INTRODUCTION
UTOPIAN LONGINGS, LUDIC AESTHETICS AND EXCHANGE

By Rebecca Rouse & Lars Kristensen

This volume collects documentation and reflections on works presented at PlayLab's LudoKonst 2023 festival. PlayLab, co-founded by Kristensen and Rouse in 2022, is an open lab space in Skövde, Sweden focused at the intersection of games, technology, and the performing arts. As an open lab, PlayLab values incompleteness and work-in-progress aesthetics, because these qualities are productive and necessary for creative innovation.

For the 2023 inaugural edition of the LudoKonst festival (Ludo from *ludera*, the Latin term meaning 'to play', and konst from the Swedish word for 'art') the festival had a particular emphasis on sound and music, which were central components in each work curated. Supported by funding from Region Västra Götaland's cultural development programs, and produced with cooperation from the Skövde Art Museum, Gothenburg Folkteatern and InterArts Center Malmö, the festival took place over three days in October 2023, and was free and open to the public.

In the foreword above, Thomas Oldrell (Director of Skövde Art Museum) has shared his reflections on the relationship of art and play. In the chapters that follow, the presenting artists add to this conversation. In total, five works-in-progress were shown at LudoKonst 2023: *Comforter, The Foundling, Mobilized: an essay pretending to be a game, Unmet, Disquiet, and The Prophecies*. In addition, artists' conversations were featured, including Fauna Circus's reflection on an earlier residency at PlayLab and their work-in-progress *Ec(g)o*. A workshop on a participatory singing approach, called *Play-Sing*, was also held. A networking event was organized for all participants at the Skövde Art Museum, and each work presented included a talk-back session, giving guests the chance to interact with the artists personally and share reflections and feedback on the works in development.

In this introductory chapter, we provide brief overviews of the five works-in-progress presented, and then share reflections from a curatorial perspective, putting the works in conversation with contemporary cultural themes we found resonant across the group. These include a *longing for utopia*, different uses and positions of *ludic aesthetics and techniques*, and various forms of *exchange*. By utopian longings, we refer to Sargent's definition of utopianism as "social dreaming – the dreams and nightmares that concern the ways in which groups of people arrange their lives and which usually envision a radically different society than the one in which the dreamers live. But not all are radical, for some people at any time dream of something basically familiar" (Sargent 1994: 3). Sergeant emphasizes the definition of utopianism is constantly

shifting, as the concept itself is tightly entangled with ideas of progress and desire, and that "utopianism is the result of the human propensity to dream while both asleep and awake" (Sargent 1994: 4). While utopianism has traditionally been explored through literature and social theory, the performing arts provide an intermedial setting in which to facilitate such collective waking dreams, to express and try out in action, via ludic techniques, different hopes and fears regarding the human condition and our shared future. As we discuss below, the works shown at LudoKonst all presented perspectives, hopes and ideas about how people might relate to one another (in particular a desire for intimacy and connection in our polarized world) and ideas about how technology and the human might come together in ways that still foreground human creativity and personal connection. As Sargent discusses, the dystopian is necessarily twinned with the utopian, and indeed some works from LudoKonst also share darker dreams and visions.

In terms of the ludic aesthetics and structures we identify in the works discussed below, we refer to Huizinga's writings on play as a foundation for understanding these concepts. Huizinga defines play through several key characteristics, including that it is freely engaged with (as opposed to obligatory); it is marked as outside of "real life," both in location and in duration; it creates order and can indeed even create a temporary 'perfection' (here we have a connection with utopianism); it has elements of tension and uncertainty; it is created through and bound by rules (which can also be negotiated and re-negotiated); and it often results in the development of a 'play-community' or ongoing connection between players (Huizinga 1938). Huizinga also states that play is conducted for its own ends, and without profit – however, we also identify elements of exchange in the works we examine. This discussion of exchange is presented through a range of lenses from game studies, marxism, and deconstructionist perspectives such as Derrida's ideas on the gift. Following our introduction, the chapters in the volume present artists' own reflections, scholarly work related to their practice, and reflections from guests who attended the festival, presented in the form of reviews.

