

TECHNO POETIC BIENNALE

The re-enchanted future is
found in the intersection
between art and technology

Concept by Lars Seeberg & Mikael Fock

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Why do we need a Techno Poetic Biennale?

The reason why we have set out to establish a Techno Poetic Biennale is a desire that both of us share: The desire to challenge and explore technological development in the context of arts and culture – and at the same time give art and artists the opportunity to challenge and develop the narratives of the new era through the use of new technologies.

We believe that in the interplay between arts and culture on one hand, and all the world's technological disciplines on the other, entirely new narratives about our present, past, and future can be created. Narratives that, similarly, can be communicated through completely new artistic formats that engage, involve, and inspire us in ways we cannot yet imagine.

In our view, art has always had a fantastic opportunity to reinvent itself freely in its encounter with new technologies. Just think of the far-reaching consequences the invention of the camera has had for art and cultural history.

Today, however, we cannot talk about singular inventions that will transform the world of arts and culture. On the contrary, we are faced with a multitude of technologies that have the potential to create societal upheavals of unprecedented scale. To create entirely new worlds for all of us, even.

Therefore, a central question is how we ensure the right to unfold ourselves artistically and creatively in these new worlds, rather than just

being exploited by the technologies, while their owners force us to pay to use them.

We see an increasing need for a far broader array of actors to have the opportunity to use and explore the latest biotech and machine learning technologies and take ownership of them. This is especially true for artists, allowing them to truly experiment with the technologies and develop the new formats that we will all benefit from.

If we do it right, we can have a technopoetic renaissance. But it requires a focal point. A meaningful and physical meeting place where artists, technologists, and researchers can manifest the intersection that their professions already constitute. Where they can challenge the dominant commercial approach that characterizes technological development.

It is such a gathering place that we want to establish with a Techno Poetic Biennale – and which we hope you will help us create.



Lars Seeberg & Mikael Fock
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Technology should re-enchant us – not disenchant us

In the fairy tale *The Shadow*, H.C. Andersen has his learned main character cast his shadow over the balcony across the street and wander behind the magical curtains – and right into the chamber of poetry.

Andersen's point is that humans not only lose their shadow but also their access to poetry and art and, ultimately, life itself if we let our shadows do the work for us.

The many new AI technologies and social media platforms in particular have transformed our smartphones and other digital devices into powerful shadows that may know more about us than we do ourselves.

With the establishment of a Techno Poetic Biennale, we wish to let humans – not their shadows – take control of the new creative technologies that are helping to define the artistic spaces and narratives of the future.

Every century has its art spaces and stage spaces, and our time is a complex one where our perception of reality is increasingly altered by the accelerating technological development, and where fiction takes forms we have never experienced before.

Therefore, there is a need for a platform where artists, technologists, and researchers together can explore the new possibilities – and thus create new works that meet the challenges and narratives of the new era.

A new technology is no longer just a new tool – like a new lamp or a piece of drawing software – but also co-creative, autonomous systems, generative processes, three-dimensional digital universes, and artificial intelligences that expand and support the artist's imagination.

Where the stage previously formed the framework for reproductions or gradations of the reality we know, this frame is now dissolving, and entirely new parallel and hybrid realities are in play.

New technologies like Virtual Reality, Augmented Reality, and, of course, artificial intelligence – or just AI – cannot be isolated and understood separately from the rest of our shared reality.

On the contrary, they will become part of both the business sector, cultural life, the education sector, healthcare,



the rest of the public sector, and every individual citizen's everyday existence – at an increasing speed.

When the winds of change blow as powerfully as they currently do, the primary focus area is often the economy.

Nevertheless, there is a risk in letting the economic perspective be all-dominant. Especially in the encounter with technological development, which not only affects socio-economic conditions but also our very understanding of what it means to be human in this world. Our way of interacting with our fellow humans. Our way of living and learning – and, not least, our way of being creative: The stories we tell, the pictures we show, the music we play, and the performances we stage.

Put a bit sharply, there are two crucially different approaches to the technological development that we as a society can have: Disenchantment and re-enchantment.

