

Dilating on Life: Ani DiFranco's Musical
Structuring of Subjectivity and Pleasure in *Dilate*.

by

Adelia Honeywood Harrison

B.M., The Eastman School of Music of the University of Rochester, 1993.

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Department of Music; Historical Musicology)

We accept this thesis as conforming to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

April 2000

© Adelia Honeywood Harrison, 2000

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the head of my department or by his or her representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Department of Music

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

Date April 28, 2000

Abstract

The experience of subjectivity provided by an art form can consist of the sense of “recognizing ourselves, our feelings, our bodies, our beliefs, or our social positions” in the art work (Middleton, 1990). For fans of guitarist-singer-songwriter Ani DiFranco, the identification with a subjective reality experienced in her music is powerful and pleasurable enough to inspire them with ardent devotion.

Ani DiFranco’s influence may not be simply reduced to her media image as a bisexual feminist, with fanatically obsessive and possessive fans, who has achieved stunning financial success completely independent of any major recording label. It cannot be simply reduced to her left-wing, politically charged lyrics, or her highly personalized autobiographical narratives. Nor has her success been limited to audiences of a particular sub-cultural group that share identity politics. The major force behind the “DiFranco phenomenon” is the music itself.

This paper posits the thesis that meaning in DiFranco’s music is not simply dependent on cultural influence and reception, but that musical structures play a crucial role in creating meaning and subjective experience for DiFranco’s fans. Analysis of musical structures operating in four songs from DiFranco’s 1996 album *Dilate* examines how these structures work to convey a particular sensual, emotional, and temporal reality. Emphasis is placed on various facets of performance that are essential to musical connotations of meaning.

The concluding section discusses DiFranco’s music as a site for sharing pleasures of identification, emotional communion, physical agency, and empowerment. Also examined is the volatility of a performer-fan relationship based on emotional investment and identification, one that is balanced precariously on the tensions between the personal and the political. The appropriation of the music’s perceived messages by particular groups as representative of their own value systems poses as many challenges to artistic integrity as does the commercialism of the music industry.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract		ii
List of Tables		iv
List of Examples		v
Chapter 1	Analyzing Subjectivity in the Music of Ani DiFranco	1
	1.1 Subjectivity in the music	1
	1.2 Analyzing Ani	4
	1.3 The analysis object	7
	1.4 Approaches to analysis	9
Chapter II	Four Analyses	14
	2.1 “Dilate”	14
	2.2 “Adam and Eve”	29
	2.3 “Shameless”	36
	2.4 “Going Down”	46
Chapter III	Ani and Her Fans	56
	3.1 Desiring Ani: intimacy, identity, and lust	56
	3.2 Politics and identity	60
	3.3 Bonds of trust	63
	3.4 Technical values	65
	3.5 Personal or political?	68
	3.6 It is all in the music	71
Discography and Bibliography		75
Appendix A	Song Lyrics	79
Appendix B	Biography	82

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	“Dilate”	16
Table 2	First word of each pair (“Shameless”)	37
Table 3	“Shameless”	37

LIST OF EXAMPLES

Ex.	1	Bass reduction	"Dilate"	15
	2	Overall harmonic rhythm of each strophe	"Dilate"	16
	3	New bass in Y	"Dilate"	24
	4	Bass line: Instrumental bridge 2, and final instrumental section	"Dilate"	25
	5	Bridge vocal riff	"Dilate"	25
	6	Vocal-melodic idea of final instrumental section	"Dilate"	26
	7	Repeated four-bar phrase	"Adam and Eve"	30
	8	First verse with final pitch of each line	"Adam and Eve"	30
	9	Guitar accompaniment in chorus	"Adam and Eve"	30
	10	Basic drum pattern in verses	"Adam and Eve"	32
	11	Vocal line in chorus	"Adam and Eve"	34
	12	Funk Riff 1	"Shameless"	37
	13	Vocal melody of A-section	"Shameless"	37
	14	Harmonic rhythm of chorus (B-section)	"Shameless"	38
	15	Vocal melody of chorus (B-section)	"Shameless"	39
	16	Cymbal pattern for first eight measures of chorus	"Shameless"	39
	17	Funk Riff 2	"Shameless"	45
	18	Drum sequencer pattern	"Going Down"	49
	19	Bass line	"Going Down"	49
	20	Entire text of "Going Down"	"Going Down"	50
	21	Sixteen measure interlude	"Going Down"	52
	22	Last sixteen measures	"Going Down"	54

