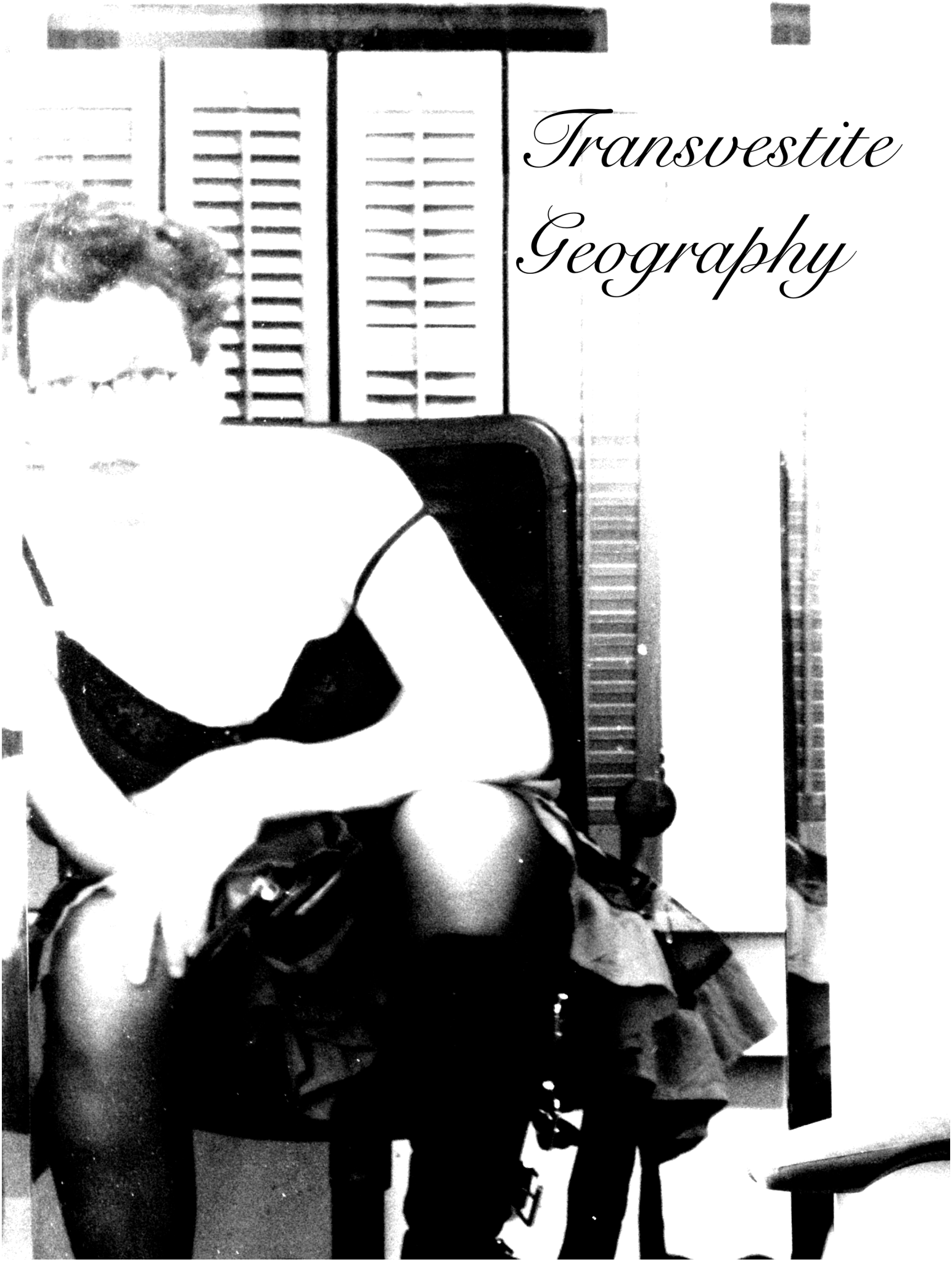

Transvestite Geography

Transvestite Geography

It's 2023 and I'm looking for a woman.

