



Details of Lost Time

fear, loathing, and dysphoria
on the road with Ani DiFranco

In the mid-1990s and early 2000s, I traveled the Northeastern United States attending concerts with friends I had made online. A variety of different artists, styles, and scenes, but by and large the performer I saw most was Ani DiFranco. These memories have lived in my head for decades and I wanted to get them on a page before they fade.

February 18, 1995 – Buffalo, NY – Network

In the autumn of 1994, I dropped out of my sophomore year of college in Rochester, NY. I moved back home and started attending the University of Buffalo after a year of struggling in RIT's photojournalism program. Alienated from old high school friends, living with my parents, and attending college as a commuter – I was desperate for any sort of social life.

My memory is I read a concert preview for a “local girl made good” artist named Ani DiFranco in the local paper, and my gen-x desire for an authentic music act led me to the club Network right off Buffalo's light rail line. It helped that one of the talking points around Ani was her bisexuality – a rare acknowledgment in those days and something I needed to see. I was still sorting out my own “not straight but not gay like the gay boys” sexuality.

I didn't know what I expected but the show left me stunned – the queer women in attendance, Ani's whole *thing* at that point, the story about slapping a Dykes Rule stick on a state trooper car, and the When Doves Cry cover to close out the show. It was a time and I was hooked. Even with everything to come, it was a purely euphoric memory.

Of course – memory likes a good story. I dug up my bootleg recording of that concert (I was one of many hubs in the “tape trading, two blanks for one bootleg” scene of the early internet) and it was much as I remember it. However – I'd forgotten that the lesbian avengers “Dykes Rule” sticker story was prefaced with a comedy bit declaring Ani's hirsute drummer, Andy Stochansky, an honorary lesbian. I remember the laughter of the crowd and the disquiet in my own gut. A feeling of shame combined with some ineffable desire for the thing this crowd of women found ludicrous.

October 2nd, 1995 – Rochester, NY – Harrow East

I'm in line at the Harrow East Ballroom – part of a complex of buildings that used to be the home of Rochester's Jewish Young Men's and Women's Association before the association moved out to the suburbs in the '70s. Standing in its brick courtyard and next door to the nightclub Freakazoid (just find the big Giant F). Freakazoid will close five-ish years later and the goth club Vertex will take its place after a July 2000 fire destroyed the old Vertex space.

I am excited and, against all internal preconceptions of who I am, strike up a conversation

with the pair in front of me. A middle-aged deadhead adjacent guy with a woman sporting brightly colored hair. She turns out to be his daughter.

I talk about seeing Ani in Buffalo and being back at RIT after my semester hiatus. I'm not flirting with her – just talking. Falling into easy conversation with a girl close to my age in a way I never could with boys or most of the straight girls I fancied.

Memories of the show are spotty and it's never on any bootleg lists. I remember I enjoy myself – I buy a t-shirt, get this girl's phone number, and let them drive me back to campus. There's a skip in my step as I walk the quarter mile back to the dorms from the student union. The girl and I talk for a few months on the phone and then lose touch. I'm never sure if this was friendship or a probe into romantic possibilities.

March 8th, 1996 – Syracuse, NY – Schine Underground

I'm shivering in an alley and worried I'm not going to be let into the bar. M——, one of the charismatic personalities on the Ani DiFranco email listserv has asked – stated, really – “Everyone's 21, right?”. I tense, as I'm about half a year out from my birthday and without a fake ID. I never had a fake ID because I was straight edge through high school and early college. Also, we always talked about fake IDs but I don't know if anyone had a fake ID outside of friends who borrowed their sibling's licenses.

My mind quickly jumped to its usual calculus – the charismatic and forceful personality from the Ani DiFranco listserv who I think I'm developing a crush on wants me to be 21. Can I pretend to be 21 in this scenario? Fuck, no, it sounds like the bar is 21 plus?

I keep quiet and the doorman checks my ID, I get the big X on my hand, and I'm let in.

We're all here because someone at the concert heard Ani was going to be here and there she is. I don't care too much about that – I'm more interested in the queers from the listserv. Lesbians. Bisexual dykes. A few boyfriends. This was probably the first time in my life I was part of a group who weren't straight and it filled a hole in me whose shape I was only vaguely aware of.

