

The colonization of the future: Predictive AI, temporal alienation, and the foreclosure of novelty

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The proliferation of predictive analytics, driven by advancements in machine learning, constitutes a defining feature of contemporary governance and digital capitalism. This paper argues that the ubiquitous deployment of these technologies initiates a fundamental ontological shift in the human relationship with time, characterized as the 'colonization of the future.' We employ Henri Bergson's metaphysics of time—specifically the distinction between spatialized time and Duration (*la durée*)—to illustrate how algorithms operationalize a calculated temporality incompatible with lived experience. Predictive AI does not merely anticipate the future; it actively constructs it through pre-emptive optimization based on historical data patterns. This generates a cybernetic feedback loop that systematically marginalizes deviations from established norms, rendering the future not as a horizon of open potentiality, but as a computationally tractable risk landscape derived from the past. We examine the microphysical effects, such as the shaping of individual choice architectures and the cultivation of a 'predictive self,' and the macropolitical consequences, including the algorithmic entrenchment of societal inequalities through pre-emptive resource allocation. We conclude that this relentless pursuit of predictive accuracy induces 'temporal alienation' and jeopardizes the capacity for genuine novelty—and thus, for radical political change—by instituting a chronopolitical regime that is inherently conservative.

The trajectory of contemporary artificial intelligence (AI), particularly machine learning (ML), has pivoted away from the replication of human cognition towards the refinement of statistical prediction. Predictive analytics now form the infrastructural logic underpinning diverse domains, from consumer finance and insurance underwriting to criminal justice and the optimization of digital platforms. This regime of anticipation promises enhanced efficiency, minimized risk, and optimized outcomes. However, this pursuit of a predictable world demands critical interrogation regarding its impact on the very structure of temporality and human agency.

This paper contends that the pervasive reliance on predictive algorithms constitutes what we term a "colonization of the future." This colonization is not merely a metaphorical description of enhanced foresight; it is an ontological reconfiguration of time itself. It involves the transformation of the future from an indeterminate horizon of possibility into a closed domain of calculated probability. In doing so, it establishes a new chronopolitics—a governance of time—where the future is preemptively constructed and enclosed to serve the imperatives of optimization and control.

The central mechanism of this colonization is the operationalization of a specific form of temporality: one that privileges the past as the sole determinant of the future. By identifying patterns in historical data and projecting them forward, algorithms inherently favor continuity over rupture. This process creates a cybernetic feedback loop wherein the algorithmic anticipation shapes the reality it claims only to analyze, resulting in a "past-determined future."

We begin by examining the metaphysics of algorithmic time through the lens of Henri Bergson, contrasting the calculated time of computation with the lived time of human experience. We then analyze the political economy of pre-emption that drives this technological deployment, exploring how prediction functions as a tool of control in surveillance capitalism. Subsequently, we investigate the impact of this temporal regime across scales: the induction of "temporal alienation" and the constitution of a "predictive self" at the individual level, and the reinforcement of structural inequalities at the societal level. Finally, we argue that this temporal enclosure represents a significant threat to the possibility of genuine novelty and, consequently, the capacity for radical political transformation.

To understand the ontological implications of predictive AI, it is necessary to scrutinize the conception

of time embedded within its mechanics. The philosopher Henri Bergson offers an essential critique of the quantitative understanding of time that underpins modern science and, by extension, computation. Bergson distinguishes between two fundamental types of temporality. The first is "spatialized time." This is time conceptualized as a homogeneous, linear medium, infinitely divisible into discrete, measurable units. It treats time analogously to space: events are points on a timeline, and the future is an empty container waiting to be filled. This is the temporality of the clock, the industrial process, and the dataset.

The second is Duration (*la durée*). Duration is the qualitative, heterogeneous, and continuous flow of lived experience. It is not divisible but rather characterized by the interpenetration of states of consciousness, where the past dynamically informs the present in a continuous unfolding. Duration is the locus of creativity, free will, and what Bergson termed the *élan vital*—the vital impetus driving evolutionary divergence and the emergence of the genuinely new. In Duration, the future is radically open; it is a virtualization in the process of actualization, inherently unpredictable because it is continuously being created.

Predictive algorithms are ontologically restricted to the domain of spatialized time. Machine learning requires the discretization of experience into quantifiable data points. The predictive process involves analyzing this static record of the past to identify correlations and projecting these statistical relationships forward. As Amoore suggests, the algorithm operates by discerning the future as a "presence-in-waiting" already latent within the data.

This constitutes the metaphysical foundation of the colonization process. The algorithm cannot apprehend the emergent qualities of Duration. It can only optimize for the probable based on precedent. The improbable—the rupture, the deviation, the Bergsonian novelty—is marginalized as statistical noise or error. By defining the future solely as a recombinant iteration of the past, predictive AI systematically reduces potentiality to probability. The capacity for unpredictable creation is rendered computationally intractable, thereby foreclosing the emergence of genuine novelty. The colonization of the future is not an unintended consequence of technological advancement but the logical outcome of a political economy predicated on optimization, risk management, and control. The shift from prediction to preemption is central to this dynamic.

Within the framework of surveillance capitalism, human experience is expropriated as behavioral data, which is then utilized to anticipate future actions. However, the economic imperative extends beyond mere anticipation to the active manipulation of behavior towards guaranteed commercial outcomes. This is the essence of pre-emption: acting in the present to secure a desired future or neutralize emergent threats before they actualize.

