

Poster abstract, Minding Animals Conference 2012

### **A touch screen as encountered by an orangutan**

Dr. Hanna Wirman

Hong Kong Polytechnic University, School of Design

When Bento entered the playroom for the first time, he practiced his amazing muscles in an attempt to pull out the touch screen that was mounted on a wall. He then continued to find out whether the newly welded door to the enclosure could be smashed down. Whenever he actually uses the touch screen, he does not have a preference for hands, but often utilises his tongue instead. This might be, however, because very early on we taught him and his cage-mate Is to interact with the screen by spreading traces of honey on it.

Bento and Is are two male teenagers of a close species to us, the Bornean Orangutan, at the Tasikoki Wildlife Rescue Centre. Given that play seems to be one of the few activities that academics from all fields agree on us humans sharing with a vast number of other animals (e.g. Huizinga 1938, Sutton-Smith 1997, Fagen 1981), computer games were chosen to help in facilitating cross-species interaction - as well as to provide enrichment for orangutans - in our project. The design-research agenda of ours approaches games also as a tool to raise awareness about the case of the endangered species of orangutans that keep losing their natural habitats due deforestation and palm oil plantations.

Drawing on experiences gained from designing for orangutan-human play and the resulting gameplay, this poster presents some of the early findings of orangutan play and the emergence of Is' and Bento's gameplay practices. With a special focus on the use of a technology and the particular interactions with on-screen elements, the poster highlights gestures, movements and other bodily encounters with digital game technology.