I would have met her sometime between 2007 and 2012 at a Portland bar called Plan B.

```
                    |   |                    |   |
                    |   |                    |   |
--------------------+   +--------------------+   +----------------------
                              SE Main St
--------------------+   +--------------------+   +----------------------
                    | S |                    | S |
          Plan B    | E |                    | E |
                    |   |                    |   |
                    | 7 |                    | 8 |
                    | t |                    | t |
                    | h |                    | h |
                    |   |                    |   |
                    | A |                    | A |
                    | v |                    | v |
                    | e |                    | e |
                    |   |                    |   |
```

Plan B used to be called Acme, and now the building houses a bar called the White Owl Social Club.

I would have been there for a goth club night – I'm reasonably sure it was Hive, but it might have been Dementia. The goth club nights were often a spooky portent of doom for a bar – a booking of last resort for the owners. Guaranteed attendance but perhaps not as much loose money as they were hoping for.

Hive eventually found a permeant-ish home at the Star Theater downtown.

```
                     |   |                     |   |
                     |   |                     |   |
--------------------+   +--------------------+   +----------------------
                              NW Couch St
--------------------+   +--------------------+   +----------------------
                     | N |                     | N |
                     | W |                     | W |
                     |   |                     |   |
                     | 4 |                     | 5 |
                     | t |                     | t |
                     | h |                     | h |
                     |   |                     |   |
                     | A |                     | A |
                     | v |                     | v |
                     | e |                     | e |
      Star Theater   |   |                     |   |
                     |   |                     |   |
--------------------+   +--------------------+   +----------------------
                              West Burnside
--------------------+   +--------------------+   +----------------------
                     |   |                     |   |
                     |   |                     |   |
```

I know it was 2007 to 2012 because those were the years when my little hobby of "being a woman for the night" reached a fever pitch. My presentation and makeup skills were finally locked in and between the goths and a clatch of other girls with "wardrobe-related hobbies" I was out more weekends than not.

When I met the woman from Hive I was, as we said, "en femme" and slightly embarrassed because she was what polite society now calls a transgender woman.

The first time I ever went out en femme on the west coast was in 2006 at a goth club called The Vogue. This was in Seattle. I was living there working for a Big Technology™ company in Redmond. I was also finally embracing the queer (if compartmentalized) life that I'd imagined for myself when I left the east coast in 2005.

This was the 11th Avenue Vogue.

```
                     |   |                    |   |
                     |   |                    |   |
--------------------+   +--------------------+   +----------------------
                                E Pine St
--------------------+   +--------------------+   +----------------------
                     | N |                    | N |
                     | W |                    | W |
                     |   |                    |   |
                     | 1 |  The Vogue         | 1 |
                     | 1 |                    | 2 |
                     | t |                    | t |
                     | h |                    | h |
                     |   |                    |   |
                     | A |                    | A |
                     | v |                    | v |
                     | e |                    | e |
                     |   |                    |   |
--------------------+   +--------------------+   +----------------------
                                E Pike St
--------------------+   +--------------------+   +----------------------
                     |   |                    |   |
                     |   |                    |   |
```

The club had a longer history in Seattle – the first avenue location was more of a grunge and rock-n-roll bar. Depending on how your measure these things it was one of the first places Nirvana played a show.

```
                    |   |                    |   |
                    |   |                    |   |
--------------------+   +--------------------+   +----------------------
                                2nd Ave
--------------------+   +--------------------+   +----------------------
                    | L |                    | V |
                    | e |                    | i |
                    | n |                    | r |
                    | o |                    | g |
                    | r |                    | i |
--------------------+ a +--------------------+ n +----------------------
--------------------+   +--------------------+ i +----------------------
                    | S |                    | a |
                    | t |                    |   |
                    |   |                    | S |
                    |   |        The Vogue   | t |
                    |   |                    |   |
--------------------+   +--------------------+   +----------------------
                                1st Ave
--------------------+   +--------------------+   +----------------------
                    |   |                    |   |
                    |   |                    |   |
```

`@rotate aproximatly 45° clockwise`

My trip to The Vogue happened approximately twelve years after Kurt killed themselves. There's some evidence and lots of thought that Kurt was a trans woman. I want to believe this. But Kurt probably didn't think of themselves as a trans woman, because so many of us didn't back then. Or maybe that's just something else I want to believe – still desperate for a connection to a depressed late teen idol.

