

FALL

An Exhibition by Svea Duwe and Fabien Zocco

A bird fell from the sky in Wrocław 2015, leaving behind only its snow-white wings: a trace of a life lived, of former flight, of a being, first alive, now dead. When Svea Duwe, at that time on a residency in the city, stumbled across the bird's remains – now pure signifier, pure sign – she captured the moment on film. The resulting photograph, entitled »Fall«, set in motion a thought process. This, in turn, gave rise to both a new body of work and an artistic dialogue with Fabien Zocco, who was just completing his residency in Wrocław as Duwe was commencing hers.

Things fall, people fall. They fall over, fall down, fall to pieces. They can fall flat or fall foul, fall under a spell or on deaf ears. They can fall through or by the wayside, fall toward or away; into, outside or beyond. When we fall, we leave all equilibrium behind us, we let go of ourselves, lose control, plunge headlong into an unknown place, an unsteady state, a realm which, for all the ecstasy it might hold, invariably has something – often much – to do with pain. Can we fall on purpose? Or is that a different thing altogether?

Falling, as Martin Heidegger would have it, is a movement – at once away from and towards – that we do not consciously initiate. It is a moment of disruption and turmoil, a turbulence that brings about a new orientation. In contrast to Christian theology, which revolves around humanity's first fall in the Garden of Eden, Heidegger relates this everyday dynamic less with human transgression than togetherness. Indeed, for him, it is the very condition of social existence. We have not, he argues, fallen from a purer and higher »primordial condition«. Rather, we have »fallen prey« to the »world«, which means »being absorbed in being-with-one-another« [*Sein und Zeit*, §38]. It is by falling, by letting go, that we move towards our fellow human beings, towards the »We«. Whether or not we forego our authenticity in the process is another question.

It is precisely this tension between falling per se and »falling prey« to the world that Svea Duwe and Fabien Zocco explore in their exhibition »Fall«, the most substantial and thought-provoking manifestation of their ongoing artistic dialogue to date. Both artists examine in depth the question of how we relate to one another, of how we posit our place in society and the cosmos. Both probe the boundaries between you and me, between self and other, us and them, here and there. Whereas Duwe works in the very material media of sculpture, installation and photography, Zocco is interested in the more immaterial traces of human activity to be found in cyberspace. He generates his video works from fragmentary images and texts. These he compiles from the Internet and other databases by means of algorithms.

Having studied history, literature and film prior to attending art school, Zocco has always approached his work with a fascination for the complex layers of knowledge by means of which we construct our sense of world. In the exhibited works, »From the Sky to the Earth«, »Survolt | Overflight« and »Fear of«, he pays particular attention to the mechanisms that increasingly construct that sense of world for us. Consider, for example, »From the Sky to the Earth«, a work in which Zocco connects the names of all the known stars in the cosmos to images of places with the same name, stored in the database of Google Earth. Here the poetry of the celestial names collides with the prosaic and distorted images of places across the world, many of them suburban. Does this collision, one might ask, somehow raise the status of the places, lifting them up in the direction of their celestial aspirations? Or does it not pull the stars out of the sky, making them fall down to the

bland new world proudly brought to us by Google? Maybe both, maybe neither. Perhaps the collision instead opens up a new imaginary, more poetic place somewhere in between up there and down here.

The difficulty of orienting oneself in times of, at best, hazy horizons is also a key concern for Duwe, whose works frequently return to sign systems either dysfunctional or obsolete. Whether we consider her almost sculptural series of black-and-white photographs, »Turn«, in which necks without heads »look« towards or away from something or one another, or her sculpture »Follow Nowherehorizon«, in which a signpost becomes a barricade or a barricade a signpost, there is no avoiding the uncanny sense that we have lost our heads and our way. A sense of future, as her installation »Zukunftsruinen« so evocatively signals, is a thing of the past. Like the disparate group of figures it assembles, a kind of bedraggled salute to the techno-utopian visions of the twentieth century, Duwe's works consistently raise the question of what happens after the fall. They make palpable our paralysis, our procrastination, our futile turning to the left and the right for want of a better idea.

Falling is clearly a condition of existence and of the social. It causes seemingly unbridgeable divisions between »us«, however we construct it, and those who make up our world. And yet, if we think about it, falling is also what brings us together. Both Svea Duwe and Fabien Zocco offer us manifold insights into the processes underlying falling, into the directions and ways in which we tumble, for better or for worse. The vital question is, can we fall better? Can we, to return to Heidegger's terminology, be somehow more humane in the way we »fall prey to the world«?

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