

KONSTANTINOS DOUMPENIDIS
The Fascist Virus
29 October - 15 November 2020

centrum
contemporary kultur berlin

visiting hours:
Thursday - Friday from 5 to 9pm,
Saturday & Sunday from 2 to 6pm
Reuterstr.7, 12053 Berlin

In one of his unpublished articles entitled *The Fascist Virus* (1934); Austro-Hungarian political economist and social philosopher Karl Polanyi refers to the contagion of fascism. Specifically, he refers to the targeting of the working class by fascist governments, and to the minorities they sought to exterminate. Polanyi identifies fascism as a virus that, during normal times, remains latent within capitalism. At times of systemic crisis, however, it becomes virulent.

By juxtaposing two hotly debated terms and with Polanyi's homonymous text as a starting point, Konstantinos Doumpenidis weaves an allegory on the pathology of contemporary societies and the rise of right-wing extremist voices within Europe. He examines phenomena of the past where ecology and the love of nature were utilized by the Ethnosocialists as a vehicle for the protection of the Land and for propagating an organic, unquestionable sense of belonging, through a movement known as Eco-fascism. Eco-fascists place the blame for climate change on population demographics. They ignore the intertwining relationship between capitalist profits and environmental devastation, presenting an extremist rhetoric with an emphasis on diminishing those who identify as marginalised and non-white, while at the same time redefining the subject away from climate protection (Klimaschutz) towards homeland protection (Heimatschutz).

At a highly turbulent time in Germany back in the 1930s, people turned to the far right. The country was plagued by hyperinflation and national humiliation after the defeat of World War I, and Adolf Hitler emerged as the one to punish those responsible and bring back to light the greatness of the "white Aryan race." Through their propaganda, the Nazis promoted esoterism and ecology, they talked about the importance of the whole (white German) man and about alternative therapies. During the COVID-19 pandemic, "New Agers" have been protesting against the use of masks and vaccines as means to eradicate the virus. In these demonstrations, members of neo-Nazi organizations find an opportunity to oppose the policies pursued by governments through supporting conspiracy scenarios, but also take a stance against humanity for the evil they cause on the planet.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been linked with awakening ecofascist ideologies in a sense that it advocates the protection of the environment over the loss of thousands of human lives. "We are the virus" statements assume that humanity and the planet are mutually exclusive. During the pandemic, various internet users appeared to be republishing misleading photos of clear water in the canals of Venice, likening the virus to the "Earth's vaccine". Contemplating on the evolution of Eco-fascism and its current manifestations, *The Fascist Virus* is a dystopian fairytale about a history that tends to repeat itself.

EXHIBITED WORKS//

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The Fascist Virus, 2020
video
5'39''

In the video entitled *The Fascist Virus*, Konstantinos Doumpenidis combines film material from Nazi Germany, commenting on the use of symbols and the occult in the 3rd Reich while linking it to footage from pagan and mystical practices of today. The goal of the Nazis was ecological consciousness as a reaction to the bourgeois way of life and urbanism, a "conservative ecological turn" with the aim of protecting the homeland and essentially preserving the race. For this reason, ancient ritual events, festivals and solstices were revived, while nature was honored as a goddess and nurturer.

Along the same lines, the revival of Völkisch settlements¹ as seen in the village of Jamel in North-Eastern Germany, and the farmers protests in the summer of 2020 where 324 tractors were used to form the outline of a red sword cutting a white plough², create some interesting connections between the past and present. The poem "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell" by William Blake is embedded in the video as a silent commentary. In many of his texts William Blake writes about the responsibility that humans bear towards environmental destruction. His writings have been associated with Deep Ecology and have often been appropriated by far-right circles.

Wheat and Pigs, 2020
In-situ installation
acrylics and epoxy resin on PVC, wood, grass, soil, leaves
variable dimensions

In *Wheat and Pigs*, Doumpenidis comments on how certain local foods embodied fascism while deepening the connection between farmers and the land in an attempt to achieve a sense of nationalist self-sufficiency away from multinational companies and international commerce. The connection of the soil with the defense of food creates a biological nation.

Technoscientific organisms as specially bred wheat and pigs became important elements in the institutionalization and expansion of fascist regimes. Only plants and animals conforming to the new national standards would be allowed to reproduce. Pigs that didn't efficiently convert German-grown potatoes into pork and lard were eliminated. It may be argued that thinking about the biological nation through food rather than through race projected a more acceptable version of fascism, ignoring its more violent aspects.

Konstantinos Doumpenidis (b. 1984, Xanthi, Greece) holds a Master's degree in Digital Arts from the Athens School of Fine Arts. His practice is multidisciplinary, stretching between video art, photography, sculpture, publications and social experimentation. Selected exhibitions: *When You Say We Belong To The Light We Belong To The Thunder*, Contemporary Art Museum of Estonia, Tallinn (2019); *L' Autre Europe Avec Jean*, in the context of the residency programme Emergency at Vevey, Switzerland (2018); *Island*, MEME Athens (2017); *Medphoto* Photography Festival, Rethymno, Greece (2017); 5th Thessaloniki Biennale of Contemporary Art (2015); *PhotoBiennale* Thessaloniki, Thessaloniki Museum of Photography (2014); *By necessity*, Athens Photo Festival (2013).

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¹ The Völkisch movement (German: Völkische Bewegung) was a German ethnic and nationalist movement which was active from the late 19th century through the Nazi era. Erected on the idea of "blood and soil", inspired by the one-body-metaphor (Volkskörper, literally "body of the people", "ethnic body") and the idea of naturally grown communities in unity, it was characterized by organicism, racialism, populism, agrarianism, romantic nationalism and—as a consequence of a growing exclusive and ethnic connotation—by antisemitism from the 1900s onward.

² the symbol of the *Landvolkbewegung*, a farmers' protest movement active in the state of Schleswig-Holstein from 1928 to 1933.