**The space conquest : from the dream of glory to a business playground**

“Man, from this day on, can go wheresoever in the universe his mind wills“. Such was *The Economist*’s enthusiasm in July 1969, after the first moonlanding ; yet, since then, this enthusiasm has been dampened according to another article by the same newspaper published in 2019 and detailing the latest space developments. Completed by a cartoon from 2017 in which an astronaut complains about space tourists and David Bowie’s song *Space Oddity*, these documents depict the evolution of space exploration in the past fifty years and beg the question : to what extent have the latest space technologies opened new economic perspectives compared to the 20th century’s mere dream of exploration?

Indeed, space has long been a dream for mankind : the 1969 editorial highlights the hopes raised by the first moonlanding, leading people to think that humans could colonize the entire universe. Astronauts themselves were legends : only 38 of them had crossed the atmosphere, and Major Tom, in *Space Oddity*, was interviewed by the media as a celebrity. In those days, being an astronaut “really meant something“, as the astronaut from the drawing points out : it meant you were participating in the progress of humanity.

Yet, recently, the stakes of space exploration have changed. While the editorial from 2019 now describes the moon landing as an “aberration“, performed for the sake of America’s political greatness, space has now become the province of businessmen. Private companies’ investments reach $2 billion per year, and recent space technologies have allowed rocket costs to plummet. This resulted in a deployment of communication satellites, but also in possibilities to mine resources and even send tourists. Companies like SpaceX pioneer in this field, and the two tourists of the drawing are eagerly waiting with their tickets to board a rocket to the stars.

However, space also comes with pitfalls. The 2019 editorial underlines the recent creation of space military forces by several nations like the USA, leading to future armed conflicts if no international regulation is implemented. Bowie also reminds us, with the brutal ending of his song, that space is a dangerous place : Major Tom only has time to say goodbye to his wife before communication is cut and he floats powerlessly, and likely dies, alone in his capsule. The conspicuously unprepared tourists of the drawing might not be ready for such a venture.

Overall, perspectives have largely evolved in the past 50 years, from American delusions of grandeur to new profit sources. Will we have to wait another fifty years to see where it leads us ?

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