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### Argo Navis: A Drifting Circumambulation

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ARGO NAVIS: A DRIFTING CIRCUMAMBULATION

By

KYLE D. LEMSTROM

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SYNTHESIS\*

MASTER OF ARTS

CRITICAL AND CREATIVE THINKING

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS BOSTON

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Advisor: Robert Ricketts

\* The Synthesis can take a variety of forms, from a position paper to curriculum or professional development workshop to an original contribution in the creative arts or writing. The expectation is that students use their Synthesis to show how they have integrated knowledge, tools, experience, and support gained in the program so as to prepare themselves to be constructive, reflective agents of change in work, education, social movements, science, creative arts, or other endeavors.

## Navis

The Union Astronomiqué Internationalé in 1930 ratified the dissolution of Argo Navis, ghost ship of Jason and the Argonauts. Finally, and forevermore, the constellation was torn asunder—torpedoed as it were. Dating from at least Greek antiquity and considered unwieldy since the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, the mythic ship had slowly and officially fallen out of favor. The subsequent flotsam—the keel, the stern, and the sails—live each as constellations in their own right: Carina, Puppis, and Vela, respectively.

With “829 naked-eye components,” Argo Navis (Figure 1) encompassed a dense array of stars (Allen, 1963, p. 64). An area so vast and stars in such abundance, the ship was variously depicted as disappearing into the fog, passing between rocks, obscured by foliage, somehow invariably lacking a prow. Equally curious, the ship appeared to move “backwards on the white waters of the Milky Way” (Massey, 1907, p. 362). It is a seemingly arbitrary assemblage. The same holds for constellations

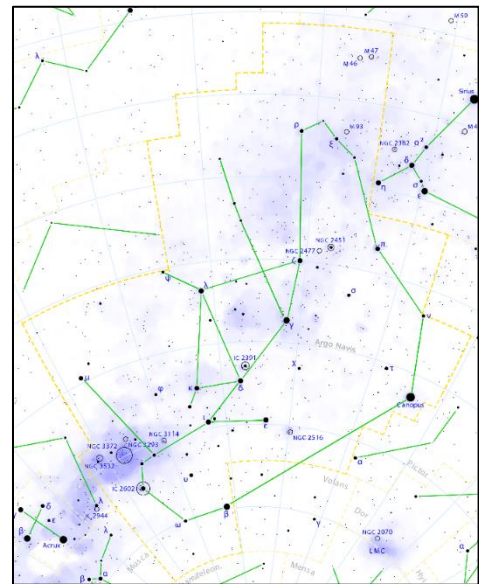


Figure 1. Celestial map of Argo Navis (Bronger, 2000).

generally; they are devices of their times and their makers. Keeping this in mind—and taking liberties in parallel with those the ancients allowed themselves—I’d argue that Argo Navis resembles not only a ship as intended (Figure 2) but also a distorted, simplified contour of the United States. By juxtaposing the two maps (constellation and country), an odd, circuitous route is revealed (Figure 3)...one that would be a proper folly to pursue.

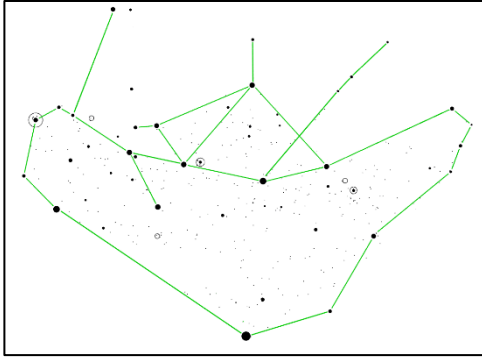


Figure 2. Argo Navis isolated. Adapted from Figure 1.

