

# The Contested Future of Space Tourism

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“Go back to the 1950s science fiction comics. The lean astronaut goes and climbs into his spaceship, he chucks the kit he needs into the backseat and he goes and does his missions and comes back again. That’s what space needs to be like.”

- Interviewee



## Central Questions:

- How is space tourism labelled/sold?
- What kinds of future do those working on it imagine?
- What forms of social life do they want to create?

# Theoretical Perspectives

## **Kingsley Dennis & John Urry, “After The Car”:**

Car as a system around which social life is built;

Not just “rational choice” – emotional, aesthetic, symbolic meanings;

The emergence of a “post-car system”;

A future shift to “local sustainability” or “hypermobility”;

Hypermobility – new vehicles, technologies, fuels...

Downsides: road deaths, injuries, pollution, climate change, etc;

## **Tim Dant, the “Driver-car”:**

Car as a vital object in understanding social dimensions of mobility;

“Driver-car” assemblage enables certain actions;

Ubiquity of the car;

Enables very distinct social actions that other tech/transport do not

# Three Rhetorics:

## **Citizen Space Exploration**

- Emancipatory?
- “Exploration” of space as a social space?
- Future of *living*

## **Space Tourism**

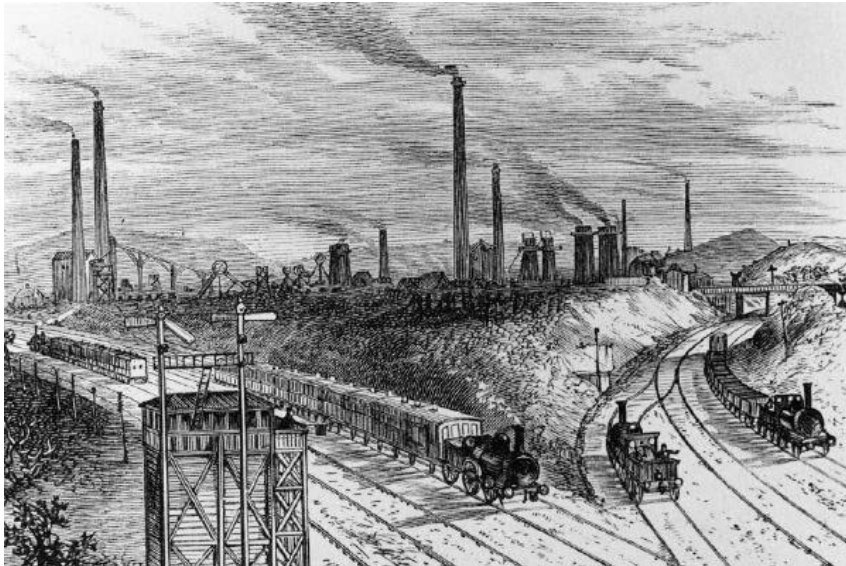
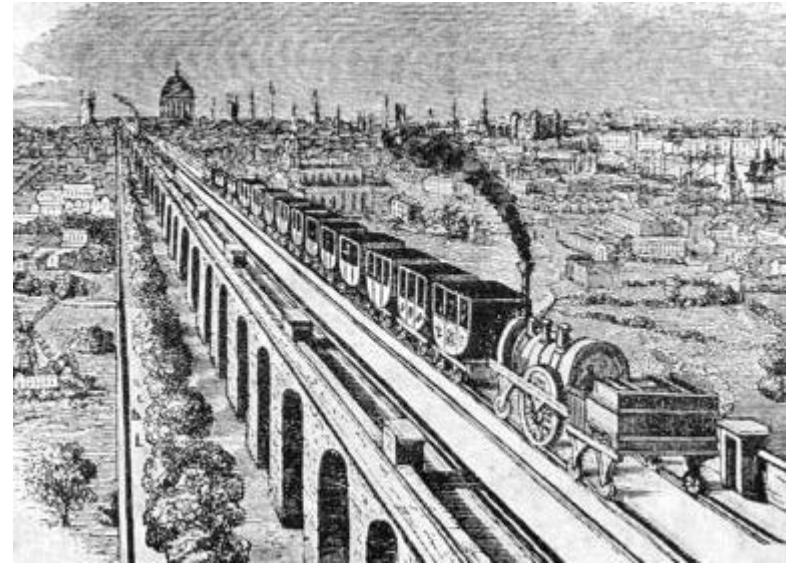
- Mass market
- “Sightseeing”
- **Future of *commercialization***

