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## Close Reading 2

Anna Kornbluh Extinct Critique

(<http://annakornbluh.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Kornbluh-3.pdf>)

“This transformation appeals to historical precedents of multilevel governmental direction of the entire society, including autonomizing the political and regulatory functions of the state from industry by ending campaign contributions, and publicizing/nationalizing fossil fuel companies to ensure their breakup. The basic theory behind these demands is that it is possible to repoliticize the economy, and while this politics often wears a communitarian/pluralist sheen, there can be no mistaking that a big deep state is its condition of possibility. Absolutely heretical to reflexively anti-statist, anti-institutionalist dissolutionists, this de facto state theory is just elementary dialectics: thinking at large scales, centrally coordinating planning, centrally providing infrastructure are affordances of the state form, which organized political power of the people can wield for their own wellbeing. Standing Rock and We Are Seneca Lake and Skolstrejk för Klimatet formulate a theory of the state and of the necessity for other dispensations as the affirmative correlate of the critique of carboniferous reason. How can we be out of steam and modest, horizontalist and weak, when there is such an urgency to buttress the firefight, when the environment for our thought is a desperate spur?

Dialectical critique is affirmative, so here are my norms. Do critique: assess the environments for thought, and build necessary alternative environments. Commit to strengthening our institutions for critique and reflection and mediacy, precisely now when they’ve been decimated. Do the feminized service labor of making the place where we work work. Behold the university as a site of workplace struggle and as an immediate sphere in which it is possible to be effective, even on the colossal problem of the ecocide: organize to be sure your institution divests from fossil fuels, organize (and bargain fairly with) university laborers like faculty, contingent faculty, graduate students, and support staff, and then organize some more. In your teaching and writing, risk synthesis! Theory must work to build the world up. We must, in the present, make claims about causality, systematicity, and the revaluation of values, so we can make the very specific move to counter rapacious greed with rapid decarbonization. The dispersive poetics of attunement to the material world, romancing precarity, and dissolving binaries entice us to lie down. Critique and its cartography of other spaces enjoins us to stand up. Extinction rebellion leaders are eloquently calling for judgements of the good and the just. The war vet turned extinction pedagogue Roy Scranton dares us “to make meaningful choices in the shadow of our inevitable end” (Scranton 2013). The political theorist Thea Riofrancos (2019) argues, “resignation cloaked in realism is the best way to ensure the least transformative outcome.” Climate strike leader Greta Thunberg has her own building metaphor for struggle, what she calls “cathedral thinking”: “We must lay the foundation while we may not know exactly

how to build the ceiling” (Thunberg 2019). This kind of in medias res synthesis, this celebration of the freedom in necessity, this consecration of construction—this too is the lifeway of critique. “Critique” and “crisis,” it is surely a literary cliché to note, have a common etymological origin in the Greek *krínein* , “to decide.” The extinction crises in theory and practice, in the university and on Earth, force a decision. It is too late, our ossified intellectual habits are dying, as are we—but crisis paralyzes, romantic resignation, and arrested critique guarantee the worst. Wild imaginings, big abstractions, and brassy syntheses are less bad. Weak theory is a seductive siren, postcritique a consoling modesty. Go out strong..”

## 2. Citations

Modernism, Satire and the Novel by Johnathon Greenberg  
<https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/modernism-satire-and-the-novel/8EE9B5C71E5393D13430629D824DFAF6>, I downloaded chapter 1 and 2)

Obliterate by Melanie Micir, Aarthi Vadde (<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/703529/pdf>)

Field ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Field\\_\(mathematics\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Field_(mathematics)))  
 Group Theory ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Group\\_theory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Group_theory))

## 2. Close Reading

0. “So here are my norms.” Anna Kornbluh is practicing what she preaches. “Here are my norms” ought to be done with everything from now on.

1. “..publicizing/nationalizing..” Publicizing/nationalizing is now a quasi-word synthesized from smashing existing concepts and conditioning them on one another. This idea on its own is revolutionary. It saves words like publicizing from being initially interpreted in a non-Marxist context, and it allows the radical amateur access to the English machine to construct new ideas and concepts, albeit fragile and unstable, allowing them to play probably impactful roles in Academic Literature’s current desire to turn literature into group theory. And this new literary object spawns naturally from the core of her essay: “risk synthesis!” It makes me excited to explore life after the modern critique. The future is now! October 2020!
2. “Commit to strengthening our institutions for critique and reflection and mediacy, precisely now when they’ve been decimated.” Kornbluh is reframing the social consciousness by valuing destruction and ruin critique can bring. A massive shift in perspective is central to restoring the institution.
3. “Do the feminized service labor of making the place where we work *work*.” A satiric reference to the current misogynistic structure undergirds the world. She credits the history of the women endeavoring to be free who believe in the same idea as Kornbluh’s proposed alternative.