Reflecting on the five works-in-progress presented at LudoKonst as a group (*Comforter, The Foundling, Mobilized: an essay pretending to be a game, Unmet, Disquiet, and The Prophecies*), we as curators seek to draw out threads of connection and identify common themes. The work-in-progress nature of the performances presented at LudoKonst means they all had an unfinished, open quality, which allows a unique glimpse into the artistic process. In addition, the unfinished nature of the works also makes more visible those seams and tensions between performance traditions and new technologies and structures. Each work stems from a different performing arts tradition, and in this way the group provides an interesting data set to look at in terms of the push and pull between those traditions and game structures, technologies digital and otherwise, and culture today. These works therefore each bring a unique dramaturgy to bear in their engagement with the ludic, stemming from chamber opera, contemporary dance, performance art, electroacoustic sound installation, and immersive theater, respectively. All are part of a

current move in the performing arts to incorporate games, game structures, and the playful – all of which we can refer to as *ludic* structures, techniques, and aesthetics.

As more cultural forms and artworks move to embrace the ludic, new challenges also arise (Bakk 2017). The performative frame is well-suited to address these challenges as it is a flexible form, particularly in terms of openness to new technologies (Baugh 2013). Performance is also perhaps more open than other art forms to "impure" crossings and innovations, along with the complex political and aesthetic entanglements this openness both creates and reveals (Nagib 2014). In spite of this flexibility, it is not entirely straightforward to implement more rigid game technologies, structures, and systems into performance settings that have long relied on looser, playful ideas of spectatorship. Different strategies and techniques are implemented across the five works discussed here, each with different outcomes but some common threads, particularly in terms of utopian longings regarding relations between people and technologies.

Image of Charlotta Grimfjord Cederblad performing in *Comforter*. Photo by AnnaCarin Isaksson (2023).

COMFORTER

by Charlotta Grimfjord Cederblad & Erik Dahl

Comforter is a performance art monologue with interaction points for a small audience of 1–8 participants. The two performers, Charlotta and Erik, present an allegorical story of a stressed-out horse, personified as a human, and bring up strategies for self-soothing and comfort. Charlotta performs as the main storyteller for the experience, with Erik providing musical accompaniment. Audience members are invited to interact via a special mobile phone, which can be used to send messages to the performers during the performance, and asked to choose from a set of images to reflect on how they personally relate to themes of stress and self-soothing. Miniature plastic toys are used in the toy theater tradition to help illustrate the allegorical storytelling, which is also accompanied by an improvised score of live music and song.

In *Comforter*, we see the dominance of a performance art dramaturgy that reflects the tradition of the introspective monologue (such as performances by Tim Miller, Spalding Gray, Carmelita Tropicana, and others). In this tradition the audience is brought into an intimate relation with the single performer, but is most often in a passive role as spectator to the performance which is often confessional in tone. *Comforter* plays tradition by bringing the audience both closer and enacting distancing techniques at the same time. The device of allegory provides a distancing mechanism for the performance, allowing the performers to take on fictionalized roles. The miniature toy theater technique assists here as well. The mobile phone is used as a kind of shield by which the audience member may choose to come closer to the performance, interrupting its flow to ask the performers questions or share reactions in a safe way that the performers have structured beforehand. The technique of choice-making for the audience member is introduced to invite a further closeness to the material within a comfortable constraint. In this way, the ludic aesthetics and mobile technology are integrated in service of the dominant performance art dramaturgy, reinforcing the pull towards intimacy that is a hallmark of the genre.

In terms of ethics of interaction, the work concludes with a coercive moment in which the toy theater stage, which is a cloth blanket comforter, is placed over the body of the audience member, who is instructed to lie down. In contrast with earlier interaction points provided for the audience member, this final interaction is not presented as optional or voluntary. The meaning or intention behind this forced enfolding of the audience member into the performance is left up for interpretation. Nevertheless, the narrative of the work exhibits a utopian longing for fulfillment via self-soothing and self-directed comfort, and presents this type of inward focus as a viable solution to social and interpersonal problems.

Interactor opening package of physical materials that accompany the digital AR iPad app for *The Foundling*. Screenshot from the movie *LudoKonst* By Hampus Corneliusson at Spöket (2023).

