Unknown Quantities

The normal issue

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(unknown) quantities

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Editorial

Normal
/ˈnɔːm(ə)l/

adjective
conforming to a standard; usual, typical, or expected.

Related words: routine, order, regularity, natural, regular, routine, traditional, typical, average, accustomed, conventional, customary, run-of-the-mill, unexceptional, sanity

This third issue of *Unknown Quantities* places an often-overlooked concept in the foreground. Although it remains difficult to define or quantify, it simultaneously governs the ways in which we perceive our environment, those around us and our selves.

"Normality", the state of being "normal", is largely defined as the process of "conforming to a standard; usual, typical or expected" (OxfordDictionaries.com, 2015). Yet these terms remain substantially loose, subjective and highly dependent on context. Some say that we can only define what is normal by identifying what it is not. As abnormal behaviour highlights the characteristics of normal behaviour, normal mental health is recognised by the lack of abnormal thought. However, without abnormality, what is it to be normal? Who defines it? Who regulates it?

We can divide normality into two overarching notions: a personal normality and a collective normality. While the former refers to what is customary for each particular person, such as their specific tastes or demeanour, the latter denotes the norms imposed by and on society. It is this notion that we have found specifically problematic, as it underlines normality as a social construct that excludes and stigmatises those who differ. Although perspectives on the subject have changed over time, society's need to label and categorise remains entrenched. Yet categories of normality are arbitrary and result in hierarchy, inequality and limitations.

On the other hand, categorising what is and what is not normal allows for order and understanding in a diverse world. The common use of the word "normal" to describe what is comfortable and safe speaks to the necessity of routine and stability in everyday life. As a consequence, the term carries both positive and negative connotations, as breaking the norm can simultaneously equal chaos and upset as well as the extraordinary and revolutionary.

This issue of *Unknown Quantities* presents a selection of testimonies and interviews from ten individuals across the globe, from Turkey to the United States. Their perspectives highlight the subjective nature of the term, the fluidity of its definition and the grounding it has in different fields of study, from photography to child psychology and poetry.
The questions we proposed to our interviewees sought no right or wrong answer, nor did we expect them to provide a fixed conclusion. Instead we hope it will provoke a debate about a term that habitually passes us by silently.

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Decrypting key

A	R	9	a	r
B	S	0	b	s
C	T	,	c	t
D	U	.	d	u
E	V	?	e	v
F	W	[]	f	w
G	X	{}	g	x
H	Y	()	h	y
I	Z	+	i	z
J	1	=	j	
K	2	-	k	
L	3	!	l	
M	4	*	m	
N	5	“	n	
O	6		o	
P	7		p	
Q	8		q	

Wingdings is a typeface made exclusively of pictograms. It was designed by Kris Holmes and Charles Bigelow for Microsoft in 1990. At that time images were often too data heavy to work with easily in software. Wingdings provided an alternative form of access to high quality scalable vector images. Contrary to some popular conspiracy theories, Holmes and Bigelow did not embed any hidden messages into the design.

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