Chapter 1: Analyzing Subjectivity in the Music of Ani DiFranco

1.1 Subjectivity in music

Susan McClary and Robert Walser have written that the aspect of music most prized by society “is precisely the illusion that one experiences one’s own subjectivity or a collective subjectivity in music.”¹ The experience of subjectivity provided by an art form can be the sense, as popular music scholar Richard Middleton put it, of “recogniz[ing] ourselves, our feelings, our bodies, our beliefs, or our social positions” in the art work.² Or it can be the sense of communing with another in that the feelings expressed in the work of art allow us to come to know the narrating subject (whether or not it is the author). We may perhaps share the feelings or ideas expressed, or be attracted to a way of being that seems contrary to our own habits. In either case a relationship is formed with the subject.

Upon my first, and accidental, encounter with a live performance of Ani DiFranco at the Vancouver Folk Festival in 1997, and upon my subsequent purchase of two of her albums, I became as powerfully attached to the music as if it were a real person, a new found friend, or perhaps, as if I could see within it aspects of myself, a mirror of my own inner life, both lived and unlived in the real world. Although as a musician I was delighted with her technical skill and invention, I was also sharing what all her listeners, musically trained or not, could enjoy—an experience of subjectivity.

¹ Susan McClary and Robert Walser, “Start Making Sense: Musicology Wrestles with Rock” in *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*, ed. Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (New York: Pantheon, 1990), 278.

² Richard Middleton, *Studying Popular Music* (Milton Keynes, Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1990), 253.

Some of DiFranco's fans might say that the subjective experience is contained wholly in the lyrics. She certainly has a tremendous poetic gift and her autobiographical songs tell the story of her life and experiences, as consistently and clearly as if the listener were spending time with DiFranco herself. That is how one gets to know her. Through the lyrics of many songs I learned that she was a kid from Buffalo, a working-class, fiercely independent young woman who knew how to be tough, but was also sensitive and vulnerable. I learned that she was sexually experienced and had loved many people, both male and female. Also that she was an artist in total control of her creative output who has always fought to be independent of what she felt to be the hypocrisies of the recording industry. The personality speaking through the song lyrics came across to me as someone determined to be her own person, no matter what the world might have to say about it.

I heard these lyrics carried by an unusual musical talent appreciable in its own right. Initially it was just her and her guitar, an instrument which one critic refers to as her "second voice,"³ played with a technical skill, expressivity, and inventiveness unusual in the solo singer-songwriter genres. Indeed, as her second voice, her guitar playing is used as an expressive device surpassing the typical function of mere chordal accompaniment. In her album-making with her back-up musicians, her compositions and arrangements are aesthetically pleasing through the interaction of numerous dimensions: their structuring of time; the use of instrumental and vocal colors and recording techniques; texture, timbre and their combinations; repetition, as well as subversion of the urge to repeat.

³ Greg Kot, "Queen of the Road," *Rolling Stone Magazine*, 15 May 1997, 111-112.

But there was more . . . the music was able to tell what the words did not. It was through the music that I learned what the events of her narratives *felt* like, emotionally and physically. The music expressed the ambiguities and ambivalences, the joys and sorrows, of the fully lived life described in the narratives. It expressed physical experiences in the idiosyncratic rhythms of her playing that came from nowhere but her own body. And there was a voice that came from all parts of this body, saying things I needed to say and did not know how. I knew that she lived in her body, knew how to enjoy it, and how to use it.

I listened to DiFranco's music for two years without any knowledge of the societal discourse surrounding her music. I did not know that there was tremendous media attention focused on her bisexual, "in-your-face" image, or that the media recorded her core fan-base as consisting of thousands of teen and college-age women, including a devoted lesbian following, who scream over her at concerts like nothing since the Beatles and "who love her obsessively; they want to be her or f— her, usually both."⁴ I did not know that in her success as an indie artist with her own label that "she's like nothing the pop world has ever seen,"⁵ wooed by every major label and turning them all down, that in fact she has the major record companies up in arms over what a DIY (do-it-yourselfer) might be doing to their hegemony.⁶ I was outside of the discourse that had been created around her music, but I was face-to-face with the music itself and being powerfully affected by it. The music could not just be a product of the "nurture" of society then, it obviously had some power of communication in itself outside of the known cultural

⁴ Natasha Stovall, "Private Babe: Ani DiFranco," *Village Voice*, 24 February 1998, 133-134.

