

Lukács and Bergson and existential themes – strongly informs Debord’s concluding chapter of *The Society of the Spectacle* and whose theory of reification specifically identifies the ‘[s]patialisation of experienced duration’ and a ‘loss of temporalisation’ as its constitutive elements.

*Debord, Time and Spectacle* stands out for the unusual manner in which Debord is examined specifically as a part of the tradition of Hegelian Marxism. Yet this also remains an emphatically French Debord, in a fashion which minimises his work as a diagnostician of modern capitalist society by upholding an affirmative conception of historical praxis and deriding the spectacle for failing to live up to that possibility. Despite the limitations of centring a reading of the spec-

tacle on time and history, Bunyard certainly succeeds where this approach serves to develop ‘a holistic reading of Debord’s oeuvre.’ Nonetheless, at a moment when there is such an intense social need to excise ambiguity from a critical theory of society, the determinate mediations contained within the concept of modern spectacle ought to take some precedence over a generalised diagnosis of the deprivation of historical agency. The task therefore remains, one might say, to *Germanicise* Debord against the complaints he himself made about how the theoretical concepts of *The Society of the Spectacle*, ‘almost all of which have a German origin’, had been ‘quietly ignored’.

Eric-John Russell

## Symbolic glue

Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte, eds., *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilising Against Equality* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017). 302pp., £85.00 hb., £27.95 pb., 978 1 78348 999 2 hb., 978 1 78660 000 4 pb.

What fuels the success of authoritarian populism around the globe and how does the extreme right manage to hijack public debate? We know that ‘sex sells’, but we also need to learn how ‘gender’ turns the tables in this context, and *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe* is an excellent place to start. The editors, Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte, have gathered reports from thirteen countries following two conferences that took place in 2015 in Budapest and Brussels. Each of the thoroughly researched and accessibly written chapters discusses the discourses, strategies and organisational efforts of the anti-gender movement in one European state, including Russia, often cross-referencing the phenomenon in other places. Most authors have a background in sociology and are prominent scholars of gender studies.

The chapters reveal some local disparities. For instance, the involvement of the Catholic Church varies from great prominence in Italy and Poland to a mere background function in Spain. In Slovenia and Croatia, specific anti-gender parties were established; in France the topic helped boost the existing party on the extreme right, the Front National; while in Germany a newly founded right-wing party, the AfD,

benefited from spreading anti-gender resentment. Most findings, however, corroborate the diagnosis that we are dealing with a coherent and concerted phenomenon across Europe (and possibly beyond) which deserves its own name: ‘anti-genderism’. This movement took off from the discursive framing of ‘gender ideology’ by writers in close association with the Vatican in the late nineties, and peaked in campaigns across many countries in 2012 and 2013.

One of the many things we can learn from the book is that our enemies know us better than we know them. Of course there are a host of projections, lies, exaggerations and false accusations fueling anti-gender campaigns, but, in a certain way, they are about what they claim to be. They are not merely conservative or Christian, not even primarily anti-feminist or anti-LGBTQ (though in consequence they are), but they are about gender. The anti-gender movement opposes the progressive conclusions drawn from the fact that gender identities are historically variable, power-laden social roles and that ‘normality’ can claim moral authority no more than ‘nature’ can. As I argued in a previous issue of *Radical Philosophy*, anti-genderism is a very specific

type of defense mechanism, one that tries to stabilise corroded sexist and heteronormative ideology (see 'Anti-genderismus and right-wing hegemony', *Radical Philosophy* 198). In this respect, it is a reaction to left-wing success. Like European anti-semitism at the end of the nineteenth century, anti-genderism comes after (legal) emancipation. In effect, anti-genderism provides a leverage point from which to launch the counter-revolution to May '68 – something which is symbolised, in full historical irony, by the fact that one of the leading German anti-gender journalists, Bettina Röhl, is the daughter of the late Red Army Faction member Ulrike Meinhof.

What makes the anti-gender discourse so effective as a political force, and certainly far more effective than the left so far likes to admit – we want to fight fascists, not anti-genderists, after all – is how, from that focal point ('gender'), an entire conspiratorial web is spun. The term is left untranslated even in European languages in which an equivalent exists. Thus it sounds vague and foreign and can be more easily connected to vast agendas supposedly hiding behind it, tying it to all the hot topics of right-wing resentment in the following ways: Gender is designed to destroy families, because it denies that men and women are different and made for each other. Gender is designed to 'sexualise' children, because it is taught to them in schools in order to confuse them in their natural development. Gender is designed to abolish the national population, because people are stopped from procreating in 'natural' hereditary ways and then are replaced by immigrants. Gender is designed to curb freedom of speech, because whenever one criticises immigration, one is called a racist. Gender is designed to undermine national sovereignty, because it is imposed via EU policies; in fact, the entire EU has been taken over by the gender lobby.

So while, at its clear-sighted, reactionary core, anti-genderism really is about gender, in its obscurantist proliferation, anti-genderism allows resentful and nativist strata of the society to 'explain' all sorts of things which have no causal link to feminist theory, but arose from neoliberalism, urbanisation, shifting

forms of labour and foreign policy, in a way that fits a unified right-wing world-view. If 'gender', as almost all articles argue in reference to Eszter Kováts and Maari Põim, serves as symbolic glue, it is a very sticky one indeed. Moreover, as several chapters of this book – and a newer report on Serbia by Adriana Zaharijević – make clear, this 'glue' is deliberately produced and promoted by a few actors and right-wing think tanks, refuting the myth of anti-genderism as a spontaneous 'common sense' upheaval.

The reports in *Anti-Gender Campaigns* could go further in examining the exact link not just between anti-genderism and nationalism, but also the anti-immigration discourses, Islamophobia and racism entrenched in those nationalisms. Is anti-genderism one register, and xenophobia another, of current right-wing fervour? Or are they more intricately linked? Is anti-genderism a sort of dry run for the articulation of outright racist political formations? Anti-genderism produces its own 'witch hunts' against outspoken feminists and gender studies scholars by way of eliminatory rhetorics, but how does it also contribute to the given historical conjuncture in which migrants and people of colour are at highest risk of physical attacks and of a necropolitics?

Even if it doesn't answer all of these questions, Kuhar and Patternotte's anthology provides an encouraging methodological example as to how sociological research into pressing political issues can be conducted. In their sober, account-taking style, the essays provide maximum enlightenment. At the same time, they create the baffling result that this book would serve just as well as a manual for building anti-gender campaigns, or for building one's political career on no expertise except authoritarian anti-gender rhetorics. *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe* is neither a blazing ideology critique nor a manual for resistance. But asking for that might be getting ahead of things. The first step is to take the phenomenon of anti-genderism seriously and learn about its dynamics, as this book enables us to do.

**Eva von Redecker**