

**Anna KORNBLUH, *Immediacy or, The Style of Too Late Capitalism*, Verso, 2023, ISBN 978-1-80429-134-4, 200 p.**

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What Anna Kornbluh achieves in her volume, *Immediacy or, The Style of Too Late Capitalism*, is to provide a comprehensive panoramic view of a segment that lies at the heart of today's apocalyptic ethos: the cultural and socio-economic lack of mediation. Adopting a historicising perspective on the contemporary logic of capitalism – thereby following Fredric Jameson's methodology to some extent – the author argues that our era can be encapsulated under the concept of “too late capitalism.”

In the introduction, Kornbluh outlines the devastating events and contexts that form the foundation of a global omnicrisis. On this basis, she asserts that the homogenising condition in which humanity finds itself is best described through this notion of “too late capitalism.” Furthermore, she identifies immediacy as its defining characteristic, presenting it “as a master category for understanding twenty-first-century cultural production” (15).

The volume revolves entirely around this concept and its dialectical relationship with all forms of mediation. For Kornbluh, the cultural and economic praxis of contemporaneity is steeped in strategies designed to eliminate any kind of mediation between products and consumers. Whether discussing cultural products, commodities, or rhetorical strategies (to name but a few areas of her analysis), she contends that immediacy represents a new style of production, rooted in a newly discovered personalist attitude towards reality. Immediacy, she explains, encompasses intimacy, authenticity, rapidity, instant aestheticism, and the rejection of filters and distance – all of which are linked, directly or indirectly, to the *pragmatic* drive to eliminate intermediaries. Calling it the style of today's cultural practice, Kornbluh situates immediacy at the foundation of what she terms “pop ontology” (17). She argues that this stylisation of every facet of human life infiltrates the processes of capital circulation, artistic creation – writing and video – and

imaginary techniques. The result, she contends, is the erosion of any specific stylisation. If mediation entails “making sense and meaning by inlaying into medium” (14), then immediacy leads to nonsensical entropy, concealed by a veneer of directness, sincerity, and efficiency.

The volume is organised into five chapters, in which the author examines the effects and recent manifestations of immediacy, as well as their shortcomings. The chapters are titled as follows: *Circulation*, *Imaginary*, *Writing*, *Video*, and *Antitheory*. In each chapter, Kornbluh interrogates capitalism’s pursuit of efficiency and purported authenticity, exposing how sense, meaning, collective habitation, and value are systematically undermined by the erasure of contextual mediums.

In the first chapter, Kornbluh examines how the circulation of material or abstract capital (e.g., oil or information) is immediatised under the regime of “too late capitalism.” She highlights that while money has historically served as a mediating tool between commodities (C-M-C), in contemporary capitalism, the ends have been supplanted by the means, fostering an immediatisation of extremes: money invested for the sake of money itself. Capital circulation has been streamlined to such an extent that mediating labour is rendered unnecessary. From this, Kornbluh deduces a systemic drive towards reducing the need for workers.

The omnicrisis of the twenty-first century has led to a paralysis in how crises are perceived and managed. By inventing and selling new solutions, “crisis is officially ordinary” (30). Flux is immediatised, with pre-existing tools ensuring the continuous flexibility and circulation of capital, such as digital code and its analogue platforms. Offering a brief history of online platforms — from Netscape to TikTok — Kornbluh demonstrates how immediacy accelerates the transmission of messages and images, creating a sense of omnipotence and an insatiable demand for perpetual presence. In this context, the emoji emerges as a language that transcends linguistic barriers, aids the illiterate, flattens mediums, and reduces communication to the barest of representations. Furthermore, in relation to this digital shift, Kornbluh adopts a historicising stance to explore what follows the end of postmodernism. Citing N. Katherine Hayles, she observes that postmodernism effectively ended in 1995 (40). Kornbluh concludes the chapter by highlighting how the invisibility of digital codes contributes to the creation of immediacy as a style that resists representation, visibility, and realisation.

In the second chapter, entitled *Imaginary*, the author systematically articulates her position by framing the cognitive operation of imagination within the terms of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Presenting the three domains of psychic experience—the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real—Kornbluh advocates for the symbolic as a mediator of consciousness, which she argues is lacking in today’s attitude towards the real.

Psychoanalysis in itself represents, in her argument, “an unprecedented science of mediation” (p. 45) that succeeds, first and foremost, to portray “how the self is not self-evident but rather a product of social relations” (p. 45). Following Freud and Lacan, Kornbluh draws on their theories of the ego to reveal how narcissism constitutes the immediate style of the human imaginary. Without the mechanism of the symbolic apparatus, narcissism—an image of the self—is socially re-enacted as an endless accumulation of presentness: “Narcissism becomes qualified as an attachment to the ego qua effect of the mirror, and the constitutive role of mirroring repeats in the narcissist’s concepts of development, growth, and action” (47–48).

Furthermore, the author deduces an entire “economy of the imaginary” that underscores the postmodernist fascination with the real. In this context, immediacy creates a sense of the “imagined real,” which leads to hypersensitivity and hypervisibility. The need for extreme content—such as images of horror, violation, supernaturalism, and cringe—is exemplified through TV shows that fail to fully produce a sense of reality.