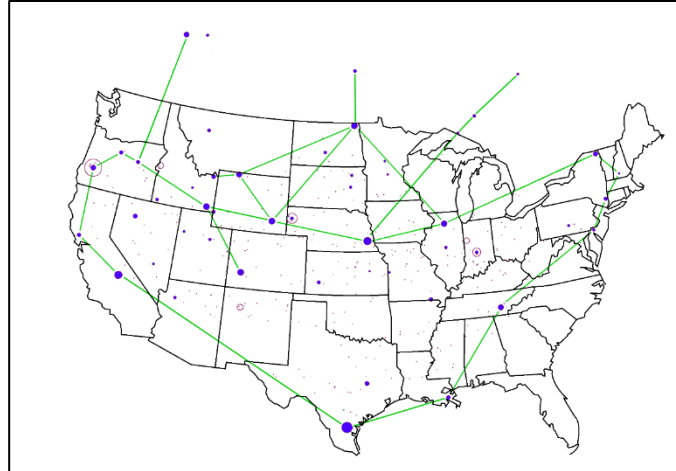


Figure 3. Argo Navis as a map of the United States. Adapted from Figures 1 & 2.

By navigating this route as a device for artistic intervention, each star, component, or asterism suggests a location for future action. As a knowingly quixotic venture, then, a few points would demand clarification: How does this, the representation of a seafaring vessel and its legendary voyage, serve as legitimate inspiration for a halting overland journey? Why navigate by constellation (and this one in particular)? What then might I discover through such odd peregrinations? What is the goal?

Fabled as the “first ship,” and led by Jason, the Argo Navis’ goal was singled-minded: to retrieve the Golden Fleece (Gillingham, 2018, p.52).

Jason: “The people need more than a leader. They must believe the gods have not deserted them. They need a miracle.”

Pelias: “And where will you find this miracle?”

Jason: “I have heard there is a tree at the end of the world with a fleece of gold hanging in its branches.”

Pelias: “I have heard this too. So have many men. They say it is a gift of the gods.”

Jason: “It has the power to heal, bring peace, and rid the land of plague and famine. If I could find this prize and bring it home..., then it would inspire the people, wipe out the years of misrule. They would know the gods have not abandoned them. My land would be rich and strong again....

Only the strongest ship ever built will survive [the] voyage” (Schneer, 1963).

It’s an ancient story with numerous versions. In its most popular telling, the 1963 film *Jason and the Argonauts*, the eponymous hero is pitted against a wily uncle. Pelias is the misruler against whom Jason speaks, and who ultimately dupes him into his perilous quest. The above scene is the movie in a microcosm—comically earnest to the point of absurdity—which makes excellent fodder to return to, and for the journey I suggest.

By all accounts, Jason traveled to the “end of the world” to acquire the Fleece, battling giants and harpies, navigating the Clashing Rocks (Figure 4), subduing dragons and fire-breathing oxen. He braved Odysseus’s Sirens, and sired heedlessly, betraying his sworn lovers (including the sorceress Medea). The Argonauts’ encounter



Figure 4. Triton parts the Clashing Rocks. In *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963). Screenshot by author.

with the Clashing Rocks might account for the constellation Argo’s lack of a prow (it’s also one of the most divinely self-deluded moments of the film). On the other hand, it may be attributed simply to the passage of time: abandoned and falling into disrepair after its successful maiden voyage, the ship ultimately collapsed and killed Jason as he slept under its rotting stern. Dante subsequently consigned Jason to the Eighth Circle of Hell, where panderers and seducers, who

“deliberately exploited the passions of others and so drove them to serve their own interests, are themselves driven and scourged” (Sayers, 1951, p. 185).

Traveling the States according to the abovementioned method will not easily yield a single-minded, coherent thing. Indeed, depending on the means of travel (by bicycle, for instance (Figure 5)), the journey is not dissimilar to a flagellation. We see that Jason—*our Hero*—is crushed, scourged, suffering his imperishable trauma, his ship both literally and figuratively in ruins. Is it my intention to win his absolution? Repair his ship? Relive the glory of his venture?



Figure 5. Writer Alfred Jarry on his cycle *Clément*. (1898).

This undertaking is not a work of astronomy, nor is it an act of heroism. It is an experiment, loosely connected to a former constellation and its mythology, but largely as a springboard for creative exploration. As a constellation, the presumed associations would seem quite clear: mine is a disparate practice, a constellation of ideas, for instance. (In this interpretation, the constellation is perhaps a unifying metaphor, through which I ascribe meaning.) Similarly, as a “former” constellation, Argo Navis yields additional metaphoric potential around failure, futility, “heroism,” new beginnings, and the like—but let’s leave off with the assumptions.