I remember being awkward and nervous as I passed the ID on to the door checker. I remember dancing and watching myself in the mirror, happy but not fully satisfied by who I saw.

I still enjoy watching myself dance in mirrors.

This wasn't the first time I was out and about in a dress. In 1997 I acquired a dress from a small thrift store in Rochester, NY's Jefferson Plaza.

```
    Small Thrift Store                    Other Shops




                              Parking Lot



--------------------------------------------------------------------------
                             W Jefferson Rd
--------------------------------------------------------------------------
@rotate aproximatly 25° clockwise
```

I told myself I bought it for punk rock and Halloween reasons. I remember my women's studies art class professor commented that I was cutting a very different sort of woman with my bald head and I confidently responded – "No, I'm just a boy in a dress". She nodded – either accepting my story or seeing what I couldn't see.

When I left Seattle to return to Portland in late 2006 I'd embrace what we now call a duel role life. I met a girl like me online via yahoo messenger. Z— was a lawyer and was great at cajoling a number of us into outings. There was The Northabank, a small gay bar in Vancouver, WA

```
                    |   |                    |   |
                    |   |                    |   |
--------------------+   +--------------------+   +----------------------
                              West 7th St
--------------------+   +--------------------+   +----------------------
                    | W |                    | M |
                    | a |                    | a |
                    | s |                    | i |
                    | h |                    | n |
                    | i |                    |   |
                    | n |                    | S |
                    | g |                    | t |
                    | t |                    |   |
                    | o |                    |   |
                    | n |                    |   |
                    |   |                    |   |
                    | S |         The        |   |
                    | t |         Northbank  |   |
--------------------+   +--------------------+   +----------------------
                              West 6th St
--------------------+   +--------------------+   +----------------------
                    |   |                    |   |
                    |   |                    |   |
```

There was also Embers, which at that point was more a gay-themed bar, and then the aggressively male CC Slaughters. I always felt barely tolerated there, but the cis Kinsey 6 staff saw the cis bachelorette parties as a bigger threat.

```
     |   |          |   |     |   |     |   |     |   |               |   |
     |   |          |   |     |   |     |   |     |   |   CC          |   |
     |   |          |   |     |   |     |   |     |   |   Slaughters  |   |
-----+   +----------+   +-----+   +-----+   +-----+   +---------------+   +-
                                NW Davis
-----+   +----------+   +-----+   +-----+   +-----+   +---------------+   +-
     | N |          | N |     | N |     | N |     | N |               | N |
     | W |          | W |     | W |     | W |     | W |               | W |
     |   |          |   |     |   |     |   |     |   |               |   |
     | B |          | 6 |     | 5 |     | 4 |     | 3 |               | 2 |
     | r |          | t |     | t |     | t |     | r |               | n |
     | o |          | h |     | h |     | h |     | d |               | d |
     | a |          |   |     |   |     |   |     |   |               |   |
     | d |          |   |     |   |     |   |     |   |               |   |
     | w |          |   |     |   |     |   |     |   |               |   |
     | a |          |   |     |   |     |   |     |   |               |   |
     | y |          |   |     |   |     |   |     |   |               |   |
     |   | Embers   |   |     |   |     |   |     |   |               |   |
     |   |          |   |     |   |     |   |     |   |               |   |
-----+   +----------+   +-----+   +-----+   +-----+   +---------------+   +-
                                NW Couch
-----+   +----------+   +-----+   +-----+   +-----+   +---------------+   +-
     |   |          |   |     |   |     |   |     |   |               |   |
     |   |          |   |     |   |     |   |     |   |               |   |
```

@even less to scale than the other maps

I remember one evening at Z—'s apartment getting ready and the third girl turns the corner as I'm putting the finishing touches on my outfit and she freezes in surprise (and perhaps envy) and says

> You really have that goth girl thing nailed, don't you?

For what it's worth I did – and this made me happy in a way that's still hard to describe.

I don't remember her name – she made a pass at Z— one night and then stopped coming around. Another girl, Al—, was a mainstay at these gatherings. Her boy name was my boy name. She'd always talk about annoying her wife when she got lost in "the pink fog".

