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Technofuturist Registers for AI and the Future of Work

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ABSTRACT

This article contributes to sociolinguistic scholarship on register formations, digital technology, and labor by analyzing technofuturist registers—historically inherited, typified, and socially shared modes of speaking about technology. These registers create distinct modes of feeling, relating, idealizing, and desiring technology and its effects on society and our future. The focus is on recruiters' and tech entrepreneurs' talk about artificial intelligence (AI) as a site for the enregisterment of AI. These registers link recruitment and AI-powered job matching technologies to a broader anarcho-capitalist vision of an AI-driven future, one that both recruiters and society are encouraged to embrace. Centering technofuturist registers contributes to our understanding of contemporary language about tech, helping to understand how AI is made desirable and, in so doing, how digital technology shapes the social imagination of the future and with it, reconfigures visions of labor, personhood, and modernity.

Résumé

Cet article contribue à la recherche sociolinguistique sur la formation des registres, les technologies numériques et le travail en analysant les registres technofuturistes, c'est-à-dire les modes de discours sur la technologie hérités de l'histoire, typifiés et partagés socialement. Ces registres créent des modes distincts de perception, de relation, d'idéalisation et de désir à l'égard de la technologie et de ses effets sur la société et notre avenir. L'accent est mis sur les discours des recruteurs et des entrepreneurs technologiques sur l'intelligence artificielle (IA) en tant que lieu d'enregistrement de l'IA. Ces registres relient le recrutement et les technologies de mise en relation professionnelle basées sur l'IA à une vision anarcho-capitaliste plus large d'un avenir guidé par l'IA, que les recruteurs et la société sont encouragés à adopter. Cette analyse contribue à notre compréhension du langage contemporain sur la technologie, en aidant à comprendre comment l'IA est rendue désirable et, ce faisant, comment la technologie numérique façonne l'imaginaire social de notre futur et, avec lui, reconfigure les visions du travail, de la personnalité et de la modernité.

1 | Introduction

At the 2023 Recruitment Agency Expo in London, UK, I documented[1] promotional language about artificial intelligence (AI) that urged recruiters and employers to "innovate" and "automate," declared that "the future is now," and promised that "technology pushes the limits for a world without barriers." This language was characterized by imperative structures such as "grow profit," "boost productivity," "optimize," and "speed up," and metaphorical extensions of physical force, including expressions like "punch" and "conquer new frontiers." More than 3000 attendees were invited to "dive into a world of innovation" and to "learn about the future of recruitment from those shaping it," as announced on the expo website, while being presented with

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the latest trends in new digital recruitment technologies. Sociolinguists are beginning to understand how AI innovations impact language, communication, and reconfigure social interaction, ideology, and human experience—including the conditions of our sociolinguistic work (Erdocia et al. 2025; Gershon and Handman 2024; Kelly-Holmes 2024; Maly 2021). Focusing on the discursive processes that shape ideological imaginaries of AI, labor, and the future, this article extends emerging sociolinguistic scholarship by examining how recruiters and tech entrepreneurs enregister AI as an object of worship and desire—a "single source of truth," a "super-human power"—that promises to make recruitment effective, workplaces stronger, workers happier, and the United Kingdom richer. They do this in a register that indexes strength, impact, and innovation, with the language of both imperial history and the 2000's internet to characterize tech as powerful and desirable; one must both "Conquer new frontiers" and "Say goodbye to recruitment FOMO [fear of missing out]." The combined message is clear; after years of economic stagnation, AI was presented as restoring the United Kingdom's former economic imperial grandeur through the conquest of new (technological) frontiers, repositioning the United Kingdom as the global leader in technological future-making.

This idealization of AI, although magnified by the promotional nature of the recruitment expo, is characteristic of the current narration of future technology in the United Kingdom and globally. In this article, the 2023 Recruitment Agency Expo in London is a starting point to explore the social and semiotic work that these modes of narrating AI do. I contribute to sociolinguistic scholarship on register formations, digital technology, and labor through an analysis of *technofuturist registers*. These are historically inherited, typified, and socially shared ways of talking about technology. They imbue technology with meaning and value, creating distinct ways of relating to, idealizing, and desiring technology, as well as its effects on society and the future. I ask: How do technofuturist registers work? Where do they come from? How are they constituted, taken up, and circulated? How do they shape the value and meanings of digital technology? What effects do they have on how the future of recruitment is imagined and enacted?

2 | Technological Superpower for the Future Workplace

Contemporary idealizations of AI as super-human—such as those documented at the recruitment expo, where AI is framed as exceeding human agentive and intellectual capacities—are social and semiotic constructions shaped by historical reiterations of technofuturism (Chen 2021), circulated across science fiction, art, technology, labor, and governance. Technofuturist registers organize and reinforce powerful ideas about capitalism, including its growth, legitimization, and power, as well as its perceived value for society and the human future. They shape capitalism's embrace of digital technology to drive wealth and individual freedom while diminishing state power. Digitalization produces material relations, as well as the social understanding of these relations. Technofuturist registers configure these understandings by imbuing digital technologies with meaning and value.

Saturated by reference to the future, humanity, and liberty, and modeled after the distinct language of prominent male tech entrepreneurs, technofuturist registers are strategic uptakes of an anarcho-capitalist imagination (Yan 2024). Anarcho-capitalism is a political rationality that combines a rejection of the state with a radical embrace of laissez-faire capitalism, advocating for a stateless society where all services—including law, security, and infrastructure—are provided through private market mechanisms (Rockwell 2014). Many anarcho-capitalists endorse a philosophy of capitalism known as *accelerationism* (Srnicek and Williams 2013), which calls for the intensification of automation, intelligent technologies, and hyper-libertarian market forces to propel and strengthen humanity. Variants of these anarcho-capitalist ideas are shared in the world of tech and by political leaders across the political spectrum. Former UK New Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair and former UK conservative leader William Hague argue in a recent report that "a pro-innovation approach to AI regulation" (that means the abolition of legislative obstacles) and the conquest of new technological frontiers should be "A New National Purpose" (Blair and Hague 2023). Building on this, and with the distinct language I documented at the expo in London, current UK Prime Minister Starmer has recently announced that AI will be "mainlined into the veins of the UK," as it represents "a chance to turbocharge growth and radically improve our public services" (Starmer 13.01.2025).[2]

Such ideas sometimes converge with desires for a stateless future organized by corporate power, intelligent technology, and cybernetic, dominant superbeings overcoming the limited capacity of human agency for a better future (Slobodian 2023). More radical variants of anarcho-capitalist thinking, shared by tech investors such as Elon Musk, founder of Tesla, SpaceX, Neuralink, and X, and Marc Andreessen, investor in Facebook, Airbnb, Lyft, and Skype, are underpinned by theories recalling eugenic ambitions to perfect humanity (Chan 2025). In his *Techno-Optimist Manifesto* (Andreessen 2023), Andreessen argues that for capital to prosper, and then society, human intelligence must be scientifically cultivated and augmented by merging superior human beings with intelligent machines.