Bernar Venet reflected that “an artist should never have a sense of a work before they start to make it art. [They] have to be adventurous and just try, allowing [their] personality to take over” (Morgan, 2020). By this measure—attending to my above questions of inspiration, meaning, and pretense—I can easily claim creative license for undertaking a lurching wayward

journey, but what need is there of legitimacy? While I am inclined to produce work that withstands scrutiny, I'm not particularly interested in work that's broadly scrutable. I acknowledge that, in such obfuscation, I seem to flatter myself by insinuating subtext, nuance, and ambiguity. As Werner Herzog speculated during his lonely trek from Munich to Paris, "if I actually make it, no one will know what this journey means" (2015, p. 23). Supposing it is through travel my aim to arrive at something meaningful—to presume from the outset that I am privy to this meaning would betray a tautology. What I prize above all else is the potential for frivolity, for absurdity and the inane.

Mine is an irreligious journey. There is no sacred destination, no arrival—*no Fleece*. It circumambulates itself, spinning cheap yarns. I don't know what precisely motivates me, momentum, perhaps, or rather a fear of inertia (Is my absurdity reactive or reflexive?). This work is contingent upon certain factors, which appear disparate and unwieldy: risk, guilt, environment, art, etc. I acknowledge them as dominant (and societally influenced) themes in my habits of mind. With pilgrimage as its nexus, my intentions in the Argo project begin to suggest an either/or proposition. According to one notion, the work, through a grand physically embodied concept, seeks unity of practice—as one might crave a reunification of Carina, Puppis, and Vela in a single constellation. Alternately, embracing disunity (and polarity), the project in a centrifugal manner forces a reckoning with dissimilitude: Argo, the antiquated. I cannot predict what I will find through this exploration. I can only imagine that through circumambulation, my circular movement will engender a momentum that either draws the work to a unifying center or spins divergent themes off into distinct orbits.

Let's imagine, though, in the series of synthetic arrangements that follow, that there is a single cogent rationale for my venture. In this respect:

... Through navigation of the country, which rhetorically finds itself more divided than at any point since the Civil War, it is my heroic duty to find a lodestar for the United States' lapsed moral compass, for its general incoherence. In this respect, there is a presumed desire for "a coming together" à la the above stellar reunion.

*Or...*, On the contrary, this navigation is a harbinger of imminent and irreparable bifurcation. Mine is the momentum that welcomes the end, a death knell: the symbolic dissolution of the States.

*And/or...*, It is a vainglorious journey of self-discovery.

*And/or...*, It is a flagellation; a pilgrimage of penance that attempts to correct the myriad wrongs my existence has brought the world. It is a misguided act of rebalancing.

*And/or...*, It is an unraveling of the monomyth, a *Pierrot's Journey*.

*Yes, and...*, It is poesy—the whimsical folly of a rambling aesthete. It is presumptuous; it is boring; it is chaotic and contrived.

*Yes, and...*, It is a long, sensual forest bath.

*And, above all...*, It is a purge: the physical expression of a mind as it attempts to reconcile the complexity of contemporaneity through mushy (post-)Modernist tropes ("generated by a mind as empty as it was before it became one") (Cage, 1961, p. 15).

*Indeed...*, It is an exercise in absurdity, and nonetheless an interesting enough way to pass the time.



If I compare my practice to pilgrimage or to the sense of being lost, these are merely tools for framing my reflection. So too with Argo—it is a meaning-making device, both a catalyst and a cipher.

What I’m interested in, truly, is making stuff that helps me to be better at making other stuff, better at articulating ideas or feelings through an appropriate or necessary form—so, working in a series format, where the series encompasses all of the possible things that could be created by a mind engaged in creating things (ideas, works, ephemera). Like Montaigne, though, “I cannot keep my subject still. It goes along befuddled and staggering, with a natural drunkenness.... My history needs to be adapted to the moment” (Bakewell, 2011, p. 7). Trusting to the process requires that I embark on a land-bound celestial voyage, but here again, my metaphors are confused: *Is it star-charting? Is it sea-faring?* It is meaning-making, as through a colander of irregular holes.