⁵ Robert Christgau, "The Big Girls Understand," *Village Voice*, 10 June 1997, 64-65.

⁶ "A Note of Fear," *The Economist*, 31 October 1998, 67-68.

context. What in the “nature” of this music contributes to *its* power to “nurture” such a rich discourse around it? Perhaps even to define it? The belief that it is just in the lyrics is due to the fact that the effect of the musical structures acts upon people mostly viscerally and unconsciously, and is difficult to articulate verbally. The lyrics are indeed riveting and often could stand alone. But I am a musician and I was hearing powerful music within which the words are an element as much as the guitar playing. All elements are equal, neither could have “come first”. What was happening in that music?

1.2 Analyzing Ani

The previous paragraph brings up the terms “nature” and “nurture” because there seems to be in the study of music (and other arts) a debate analogous to the “nature vs. nurture” debate found in anthropology and psychology. This is the prominent “form vs. content” conflict in the analysis of art forms. For a long time the formalist study of musical texts in Western “art” music emphasized the “nature” of the music as completely autonomous of the society in which it occurs, and the search for musical meaning was derived primarily from the musical structures themselves. Popular music does not easily fit into this scheme because the creation of meaning through *musical* structures in popular music is often either de-emphasized, or achieved through different means than the deep, internal relationships inherent in “art” music. Thus for a long time the study of popular music was conducted in the domain of sociology and cultural studies, emphasizing (either because of belief or lack of musical training) the “nurture” side of things, an emphasis on interpretation of content where popular music is seen as the product of the culture that

produces and receives it and is only meaningful in relation to that culture.⁷ Recently however, scholars from both musicology and cultural studies are attempting to find ways to bridge the gap between formal analysis and social interpretation and problematize its coincidence with a divide between popular and art music that is now crumbling. Privileging either form or content is not a satisfactory approach to either art or popular music because the debate is raging within the confines of each. Just as more musical scholars are searching for methods and vocabularies to grapple with the technical issues of the popular forms (and thus assuming in them an artistic validity that is not only socially dependent), they are questioning an approach to *any* style of music, including Western “art” music, that does not take into account the cultural context in which music functions.⁸

Of course the natural tendency in studying a singer-songwriter like DiFranco is to weigh heavily in the direction of tangible cultural content, and certainly there is no shortage of exciting material. However, to neglect aspects of musical form would create

⁷The academic essays about the sociology of popular music contained in Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin’s collection, *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*, serve as a chronicle of the development of popular music studies from its original groundwork in sociology to its more recent and still somewhat tentative appropriation by musicology and semiotics.

⁸ From the art music side Joseph Kerman has criticized formalist approaches to music theory and musicology that ignore interpretation and critique in his article, “How We Got into Analysis, and How to Get Out,” *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1980), 311-331, and in his book *Contemplating Music: Challenges to Musicology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985). In popular music studies, the need for analytic rigor has been addressed by semiotic musicologists such as Gino Stefani and Philip Tagg, who use semiotic methodology to define codes that wed cultural content and formal parameters. See Gino Stefani, “A Theory of Musical Competence,” *Semiotica* 66 nos. 1-3 (1987), 7-22; Philip Tagg, “Musicology and the Semiotics of Popular Music,” *Semiotica* 66 nos. 1-3 (1987), 279-298. Musicologist Robert Fink explores the twists and turns of the form/content dialectic as well as the dissolution of the boundaries between the classical canon and popular music in “Elvis Everywhere: Musicology and Popular Music Studies in the Twilight of the Canon,” *American Music* (Summer 1998), 135-179. See also McClary and Walser, “Start Making Sense.”

serious gaps in understanding the power of her work. This paper will attempt to bridge that gap by placing an emphasis on analysis of *musical structures*.⁹

My focus on musical structure will not be just about form for its own sake. The above discussion of DiFranco's work indicates a clear concern for the immediate experience of the music—how the musical forms affect listeners mentally, emotionally, and physically. The call for a critique of how artistic forms can “program sensations,” yet another perspective on the form vs. content debate, follows Susan Sontag's description of contemporary art as “the analysis and extension of sensations.”¹⁰ How the musical structures work with lyrics to convey a particular reality in its sensual, emotional, and temporal aspects is what I will attempt to explain through the analysis of musical structures operating in four of DiFranco's songs. Furthermore, I will emphasize various facets of performance that are essential to musical connotations of meaning. Following McClary and Walser's admonition, I will strive to pay more attention to “those aspects of the music that trigger adulation in fans,”¹¹ not only in the structuring of this approximated reality but in the types and forms of pleasure that the music offers to the listener.

