

Cock Crazy

I'm cock-crazy. Dick-delirious. A wiener-worshipper, though not exactly in the way of most gay men. My penis passion is part standard issue homosexual but that's the least interesting thing about it. By cock crazy I mean not caring whether I'm turned on either by the appendage itself or the gentleman to whom it's attached. The seeing of it is all. The seeing of it, preferably not in a sexual context. The seeing of it, when a much longed-for glimpse is finally rewarded. The seeing of it, which does not lead to masturbation or even explicitly sexual thoughts but to a sense that my careful planning and timing have paid off.

It's akin to bird watching, in its obsessive qualities and its preoccupation with record keeping, though unlike bird watching it's always a solitary pursuit. Bird watchers often meet in groups, called together by someone who has spotted a rare specimen or an out-of season avian visitor and is eager to share the moment. Wiener-watchers have two modes: public and surreptitious.

Public watching happens easily and regularly in gyms, and can be quite open, though explicit staring is frowned upon. It's easy, however, to master a side-eye stance while fussing with one's gym shoes or shorts – one gives the impression that one is looking in quite a different direction. Urinals, before the current craze for modesty panels, were a rich source (and there are still men who like to take a step back from the receptacle – it's not clear whether they do it to provide a better view or to gain room to shake their wiener dry).

Contemporary dance, theatre, film and even opera allow for semi-public (or better yet – semi-surreptitious) viewing. I will attend any film that's known to feature male nudity, even if the movie is reputed to be a real stinker. YouTube offers a treasury of performance that seems to require the presence of at least one wiener to be credibly avant-garde, and team sports offer accidental penis-pop-outs fairly regularly. I'm not a sports fan, but I watch daily a YouTube video of a New Zealand rugby team that plays completely naked, taking on a naked British team in one video and a minimally clothed women's team in another. The games seem to attract a largely family audience.

I enjoyed a decade of devoted wiener watching, or, more elegantly, voyeurism, or, more crudely, peeping-tom-ism, when our commune disbanded in 1974 and we each went our separate ways. I rented a large, one-bedroom apartment at 100 Gloucester Street in the gay village. I was on the 11th floor, the top, with a balcony that looked west and north and bedroom windows that oversaw low rise buildings to the north. Many young men, gay and straight, lived in one or the other, young men who seemed uncommitted to window blinds or, if they had them, didn't close them properly. And, being young and male, they were devoted onanists.

There's a law against voyeurism. Section 162 (1) of the Canadian Criminal Code reads: "Every one commits an offence who, surreptitiously, observes — including by mechanical or electronic means — or makes a visual recording of a person who is in circumstances that give rise to a reasonable expectation of privacy..." and "the observation or recording is done for a sexual purpose."

I don't approve of surreptitious visual recording and I've never done it – much of the charm of voyeurism comes from its ephemeral nature and it seems aesthetically crass to try and preserve a moment that is

bound to seem more banal the more often you watch it. The excitement attendant on capturing a scene, after much patient watching, can't be repeated.

The law also seems to provide an exemption for voyeurs, like me, who don't surreptitiously look for sexual purposes. I can't recall a single masturbatory event prompted by what I was watching through my binoculars – the excitement was over once the curtains closed or the guy shifted out of view. I'd seen his wiener.

I wrote about my obsession in 19TK for the gay magazine, Xtra. I assigned names to the men I watched, rather in the way I would the sex-work clients who became regulars. I began the piece with The Artist Who Lives in Filth, and here follows a much revised and edited version of that decades-old tribute to voyeurism.

“Now, TAWLIF thought he was being very careful. His drapes were almost always tightly drawn. But when they were open, I could tell from the position of his (rather soiled) futon that if the curtains were ever apart even just a bit and if he decided to masturbate when they were, I'd be able to see just that critical part of his body.

“Well they were and I could and he did and I watched.

“I felt like one of those figures in some allegorical painting -- Patience Rewarded, or the Apotheosis of Perseverance. After all, I'd been at my post almost every night for months.

“Not, of course, just to catch the until-now un-reviewed performance piece by The Artist Who Lives in Filth. I have my regulars. There's Mr Greenjeans. I call him that because he's thoughtful enough to rearrange the plants on his window sill if they appear to be blocking my view. I like the way Mr Greenjeans works masturbation into the fabric of his daily life -- he's the only guy I've ever seen who has a coffee and a cigarette while he's jerking off. There's Mr Flash, who appears to spend the entire summer naked on his balcony. He catches my attention by dragging a large mirror out and using it to flash signals onto my living room wall. I fear for Mr Flash. To give me a better view, he sometimes balances on a bunch of old boxes -- and he's a good 25 stories up.

“And Joey -- whose name I actually knew -- a local and legendary beauty who has since, break my heart, moved out. Joey had venetian blinds and he'd close them. But I'm on a higher floor, and could look down through the slats to some extent, giving me an image rather like that on a television screen with a lot of interference. Joey had style. When he got the urge, he'd dress for the occasion. Baseball cap, white gym socks, a pair of grey shorts and a T-shirt.

“I could have sold tickets.

“To me, voyeurism is the eroticization of neighbourliness.

“That seems rather grandly philosophical, but neighbourliness, a genial interest in other people's lives, is surely one of the reasons we look at other people we don't know. Tell me you don't slow down if you're heading along your apartment hallway and someone's door is open. Call it nosiness, but that just begs the question. We're nosy because we like connecting. We're social animals who feel more ourselves when we have a handle on other people's lives, who value privacy because it complements, not negates,

neighbourliness. The city simultaneously makes that easy and difficult. The opportunities to connect seem endless; there are people everywhere. But most of us seem bound to discrete lives discreetly lived, and share few communal civic or religious rituals. So, when we look, our eyes are hungry.

“When we look, we are asserting both our own presence and that of the other. When we lust-look, we draw that assertion into the web of eroticism that voyeurs weave through the city.

The circumstances of growing up gay have made me expert at taking pleasure where I find it. I am on my shameless missions in subways, shopping malls, parks, washrooms and on our balconies and at our windows. I, and others like me, are giving a whole new meaning to Neighbourhood Watch.

My seven-power binoculars sat always at the ready, and my appetite was quite indiscriminating. I would watch women make their beds. I loved it when people painted their apartments. Straight boys drinking beer and watching television were a real joy, and I felt positively tender towards a young straight couple who switched to a cheaper detergent – were there money issues?

I heard marvelous tales, particularly about the sheer invention and flamboyance of the residents of City Park. There, I was told, there were men who regularly performed, who swept back their curtains at an appointed hour, whose theatre of private pleasures was open to all who cared to look. There was one man, legend says, who videotaped himself, then put the television in the window on those nights when circumstances took him away from home. That's the kind of invention that could get you a Canada Council grant.

My voyeuristic pleasures came to an abrupt end in 19tk, when I moved to an apartment on the 16th floor of a building overlooking the playing field of Jarvis Collegiate. The view, densely urban, is splendid, but though there are other towers nearby they are too far away for even the most devoted voyeur.

My binoculars still sit by the window, mostly untouched. I see the occasional hawk fly by. During the fall months of the high school year there are scores of delectable teenage boys on the playing field and sometimes they change into their sports outfits outside. I watch them, but there is no nudity and certainly no wieners.

For voyeuristic pleasures, I rely now on that New Zealand rugby team and its YouTube videos. As further proof, if any were needed, that I'm quite legitimately cock-crazy, I never weary of those Kiwi dicks.