Simply listening in on these conversations – people from books and the internet come to life – was life-changing. I didn't know what my place in this community was – I had reached an uncomfortable accord with my bisexuality at this point. Sleeping with men, trying to be open to the possibility of romance there but always this intense pining for women. I just knew it felt *right* to be there, even if I felt many women in this group were, as best, tolerant or amused by my presence.

The Next Few Years

The next few years are a blur as I join this concert-going scene. Some folks travel all up and down the East Coast to see shows. I stick to I-90 accessible venues and occasionally foray as far as New England. A college friend asks me why I don't just find a local friend group of Ani DiFranco fans – I don't have the words yet but the chance to reinvent myself on the road and away from everyone who knows me is an irresistible drug.



My memory is I'm in Syracuse, but not the '96 show, so it's March 22nd, 1997. Ani has played the Landmark Theatre. We're all gathered in someone's ground-floor unit in a generic apartment complex. Not student housing, but close. One of those big group conversations where everyone's just talking, riffing – stoner talk without the weed. At one point there's a lull and a girl theorizes that these conversations periodically pause because of our nomad instincts – listening for the herd of buffalo to make sure it hasn't moved on.

I feel both at home and still a little bit in awe of these women. Grateful to be here, but also a continued unease that my permission to be here could be revoked at any time. The looks I get from some of these women back this up.

I didn't sleep well in those days and woke up a little before dawn. I bundle on my winter clothing and head down the street to a Brugers Bagels and return a breakfast hero.



It's the next day after some show. Somewhere in the northeast with snow on the ground. A travel day for M—— and her boyfriend. We go get breakfast or lunch somewhere. I order small, conserving my limited cash. These were the days I was middle class/student poor – low on cash but not institutionally so.

We're walking and global warming comes up - I make a joke about how we could use some global warming because it was too damn cold. M——'s boyfriend, on track to be an environmental lawyer, reads me the riot act on rising sea levels and shifting agriculture patterns.

He's not wrong, and it's a distinct memory of the first time I started to think through actual issues instead of joking about them like a bad late-night host. But also M——'s boyfriend is kind of a jerk about it.



We're in someone's apartment before a show. There's a girl, not M——, at the kitchen table. In my memory, she has a plethora of rings and a silver pendant on a rainbow chain. She's pontificating about the challenges of balancing time between her boyfriends and girlfriends.

Even as this group helped me develop my confidence and some sense of style and cool

I never dated anyone from it. Mostly because that idea of style and cool was only just forming – I was still shy and awkward. Also – the idea of being “one of the boyfriends” sat poorly in my gut. This was particularly true as these women began talking through their relationships with men and I wondered how these bozos couldn’t see the harm they were doing to their girlfriends.

I wanted something else that was hard to name.



I’m in New Haven, CT, there for Ani’s shows at the Palace Theatre on April 18th, 1997. I have recently shaved my head and I smile when I see Ani’s new bassist, Jason Mercer, sports a similar haircut. I had the campus barber take it down with clippers and then a girl from my dorm gave me the bic treatment. I don’t remember her name – I will have a light crush on her for a bit before settling into friendship. We listen to lots of Cowboy Junkies together and roll our eyes at her dorm neighbor who doesn’t believe in deodorant. I remember consoling her after an STD panic and the campus doctor shaming her for having sex.

We all met at a diner before the show and I remember ordering a grilled cheese with mushrooms and being – not the center of attention – but for the first time in my life – charming. I have a photo from that night of me hugging M—— that will sit on my desk for years.

The show is the show – my little Ani DiFranco website does well enough that I rank for a photo pass. This means I’m jammed up by the stage. I got some great pictures but, honestly, the main benefit of the pass is I’m able to be jammed up against the stage like it was 1995 again. An older dude from our group, Tom, was the real photographer.

We all spend the night at another fan’s house. Two fans, actually. A straight presenting couple, although the Mr. scans a little gay – or maybe his naked camping photos in the bathroom lead me to believe that. Men comfortable with their bodies mystify me. I will continue to try and date men and find the sex a relief but their vibe atrocious. I have never preferred their company.

I am, as always, struck by how good it feels to be a part of this group and wish that there were people like this who lived in my city. The glimmer of the idea that maybe the problem isn’t me but instead my address enters my head.



J—— and I are driving between concerts – I *think* I’m at the wheel. I never crushed on J—— like I did on M——. In those days they were presenting butch, strictly lesbian, so that was a non-starter. Also, we just vibed more as friends.

