

2024

CLCWeb Call for Papers: Keywords for Value and Culture

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Recommended Citation

"CLCWeb Call for Papers: Keywords for Value and Culture" (2024). *CLCWeb Call for Papers*. Paper 1.
https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb_cfp/1

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CLCWeb Call for Papers: Keywords for Value and Culture

This special issue asks why the uptake of value-form theory has been so great among Marxist literary and cultural critics. As the editors of *After Marx: Literature, Theory, and Value* (2022) have persuasively argued, recent years have seen a “collective rethinking of what a Marxist approach to literature might be and do”, one that responds to economic and cultural trends dating back to the 1960s. And yet, while a conjunctural analysis helps clarify the disciplinary context, we seek to address a more capacious conceptual overlap between aesthetic theory and value-form theory. The emphasis on form, for example, suggests a more deep-seated, elective affinity between the two fields that hinges on modalities of reading. Emerging out of Adorno’s classroom at the University of Frankfurt in the 1960s, critics associated with the *Neue Marx-Lektüre* like Hans-Georg Backhaus (1980) and Helmut Reichelt (1982) argued that the mode through which Marx presented his ideas, and the way in which we read him, are not secondary to but rather constitutive of the critique of political economy. Furthermore, the key problem of value-form theory is itself a representational dilemma, namely: how to read for a social substance (value) that is omnipresent and determining yet abstract and difficult to figure?

This special issue considers the implications of value theory for cultural analysis broadly construed. In this, it builds on recent Marxist scholarship considering the different representational logics of capital’s value forms (La Berge 2014), the role of figuration in the representation of abstract social relations (Jameson 2011; Lesjak 2021), the relationship between value and aesthetic categories (Ngai 2012; 2020), the aesthetic implications of “real abstraction” (Vishmidt 2018), and the extent to which cultural production can be “subsumed” under capital (Brown 2019; Beech 2015). It will further think through the literary reception of Alfred Sohn-Rethel’s influential concept of “real abstraction” (1970) and Moishe Postone’s work on “impersonal domination” (1993). Furthermore, it will discuss related work by the *Wertkritik* writers on the form-determination of labour (Trenkle 1998; Kurz 1986), the value dissociations

of gender and race (Gonzalez and Neaton 2014, Scholz 2009), and the collapse of modernisation (Kurz 1991).

By examining the conceptual terrain shared between value theory and aesthetic theory—i.e., abstraction, figuration, representation, expression, appearance, form and content—this special issue aims to point to new directions in Marxist criticism. What is to be gained, or lost, in moving back and forth between the critique of political economy and theories of aesthetics and cultural production? Is the “form” in “value form” the same as the “form” in “aesthetic form”? What can a literary approach offer to ongoing debates about abstract labour, exchange society, and crises of accumulation?

This special issue will take a “keywords” format. In adopting this approach, we pay homage to Raymond Williams’s classic compendium *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976), but we also take inspiration from more recent initiatives within materialist cultural studies such as the “Marxist Keywords for Performance” project (Blackwell-Pal et al. 2021) and the volume *Fueling Culture: 101 Words for Energy and Environment* (Szeman, Wenzel, and Yaeger 2017). While the style and mode of presentation may differ among the various keyword essays, the purpose of each contribution will be to bring into conversation the concerns and capacities of aesthetic theory, value-form theory, and the Marxian critique of political economy.

As such, we invite short essays of 2000-3000 words that focus on a single concept, metaphor, or piece of terminology. This might entail approaching Marx’s texts from an aesthetic point of view, highlighting the valence of a specific term within value-form theory for the interpretation of works of art, historicising discursive resonances across the conceptual fields of aesthetic theory and Marxism, or synthesizing a particularly relevant or heated debate amongst Marxist cultural critics. Possible keywords include:

- Analepsis
- Ascription

- Autonomy
- Compulsion
- Dissociation
- Energy
- Fetishism
- Fungibility
- Materiality
- Negation
- Reproduction
- Style
- Substantialism

Keywords already confirmed include: 'abstraction', 'estrangement', 'figuration' 'gestation', 'objective form', 'representation', and 'rhetoric'. Prospective contributors may choose to get in touch with the editors to pitch their ideas before submission.

Abstracts of 250 words and a 100-word bio-note should be sent to keywordsforvalueandculture@gmail.com by May 5th 2024. Full essays of 2000-3000 words are due by August 28th 2024.

Other enquiries should be directed to the special issue editors Dr Thomas Waller (thomas.waller@ucd.ie) and Dr Sean O'Brien (sean.obrien@bristol.ac.uk).