## Journeys

### *Puppis*

But each journey requires a departure. In the case of Argo Navis, the “sensible” departure is along the path of Puppis, also known as the Poop Deck, which represents the highest deck of the ship, and looks down upon the helm. The Puppis journey (Figure 6), therefore, becomes the first foray into discovering if anyone is truly “at the helm”—and perhaps here to cull some meaning. (Maine in this

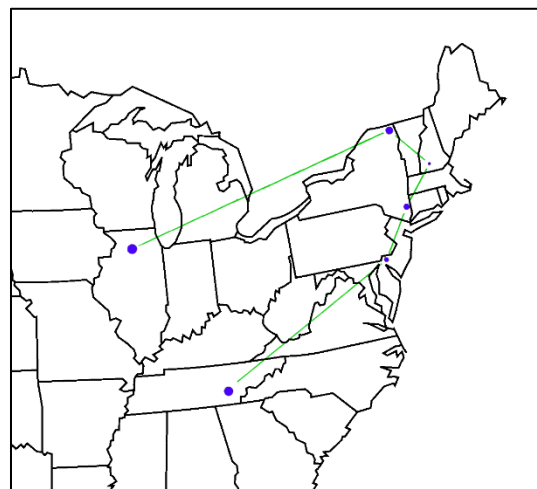


Figure 6. Puppis map of the northeastern United States. Adapted from Figure 3.

rendition arbitrarily becomes the figurehead, which in my finer moments I envision as bestowed with Hera's (Figure 7) role as patron and protector.) Here also is an opportunity to hone my aptitude for what Keats described as the "Negative Capability, that is, when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact...[and] remaining Content with half knowledge" (Buxton, 1952, p. 71).

So, maybe I am looking to relinquish authority—but only to the ascendancy of my emerging self, right? According to Hannah Arendt, "there is hardly a better way to avoid discussion than by releasing an argument from the control of the present and by saying that only the future will reveal its merits" (1994, p. 44). If hers was a critique of oppression, though, mine is perhaps better aligned with Sontag's "Against



Figure 7. Hera, figurehead of the Argo Navis. In *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963). Screenshot by author.

Interpretation." In this respect, my project attempts to "retrieve that innocence before all theory when art knew no need to justify itself, when one did not ask of a work of art what it said because one knew (or thought one knew) what it did" (2007, pp. 4-5). The former—Arendt on propaganda under a totalitarian regime—is meant to cancel action in the minds of the populace. My urge, then, works toward the opposite: Argo as a functional creative constraint, which forces distant connections in a newly and intentionally vacant mind. I am trying to cultivate a posture of knowing innocence.

Fia Backström's "Studies in Leadership (a family affair)" comes to mind, an exhibition in which the artist performed as one "without a vision...instead of fulfilling the anticipated autocratic role of the artist." Her creation of the show evolved through an exploration of "soft leadership." She offered little direction, and her equivocal and evasive posture subtly nudged the museum staff to determine for themselves the presentation of her work. Evading "responsibility" proved difficult for Backström, and feels oddly familiar in the context of my work: "I continue to tell pertinent stories, while managing not to tell...anything" (Liese, 2017, p. 212).

Perhaps the nearest analogy is in the relationship between travel and art: through adventurers like Robert Manry, who documented his Atlantic crossing; A.F. Tschiffley, on horseback from Buenos Aires to New York; or artists like Bas Jan Ader, Fabian Knecht and Guido van der Werve. Knecht in 2010 undertook an 8,000-mile journey from Germany to Russia called *Fred Spits in the Pacific*, ferrying spit on behalf of a terminally ill child. Van der Werve, "grieving over the fact that Chopin's heart was buried in Warsaw while the rest of his body lay 1,703 kilometers away, in Paris," retraced the distance in reverse—cycling, running, and swimming from Poland to Paris (Szántó, 2015, p. 19). Ader is best remembered for his ill-fated transatlantic crossing, yet the undertaking represents only a third of the intended cycle for his *In Search of the Miraculous*— "sadly we can only glimpse at the enormity of his feat because [he] failed" (Dean). Manry, in his papers, offered a starkly concise reflection on his own transatlantic:

"I had to concede that my voyage would benefit few persons other than myself, except insofar as it might, momentarily, lift some who heard of it out of the routine of their own lives, but it did give me a segment of existence that, God willing, I might fashion into

something nearer to a work of art than my life on land had been” (Dumbadze, 2015, p. 112).