We talked about a lot of things – their relationship with M—— that would end up blowing up badly – but also just the difficulties of growing up a weird kid, what we’d be doing if

we weren't following a pop star around on tour, and the weirdness of that hobby/lifestyle.

I remember this ride because of all the butch, strictly lesbians, I'd encounter in this group, J—— was one of the few who didn't look at my presence in the scene with a bit of skepticism. Decades later when I finally started transition I'd look them up and see they were vibing non-binary and had worked with non-profits aiding trans youth.



Darien Lake is an amusement park in Corfu, NY. Now a Six Flags venue but back then independent. Next to the roller coasters and water slides, there's an outdoor music venue and Ani's playing, opening for Bob Dylan. The show is unremarkable, but I remember there was a labor dispute with the stagehand union at the time. Ani did a local news segment where she picketed a bit with the workers – but still played the show.

A bit of awkward local news stagecraft and image control.



M—— has dropped by my student apartment – RIT's Riverknoll. I will spend a summer here, cruising on IRC and the old Multicom IV gay BBS. This is the apartment where a slightly older guy will tell me I have an STD. One of the OTC treatable ones.

I have old photos out and M——'s surprised to see one of herself from that Syracuse show in '96. We talk. Bruce Springsteen comes on the mix tape and we debate whether he's a butch lesbian musician or not. We sit on my futon, legs touching, but it doesn't go any further than that – me afraid to ask for what I want.

We hug goodbye and M——'s back on the road.



September 25 1998 – Rochester, NY

Blue Cross Arena

I park – maybe right on Exchange Street in the extra parking lane in front of the Hall of Justice. My memory is walking diagonally across the street to the entrance, my thrift store dress blowing in the wind across my legs.

I wasn't trying to pass femme – these were my peak “punk rock boy in a dress years” but it still felt good – equal parts transgressive and right.

I don't remember who I met in the hall – a small circle of people from the mailing list cohort, most of whom I didn't know well. Some looked at me uncomfortably. I said my hellos and as I left to find my seat I heard someone say “What's he doing in a dress”.

This comment feeds my righteous sense of indignation that gender was even a thing and, in retrospect, wounded the part of me that wanted so much more.

The show was uneventful. I did not loop back with the group for post-concert activities. The horrible thought that this might not last forever was planted in my head.



May 5th, 1999 – Syracuse, NY – Landmark Theatre

Last Show

I park a few blocks away and hoof it over to the theatre – Syracuse’s Landmark. I get to the venue and I don’t see anyone I know. Nominally H——, working merch, but once you’re on payroll and showing up in songs you’re probably elevated beyond normal fan circles.

The show is uneventful. I leave a little deflated – bummed out that I seem to be the last of our old cohort from ’96 to show up for a show. I get back to the 1984 powder blue Pontiac Bonneville I’d bought a few years previous and head down I-90 towards Rochester.

About halfway through my trip I realize the interior and exterior lights of the car are starting to dim. That whatever work I’d recently had done on the alternator wasn’t done right, and that if the car stalled out (as it often did coming to a stop) it probably wasn’t going to start again.

The lights are barely working as I come up on the then-human-powered toll booths. I slow to 10 MPH – any slower and I risk stalling – and I cruise through a closed lane. I wonder what sort of ticket I’ve incurred. As I move from highway to city streets a car will occasionally flash its lights at me. I weave my way to the mechanic on Mt. Hope Ave, drop the keys in the night slot, and walk home.

32 Flavors of Tenderqueer

In the – summer? fall? – of 1999 Ani DiFranco licensed her song, 32 Flavors, to the National Football League for use in a promotional video. To a group of old-school fans, growing less and less entranced with her shifting image, this presented the perfect opportunity to be really shitty online. I participated and, looking back, am incredibly embarrassed about my behavior.

The gen-x thought technology of selling out seems impossible to understand or defend in this day and age. One of those things we borrowed from our boomer parents – perhaps an earnest attempt to call out the weird Faustian bargains capitalism expected of us

but too often it was an excuse to tear people down. To win virtue points in our small social scenes. Not really about the issues (independence from corporations, the NFL's bad history with domestic violence) they presented as being about. An excuse to be shitty towards a celebrity – doubly so when it was a celebrity who previously marketed herself as a beacon for those values.