4. “Behold the university as a site of workplace struggle and as an immediate sphere” workplace struggle spawns images of a class struggle, struggle in general is central to the way Kornbluh argues we should interact with our world.
5. “Behold the university as a site of workplace struggle and as an immediate sphere” immediate sphere spawns images of a social sphere, a concept in today’s cyberworld contains an exponential amount of connections between people. Possibly an argument that we need to view the university as a web of social and political connections.
6. “*Theory must work to build the world up.*” The way I hear it with the italics, it has a pleading/desperate tone.
7. “We must, in the present, make claims about causality, systematicity” Causality and systematic, albeit concepts from a scientific/theoretic perspective, reflect a current appeal to scientism much different from the modernist appeal (logic)
8. “We can make the very speci!c move” a subtle/minimal argument Kornbluh is making: we survive from our current crisis through a very thorough, specific, and detailed plan of action.
9. “in medias res synthesis” in medias res references the literary style of starting the narrative in the middle of a plot. Another call to shift in perspective towards the “always constructing” mentality: a way in which you orient yourself on the edge of knowledge’s boundary/fog of war and every step forward through synthesis expands your view every so slightly.
10. “Big abstractions,... are less bad” Big abstractions are very much in direction we are moving towards, very group theory-esque.
11. “..., and brassy syntheses are less bad” The ‘brassy’ description of these syntheses reflect the tastelessly loud/unpolished amateurism
12. “‘Critique’ and ‘crisis,’ it is surely a literary cliché to note, have a common etymological origin in the Greek *krínein* , “to decide.” The extinction *cri- ses* in theory and practice, in the university and on Earth, force a decision.”
13. “postcritique a consoling modesty” A ‘consoling modesty’ is something that can help you come to an understanding in a rough situation, but offers no means of redemption
14. (Thunberg 2019)
15. “Go out strong” Kornbluh ends on this, making a really strong stance on the inevitability of our extinction.

### 3. Synthesis

Micir and Vadde’s *Obliterature* endeavor to produce knowledge in a necessarily different way, they call for “weak theoretical way such that the institutional and para-institutional, the canonical and the obliterate, the disciplinary and the extradisciplinary orbit around one another rather than rendering each other secondary, useless, or passé,” a shift in perspective where a “barycentric spatial orientation” between the amateur and professional replace the ostracizing

hegemony of the institution. The characterization of this policy, images of ‘weak theory’ and ‘rendering useless (without mention of future or rebuild),’ may leave room for critique, but I, following Anna Kornbluh *Extinct Critique*<sup>1</sup>, will not be doing so. Like Kornbluh said, “out of steam, critique backs fossil fuel” especially when obliteration is a highly valuable/unstable object that requires *Obliteration*’s Two Body Proposal to survive. In effort to avoid a literary mode that ‘Republicans and corporations find congenial,’ we must risk the synthesis of *Obliteration* and *Extinct Critique*, we must root ourselves on these foundational works, conditioned on the immediacy/inevitability of extinction, in effort to shift the knowledge-production mode to a symbiotic/mutualistic relationship between amateur and professional.

I will synthesize these works with special respect to Kornbluh’s desire for “Wild imaginings, big abstractions, and brassy syntheses.” Literary knowledge production as a process of iterative abstraction gives us a path forward, detached from the path of the modern/postmodern. The time of the modern, in its simplest/roughest form, was concerned with understanding *being* using the newly founded mathematical theory of a field<sup>2</sup>. A field  $F$ , classically, is a set with two fundamental binary operations and must satisfy the field axioms like associativity, commutativity, identity, etc. This is iteration 1 of abstraction. At this level, the axioms of being are predetermined/universal, and it was the duty of authors to write forward and discover them. To make a big abstraction, the time of the postmodern rode closely with the mid 20-century rapid domain expansion of Group Theory into algebraic structures. The significance of this correlation is that a field is just *an* algebraic structure, one of infinite, a shift that destabilized the idea of *being* from the time of the modern, while characterizing being for the postmodern. This can be seen in Johnathon Greenberg’s approach to studying the modern in his book *Modernism, Satire and the Novel* in which *an* era emerges “worthy of discrete nomenclature.” Current literary analysis follows the philosophy of Group Theory very closely, where a set of fundamental algebraic structures undergirds the world and it is the authors duty to understand their unique fundamental axioms in order to “schematize modernism and postmodernism” (ch. 2, 20). This is iteration 2.

Transcendental mathematics exists. My argument suggests we are only on the second iteration of abstraction. The next body of work must discover iteration 3, ideally iteration  $n$ , and synthesize its results with *Obliteration*’s barycentric model.

1. “The profession of criticism is being disassembled, the ecosystem for thinking is imperiled by rapidly escalating levels of cognitive-compromising carbon, and meanwhile our thought leaders rhapsodize these declinations as “weak theory” and “amateur criticism.”, “*Theory must work to build the world up.*”
2. The theories of rings and fields comes from the Emmy Noether (23 March 1882 – 14 April 1935) [[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emmy\\_Noether](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emmy_Noether)]