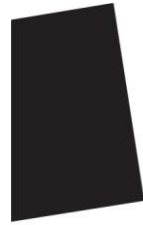


Marjolijn Dijkman: COMMA 02

Essay



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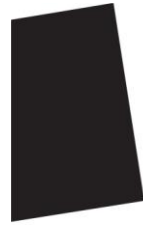
Marjolijn Dijkman: COMMA 02

*“Where can I find you?”
“On the M40.”*

The question is an ordinary one for people who need to meet. The reply, specifying the full 100 miles of this English motorway, is both possible and improbable. Traffic, often stationary, sometimes running at up to 100 miles per hour, can be found at all hours, in both directions, along the length of this military/economic corridor. Using these roads requires a strange order of vigilance, lots of ‘watchfulness’, some ‘looking’ and the maximum amount of ‘seeing’. My job, as a driver, is to remember the recent past, usually reversed in a mirror, and keep my foresight in peak condition. I am an interpreter, of course, because I have to translate everything around me, imagining the intentions of others and speculating what to prioritise. It is intensely collaborative because those other people are interpreting my actions. We are all picking our way through the same terrain, fractions of a second apart. We want to keep the eventualities to a minimum, but we don’t want to be bored.

How we achieve this is a very long way from the codes and protocols laid out by government. The wonder is that so many people can be in a state of simultaneous reverie in such precarious circumstances. The alignment of this highway coincides with some remarkable air traffic patterns. At the right time of day you can see the dawn run with planes backed up for arrival or, better still at dusk, their headlights imitating the traffic below, but stretched out across tens of miles, high above. No matter how fast I’m travelling, the sensation of being grounded, of tyre to tarmac, is overwhelming. The conundrum is trying to locate those planes in space, to rehearse where they may have come from and where they might be going.

On the M40 (known to the European Union as the northernmost extension of the E05, a route which starts out from the edge of Africa) there is one curvilinear spot where all six lanes negotiate a hillside. Up above planes are often corralled in a holding pattern (beautiful to witness because of the utter wastefulness) and I too have often circled here, playing the impotent passenger. Going round and round offers us the chance to spy out the landscape down below and nominate different elements, re-attaching them to our earthly knowledge. It seems that we are unable to do the reverse, although I have always suspected that birds have this spatial facility.



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The common vanity of artists is that they believe they choose what to look at. The great pleasure of spending time with artists is a feeling that you could be travelling on the same road, fitted with a visor, which encourages you to see things a little bit the way they do. This may be literal or metaphorical, or both. One companion of mine only sees colour. After a few minutes I too begin to see relationships which I would habitually file somewhere else in my mental warehouse. I am unable not to see materiality, weight, density and temperature before all else. Only then can I approach the colour question. I am also drawn to ideas of provenance, where things have come from, how they got there and what will become of them.

These little differences, and how to sort them, make for marvellous frictions. They can cause magnificent enmity as much as they can foster firm loyalties. Watching others struggle with their encyclopaedias of encounter is a passing pleasure in the company of artists. What is it about our disposition which makes one person sort something one way, and another the other? What do we need to find out? Do we prefer to wonder? Are there conclusions to draw? Is there a magical laboratory somewhere in which we could all agree? Are we that agreeable?

There are several sites of reverie which are companions to the spaces of modern travel, other kinds of tele-porting where we seem to sort the world in a special way. The gaze of the person engrossed in a telephone call is like no other, where the world before their eyes becomes theatrical or cinematic. There are also the odd synchronicities when broadcasting and its various emissions coincide with the dumb circumstances of being modern. Amongst it all are the fabulous misapprehensions where sound, vision and space slither into one single soufflé.

At home, the little comforts of recognition which reassure us are attached to our essential privacy. Last week I went to answer my mobile phone but realised that I had been duped. In the background the television was on, and I could discern some sort of interview with a member of the Taliban. He answered his Nokia promptly. It has the same ring tone as mine.

Richard Wentworth