Then there were N— and An—. They weren't a part of this particular clatch. Instead,

they were the rare people who existed in several of my compartments. N— and I moved in the same social circles. We would club until two o'clock and come back to her apartment, in full femme regalia, to her Republican roommate getting ready to leave for a TSA job. These outings became less frequent when I proposed a foot rub progress and N— drunkenly and awkwardly stumbled off to their room. Also, she'd started dating a friend who'd go on to become my longest-standing Portland friend, and I didn't want to complicate things.

An— I met through the kink and poly munches in Portland. An— had a poly partner who dripped with Scorpio energy regardless of her birthday. I had a type. An— and this girl mixed like oil and water, and eventually An— would settle down with a sweet lady and her dogs. They'd both come to fetish events together. My favorite problematic story about An— is when he said he'd lied about the age on his femme FetLife profile because "I thought it was something a woman would do".

D— was a girl who'd join occasionally and you could tell she had her own scene to attend to. I fancied myself like D—. These outings usually ended early, and after I'd dropped off my appointed charges I'd head out for a night of dancing somewhere – usually with goth music.

By this time Club Noir had closed. Its bar space became the generic rock/hipster bar The East End, and would occasionally host goth nights. The East End closed after a fire, and the space became The Elvis Room. The Elvis Room closed after the world burned down in COVID during the reign of an openly fascist American president. Now the space is a nominal lesbian bar called Doc Marie's. A gay bathhouse, Hawks, used to be located across the street but was torn down.

```
          |   |                     |   |                     |   |
          |   |                     |   |                     |   |
----------+   +---------------------+   +---------------------+   +-------
                                SE Ash
----------+   +---------------------+   +---------------------+   +-------
          | S |                     | S |                     | S |
          | E |              East   | E |                     | E |
          |   |              End    |   |                     |   |
          | M |                     | G |                     | 6 |
          | L |                     | r |                     | t |
          | K |                     | a |                     | h |
          |   |                     | n |                     |   |
          | J |                     | d | Hawks               |   |
          | r |                     |   |                     |   |
          |   |                     |   |                     |   |
          | B |                     |   |                     |   |
          | l |                     |   |                     |   |
          | v |                     |   |                     |   |
          | d |                     |   |                     |   |
          |   |                     |   |                     |   |
----------+   +---------------------+   +---------------------+   +-------
                                SE Pine
----------+   +---------------------+   +---------------------+   +-------
          |   |                     |   |                     |   |
          |   |                     |   |                     |   |
```

They reopened further out in Montavilla.

```
          |   |                     |   |
          |   |                     |   |
----------+   +---------------------+   +--------------------------------
                                SE 97th Ave
----------+   +---------------------+   +--------------------------------
          | S |                     | S |
          | E |              Hawks  | E |
          |   |                     |   |
          | P |                     | O |
          | i |                     | a |
          | n |                     | k |
          | e |                     |   |
          |   |                     |   |
          | S |                     |   |
          | t |                     |   |
          |   |                     |   |
          |   |                     |   |
          |   |                     |   |
          |   |                     |   |
          |   |                     |   |
----------+   +---------------------+   +--------------------------------
                                SE 99th Ave
----------+   +---------------------+   +--------------------------------
          |   |                     |   |
          |   |                     |   |
```

With Noir closed there was no dedicated Portland goth club. In 2011, the Lovecraft Bar opened. This bar now operates as Coffin Club.

```
          |   |                    |   |
          |   |                    |   |
----------+   +--------------------+   +--------------------------------
                                SE Oak St
----------+   +--------------------+   +--------------------------------
          | S |                    | S |
          | E |         Lovecraft  | E |
          |   |                    |   |
          | M |                    | G |
          | L |                    | r |
          | K |                    | a |
          |   |                    | n |
          | J |                    | d |
          | r |                    |   |
          |   |                    |   |
          | B |                    |   |
          | l |                    |   |
          | v |                    |   |
          | d |                    |   |
          |   |                    |   |
----------+   +--------------------+   +--------------------------------
                               SE Stark St
----------+   +--------------------+   +--------------------------------
          |   |                    |   |
          |   |                    |   |
```

The name change happened in part because there was some sex pest weirdness with its old owner.

