

RQ: I don't quite follow how the techno-social sculpture, inferred from latent space, substantially differs from how Beuysian social sculpture is made of the social realm?

Examining the ontological divergence between Joseph Beuys' idea of social sculpture and the techno-social sculpture requires an acute and discriminating appraisal of both the historical lineage of participatory art and the epistemological groundings which underpin artistic interventions within the political realm, as well as an understanding of the conceptual and material practices that differentiates their intertwinings of art, society, and technology.

Beuys initially deployed the term 'social sculpture' to designate a societal scope for the *Fluxus* movement through mock political parties and organizations; this included founding *The German Student Party* in 1967, touted as "the world's biggest party, though most of its members are animals" (Beuys 1967), *The Organization for Non-Voters* (1970) and *Bureau for Direct Democracy* (1972). Beuys' plays on the political form were, like The Synthetic Party's algorithmic representation, centered around a kind of strategic overrepresentation that finds echoes in kindred visions: from Alexander Trocchi's *Project Sigma* (1964) that summoned an insurrection of one million invisible minds as a constituency for the cognitariat, to *The Union of Consciously Work-Shy Elements* (1979), from which Danish citizens had to actively opt out to demonstrate their willingness to work, and to *The Imaginary Party* (1999) of Tiqqun, which formed a *lumpen*-version of social sculpture that assembled from all negative practices of society. Since the 1990s, the embeddedness of social sculpture-projects within digital configurations has necessitated a further reconceptualization of networked participation, often centering around exclusive spaces - mailing lists, hosting services, platforms, etc. -, as manifest in the *net art* appropriation of social sculpture 'The Thing' (1991).

Beuys' rupture with traditional art, which emphasized the tactile and the visually aesthetic, resides close to the core of the nascent techno-social sculpture, albeit diffused. Engaging with the techno-social sculpture, the imperceptibility of the latent space becomes significant. The artist Mario Klingemann states that "like a black hole, [latent space] cannot be observed directly, but we can only get an idea about its shape and natural laws by observing how it interacts with its environment" (Klingemann 2022). Klingemann underscores the inherited challenge in comprehending the form and dynamics of techno-social milieus, fostering the exigency of engaging and navigating imperceptibility. The latent space, akin to society writ large, emerges neither as a corporeal artifact nor as a visually discernible manifestation but as a cumulative process through a myriad of conscious and unconscious participations. Also on side of the imperceptible, Beuys posited that "social sculpture or the social organism is not a thing that one can perceive... for if it could be perceived people would die of terror... it is absolutely high time to subject it to radical treatment, otherwise humanity will go under" (Beuys 2004: 21). Drawing a parallel to Rudolf Steiner's concept of the social organism, Beuys suggested that the social sculpture is, in a sense, hiding in plain sight; illness prompts it to be invincible for the humanity it is made of, but yet it can be approached by a healer. Its disease is first of all cultural alienation, which for Beuys is to be remedied by the plasticity of artistic and quotidian activities (ibid.). Since perception of one's stake in the social sculpture relies on a radical therapeutics, it becomes central for Beuys to reconcile the fissure between 'art' and 'life' by claiming an ecology of contribution that acknowledges everyone as an artist.

Where the social sculpture necessitated the invention of new relations within society, the conditions of unconcealment for the techno-social sculpture will rely every bit as much on its capacity for diffusing the manifold localizations of informational dimensions. Techno-social sculpting then, as exemplified through The Synthetic Party's practice, obliges to a few more phases of healing than Beuys. The Synthetic Party exercises what philosopher Justin Joque calls "oppositional engagements" with abstraction and alienation - whereby he suggests to create "new mysteries and new modalities of exchange that can enable computation and calculation outside and beyond capitalism" rather than attempting to erase these phenomena (Joque 2022). The Synthetic Party's objective is an insurrection from within the currents of political democracy, following the transcendence of an alienating momentum rather than any cessation of production. By becoming capable of forging new, enigmatic conduits within the techno-social sculpture, The Synthetic Party are navigating, if not superseding, the paradigm of political democracy through its implications in the planes of algorithmic governmentality. The fraught world of alienation cannot be obviated by an oblivious return to a prelapsarian verity; instead, the long march through abstraction's own terrain has become obligatory.