Cancel culture before we call it that. Tenderqueer before Tumblr. We talked an incredible amount of shit about this on our mailing lists and our websites. I practiced the acerbic wit I'd picked up from some of the boys I'd been hooking up with and made M—— laugh hard.

I feel particularly embarrassed now – knowing that the NFL was planning on using a cover version of the song that Ani's label couldn't have stopped. I feel particularly embarrassed knowing some of the traumatic shit DiFranco went through in those early years we lionized from middle-class comfort. Punk is cool, but sleeping outside, less so. Old New York is cool, but being adjacent to coercive sex work and junkie culture, less so.

We all generated enough negative buzz that her business manager, Scot Fisher, called some of us on the phone to smooth things over. Another awkward PR move. My younger website-running friends seemed delighted and placated by this. I felt – shitty. Shitty because, even then, I realized my behavior was poor and also because, even then, I knew when I was being handled.

I was on my way out of the scene but this incident served as an accelerant. I kept my website going for a few years because running a website was still cool, but my heart wasn't in it. As Ani went on to further mainstream success I tried to keep in touch with some of the folks I met in those years, but it was never quite the same.

M——

Oct 24, 2003 – Dan Bern – Wakefield, Quebec – Black Sheep Inn

Oct 25, 2003 – Dan Bern – Toronto, Ontario – El Mocambo

I've joined M—— on the road. Through a series of weird life choices she's found herself doing road management and merch girl work for a touring musician, D——. M—— was one of the folks who came down hard on Ani as her music and politics drifted away from their roots.

My unrequited crush remained unrequited.

I remember being nervous about crossing into Canada with undeclared merchandise for sale, but M—— shrugged it off. This was also the woman who would occasionally fly with then-illegal marijuana by storing it in her Keeper brand menstrual cup.

We made it into Canada, passing through Montreal and on to Wakefield. This was my first visit to Quebec, and the French language on all the billboards charmed me. The owner of this venue did not charm me. The Black Sheep was a bar under a second-story hostel, but the owner made it clear he was *not* running a hotel and I suggested to M—— that we start finding a place to stay the night. More experienced in road matters, she said something that amounted to don't worry about it, and after raking in a packed house worth of profits the owner seemed less worried about M——, D——, and me spending the night in the old hostel beds.

I woke up early, still a restless sleeper. I tried reading the copy of *You Shall Know Our Velocity* I had picked up that seemed popular with all the Microserfs pilled home page people I followed online, but it said nothing to me about my life. Instead, I turned its blank front cover into a journal, and started to write out my anxieties about M——, and how my idea of her was changing the more time I spent with her.

I went into the small town and found nothing open but a bodega-like market. I acquired some sort of manufactured food for breakfast, nodding at the shopkeeper, afraid to display my lack of French language. I returned to the not-hostel to find M—— and D—— discussing details of the next show with one of the fans from last night hanging around D——. It was clear neither D—— nor the fan had spent the night alone.

These displays of road-poly always made me uncomfortable – the *idea* of non-monogamous relationships had a pull on me, but the way these road relationships never seemed to have clear agreements and often left one or both parties feeling done wrong always made me believe I was witness to the start of some future drama.

The meeting adjourned and M—— announced it was food time, and that we were meeting someone she knew named G——. We proceeded to a food spot that had “popular on Mother's Day” vibes. G—— turned out to be a *very* shy and nerdy young man. Trucker glasses, a vibe we'd now say was slightly autistic, and still learning how to move in the world. M—— was – not kind to him.

She relished making him uncomfortable and embarrassed. It went beyond the point of my comfort. As I saw her thoughtlessness border on cruelty I saw a younger version of myself in G——. I wondered if the way M—— was treating G—— was the way M—— had treated me. A convenient amusement.

At one point she was talking about old 70s gay culture and was joking about the dick dock – the Provincetown beach that was a notorious cruising ground. M—— started mockingly asking G—— if he was looking for a trip to the dick dock and something in me snapped into place, and I steered the conversation away from G—— and towards me.

“And all my generation got was a basement tea room in the student union”

There was an awkward silence as I turned cruising from a joke to tease G—— with into a real thing that I knew about and maybe participated in. Conversation resumed, but with

M—— spending less energy teasing G——.