So my Portland goth clubs were club nights at places like the aforementioned Plan B, Mt. Tabor Legacy Lounge, or the Bossanova Ballroom.

```
          |   |                    |   |
          |   |                    |   |
----------+   +--------------------+   +-----------------+ ....
                              E Burnside St
----------+   +--------------------+   +-----------------+ ....
          | S |                    | S |
          | E |  Bossanova         | E |
          |   |  Ballroom          |   |
          | 7 |                    | 8 |
          | t |                    | t |
          | h |                    | h |
          |   |                    |   |
          | A |                    | A |
          | v |                    | v |
          | e |                    | e |
          |   |                    |   |
----------+   +--------------------+   +-----------------+ ....
                             SE Akeny St
----------+   +--------------------+   +-----------------+ ....
          |   |                    |   |

          .....                    .....       .....                 .....
```

```
          |   |                    |   |       |   |                 |   |
----------+   +--------------------+   +- ... -+   +-----------------+   +--
                            SE Madison St
----------+   +--------------------+   +- ... ----------------------+   +--
          | S |                    | S |                            |   |
          | E |                    | E |                            |   |
          |   |                    |   |                            |   |
          | 7 |                    | 8 |                            |   |
          | t |                    | t |                            |   |
          | h |                    | h |                            |   |
          |   |                    |   |                  Mt Tabor  |   |
          | A |                    | A |                  Legacy    |   |
          | v |                    | v |                  Lounge    |   |
          | e |                    | e |                            |   |
----------+   +--------------------+   +- ... ----------------------+   +--
                          SE Hawthorne Blvd
----------+   +--------------------+   +- ... -+   +-----------------+   +--
          |   |                    |   |       |   |                 |   |
          |   |                    |   |       | S |                 | S |
          |   |                    |   |       | E |                 | E |
          |   |                    |   |       |   |                 |   |
          |   |                    |   |       | 4 |                 | 4 |
          |   |                    |   |       | 8 |                 | 9 |
          |   |                    |   |       | t |                 | t |
          |   |                    |   |       | h |                 | h |
          |   |                    |   |       |   |                 |   |
          |   |                    |   |       | A |                 | A |
          |   |                    |   |       | v |                 | v |
          |   |                    |   |       | e |                 | e |
          |   |                    |   |       |   |                 |   |
```

@ apologies to actual cartographers for all
@ of this, but in particular this one

On the west side, there was DeaconX fetish night at Berbati's pan. I'd also dance at The Fez in boy mode and sometimes, when my gay complicated-gender girlfriend who knew everything was DJing, as a girl.

```
          |   |          |   |               |   |               |   |
          |   |          |   |               |   |               |   |
----------+   +----------+   +----- ... -----+   +---------------+   +--
                              W Burnside St
----------+   +----------+   +----- ... -----+   +---------------+   +--
          | S |          | S |               | S |               | S |
          | W |          | W |               | W |               | W |
          |   |          |   |               |   |               |   |
          | 1 | The      | 1 |               | 3 |               | 2 |
          | 1 | Fez      | 0 |               | r |               | n |
          | t |          | t |               | d |               | d |
          | h |          | h |               |   |               |   |
          |   |          |   |               | A |               | A |
          | A |          | A |               | v |               | v |
          | v |          | v |               | e |               | e |
          | e |          | e |               |   |               |   |
          |   |          |   |               |   |               |   |
          |   |          |   |               |   |               |   |
          |   |          |   |               |   |               |   |
          |   |          |   |               |   |               |   |
                                            -+   +---------------+   +--
                                                   Ankeny Alley
                                            -+   +---------------+   +--
                                             |   |               |   |
                                             |   |               |   |
```

```
@ don't believe this grid's lies -- the streets get weird down here
```

Legacy Lounge is now an adult arcade. The Bossanova Ballroom still books events but their days of being the goth club of last resort seem over. Both The Fez and Berbati's closed years ago.

