

# ART LIES

A Contemporary Art Quarterly

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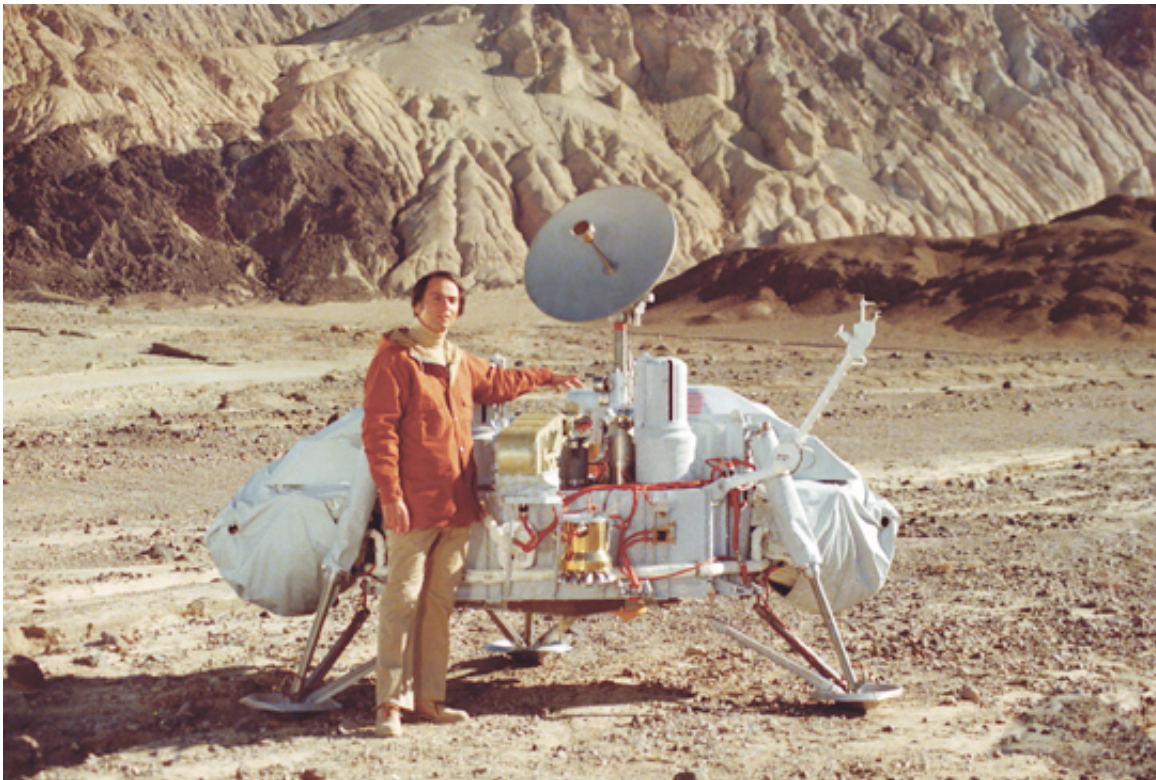
## Issue 61

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## Interrupting the Imaginary

### Inside the Ship of My Imagination

- Zoe Crosher -

Driving through the Arizona night sky. Driving through Arizona, looking up at the night sky. There are certain places known for their darkness, a quantitative way of describing visibility of the heavens from the ground: a term I've forgotten (illuminance?) but that I know describes where I am now, in almost pitch-blackness, going too fast on a lost road, observatory-hopping. There's Braeside in Flagstaff, run by someone whose email call name is Captain, and the Lowell observatories in Flagstaff where I already have been, impatiently waiting in line to see Jupiter this past summer, loving that there could be public activities

running so late into the night. Wandering up the hill, bumping into all sorts of bodies, all wanting to look at the much bigger bodies in the sky. Inside the dated observatory, there are culturally sensitive maps and fifth-grade explanations for the “cosmos,” a term Carl Sagan used to describe a sense of order for nature, mathematics—things that move, pulse, are born and die in intense quasar metronome bursts, coming to us in light years—a measure of how far away these celestial bodies really are. I’m looking at something that may not exist anymore, that has traveled twenty-six years (remember the opening credits in *Contact*?) because it’s twenty-six light years away. There is a promise in the unchanging alignments overhead, the unwavering constancy of the observable and measurable night sky...and all I want to do is be present and watching when that blue giant does explode and suddenly the constant and reliable blip I’m so used to looking at in the darkness is no longer there. I want the imaginary to be interrupted.

