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# THE RUBY SLIPPERS ACROSS TIME, SPACE, AND MEDIA

ELENA SIEMENS

**Abstract** | This article discusses representations of Dorothy's magical shoes in diverse media—from the original text by L. Frank Baum (1900) to classic MGM film (1939) to Vogue's 2005 fashion shoot by Annie Leibovitz. According to Salman Rushdie, "the real secret of the ruby slippers is not that 'there's no place like home', but rather that there is no longer any such place as home." Canadian designer John Fluevog shares this point of view, as exemplified most prominently by *The Cosmos: Meteor shoes* (2016), which celebrate the road as the destination itself. I compare Fluevog to Gucci's flamboyant *Star Trek-inspired* campaign *GucciandBeyond* (2017), as well as the Gucci's more recent *Utopian Fantasy* campaign (2018). The essay cites, among others, Alain de Botton and Andy Warhol, both professing their fascination with air travel. Additional critical sources include Dick Hebdige's pioneering work on style subcultures, and MOMA's recent volume on *Fashion Is*. The essay's concluding sections discuss commercial appropriation of fashion, as well as fashion's open-ended definition.



Elena Siemens, *Fluevog Vancouver* (2016)

**Résumé** | Cet article discute des représentations des souliers magiques de Dorothée à travers divers médias—depuis le texte original de L. Frank Baum (1900), en passant par le film classique de MGM (1939), jusqu'à la série de photos d'Annie Leibovitz dans *Vogue* en 2005. Selon Salman Rushdie, "le vrai secret des chaussures rouges n'est pas que 'there's no place like home' mais plutôt que le 'home' n'existe plus." Le dessinateur de mode canadien John Fluevog partage cette opinion comme le montre de façon remarquable la collection de chaussures *The Cosmos: Meteor* (2016), qui célèbre la route comme la destination en elle-même. Je compare Fluevog à la campagne

haute en couleur de Gucci inspirée par *Star Trek*, *GucciandBeyond* (2017), ainsi qu'à la campagne plus récente de Gucci, intitulée *Utopian Fantasy* (2018). L'essai cite, entre autres, Alain de Botton et Andy Warhol, qui ont tous deux professé leur fascination pour le voyage aérien. D'autres sources critiques incluent le travail de Dick Hebdige, un des pionniers dans l'étude des subcultures du style, ainsi que le

récent volume du MOMA, *Fashion is*. Les paragraphes de conclusion discutent de l'appropriation commerciale de la mode ainsi que de l'aspect constamment renouvelé de ce qui définit la mode.

"Fashion is fluid" —

*Fashion Is...*  
(The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

The "real secret of the ruby slippers," Salman Rushdie argues, "is not that 'there's no place like home,' but rather that there is no longer any such place *as* home" (57). Intended as a critical introduction, this essay traces the ruby slippers' fascinating journey from the original text by L. Frank Baum (1900) to MGM's classic film (1939) to *Vogue's* 2005 fashion shoot by Annie Leibovitz. I further discuss a more recent interpretation of the ruby slippers, The Cosmos: Meteor shoes by Canadian designer John Fluevog (Spring/Summer 2016). Their soles inscribed "Created in the Cosmos, Worn on Earth," the Meteors also celebrate the road as the destination. I compare Fluevog to Gucci's Star-Trek inspired campaign *GucciandBeyond* (Fall 2017) and the brand's equally out-of-this-world *Utopian Fantasy* campaign (Spring/Summer 2018). My critical sources include Alain de Botton and Andy Warhol, who both profess their fascination with air travel (and airports), as well as Benedict Anderson's writing on "imagined communities" and Dick Hebdige's foundational work on style subcultures. The essay's concluding sections discuss the commercial appropriation of fashion, as well as fashion's open-ended definition.

#### Fluevog Vancouver

Fluevog's store on Granville Street in Vancouver, its whimsical façade adorned with gilded angels and neon lights, recalls a world of magic and fantasy. One of the city's oldest and longest streets, gritty Granville stands "in sharp contrast to Vancouver's modern, 'city-of-glass' architecture" (Siemens,

