

Dispatches from Vancouver, Vol. IV: Bringing sexy back from where the wild things are

Posted By [Ilya Shapiro](#) On February 19, 2010 @ 8:41 pm In [Feature:Opinion](#), [Opinion](#), [Opinion:Upper Section](#) | [No Comments](#)

VANCOUVER—On my last day in Vancouver, I didn't end up attending any sporting events—preferring to save my money for sushi and souvenirs. Instead I walked around bits of the city I hadn't previously covered, such as the bridge over False Creek by the Olympic Village (whose high rises are bedecked by various national flags, as well as Australia's trademark-skirting boxing kangaroo).

One of the landmarks along the waterfront is a shimmering dodecahedron that during the 1986 World Expo—my only previous time in Vancouver, on a family trip—was a futuristic science center. During this Olympics, this Bucky Ball was *Rusky Dom* (Russia House), given over to the organizers of the 2014 Winter Games in Sochi. Unfortunately, this taste of the future is only open from 12-5 p.m. and the line to get in is longer than the Trans-Siberian Railroad. After that, only VIPs—athletes and dignitaries (and mafiya?)—can get behind the velvet rope. As for trying to sweet-talk the ~~bouncers~~ line attendants, “nyet, tovarisch.”

The next scary beasts I encountered were northern hippies (*bohemi-us arcticus*) who had set up a tent city as some sort of protest against the games. It turns out that the Olympics kill children, increase homelessness, and generally destroy communities (as does condo construction—the signs can apparently be recycled for all sorts of anti-modernity purposes). The most striking tableau was a bed sheet showing the Olympic mascots—who are some sort of paean to bad Japanese anime—dressed as Nazis and death figures.

Luckily, the dreadlocked masses yearning to take a bath firmly oppose censorship, though expressing skepticism about their live-in was *verboten*, presumably as the product of false consciousness and so not really free speech. Not wanting to tangle with these characters, or their lawyers—people with clipboards wearing pink t-shirts saying “legal advisers”—I moved on.

Unfortunately, I moved out of the Noam Chomsky and into the Cormac McCarthy. Starting to the north of Chinatown and extending to the edge of the Gastown District, dwell creatures that I later heard described as zombies, bums, or, plainly, heroin addicts. I'm a pretty adventurous sort, and it was broad afternoon daylight as I traversed this zone, but I have to admit that I was unsettled. The corner of Main and Hastings: that's where the wild things really are.

Having escaped some rather exotic neighborhoods, I needed some retail therapy. I'm not much of a shopper, but the Olympic Superstore, housed within downtown's flagship Hudson's Bay Company store, provided a kaleidoscopic delight of warm-up jackets, trading pins, and, um, canoes. It also had some flat-screen TVs, which is how I watched Shani Davis defend his 1000-meter speed-skating champ (cheered on by Stephen Colbert, who again showed his PR savvy) and Shaun White—the artist formerly known as the Flying Tomato, and pretty much the only snowboarder I can tolerate—repeat as golden-boy of the half-pipe.

The thing about the Superstore, however, is that like at all official Olympic venues, you can only pay for your purchases (if you don't have fistfuls of ~~Monopoly money~~ Canadian currency) using a Visa card. This comes as no real surprise: we've all seen the ads. I still don't understand what Visa gains by being the exclusive Olympic credit card: it annoys people who happen not to carry one while not having a demonstrable effect on those who do. Is the idea that Visa-holders will swell with pride and spend more? That non-holders will apply on the spot? I'm not convinced either is a viable strategy, but I don't run any large international companies.

As I left Vancouver and returned to the America part of North America, I bought the Sports Illustrated swimsuit issue—a February tradition that for me dates to using Kathy Ireland for motivation at the high school swimming city championships. You could say I was bringing

sexy back to the USA. And I paid with my American Express.

Ilya Shapiro, a senior fellow in constitutional studies at the Cato Institute, wrote his master's thesis at the London School of Economics on the transformation of the Olympics in the post-Cold War era. He is filing periodic dispatches for the Daily Caller from and about the 2010 Winter Games.

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