Covering a disparate set of social domains, expertise, and desires, strategic uptakes of this anarcho-capitalist imagination link the world of tech not only to labor and capitalism but to the whole of human futures: government, education, art, health, and humanity's survival. These linkages—realized through technofuturist registers—semiotically connect digital technology to the future of humanity, to power, to recruitment, and to the laboring self. Drawing on language scholarship on the performative dimension of registers (Agha and Frog 2015; Urciuoli 2008; Gal and Irvine 2019; Tebaldi 2023), I argue that technofuturist registers do not simply denote an objective technological reality, a material assemblage of informatic systems powered by data. Nor do they simply impose standardized means of speaking about technology, a distinct language that, as I will show, is often forceful, masculine, and bold. Technofuturist registers are performative speech acts, social practices turning new, digital technology into a *thing* with specific meanings and value. They align technology to very disparate arenas of social and economic life, including labor and future making, and morally saturated configurations of personhood. This is a process that Gal (2018) calls the social organization of interdiscursivity. As such, these

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registers provide a semiotic template for knowing, perceiving, and valuing technology and linking this value and meaning to a set of societal arrangements. This template prefigures, that is, it imagines, enacts, and, crucially, creates desire for an anarcho-capitalist future (or variants of it) with its configurations of personhood, social relations, and political projects. Imbued with the authority of actors governing politics, capitalism, and labor, but also by the authority of the bodies of knowledge that have historically informed projects of modernization and capitalism, these registers make these links appear natural and necessary. They induce desire for technology and produce forms of social conduct, normalizing the social and economic configurations that these registers express.

I am interested in the multiple uptakes of these technofuturist registers and in how these uptakes generate desire for a technofuturist imagination, which is a pool of socially shared semiotic resources ranging from anarcho-capitalism to its more radical variants characterized by eugenic accelerationism. These resources are contemporary sedimentations of ways of speaking about and perceiving technology that date back to 1900. It was during this period, with the advent of Taylor's scientific management models, that qualities like velocity, dynamism, and strength—qualities signifying perfection and human transcendence that technology was made to express—were mapped onto the worker, the workplace, and society (Muehlebach and Shoshan 2012). The European futurist movement mystified these technological changes as a modernity constituted by "all-powerful machines" and "super-human men" (Blum 2023). These meanings functioned as templates serving the way the factory, and, by extension, society in its contemporary and future form, was imagined and talked about, but also made to improve.

In this article, I argue that this idealization of technology is reiterated and intensified today by feelings of recurrent polycrisis, which lead to fetishizations of digital technology as super-human power providing solutions to these crises. The UK government constructs AI as providing solutions not just to economic stagnation and unemployment. AI also helps improve government, conserve wildlife, tackle climate change, achieve world peace, and cure life-threatening diseases (UK Government 2024, 2025). It is this fetishization, the multiplication of meanings and desires, as well as the authority and desirability of an economy of businesses and prominent tech innovators selling their technological solutions, which allow technofuturist registers to be adopted by recruiters and employers. These actors reinscribe these registers into imaginations of the future of work. Although they sometimes pursue different political and economic agendas, they converge in their shared pursuit of an anarcho-capitalist future. For these actors, the future of work is an anarcho-capitalist one.

Centering technofuturist registers broadens scholarly debates on digital technology, power, and labor to focus on the meanings, social configurations, and political and economic agendas that technology is used to perpetuate or transform. Sociolinguists have provided pioneering scholarship on the articulation between digital technologies, changing configurations of power, and ideologies of language. For instance, Schneider (2022) highlights how AI applications reproduce modernist language hierarchies through their normative design assumptions. Jones (2025) shows how LLMs tend to reinforce cultural stereotyping and oversimplify linguistic variation, thereby reshaping communicative norms. Kelly-Holmes (2019, 2022) and Jones (2021) emphasize how the digital economy's personalization, securitization, and hierarchization processes increasingly frame language as a tool for recording and steering digital identities through algorithmic infrastructures. Maly (2024) argues that algorithmic systems shape language practices, ideologies, and their publics, making the study of language and ideology inseparable from an analysis of the socio-technical conditions that govern their production and circulation.

This article extends this scholarship by centering the complex discursive work done by various actors to make digital technology have meaning, value, and therefore power. I draw on sociolinguistic and linguistic anthropological work on media ideologies and labor (Gershon 2010, 2017a, 2017b, 2023), as well as gender, race, and political economy (Flubacher 2022; McElhinny 2010; Tebaldi and Del Percio 2024a, 2024b), which I bring into dialogue with Gal's (2018, 2021) and Tebaldi's (2023, 2024) theorization of register formations, interdiscursivity, and gender politics. Combining these strands, I develop an analytical framework that foregrounds the performative and ideological work of language in enregistering AI as socially desirable and morally charged. I apply this framework to recruiters' and tech entrepreneurs' language about AI-powered recruitment technologies, based on ethnographic data I collected at and after the 2023 Recruitment Agency Expo in London.

To analyze the work done by technofuturist registers, their circulation, and social effects, I complement these data with semi-structured interviews conducted with employers, tech workers, and recruiters, and policy documents, sales webinars, and YouTube videos documenting interviews with tech leaders. These were gathered between 2019 and 2024 as part of a larger investigation of the effects of AI on UK labor. On the basis of this material, technofuturist registers are analyzed for their linguistic and pragmatic features and for their interdiscursive and performative dimension, which highlights how they come to express and shape specific, morally desirable persona types and prefigure future societal worlds.

I show that technofuturist registers and their strategic uptake by tech entrepreneurs and recruiters contribute to a continuous process of accumulation of meaning. Technologies are thus enregistered not only with the distinctive corporate values of their often male, white, elite makers, but also with uptakes of a historically inherited anarcho-capitalist imaginary that an AI-powered future recruitment (and as an extension, the future worker and workplace) is said to express and promote. Through these technofuturist registers, the future of recruitment and the future worker become moral imperatives that people need to align with and aspire for. These registers are essential to the multiple ways digital technologies are made desirable to recruiters and employers who buy them and to the future workers subjected to their power.

3 | How Technofuturist Registers Work

I had just arrived at the expo in London, where a black pavilion, a cube surrounded by men in black shirts emphasizing their white,

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muscular bodies, attracted my attention. The men were the CEO and sales head of a UK-based, global company specializing in the platforming of recruitment. White smoke emerged from the cube. Its black-curtained entrance, the designer later explained, "separates the decadent here and now, from a technologically advanced, glorious future." Inside the cube, it was dark. "Darkness," I was told, "represents the universe. Like the future of technology, the universe has no limits." In front of me, a screen displaying the finger of a robot, which gave life to the future, like in Michelangelo's fresco painting *The Creation of Adam*, where god gives life to the first man. "The future is now," I heard through the headphones I was handed to individually experience the future, as if god's truth were talking to me in person. "The future is now," the male voice repeated. In addition:

> Extract 1
>
> It is powerful [. . .]. Bleeding edge technology giving recruitment extra strengths giving extra capabilities building value achieving more [. . .]. AI is here now and it is effective [. . .]. Unleash the power behind your data and your people. Why wait? The future is now.