THE FOUNDLING
by Raucous Theater

The Foundling is a mixed-reality tabletop theatre prototype. This work is designed to be mailed by post to audience members to experience in their own homes as a prologue prior to coming to an in-person performance. *The Foundling* includes a series of physical objects (maps, dolls, dried flowers, and letters) that interact via mobile augmented reality with media assets including 3D models and binaural audio accessed through a phone or tablet with headphones. The story presented in *The Foundling* centers on a wet-nurse character from the late 18th century, a mysterious fire, and gaps in the audience member's own identity. Over the course of the interaction with the immersive audio, physical objects, and digital assets, the audience member understands that they are one of the orphans the nurse has cared for, and comes to learn the truth about who set fire to the wet-nurse's home and why. At the conclusion of the experience the audience member receives a personalized letter revealing their birth name and parentage.

While Raucous theater company has a tradition of working in non-theater spaces, converting derelict locales into immersive performance spaces, this work is instead intended to take place in audience members' own homes, meaning the larger environment cannot be designed in support of the story. Here, however, the use of miniature scale settings functions to provide opportunity for an echo of the theatrical dramaturgy, as participants are invited to psychologically project themselves into the doll-house scale 3D models, much in the same way an audience member may project themselves into a traditionally staged world while seated in a darkened auditorium. The experience of *The Foundling* oscillates back and forth in intermedial fashion between theatrical and ludic dramaturgies and modes of interaction: at points, the pull of the theatrical voice acting lulls the participant into spectatorship. At other points, explicit instructions incite interaction, or the narrative drive to "find out" answers to the many mysteries spurs participants into game-like interactions of seek-and-find in the 3D digital space.

It is important to emphasize that *The Foundling* is intended as a prologue to a full-length immersive theater show, in which the audience would experience further elements of the storyworld in a site-specific setting with live actors and set designs. Designed during the COVID-19 pandemic within the context of disastrous closures impacting the performing arts, the at-home immersive technology used in *The Foundling* serves as a way to keep theatre alive during extraordinary circumstances, allowing audience members and artists to continue to connect and share dramatic storytelling experiences in new ways. *The Foundling's* nature as a playful, interactive toy or playset also means that audience members can shift through contexts, swap roles or identities, break rules, and potentially even tell new or emergent stories.

Audience participants interacting with mobile phones in *Mobilized: an essay pretending to be a game.* Screenshot from the movie *LudoKonst* By Hampus Corneliusson at Spöket (2023).

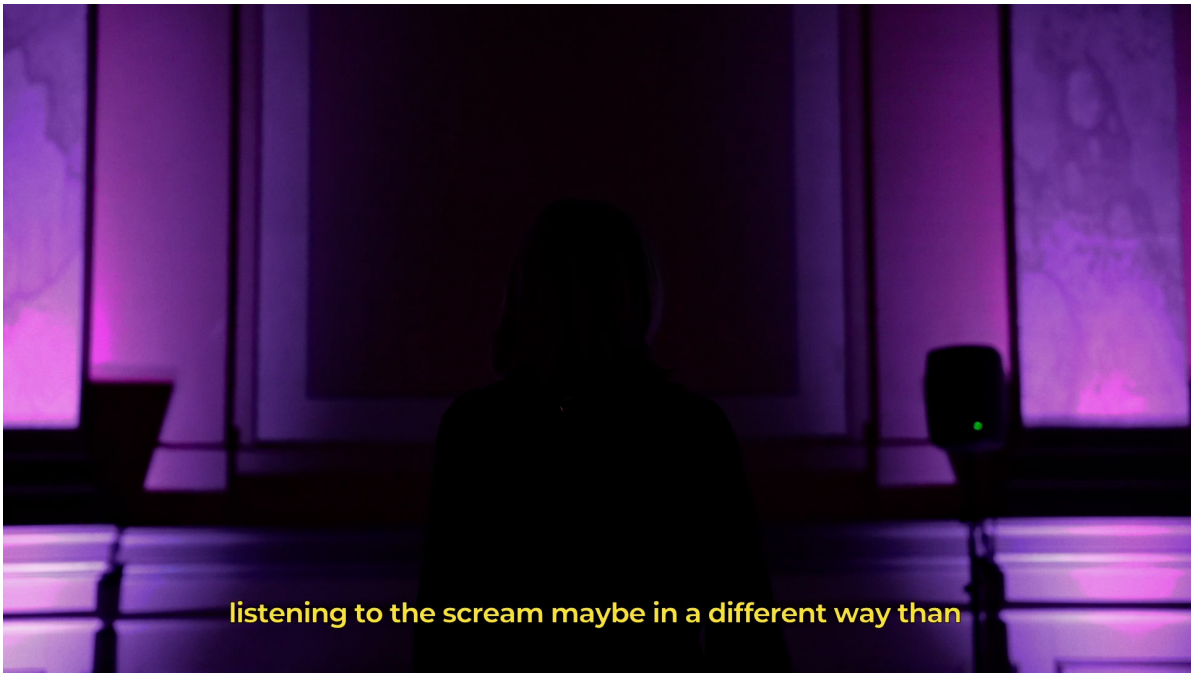
MOBILIZED: AN ESSAY PRETENDING TO BE A GAME,

