

ing. Nevertheless, there could be many convergent points between Green New Dealers and alternative hedonists. A technocratic focus on energy transition dominates much of the public discussion of the Green New Deal. Yet, Soper is correct to suggest that changes in living, working and consuming will have to become part of this discussion. A Green New Deal over the long term will have to move from addressing energy, infrastructure and investment to consider ways in which further shifts could occur in material culture, from 'more' to 'better', from disposable design to emotionally and physically durable design, from object production to post carbon service provision to meet a range of needs for transportation and entertainment, pleasure and leisure. Here the kind

of vision of the Green New Deal recently articulated by Kate Aronoff, Alyssa Battistoni, Daniel Aldana Cohen and Thea Riofrancos, with their focus on *decommodification* of the essentials of life and public investment to provide low carbon *communal luxury* for all, provides one potential bridging moment with Soper's project. An individualist and consumer-driven alternative hedonism focused on equitable downscaling and centring the eco-virtues of the upper middle classes is not going to win any elections and is not ultimately going to go anywhere. An investment, regulation and justice orientated Green New Deal that is further focused on a cultural politics of pleasure might just have a fighting chance.

Damian White

Contingent contagions

Angela Mitropoulos, *Pandemonium: Proliferating Borders of Capital and the Pandemic Swerve* (London: Pluto Press, 2020). 132pp., £14.99 pb., 978 0 74534 330 3

'When every home becomes a quarantine zone, and every epidemiological map is mistaken for an accurate representation of molecular spread, the convergence of neoliberalism and fascism around an oikonomic understanding of health and disease is all but complete.' Posting these words on her website on 12 March 2020, Sydney-based scholar and activist Angela Mitropoulos remarked forcefully on the biopolitical measures undertaken as the inexorable unfolding of Covid-19 was beginning to take shape. For anyone familiar with Mitropoulos' work prior to *Pandemonium*, these words, tagged as a 'postscript' to her earlier book-length publication *Contract and Contagion: From Biopolitics To Oikonomia* (Minor Compositions, 2012), could not but elicit the uncanny feeling of historical *déjà vu*. For *Pandemonium* can be said to appear 'after' *Contract and Contagion* only in the crudest, chronological sense one might experience historical time. Much like its predecessor, *Pandemonium* is an indispensable intervention that exposes the dangers of the culturalisation of the biopolitical and the biologisation of the geopolitical. While shorter and more journalistic in tone than *Contract and Contagion*, this publication continues the significant critical work that Mitropoulos has been devel-

oping through a number of journal articles, interviews and blog posts. Because of this pre-Covid 'pre-history', as a theoretical contribution, *Pandemonium* is best-read in the context of queer-feminist, autonomist conversations on precarious labour, risk and indebtedness, and on the constitutive role of the household in upholding the values and borders of the capitalist nation-state – before, during and, no doubt, 'after' Covid.

Over the past decade, Mitropoulos has been one of the many post-Foucauldian voices to insist that the moral logics of economic liberalism and political authoritarianism, and of financial speculation and securitisation, are co-constitutive modes of governance. More singularly, Mitropoulos has astutely diagnosed the ever-present fascist undercurrents within (neo)liberalism and presented a trenchant critique of policies and discourses firmly rooted in the imaginaries of purity, origin and the restoration of legal and natural order. Yet unlike other voices on the left who can only conceive of the 'not-privatised' through the lens of 'the nationalised' (health-care provision being an obvious case in point), Mitropoulos cautions against forgetting the murderous distinction between citizen and non-citizen, and between

(political) *demos* and (economic) populations.