- ▶ **Disenchantment** is the approach where explicitly commercial interests lead the way. Where all the new possibilities are merely used to reproduce existing patterns in predictable, albeit more efficient ways. Where we deliberately avoid the huge potential space that the new technologies represent, simply because it is too overwhelming, too cumbersome, and too uncontrollable.

- ▶ **Re-enchantment** is not the blind embrace of the new technologies' potentials, but rather the fundamental recognition that these potentials exist, and that they are worth exploring. Because this is where we have the opportunity to find new perspectives, stories, and ways of approaching the world. To meet the mystery and magic that lie in the unexplored and in being astonished. With a belief that this is where true artistic freedom and genuine innovation take place.

Techno Poetic Biennale is a platform that, as its highest purpose, should facilitate this form of re-enchantment.



The purpose and contents of the biennale

The Techno Poetic Biennale has four overarching objectives:

- ▶ **Increased collaboration:** By bringing together experts, professionals, and enthusiasts from diverse backgrounds such as art, science, society, and business, the biennale aims to promote collaboration and interdisciplinary exchange, making it easier to explore the multifaceted implications of digitalization together – thereby unlocking its full potential.
- ▶ **Improved accessibility:** By making new technologies accessible to everyone, the biennale builds a bridge between technical expertise and the broader community. The biennale will offer creative experiences, workshops, and initiatives that will increase public engagement. By democratizing access to knowledge and resources, the biennale enables individuals from all backgrounds to meet the democratic challenge and participate in shaping our common future – especially through encounters with new artistic formats.
- ▶ **Encouragement of innovation:** By creating an environment that fosters convergence between research, business, communities, and art through new technological projects, the biennale sparks innovation and encourages the development of new ideas and solutions that benefit society as a whole.

- ▶ **Creating meaning and understanding of larger contexts:**

Art, through challenging new intelligent technologies, should challenge the occupation of citizens and society, which takes place, among other things, through invisible AI services, by offering new democratic and inclusive interpretations of the world.

The biennale will naturally appeal to professionals, researchers, artists, and others who operate at the intersection of art and technology.

But it will also be open to everyone who has a personal interest in this intersection.

In addition, it will be relevant for school classes and families with children.



The specific contents

The goal is for the biennale to collaborate with as many theaters, music venues, exhibition spaces, conference facilities, and outdoor locations as possible during an intense festival period of about a week.

The first edition of the Techno Poetic Biennale could thus include:

- ▶ **An international performance part** showing the most interesting stage and performance art that reaches out towards the newest technologies and challenges our worldview.
- ▶ **An international exhibition part** with groundbreaking and thought-provoking technological artworks à la the [Ars Electronica festival in Linz](#) or the [Dimensions exhibition in Leipzig](#).
- ▶ **An international conference part** in collaboration with opinion leaders, artists, researchers, and companies from all over the world, which will create a deeper understanding of the larger contexts and inspiration around the themes of the year.
- ▶ **International productions and co-productions** through residency programs with arts, culture, and knowledge institutions – both national and international – which will offer new frameworks for collaborations between researchers and artists

in an attempt to provide researchers and technologies with new inspiration – and artists a platform for unfolding new era narratives. These will be living examples of how to expand STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) to STEAM (with the addition of Arts).

Several of the biennale’s formats may naturally extend beyond the actual festival period.

This applies both to performances and exhibitions that are part of the biennale, which can then also be experienced before or after.

Similarly, workshop programs in collaboration with educational institutions will naturally start in the weeks before the festival and then produce results that can be showcased during the biennale. In addition, the biennale will need to be prepared with local and international



producers via, for example, residencies for selected artists and scientists, both in Denmark and abroad. Various co-productions should also be initiated so that they are ready for the biennale.

All with the aim that the many interdisciplinary efforts, projects, and works peak in interest during the biennale – although they might also exist before and after.

At the same time, it is important that in the exhibition and performance formats, outreach is made to all age groups, so that both professionals, students, school classes, and ordinary citizens can see themselves in large parts of the program.