### **Stargazing tip for December 19**

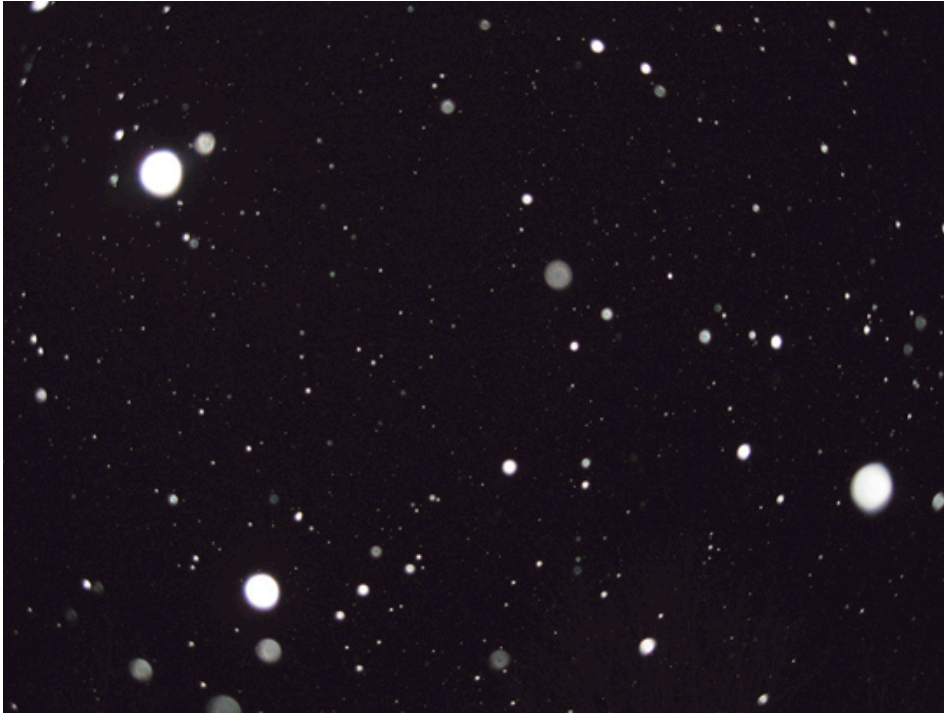
Keep your eyes open for an occasional “shooting star” tonight, because Earth will punch through a cloud of comet dust. The dust will create the Ursid meteor shower, which most years is unremarkable. Rarely, though, it puts on an impressive show.

Sandy Wood’s voice is dreamy, like a murmur, and exactly how space is supposed to sound. Going seventy-five mph through the Flagstaff desert drugs me even more, and I am in her trance, her two-minute *StarDate* cooings about Ursid tapping every emotional response in me that I want all the promise of the universe to be true. She’s incredibly good at lulling her audience of space enthusiasts into believing whatever she says—a smart move on the McDonald Observatory’s part, located in the Davis Mountains of West Texas, which I know from listening to the program over and over again. Her silky voice—whispering—making actual science into a populist, understandable science takes science fiction into the realm of hard science.

StarDate announcer Sandy Wood of San Antonio will be honored this Thursday, August 31, for fifteen years as presenter of the long-running astronomy radio feature. Texas Public Radio is sponsoring the event, called “Hands on the Night Sky,” for members of its radio stations. (The event is not open to the public.)

Along with waiting in intense anticipation for the *StarDate* jingle on 89.3 KPCC, I’ve been decadently consuming Carl Sagan’s TV miniseries from the eighties called, simply, *Cosmos*. A brilliant, thirteen-part show taking place primarily in a dandelion puff of a spaceship that jumps around both time and space and is called “our spaceship of the imagination,” the narrator is always and without fail dressed in a red hooded jacket and tan sweater (with patches on the elbows), reigning over a world outfitted with bizarrely edited jump cuts, amazing reenactments (filmed on location in European town settings, abandoned and ancient Indian structures and through various telescopes, like at the Griffith Observatory in Hollywood), complete with a soundtrack option, available only on DVD.

I have been thoroughly Sandy Wood-ed and Carl Sagan-ed. If I could I would be one or both of them in my second act, my truer inclination leaning more towards Sandy, breathy and on the air. In the furthest reaches of my fantasy, maybe she and Carl would have a love affair, sometime in the mid eighties after a lecture he gave at the University of Texas at Austin. She’s new and getting her feet wet with this whole space thing, chatting with Carl in a voice like molasses about seeking harmony in the cosmos, the impulse to see, to know. As Sandy says, “A voice talent does a lot of work that can be meaningless. To do something that has real weight and substance is really rewarding.” I couldn’t agree more.



Zoe Croser, Snow falling in Michigan

Other lists of things I would be able to do and watch out for if I were either Sandy Wood or Carl Sagan\* (in no particular order):

\*(Excerpted from “Baloney Detection Kit—Warning signs that suggest deception.” Prepared by Michael Paine, The Planetary Society Australian Volunteer Coordinators. Based on the book by Carl Sagan, *The Demon Haunted World*. The following are suggested as tools for testing arguments and detecting fallacious or fraudulent arguments. Also excerpts from Sandy Wood’s CV.)

30+ years experience in a very versatile career - from Smoothe & Clear to zany characterizations to non-fiction type narrations.

Suppressed evidence or half-truths.

Try not to get overly attached to a hypothesis just because it’s yours.

Quantify, wherever possible.

If there is a chain of argument every link in the chain must work.