After 20 s of motivational sentences—realized through short, clipped syntactic structures reduced to single noun phrases (e.g., bleeding edge technology) or imperative verbs (e.g., "Unleash the power"), as well as through the absence of conjunctions (e.g., "building value achieving more") and repetition of commands—and aligned to visuals of bodybuilders lifting weights and white men raising fists (mirroring the motivational, masculine language used), the voice introduced the future of technology:[3]

> Extract 2
>
> Conversational Intelligence [. . .]. Conversational intelligence is a form of AI which makes you win and grow [. . .]. AI analyzes conversations, phone calls, and meetings to identify keywords, phrases, tone of voice, and emotions to provide feedback and insights, strengthen your decisions, recruit the best talents.

I wanted to know more about conversational intelligence, but the video introduced the next technology:

> Extract 3
>
> Predictive analytics, data trends, activity prediction. Seek out passive candidates who have the propensity to move before they even signal that they are looking [. . .]. Predict moves, motivations, ambitions, choices, patterns.

In the future-cube, technofuturist registers group AI to tropes of divine power, masculinity, and capitalist expansion as well as automation, labor, value, and prediction. This clustering and expansion of meaning (and, as I show below, their semiotic linking to types of speakers, activities, practices, and events) is an essential part of the work that (technofuturist) registers do. Urciuoli (2008) defines this semiotic process of clustering, in which meaning formations expand to add new tropes, as mutual enregisterment. This is the semiotic building of a loose associational chain, one that may not necessarily construct a coherent semantic field nor always entail all aspects of its meaning. Nevertheless, it is sufficiently referentially successful to the extent that users—including the tech entrepreneurs or recruiters at the expo—share and buy into it. This process of mutual enregisterment, the assemblage, conventionalization, and linking of co-occurring forms and meanings with morally valued types of speakers, characteristics, activities, and practices, as well as materialities (such as tech) and events (such as recruitment), is not unique to the world of labor but is key to all register formations (Gal 2018). Urciuoli (2008) and Gal (2018) clarify that mutual enregisterment is far from being a natural process but ideological. It is achieved through strategic narratives that sometimes solidify, sometimes expand, or weaken the links between (e.g.) AI, masculinity, capitalism, and divine power. These narratives not only construct these links but also explain similarities among the different elements of meaning, which they link and make them appear as if they naturally belong together (Tebaldi 2023).

In the United Kingdom, these narratives are circulated by highly mediatized governmental reports on the future of AI, as well as interviews and video essays on future technology. These are produced by international media houses (e.g., BBC, CBN, or the pro-Trump OANN), neoliberal, sometimes Christian think tanks (e.g., Homebrewed Christianity, Real Vision, and Capturing Christianity), or political leaders and governmental actors.

An emblematic example of these narratives' work is the UK government's 2023 *AI Safety Summit*, where Elon Musk was interviewed by then UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak (2023). The 50-min interview was widely circulated by UK TV broadcasters (BBC, Sky News, ITV News, and Talk TV) and digital platforms (YouTube and X), and followed by millions of viewers (93 million views on X within the first 24 h). The following 5-min extract[4] shows how interviews circulate authoritative narratives, which are taken up and discussed by and beyond the tech community.

> Extract 4

13:49	Sunak	You've talked a lot about human consciousness, human agency, which actually might strike people as strange, given that you are known for being such a brilliant innovator in technology. But it's quite heartfelt when I hear you talk about it and the importance of maintaining that agency in technology and preserving human consciousness. Now, it kind of links to the thing I was going to ask. When [. . .] I talk to people out and about in this job about AI, the thing that comes up most actually is [. . .] "What does AI mean for my job? Is it going to mean that I don't have a job or my kids are not going to have a job?" Now, you know, my answer as a policymaker, as a leader, is actually AI is already creating jobs. You can see that in the companies that are starting. Also, the way it's being used is a little bit more as a co-pilot, necessarily, versus replacing the person. [. . .] I was quoting an MIT study today that they did a couple of years

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		ago—something like 60% of the jobs at that moment didn't exist 40 years ago […] and my job is to create an incredible education system, whether it's at school or retraining people at any point in their career. Because ultimately, if we've got a skilled population, they'll be able to keep up with the pace of change and have a good life. But, you know, it's still a concern. What would your kind of observation be on AI and the impact on labor markets and people's jobs, and how they should feel about that? […]
15:33	Musk	Well, I think we are seeing the most disruptive force in history here, you know, where we have, for the first time, something that is smarter than the smartest human. It's hard to say exactly what that moment is, but there will come a point where no job is needed. You can have a job if you want to have a job for personal satisfaction, but the AI will be able to do everything. So I don't know if that makes people comfortable or uncomfortable. It's [laughter]… you know, that's why I say if you wish for a magic genie that gives you any wishes you want and there's no limit—you don't have those wish limit nonsense—you just have as many wishes as you want. So it's both good and bad. One of the challenges in the future will be, how do we find meaning in life if you have a genie that can do everything you want? […] We won't have Universal Basic Income; we'll have Universal High Income, in some sense. It'll be somewhat of a leveler or an equalizer, because really, I think everyone will have access to this magic genie, and you'll be able to ask any question. It'll be certainly good for education—it'll be the best tutor, the most patient tutor. Sit there all day, and there will be no shortage of goods and services. There will be an age of abundance. I'd recommend people read Iain Banks. The Banks Culture books are probably the best envisioning—no, they're definitely by far the best envisioning of an AI future. There's nothing even close. So I'd recommend really Banks. I'm a very big fan. All his books are good.

In this interview, Sunak and Musk each construct overlapping yet distinct strategic narratives that bind AI to broader ideological imaginaries—particularly those of (divine) power, capitalist abundance, and post-labor utopias—while legitimizing their own roles as visionary leaders. Like the language of recruiters and tech workers at the expo, their discourse draws on gendered and hierarchical associations, often foregrounding rational mastery, control, and benevolent technological guidance as masculine-coded attributes.

