.com/politics/conspiracy/malaysiapatent.asp](http://snopes.com/politics/conspiracy/malaysiapatent.asp)
8. 'Mossad and Done', 13 March 2014, [snopes.com/politics/conspiracy/malaysiapatent.asp](http://snopes.com/politics/conspiracy/malaysiapatent.asp)
9. 'The Malaysian Airlines Boeing could have flown for several hours after its disappearance', AFP, 13 March 2014, [lemonde.fr/asia-pacifique/article/2014/03/13/le-vol-mh370-pourrait-avoir-continue-plusieurs-heures\\_4382082\\_3216.html](http://lemonde.fr/asia-pacifique/article/2014/03/13/le-vol-mh370-pourrait-avoir-continue-plusieurs-heures_4382082_3216.html)
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