

## EDITORIAL:

### POSTCAPITALISM AND THE HUMANITIES

In this month's issue of *Darshika* we are featuring a special theme, "Postcapitalism and the Humanities." Most of us are familiar with Mark Fisher's reiteration of Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižek's supposed lament that "it is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism" (p. 2). If not, we are still living the experience of late capitalism, often dismayed to recognize—if we decide not to live in willful ignorance—that unparalleled advances in technology and industry, which Marx saw as the key to humanity's liberation, have instead contributed to economic and political crises reminiscent of the history of feudalism. Added to this is a threat that humanity has never before faced, the threat of extinction at its own hands. Unbridled markets appear to have taken on a life of their own, replacing nature, fate, and the gods as entities over which we have no control, even though we have created them. The most powerful leaders of the largest nation-states seem bound by the metrics of the GDP; the economy is our only religion, even though it is a false one.

Economics is "a made-up science," squeaks one of the birds in Michael Deforge's utopian graphic novel *Birds of Maine*: "it's like 'going to school to study unicorn psychology'" (p. 47). Young artists like Deforge are committed to sounding the alarm, but there is nevertheless a seemingly impassable gulf between the world of arts and letters and the corridors of real power. The critical role that has often been delegated to the humanities has been co-opted by the cynical determinism that was the hallmark of postmodern discourse and critique; and while some humanities scholars are becoming more attuned to the constructive possibilities still immanent within capitalism, the most well-intentioned are still so beholden to the false dichotomy of absolutism vs. radical contingency that they often "avoid utopia's [presumed] totalitarian propensities by rendering it almost completely indeterminate" even as they attempt to resurrect it (p. XIX). As James D. Ingram admits in his introduction to *The Political Uses of Utopia*, "even when critical theorists in the Frankfurt style seek to revive utopia in more emphatic terms...they tend to devote more attention to ensuring its nondogmatic, epistemically provisional status than its social content, let alone its politics" (p. XIX).

Motivated by our commitment to interdisciplinarity, in this issue of *Darshika* we obviate this difficulty by invoking the "non-bullshit Marxism" of our sociologist comrades, particularly the late great Erik Olin Wright, who did not confuse concrete strategies or tactics with attempts to "reify" anything. "Vague utopian fantasies may lead us astray," Wright admits, "encouraging us to embark on trips that have no real destinations at all, or worse still, which lead us toward some unforeseen abyss" (p. 6). The antidote, however, is not anxious, perpetual indeterminacy but "'real utopias': utopian ideals that are grounded in the real potentials of humanity, utopian destinations that have accessible waystations, utopian designs of institutions that can inform our practical tasks of navigating a world of imperfect conditions for social change" (p. 6). There is, in fact, no real reason why the unicorn psychology of economics ought to seem any less fantastical than the possibility of transcending it. "Those with their heads truly in the sands or the clouds," opines Terry Eagleton, "are the hard-nosed realists who behave as though chocolate chip cookies and the International Monetary Fund will be with us in another three thousand years time" (p.33). Utopian visions themselves need not be reactive nor absurd, simultaneously idealistic and retrogressive; instead, utopian activity could be defined as "the

uncovering of what is anticapitalist, that is to say, what constitutes *already actualized* forms of the negation of capitalism in our contemporary capitalist societies” (Fischbach, p. 123). Utopia in this sense is “a thought not only of what is really possible in the present situation, but also of what actively negates that situation” (Fischbach, pp. 122-3).