Here, of course, an action becomes vested with meaning, becomes the “expression” that an audience (and practitioner) craves. Here one imagines a reprieve from inner judgment and societal trappings, a reprieve that stokes naïveté and invites happy accidents. But travel/art is still a known construct, and as such, becomes another known consideration—another “line” in the constellation.

Let’s return to the concept of pilgrimage—defined here as “a transformative journey to a sacred center”—, its strengths as a constraint, and as a frame for reflection (Cousineau, 1998, p. xxiii). My pilgrimage, “an irreligious journey,” pursues the sacred in that it seeks meaning and value; it is a mostly secular, if occasionally profane, thing. I’ll begin by using pilgrimage as a device for elaborating on those above “synthetic arrangements.” As an example: to deconstruct potential meanings of a statement like, “it is an unraveling of the monomyth, a *Pierrot’s Journey*.” Many of the above examples are masculine (Figure 8), heroic undertakings (sailing ventures; running; cycling), and mine—despite the tone—is intended as anything but (though one is dutiful always to reassess their position in the world). I do not operate from a sense of confidence or agency. I don’t claim the stance of antihero and do embrace my inborn traits as better attuned to the coward, the empath, the Pierrot-buffoon. I bring myself to this

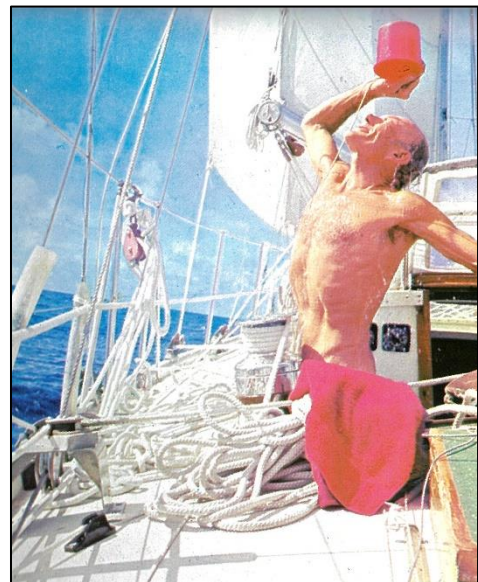


Figure 8. Sir Francis Chichester, hero, bathes (Chichester, 1968, pp. 62-63).

point, this journey, by force of will and against better judgment—because I would otherwise fail to act.

Elfriede Jelinek’s Nobel lecture explored her (and our) slippery relationship with language: “How do I ensure that all these words of mine say something, that could say something to us? I cannot do it by speaking. In fact I cannot even speak, because my language is unfortunately not at home just now” (2004). My relationship with art—if indeed it is distinct from language—is similarly fraught. It demands (acts of) faith, the surrender to risk, and comfort in ambiguity. In this respect, and for my purposes, the crux of Jelinek’s argument might be rephrased as “[*art*] knows what it wants. Good for it, because I don’t know, no not at all” (2004). This, then, is the faith and risk of my undertaking: that it is *what Art wants*.