On other nights it was the queer dance parties, which all seemed to happen at the Rotture/Branx complex or Holocene. Blow Pony and Sick Disko were the mainstays at Rotture/Branx. Rotture/Branx was a club that existed in many compartments – the bartenders knew me in both roles.

```
          |   |          |   |               |   |          |   |
          |   |          |   |               |   |          |   |
----------+   +----------+   +----- ... -----+   +----------+   +-------
                                SE Pine St
----------+   +----------+   +----- ... -----+   +----------+   +-------
          | S |          | S |               | S |          | S |
          | E |          | E |               | E |          | E |
          |   |          |   |               |   |          |   |
          | 3 |          | 4 |               | 1 |          | 1 |
 Rotture/ | r |          | t |               | 0 |          | 1 |
 Branx    | d |          | h |               | t |          | t |
          |   |          |   |               | h |          | h |
          | A |          | A |               |   |          |   |
          | v |          | v |               | A |          | A |
          | e |          | e |               | v |          | v |
          |   |          |   |               | e |          | e |
----------+   +----------+   +----- ... -----+   +----------+   +-------
                                SE Oak St
----------+   +----------+   +----- ... -----+   +----------+   +-------
          |   |          |   |               |   |          |   |
          |   |          |   |               |   |          |   |


          .....          .....               .....          .....


          |   |          |   |               |   |          |   |
          |   |          |   |               |   |          |   |
----------+   +----------+   +----- ... -----+   +----------+   +-------
                                SE Alder St
----------+   +----------+   +----- ... -----+   +----------+   +-------
          |   |          |   |               |   |          |   |
          |   |          |   |               |   |          |   |
          |   |          |   |               |   |          |   |
          |   |          |   |               |   |          |   |
          |   |          |   |               |   | Holocene |   |
----------+   +----------+   +----- ... -----+   +----------+   +-------
                              SE Morrison St
----------+   +----------+   +----- ... -----+   +----------+   +-------
          |   |          |   |               |   |          |   |
```

When Rotture/Branx closed, the space became (or went back to being called?) Euphoria. There was a period where Euphoria ownership booted the queer events to focus on EDM and not "confuse" the patrons. The building now houses 45 East. The Tazo Tea bottling center on 2nd closed long ago and the balcony no longer smells of tea.

Holocene carries on, although the days of the Sissy Boy drag troupe are long gone.

Returning to Hive at Plan B – at first I thought this woman was, like me, a self-identified transvestite, or "TV" using the slang of the time. She dissuaded me of this almost immediately by bragging about her recent top surgery. She was, as we'd say back then, a transsexual. A "TS".

These days queer trans folks have reclaimed the word transexual, but transvestite still lingers in shame. At the time, these were the words we used. TS/TV/CD was a key field on any dating or fetish website.

```
<select>
    <option value="0">TS</option>
    <option value="1">TV</option>
    <option value="2">CD</option>
</select>
```

The trans women I'd crossed paths with in my 20s and 30s were almost, save two, incredibly standoffish. I played my role as the cross-dressing transvestite by being mildly embarrassed about who I was and how I was spending my evenings.

Of the two who were slightly different: – T— was a girl seven years my junior. I met her on LiveJournal then we both realized who each other was at a party. On LiveJournal I was femme presenting with a "don't panic, I'm a boy" caveat in my profile. On LiveJournal, I would, among other things, recount my various club land adventures and muse like a teenager about gender. Being the Nevada cliche before it existed. I'm also pretty sure I read the same shaving advice that Maria did.

T— has since told me that reading my LiveJournal helped her accept herself as a trans woman – which is wild given it took me another decade and a half to get there myself. Over the years she's been a dear friend and was my earliest biggest champion when I finally accepted myself. When we talk about the before times she's said she knew I was probably trans, but was giving me the space to figure things out for myself. I've heard some of the nerdier dolls call this the Trans Prime Directive.

The second different trans woman was the woman I met at Hive. At one point in the evening, still trying to figure out what her deal was, I asked her why she got the augmentation and she said (and I quote) "Because big tits are awesome". I'd never met a trans woman who talked so openly and joyously about her transition. It was something to be celebrated, not hidden away as though it hadn't happened.

