

## The Ideal Animal: How Images of Animals and Animals Were Created

**Veranstalter:** Ulrike Heitholt, University of Kassel; Steven van der Laan, Utrecht University

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**Bericht von:** Kate Whiston, University of Nottingham

How do humans shape animals through selective breeding? How are 'ideal' images and standards of animal aestheticism produced? What can be learnt from studies of animal breeding about human-animal relations and animal agency? These were just some of the questions addressed at *The Ideal Animal* conference, held at the University of Kassel, in Witzenhausen, on June 2nd and 3rd 2016. The aim of the conference was to discuss the mutability of breeds and species, examining different methods used in selective breeding, the transformation of animal bodies, and the construction of aesthetic 'ideals'.

The first paper was by JADON NISLY (Bamberg) on the 'ideal' dairy cow during the German Economic Enlightenment. Looking at one example of an eighteenth-century state-run model farm, Nisly explored the inherently economic motivations behind agricultural breeding and the formation of state breeding programmes. The dairy cow was objectified and an 'ideal' image produced based on its productivity, although the cows themselves played an active part in the knowledge created about them.

DIANA KRISCHKE (Göttingen) further illustrated the appropriation of animals in her paper on Hanoverian horse breeding during the Baroque period. She showed how different types of horses were bred for different human uses, each with a specific aesthetic and bodily conformation. Through rigid breeding programmes, the Hanoverian horse's exterior was dramatically moulded by selective breeding, creating more than two hundred breeds, in order to produce horses 'fit for purpose'.

Whilst representing *physical* power, through their use in transport, industry, and energy production, horses have also acted as sources of economic power and social

capital. HILJA TOIVIO (Tampere) illustrated this with reference to the Finnhorse in nineteenth-century Finland. Purebred breeding theory proliferated through Europe at the end of the nineteenth century. In Finland, Toivio claimed, breeding of native purebred Finnhorses was monitored through studbooks in order to improve the national economy.

BRETT MIZELLE (Long Beach) discussed nineteenth-century American purebred breeding culture. Livestock were commodities and the 'ideal' incorporated form, appearance and pedigree. The studbook became an important tool in recording bloodlines, but, Mizelle explained, Lewis Falley Allen, agricultural improver and businessman, expressed concern about competing breed registries. Nineteenth-century American human-animal relationships, he concluded, were typified by excess; livestock paintings exaggerated their real-life subjects and public spectacles of animal bodies – both alive and dead – were common.

ULRIKE HEITHOLT (Kassel) addressed the objective measurement of the 'ideal' cow in nineteenth-century Germany. The Deutsche Landwirtschafts-Gesellschaft (est. 1885) aimed to establish fixed breeding and judging standards for cattle breeds. Winning bovine bodies at agricultural shows were measured, in an attempt to quantify and mathematically calculate the ratios and dimensions that made up the 'ideal' cow. Heitholt argued that this sparked debate about the paradigms of breeding; science versus intuition and experience.

In contrast, KATE WHISTON (Nottingham) explored the *subjective* nature of British fancy pigeon aesthetics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Breeding fancy pigeons relied on experience, but also adopted the use of studbooks, the practice blurring the boundaries between 'art', 'nature', and 'science'. Breed standards were published by breed societies and the Pigeon Club (est. 1885), an attempt at objectivity which was, ultimately, in vain, due to tastes, fashions, fads, and trickery.

SVEN KÖNIG (Kassel) explored the history of genetic evaluation in selective breeding of dairy cows. Post-1939, performance

records and phenotypic data helped select 'ideal' cows, emphasis being on milk and protein yields. From the 1970s, statistical methods for genetic evaluation were used, reducing cattle to mathematical index values. In the 1980s, the 'ideal' cow became defined by its functionality; conformation, fertility, longevity, and milking speed. Today, genome-based selection is practised, using DNA to delineate 'ideal' cows.