## **Personal Spaceflight**

- Individualistic
- Wealth/lifestyle implied? E.g. “personal assistant”, “personal trainer”
- **Future of *transport***

# Transport Comparisons I: Rail

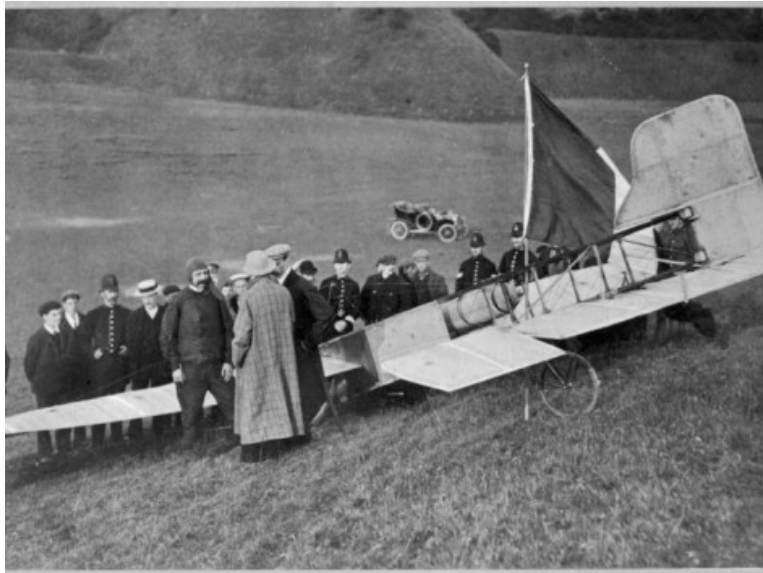
“Like when the railways were built, there was this explosion and everyone wanted to jump on the bandwagon and new railways were being built all over the place. Some were incredibly successful, some went bust. **I think it will be like that.**”



“The railways enabled a lot of industries to develop because of the **improved transportation** – in addition to all the **social changes** they enabled as well – so there’s probably a lot of interesting spinoffs and side effects of changes in the transportation system.”

# Transport Comparisons II: Aviation

“Look at flight. When it started, it was only the top 1% flying, the domain of the mega-rich. **Is that not what space is now?** [...] The first aircraft that flew, single-digit passengers paying the equivalent of ten times the average person’s salary was the cost of an early flight across the channel.”



“The situation is a bit **like passenger air travel was in about 1919** when the first flights going across the English channel were a converted First World War bomber with two passengers and a load of mail, and it cost a fortune, and you might not get back in one piece [laughter].”

# Transport Comparisons II: Aviation

“I hope it fades to the point where it’s seen as routinely useful. Rather like the motor car had a red flag at first and an aircraft was a dangerous thing to get into; it’s only 100 years since an aircraft first flew. They’re still high-tech and difficult to build, but they are treated as **part of society.**”



# Transport Comparisons II: Aviation

“There’s only roughly 50-100 flights into space per year, so the volume of traffic into space is minimal, compared to **thirty million** civil aircraft flights per year. The volume of traffic in aviation is orders of magnitude larger, but the potential of space we’re just literally scratching the service.”



“If space is more and more important in **everyday life**, surely the ability to service space on a routine basis the same way as ships service ports and aircraft service passenger travel these days, it’s got to be a good model for space.”





# Transport Comparisons II: Aviation

“The essence of the project is very much in the commercial frame, to make **access to space** much cheaper than it is currently, and to open up the whole space market and drive it much more into the commercial domain, **as with aviation.**”

“Much more like the aircraft industry where **Airbus and Boeing are slugging it out all the time**, trying to get one over the other, and that way the cost of air travel is brought to a minimum because there is genuine competition. [...] So competition, genuine competition is something we think is tremendously important.”



