



**Call for Papers: The Irrational in Russian History**  
**German Historical Institute, Moscow, 14-16 April 2011**

This three-day workshop will be devoted to the complex and changing assessments of the irrational in Russian history and culture. During the European Enlightenment, in Russia and elsewhere, the irrational came to be seen by thinkers, state officials, and medical doctors as the antithesis of everything that was positive; it denied logic, order and symmetry. This negative assessment of irrational states of mind was, however, not universal. The Church continued to view some mental states that pointed beyond rational consciousness, such as visions, as revelations of divine truth. Theological texts consequently described those who, in the eyes of doctors, were “sufferers”, as “blessed ones”. The Enlightenment assessment of the irrational was prominently challenged at the turn of the twentieth-century with the development of a new understanding of the self. Artists, philosophers and mystics questioned the existence of the enlightened, rational individual and described the human self as multi-layered. The hidden realm of the unconscious exerted considerable fascination, and fin-de-siècle writers, doctors and occultists made numerous attempts to access the dark realm which seemed to house forces of awesome power.

The conference will be dealing with states of mind such as madness, visions, hypnosis, trance and dreams. The questions it addresses include, but are not restricted to, the following:

- How can rational academic disciplines make use of irrational experiences in ways that prove intellectually insightful?
- In which ways did various groups—such as religious thinkers, lawyers, medical doctors, artists etc.—assess irrational states? What caused their evaluations to change over time?
- What is the relationship of the individual mind to the external world according to these notions?

- How is individual experience of the irrational connected to larger social and cultural concepts?
- What does this reveal about the relationship between personal encounter and cultural patterns?
- What roles did irrational states of mind play in self-fashioning?
- How did irrationality relate to personal freedom and what is its connection to emotions?

The conference will be organized in the standard format of presentations followed by discussions. In addition, one afternoon will be set aside to visit the Museum of the History of the Moscow City Psychiatric Asylum (Музей истории Московской городской психиатрической больницы им. Н.А. Алексеева). This should provide a visual entryway into past spatial and architectural ways of reasonings about irrational mental states, and to allow participants to engage in conversations that are not interrupted by organizers' calls to timekeeping.

Speakers include Nikolai A. Bogomolov (Moscow), Julia Herzberg (Munich), Susan Morrissey (London), Malte Rolf (Hannover) and Ilya Vinitzky (Pennsylvania).

The German Historical Institute will assist with visas. Costs for travel and accommodation will be covered.

Proposals for papers of twenty minutes in English or Russian are invited from scholars from across the disciplines working on any aspect of the irrational in Russian culture. Proposals should be between 400 and 500 words long. Offers of papers (as well a brief C.V.) should be submitted by 15 September 2010 to the following address: [conference.ghi@gmx.de](mailto:conference.ghi@gmx.de). We will inform participants by 31 October 2010.

Conference papers in English or Russian (maximum length 5,000 words) will be circulated beforehand and should be submitted to the organizers by 1 March 2011.

We look forward to receiving your abstract!

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