Additionally, the narcissistic passion for self-reinvention results in the immediatization of public and private spheres, including intimate photographs. Individuals become ensnared in a continuous mechanism of re-enabling themselves in various forms. Paradoxically, this instantaneous flow of imaginaries accumulates in a way that ensures nothing escapes. Kornbluh concludes this chapter by proposing a forgotten alternative: “a formalised solicitation of the symbolic” (55).

The third chapter, the longest, explores how literary forms have evolved within a capitalist framework, given that the circulation of information has eradicated mediation. In summary, Kornbluh asserts that the dominant literary form of our time is autofiction. With the decline of fiction—the principal mediating instrument in writing—the mind, with its ostensibly pure and direct character, has emerged as the survivor, manifesting in self-narratives. This literary form, Kornbluh

explains, adopts a style that replaces narration and objectivity with streams of thought and subjectivity. Here again, readers encounter a domain characterised by intransitivity, directness, and immediacy. The imaginative creation of new narratives has been supplanted by unique constructions of the authorial self.

Exploring the popularity of autofiction, Kornbluh argues that “it functions as the conspicuous self-justifying wing of contemporary literary production’s unprecedented preoccupation with the ‘auto,’ across a variety of sole-proprietor genres ensuing from the industrial restructuring of publishing, journalism, and academic labour” (61). Autofiction, she contends, fosters narcissism and erases the potential for third-person narrative, trapping the reader in a perpetual present with a flat, plotless storyline. One key writer Kornbluh examines is Karl Ove Knausgård, noting his aversion to invention and fiction.

Moving forward, the author considers a resurgence of realism and first-person perspectives, both of which she identifies as characteristics of autofiction. Neorealism, understood as a stylistic approach to society, exhibits a passion for hyper-representations and immediacy. Kornbluh observes: “while irony rides ’70s waves, sincerity rules today” (62). At the other end of the spectrum, she posits that third-person perspectives possess the potential to transcend phenomenological subjectivity (65), enabling both writers and readers to aspire to a new form of objectivity. Notably, Kornbluh overlooks modernist novels, despite much of the literary canon being built around third-person narratives. She also criticises archipelagic prose for its rapidity and oceanic prosaicness for its lack of coherence.

Distancing herself from the immediacy style of novel-writing, Kornbluh turns to non-literary forms, focusing on the personal essay. Though often seen as emblematic of marginalised communities, she argues that such essays mirror individualism and opinionism. In their subjective dimension, personal essays operate as impressionistic acts of self-authorisation that aestheticise the industrial rhythms of publishing (81).

Building on these insights, Kornbluh shifts her focus in the fourth chapter to streaming video. Here, she critiques how the medium has been dissolved in video platforms, beginning with one of the most recent cinematic styles: colonoscopy cinematography. She swiftly condemns this emerging style, which has yet to be “recognised as a great art of our moment” (90), for its reliance on close-ups and digital interventions that resolve any visual irregularities.

Turning to more mainstream types of visual production, Kornbluh critiques the core transformations that have marked the transition from film to video. The latter, she argues, epitomises a mediumless format. The proliferation of platforms promoting video content, the capacity for image capture, and its intimate nature all consolidate streaming video's ability to implement a new form of homogeneity in "too late capitalism." Critiquing television's influence on viewers and its unrelenting information flow, Kornbluh examines recent streaming-video categories and highlights how, despite the heterogeneity of devices we use (cinema, TV, computers, laptops, phones, etc.), video has emerged as the dominant medium for visual information. Contemporary cultural production, she observes, "prizes circulation, practising flow and emanation in a bizarre swirl of emptiness and extremity that has come to define modes across media [...] As the artform par excellence of too late capitalism, streaming video is rushing, delugent" (114).

The final chapter, "Antitheory," begins as a polemic against Bernard Harcourt's *Critique and Praxis*, which laments theory's separation from praxis. In contrast, Kornbluh argues that the imperative for praxis—typically independent, impressionistic, and sentimental—has led to what she terms "antitheory." She contends that theory, by its nature, serves as a form of mediation. Drawing on Hegel, Kornbluh demonstrates how immediate epistemology equates to sensory knowledge, representing only the initial stage in a more profound process of understanding ontology. Summarising, an immediate approach results in a superficial perception of reality. Furthermore, advocating for a Marxist perspective, Kornbluh underscores theory's role in interrogating the medium itself (between thought and practice, labour and nature, capital and value): "mediation is not just an ideal process in the realm of ideas [...] but a material process in the realm of corporeality and social interdependence" (120).

Finally, she concludes that this form of antitheory culminates in "autotheory," a highly individualistic approach to society and nature that disregards the need for conceptualisation and rigour. In this self-authorising scenario, traditional mediations—such as university presses, academic credentials, or the theoretical canon—can be bypassed. Kornbluh warns that the ultimate endpoint of these immediate antitheories is nihilism. By perpetuating a constant state of crisis, immediacy provides an ideal environment for abstract troubles. Moreover, history

itself can be compressed into the present, devoid of the medium that connects historical events, fostering the belief that “It has always been this way.”

In conclusion, Kornbluh offers solutions not only to address autotheory but also to confront immediacy as the style of “too late capitalism.” She argues: “mediations are many-textured compositions that sustain inconsistencies and de-complete or de-immanentise, holding open the possibilities of practical connection in and through action to build” (140). On this basis, she asserts that only by constructing mediations can the perpetual crisis be mitigated. Symbolic creation and collective action, she suggests, must form the foundation of this process, which should strive to create middles rather than promote extremes.