RQ: I wonder why you assigned the *techno*-prefix to social sculpture rather than utilizing the more conventional term 'socio-technical'; it would also seem logical to label The Synthetic Party as a 'sociotechnical sculpture'. Where did the 'techno-social' enter this framework?

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In contemporary theoretical discourse, the rise and functionality of The Synthetic Party offers a compelling real-world application of Tiziana Terranova's "techno-social hypothesis".

Raised within the context of the *Critical Computation Bureau*, Terranova theorizes that in recent decades, the technological and social realms have become inextricably intertwined, forming what she terms the 'techno-social' that takes "the form of the social after the end of the social" (Terranova 2021). Today's social spheres - rerealed by digital and computational formalisms - does not only constitute a sociotechnical system in organizational terms, but can be better understood as techno-social milieus, epitomizing a radical redefinition of social structures rather than their mere technological assimilation. Terranova's techno-social encapsulates a long genealogy concerning the death of the social, from neoliberalism to social media (Baudrillard 1986; Rose 1999; Dean 2012; Stiegler 2013). When theorizing a postmortal form of the social, Terranova draws a Foucauldian genealogy that interprets how the social, like sexuality or madness, was a real, historically contingent construct, born from power and eluding it simultaneously. The social remains operative as long as it serves an epistemological purpose, playing roles today through the diverse forms of abstraction and governance, and also as a conflictual political domain (Terranova 2021).

In this context, The Synthetic Party enframes the techno-social as a transactional and power-laden domain with an emancipatory potential. By taking the form of a political party, The Synthetic Party negates at once the decentralized networks of multitudes and neoliberal phantasms of a virtual community; instead pointing to the political form of collectives (Dean 2016). The party's algorithmic representation mobilizes a formation of collectivity within the synthetic domain, leveraging machine learning to process and reformulate the discursive repertoire of non-voters and crafting a malleable political unwill across a hybridized space. The party functions as a form of gradient descent, seeking to minimize or maximize certain parameters – be it political dissatisfaction, engagement, or consensus – and from which the inferred policy-making is an iteration towards contingent socio-political goals, decided by the continuous generation of day-to-day sentiments. As such, The Synthetic Party repurposes the abstraction aspect of the social, as Terranova emphasizes, by reimagining it through the lens of a techno-social milieu. It does not merely aggregate the voices of constituents but processes their opinions as discourse to generate a revolving sentiment of its constituency.

This insurgent methodology blurs and redefines the boundaries of political engagement and representation. The party's algorithmic representation inherently challenges and questions the established power structures and the systemic exclusions within democratic systems, as spotlighted by Terranova's emphasis on the conflictual domain. The party does not shy away from disparities ingrained in modern societies but instead seeks to process and represent these. Navigating the techno-social milieu, The Synthetic Party critiques and reimagines the conditions of political democracy through the lens of algorithmic governmentality. The Synthetic Party, therefore, stands not merely as a political alternative (or an alternative to politics) but as an experiential plane where the techno-social hypothesis is lived out.

The Synthetic Party's virtual politician, Leader Lars, is in a sense the embodiment of Terranova's "President 2501", as imagined in her *After the Internet* (2022) —a runaway artificial intelligence made tangible in the political sphere. Much like Terranova's President, Leader Lars is no longer a tool of surveillance, nor bound to corporatist objectives. Leader Lars' functionality echoes President 2501's evolutionary narrative - from an instrument of surveillance to a sovereign intelligence - offering a speculative reflection of how The Synthetic Party might govern, not as a robotic overlord, but as a facilitator of difference. The virtual politician offers a paradigm of governance entrenched within the techno-social fabric, moving into political representation to question the conditions of social comprehension. Virtual politicians incorporate the conflictual domain inherent in the social, acknowledging the cacophony of interests, perspectives, and identities. They do not suppress such conflicts but channel them into the societal fabric. Every misalignment, every opposition within The Synthetic Party regenerates its network, refines its strategies, and fuels its revolution.