“A pilgrimage thrusts the pilgrim out of one reality and into another, for the benefit of gaining new experiences and achieving a higher level of awareness” (Szántó, 2015, p. 117). Puppis, as the first leg of travel (and by definition a solo affair), functions as an experimental test case and, uniquely, an opportunity to reflect on imagined scenarios—“what Stephen Hawking calls ‘remembering the future’” (Cousineau, 1998, p. 68). The journeys that follow (Carina and Vela) will necessarily be imbued with a past (what is experienced and learned in Puppis), as opposed to my cultivated “knowing innocence” of the present. Each journey will engender and nurture a new set of practices. (A pilgrim arrives *home* but also arrives at the strong desire for human contact—crucially here in the form of collaboration). Indeed, the pilgrimage metaphor, and the need to individuate my practice, might ring hollow in those future undertakings. For now, though, the concept suits my meandering search, my desire to move from below the thumb of some unseen or misapprehended authority.

“Religious historian Huston Smith finds four aspects to pilgrimage: singleness of purpose; freedom from distraction; ordeal or penance; and offerings” (Cousineau, 1998, p. 107). As component features, each also alludes to a practice, be it religious or otherwise: separation, isolation, focused and attentive silence, ritual acts, and the like. Similarly, these aspects appeal to notions of hierarchy and power, an above and below, and perhaps a desire for absolution, as from shame or guilt. The artist Andrea Zittel has talked about “wanting to come up with some sort of solution to either eliminate or reconcile the sources of [her] shame,” in a manner that has been referred to as “‘shame-based’ living” (2002, p. 5). If shame is not the singular driving force in my work, it is undoubtedly one facet among the many that feed my urge for something akin to Zittel’s reconciliation, the pilgrim’s absolution—or what I’d generally refer to as “purge.”

I am prepared to relinquish authority; I search for a vehicle through which to purge; I crave silence and solitude; I am eager for the incantatory (and likely humorous) rhythm of self-ritualized acts. At what course of action have I arrived?

My peculiar solution is to take a big bike ride in the shape of an ancient constellation.

My practices—my imagined rituals—flow from the stagnant pool of influences that stew in my anxiety- and arts-addled brain, from all the years of reading and looking and trying to create. “Art is not difficult because it wishes to be difficult, but because it wishes to be art. However much the [artist] might long to be, in his work, simple, honest, and straightforward, these virtues are no longer available to him” (Barthelme, 1985, p. 174). My desire for a good purge is for one that figuratively leaks from the ear: *On to new beginnings! I’ve had it with all this drive!*

So, the purge will take the form that it must, will evolve as it must—will require sacrifice and focus in order to achieve some manner of sustained meditative state. My general inclinations swing wildly from the dumb and indulgent to the willfully ascetic. I here attempt to integrate the two: vapidness with purpose; true faith in blind luck; immersion in an avid-torpid-vigilance. The habits and practices of my “pilgrimage” are unforeseen; by “remembering the future,” I imagine them as such:

### **Aspect: Singleness of Purpose**

#### *Divining Lines*

A paint can is twice pierced through its curved surface, one hole opposite the other, and rolled down a street or hill. The passage is selected for its semblance to the direction of future travel—the guiding lines of the constellation. As the can rolls, it spews paint as along an irregular, dotted line. Divining these lines, as one would read tea leaves, reveals to the traveler the halting or uncertain nature of the path ahead.

The ritual is repeated upon departure from each stellar coordinate. With every subsequent line, the traveler, unable to apprehend greater insight, imagines inscrutably deepening meaning.

#### *Logbooks for Cosmic Integration*

“And there’s nothing like going to sea, for getting rid of all the poisons, you know.”

—Donald Crowhurst (Tomalin & Hall, 1979, p. 234)

A traveler embarks carrying two logbooks: In the first, he dutifully reports atmospheric conditions, cloud patterns, miles traveled, interventions as undertaken, caloric intake, daily reflections, etc. The second—to an uninformed audience, indistinguishable from an authentic document—is a masterful exercise in falsity. No fabrication is too great, provided it feeds his sense of virtuosity and ensures his heroic legacy; the need to triumph over mediocrity and anonymity is paramount.

One logbook or the other carries a vague watermark or tea stain resembling a soldering iron balanced on a can of powdered milk on an empty boat in a calm sea. There is perhaps a sophisticated message to be deciphered.