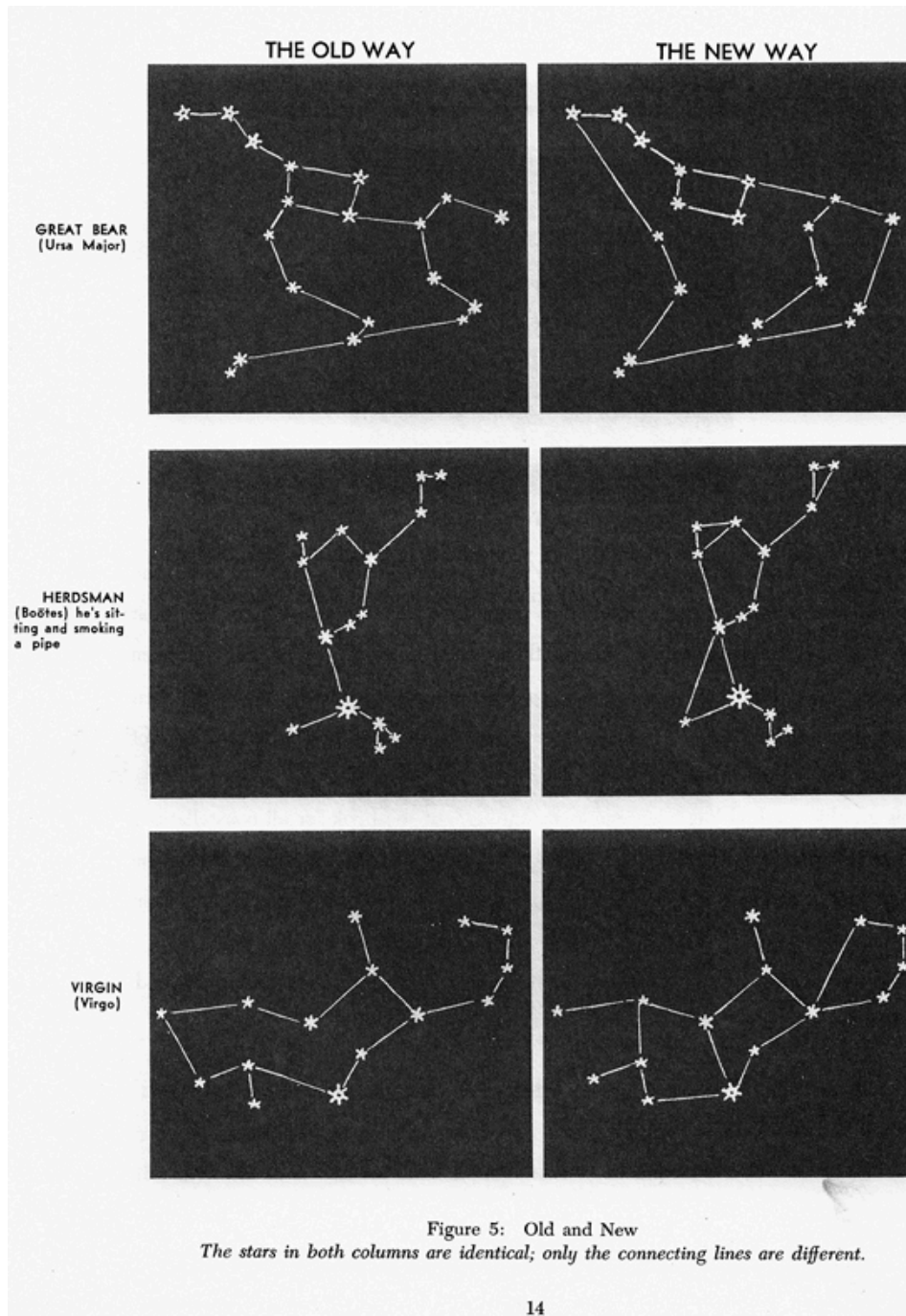
Accents

British, French, Spanish, lots of characters!

Ad hominem—attacking the arguer and not the argument.

There is more stargazing to be found in the studio of Los Angeles-based artist Siri Kaur, describing the elbowing aside of fellow space amateurs to perfectly render her Pleiades and Veil Nebula. The root for the word amateur is *amor*, to love. She, and her fellow amateur astronomers, have been using photography for its (and sciences’?) original intention—to make visible what is normally invisible—to show what cannot be seen. Her stunningly beautiful light-sensitive photographs of the night skies look like front-page images

from issues of *StarDate* magazine (Sandy’s voice like honey in the background) or the shots of snow I took last night in Michigan. They beg questions of the amateur and the professional, the individually printed and the mass-produced, the arts and the sciences, Sandy and Carl, the real and the imaginary.



More things I would be able to do and consider if I were either Sandy or Carl\*:

Common fallacies of logic and rhetoric

I Offer my Services for these Recording Purposes

Argument from “authority”

Observational selection (counting the hits and forgetting the misses)

Language(s) of Which I Am a Native Speaker:  
English - North American

Non sequitur—”it does not follow”—the logic falls down

Voice Genders and “Ages” I Can Perform  
Middle-Age Female  
Senior Female

Meaningless question (What happens when an irresistible force meets an immovable object?)

Confusion of correlation and causation

Wait.  
Don't I do this already?

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