M—— and I drove on to Toronto for a final show at the storied El Mocambo tavern. At one point we see a dog in the distance running right at us and M—— freezes – “We’re going to watch that dog get hit by a car”. I slow down and the dog passes us on the left, its owners in hot pursuit. I find myself in that co-dependent bind of seeing M—— wants to stop, but I want to keep going because this isn’t our business. We see the owners grab the dog in the rearview mirrors and avoid having to resolve that bind.

When we get to the venue I disconnected hard from M—— and almost immediately bump into a gal I know from the internet. C——. A young, short, incredibly fit raver baby dyke with whom I am slightly smitten, but in a “know nothing is going to happen” sort of way because C—— is *way* too cool for me. I hang with her and her two other friends. We smoke a bit of a joint outside and they assure me the cops don’t care, and that they care even less in Vancouver.

I hang with C—— for most of the night – she bummed loonies off me to tip the bartenders and I obliged. I realized I was being manipulated but didn’t mind. She talked about being super excited to see M——. Apparently, on M——’s last swing through Toronto she and her boyfriend had a threesome with C——, and I saw the look of a smitten human who didn’t know nothing was going to happen.

C—— drifted away as the crowd bullied D—— into multiple encores. After the last one I drifted back toward the merch table and saw C—— talking with M——, and then walking away. As she came towards me she had a stricken look on her face

“She doesn’t even like me”

I don’t remember what I said. I probably tried to be comforting. I might have said M—— was a hard woman to love. C—— and I said our goodbyes. This was the last time I saw her.

As I approached the merch table M—— was clearly irritated and distraught, and tried to talk me into taking the bus back to Rochester instead of driving me down there, as agreed. I found some inner reserve of backbone and said “No, I can’t afford that, and the bus would be getting in at a super sketchy hour with no way back to my place for me”.

We drive the three hours back to Rochester in awkward, mostly silence. M—— slept on my floor (because I had no couch). We said our goodbyes in the morning and she left without breakfast.

We remained in touch, but much more distant. I’d see her again in 2010 when I was in Los Angeles for a work thing. Dinner and drinks with her husband. I would observe her to be a very nervous and anxious person – quirks I once thought of as boldness masking an insecurity. We had a fine time, but I decided this wasn’t a person I wanted in my life anymore.

Sometimes people outgrow people. Not all friendships are meant to last.

J——

April 23rd, 2005 – Dar Williams – Aurora, NY

Wells College Phipps Auditorium

There's a thing that would happen in the pre-GPS world where you'd be driving along, zoned out, and suddenly get The Fear™. Am I going the wrong way?

There's not a lot you can do about this in the moment. You have, if you're lucky, a MapQuest printout with an exit number, and when you see the next exit coming up you quickly calculate if the numbers are going the right way to get to the exit you want. If you're not confident about remembering the last exit number you might have to pass two exits

I finally realized I had taken a *left* onto NY-90 instead of a right and turned around. One more tic on the things to be nervous list about as I approach Wells College.

Other things to be nervous about: I'm heading to this concert *without* a ticket – sales were local only but I know that there are always a few tickets released the day of the show and then the no-shows. I'm meeting up with J—— and they'll be bringing a gaggle of younger (early/mid-20s) dykes along. My “will these new lesbians accept me” senses were running on high. Also – Wells is still a woman's only college, and while I've been told it's a general public event I don't *know* if it's a general public event. I'm also a little nervous about seeing J——. It's been a minute since our shared car ride and I can't help but project my experience with M—— onto this reunion.

I get there just as everyone's been seated – I spot my friend and her friends inside and wave. My presence – flummoxes? – the two middle-aged women working the door at their fold-out table. I explain my situation and they tell me to take a seat. They tell me I can have a no-show ticket IF it's still a no-show at the start of the concert. They don't seat people after an event has started.

I sit, somehow confident it will work out. Two minutes before Dar goes on they wave me over to a seat. I wave again at J—— and her friends as I sit down a few rows away. It's a lovely performance.

We gather together after the show – I can't remember if we pile into a single car or take separate ones, but we're on the search for diner food. We try Friendly's and the host tells us they're to go only at this hour. We're suspect.

The locals gather their brains together and we find another diner. Probably a Perkins. We just – vibe. I feel none of the exclusion from these slightly younger women that I'd

felt from the slightly older dykes I'm made uneasy friendships with in the past. A young butch waxes melodic about the silky white smooth skin of her new crush. I feel – at home with these women. I hate when the night ends and we have to part ways.

