

# Introduction

*Ayumi Nishi and Kanae Sekino*

*Correspondence: Hitotsubashi Journal of Arts and Literature* is an annual peer-reviewed journal created as a platform to facilitate dialogue among graduate students and teachers. The journal is supported by the Graduate School of Language and Society of Hitotsubashi University.

We would like to thank Dr. Fran Bigman, who willingly accepted our request to give a keynote speech for the very first *Correspondence* one-day forum, held on the 8th of September 2016 at Hitotsubashi University. Dr. Bigman also gave valuable comments on papers by Kanae Sekino and Ayumi Nishi presented at the event, both of which were developed into the essays collected in this journal. We would like to thank those who attended the event and contributed to the stimulating discussion. Professor Asako Nakai continued to support preparation for the publication of the journal and gave us advice whenever necessary. Special thanks to Miwa Aoyama for the cover design. We appreciate the continued help from Adrian Osbourne and Daniel Gerke of Swansea University for their meticulous proofreading. We are also grateful to Dr. Janet M D Higgins for her advice.

After the first issue which was themed “reconsidering the nation,” the second issue of *Correspondence* is a collection of essays focusing on the question of “feminist narratives and liberation,” reflecting the wide range of interests that the students of Graduate School of Language and Society share. While the contributors to this issue are all primarily literary critics, the essays collected here examine feminist narratives in various forms; literature, film, plays, media articles, and

## *Introduction*

even government narratives. The essays explore the ways in which women are still structurally limited to secondary positions for their labor choices, reproductive rights, caregiving responsibilities, and sexual self-determination. Although the contributors discuss women's situations in the twentieth century and after, the locales and the focus vary; Japan, Britain, America, or South Africa.

This issue begins with a set of essays that highlight the problem of labor and women. The essays by Kono and Uematsu specifically examine the representation of women's labor celebrated in the neoliberal period.

Shintaro Kono maps the problems that are faced by feminism in the neoliberal/postfeminist era: the concealment of labor and division among women. He explores the representation of women's labor in popular films by overviewing the development of female characters in the Star Wars series and Disney princesses. He then turns his attention to the two famous Hayao Miyazaki films, *Kiki's Delivery Service* and *Spirited Away*, by Studio Ghibli. Kono characterizes Kiki's labor as "post-Fordist identity labor" representative of the neoliberal era, while he argues that *Spirited Away* presents the complexities of care labor which can be understood within the third-wave feminist discussion.

Nozomi Uematsu critiques the development of the Japanese government's discourse on women's contribution to economics since 2011 and highlights the two contradicting expectations that "womenomics" inherently possesses; the Abe administration aims to promote women's labor in the public sphere while it strongly preserves a more conservative family structure. Uematsu argues that the responsibilities inherent to maternity are emphasized as a personal issue in the postfeminist era, not so much as a matter of welfare. She traces back the origin of these dual expectations for women to the 80s when the two contradicting laws regarding women were passed. She then situates Banana Yoshimoto's *Kitchen* in this context. Uematsu argues

that *Kitchen* depicts a woman's life that will not diverge from the societal expectations of women's "happiness."

While Kono's paper discusses the problems and problematics of gendered care labor in films, Kanae Sekino turns her attention to the representation of caregiving in Doris Lessing's "The Diary of a Good Neighbour." She points out the effect of a stereotypically gendered norm that the protagonist internalizes in giving care to a stranger. However, Sekino also suggests that the novel distances itself from the popular feminist claims which see gendered caregiving as an oppressive burden for women and that the novel tries to revalue the significance of care in a positive manner.

The essays by Nishi and Bigman, as well as Uematsu, focus on the debate of the autonomy of women on their bodies, reproduction and sexual self-determination. Ayumi Nishi's essay examines the issue of women's place in the post-apartheid South African society by focusing on Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story*. Nishi explores the ways in which coloured women's political agency is recovered through the attention to the representation of the materiality of their bodies. She argues that coloured women's attempts to regain their sexual autonomy are willfully inserted in the novel in order to reject the popular discourse which present them as mere symbols of the new nation.

In her keynote speech, Fran Bigman examines the discourses surrounding women's reproduction/non-reproduction in plays, novels, and films as well as in mass media. She first introduces the discussion over egg-freezing in America and points out that women who choose egg-freezing as a lifestyle option are criticized, whereas those who choose egg-freezing out of necessity are accepted. She then looks at the representation of abortion in various British plays and novels since 1907. Bigman shares her future project in which she plans to further examine the paradox of the perception of reproductive technology from different feminists' viewpoints.

## *Introduction*

Despite the differences of the focus, the articles in this collection are shaped around overlapping areas of concern, and they demonstrate the continued need for feminism to question and seek ways to overcome gender inequality and injustice.