

“Imagining the Unusual: Cognitive Dissonance, Pattern Breaking and Other Fantastic Beasts”

An interdisciplinary conference in Moscow, September 19-21, 2019.

The unusual, extraordinary and eccentric in the last decades is more often seen in advertising than in academic discourse. Beginning from at least the mid-19th century, European culture grows increasingly suspicious both of this rhetoric and of what stands behind it, which partly coincides with the era of scientific methods of world cognition. In fact, such categories as “great person”, “genius”, “extraordinary event” come to belong to the realm of mass culture, where they are ruthlessly exploited for profit. As the result of this, researchers avoid talking about the unusual, preferring either to banalize it or to exclude it from the academic discussions altogether. We, on the other hand, suggest talking about this elephant in the room, which both draws the eye and prevents serious discussion. We specifically concentrate on the link between the impression (of emotional reaction, sensory organs) and its rationalization – verbalization, portrayal, evaluation, usage, etc. Among the possible topics and problems to discuss we would like to offer the following:

- Is the unusual possible per se or is it always integrated into some tradition of representation of the unusual?
- How do affective/emotional reactions to the unusual work?
- The “good” and the “bad” unusual (exclusiveness, curiosity, whim, eccentricity, nonsense): how does the value attribution of the unusual happen?
- Regimes of the usual: structuring the order, in the context of which the difference is perceived
- Images of the Other: exotics, anomaly, monstrosity
- The museum object: from cabinets of curiosity to the defamiliarization / “mummification” of contemporary experience
- Readers’ / spectators’ anticipations and breaking those: the unusual “inside” the canon (e.g., a sudden plot twist; portraying a mythological creature) and “against” the canon (e.g., breaking the boundaries of genre)
- Sensations and modern “production of novelty” (in media, fashion, etc.)
- “Designing” the unusual and extraordinary
- The extraordinary as extraterritorial: extraterrestrial, spaceless, utopian

Please send paper abstracts in Russian or in English (600-800 symbols) to russianescapade@gmail.com by July 5 , notices of acceptance will be sent by August 1.

Conference is organized by RANEPa School of Advanced Studies in the Humanities, HSE Art and Design School, MSSS Faculty of Cultural Management and Fashion Theory journal.

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