Sunak frames AI as a "co-pilot"—a metaphor that downplays AI's autonomy and centers human agency and human–machine collaboration, aligning AI with productivity enhancement rather than replacement. Like a benevolent father figure, he reassures the public by linking AI to positive labor market evolution ("60% of the jobs at that moment didn't exist 40 years ago") and to improved life quality ("have a good life"), projecting AI as a tool for achieving social stability and economic growth. His emphasis on education reinforces a meritocratic promise: those willing to adapt will thrive. This narrative situates Sunak as a responsible steward of change, aligning with paternalistic leadership ideals. In contrast, Musk elevates AI to the status of a divine or magical force—"the most disruptive force in history" or "a magic genie that gives you any wishes you want." He depicts AI as "something that is smarter than the smartest human" and rendering labor obsolete, thereby reframing work not as a necessity but as "personal satisfaction." Musk envisions a post-scarcity world marked by "Universal High Income" and "an age of abundance," aligning AI with techno-utopianism and anarcho-capitalist economics.

Both Sunak and Musk contrast their confident embrace of AI with the anxieties of the general public ("What does AI mean for my job?"), whom they position as lacking the knowledge or courage to fully grasp AI's benefits. In doing so, they consolidate their own status as leaders—masculine figures of reason, innovation, and control—who are uniquely capable of interpreting and leading this technological transformation ("my answer as a policymaker, as a leader," "you are known for being such a brilliant innovator in technology"). Crucially, their narratives do not simply celebrate AI but frame it within a cosmology of both reverence and risk. Like a god figure ("for a magic genie that gives you any wishes you want and there's no limit"), AI appears as a force to be both worshipped and feared. This ambivalence reinforces AI's mythic status, granting its handlers—Sunak and Musk—quasi-priestly authority over its interpretation and management.

The anarcho-capitalist undertones of this imaginary are made explicit through Musk's enthusiastic endorsement of Iain M. Banks's *Culture* novels. In *The Culture*, AI replaces governments, material needs are effortlessly met, and humans live in a technofuturist utopia. However, with the end of labor, humans drift into superficial obsessions—fashion, fads, status games—qualities often gendered as feminine and therefore trivial within a male-dominated tech culture (Borba 2022; Bray 2007). This dynamic reveals a crisis at the heart of Musk's techno-utopianism. If labor has traditionally grounded masculine identity and moral purpose, what becomes of that identity in a world without work? Musk's laughter at the idea that people may feel uncomfortable in a post-work society, and his acknowledgment that people will need to "find meaning" in such a world, reflect this anxiety. So does his call—echoed by Sunak—for education as preparation for freedom. Education here is about moral adaptation to a future where AI handles production, governance, and decision-making.

In this way, the link between AI, divine power, laborlessness, abundance, and moral realignment is not merely rhetorical but ideological. Sunak and Musk participate in constructing a cultural fantasy in which AI not only enables post-scarcity but also displaces the government functions of the state. This fantasy reproduces key tropes of anarcho-capitalism: skepticism toward government, celebration of market-driven abundance, faith in elite technologists, and the promise of liberation, albeit one that may be reserved for those capable of navigating the terms of freedom in a world without necessity.

Authoritative narratives about techno-utopian futures are further circulated in blogs and media outlets consumed by the tech and recruitment world. In 2017, for example, as a reaction to another interview in which Musk referenced Banks, The Economist (2017) argued that Banks' novels are not "just light bedtime reading," but "they explore many of the themes that are worrying the

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tech world at the moment." Banks is not only "Silicon Valley's favourite author" but his novels are "a space opera that anticipates some of the challenges that technology is beginning to pose in the real world, and which are of great interest to the sort of people who are building the future in which we will all soon have to live." Moreover, "If you want to understand the thinking of today's tech titans, Banks's novels are a good place to start."

Whether or not tech entrepreneurs and recruiters I met at the expo see Banks, or Musk as an inspiration for their work and vision of the future, these technofuturist registers and their uptakes produce a regime of truth, a template of perception that saturates how people in tech and recruitment think about and approach their work, whether they endorse, challenge, or distance themselves from it.

These technofuturist registers, however, do not simply saturate language, an activity, a person-type, or technology and our future with meaning but, as Gal and Irvine (2019) note, are always constructed in opposition to other registers, creating contrasts of value, quality, and power. For example, much like in the Sunak–Musk interview—where those deemed ready for the AI-powered future were contrasted with those who were not—the technofuturist registers of recruiters and tech entrepreneurs at the London expo similarly opposed recruitment practices and recruiters considered fit for the future of work to those seen as unprepared.[5]

For example, during the tech expert talks I attended at the expo, AI was not just enregistered as "the future," "strong," "efficient," "powerful," "active," "fast," "innovative," "dominant," and "super-human" but also opposed to past generations of technology used in recruitment understood as "weak," "soft," "passive," "slow," "decadent," "deficient," "faulty," "weak," "retrograded," and "unfit for the future of recruitment."[6] These contrasts were fractally mapped on the community of recruiters. Those who used AI were framed as "innovators," "brave," "powerful," "inspiring," "dominant," "leading," and "successful." The others as "tired," "hesitant," "burned," "depressed," "lacking a vision," and sometimes as "losers." These lexical contrasts mapped innovation and leadership onto stereotypically masculine-coded traits (e.g., bravery, dominance, strength, leadership), while portraying failure and resistance to change through feminized and pathologizing terms (e.g., tired, emotional, lacking vision). Interdiscursively, this framing echoes the ideological stance underlying Facebook and Meta owner Mark Zuckerberg's call for more "masculine energy" in the tech industry (Zuckerberg 2025). His statement, like the register documented at the expo and in the Musk–Sunak interview, enacts a gendered language ideology in which technological mastery is semantically and pragmatically masculinized. This language also evokes longer standing cultural scripts in which terms like "powerful," "dominant," and "leading" index not just authority and innovation but a normatively male-coded subject position. These interdiscursive links also connect to historical technofuturist imaginaries (Barbrook and Cameron 1996; Bederman 2008), where progress, technology, and strength have been repeatedly gendered as masculine.

At the expo, these contrasts were also frequently classed and generational. Success and innovation were visually and linguistically associated with young, energetic individuals in expensive, stylish suits, whereas failure and hesitation were mapped onto older, visibly tired individuals with outdated clothing. This semiotic layering—where bodily appearance, fashion, age, and affective stance intersect—was reinforced through repeated indexicals of strength and weakness. The result is a fractal recursivity (Gal and Irvine 2019), where differences at the level of individual performance (e.g., willingness to adopt AI) reproduce and naturalize broader social hierarchies of gender, age, and class. In this way, the promotional discourse does not merely "echo" ideological stances but materializes them linguistically and visually, drawing on interdiscursive and indexical links that frame technological change as not only inevitable but also normatively masculine, youthful, and elite.