by Nea Landin & Gabriel WIding

Mobilized is an interactive media work that asks the audience to perform certain movements, speech acts and gestures as a group. The performance is initiated outside the performance space with a session in which all participants' mobile phones are configured to the correct settings; no vector screen, no notifications, and no save-screen, since these can disrupt the flow of the performance. Once inside the performance space, participants are asked to log onto a webpage where information is solicited about their preferences, i.e., what was the first movement that you liked? What is your favorite color? Soon the screen is filled with commands that participants are asked to carry out: walk over there, jump, wave your hand, and so forth. As the performance progresses, the whole room is filled with participant-performers who do all sorts of things while looking into their phones. There are three chapters or sections of the performance. In the first chapter, participants are familiarized with their device and what it asks them to do, while also observing and perhaps even bumping into other participants. In the second section, the group is divided into two. The first group gives commands to the other, then after a while this is reversed. In short, participants are both in command of another participant through their selection of tasks assigned to another person, while also being commanded in turn. In the final section, individual participants are asked to read aloud quotations from academic and philosophical texts, while the rest of the participants listen, move, or gesture.

Mobilized: an essay pretending to be a game is grounded in contemporary dance and avant garde movement traditions. Reflexively, the work is about choreography of movement and the socialization among the audience members. Reflection on these meta-themes are the goal of the performance, as is common in the tradition of performance art. In this tradition, the dramaturgy is looser in form, since it leaves most of the storytelling and meaning-making to the audience, who are participants. Much like the ludic process of gameplay, this process of meaning making then becomes the story, as it may be recounted by participants to each other after the experience (Eladhari 2018).

The *intermediality* in *Mobilized* is interesting as it is an in-person experience which nevertheless has a great deal of focus on the mobile phone as a device and portal for interaction. The phone can almost be said to be the star performer of the experience, as it is through the mediation of the phone that nearly all of the interactions occur. However, because the prologue to the experience involves a detailed session of un-doing many common phone settings, this means that the phone is somewhat defamiliarized. On the other hand, it could also be argued that by leaning so heavily on what may be the single most ubiquitous technology today (the smartphone) the experience is framed as contiguous with our ongoing relation with the technology in the everyday.



The interactive speaker system in *Unmet, Disquiet*. Screenshot from the movie *LudoKonst* By Hampus Corneliusson at Spöket (2023).

UNMET, DISQUIET

by Jamie Fawcus, Susanne Hansson & Anna Granath

Unmet, Disquiet is a live performance of electro-acoustic music where each audience member contributes to the soundscape through their movement in the room. At the centre of the room is a sensor that measures the distance of objects and people, and this information is fed into the live music performance. The work follows the tradition of experimental electro acoustic soundscape installation, with the interactive input from the audience and live improvisation from the musicians. Two musicians are positioned at the side of the performance space, their presence clearly visible as they also listen and respond to the interactions of the audience members. The soundscape consists of a variety of human screams that are processed to create a textured soundscape ranging from the abstract to recognizable recordings of screams, which each audience member can either sit and listen to, or influence by moving around in the room. This influence is not necessarily clear to the audience members, however, given the subtle textures of the soundscape itself as well as the use of multiple inputs (audience members and musicians) simultaneously.

