

MEDIOCRITY

'Mediocrity knows nothing higher than itself' (Sir Arthur Conan Doyle)

'Mediocrity is excellent to the eyes of mediocre people' (Joseph Joubert)

Mediocrity... surely we all know what it is... and no doubt we all like to think we are ourselves immune to it, if not always able to fend off its nefarious effects... But what is it exactly? Where/when does it start, how can it be demarcated and recognized (and thus, hopefully, exorcised), and can one define and write critically about what forms it takes since by implication it fades into invisibility?

While stupidity has now its pervasively intelligent, acclaimed study (by Avital Ronell) and mediocracy - the more modern equivalent of Ezra Pound's 'pejorocracy' castigating the levelling effects of weak democracy and thinking - has also received its own share of attention (as in Dominique Lecourt's controversial exposure of neo-liberal restorationist ideology in contemporary French thought), mediocrity, as a 'concept' behind a pervasive 'practice', has largely been ignored (with the exception of Paul Fleming's *Exemplarity and Mediocrity*, which attempts to chart the (largely Germanic) genealogy of the concept, or populist self-help books against mediocrity) and still awaits its critical undoing.

Duller, blunter than outright stupidity and its near-synonyms (some of which, like 'idiocy' / the 'idiot', or the 'dunce' have acquired their *belles lettres de noblesse* via Wordsworth and Dostoevsky, and Pope respectively, or like Roland Barthes's 'obtuse' its critical rehabilitation), mediocrity, from Latin *mediocris*: of middle degree, quality, or rank (cf. Horace), has that deceptively 'silent majoritarian' feel of comfortable, therefore not so exceptionable, average, middle-of-the-road pedestrianism... The reverse of exceptionality and exemplarity, despite Barthes's 'mythologies' of the banal, its credentials could be mistakenly sought in modern literary (therefore, in a sense, already not-so-mediocre) antecedents such as *l'homme moyen sensuel* (which Joyce used to describe the anti-hero of his modern *Odyssey*, Leopold Bloom), the 'common reader' and the 'middlebrow' (Woolf), or Musil's 'man without qualities', to name but a few ironically exemplary figures blending into a remarkable normativity and normality through which it could found its legitimacy.

In these economically fraught times when the creative, innovative forces in academe are being increasingly stifled and commodified by a rampant managerialization of intellectual standards in the guise of research quality control mechanisms (scientometrics) - in spite of such blinkered capriciousness being regularly denounced by top academics of all persuasions ever since Bill Readings's pioneering critique of 'excellence' in *The University in Ruins* - *Word and Text* invites contributions that will help shed light on this many-faceted new pejorocracy that does not / will never know its name in its historical, institutional, political (etc) dimensions, analysing its discursive manifestations, philosophical articulations, or literary exemplifications.

Topics may include (but are not limited to):

- The ancient roots of mediocrity (vs *idion*, *qualitas*, etc.);
- Linguistic, discursive and cultural forms and stereotypes (national or otherwise) of mediocrity: 'crab/flock mentality', 'keeping up with the Joneses', the demagogics of *vox populi*, *vox dei* (etc.);
- Individual studies of literary works, films, philosophies dealing with the mediocre in any form (e.g., apart from the above, James Fenimore Cooper's view of democracy as tending towards mediocrity, Keats's chameleon-poet as a paradoxical example of anti-mediocrity, etc), hence
- Can there be an *écriture du médiocre* (cf. *écriture blanche*, *neutre*)?;
- Globalization, commodification and/as mediocratization;
- Academic trends towards the multi-, inter- (etc) as mediocre common denominators;
- The ongoing, intensifying 'mediocratization' and 'institutionalization' of 'excellence';
- Copying, imitation, plagiarism, recycling, conformism (etc) as paradigmatic forms of mediocrity;
- Resisting the mediocre in the everyday (Lefebvre, de Certeau; cf. Michael Sheringham's *Everyday Life*;

Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present).

One last caveat: this is not an issue on performativity, so mediocre people, even if 'you do not know who you are', need not apply...

We welcome interdisciplinary approaches, ranging across critical theory, literary and cultural studies, linguistics as well as other disciplines in the humanities. Contributors are advised to follow the journal's submission guidelines and stylesheet. The deadline for article submissions is 30 March 2013. Articles should be sent as attachments to: wordandtext2011@gmail.com. All submitted articles will be blind-refereed except when invited. Accepted articles will be returned for post-review revisions by 28 April 2013 and are expected back in their final version by 5 May 2013.