Technofuturist registers do not only produce differentiated mutually enregistered clusters of meaning which link more mainstream, libertarian (e.g., AI as automation, individual freedom, and higher life quality) to more radical eugenic meanings (e.g., AI divine power, masculinity, superior intelligence, and the survival of the fittest); that is, they make them appear as meaning the same and oppose them to other clusters with contrasting meanings. The unequally valued meanings that contrasting registers assemble and conventionalize also produce a hierarchy of people and social configurations (e.g., workplaces) that this cluster is fractally made to represent. The fact that the hierarchies at the London expo overlap with the persona types and visions of the future promoted and idealized by anarcho-capitalist tech entrepreneurs is no coincidence but rather points to the strategic nature of the semiotic work carried out by technofuturist registers. Believing in the inevitability of technological innovation and in AI's expansion of human intelligence to help strong, white, masculine humans save the future of recruitment and, as an extension, labor and capitalism, technofuturist registers create desire for the social imagination that tech entrepreneurs promote and economically benefit from. In other words, registers make the cluster they build appear not only normal, necessary, but also desirable (Tebaldi 2024).

Language scholars (Dlaske and Del Percio 2022; Flubacher 2020; McElhinny 2010; Milani and Richardson 2021; Tebaldi and Burnett 2025) have argued that desire is not merely an individual biological or psychological state but a socially shared process shaped by power dynamics. These dynamics are produced and mediated through forms of discursive work, such as the technofuturist registers documented here, which align individuals with broader configurations of capital and politics. This is particularly true for the expo in London, where recruitment firms had to be convinced to buy cutting-edge technology for an anarcho-capitalist future. But it is also true for the larger public that must be persuaded about AI's ability to provide solutions for economic stagnation, educational improvement, and higher levels of security.

When I left the cube, one of the men in black shirts exclaimed: "Isn't it mind-blowing? Isn't it powerful? Isn't this revealing? This is the future of recruitment." I was still stunned by what I had seen in the cube and did not immediately respond. "Isn't it mind blowing?" he insisted. "Isn't it powerful? This is the future this is where recruitment is going." He introduced himself without letting me ask my questions and explained that he had designed this future-cube. And in a series of short questions: "Who are you

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working for? Are you a CEO?" I stuttered, saying something about being "a researcher," "exploring language, work, and technology," "inequality," and "power." He interrupted me and, in an assertive tone—short, declarative sentences—countered something about "this is big data, growth, technological innovation," "the future," which he contrasted to "the weakness of academic work and its increasing effeminization," its "obsession with history, conservation, and the wokeness of academic discourse." "We are doers here, we are the future of technology," he exclaimed. He invited me to: "ask the real questions […], be positive and optimistic about technology, this is where we are going, this is what expects us, this is what will make the industry more resilient, more powerful, this is the future, isn't this exciting?" It is only at this point that he explained that this was literally the future; the technology that was presented in the cube was not ready. The future was a promise (I, however, show below that other tech firms were already selling predictive technologies). He explained that "the immersive experience has to prepare recruiters for a new future," a future that, according to him, must be "celebrated, brings recovery, prosperity, growth, and strength."[7]

The cube was just a staging of a desirable future. But the technofuturist register it produced and multiplied was not simply about promoting sophisticated recruitment technologies. Nor was it about providing information about technologies that would eventually be on the market. I was not asked if I had questions about the technologies presented or about how they could help recruitment. He was rather interested in my affective response to what I had seen. Like Bialecki's (2022) technofuturist Mormons, who, according to an "already but not yet" logic, understand technology as a means for humans to reunite with god while not yet being in heaven, he wanted me to celebrate and desire this future. He encouraged me to unite with technology's divine, masculine nature while waiting for the anarcho-capitalist-techno-utopia yet to come.

Creating desire is not only about learning to long for this AI-powered future but also about educating, asking people to adjust their conduct to this future, and moralizing this adjustment. When I did not offer the expected response to the experience of the cube, my entire persona was problematized. I was verbose, weak, effeminized, woke, and the unready past. These qualities were opposed to his self-construction as concise, active, powerful, resilient, and the inevitable future. The embodiment of Zuckerberg's masculine energy. This masculinized moralization is shared across Banks' humans struggling with the AI-granted freedom, the recruitment expo, and the UK government, which explains in its *National AI Strategy* report (2021) that:

> Extract 5
>
> Moral: As AI becomes an organising principle which creates new opportunities and changes the shape of industries and the competitive dynamics across the economy, there is a moral imperative to ensure people from all backgrounds and parts of the UK are able to participate and thrive in this new AI economy.

Although the moral obligation is framed as resting on the state—such as through the provision of "an incredible education system" mentioned by Sunak in the aforementioned interview—the imperative to thrive and contribute to national economic prosperity in an AI-powered economy extends this responsibility to individuals. The moral order embedded in technofuturist registers delineates an entire social world with its own values, distinctions, and hierarchies, separating individuals, practices, and technologies deemed fit for this technoutopian future from those that are not. As targets of this language, recruiters (though in principle this applies to anyone imagined as fit for the future) are invited not only to desire this future but to actively produce it. This desire entails more than mere alignment with AI; it requires the ongoing adjustment of one's behavior, moral compass, and sense of self to a promised AI-driven future—a future that has been anticipated for over a century.

4 | Uptakes of Historical Technofuturism

Tech entrepreneurs I interviewed are inspired to varying degrees by a prominent group of British, US–American, or European anarcho-capitalist thinkers, computer scientists, economists, philosophers, such as Neo-Monarchist Nick Land, techno-spiritualist Ray Kurzweil, Libertarian economist Patri Friedman (Milton Friedman's grandson), and Silicon Valley entrepreneurs such as Peter Thiel, the founder of PayPal, Zuckerberg, Musk, or Andreessen (many of them are early investors in OpenAI, the company behind ChatGPT). These extremely wealthy, white, male figures have reached cult status within the tech world (Little and Winch 2021). Technofuturist registers are interdiscursively linked and modeled after these utopian market heroes (Luri et al. 2023), whose authoritative ideas, charisma, and successes, but also chauvinism, provide envelopes of behavior to be desired and imitated. Tech entrepreneurs I met may not always agree with these figures' radical ideas (though many do), but they draw on their registers as powerful templates for communication, modes of thinking, and envisioning the future of technology and recruitment. Moreover, their anarcho-capitalist ideas are highly compatible with the more mainstream libertarian ideologies that many tech professionals, who grew up with the promise of the internet as a sphere of unlimited freedom and possibility, aspire to and promote.

These prominent actors' ideas are debated and circulated in public talks and manifestos, but also in tech blogs, magazines, and on social media, communicative spaces around which the tech public is constituted. Musk's endorsement of Banks' novels led to dozens and dozens of articles in generalist British or US–American outlets (e.g., The Economist, The Guardian, The New York Times, Newsweek, and Vanity Fair) and specialized tech media (Futurism, Inverse, Reason, Ars Technica, Interesting Engineering, Hack Spirit, etc.). Technofuturist registers need to be understood in their seriality as contemporary iterations of past modes of thinking, feeling, and expressing technology. Tebaldi (2023), Agha and Frog (2015), and Spitulnik (1998) argue that it is through these multiple instances of uptake, the reinscription of variants of this register into different domains of practice, that meaning is accumulated, expanded, and normalized, and that technology is enregistered in specific ways.

