

Abstract title **Playing with pigs: unsettling animal practices through game design**

Author Driessen, Clemens, Utrecht University, Utrecht, Nederland & Wageningen University, Wageningen, Nederland. (Presenting author) Email: [clemens.driessen@wur.nl](mailto:clemens.driessen@wur.nl)

Co-author(s) Bracke, Marc , Wageningen UR Livestock Research, Lelystad, Nederland

Topic 1. Human Animal Relationship

Keywords pig cognition  
animal practices  
human-animal interaction  
video game

Presentation Preference Paper presentation

#### Abstract text

Many believe that animals are granted moral status based on their cognitive abilities. Some species are thought of as more intelligent and therefore more deserving of our respect and more likely to be able to suffer in ways that are meaningful to us humans. At the same time, many people take the well-being of particular animals into account depending on their personal relationships with them. These relations emerge in cultural practices that are largely the product of contingent historical processes and practical convenience. This means there are cognitively advanced animals who have collectively failed to bond with humans in a way that would suit their mental and social abilities, and thereby have failed to generate the moral respect of humans in accordance with their potential. In modern societies the different practices involving animals moreover tend to be strictly separated and understood as morally isolated. Even though we can witness ever increasing concerns over farm animal welfare, the cultural separation of animal life forms such as pets, laboratory and farm animals, is hardly questioned. This not only prevents awareness in (urban) populations of the hidden presence of large numbers of potentially interesting creatures, but also precludes an acknowledgement of the ambivalences involved in the way we (fail to) care and provide appropriate conditions for production animals.

This paper proposes a new mode of researching human-animal relations, animal welfare and animal ethics, namely by technological design. It will explain how initiating a design project to make farmed pigs playfully interact with humans mediated by a specially developed interface offers a different way to explore questions such as ‘what are our duties towards the animals we consume?’, and ‘is the life of an intensively farmed pig worth living?’ The interactive design process allows not only for

a more active, experimental and immersive mode of involvement with these questions, it also offers a way to connect these ethical questions to metaphysical and scientific ones: on the similarities and differences between humans and pigs, on the nature of animal minds, on how to communicate without language, and how boredom involves suffering. Thus, an interspecies interactive video game may not just be a way of meeting the exploratory needs of farmed pigs, it also explores in a new way Fraser's 'inextricable connection' between science and ethics. Thinking through possible relations with pigs in this design project helps to imagine ways in which we, together with these animals that coevolved with our civilisation, can develop a shared material culture appropriate to their still emerging domesticated life form.

The resulting human-animal interactive game aims to establish a new type of relationship between farmed animals and their prospective consumers, intertwining human-animal practices of the farm, the household pet, the zoo and the circus. On the one hand this could be a playful and high tech way to restore the proximity and perhaps bond that large swaths of humanity and pigs have experienced since the dawn of civilization up until one or two generations ago. Then we might again understand the type of relationships farmers can have with their animals, which may involve not only norms of productivity and efficiency but also modes of care and even companionship. On the other hand gaming with pigs could intensify our latent sense of inconsistency in the way we treat animals. Will people be willing and able to play with their food? This paper discusses the varied responses of farmers, pigs and the public at large to the design proposal. And it will explain how particular design choices were made to maintain and deepen the ambivalence of modern pig farming and consumption.