Unmet, Disquiet is interesting in terms of the ambiguity of interaction and causality. It is unclear for participants if they are actually having an impact on the complex soundscape or not. The soundscape itself is also ambiguous in content, at times presenting identifiable screams, at other times more abstract sounds left to the participant to broadly interpret. These ambiguities fit well within the tradition of experimental electro acoustic installation, in which dramaturgies may be more readily available to the musicians themselves than to other participants or listeners. Structures can nonetheless be interpreted by all in the experience, for example it is possible for participants to perceive highs and lows in the performance, and develop an emergent narrative from this fluctuation, much in the way that a rise in tension expressed via soundtrack communicates dramaturgical tension in a Hitchcock film. In *Unmet, Disquiet* the ambiguity of both interaction and content is a ludic way of playing with dramaturgical structure and provoking the audience to question the nature of what they have been listening to, as well as question the impact of their participation in the work.

Hedvig Jalhed performing as the Oracle in The Prophecies. Screenshot from the movie *LudoKonst* By Hampus Corneliusson at Spöket (2023).

THE PROPHECIES
by Operation Opera

The Prophecies is an interactive micro-opera in which audience members pose questions to an oracle, who sings a live improvised response with lyrics generated by an AI system. The performance begins in an antechamber, in which audience members are invited to play a game of chance with a costumed host character to receive a personality reading, similar to divination rituals such as tarot or more psychological Myers-Briggs personality typing. Following this playful categorization, the audience member is prompted to write their question to the oracle on a slip of paper. One by one, each audience member is called in for their personal meeting with the oracle, who sings a live operatic reply staged within a large-scale 360-degree screen space. The intensity of this encounter is achieved by the combination of the grandeur of operatic voicework backed by lush electronic orchestration, the immersive image space of animated projections, along with the use of traditional scenographic elements. In terms of costume, set pieces, lights and even a fog machine, all elements of the performance function together to preserve the traditional operatic dramaturgy of spectacular, emotional encounter. After meeting the oracle, audience members may remain in an outer room, eavesdropping on others' encounters. While each encounter is unique, due to the unique questions posed by the audience members (many of which were serious in nature), the AI-generated nature of the text, the improvised music, and variation in the performers' expressions, each encounter nevertheless exhibits the classic operatic structure of an opening section followed by exposition, rising to a climax, and concluding with a brief denouement.

In *The Prophecies*, while a strong foundation of traditional operatic dramaturgy is preserved, the technological and ludic enter in interesting ways to disturb or expand this tradition, even if only at the edges. The initial interaction in the antechamber, in which the audience member is categorized through their interaction with a board game like structure, serves to provide the audience member with a type of role within the storyworld of the opera. This interaction has both a ludic and transactional nature, with the role provided to the audience member, and the audience member then responding with the submission of their question to the oracle. The playful nature of this opening provides the audience member with opportunity to enter the experience with more than one narrative drive – the drive to hear the answer to the question, but on a meta-level, another drive to see "if the performers can do it" or "how it can be done" in terms of improvisation, AI, and opera. In a way, the meta-drive of "if they can do it" is also present in traditional operatic dramaturgies because opera is a performance form that stretches the bounds of human capabilities in terms of vocal capacity, endurance, and emotional expression. But the first drive, the drive to hear the answer to a personal question, presents a different dramaturgy for the audience member that is ludic. The individual, personal experience is foregrounded here, in the way that individual choices are foregrounded in the understanding of what makes meaning in a game-based experience.

Stepping back again to reflect on the group of works shown at LudoKonst 2023, it is not surprising that these utopian longings and visions are present, given the ties between utopia/dystopia and the ludic, and with games in particular. According to Gerald Farca, games are ideal for the exploration of the ideas behind both utopian and dystopian representations. Video games help players "see beyond the inoculating powers of the status quo, differentiate societal issues, and explore potential solutions to these through play" (Farca 2019). Players perform trial and error maneuvers that explore how to deal with issues of left and right political ideology, ecocriticism and different socio-economic systems. Moving away from the old totalitarian ideas of utopia as something that should be attainable at all costs, today, argues Farca, utopia means a "cautious desire" to reach a society that has improved from the current state – the status quo. This is also the approach that we are implementing when investigating the performances presented here. Utopia indicates a desire to reach into the future in order to envision a possible but brighter world.