*Theatre 77*). Subject to flamboyant gentrification in recent years, this street still preserves some old-fashioned landmarks, such as two venerable entertainment venues, the Orpheum and the Vogue (dating from the 1920s and the 1940s, respectively). The Fluevog store (opened in 1973) initially "was an elaborate bedroom, with shoes gracing a giant bed" ("Our Story—About Fluevog"). As described on the brand's official website, one of John Fluevog's first designs was The Pilgrim (1970), its "boldness [...] was completely against the mainstream of the time, and John has kept it unconventional ever since!" ("Our Story—About Fluevog"). Fluevog has attracted such celebrity customers as Robert Altman, Alice Cooper, Madonna, Beyoncé, and Lady Gaga. In 2013, Fluevog shoes became the official footwear of flight attendants on AirCanada Rouge. The brand's site comments: "John's always toyed with the idea of 'Flying Vogs'" ("Our Story—About Fluevog"). The audacious Cosmos: Meteor shoes further attest to Fluevog's fascination with travel on this planet and beyond as a preferred mode of living.



Elena Siemens, *Fluevog Vancouver* (2016)

### Celebration of Escape

In his BFI volume on *The Wizard of Oz*, Salman Rushdie challenges the traditional interpretation that the ruby slippers deliver Dorothy the gift of returning to her family home in Kansas. “The Kansas described by L. Frank Baum,” Rushdie points out, “is a depressing place, in which everything is grey as far as the eye can see – the prairie is grey and so is the house in which Dorothy lives” (16). “The Kansas of the film,” he continues:

is a little less unremittingly bleak than the Kansas of the book, if only because of the introduction of the three farmhands and Professor Marvel, four characters who will find their “rhymes”, their counterparts, in the Three Companions of Oz and the Wizard himself. Then again, it is also more terrifying, because it adds a presence of real evil: the angular Miss Gulch, with a profile that could carve a joint, riding stiffly on her bicycle with a hat on her head like a plum pudding, or a bomb, and claiming the protection of the Law for her crusade against Toto. Thanks to Miss Gulch, the movie’s Kansas is informed not only by the sadness of dirt-poverty, but also by the badness of would-be dog murderers. (17)

Rushdie asks: “And *this* is the home that ‘there’s no place like’? *This* is the lost Eden that we are asked to prefer (as Dorothy does) in Oz?” (17). He emphatically says “no” to both of these questions. Instead, he insists that *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*:

is unarguably a film about the joys of going away, of leaving the greyness and entering the colour, of making a new life in the “place where there isn’t any trouble.”

“Over the Rainbow” is, or ought to be, the anthem of all the world’s migrants, all those who go in search of the place where “the dreams that you dare to dream really come true.” It is a celebration of Escape, a grand paean of the Unrooted Self, a hymn—the hymn—to Elsewhere. (23)

### Vogue’s Take

**V**ogue’s 2005 take on *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* delivers a similar message. Styled by Grace Coddington and photographed by Annie Leibovitz, this photoshoot employs the same Technicolor palette as the classic 1939 film. Vogue’s Dorothy is portrayed by Keira Knightley, who famously played leading roles in several screen adaptations of literary classics, including Leo Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* (dir. Joe Wright, 2012), which was awarded an Oscar for its costumes by Jacqueline Durran. Durran followed the director’s suggestion that “the costumes should be 1870s in shape but have the architectural simplicity of the 1950s” (qtd. in Siemens, *Street* 10). The only instance when Durran remained faithful to Tolstoy was Anna’s black dress from a key scene in the novel. In *Street Fashion Moscow*, I cite Wim Wenders’ poetic passage on the “narrative power” of clothes:

A crispy ironed shirt!  
A woman’s life her entire life showing the  
sufferings of a dress!  
(qtd. in Siemens, *Street* 10)

I further refer to Anne Hollander’s *Seeing Through Clothes*, which discusses the relationship between “clothes in the works of art” and “clothes in real life” (qtd. in Siemens, *Street* 11). According to Hollander, “the way clothes strike the eye comes to be mediated by current visual assumptions made in pictures of dressed people”



Elena Siemens, *Fluevog Vancouver* (2016)

(qtd. in Siemens, *Street* 11). She points out that starting from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, cinema and photography have become dominant in providing inspiration and guidance for the way people dress.

*Vogue*'s savvy *Wizard of Oz* photoshoot similarly aims to inspire the reader, as well as sell fashion. In it, Dorothy wears designer clothes and a series of ruby slippers by, among others, Balenciaga, Oscar de la Renta, Rochas, Lanvin, and Chanel Haute Couture. Grace Coddington, then the Creative Director of *Vogue*, also enlisted a group of diverse contemporary artists, from Jasper Johns (best known for his iconic Flag paintings) to Jeff Koons (the author of monumental

puppy sculptures and inflatable rabbits, featured more recently in Louis Vuitton's 2017 fashion campaign), to take part in the shoot. *Vogue* leaves out the "greyness" of Dorothy's family home in Kansas; instead, the campaign focuses exclusively on the brilliant Technicolor Land of Oz, where "the dreams that you dare to dream really come true."



