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## To be, or to be autonauts

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Julio Cortázar and Carol Dunlop parody the travel book and reinvent the road story

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**REVIEW** Certain travelogues can be likened to love letters to a destination, though rarely does actual romance play a part in their construction. But when acclaimed postmodern Argentine author Julio Cortázar took to the road with his third wife, Carol Dunlop, it was a journey precipitated by mutual fondness as much as a desire for discovery.

In *Autonauts of the Cosmoroute* (Archipelago Books, 354 pages, \$20) an author best known for his nonsequential opus *Hopscotch* and collections of surreal short stories approaches the task of travel with the same whimsy and contradiction that characterize his literary oeuvre. Setting out on a pseudoscientific expedition to map the freeway between Paris and Marseilles, a distance of approximately 500 miles, Cortázar (nicknamed El Lobo) and the Canadian Dunlop (La Osita) spend a full 33 days en route, confining themselves to two rest stops per day.

Diligently recording their every meal, the time and temperature, and the specifics of local flora and fauna, the two intrepids further intersperse their daily log reports with expository musings on the nature of games, perception, and existence; fictitious letters from a fellow freeway traveler; and sweetly sincere tributes to their May-December romance. From Dunlop: "This genus of wolf is capable of the worst insanities, which are usually the most beautiful." From Cortázar: "My new day, my reason to live a new day."

Whether perused as an exploration of the external world or a map to an interior one, Anne McLean's translation of *Autonauts of the Cosmoroute* compels the reader to examine the minutiae of the mundane with the microscope of wonderment. Reveling in inconsistency, El Lobo and La Osita aim not to simply bridge distances but to illuminate them. Their unique approach is perhaps best espoused by Cortázar, who apocryphally quotes another, unnamed metaphysician: "When you concentrate your attention in that gap, in the void between two objects ... then at that one moment, you see reality."

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