Later that evening, outside on the patio, we talked a bit. She was generous and curious

about me, I was standoffish and feeling silly playing dress up but putting up that cool "over it all" front I wore like armor. I don't remember her words but she said if I ever wanted to talk, or needed help getting through the system, I should talk to her. I nodded, gave a diplomatic "thank you that's a lot to think about", and never followed up. I was, after all, just a transvestite.

I want to find this woman, hug her, and thank her. Of all the trans women I met in my 30s, she was the only one who invited me in. The only one who realized sometimes you need to break the prime directive.

Epilogue

As I write this I'm about a year into social transition and ten months into medical. Low T and high E have been amazing for my mental health and overall happiness. Discovering I've had low-key dysmorphia and you can like your body has been wild.

Over this first year, I've managed to reconnect with some of the old clatch.

D—'s still in the wind, but Al— transitioned and started HRT years ago, then had to stop for medical reasons. She now identifies as genderfluid and presents femme.

I bumped into N— recently at a friend's wedding and he said he worked on his gender stuff a lot during therapy, but came to the conclusion that his life was at a spot that made transition impossible, so "why keep worrying about it". He keeps a box of his favorite clothing from the period, and during the reception karaoke he sang Sweet Transvestite from Rocky Horror.

I stopped in to see An— at their retail job and we talked a bit about the old days – he dodged questions about gender things but had another (younger, cool, chill) employee there so who knows what he felt he could share. We might get together for a drink.

Z— was trickier to find. We'd stopped talking. This happened when they moved in with their girlfriend. At the time I had encouraged them, and everyone I knew, to bring up their wardrobe-related hobbies as early as they could in any dating cycle. Z— was terrified of doing this, and I didn't know how to advise them. I moved in counter-culture circles and Z— did not.

All was revealed when they moved in together and their partner did not react well.

Again, I didn't know what to say other than I told you so, but to say that would be cruel so I said nothing. We drifted apart. I lost Z's email and phone number in the decade and a half since. Yahoo Messenger was retired years ago.

In 2023 I dug up my old iPhone 1 with its screen bubbles and found their old number. I reached out and there they were. We caught up. I apologized for not being able to support them when they needed me, and they said it was no problem, that I had been

right, and that they had worked things through with their girlfriend. They were still together to this day, and he was living as a man.

I asked about gender things and he said after our falling out that he'd continued to go out, occasionally, but kept it separate from (but known to) his partner. Like me, as his 40s crept up his activity faded. Aging out of the scene and satisficing bringing less and less satisfaction.

Then he said that "she" still lingers in the back of his mind. Especially recently. And that he's not sure what to do about that.

Again I find myself wanting to urge Z— in a direction, but it seems like we all need to come to this in our own way and time. So I'm generous and curious. I told him if he ever wanted to talk about things or needed help navigating the system that the door was wide open. Z— thanked me. Diplomatically.

We haven't really talked since.

Postscript

A note about pronouns: Back in the day we had a habit of using feminine pronouns when we were out en femme, and male pronouns when we were not. I've mostly continued that here, dropping into they/them occasionally for dramatic purposes. Also, names have been changed to balance people's privacy with my being a gossipy bitch when I process my feelings.

As much as there are giant unneeded barriers to receiving trans health care, hormones, and HRT are one of the easiest and most effective paths to get for folks moving in a trans feminine direction. You can talk to your primary care physician, or find a women's hormone specialist (many do trans-HRT because it's easy work and patients are incredibly happy about it), and as of this writing, there are a few national providers who operate online (Plume, Folx). The model is called informed consent and they'll give you some meow meow meow about risks, then you sign off, and you get a prescription for estrogen and maybe an androgen blocker. You do labs every three months until you get the dosage dialed in.

Changes take months and years, not days. Most are reversible. If you're on the fence about your identity a month on E can be an incredibly useful thing. If it's not for you you can always stop before breast growth kicks in (an average of two or three months before that starts). I wish a culture of hormone-only transition was wider spread in the late 90s and 2000s – that the word non-op wasn't thrown around with scorn.

That said – if I could tell that younger lost girl only one thing it's that she's allowed in. We're all allowed in.

Alana Storm – Summer 2023 – https://bit.ly/alana-x-storm

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