A contrasting paper by STEVEN VAN DER LAAN (Utrecht) examined the *subjective* methods of judging Dutch pigs in the early twentieth century. A scale of points was used, a method which was condemned as unscientific. Exhibitions were criticised for promoting breeding for fancy, rather than scientific breeding, creating a rift between pig farmers and pig breeders. Nevertheless, van der Laan demonstrated how such exhibitions endured until the mid-1970s, despite the increasing commercialisation of pig farming.

Concluding the first day of the conference, JEANNETTE VAUGHT (Texas) discussed the primacy of the 'visual' in American beef cow breeding in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In judging Hereford beef cattle, a visual assessment was made of their frame and fat content. However, the increasing proliferation of genetic science challenged this, breeders using genetics as an indicator of animal quality. This approach, she argued, was an attempt at breeding *through* the body, beyond the visual, questioning the extent to which an animal's exterior mapped onto its interior.

The second day of the conference began with JESPER OLDENBURGER's (Utrecht) paper on Dutch sheep breeding in late twentieth-century. The Texel breed had originally been bred by 'eye', breeders relying on intuition and experience. This method, however, came under scrutiny at the end of the 1960s, the Dutch government and agricultural scientists promoting the use of quantitative genetics in selection and breeding. However, due to the breed's physiology, the quantitative approach was unsuccessful, the 'breeder's eye' remaining the most efficient method of selection and breeding.

VERONIKA SETTELE (Berlin) explored the transformation of German pigs in the mid-

1900s, from „Fettschwein“ – pigs bred for lard – to „Fleischschwein“ – pigs bred for high quality, lean meat. These changes to the porcine body reflected societal changes in prosperity and human taste for meat. The 'ideal' German pig was, Settele argued, created on the supermarket counter, the economics of pork being closely related to its texture, colour, fat content, packaging, and price.

UTA KÖNIG VON BORSTEL's (Göttingen) paper explored contemporary Holstein cattle breeding and their exhibition. Cows are judged based on their conformation, the degree to which they meet physical and visual expectations. Professional photographs of prize-winning cows are used by farmers as models to breed from, but these photographs are artificial constructs. The bovine subjects are subjected to 'cow styling', and the photographs themselves frequently undergo processes of doctoring and manipulation.

AMIR ZELINGER (Munich) discussed the creation of the 'ideal' German Shepherd in Imperial Germany through selective breeding, and the organisation of German dog breeding following the formation of the HunderVerband für Deutschland (est. 1879). Drawing on ideas from racial theories about human diversity, dog breeders strove to breed 'pure' dogs with good pedigrees. This quasi-eugenic racialisation of dogs, Zelinger argued, was also an act of anthropomorphisation, rendering the dogs integral to German society.

In a different approach to human-canine relationships, MAGDALENA DABROWSKA (Lublin) presented her analysis of contemporary purebred dog photography in magazines. Such photographs illustrate the bond between dogs and their owners, and present the 'ideal' canine body. They are, however, carefully-staged and, Dabrowska argued, show the primacy of the visual in making judgements about 'ideals'. These images, therefore, show the strong links between vision and both pleasure and power.

ULRIKE KIRCHBERGER (Kassel) discussed the history of acclimatisation societies in nineteenth-century Australia and its colonies. Such societies aimed to domesticate non-native animals and plants, ready for their introduction into Australia. Their 'ideal', she argued, was economically useful, aes-

thetically pleasing, contributory to scientific knowledge and advancement, and beneficial to the imperial project. However, Kirchner demonstrated that, in this example of ecological imperialism, scientists had little control over nature; non-native species soon became invasive and independent of humans, demonstrating non-human agency.

In the final paper, TAMAR NOVICK (Berlin) presented a biography of Stavit, a celebrity dairy cow in British Palestine. Her impressive milk yields were carefully monitored and recorded, there being a strong link between the agrarian economy and colonisation in Palestine. Stavit was appropriated by settlers in Palestine (later Israel), to demonstrate that the lands of the East were bountiful, and she became a national symbol of Jewish innovation, settlement, and fertility.