Elena Siemens, *Fluevog Vancouver* (2016)

### The Cosmos: Meteor 2016

The Cosmos: Meteor by John Fluevog can also be seen as a contemporary interpretation of the ruby slippers. The Meteor's product description reads: "It's not always easy to wish upon a falling star, but thanks to this Cosmos Family beauty, it's easier than ever to walk up on one" ("Cosmos Meteor"). The Meteors were the "result of careful research into what a Mini design might look like after being sent to the moon and back" ("Cosmos Meteor"). Unlike the ruby slippers, which promise the wearer a safe return home, the Meteors celebrate the road as the destination itself. The opening spread of *Fluevog Post* from Spring/Summer 2016 announces: "Somewhere Out There: Staring This Spring: The Cosmos: Meteors" (*Fluevog Post* S/S 2016).

Reminiscent of Rushdie, Fluevog's sensibility is characteristic of today's mobile and unsettled world, where home/shelter is frequently a transient space, such as an airport, its vagabond dwellers forming, to borrow Benedict Anderson's term, an "imagined community." In *The Art of Travel*, Alain de Botton writes about the comfort he draws from visiting Heathrow airport:

When feeling sad at home, I have often boarded a train or airport bus and gone to Heathrow, where, from an observation gallery in Terminal 2 or from the top floor of the Renaissance Hotel along the north runway, I have drawn comfort from the sight of ceaseless landing and take-off of aircrafts. (35-36)

De Botton finds it "pleasant to hold in mind" that at any time, on some random afternoon "when lassitude and despair threaten, there is always a plane taking off for somewhere, for Baudelaire's 'Anywhere!'" (39). Baudelaire, by his own admission, "felt more at home in the transient places of travel than in his own dwelling" (qtd. in De Botton 35).



Elena Siemens, *Fluevog Vancouver* (2016)

De Botton also references T. S. Eliot, who "proposed that Baudelaire had been the first nineteenth-century artist to give expression to the beauty of modern travelling places and machines" (qtd. in De Botton 35). According to Eliot, Baudelaire "invented a new kind of romantic nostalgia" – "the *poésie des départs*, the *poésie des salles d'attente*" (35). De Botton adds that the list can be extended to include "the *poésie des station-service* and the *poésie des aéroports*" (35).

### Gucci in the Sky

"Today my favorite kind of atmosphere is the airport atmosphere," Andy Warhol writes in *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol* (160). He elaborates:

Airplanes and airports have my favorite kind of food service, my favorite kind of bathrooms, my favorite peppermint Life Savers, my favorite kind of entertainment, my favorite loudspeaker address system, my favorite conveyor belts, my favorite graphics and colors, the best security checks, the best views, the best perfume shops, the best employees, the best optimism. (160)

Warhol confesses: "The atmosphere is great, it's the idea of flying that I question. [...] I'm embarrassed that I don't like to fly because I love to be modern, but I compensate by loving airports and airplanes so much" (160). More recently, the fashion brand Gucci has also professed its fascination with the atmosphere of air travel, or, more precisely, that of intergalactic voyages. Photographed by Glen Luchford, the brand's Fall 2017 campaign *GucciandBeyond* "is placed in an intergalactic world inspired by sci-fi motifs from the 1950s and 1960s. The brand also took heavy inspiration from 'Star Trek,' recreating the show's signature elements, like the

Enterprise, its transporter and bridge for a Gucci'd out Starfleet crew" (Bobila). Jonathan Ho's review, titled "[Star Trek] Gucci Fall 2017 Campaign Goes Where No Fashion Brand Has Gone Before," points out:



Elena Siemens, *Fluevog Vancouver* (2016)

In Gucci's vision of retro-future, one can be thankful that Seinfeld's and Star Trek's vision of the one-piece uniform with boots never comes to pass, instead, human characters toggled out in a dazzling array of textures and colours which comprise of the Gucci Fall 2017 campaign greet extra-terrestrials and battle dinosaurs on Earth's pre-history before being beamed up to psychedelic starship juxtaposes high fashion with sci-fi in a wild, never before seen fantastical composition which underscores how brilliant the commentary is. (Ho)