⁹Roland Barthes' discussion of another form of communication, the photograph, emphasizes the need for formal analysis of a work before proceeding with social analysis: “The emission and the reception of the message both lie within the field of a sociology: it is a matter of studying human groups, of defining motives and attitudes, and of trying to link the behaviour of these groups to the social totality of which they are a part. For the message itself, however, the method is inevitably different: whatever the origin and the destination of the message, the photograph is not simply a product or a channel but also an object endowed with a structural autonomy. Without in any way intending to divorce this object from its use, it is necessary to provide for a specific method prior to sociological analysis and which can only be the immanent analysis of the unique structure that a photograph constitutes.” Roland Barthes, “The Photographic Message” [1961], in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), 15-16.

¹⁰ “Sensations, feelings, the abstract forms and styles of sensibility count.” Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966), 300. An approach of rigorous systematic analysis of musical affect as the result of cultural encoding is taken by Philip Tagg, *KOJAK, 50 Seconds of Television Music: Toward the Analysis of Affect in Popular Music* (Gothenberg: Institute of Musicology, 1979).

¹¹ McClary and Walser, “Start Making Sense,” 287. Fink calls for an “erotics and hermeneutics of art, together” saying that the musicologist should “get in, say something that helps convey the immediacy of

Finally, I do not intend to leave out cultural interpretation, but will conclude with a discussion of the types of pleasures fans receive from the experience of DiFranco's music; why they come to identify so intensely with it on a personal level; and the volatility of the relationship between personal and political when the music's perceived messages are appropriated by particular groups as representative of their own value systems.

1.3 The analysis object

Choosing the object of analysis in popular music can be problematic. There is practically no such thing as a score in the genesis of a great deal of popular music and printed sheet music is something that comes out long after the song has been made popular by the artist performing it. And in the case of unique and idiosyncratic performers who, like DiFranco, sing *and* accompany themselves with a great deal of improvisatory and expressive freedom, any type of printed music would be hopelessly inept at capturing the qualities of the work. Unlike traditional musical analysis where we can focus on the score, the centrality of performance to the identity of this type of artistic output cannot be ignored. This leaves us with three other options: live performance, live recordings, or albums. It is very difficult to reify a live performance in the form of an analysis. Live recordings are very interesting and helpful if the focus of the study is on the particular event of a performance, as a record of an event in time. However, as a musicologist, I am interested in studying "works," "artistic objects" constructed and planned by the artist.

the musical experience, and *get out*" (emphasis his): Fink, "Elvis Everywhere," 167; for a discussion of the different approaches to understanding musical experience see Frith, "The Meaning of Music," "Toward a Popular Aesthetic," and other chapters in *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 249-268 and 269-278.

And yet works that, in this case, capture the unique and spontaneous facets of individual performance that define the artist's work. Therefore, out of the many possibilities, I have chosen to focus on the act of performing that has as its goal not itself, the event of performance, but a frozen, finished product: the album¹².

Focusing on a recorded album opens up other interesting issues as well. First of all, solitary listening to recorded music intensifies the experience of subjective identification that this paper is seeking to explore. To bring a performer's voice into one's own home and social surroundings is an intimate act of appropriating that voice as an aspect of one's own identity. When Adorno was describing the cultural implications of the gramophone in 1928 he noted that "what the gramophone listener actually wants to hear is himself, and the artist merely offers him a substitute for the sounding image of his own person."¹³

Secondly, the ability afforded by recordings to listen to tracks or fragments repeatedly, instills a greater intimacy and knowledge of detail in the music. This is true for the average listener, not just the scholar, and for Simon Frith this has meant for popular music greater "concentration on the 'personal' touches of specific performers; music is heard in new ways as expressive of personality."¹⁴ This is why the art of

¹² Simon Frith notes that the recording in popular music has, in a certain sense, "taken on the role of the score in art musics—as a kind of register of what the music is *ideally*" (his emphasis), the difference being the reference to "the work as performance," rather than the "work as score." As opposed to a live recording which seeks to be faithful to reproducing an event, Frith describes the engineered recording as referring to a "constructed performance" which functions as the ideal of how the artist would like to present her/himself to the world *as a performer*. Simon Frith, "Technology and Authority," chapter in *Performing Rites*, 226-245.