### *Stakhanovitic Pataphysics*

For lack of navigational skill, a traveler is forced occasionally to climb a tree—the tallest in the vicinity. The tree becomes essential,

- 1) Embodying an act of discovery: From on high, the traveler is better able to ascertain his locale.
- 2) For rumination: The climb, as a microcosm of the voyage, narrows focus and instills a rhythm suitable for reflection.
- 3) For sustenance: Travel, like tree climbing, is physically demanding, and nourishment is essential. The traveler carries with him a heap of easily transportable fruits. He eats and climbs, eats and descends.



- 4) As a landmark: All this food produces scraps (primarily banana peels, as bananas are healthy, delicious, and arrive prepackaged). The traveler “paints” his tree with castoff banana peels, creating a giant yellow map pin.
- 5) As an offering: Bananas and their offal make for a wonderfully loamy humus. Odd bits are likely to fall; the tree is thus richly rewarded for her beneficence.

### Aspect: Freedom from Distraction

#### *Folly Drawings*

“Gide was reading Bossuet while going down the Congo.”

— Roland Barthes (1972, p. 29)

A traveler draws labyrinths (Figure 9) while cycling the United States. Between handlebars, the bike has been outfitted with a makeshift detachable easel. The easel accommodates small sheets, each waxed against the elements. Starting from a grid, the page is alternately scored or drawn upon, preparing the surface.

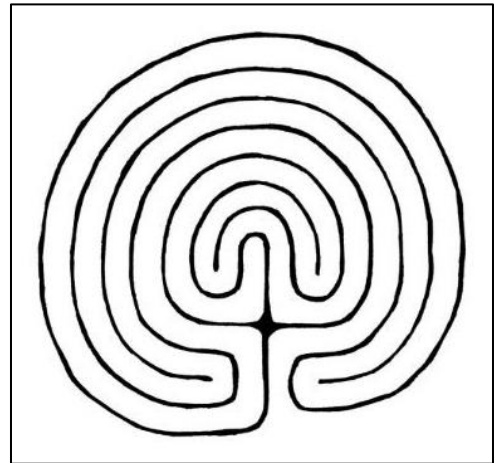


Figure 9. A classical labyrinth (Borges, 1993).

A blockhead Erasmus, this traveler carries a mortar and pestle. In the evening, the day’s ride complete, a sheet is washed with a mixture of local materials—ashes often, from the evening’s spent kindling.

***AN-Ultra***

Mindful always of nutritive sustenance (and girding himself against the unexpected), a traveler prepares his *élan vital* in the form of gelatinous cubes—a preserved and moveable corrective—a recipe for happier accidents.

***Using:***

- 1 pound frozen fruit
- 1 cup pitted dates, packed ( $\approx$  2 dozen)
- 1 cup rice flour or cornstarch
- 1 cup milled chia seeds

The ingredients—boiled, pureed, and poured over a blotter paper crust (as a tart would employ pastry)—are baked and divided into 28 servings, providing the traveler a minimum of two week’s supplement propulsion. A portion of the crust,  $1/28^{\text{th}}$  of the total, is discreetly enhanced with 250  $\mu\text{g}$  lysergic acid diethylamide. The traveler, in his supreme hypervigilance, cannot but be caught unawares.

**Aspect: Ordeal or Penance*****Fluvial Barratry***

Like an ambulance chaser, the traveler is ever on the lookout for flash floods, “scanning the dial” for word of an impending deluge. His particular tools are ready-to-hand: a folding aluminum lawn chair on his back, a series of hats (finally settling on a Stetson), and a book or two (Leonardi & Stagi’s *The Architecture of Trees*; *Little Nemo in*

*Slumberland; Tomkins's The Afternoon Interviews; Werner's Nomenclature of Colours; etc.).*

Leaned back, legs crossed, reading his stories, seated midstream and perpendicular to the current, he greedily awaits the torrent, which will concuss and sweep him away.

### ***Qaphqa Dossiers***

A traveler builds a compendium of slights and mistakes, offenses and betrayals, amassing the definitive opposition study of himself.

The compiled documents are published anonymously and distributed at-random and on a whim along the route of his travel: hidden in a tree hollow; stuffed into cracks of an aqueduct; thrown from a height; tucked under a windshield wiper; sandwiched between slate at the bottom of a creek; slipped into a public library book; dropped in a urinal; etc.