The review adds that Gucci's campaign "begs you to take a leap to the fashion frontier, instead of exploring brave new worlds, it's an exploration of adventurous sartorialism" (Ho)—a sentiment reminiscent of Andy Warhol, who preferred the airport atmosphere to flying (Ho). Gucci has continued its "exploration of adventurous sartorialism" with the *Utopian Fantasy* campaign (Spring/Summer 2018). For this equally over-the-top campaign mixing Renaissance art with Snow White, Gucci traded in "glossy photographs for digital paintings" by Spanish artist Ignasi Monreal (Urbina). In addition to producing recreations of the old masters, Monreal also starred in the dreamlike video for the aptly titled *GucciHulluciantion* campaign (Spring/Summer 2018). In contrast to Gucci's enthusiastic use of digital technology, John Fluevog stubbornly continues to print his *Fluevog Post* (and other promotional paper products, such as postcards)—yet another evidence of the designer's maverick stance.

### Be Separate from the Crowd

Reminiscent in some aspects of Anderson's "imagined communities," style subcultures unite individuals (either within or outside national

boundaries), who share common cultural and sartorial preferences. In his seminal work on style subcultures, Dick Hebdige focuses on:

the expressive forms and rituals of subordinate groups—the teddy boys and mods and rockers, the skinheads and the punks—who are alternately dismissed, denounced and canonized; treated at different times as threats to public order and as harmless buffoons. (Hebdige 431)

Inspired by Jean Genet's *The Thief's Journal*, Hebdige is "intrigued by the most mundane objects—a safety pin, a pointed shoe, a motor cycle—which, none the less, like the tube of vaseline [in Genet], take on a symbolic dimension, becoming a form of stigmata, tokens of a self-imposed exile" (431). Hebdige later realized that he "had underestimated the power of commercial culture to appropriate, and indeed, to produce counter-hegemonic styles" (Hebdige 429). The "market-savvy" punk exemplifies this particularly well (Hebdige 429).

*The Wizard of Oz*, and the ruby slippers in particular, have also been the subject of active commercial appropriation—by the film industry, fashion magazines and various fashion brands, as well as individual designers. The Meteors by Fluevog present a different case, as they allude to the ruby slippers only indirectly: the shared reference to travelling beyond the imaginable, "somewhere over the rainbow." John Fluevog, who frequently follows his personal preoccupations and discoveries, is best described as an auteur designer. For example, The Wearevers Danke shoes were first conceived in Berlin, where Fluevog was "mesmerized" by Berlin's "burgeoning modern art," and the city's "ultra-functional urbanity" ("Wearevers Danke"). Inspired by Berlin's architecture, Fluevog "drew up the

designs for a simple, but functional chelsea bootie on the comfy custom molded Wearever sole" ("Wearevers Danke"). Each pair of Fluevog shoes comes in a soft cotton bag inscribed with the following advisory by John Fluevog:

Always hold on to the truth. Don't let others sway your heart. Don't compromise yourself for the sake of temporal grooviness. Be separate from the crowd that's awash with normality by standing on a firm foundation. Never waver in your love or faith, and in all you do, please wear my shoes.

#### Fashion Is...

The MET's volume on *Fashion Is...*, from which this essay derives its epigraph, contains "nearly two hundred definitions of fashion [pairing] simple descriptions with a range of costumes, artifacts, and works of art from the Metropolitan Museum's encyclopedic collection, including The Costume Institute" (Tribble). The book's preface points out:

The descriptions given are subjective observations that are open to discussion. Fashion is a ruffle, fashion is a crease. Fashion is for the head, fashion is for the feet. Fashion is denim, fashion is diamonds. Some of the responses speak to the technique, while others are descriptive and evocative. (Tribble)

This provocative volume solicits active participation: "Because fashion has no limits, readers are encouraged to react, to think, and to create their own definitions of "fashion" (Tribble). The book contains a number of definitions relevant to my essay: "fashion is fantasy," "fashion is advertisement," "fashion is photographed," "fashion is illustrated," "fashion is the past," and



“fashion is the future” (Tribble). In addition, my discussion of the ruby slippers’ head-spinning journey across time, space, and media suggests several other entries, such as: “fashion is the

Yellow Brick Road,” “fashion is imagined,” “fashion is lived,” “fashion is air travel,” and “fashion is the Fluevog store on the rain-swept Granville Street in Vancouver.”



*Elena Siemens, Fluevog Vancouver (2016)*

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