In summary, it was phenomenal how closely all the papers spoke to each other, in what can be concluded as a very successful and fruitful conference. Animals are clearly central to our economies, politics, and identities, simultaneously acting as both objects of knowledge and facilitators of knowledge creation. Human-animal relationships, it is often argued, mirror societal relationships, and many of the papers referred to the similarities between the motives, language, and aims of animal breeding projects and racialized approaches to discriminating between humans. Furthermore, it was clear across all the papers how the human desire for control, standardisation, and quantification of animal bodies, reinforced through selective breeding, only further served to reinforce human superiority over nature. There is a very prominent link, therefore, between 'seeing' animals and having power over them.

Both subjective and scientific attempts to delineate 'ideal' animals have seen animal bodies become battlegrounds, reflecting the changing landscapes of selective breeding. The human-animal relationships involved in animal breeding, therefore, serve to challenge definitions of domestication, providing fascinating examples of human-animal entanglements which transgress the boundaries of 'art', 'science', and 'nature'. Animals are constantly being transformed, redefined, and reappropriated by humans, reflecting the tran-

sient and fragile nature of the animal world. Species are (re)moulded to suit various anthropogenic uses, and breeds become 'constructs' of cultural imaginations. Attendees at the conference were left questioning what, in fact, we even mean by terms such as 'breed', 'ideal', and 'improvement'. It is with this thought that I am also going to leave you.

### Conference Overview:

#### *Panel 1: Creation of Breeds*

Chair: Werner Troßbach, Kassel

Jadon Nisly (PhD candidate, Otto-Friedrich University of Bamberg): The Ideal Dairy Cow of the German Economic Enlightenment: Knowledge Production and Transfer on a State-Run Model Farm (1782-1795)

Diana Krischke (PhD candidate, Göttingen University): Horse breeding history with focus on baroque times

Hilja Toivio (PhD candidate, University of Tampere): The integration of international influences to national requirements in the Finnish horse breeding in the 1890s

#### *Panel 2: Breeding Methods*

Chair: Sven König, Kassel

Brett Mizelle (Professor, California State University Long Beach): „Good form and appearance, and good pedigree, should go together“: Lewis F. Allen and the Pursuit of the Ideal Animal in Nineteenth-Century America

Ulrike Heitholt (Research assistant, University of Kassel): Ideal Bodies - Measuring Cattle at the End of the 19th Century

Kate Whiston (PhD candidate, University of Nottingham): „The best bird has yet to be bred“: Ruffling Feathers and Contesting Aesthetics in British Pigeon Fancying, c.1850-1939

#### *Panel 3: Art and Science of Breeding*

Chair: André Krebber, Kassel

Sven König (Professor, University of Kassel): Breeding the ideal dairy cow: strategies in the past, present and future

Steven van der Laan (PhD candidate, Utrecht University): The demise of Dutch pig breeding exhibitions. A discussion on selection methods?

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Jeanette Vaught (Lecturer, University of Texas Austin): Breeding Through the Body: Learning to See Genes in American Herefords

*Panel 4: Transforming Breeds*

Chair: Brett Mizelle, Long Beach

Jesper Oldenburger (PhD candidate, Utrecht University): Breeding an 'above-average' Texel: statistics and breeding sheep in the Netherlands 1966-1992

Veronika Settele (PhD candidate Freie Universität Berlin): „Vom Fettschwein zum Fleischschwein“. Transformations of Pig Farming in Post-War-Germany

Uta König von Borstel (Professor, University of Göttingen): Presentation of German Holstein dairy cows on cow shows between 1950 and 2015: An analysis based on professional photographs of cow shows

*Panel 5: Animal Breeds and Society*

Chair: Mieke Roscher, Kassel

Amir Zelinger (PhD candidate, Rachel Carson Centre, Munich): Creating Ideal Companions: Dog Breeding in Imperial Germany

Magdalena Dabrowska (Assistant professor, University of Maria Curie-Skłodowska, Lublin): The pleasure of looking. Purebred dogs in photography and advertisement

Ulrike Kirchberger (Lecture, University of Kassel): Acclimatization Societies in Nineteenth-Century Australia: Ideals and Realities

Tamar Novick (Postdoctoral research fellow, Max Planck Institute, Berlin): Udderly Marvelous: Creating the Perfect Settler Cow

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