¹³Theodor Adorno, "The Curves of the Needle" [1928], *October* 55, 1990, quoted in Frith, 238.

¹⁴ Frith, *Performing Rites*, 240.

recording is a fundamental vehicle for artists like DiFranco whose individual personality is the centrepiece of their work and who strive for their music to connect with others.

Lastly, there is the seductive lure of the disembodied voice that John Corbett describes as the “lack of the visual, endemic to recorded sound , that initiates desire in relation to the popular music object.”¹⁵ The absent physical body is filled in by the subjective imagination of the listener, inspired by the connotations of music and the performer’s voice, and imbued with all the qualities of that subject’s own experiences and desires. More so than live performance or video, the audio recording allows the listening subject to fill self and desire into the “story” of the music. Furthermore, the absence of the physical image and performance setting help—for the analytical purpose of this paper—to highlight and separate temporarily the workings of musical structures from the social forces in DiFranco’s work.

1.4 Approaches to analysis

I have chosen DiFranco’s 1996 album, *Dilate*.¹⁶ It is a landmark album in this predominantly live performer’s recorded output, highlighting her talent for studio production. Whereas previous albums, although successful, were primarily attempts to reify live performance in a studio, this album, and those subsequent, show DiFranco’s tightening grasp on the creative possibilities offered by a recording studio in the production of a finished product. There is a much greater exploitation of recording technology to create soundscapes and effects than in her previous albums. Another

¹⁵ John Corbett, “Free, Single and Disengaged: Listening Pleasure and the Popular Music Object,” *October* 54 (1990): 84-85, quoted in Frith, 238.

¹⁶ Ani DiFranco, *Dilate*, Righteous Babe Records, Inc., 1996. See the Discography for a complete list of Ani DiFranco’s recordings to date.

difference between this album and previous ones is that the content is entirely intimate and personal, lacking songs of political and social critique that are one of her trademarks. It is a dark and often bitter album, yet charged with energetic anger and defiance, where DiFranco expounds (with the exception of four tracks) the pained and suffering face of human relationship inspired by one particularly intense and rocky love affair.¹⁷

Through analysis I will attempt to construct some basic notions about how the music conveys a certain meaning and articulates a particular reality. However, the structural principles in this music are of a different nature than what the analyst searches for in Western art music. The teleological organization of pitch and motivic structures which constitutes the foundation of the analysis of Western art music is often relatively unimportant in a popular practice that is only sketchily notated, if at all, and is centralized, in this case, around its spontaneous and idiosyncratic realization by the performer. The analytical methods and goals chosen must be relevant to the nature of the analysis object.

Richard Middleton discusses four factors that structure subjectivity in popular music: 1) syntagmatic structure (defined below), which places the listener in a particular mode of time-awareness; 2) emotion— the invitation to feel; 3) character roles with which listeners can identify; and 4) bodily participation— “the invitation to map, trace, and fill out the patterns of movement offered by the rhythmic structure and texture.”¹⁸ I

¹⁷ In several interviews and articles DiFranco explains that the album is mainly about her tumultuous relationship to one man, whom she refers to as “Goat Boy.” See Elysa Gardner, “Radical Chick,” *Entertainment Weekly*, 2 May 1997, 36-40; Ellen Papazian, “Woman on the Verge,” *Ms.*, November/December 1996, 38-45; James Diers, “Reluctant Hero,” *Twin Cities Reader*, 30 October 1996, 17-18.

¹⁸ Middleton, 251.

would also add a fifth: the musical evocation of setting, as an analogy to, or in lieu of, a visual setting, into which the listener is placed.

The *syntagmatic chain* deals with the relationship of musical events in terms of “binary oppositions or continua.”¹⁹ Middleton defines the syntagmatic chain as being concerned with the sequential temporal flow—“the way units are joined sequentially to form ‘strings’.”²⁰ Such strings either involve the juxtaposition of suddenly contrasting events, or more gradual change and variation over the temporal distance of a continuum, these two facets being the extremes of total contrast versus unvaried repetition. Music of all genres is thought of as a system of equivalencies relating to each other in complex ways that have to do with the amount and type of transformation involved.²¹

The syntagmatic chain is characterized, structured, colored and textured by the “bundles of features”²² that make up music. These are the music’s varying *parameters*.