The three articles that we feature in this issue of Darshika have “real utopian” aspirations even though we acknowledge that such aspirations are fruitless as long as intentions and imaginings outstrip political will. We do not want to confuse imagining with political action, but we also agree with Wright that “what is pragmatically possible is not fixed independently of our imaginations, but is itself shaped by our visions,” and that “nurturing clear-sighted understandings of what it would take to create social institutions free of oppression is part of creating a political will for radical social changes to reduce oppression” (p. 6). Our first article, by Wayne George Deakin, argues for reconfiguring Western political discourse by jettisoning another false dichotomy, that of Left vs. Right. Pointing out that the term “Left” has been stripped of its original meaning and detached from its materialist roots, Deakin suggests replacing it not only with a new vocabulary but also with a radical politics rooted in Hegel’s notion of concrete universals. Deakin’s approach has much in common with Alasdair MacIntyre’s commitment to ethico-political values that emerge out of shared practices, but for those of us left cold both by MacIntyre’s retreat into Catholicism and the exasperating dialectics of Hegelian Marxism, Deakin’s exploration of the “non-metaphysical” Hegel’s value to a more holistic politics provides a much-needed third option.

Nancy Armstrong has recently argued that the figure of the garbage picker is an apt metaphor for the neoliberal artist, whose task can be conceptualized as an attempt to retrieve the “material culture filtered out of classic political-economic and novelistic discourse as waste or garbage” (p. 161). Exposing and recovering capitalism’s waste—artistic, material, ideological, or otherwise—is essential to our survival as a species, but our second featured *Darshika* author, Alejandro Huete, aligns with Naomi Klein in positing that capitalism is (unsurprisingly) unequal to this task, especially when the task involves cleaning up the actual, material waste generated in excess in developed countries and exported to undeveloped ones. Huete’s description of neoliberalism’s attempts to monetize this process, to capitalize on waste, has all the qualities of a waking nightmare, but the ultimate purpose of his article is not to allegorize or dramatize the process but to examine how specific postcapitalist theories might address its practical outcomes better than capitalism has proven able to do, and how we might fix the problem altogether by transcending our belief that capitalism limns the boundaries of the achievable.

Our final author, Ji Min Nam, reminds us of the continuing relevance of the humanities themselves, in their humanistic functions, to the global battle against neoliberalism. Nam rehearses several classic and contemporary arguments for the role that the humanities can play in enabling us to view each other as ends in ourselves rather than means to exploitive ends. Nam’s article is unique, however, is its treatment of this topic within the context of contemporary South Korea, whose recent relapse into conservatism has been especially comprehensive. Nam discusses the consequences of this conservative backlash on the lives of Korean women, the disabled, and the queer community—not to mention humanities students—but she also suggests some possible solutions that still exist across various domains. Although small and localized, these possibilities exist as sources of hope *if* we agree, again with Wright, that “relatively small transformations [can] cumulatively generate a qualitative shift in the dynamics and logic of a

social system” (p. 321). When revolution is no longer on the horizon but climate catastrophe is, we are placed in the painful position of committing to the transformative potential of the small while understanding that the ultimate goal of these small transformations is, and must be, to cumulatively generate a global, seismic shift. The authors featured in our issue are all writing with this purpose and understanding.

Sarah Kimmet  
Guest Editor

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**Darshikā: Journal of Integrative and Innovative Humanities**

To promote the importance of interdisciplinary studies and the coalescence between humanities and other areas such as the sciences—natural, social, or applied—economics, and business administration, the Faculty of Humanities, Chiang Mai University, is launching Darshikā: Journal of Integrative and Innovative Humanities. This peer-reviewed bi-annual journal aims to disseminate novel interdisciplinary studies and to bridge the gap between humanities and other disciplines, emphasizing the critical role of humanities in any field of study's discussion and innovation. Additionally, it is hoped that the journal will become recognized in international academic journal indexes, such as Scopus, within four years.

**Objectives**

To promote the importance of interdisciplinary studies and the coalescence between humanities and other areas

**Journal Standards**

To comply with the standards for academic journals in the Social Sciences and Humanities set by the OHEC and TRF, the editorial board consists of professors and doctoral experts who have been conducting research continuously. The editorial board members are mainly from external institutions and partly from internal institutions. All submitted articles are double-blind peer reviewed by at least two reviewers. The journal is published every May and November

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