Mitropoulos' key analytical framework of *oikonomia* rests on her refusal of a politics that is bounded by the national, and its autonomist reconfiguration of the relationship between nation and household renders it helpful for making sense of the political reality of Covid-19. *Oikonomia* incisively cuts through the pernicious ways in which the legal has historically been conflated with the natural – and the pivotal role of the 'home' in such an ideological move. As Mitropoulos elaborates in *Contract and Contagion*, the *nomos* of the hearth is founded on the invisible, coerced labour of subjects: from the classical *oikos* of ancient Athens as the management of women, children, slaves and animals to the neoliberal management that governs the Thatcherite nuclear family. *Oikos* is more than the home. It is the privatised care and duty-of-care, it is the unwaged and devalued labour of those who are not 'masters', it is the non-porous entity of the bio-family established by the blood ties of procreation and of genetic and material inheritance. In its foregrounding of the labour-value of affective work within the intimate sphere, *oikonomia* could perhaps be mistaken for social reproduction theory. Yet Mitropoulos' framework is distinct from social reproduction approaches in that it foregrounds the bounded character of the domestic in relation to the national (via Melinda Cooper, Lauren Berlant and Elizabeth A. Povinelli). Unlike a Marxist-feminist emphasis that seeks to identify a domestic mode of production, *oikonomia* centres instead on how the labour-value extracted from unwaged and unfree workers in the hetero-patriarchal household is always already implicated in the biopolitical management of populations. As Mitropoulos puts it in a pithy neologism that appropriates the idea of GDP: 'what it takes to live, to be healthy and flourish, vividly clashes with the capitalist mystique of economic productivity, of the idealized household and the metrics of the Gross National Product'. The thought of post-*operaisti* figures such as Paolo Virno, Maurizio Lazzarato or Franco 'Bifo' Berardi is here relevant only insofar as their analyses of labour pertain to post-Fordist social relations. When it comes to giving flesh and blood to the precarious subject, it is the livelihood (and the very life) of the undocumented migrant that is at stake for Mitropoulos, not the working conditions of the nomadic cognitariat.

Another key epistemic divergence, which has re-

cently been made explicit through the critiques Mitropoulos has waged against Jean-Luc Nancy and Giorgio Agamben, in 'The pandemic, and the pandemonium of European philosophy' (*Political Geography*, January 2021), pertains to the concept of property. Although *oikonomia* is not an intersectional concept, strictly speaking, Mitropoulos' indebtedness to property law and Cheryl I. Harris's foundational 'Whiteness as Property' (1993) enables her to operate at the nexus of race and gender and attend to the ways in which the moral-economic logic of household management exposes the property relation as constitutive of legal and political personhood. This is a process that is inextricable from what Mitropoulos calls 'naturalisation', to involve not only processes of racialised, sexed subject's reduction to biology but also forms of depoliticisation and de-temporalisation that point to theologically-inflected imaginaries of providence, eternal taxonomy and restoration of order. As such, when in February 2020 Mitropoulos published a piece in *The New Inquiry* entitled 'Against Quarantine', she was far from adopting a position close to Agamben's. Whereas Agamben's much-discussed statements against statist restrictions on freedom of movement are premised on the state of exception's infringement on personal liberty (with personhood here classically conceived in terms of civic rights originating in property law), Mitropoulos' questioning of quarantine's efficacy interrogates the distinction between an epidemic and a pandemic (the latter crossing national borders); between physical distancing, case isolation and quarantine; and between measures based on epidemiological evidence and measures based on racialised and territorial speculation. In Mitropoulos' own words, 'the assumption that political rights and citizenship are varieties of inherited entitlement rests on a naturalized analogy between private property and political representation'.

This nexus of property *as/of* personhood is further bolstered by Mitropoulos' analysis of contingency. Through her tactical deployment of ideas from Lucretius' long didactic poem *De Rerum Natura*, and the incalculable and unpredictable singularising atomic modification that occurs through a *clinamen* or swerve, Mitropoulos aligns herself with a Negrian Spinozism, thereby forging her *oikonomic* critique against Aristotelian taxonomy, Malthusian population theory and, implicitly, Leninist historicity. In *Pandemonium* and the context



of the historical reality of Covid-19 especially, the *oikonomic* measurement and management of contingency is exemplified by the functions and operations of the so-called ‘cat bond’ (short for ‘catastrophe bond’), a type of financial investment that only pays out nation-states when sufficient numbers of populations have first died. Mitropoulos compellingly establishes the philosophico-political connection between the future-perfect temporality of pandemic bonds and the racial necropolitics of herd immunity. What is less compelling, regrettably, is the manner in which individual thinkers are fleetingly mobilised in doing so (Plato, Aristotle, Nietzsche, Derrida, Marx, Hobbes), their names deployed effectively as synecdoches for competing ideological standpoints. While such a simplified schema may be apposite insofar as *Pandemonium* seeks to galvanise a non-academic audience in the form of a short, radical handbook, the insertion of names-as-ideologies into what is an otherwise subtle and sophisticated analysis of the chronobiopolitics of contingency does seem to move Mitropoulos in the

opposite direction of abstraction, and towards a reified de-historicisation of philosophical thought.