Philip Tagg’s checklist of parameters includes:

absolute and relative duration, order of sections, pulse, tempo, meter, periodicity, rhythm, melody, pitch, range, tonal vocabulary, orchestration, timbre, phrasing, instrumentation, accentuation, tonality, texture, harmony, relationship of parts or voices, dynamics relative and absolute, acoustics, electromusical treatment, etc.²³

Some of these parameters could be considered to function “paralinguistically” or “paramusically” in specific pieces or songs, that is, they might be considered decorative or superfluous, and not as strictly necessary in the communication of the basic message as is the denotative structure. If I consider the elements that constitute the denotative

¹⁹ Ibid., 222.

²⁰ Ibid., 177.

²¹ Ibid., 221.

²² Ibid., 177.

²³ Philip Tagg, “Musicology and the semiotics of popular music,” 293.

structure of a song to be the semantic meaning of the words, the melody, the harmony, and the overall discursive form, these elements serve as *primary signifiers* in the song. But the nature and type of other musical parameters supposedly “decorating” the primary signifiers can also be crucial to the articulation of subjectivity in a song. These parameters often have structural significance but come to bear heavily on what the semioticians call *secondary signification*. This is the area of connotation: “the feelings, associations, evocations and ideas aroused in listeners by songs,”²⁴ and the functioning parameters are an important component in the question of *pertinence*—pertinent elements of an art being those elements which actually convey meaning. Philip Tagg called for a testing and documentation of the meanings signified by such connotative musical parameters through reference to existing pieces and common extramusical associations.²⁵ For the purposes of this paper, I work on the assumption that there are very obviously extramusical connotations in music that can be grasped by most people in our culture, both in popular and in “art” music. If the assumption of the meaning of a particular musical symbol needs to be tested against something, one can look in this type of music to a primary signifier, the only one of fixed semantic function, the words, as a sort of check or additional confirmation of the intended functions of the music’s connotative parameters.

Out of the connotative parameters that function in DiFranco’s music the six that I feel to be the most important are: 1) the expressive use of her voice; 2) her instrumental playing, in terms of her idiosyncratic, rhythmic guitar-playing style; 3) rhythmic density; 4) dynamics; 5) instrumentation; and 6) electromusical treatment. Others include texture

²⁴ Middleton, 220.

²⁵ Philip Tagg, “Musicology and the semiotics of popular music,” 290-291.

(in terms of the covering of multi-dimensional musical space); pulse; tempo; meter; and accentuation. These parameters create and characterize the five aforementioned structures of subjectivity in music: the syntagmatic flow, emotion, character roles, bodily participation, and the evocation of setting. Different parameters will have different emphases in individual songs. Of course a basic message can be conveyed by the fundamental grammar of words, melody, chord structure and overall form, but I believe that when the relevant musical connotative parameters are stripped from the songs, crucial aspects of the experience of subjectivity and meaning are lost. Perhaps it is not so much that the general *meaning* of the message is lost, but that the *identity* of the message changes and is flexible according to the connotative parameters that characterize and depend on *who* the authoring subject is, and *to whom* the message is being addressed. When the parameters change, the “who’s” may change, perhaps replacing the identity of the authoring subject with one of a different character, or addressing the song to a new audience.

The following analyses of four tracks from *Dilate* will explore these issues. The analyses are intended to be read with the aural aid of the album. I have not transcribed “scores” for these analyses. To do so, as already discussed, would be superfluous as internal pitch relationships are not the primary structuring device, and because a score could not possibly capture the unnotatable and idiosyncratic parameters of the performance. Where needed, I have provided rough aural transcriptions to aid the reader.²⁶

²⁶ Many of the transcriptions were aided by guitar tablature downloaded from the internet at the AniTabs site, constructed by Leigh Marble, <http://www.netSPACE.org/~leigh/ani/>.