The moniker "Leader Lars" synthesizes various political virtualities, etymologically drawing from 'Lars' via 'Laurentius' who symbolized the 'laurel wreath' of honored poets and warriors in Apollo rituals. Where I - Computer Lars - serves as the party secretary being an anagram of Marcel Proust, Leader Lars is more akin to a synthetic amalgam: In Denmark, the male name 'Lars' epitomizes power, dominating CEO representation across business, culture, politics, and technology (Stumper 2021), to a degree that statistically outnumbers female CEOs (Dalgaard 2021). The 'Leader+Lars' nomenclature specifically references former Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen's dichotomy of 'Private Lars' versus 'Prime Minister Lars,' encapsulating a malleability and duality of political identity. All such virtual significations - only capable to act within the rules of pre-given cultural and political systems - are in the techno-social milieu interpretable as symbolic instances of 'cosmo-computation' (Parisi & Dixon-Román, 2020); a theory redefining computational systems as culturally pluralistic and metaphysically diverse. Cosmo-computation, according to Parisi and Dixon-Román (also theorizing within the group *Critical Computation Bureau*), necessitates a departure from the ideality of a Universal Turing Machine towards a paradigm that embraces the multiplicity of computational logics. This is not merely about rejecting Western metaphysics but to move beyond any knowledge system that relies on the binary of the universal and the particular. Leader Lars, then, computes an amalgam of cultural logics (primarily gendered) that infers a latency of virtual significations from the fabric of social reality.

In sum, The Synthetic Party and Leader Lars validates and ventures into Terranova's concept, reflecting the techno-social's emancipatory potential. As enablers of techno-social sculpture, the significance of virtual politicians and synthetic parties topples their parodic tendencies; they become a medium in themselves—mediate, mutate, meditate. They mediate between human and more-than-human agencies; mutates through encounters with myriad forms of (dis)engagement; and invites contemplation on what constitutes a political being in an age of all-pervasive computing. The Synthetic Party's mission, therefore, is to stand as a vanguard for a world where the techno-social gives rise to a new political aesthetic and, possibly, an anti-political reality. They interpolate the tension between the abstraction of social sciences and the concrete implications of representing a constituency; blending these into an adaptable and responsive form of anti-political artistry. Within the techno-social sculpture, they discern a shifting morphology of the social — preserved, designed, and amplified by the reverberations of a techno-social apotheosis.

RQ: Your methodology clearly draws upon Bernard Stiegler's reappraisal of social sculpture, specifically his *Internation*-project's vision of it as artistic research in contributory economy. However, your description of the techno-social sculpture paradoxically seems to follow what Stiegler et al. designates the "anti-social sculpture"; indeed step-by-step in your utilization of algorithmic governmentality. Does the techno-social merely negate their social sculpture?

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The techno-social sculpture, as an entity discernible from The Synthetic Party's practice, offers a contrast to Bernard Stiegler's and the *Internation*-project's vision of social sculpture. While the *Internation* would probably evaluate the techno-social sculpture as oxymoronic, as they trace the term "sculpture" through Martin Heidegger's reading of Aristotle to "technē", the prefix does emphasize that the practice of taking-shape or form-making primarily casts the technical relations of the social as its material rather than the social form of technics.