In its opening pages, *Pandemonium* declares its intention to address the question of ‘how and whether the pandemic presents a turning point or swerve, and toward what’. Mitropoulos certainly makes a convincing case about the pandemic’s endogenous relation to necropolitical capitalism, *contra* liberal accounts that have been positing a historicity of crisis and suspension. Less indication is given about the swerve’s direction of travel. Nor is the question about ‘how and whether the pandemic presents a turning point’ answered anywhere in the text. One would expect Mitropoulos’ recalcitrant account to culminate in a call-to-arms that, at the very least, rhetorically invokes a post-capitalist, post-nation, post-family horizon. Curiously, *Pandemonium* ends on an unexpectedly modest and sober note, offering tentative suggestions of wildcat strikes amidst corporatist trade unionism and not much else besides. Perhaps this resistance to a feel-good ending marks Mitropoulos’ sus-

picion of any predictable turn or *telos*, especially when the latter is couched in all-too-familiar leftist tropes of post-insurrectionary redemption. Nevertheless, key questions that are broached but not explicitly addressed require attention and – for those of us who are allies in this struggle – unfinished work to-be-done.

One such question pertains to the material unit of the couple-form and its relationship to the hetero-patriarchal, nationalist nexus of *oikonomia*. In articulating the centrality of household management in the constitution of the nation-state, Mitropoulos does not explicitly draw on the discursive formation of the couple-form. Rather, it is the institution of the (biological) family and (heterosexual) marriage that provide the ground for exposing all that is wrong with racialised, proper-tarian social relations. Although modes of queer kinning are mobilised, there remains a tacit assumption that the institutions of family and marriage are always already heterosexual, leaving little room for an analysis of the social reproduction of capitalism within gay marriage and, even more pressingly, for an *oikonomic* analysis of homonationalism. As stay-at-home measures have painfully exposed, mononormativity, too, is alive and well and it remains to be seen how far couples of reproductive capacity have made the most of the pandemic by making babies (and not kin).

Staying with this expanded *oikonomic* analysis, we might also consider two further vectors that would continue *Pandemonium*'s trajectory. This would place us in conversation with Mitropoulos' own interlocutors and

fellow-travellers: the Out of the Woods collective. Out of the Woods share Mitropoulos' anti-nationalist, anti-racist political programme and have themselves offered astute critical responses to the Malthusian turn within contemporary environmental movements. Mitropoulos is eager to stress the etymological common root between 'economy' [*oikonomia*] and 'ecology' [*oikologia*] – arguably a curious move for someone so alert to the dangers of originary epistemologies. More pertinently though, Mitropoulos' *oikonomic* analysis demonstrates that it is at this very point of convergence between inherited property (land, housing, assets) and inherited properties (genes) where nature becomes naturalised. Lastly, if state regulation of privatised risk-management is to be eschewed as a strategy, it is worth probing what role communisation might play in either eliminating or radically altering the organisation of risk post-Covid. Parliamentary politics is rightly pronounced as limited but, beyond the fleeting mention of 'debt as an acknowledgment of the interdependent conditions of survival and care', Mitropoulos refrains from offering tactical toolkits or political prognoses. And yet *Pandemonium* remains resolute in its affect and convictions. The publication's very final words – 'that everything can be reckoned otherwise' – gracefully capture how the intersecting point where calculation, evaluation of worth and punishment currently resides could find a different source, one that does not stem from natural law but from a moral economy we have yet to practise.

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Between speculation and discipline

Christopher Tomlins, *In the Matter of Nat Turner: A Speculative History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020). 376pp., £25.00 hb., 978 0 69119 866 8

Christopher Tomlins is not the first historian to have focused on the Nat Turner rebellion. In 1831, the slave Nat Turner led a group of blacks in an insurrection in St. Luke's Parish, Southampton County, Virginia that resulted in the brutal killing of fifty-five white men, women and children. Although Turner was apprehended, tried and executed, the insurrection struck terror in the hearts

of the South's slave-owning classes. It played a critical role in the hardening of pro- and anti-slavery positions that would, following many twists and turns, culminate in the American Civil War. Given the Turner rebellion's scale and seriousness, it is not surprising that many historians should have focused on it. Non-historians have been drawn to it as well. In 1967, the American novel-