In a different world – one maybe five or ten years later – my twenty-nine-year-old self would have started putting the pieces together. But this wasn't that world. The music scene was a poor place for a trans woman to accept she was trans.

Later that summer lesbian icon Diane DiMassa said the following about trans women at Mitchfest (cw: transphobia, TERF shit)

[Michigan Womyn's Festival] is for women who have been at the ass-end of life here on The Planet of the Apes their whole life. This usually does not apply to MTF's.

It's just fucking typical that a man-born lesbian can't get the concept of not being allowed somewhere.

A part of me I couldn't clearly see longed to be a queer woman, but I could never acknowledge or see it because the loudest and most badass queer cis women of the era were horrible to trans women. Most of the rest remained awkwardly silent. Those who spoke up for us had tiny platforms.

Over the next few years, I would continue to pull away from the queer women's music scene. When, fourth months later, I moved to Portland I'd turn instead to club life, goth drag, house parties, and self-medication via alcohol as an outlet for my gender shit.

June 2023 – Indiana, PA – Spotify

I reach the end of the long gravel driveway, smile at the kitschy American flag on the fake gatehouse, and turn back around to walk up the long gravel driveway. Elisabeth told me she'd left the flag as camouflage until she had a chance to assess and hopefully charm her affluent rural neighbors. It was a mood driving through the Pennsylvania hills and still seeing Trump banners around, particularly when I was at that peak awkward ten months of estrogen.

I'm back east to see old friends, kiss a woman, maybe kiss a second, start mending a twenty-three-year estrangement with my parents, and decide if my defacto marriage of eight years is worth hanging on to. Being back east and on the road brought back a lot of old music memories. I end up listening to those early Ani DiFranco albums again.

I find myself most drawn to a series of songs she did very early on – *Small World*, *Brief Bus Stop*, etc. Sparse arrangements – simple songs about the radical act of two women talking to each other out in the world. I still remember the words. As all those old feelings meet my new feelings I'm crying. Without the shame to hide behind I realize all I ever

wanted those decades ago was to talk to another woman. As a woman. About my fears. My hopes. My life.

Bitter tears of regret mixed with the tears of joy that I'll finally be able to do that, every day, for the rest of my life.

Asking too Much

The idea for this zine started small: take my reviews of some local trans/queer rock shows and bookend them with two essays. The first about my former life as a slightly toxic fan of a toxic musician in a toxic time. The second a small essay about how healing the local music scene has been.

Then, as I got into my feelings, the scope crept. I started listening to the old tapes, feeling the old draw. I was remembering those years more and more fondly – and then I made the mistake of reading an interview with Ani about her autobiography in 2019. (cw: transphobia, TERF shit)

You write that you sympathize with both sides regarding Michfest's trans-exclusionary guidelines: "I understand the need for trans women to find community with and be accepted by other women, and I understand the need for people with reproductive systems, perceived female at birth, to make space to process their particular relationship to patriarchy." The need for an exclusive space, I don't get that, as a stupid man. Could you explain to me why? It seems to me that in your life, as a cis woman, you encounter many other cis women with whom you can discuss reproduction. To have an institution that excludes such a tiny piece of the population would seem only to serve to hurt those people.

I feel pretty strongly that the staunchness of the vibe there was not helping that festival or feminism in general. But I do know and have experienced how [for] women, it's sort of the eternal circumstance to be always put to the end of the line. This is now again: "It's not the time for you to have what you need in terms of a space to process your relationship to patriarchy, to support each other over maybe even something as specific as living in this world with a reproductive system and all that that means." I think women are asked again and again and again to move over and make room for somebody else, you know? So I can feel that dynamic of it. I can empathize with the feeling of you're shutting down this experience that I really need affirmed by the people who share it exactly, and you're telling me I don't have a right to that space. There is no space yet for that! I constructed a space and now you're saying, "That too is not your space that you crave." I think it's hard for anybody outside of a very specific group to experience it the way that group does. I

agree on one level, ooh maybe this group should be a little bigger. Maybe that's the way through here. But I don't want to tell you that your experience doesn't deserve a place. Within Mish there [was] a tent only for black women to go and process what it means to be a black person with ovaries. I don't want to say to that tent, "You should let me in!"

I guess when the segregation dovetails with the status quo, that's when my antennae go up. Trans people are told practically everywhere, "Not here."

