

AESTHETIC CLASSIFICATION IN RELATION TO DOG BREEDS

This social anthropology project explores the implications of dog show judging based on human-conceived values.

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AESTHETIC - concerned with beauty or the appreciation of beauty.

CLASSIFICATION - to arrange in class or category.



Overall winner at this year's Crufts Show, a conformation event which adheres to the use of breed standards.

Topic Area:

Breeds of dog have continuously been adapted over time to suit the needs of human society.

Dog shows offer a competitive environment for enthusiasts to enter their pet. Different types of events employ different criteria in order to judge the dogs.

This project uses qualitative research to explore the opinions and issues surrounding showing. As an ultimately human creation, to what extent do shows express aesthetic judgement.

Research Aims:

- What are the views regarding the applicability of breed standards; one of the key differences in judging between novelty and conformation shows?
- Is there still a cross-over aspect to the shows and to what extent does competition play a role?
- Even with the topic's subjective nature, can one type of show, ultimately, be considered more appropriate than the other? If so, how can it justified?



Novelty show at Manston, Kent. Such events are viewed as informal fun occasions, but also as training ground for conformation shows.

Methodology:

- **Personal observations** gathered at dog shows
- **Informal interviews** carried out at dog shows
- **Structured e-mail questioning** with relevant players
- **Online forum** used to collect feedback
- **Analysis of secondary data** including existing publications and websites

Key Findings:

Humans strive to find an environment which allows them to compete in. Placing aesthetic value on a dog and conveying that in terms of either a pleasurable appearance (a certain look gained by adhering to a particular breed standard) or a sensory experience (ability to retrieve a thrown ball or perform a 'trick') allows measurable forms of competition to take place, through different styles of judging.

My experiences:

Although conformation judging which adheres to the use of breed standards, offers a more quantitative approach to classification, I feel the negative health issues that this approach permits, questions the moral grounding of this form of event.



Above: making use of the online forum
Below: in the field interview