Predictive technologies are the primary instruments of this pre-emptive logic. In the commercial sphere, this manifests in the granular manipulation of choice architectures. Recommendation engines, for example, do not merely suggest content; they optimize for "engagement" by prioritizing material statistically proven to maintain user attention. This optimization inherently favors the familiar over the novel, as the familiar presents a lower risk of disengagement.

This creates a powerful cybernetic feedback loop that reinforces the prediction. The algorithm predicts behavior, systems are optimized based on this prediction, and the optimized environment subsequently shapes user behavior in alignment with the prediction. This phenomenon, known as performativity in science and technology studies, highlights how models do not merely describe reality but actively participate in its construction.

The feedback loop tightens the temporal enclosure. By constantly optimizing experiences based on past behavior, the system constrains the parameters of future development. This operationalizes a form of governance based on the management of calculated probabilities rather than engagement with open potentialities. The future is thereby transformed from a domain of cultivation into a landscape of risk

to be managed and secured against.

The pervasive mediation of daily life by predictive algorithms has profound consequences for individual subjectivity and the lived experience of time, contributing to the constitution of a "predictive self" and inducing a state of "temporal alienation."

The predictive self is an identity formed within the closed loop of algorithmic anticipation. Individuals are increasingly defined not by their aspirations or inherent potential, but by their data profiles—their 'digital doppelgängers' constructed from aggregated behavioral traces. Choice architectures—from the routes suggested by navigation apps to the potential partners presented by dating platforms—are optimized based on the statistical likelihood of success derived from the past.

This optimization subtly erodes agency. By presenting the path of least statistical resistance as the optimal choice, the system nudges individuals away from exploration towards exploitation of existing preferences. The capacity for serendipity, unexpected encounters, and the transformation of one's own identity—all hallmarks of an open future—is systematically undermined. The individual internalizes the algorithmic logic, becoming the optimized subject the system anticipates.

The existential corollary of this enclosure is temporal alienation. This refers to the estrangement of the individual from the future as a domain of possibility. It is characterized by the paradox of accelerating technological change coexisting with a sense of stasis or "frozenness". The future is experienced not as a horizon of hope or aspiration, but as a pre-calculated extension of the present—a "future without futurity". This alienation diminishes the capacity to imagine alternatives, reducing the individual to a manager of their own optimized timeline, detached from the creative unfolding of Duration.

If the implications for individual subjectivity are significant, the consequences for societal structures are profound. When predictive analytics are deployed in domains of governance such as justice, finance, and social services, the mechanism of the past-determined future serves to entrench and legitimize existing structural inequalities.

Algorithms are frequently presented as objective alternatives to flawed human decision-making. However, as critical data studies scholars have extensively documented, algorithms trained on historical data derived from an unequal society inevitably absorb, replicate, and amplify those biases. They provide a veneer of mathematical neutrality to the status quo.

Predictive policing offers a stark illustration. Systems designed to forecast crime locations or assess recidivism risk utilize historical data, such as arrest records, which reflect patterns of racially biased policing rather than objective crime rates. When the algorithm directs increased patrols to already marginalized communities, it generates a feedback loop: increased surveillance leads to more arrests, which validates the algorithm's initial assessment. The system does not predict future crime; it authorizes the continued application of past practices.

This dynamic extends to "algorithmic redlining" in finance and employment. Individuals are denied opportunities not based on their actions or potential, but on their statistical resemblance to others who have underperformed or defaulted in the past. As Harcourt argues, this reflects a shift towards an "actuarial society," where justice is concerned less with moral culpability for past actions and more with the pre-emptive management of future risks.

In this regime of algorithmic governance, the future of the individual is colonized by the statistical past of the demographic group to which they are assigned. The possibility of transcendence—of breaking cycles of poverty or disadvantage—is systematically foreclosed by a rigid statistical determinism.

The colonization of the future by predictive AI represents a fundamental ontological shift in the human relationship with time. By privileging the spatialized, calculated temporality of the algorithm over the lived experience of Duration, this regime reduces the future to a recombinant version of the past.

This temporal enclosure, driven by the political economy of preemption and optimization, induces temporal alienation at the individual level and reinforces structural inequalities at the societal level. The ultimate implication of this chronopolitical regime is the crisis of novelty. Genuine novelty—the kind that reshapes paradigms in art, science, or society—is inherently unpredictable. It is the rupture that exceeds calculation.

In a system optimized for predictability and risk mitigation, the space for such novelty is drastically constrained. This has profound political consequences. Radical political change requires the capacity to imagine and enact a future that is fundamentally discontinuous with the past. The chronopolitics of predictive AI, however, militates against this possibility by optimizing for the preservation of the existing order. Dissent and deviation are treated as systemic risks to be managed and preempted.

Decolonizing the future therefore necessitates a concerted effort to reclaim "temporal sovereignty"—the right to an open future, the right to the unpredictable, and the right to historical contingency. This requires moving beyond the narrow critique of algorithmic bias to a deeper interrogation of the ideology of optimization itself. It demands the cultivation of theoretical frameworks and practical strategies that reassert the value of the incalculable, the serendipitous, and the non-optimized, thereby safeguarding the human.