Financing and partnerships

The biennale is expected to be financed by Odense Municipality, state funds for culture and research, as well as private foundations and companies. In addition, in collaboration with selected international partners, we will apply for relevant EU programs.

By entering into collaborations with cultural venues based on a community of interest, it is expected that they will invest in co-productions with the biennale.

The same applies to national and international productions, where there can either be co-productions with money from several parties or presentations of already produced projects that then merely require money for the actual presentation in terms of location, technology, accommodation, and travel.

In connection with international participation, the participating countries can typically contribute with support for transport, just as the Danish Arts Foundation has various funds for both international and national exchange.

The biennale consciously moves within a field where the boundary between art and science is not clear, but this relationship also constitutes a natural starting point for using many different knowledge and dissemination partners as experts.

Thus, there should be collaboration with universities in terms of collecting and evaluating knowledge, which can then be developed into actual methods that can set standards within the sector. At the same time, it is important to point out that the movements between artists and researchers go both ways, so artists learn from researchers and vice versa.

Why Odense should be the host city

Odense has a unique position to assume the role as the host city for the Techno Poetic Biennale, due to the city's existing know-how and resources, which perfectly align with the goals and requirements of this interdisciplinary platform.

Here, we will highlight four specific aspects:

- ▶ **Research expertise:** Odense is particularly strong in AI research through initiatives like CAI-X, SDU Applied AI, and the Data Science section. The city also boasts world-class incubator facilities at the Technological Institute in Odense. Being home to renowned research institutions and a university, Odense has made significant contributions to advancements in the digital field.
- ▶ **Strong arts and culture position:** Odense has a rich and diverse arts and culture scene, including H.C. Andersen's House, Carl Nielsen Museum, Odense Theatre, Momentum Theatre, Odense Symphony Orchestra, The Funen Opera, and Kunsthallen Brandts. The city's democratic approach to art, especially expressed through its festivals, makes Odense a vibrant and engaging hub for artistic development and dissemination. By integrating art into technological development and vice versa, the biennale can utilize the creative potential of artists in Odense, in Denmark, and internationally – thereby promoting innovative and unique perspectives on the impact of technology on society,

art and cultural life, science, and business. Currently, there is no single platform in Denmark offering this.

- ▶ **Entrepreneurial spirit with a focus on digitalization, robotics, and AI:** Odense has a thriving robot and AI industry with strong business connections. From robotics, drones, and automation to biotechnology and life science, Odense is strongly positioned both in Europe and globally as a center for innovation. Odense aims to be the best city in Denmark for startups and is investing in a Robotics StartUp Fund to position itself as a Tech Hub.
- ▶ **Progressive mindset:** With its motto 'connect.collaborate.create', Invest in Odense promotes a progressive mindset and a culture that values innovation, sustainability, and equality. It offers an environment that encourages forward-thinking approaches to hybrid AI exploration.



The next steps

With this material, we have depicted the overarching concept for the Techno Poetic Biennale.

We hope that everyone reading it gets a sense of why we think such a biennale is not just a good and exciting idea, but also a necessity to push artistic and technological development in the most meaningful, innovative, beneficial, and inspiring direction.

We also hope that the material provides a sufficiently clear impression of what the diverse biennale should encompass, how it should take place, and who it is aimed at.

The next important steps are all about getting people on board, allowing us to form a group of key operators that will make up the substance of the biennale.

Therefore, this material should be considered an invitation – to the artists, cultural operators, scientists, business communities, foundations, and public actors who can see the meaning in the biennale and who would like to help turn it into a reality.

We look forward to hearing from you, to meeting with you – and to re-enchanting our shared future together.

Photos:

Cover page: *3D Water Matrix*, 2014, by Shiro Takanani, photo by Patrik-Alac

P. 3: *SH4DOW*, 2023, photos by Carl Emil Carlsen

P. 4: *Mass Bloom Explorations*, Recoil Performance Group, photo by Søren Meisner

P. 5: From *Ars Electronica 2023*, photo by Mikael Fock

P. 6: Illustration created with DALL-E 2, from the cover page of the *Ars Electronica 2023* program

P. 8: H.C. Andersen's House, photo by Odense