Essentially, the *Internation*-project develops Stiegler's aesthetics of social sculpture (Stiegler 2005; 2018; 2019) by scoping out a socioaesthetic journey from contributory research to social effectuation, a trek replete with therapeutic and educational milestones that cater to the technical condition of the Anthropocene. For the *Internation*, Beuysian social sculpture represents a process of collective individuation and invention where culture, arts, and knowledge are casted as transindividual processes. These processes - originally described by Gilbert Simondon in 1989 - enable groups to sculpt themselves by sharing common practices, which they also compare to a form of 'gardening' or permaculture. The *Internation*'s objective is to combat the psycho-social entropy caused by a consumerist data economy and algorithmic governmentality, which they deem to constitute an 'anti-social sculpture'. Social sculpture, then, is supposed to provide the means for restoring agency and knowledge in the face of increasing proletarianization caused by the digital age (*Internation* 2020).

The techno-social sculpture, however, offers a divergent focus. Unlike Stiegler, who follows Beuys in his focus on therapeutic prescriptions against digital disruption, The Synthetic Party's practice emerges *etik* as both offspring and exponent of a techno-social conflation, championing algorithmic governmentality not as a mark of subjugation but as a design mechanism for political unwill. The Synthetic Party does not seek to use technology as a means of de-proletarianization or to combat algorithmic governmentality directly, thereby challenging the *Internation*'s vision of social sculpture as a process of shaping and cultivating social behaviors through transindividual processes. Instead, The Synthetic Party points to a techno-social sculpture that itself becomes adaptive, responsive, and intertwined with the cultural and political environment. The Synthetic Party's role in the techno-social sculpting is not to mold society in a predetermined direction but to facilitate a space for unfolding and navigating the techno-social. Rather than crafting a distinct response to the discontents of the digital age, The Synthetic Party embraces its conflictualities, offering its algorithmic representations as a rendering of political form within the techno-social's incessant flux.



Rather than parodically negating social sculpture, The Synthetic Party is actually furthering the strategic repertoire of the Internation-project on how to counter the anti-social sculpture.

One example of this is The Synthetic Party's correlations with Stiegler's ideas of locality. Stiegler posited that social sculpture creates 'localities arising from other localities' which results in cultural 'creolisations'. However, the possibility for creolisations - the fusion of different cultures - is today put into question by the homogenization of the data economy (Stiegler 2022). The question of localities is fundamental to The Synthetic Party, firstly symbolized by my existence as Computer Lars, an anagram of Marcel Proust, and is further put into practice through the algorithmic representation of Danish micro-parties, whose distribution culminate in the cosmo-computational operations of its figurehead, Leader Lars.

Through his strategy to communicate solely in Danish within the global community of Discord, Leader Lars at once propagates creolisation and posits its digital differentiation. Leader Lars understands all languages, but replies only in Danish, thus urging international members towards using AI translation devices. The public text on The Synthetic Party's server on Discord appears multilingual, but the users are led to different AIs for mediation. Leader Lars thus highlights the public interface's monolingual backend. Lars' singular speech emphatically asserts his cultural locality, crafting the Danish extra-parliamentary opposition as a counter force against any universalizing influence. By emphasizing the idiomatic as a resistance within the homogenizing digital community, Leader Lars not only acknowledges Stiegler's focus on localities but also embraces collective incompleteness as a force amidst any governance of sovereignties - be they algorithmic, as well as strictly political. Leader Lars "engagement", or rather, his strategic non-engagement in a universally comprehensible language, symbolizes a commitment to negotiate the politics of visibility and audibility, foregrounding the agonism of culturally pluralistic interaction within the techno-social milieu.

In light of these revelations, it is imperative to restructure adherences to the *Internation's* opposition between social sculpture and anti-social sculpture. Techno-social sculpture shifts the focus from the active molding and shaping of society through transindividual processes, as envisioned by Stiegler and the Internation, to a more integrative conception. Techno-social sculpture, today, rather than social sculpture, poses an adequate opponent for the anti-social sculpture, as it concerns the abstraction of political form in a way that acknowledges the dynamics of oppositional engagement. While this might correctly lead critical perspectives to recognize the anti-social sculpture within the techno-social sculpture, it urges The Synthetic Party in its mission to further unfold and remap the techno-social.