These links to past iterations of technofuturism are often made explicit, such as, for example, by Marc Andreessen, who, in his

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Techno-Optimist Manifesto, identifies critics of AI and accelerationism as "enemies," participants in a "mass demoralization campaign" that is "against technology and against life." This binary enemy/friend framing replicates the oppositional discourse I observed in the recruitment expo cube and parallels distinctions made by Musk and Sunak, who contrast bold technological adoption with hesitancy or fear. In his manifesto, Andreessen also explicitly sanctifies early 20th-century European Futurism, praising prominent Italian Futurist leader Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, whom he refers to as a "saint" to be emulated by contemporary tech innovators. This sanctification is not merely rhetorical but interdiscursively reanimates a semiotic register of technofuturism—one that links technology to vitality, power, violence, and speed.

Härmänmaa (2009) has shown that Italian Futurists, like contemporary Silicon Valley elites, aestheticized technological force and glorified it as a quasi-religious source of meaning and transformation. Contemporary tech discourse mirrors this register. In smoky black cubes designed like temples of the future, AI is preached with the same reverence and affective intensity as Marinetti's machine-age sermons. The language used—lexically and pragmatically forceful, militaristic, and masculinized—draws on a technofuturist register historically tied to industrial modernity and nationalist revival. As Carboni (2020) argues, the futurists' celebration of "mechanical" progress was gendered and ideological: industrial machinery, scientific innovation, and speed (e.g., the factory, the engine, the airplane) were discursively coded as dominant, forceful, and masculine—qualities that contemporary AI boosters also emphasize through similar lexical fields (e.g., "dominant," "powerful," "bleeding edge," "super-human").

This interdiscursive continuity is not only linguistic but also ideological. As Ialongo (2016) documents, Marinetti's Italian Futurism did not remain a purely aesthetic movement; it became a political force, merging with the Italian Fascist Party. Whether Elon Musk's fascist salute at Donald Trump's US presidential inauguration in 2025 was a deliberate reenactment of such fascist technopolitical aesthetics is unclear, but the gesture—alongside the accelerationist ambitions of Project 2025 in the United States and the increasingly illiberal policies of the current US administration, in which Musk serves at the time of writing—illustrates the convergence of contemporary technofuturist discourse with authoritarian political imaginaries. This convergence is further echoed in the ideological stance of other prominent Silicon Valley elites such as Peter Thiel (co-founder of PayPal, investor in OpenAI, and main funder of US Vice President JD Vance), who has publicly advocated for the end of democracy and aligned himself with the anti-democratic, anti-egalitarian, and reactionary ideals of the so-called *Dark Enlightenment*. The linguistic form of this convergence is crucial: the repetition of strong, affectively charged, polarizing language, often articulated in imperative, declarative, and slogan-like form, mirrors the stylistic properties of Marinetti's manifestos and reanimates a rhetoric of urgency, transcendence, and exclusion.

But technofuturism was not just an early 20th-century artistic project. Futurist meaning also entered the world of labor through Taylor's philosophy of scientific management, which in the 20th century was circulated into the factory through an army of engineers, consultants, and workplace planners employed to raise levels of productivity. Like for past futurists and contemporary ones, Taylorists considered the machine in quasi-divine terms, both something to be feared of and worshipped, a model of perfection for a new worker, a "national man-machine" defined as having "mental caliber," "character," and "fitness" (Lazareva 2018). Cogdell (2010) explains that, like for Musk and Banks, these qualities were seen as being found in laboring men and in what Taylor (1919) considered their violent, dominant, and strong nature, but also in the promotion of eugenics and phrenology, in biomechanics and mathematic computations that measured the laws of the body, and in the neurophysiology of the workers' movement. Like past futurists and contemporary anarcho-capitalists, Taylorists idealized technological innovations as providing solutions for the replacement of human randomness with the concentrated force, precision, constancy, and dynamism of the machine.

This Taylorist machine cult also affected the way recruiters imagined and conducted hiring. Taylorist language helped understand workers as unique extensions of machines. Therefore, they needed to be hired according to their likelihood to embody the qualities and characteristics expressed by the machines (Huang and Cappelli 2006). Very similarly to how recruiters at the expo in London were understanding workers, Graham (1995) explains that for Taylorists, these qualities were not necessarily technical, so-called hard skills, which were seen as easily acquirable or inculcated into the worker through scientific management-informed training. These qualities were moral, innate characteristics of personality, making workers conform to the values and demands of their employers (also see Urciuoli 2008). In this context, multi-stage testing techniques, including psychological profiling, were used to identify and construct such moral and personal traits, distinguishing those deemed exemplary from those considered unsuitable for the workplace (Braverman 1974). Hierarchies of fitness reflected social hierarchies of gender and labor, so that an opposition productive/reproductive labor was mapped onto machines, contrasting effeminized reproductive service (i.e., washing machine) or leisure (i.e., phone) tools with the productive, masculine engines of futurity.

In other words, throughout the 20th century, we witnessed the emergence of a language, a mode of thinking, which constructs technology as a transcendental power and perfection on which the perfect human/worker needs to be modeled. Accelerated technological development was assumed to produce not only more prosperity for all but also higher levels of moral integrity, often understood as higher levels of masculinity. Scientific management models helped recontextualize previously existing meaning formations from the world of art into the factory (and then back into the world of art and in many other domains) and serve the improvement of production, from the management of machines to the management of workforces. This history, the meaning formation it expresses, is the ideological ground on which recruiters and tech entrepreneurs in and beyond the recruitment expo in London, as well as governmental actors in the United Kingdom and the anarcho-capitalist thinkers, operate. It is what Spitulnik (1998) calls a reservoir of resources, meanings, ideological connections, pieces, and bits of language feeding contemporary desires for technological utopias. Analyzing the circulation of technofuturist registers requires exploring the moments of expansion of these clusters of meaning and their

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reinscription into contemporary technological and economic agendas. Uptake is always strategic, with situative adaptation (Urla 2019) to other registers and business models through which registers have their social and economic effects—a process that I explore in the next section.

5 | AI-Recruitment Technology for Commodification

The current AI hype cannot be disconnected from the business models and commercial interests that AI advances. Digital technologies are primarily for sale, and their newness is their main selling argument. Kroo and Gershon (2022) argue that presenting digital technologies as new requires a contrast with old, past technologies. Differentiation highlights the novelty of new technologies and allows for a reconfiguration of labor and value along this new/old contrast. This contrasting semiotic work—new/old technology, new/old recruitment, new/old recruiter—is particularly relevant in a context like the expo, where technofuturist registers were mobilized to facilitate the commodification of digital technologies.