While we cannot completely transfer Farca's model of negotiating utopia through gameplay to the theatre setting, it is valuable to retain the idea that interaction allows for certain components of working out a meaningful outcome when discussing ludic performing arts pieces. The exploratory affordances of games are crucial for players to develop this more nuanced understanding of utopia. In games, as opposed to performance, choice carries meaning which gives impetus to futuristic meaning-making of utopian potential. The player of a game explores in an alternate fashion how worlds can be (re) formed. Through engagement (or performance) in game-based worldbuilding, players enact alternate ethical structures and scenarios, which nevertheless exist in tension with real-world moral philosophies (Sicart 2009). Game rules and free play are combined into thinking about futures. The dichotomy between control and play (Caillois 2001) that a game holds is implemented in contested ways in contemporary performance works, where artists invite audiences to be active participants.

For example, the lack of ludic aesthetics of *Mobilized* is partly exposed in the subtitle disclaimer 'an essay pretending to be a game.' At no point in the performance is the claim made that the experience is a game. However, some of the aesthetics build on ludic sensibilities. In particular, the manner in which participants may command others resembles the gamer's control of an avatar. This aesthetic is made ambiguous, however, since in *Mobilized* there are no digitally animated avatars to control, but rather fellow human participants. This ambiguity both invites and skirts reflection on the ethics of control over others, and conversely, ones' willingness to comply with commands. If *Mobilized* presents a utopian longing, it may be that compliance could be fun, or even harmonious and fulfilling as an experience.

A danger in this call for participation arises when the performance uses specially invited people to partake in the performance work, e.g. migrants or refugees. Claire Bishop (2012) calls this "delegated performance" where people

are participating actors as themselves in an artwork. The artist delegates responsibility to "real" social actors, people who experience hardship or trauma, to legitimate a call for change or to provoke a response forward toward a utopian ideal. A critique of this is that it reinforces a hierarchical division of labour, where art is positioned to extract capital from alienated subjects (Tello 2018: 68). While we did not see any 'delegated' performance work at LudoKonst, it suggests, in our view, that a form of exchange value is at the center of participatory performance art. There were several pieces that had exchange value at their core of the interaction; in *the Foundling* the participants were given objects, in *the Prophecies* a direct answer was delivered and in *Comforter* a therapeutic thought process about oneself was offered to the singular person in the audience. Each of these shows had a strong connection to giving back to the audience something concretely valuable.

In a neoliberal economy, everything is financialised and given exchange value (Harvey 2005: 33). However, we can conceptualise use value and exchange value in a ludic performance. Usually we would associate performance with use value as it contains qualitative features, an emotional experience, a provoking feeling, or, for example, a touch of utopia. However, we can also see quantitative features of performance art in shows that are trends in the market, e.g. escape rooms, online LARPs, which can be exchanged according to market values, meaning that people are willing to pay an entry fee to consume a particular form of participatory performance. There is a tradition of artworks that play on these different forms of exchange, such as work by Max Liboiron (2020), in which structures of commodification and exchange are lifted front and center for participants to reflect on.

While such a classic Marxist reading of performance exchange could be applied to the works presented at LudoKonst, it does not directly connect with the idea of playing with utopia. Instead, we focus on the idea of the gift, which according to Derrida, has to be outside economic or labour circulation. Derrida argues that "the gift must remain aneconomic," meaning that it holds potentials for more ambiguity than an economic transaction. The act of giving a gift to somebody is a circulatory act, but it must not return to the giver: "if there is a gift, the giver of the gift [...] must not come back to the giving (Derrida 1992: 7). Part of the complexity in the intermedial relation between performance and games lies in this aneconomic system where the "given" is outside economic circulation, but where the giver (the act of participation) is a contribution to a shared whole. Should participatory action be outside the thinking of economic exchange, as in economic systems, we need to think carefully about how technology, which is most certainly formed through the economic value system, is used. This frame can push us to think ethically about participation itself as an exchange.

If we look at the performance as gift exchanges, other perspectives can be discerned. As we have pointed out above both *The Foundling* and *The Prophecies* (which had the most traditional performance structures) gave

participants physical souvenirs to take home (the personalized letter from *The Foundling*, and the personalised game card from *The Prophecies*). Interestingly, we can note that both are personalised, reflecting not only our current culture's obsession with personalisation but also pointing to the intimate and direct connection between the participant and the performer(s) in the case of *The Prophecises*, or the technological system in the case of *The Foundling* and the audience(s).

