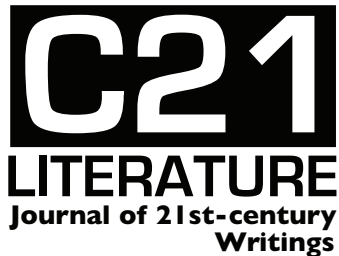




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Review

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REVIEW

Robin van den Akker, Alison Gibbons, and Timotheus Vermeulen (eds), *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect, and Depth After Postmodernism* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), ISBN: 1783489618

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The term 'metamodernism' fulfills several goals related to the last decade's movement from the ontological emptiness of the postmodern era. According to Robin van den Akker, Alison Gibbons, and Timotheus Vermeulen in their edited volume *Metamodernism: History, Affect, and Depth After Postmodernism*, metamodernism is derived from the platonic idea of *metaxis* or the 'inbetweenness' of being. For the contributors to this edited collection, the concept of inbetweenness is central to understanding what the editors call the 'structure of feeling' (borrowed from Raymond Williams) in art and artistic output since the economic collapse of 2008 (6–7). The cultural dominance of postmodernism has given way to new forms of sincerity, depth, a sense of the importance of history, aesthetics, authenticity, and other sensibilities outlined in this book. *Metamodernism* sets up a new sense/structure of feeling in arts and literatures as less a formal movement than a series of interrelated tendencies. The term metamodernism itself helps situate the considerations that create this sensibility. The three-part meaning of 'meta,' from the Greek, means simultaneously *with* or *among*, *between*, and *after*. These

definitions position metamodernism as a movement in discussion with postmodern sensibilities but also succeeding and in tension with them simultaneously. The authors position themselves as writing from within a fourth cultural turn, one of disparate and bifurcating paths of ecosocialism, neoliberal capitalism and austerity politics that marked the end of the postmodern era (17). The authors acknowledge 'a clusterfuck of world-historical proportions' (17), in which wealth is concentrated and about which Marx had nightmares.

Metamodernism is broken into three main sections; Historicity, Affect, and Depth, are all derived directly from Fredric Jameson's categorization of postmodernism in an effort to 'think *with* Jameson in order to be able to grasp today's perplexing reality' (18). In section one, 'Historicity,' contributors critically analyse texts to highlight issues of a metamodern sensibility, namely critical terms and concepts that show a moving on from the postmodern in the last decade. Using postmodern senses of apathy and ironic detachment, neoliberal economic and social weight, and other issues central to the previous three decades, the authors juxtapose the old postmodern understanding of the world as espoused by theorists like Fredric Jameson, with the new, scarier sense of the intensification of every aspect of our lives in a post-internet, post-apocalyptic age. For the contributors in this volume, the sentiments that reign in this post-postmodern age are deeper forms of irony that reach a surreal and meaningful sincerity, stronger senses of nationalism and other communal ties (both good and bad), and intensified nihilism and economic disparity.

In section two, the authors focus on 'Affect' and the return of affective literature, film, and television. This section of the book is essential to understanding the work of metamodernist literary criticism and theory, as the focus is on how we can see the shift of the neoliberal capitalist and postmodern subject to one of a more engaged and interested subjectivity (art that seeks political activism). Interestingly, as the authors of the critical pieces in this section show, that engagement is not necessarily utopian. In many respects, the new sincerity of the metamodern subject is altogether scarier than the nihilistic sensibilities of the postmodern. White Nationalism and rampant far-right ideologies gaining new prominence are good examples of this intensification of the worst parts of postmodern ontology.

In section three, 'Depth,' the contributors focus on how new movements in art, art history, literature (especially short fiction), political television and satire, and writing itself after post-structuralism represent decisive shifts in various cultural sensibilities. There are some key terms illustrated here for thinking about metamodernism: 'depthiness' or the establishment of depth not as shared reality but as 'one among many personally performed (im)possibilities' (149); 'reconstruction' or the attempt to see beyond the surface even if we can't reach beyond it; and 'curated authenticity' or the political and social construction of a 'post-truth' that is directly in reaction to the postmodern nihilistic political ontology. These additions are useful but need broader research and discussion as we move more and more in the direction of the apparent shift in ontological hierarchies. In the epilogue, contributor James Elkins focuses on shortcomings in theories of writing and responding to art within the expectations of a changing and intensifying political world. He calls attention to the penchant in some traditional academic enclaves to look inward. Such a focus, Elkins argues, creates a masturbatory, circular and nihilistic trap. According to the epilogue to *Metamodernism*, we are now in a place where we can imagine new ways of doing research and being a community of thinkers and writers.

The editors compile a series of critical inquiries into cultural metamodernism that focus on film, television, neoliberalism and world systems analysis, as well as linguistics and other theoretical foundations to consider the seismic shift in the dominant cultural sentiment of the past decade, and they do so in a convincing way. A key aspect missing from this work is the focus on what Christian Moraru in *Reading for the Planet* (2015) calls the 'condition of planetarity.' This is a condition that requires us to rethink globalism as the central way of understanding our lives and relationships. Planetarity and metamodernism similarly link to the work of Marxist feminists like Sylvia Federici, who, in *Re-enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons* (2018), theorizes the need to reclaim the commons and build economies (and with them art and artists) with community prioritized and always with diversity and inclusion at the fore. For Federici, reclaiming the commons refers to (mostly minority-driven) social and political movements that recognize neoliberal capitalist encroachments in daily life. These movements organize against the expectations of

gig and extraction economies that destroy communities through greed and accumulation. *Metamodernism* analyzes texts that respond to such manifestations in art and politics but does not focus enough on some of the lived lives of people in the world they theorize. Despite the shortcomings of this text – which also include a lack of focus on social media, streaming services for consumption of art, video games, or deeper recognition and discussion of the realities of 2016 (Brexit, French revolts, Donald Trump, etc.) – this text provides essential reading for anyone interested in how we formulate conversations in literary and cultural theory. *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect, and Depth After Postmodernism* fulfills its goal of being a position piece on the ‘clusterfuck of world-historical proportions’ that awaits us if we do not radically re-envision our lives on this planet.

Competing Interests

The author declares that they have no competing interests.

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