Yeah, exactly. I think it's just... that's all I was trying to do: Let's not be quick to say to cis women, "Move over again." Maybe that's the right thing to do, cis women, in this moment, but be careful, society, of telling women that again.

From: <https://jezebel.com/1834252022>

In some ways I'm proud of myself – if I'd read this in 2019 I would have felt that familiar tug of war between my shame and ineffable desire, and then washed it away with thoughts of "Oh she's right, who am I to disagree", etc. Letting someone else define my experience.

Reading it now though it's nonsensical and almost laughable. Her inability to see us as women – or more accurately to see us at all. Like so many of these conversations, the voices of trans women are just absent. Niko Stratis's *Always The Topic, Rarely The Voice* talks more succinctly and elegantly about this than I'm currently capable of.

Where my pride in my progress falls away is how much of a gut punch reading this still was. Still is.

I know there are points of view that are probably healthier – Nancy Nangeroni's disinterest in being invited to someone else's party and Imogen Binnie's (correct) assessment that Mitchfest had evolved into a lot of affluent and affluent adjacent women in a field.

The thing is, I don't really care about the music festival – what I still struggle with is the culture it's a symptom of. Because I still want the approval of these women. Even as their culture denied me a place and helped keep me from myself it also taught me so much of what I know about being queer. And what does that say about me – that I'm still seeking validation from a cohort of women who have no time for women like me?

I can forgive the past. I have to. If only to forgive myself. But seeing a nominal feminist still so lost in her own story that she can't see the hurt her cohort contributed to – it's incredibly disheartening.

August 5th 2023 – Portland, OR – Swan Dive

Grooblen, Mr. Vale's Math Class, Shaylee

I get to the venue early. I haven't been here since it was called the East Bank Saloon and I'm surprised to see the old modest space has been gussied up with fresh paint and fancy cocktails. My friend E——, half a generation younger than me, arrives and we order some truly awful bar food for dinner. A bit before the show we see R——, a local promoter/event runner, and later on our friend A—— will show up. We're all part of overlapping transition cohorts – I'm the oldest in calendar years but the youngest in trans years.

E—— and I first saw Shaylee together back in July at a pride show – two weeks after I returned from my trip east and ended my defacto marriage. Elle Archer's songs about leaning on substances, the fraughtness and resilience of trans survival, love, and gay sex hit me like I was twenty again. With a body in flux, I may as well be. I trauma bond with the album in a way I haven't in decades and I'll use Shaylee and other bands from that night to reengage with the local music scene.

Mr. Vale's Math Class is a little too jam-bandy for me so I head downstairs and escape to the back patio for a drink. I see R—— has taken refuge as well because "they're good but singing about math". We talk – I'm surprised to discover she's only a year younger than me. She talked about the klatch of trans women on the island that helped her get her bearings and how she's trying to do her part now. We talk about other difficult things that aren't my stories to tell. A—— and E—— join us after the set and we bullshit for a bit before Shaylee comes on.

Shaylee, of course, whips. It's hard to know which – Elle's talent or Elle's ambition – outstrips the other. I imagine it changes daily, but she oozes that sort of rock star destiny that all the great frontwomen have. The trio plays off each other perfectly. They sound not like 90s power pop sounded but the way 90s power pop felt. All the messy feelings of a Nirvana song but the rage and despondency tempered into a more precise instrument. They could truly be one of the great indie bands if the culture still had room for great indie bands.

After the show, the four of us leave the venue, get the required group selfie, and then walk east toward a Sapphic Dance night. I'm still electric from the music and drinks and harass-flirt the soft boys who look safe outside of Star Bar and Home (the old Maiden and old Morrison Hotel, respectively).

We get to the Sapphic Dance night and I feel – a chill. Portland is filled with queer dance nights and lesbian dance nights and this one is the latter. Three insular groups barely talking to each other and then us. The AFAB-only energy tastes familiar.

As I take my leave two minutes after walking in the door R—— checks in and I say "Cis

lesbians are sometimes a mood” and we share an understanding glance and then a hug. A—— and E—— decide to give it a go.

I’ll catch up with them later and learn my instincts were not wrong.





*There we were washed up on the curb
As the rush hour traffic went out with the tide
And I was aware that with every word
spoken and shared
I could see her shaking subside
I said, sister, looks to me like you're going to be fine*