In *The Foundling*, traditional theatrical scenography and voice acting techniques are used to tell the story, however no physical performers are present. While participation is required of the audience member, the participant does not generate or directly impact the content of the experience. Rather, the task is to navigate or explore and piece the puzzle together and uncover the story. However, the at-home setting of the experience means it may be open to all kinds of creative intervention, reminiscent of the flexibility offered by the 19th century paper toy theater tradition. The storytelling "playset" allows for potential disruption of traditional theater conventions, where certain etiquettes must be observed. Instead, we are at home, where the magic circle is easily created through open play and meaning-making, with rules negotiated fluently and in tandem with play. Here, play denies closure in the sense of catharsis and instead functions as open-ended, meaning that it is ready to restart again and again. This results in a type of play that can unfold across multiple contextual settings, unrestricted by traditions and conventions, allowing us to negotiate and re-negotiate the rules. The MR technology chosen for *The Foundling* is a particularly dramaturgically sound fit for the story, as the computer vision based MR system acts as a tool for revealing what is hidden, helping solve the mystery by uncovering layer after layer. Again, we find a utopian longing in the experience with the story's trajectory toward identity closure and stability; a tale of "Finally! I know who I am!"

In *The Prophecies*, however, in terms of intermedial relations between, the game structures that invite audience participation, the new technology of narrative AI, and the many traditional scenographic technologies in use, we see a more complex series of flows. The audience participation acts as a unique input to the performance, albeit prompted and constrained by the design of the transactional game-like structure. The AI text generator also provides a unique input to the performance, but it is the traditional scenographic technologies and the performers themselves that are responsible for synthesizing these contributions into a cohesive and spectacular unity. While we might often think of technologies as labor-saving devices (even in the performance realm, for example CAD software that replaces hand-drawn set design drafting), here the AI technology is a labor generating device, requiring much additional work, creativity and innovation on the part of the performers. In this way, we can also understand the performers themselves as engaged in their own intermedial ludic experience, in which they test their own limits in design and execution with respect to the dual technologies of audience participation and AI narrative generation.

One possible interpretation of *The Prophecies* is as a utopian vision of technology and human relations. Participants experience an encounter in which technology is capable of addressing their deepest inquiries, but only through the mediation of the human. In this significant task, the necessity of the human is preserved, and human capacity is seen to triumph over the additional labors and complexities the new technology presents. The individual encounter is intimate and immediate with another human, while the AI technology is present its presence is hidden from view (the performer reads the AI lyrics via an iPad which cannot be seen by the audience member). At the core, the glory of the human voice is retained as the central spectacle in the work. Participation is characterized by exchange in *The Prophecies*, with the participant entering the system via their submission of a question to the oracle, with the expectation that they will receive a meaningful answer. As this expectation is fulfilled, the world modelled in The Prophecies can also be understood as presenting a utopian vision for clarity and transparency in human-technology relations, uniquely expressed through the operatic voice.

In terms of in-person intimacy as a type of utopian longing, both *The Prophecies*' and *Comforter's* core performance experience is for one performer and one audience member at a time. The intimacy afforded by these one-on-one structures in *The Prophecies* and *Comforter* makes these shows difficult to mass produce and commercialise according to neoliberal economics, but better suited for gift exchanges where the giver is the performer and the audience, the receiver of the gift. Interestingly, *Comforter*, as well as *Mobilized*, which both included the most coercive ludic structures in our group, provided no document or trace or souvenir for the participant. Instead the gift is (potentially) an immaterial sentiment that arises in the audience. The giver-receiver relation is the same. This too is what we see in *Unmet, Disquiet*, which seems to lie somewhere in the middle of comfort and unease. A similarly eerie feeling is also present in *Mobilized* as each participant 'takes control' over another audience member, and during the final coercive moment of *Comforter*, in which we see structures of domination and submission more closely associated with a dystopian as opposed to utopian visions.

To sum up, we argue that the prototype performances shared at LudoKonst 2023 aimed for utopic revelation through intimate audience-performer relations (which the gift exchange indicates), intermedial technology uses, and ludic aesthetics. Far from simplistic, these utopian desires yield complex relationships between audience and artist that are in tension between utopian and dystopian ideals, particularly with regards to ethics of participation, consent, and control. The tensions revealed in these performances provide opportunity for reflection around utopic longings, dystopian realities, intermedial imaginings, and the role of experimental performing arts in society as a site of shared imagination for possible futures.

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