As a last analytical step, I explore the semiotic work that marketers at the expo did to prepare AI-recruitment technologies for commodification. I have already shown how technofuturist registers build opposites and how these normalize morally marked hierarchies of people. Moreover, if the past matters to differentiate new technologies from old ones, I have shown that new technology, its meaning, cannot be disconnected from the meanings that technology has historically been imbued with. To appear new, references to history must be differentiated, with specific historical meanings being strategically invoked (also extended to new meanings), whereas others are erased or downplayed.

The main attractions at the expo were a series of talks where innovators mixed marketing and expertise to sell visions of the future of the industry. One of these guest speakers was Kevin Ballard, the CEO of Predict,[8] whose AI-led predictive matchmaking technology (future prediction was seen as the ultimate technological frontier) is bought by leading economic actors in the food (McDonald's, Pret a Manger), retail (Decathlon, Aldi), transport (Airbus, Toyota, and SNCF), consulting (PWC), and finance (Société Générale, AXA).[9]

"The CV belongs to the past." Ballard started his talk with a provocation. Through its syntactic terseness, declarative force, and pragmatic function of disruption, this utterance interdiscursively echoed the stylistic strategies of Marinetti's Futurist Manifesto (1909), in which rhetorical brevity and rupture are employed to reject the past and inaugurate a new technological era. He recalled the traditional hiring process—listing it through accumulative coordination and procedural language: "Gathering CVs and resumes; building a pool of applicants; pre-selection; a long list of candidates; multiple rounds of interviews; a short list; and then hiring the person." And negating tradition with a shift to a paratactic register: "This is ineffective, inefficient. Forget CVs. CVs don't allow recruiters to grasp who people really are, how people will really perform in future." And discursively reanimating Enlightenment and 19th-century positivist critiques of human perception:

Extract 6

> The CV lacks predictive validity [in fact] the problem is the human brain […], the brain, while being a magnificent tool, has never been designed to process so much data and complexity […], the brain is biased, there are more than 180 cognitive biases which affect how we think, grasp information, and make decisions. The brain entraps us within our own universe, it is a limiting tool, it prevents us from understanding the overwhelming nature of human beings.

This human brain/AI contrast was elaborated in his speech through a series of statements that interdiscursively repeated and reproduced historical and contemporary constructions of technology as a model for human perfection:

> Extract 7
>
> The brain needs to be replaced by AI, emotions, intuitions need to be replaced by big data and predictive analytics, CVs need to be replaced by AI-powered predictive models of candidates which allow us to understand who people really are, predict who will succeed in workplaces, and how they will do it […]. This is magic [note the links to the mythical, quasi-religious register mobilized in Silicon Valley (cf. Andreessen's techno-optimist manifesto or Musk's "AI as genie" above)], do not just assess and rank, strive for more. Ensure the best team fit.

This mystification was intensified by a metaphoric temporal condensation of success, which interdiscursively cites early 20th-century futurist celebrations of the train, where acceleration signified transcendental progress and technological utopia (Carboni 2020): "Boost your recruitment and do that fast. The time between three London underground stations is 5 minutes: that's all it takes to build success, a powerful team."

Finally evoking the legacy of personality profiling—yet these were now discursively repackaged as algorithmic insights—he continued:

> Extract 8
>
> This is AI, 850 analyzed data points, 5.4 million possible configurations. What we offer is a true data mine. Our AI-powered predictive tools measure candidates' aptitude or cognitive ability, what can a worker do, their ability to acquire new skills, their ability to reinvent themselves, what motivates people, what are they passionate about, what are their fundamental needs? […] AI assesses personality, the psychological backbone of people […], personality has the biggest

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> impact on how people will behave […], the natural talents of people, their singularity, what makes them unique, who they really are, who they will be and how they can contribute to the success of the company.

In sum, Ballard's speech exemplifies how technofuturist registers do not simply break with the past but selectively mobilize it to make AI-led recruitment appear desirable, authoritative, inevitable, and new. The rejection of legacy tools—such as the CV, the human brain, and human intuitive judgment—is central to this narrative. Yet, at the same time, this rupture is sustained through the reactivation of older regimes of value drawn from early technofuturism, positivist science, and personality psychology. Ballard constructs AI as an epistemic and moral improvement over human cognition—unbiased, efficient, and infinitely capable. At the same time, he preserves and reanimates a long-standing cultural logic in which technology is imbued with transcendental power and framed as the ultimate source of truth. This dual gesture—denouncing the limitations of the past while reproducing its idealized visions of technological mastery—renders AI recruitment not just new but as the perfected super-human successor to historically masculinized, objectivist, and future-oriented ideologies of progress. This rhetorical structure not only legitimates AI itself, but it also reconfigures the figure of the recruiter. By echoing earlier discourses that mystify technological agency, Ballard begins to shift attention to what recruiters can become through their alignment with AI, preparing the ground for a new, hybrid subjectivity at the intersection of human and machine. Crucially, for Ballard, the technological pursuit of objective truth is not just about knowing who candidates "really are," but about cultivating an objective self, a super-human (scientific) recruiter wherein knowing, known, and knower converge. Commodificability of AI is thus also achieved through the semiotic extension of AI's god-like powers to the human recruiters. If, like Musk and Sunak, the designer in the future-cube wanted me to desire AI, here adopting AI superpower in recruitment meant turning recruiters into human extensions of these god-like technological agents. Like gods who see people for who they really are, AI allows this new recruiter figure to apprehend workers through a deep reading of their personae. This extension is semiotically achieved through a language that situates god-like, super-human agency in this AI-human intersection. "Replace," "ensure," "strive," "boost," "understand," "predict," "build": Ballard's use of the imperative situates agency in future recruiters and interpellates them as super-human agents. This AI–human recruiter intersection is not just discursive fantasy. Like Hayles' posthuman cyborgs (Hayles 1999), recruiters using AI do have the capacity to screen and rank in a few minutes millions of potential candidates over the entire web and assess their personality for workplace fit.

Links between the new recruiter and AI-god are intensified in personalized sales interactions where AI is sold to recruiting firms. In one of Predict's sales webinars[10] that I documented after the expo in London, the salesperson explained that:

> Extract 9
>
> Predict's AI-powered predictive technology helps recruiters identify those candidates who will make companies win […]. Our AI-powered matchmaking collects data on 20 personality traits to maximize predictive power for behavior and performance. You will know exactly how your candidates will behave in future, what they will be able to do and what not […]. This is science powered by big data. […] Seeks stability, is assertive, tries to convince others, is spontaneous, demonstrates diplomacy, connects emotionally [etc.]. Science tells us that these personal traits are universal, natural features of a human's psychology. These are features that all humans share, some more, others less. They are innate and stable. […] Affinity, cultural fitness, shared values, but also complementary values, complementary personality is what makes a strong match, what makes a team successful, what makes you grow […]. You will have the knowledge to make the right choice, to build the perfect team, you will win.