# Technological Determinism

“What stops [space tourism] being cheap is simply that we don’t have the technology to do that. Is the tech being developed? Yes! So logically the costs will come down.”

- *After The Car*: new fuels/technologies
- In development; **predicting guaranteed success.**

“We’re not going to be flying around in boring old jet aircraft in 40 years time, we’re going to be using this sort of technology.”

- Even if we agree, is that a **localism** non-tech future without planes *or* spacecraft, or a **hypermobility** future where spacecraft *succeed* planes?

# Technological Determinism

“Once you get to spaceplanes becoming commodities, it is the classic market economics – the more you build, the cheaper it gets, the more people you can fly, and you get this positive feedback. Once you manage to trigger that, then the industry will probably explode.”

- *“The more people you can fly”* – **normalization** of personal spacecraft use
- Growth of spaceflight industry into a post-car system

“The idea was to bring space transportation within the realm of normal commerce.”

- By extension, the realm of **normal social life**?

# Questions & Problems

“With cars, **you’re selling emotions** – you’ll be safe, you’ll look sexy. You don’t sell technology.”

- Many people are disinterested in car **technology** – same for space?
- Selling the **service**, not the technology
- Alternatively, space seen as new and interesting; should be sold on the technology instead?

“There’s a big assumption that space tourism is going to be attractive to people. **People go on weird holidays at the best of times.** Will people really want to go and spend one or two weeks in space to a holiday space station, then come back? Would they be prepared to pay for it? [...] Will the average man in the street want to go spend his money on a holiday in space?”

- Deterministically assuming market interest?
- Too early to judge a market? Too few social links in place?

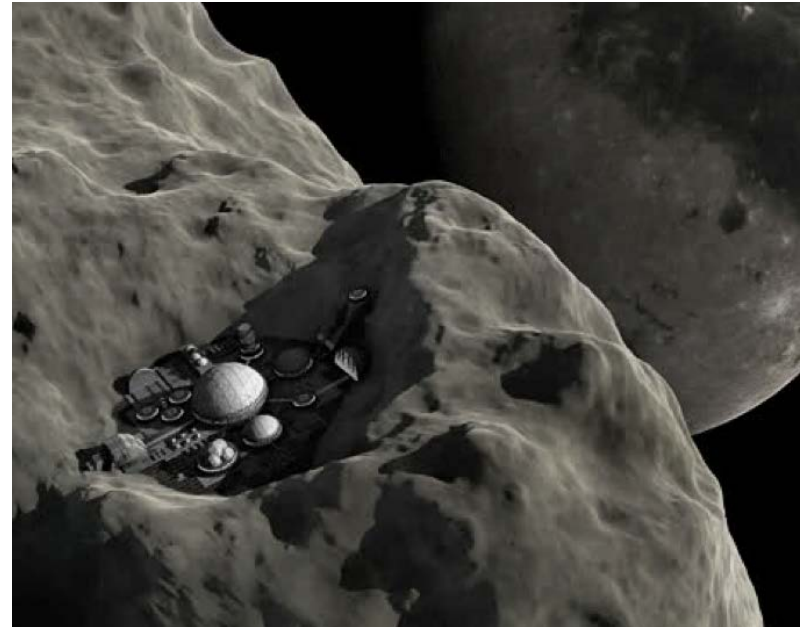
# Central Questions:

- How is space tourism labelled/sold?
  - The next development in personal transport
  - The **history of aviation repeated**
  - Something beyond “rational choice”, akin to car/plane “culture”
- What kinds of future do those working on it imagine?
  - Normalization of space tourism akin to aviation
  - Space-based holidays and travel
  - A **guaranteed** future – deterministic & based on historical “precedent”
- What forms of social life do they want to create?
  - The integration of space travel with everyday life
  - A new system around which social life can be built/developed
  - Forms that can **only** be created (so it is argued) via space

# Future Hopes?

“I believe the people currently engaged in space tourism have ambitions beyond that. [...] You can write a business case for space tourism, but you can't write a business case for mining asteroids or whatever, so do the one you can sell. But those capabilities, *I know for a fact the people who are investing in them have a vision beyond that.*”

- Interviewee



## Thank you for listening!