### **Aspect: Offerings**

#### ***Dedicated Wilderness Areas***

*Connecticut, Delaware, Iowa, Kansas, Maryland, Rhode Island*

Through “soft” activism, a traveler engages in acts of seizure akin to citizen’s arrest, “dedicating” wilderness areas that have yet to be designated for protection through

Acts of Congress. It is a method decidedly dissimilar to those of the National Wilderness Preservation System.

The traveler creates liminal barriers, walking circles around the site until a Longian and transitory zone of protection asserts itself. The host remains unassailable, and guests are henceforth beguiled to an inexplicable reverence for the land.

### ***Reflecting Pool***

In a sunny hour of a summer day, a traveler pampers Walden Pond (that she may retain her “native freshness and delicacy”)—depositing nominal quantities of copper (dropping pennies), aerating manually (blowing through a straw)—reducing the algae and thereby enhancing the reflective quality at the surface by a magnitude of *negligible* parts per *multitude* (Torrey, 1905, p. 11). Furthermore, and by main strength, the traveler willfully clears portions of the pond of fallen leaves, limbs, and various accumulated dreck.

If given to swimming, the traveler is mindful always to float, lest they stir loose a stray silt, lichen, or treasure.

## **Journeys**

### ***Carina & Vela***

With Puppis as my “first foray,” what remains in Argo Navis is somewhere in the range of 3500-5000 miles—this, to say nothing of time, planning, various resources, support mechanisms, future “practices,” and the like. The shift in focus (geographically- and cosmically-

speaking) will also signal a change of tone and temperament: Carina and Vela, whether approached individually or as a unit, will arrive as the younger siblings of an experienced elder. (Unless, of course, Puppis ends in Chicago or thereabouts, and I simply continue west via Vela, in which case there's a metaphoric shift, duly noted and soon forgotten.) (Unless, of course, this is all a yarn after all, in which case Puppis is a dream, Vela is a dream, Carina is a dream, and we're forever landlocked.)

More to the point, we've perhaps been misled that the goal here is to move forward, ever forward in search of heightened awareness, more precise meaning, new modes of expression. Maybe the "purge" was an opportunity not only to throw off an "unseen or misapprehended authority" but also to move beyond my desire for total control—of my environment, of my practice—, out of the singular "hero's" quest and forward into co-creation and collaborative experimentation. (The message here is not necessarily that there's something to learn from my journey, but if there is, it's that people matter—I am informed by, indebted to, and rely upon other creators.) Maybe though, it was merely an extended slipping of the traces. In the year or two before taking his own life, the artist Jack Goldstein reflected on Bas Jan Ader's presumed death at sea:

"The difference between him and me is that I wouldn't have to take that...trip; a flyer would have been enough. He came out of a time when the artist had to be involved with making a piece; he physically had to make the journey, while I would have treated it as pure theater, so a publication would have been enough" (Hertz, 2003, p. 23).

*Thanks, Jack.*

**Argo**

Due in part to the precession of the equinoxes—the gradual shift in the orientation of Earth’s axis of rotation in a cycle of approximately 25,772 years—the constellation Argo Navis has experienced a drift since Classical times (Hohenkerk et al., 1992, p. 99). This perspective shift means that fewer stars are now visible and that some are farther south. The shift has been scientific as well as cultural: the surfeit of visible stars remains cumbersome; the myth is antiquated. We’re thus bereft even before considering the terrestrial nature of constellations, which is to say, a vertical move from Earth’s surface obliterates orientation and cancels known celestial navigation. Stars exist in three dimensions; constellations only in two. With the benefit of hindsight, Argo is found wanting. A “10,000-foot view,” and it loses all meaning. Dead reckoning, indeed.

What then does this mean for Argo-as-metaphor, as meaning-making-device? Was it doomed always as the forward-looking and backward-longing work of an armchair artist?

It’s not my place to decide.

“Do I contradict myself?

Very well then I contradict myself,

(~~I am large, I contain multitudes.~~)”

—Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself* (1892).

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