In a psychological register, the salesperson frames individual behavior as measurable, universal, and biologically determined. The repetitive use of is-constructions ("is assertive," "is optimistic," "is relaxed") creates a pattern of essentialization, linguistically reifying personality traits as static, ontological truths rather than socially negotiated performances. The speaker further reinforces this by asserting these traits are "innate and stable," invoking the epistemic authority of "science" to cast them as naturally occurring and universally valid. At the same time, the modal construction "you will have the knowledge" and imperatives such as "build," "win," and "make the right choice" interpellate the recruiter as a sovereign subject, endowed with predictive clarity. Through this linguistic structure, truth is presented as a property of both the AI system and the human who adopts it, aligning machine, truth, and human action. AI is thus not only a knowing agent but also a doing agent, one that enables recruitment actions to appear as based on naturalized epistemologies rather than historically contingent practices.

Although sales strategies varied, this invocation of AI-predictive technology as grounded in a universalist, scientific psychology for workplace and worker improvement (Del Percio 2022) remained stable. As past futurists constructed technology as transcendence, contemporary technofuturist registers—from Banks' novels to recruitment expos—cast AI as the conduit for unbiased, non-ideological, and objective truth. Through this register, salespersons position human–AI hybrids as agents of a natural order: those who "identify," "know," "build," and "win." Here, truth is not just spoken; it is enacted—AI and its users become performers of natural selection, of a technocratic ideal where recruitment becomes a ritual of optimized, data-driven purification.

This fetishization of AI is strategically used by Predict for commodification. It allows them to link the super-human powers of AI to critiques of human recruitment as limited, slow, and biased. It also helps to speak to recruiters' desires for speed, automation, and productivity, and to their fantasies of freedom and control, which are made realizable through AI and its super-human powers. Freedom and control matter here; at no point does the salesperson suggest that AI replace human control, even

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if Predict's technology could do this. The technology screens the web for candidates, assesses their qualities, and ranks them according to employers' needs. It can also automatically communicate with candidates and even autonomously conduct and assess interviews. The human remains in control; being an AI-powered human recruiter is even fun. In other sales webinars, Predict's technology is presented as "user friendly," "fun," and "gamified," linking AI-recruitment to the futuristic computer games that many young recruiters know so well. The gamified platform lists candidates like a computer game with avatars, points, and stats, linking the human recruiter figure to the one of a gamer who is in control and has the power to choose an abstract cluster of ranked personality traits to "build" and "win."

In an anarcho-capitalist imaginary, the gaming-recruiter figure is semiotically linked to the CEO-monarch figure whom accelerationists Nick Land and Curtis Yarvin invoke as replacing current democratic governments. Like an omnipotent gamer who impersonates adventurers or king-heroes who own, know, and govern their people and build the worlds that they master, the CEO-monarch is imagined as ruling the population like a company, like the human-machine gods in Banks' novels, or like Musk or US President Trump. What makes AI so desirable and commodifiable is not only that it allows extending the figure of the recruiter to this super-human AI-human intersection. It is also this feeling of omnipotence, relevance, and control (you can be the CEO-monarch!), invoked, promised, and promoted by technofuturist registers, which ensures that recruiters remain in power today and in an anarcho-capitalist future too.

6 | Conclusion

Tech entrepreneurs' and recruiters' talk about AI illuminates the work that technofuturist registers do. They not only saturate technology with desirable meanings but also contribute to its idealization, imbue it with divine authority, and link it to an anarcho-capitalist imaginary promoting a particular understanding of the future of labor. Technofuturist registers propagate ideologically saturated meanings and are produced and circulated within an economy where digital technology is marketed and commodified by actors who financially and politically benefit from its fetishization.

Technofuturist registers are not only about selling technology but also about creating desire for these anarcho-capitalist futures and for the business models and configurations of labor they express. This is certainly not new. Capitalism has always been not only about the generation of value for profit but also about the shaping of desire for person types and social relations, which enable accumulation. This technique of capitalist accumulation through desire, which underpins AI, is also the logic of the tech economy.

The power of technofuturist registers lies less in their ability to prepare AI for commodification than in their capacity to make AI recruitment the expression of an exciting, desirable, but highly unequal, future. Before the closing of the expo, I talked to Predict's marketing staff about how they evaluated AI predictive match-making technology for their own work. Ballard had explained that the company's AI was not just sold to recruiters but used internally for staff assessment, with analysis of workers' personalities visible to everyone. Marketing staff did not frame this as problematic but as strengthening the company, promoting transparency, and building trust. This technology was what made working for Predict so exciting.

Whether or not technofuturist registers manage to persuade other workers in an analogous way remains to be seen. Scholarship on labor shows that there is resistance to this idealizing language. At the same time, the tech economy keeps growing, and the recruitment expo in London keeps expanding, attracting larger numbers of recruiters willing to buy AI and use it to reconfigure their recruitment practices. This is a process appearing in other contexts too, where AI is made to articulate desire for imagined anarcho-capitalist futures, which, while making the interests of corporate actors, may or may not hold their promise of freedom and wellbeing for all. Future research will need to keep track of how the desire constructed around AI and the anarcho-capitalist imagination it expresses will articulate with future recruitment and the material conditions of our present and future. Technofuturist registers' promises of a bright future for a few may come at the material cost of many.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Endnotes

[1] These slogans were displayed on the pavilions at the expo. They were documented by me through handwritten fieldnotes and are reproduced in their original form.

[2] Full video here: https://www.youtube.com/live/yIYcg1xdGcs?si=a6QijRw2DwoEQREu Starmer's statements were transcribed verbatim by me.

[3] Due to ethical reasons and technical challenges, audio recording was not feasible. The discursive data I collected at the pavilion were documented through handwritten fieldnotes during or immediately after interactions. These fragments of discourse are reproduced as verbatim as possible.

[4] The 5-min interview excerpt was transcribed by me. I cut it minimally and added punctuation for clarity and readability.

[5] I documented these lexical features through handwritten fieldnotes and reproduce them here in their original form.

[6] Similar contrasts can be observed in promotional materials from AI-powered recruitment platforms such as www.hirevue.com and global tech events like the AI & Big Data Expo (www.ai-expo.net). Although the oppositions may be less explicit, these materials nonetheless reproduce the same semiotic logic: They juxtapose AI-driven

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recruitment—framed as objective, efficient, innovative, and future-oriented—with traditional recruitment methods, often portrayed as subjective, outdated, and inefficient.

[7] See Endnote 3.

[8] The names of Ballard and his company are pseudonyms.

[9] Ballard's intervention was audio recorded and transcribed by me. For reasons of anonymization and confidentiality, I am presenting here only parts of his intervention relevant for my analysis.

[10] The sales-person's intervention was recorded and transcribed by me. I am presenting here only those parts of his intervention relevant for my analysis.

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