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1, 2, 3 Playtime

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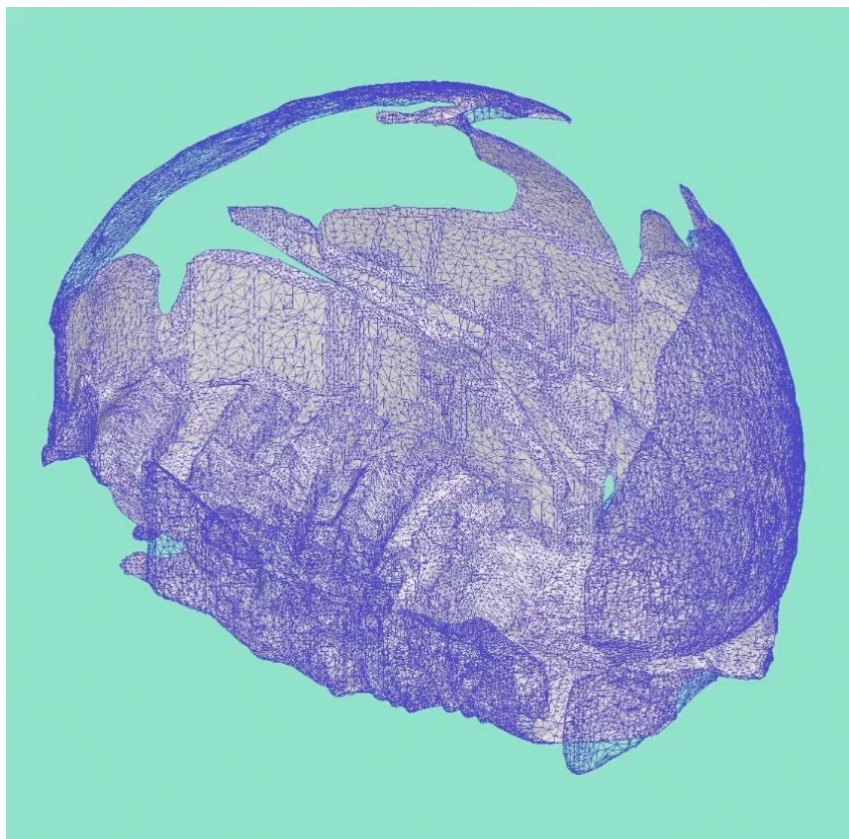
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Wisdom v 0.7, 2024. Installation. Video still. *Malmö Gallery Weekend 2024*, IAC. Freja Andersson, Emma Bexell, Fredrik Degrér, Alison Thomas Lindvall

Playtime Bureaucracy – Wisdome as a Game

Emma Bexell, Freja Andersson and Alison Thomas Lindvall

The use of digital visualisation techniques offers unprecedented new opportunities for enhancing and improving learning, education and problem solving across a broad base.¹

Our challenge was to make a prototype of a game for the exploratory workshop series *1, 2, 3 Playtime* we've been a part of at Inter Arts Center in Malmö. Our working group was made up of artists Emma Bexell, Freja Andersson and Fredrik Degrér as well as Alison Thomas Lindvall, a technical producer at Malmö Museum's new projection dome Wisdome Malmö. A projection dome is a large spherical projection surface that enables audiences to collectively experience immersive 360° films and games, amongst other experiences. The four of us in the group were all curious to explore what else the dome could be used for, besides the existing film programme at the museum. What if we could explore different game mechanics in the dome and make a quick iteration of a collective game using the immersive environment and the programmable buttons mounted on each chair in the auditorium? This sounded like playtime, and that we came to them with a gift, being both artists and game-makers with some time and resources to respond to their vision.

We had a couple of initial meetings in the space, where Alison showed us some of the games that the museum was testing for evaluation. The test licences were about to expire, so the idea to base our code on some of the existing ones proved improbable but we enjoyed drawing and voting and steering around in outer space on the big screen. Lots of new ideas emerged and we decided to come back to test some of them.

However, it proved difficult to find another time slot when we were able to get into the dome. Alison, despite being greenlit and even encouraged

1 *Wisdome Project*. Accessed October 2024. <https://wisdomeproject.se/english/>.

to participate in *1, 2, 3, Playtime* during working hours, was overwhelmed with other tasks at the museum and, of course, the schedule for the dome had to be respected. Trying to squeeze in between films about coral reefs and colonising Mars all the time gave us a sense that us coming into the space was a bit of an inconvenience. We had to wait longer than we could, due to planning and deadlines, for answers considering if we could get access to a certain time slot or not. Despite wanting and needing to explore and expand the dome's capabilities, the film schedule as well as other bookings in the dome and unclear policies regarding collaborations resulted in our speculative playtime being impossible to accommodate. At one point for example, it was unclear whether there would be a cost connected to every time slot in the dome, production and rehearsal times included. The dome and the museum had a partly new management: new people to be informed about our project, which was still exploratory and open. Questions like 'Who would be responsible for us?' and 'Who would take on the internal charge that would have to be made for us to turn on the light switch?' seemed to lurk around every corner.

