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RED SHOE DELIVERY SERVICE, OR, MY HEART'S ANTI-DESTINATION

Stephanie Snyder

In *Blue Velvet*, David Lynch offers us a primer to what happens when the automobile replaces the walking body as the primary vehicle of waking dreams. Dorothy Vallens and Jeffrey Beaumont—lovers trapped in a car—recede further from reality each time Frank, their menacing kidnapper, gives it the gas, turns the wheel and spits in their faces. Dorothy and Jeffrey, doe-eyed and horny, their affection mirrored in each other's pain and the rain-soaked windows, dare to glance at Frank. "Don't you fucking look at me!" Frank bellows, as his V8-engine propels them from city to country, from the safety of visibility into the muddy ruts and mists of fallow grass and blown-down fences.

For Dorothy and Jeffrey, Frank's forced wandering transformed their desire into an affliction—an involuntary acid trip in a wayward universe, a land without asphalt, without streetlights. No signs or markers here, just tire tracks. Frank understood that to let loose upon his prey *en plein air*, he would have to keep moving—evade the binding stares and casual glances of others. Frank's automotive dream world evidences how sharply technology has changed our experience of the walking spirit... The 19th century *flâneur*, that romantically autonomous soul, wandered the streets in sight of others, in consort with everyday life. For the *flâneur*, wandering meant hovering on the verge of visibility, wandering without cultivating the regard of others while existing precisely within the company of others... "to set up house in the heart of the multitude," in Baudelaire's words.

Somewhere betwixt and between these realms of madness—between Baudelaire, Hollywood and David Lynch's imagination—careens the Red Shoe Delivery Service (RSDS). RSDS is an art collaborative based in Portland, OR that asks people on the street to get in a van with the artists and ride with them. If a potential rider conducts a simple aesthetic exchange, RSDS will take him or her where she wants to go: wherever there is. In order to be transported, a rider must don glitter encrusted ruby slippers and pronounce her destination on video record. This data becomes material for other RSDS projects.

Like bowerbirds, RSDS's three creators—MK Guth, Cris Moss and Molly Dilworth—decorate their van to seduce, lining the interior with art and sustenance—providing physical and imaginative comfort, if not exhilaration. As far as RSDS can tell, for riders, the whole activity produces an intricate mix of misunderstanding, delight and hesitation (riddled with how much fear?). The first time I encountered RSDS I knew who they were, but I still thought about Frank Booth. I had long fantasized that when I least expected, a van would pull up beside me and steal me away.

When the door to the van opened and I saw piles of ruby slippers in the back I thought about Dorothy, Vallens that is. "Is there somewhere that you would like to go?" the artists' ask. Isn't that the question we're all asking? Where am I going? Where have I been? Once seduced by the shiny shoes and welcomed by such well-intentioned, intelligent-looking artists, I, like many, got in. I thought I was ok, but still I looked for signs of abnormality. I'm thinking: There must be some way that I am being preyed upon, some drama, however small and embarrassing that will transpire here. The conversation in the van was suspiciously mundane, "What are you doing today? What do you do?" The van took a right. I had asked to go to the grocery store. Should I have come up with something heroic? But that critical and self-reflective impulse had gone out the window the moment I chose my ruby slippers... and there I was, ostensibly proceeding to the grocery store, wearing sexy, glittery red fuck-me pumps with grey sweat pants.

Everything that at once seemed uncanny was becoming funny in a hallucinatory sort of way. I was becoming Dorothy, or Alice, or my mother in a cab. The van was becoming a wormhole to unexpected and embarrassing thoughts. I became self-conscious and stared at my shoes, then out the window at the bland commercial strip. My shoes were... so... beautiful. But where was my secret lover? Hiding behind the speaker at the next drive through?

When I arrived at the store, I was confused, grateful and exhilarated as I watched the van pull away. I had been wandered. And I did not get to keep my shoes (though I managed to acquire some later—I had to). I had already imagined myself stumbling through the supermarket in my exquisite pumps. I was a found pedestrian, and I probably wasn't that special after all, someone just standing there, really. But wait, RSDS had a record of my journey; the artists had captured it for their archives while I was barely looking. I existed.

Unless I live in an old-fashioned city, I no longer take the long walk home. RSDS took hold of my

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physical body, adjusted its costume, and brought me, like an uncharted nation, into the security of geography... They also activated my self-consciousness. Three minutes into the ride and I wanted to be a good girl. There have been times that RSDS knew they were really helping someone by giving them a ride, times they knew someone was afraid, and times the artists got irritated with their inability to cajole someone into the van.

It's a strange thing, wanting to wander people in this car age. Red Shoe, I learned later, often haunts environments in which people are "naturally waiting" around. Sometimes, like fisherman, they open the van doors and bait potential riders with their wares. Ultimately, most of the time, it's RSDS that wanders the most. It's a gift, really, because the walking body can only go so far before it stalls against the physical and psychological barriers of the commercial strip, the freeway and the lines that delineate mine from yours. Receding through the windshield, the wandering body is a gaseous mirage illuminated by headlights—gone before it arrives. We stalk ourselves behind the wheel: craving to know, as we push the gas, the pleasure of tired muscles and pulsing adrenaline. We might just have some adrenaline again if we picked up hitchhikers, or tried to convince someone to get in our van.

Frank Booth: You wanna go for a ride?

Jeffrey Beaumont: No thanks.

Frank Booth: No thanks. What does that mean?

Jeffrey Beaumont: I don't want to go.

Frank Booth: Go where?

Jeffrey Beaumont: On a ride.

Frank Booth: A ride? Hell, that's a good idea. Okay, let's go.

Hey, let's go.

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