Wisdom Malmö is one of five new projection domes built within leading science centres in Malmö, Gothenburg, Norrköping, Stockholm and Umeå, all realised through generous funding. The umbrella website for the Wisdom project describes the dome as an environment that 'offers a fantastic opportunity to explain complex interrelationships and phenomena typical for our time.'² and that 'Wisdom is about creating platforms for collaborations, where the city's inhabitants can shape the future together. New innovations or prototypes for sustainable solutions can be tested and developed by audiences and future users alike.'³

We understood the Wisdom project as being partly realised to achieve those statements. And the result seemed to have ended up further and further away from the idea of a platform for collaborations. During our process, we slowly shifted focus from creating something for the dome to critiquing the concept of the dome itself. How come this space that presents itself as an environment for visualising complex interrelationships, seemed to be stuck in its own administrative complexities that, with or without intending to, was right now keeping us on the outside? There was something cynical in the grand ambitions of the description of what Wisdom was supposed to be when compared to the underwhelming concave projection surface that we

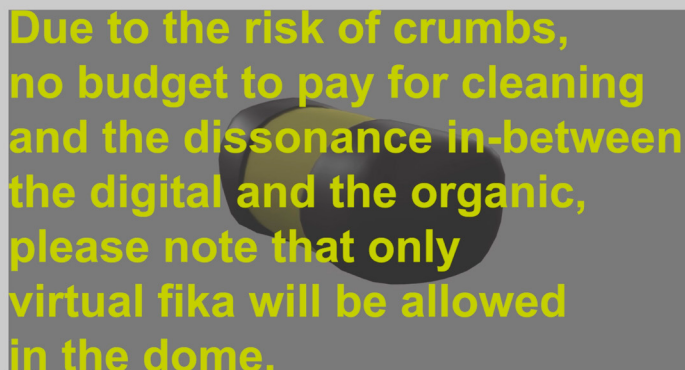
² Ibid

³ Ibid (authors' translation)

were trying and failing to get access to.

Our group had previously explored the potential of using bureaucratic processes as game mechanics and at that point in the process, the idea of a game about trying to get into the dome emerged. An idea that immediately generated some potential scores that would make visible the institutionalisation of visualization that we wanted to question: should we perhaps stage an occupation of the dome? Camp outside of the premises and hang banners saying 'Boycott visualisation'? We could make a game of connecting the dots of the mind map in the Wisdome feasibility study, create more dots like the ones that now said: 'Participation and Involvement', 'Public Testbed', and 'Maker Space'. Extend the mind map *ad infinitum*? Or should we create a role-playing game where we impersonated bureaucrats from the City of Malmö in a Kafkaesque municipality meeting where you could vote on everything, but nothing mattered? Preferably in a livestream with a constant of zero viewers.

Our attempts became more and more tangled into the metanarrative of the space: this place of potential and creativity on the other side of the wall. The game became harder and harder to grasp and we were eventually, alt-



**Due to the risk of crumbs,
no budget to pay for cleaning
and the dissonance in-between
the digital and the organic,
please note that only
virtual fika will be allowed
in the dome.**

though perplexed, intrigued and inspired by the knots knitting knots. The actual and the virtual had been mutually subsumed and we still had nothing to show for a game prototype.

What we ended up exhibiting at the showcase at Inter Arts Center during Malmö Gallery Weekend were actual findings from our process, taken into an aesthetic realm and enhanced: fake agendas and cynical surveys, the physical outlines of an office of a fictive working group from the City of Malmö, some absurd risk analyses along with a video where visualisations of the actual Wisdome from the planning phase was edited together with footage we found from the construction of the dome and some 3D scans we made ourselves during the first visit to the space. In the film, there was also a 3D model of a punch roll rotating on the screen. This was the Swedish pastry that we had not been allowed to bring physically into the dome because of regulations, so instead we'd made a virtual one.

We'd tried to enter a space which 'offers a fantastic opportunity to explain complex interrelationships and phenomena typical for our time' but it clearly resisted our best efforts (and one of us had an actual key in her pocket). The phenomena typical of our time seemed mostly to be a slightly utopian idea about civic agency and knowledge production stuck in between the cogwheels of the bureaucratic machine that had thought it into being. A little piece of science fiction that had made Wisdome happen, but that now was mostly considered a smudge on the control panel. What eventually emerged for us was not the game prototype we'd hoped for, but this story we kept telling our comrades about our complex quest for access to this particular space. Maybe the mechanics of our own quest might carry some wisdom? At the very least it carries some questions: What is innovation? Isn't it the things we don't know about yet? How does an institution keep itself open to the fact that those innovations might take on forms that challenge the very structures of how they think innovations are innovated? It matters what visualisations we use to visualise a place for visualisation. It matters what projectors project projections. Apparently, our artistic endeavours were not a top priority in relation to teaching the city's inhabitants, in the standard way, how the world works. What we've seen in this year-long project has been something like the peculiar contours of artistic agency within institutions who profit from artistic potential. The prospect of giving the 'creative sector' 'unprecedented opportunities' to 'innovate' in the projection dome didn't work when the enquiry came from the outside.

Instrumentalisation of creative work on the one hand, and administrative