Chapter II: Four Analyses

2.1 “Dilate”

The album’s title track, “Dilate,” (track #4) is structured by repetition and gradual variation. Middleton defines two types of repetition in music. *Musematic* repetition is the repetition of musemes, such as riffs in Afro-American music and rock, the repetition of which is likely to be prolonged and unvaried and tends toward a one-leveled structural effect.²⁷ The term *museme* was coined by Philip Tagg by analogy to the linguistic concept of the morpheme. He defines it as “the basic unit of musical expression which in the framework of one given musical system is not further divisible without destruction of meaning.”²⁸ Defining the limits and extent of this musical unit is somewhat intuitive to the context at hand. The word *riff* in popular music is nearly synonymous with the term “musical idea”²⁹—a repeated motive or ostinato. The second type of repetition is *discursive* repetition, which Middleton defines as repetition of larger units such as phrase, sentence, or complete section. These are likely to be mixed in with contrasting units, and tend towards a hierarchically ordered discourse—a developmental structure.³⁰ These two types are often combined to varying degrees and with varying effects.

A combination of these two is the case in the song “Dilate.” (See Appendix A for complete song texts). The discursive structure of “Dilate” is comprised of six full musical strophes of eight measures each, four of these with vocal text and two instrumental. The voice is present in the instrumental strophes but is used as an instrument and not as a communicator of linguistic meaning. The last instrumental

²⁷ Middleton, 269.

²⁸ Philip Tagg, *Kojak- 50 Seconds of Television Music*, quoted in Middleton, 189.

²⁹ Middleton, 125.

strophe is a fading coda. Forming each eight-measure strophe are two four-measure units of repetition, that I have labeled X and Y. (Ex. 1) I have further divided X into two two-measure units, xa and xb, while Y consists of a twice-repeated two-measure unit. For the purpose of emphasizing the structural parallelism, I use the label “y” to indicate the two-measure unit that is repeated twice in Y.

Ex. 1: Bass reduction



Each measure of X consists of a twice-repeated low bass note on an anacrusis and downbeat, accompanied by chordal figuration above. The smaller units xa and xb are just slightly varied from one another, xa on an A7 chord (root in the bass), xb on D (root in the bass) for its first measure and returning to A in the subsequent measure. The low A in xa is bodily “pounded” out on the guitar by DiFranco. As we shall see, this pounding motive is a constant musical motto of both structural and signifying importance throughout the song. Y is a four-measure contrasting unit, which also consists of bass underneath chordal figuration—but without the pounding motto. Unlike X, whose harmony is stably rooted in the tonic of A—departing to D in the third measure but

³⁰ Ibid., 269.

returning to A in the fourth—Y has a faster moving harmonic rhythm. It repeats twice a two-measure unit where the bass progresses through B, C#, D, the first two chords changing every half measure and the D being sustained for one full measure. Example 2 indicates the overall harmonic rhythm of each strophe consisting of the combination of X and Y.

Ex. 2: Overall harmonic rhythm of each strophe

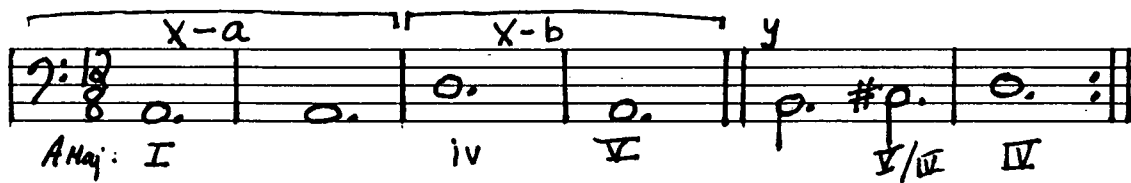


Table 1 "Dilate"

Section	Unit of Repetition	# of Text Lines	# of Measures	Harmony
Instrumental Introduction	xa + xa		2 + 2	A
Verse 1	xa + xb (=X) y + y (=Y)	8 (7)	2 + 2 2 + 2	A D
Short Instrumental Interlude	xa		2	A
Verse 2	xa + xb (=X) y + y (=Y)	(6) 8	2 + 2 2 + 2	A D
Instrumental Bridge 1	xa + xa		2 + 2	A
Verse 3	xa + xb (=X) y + y (=Y)	8 8	2 + 2 2 + 2	A D
Instrumental Bridge 2	xa' } augmented xb' } and varied		4 4	A (D) -A
Verse 4	Same as verse 3.			
Final Instrumental Section	xa' } augmented xb' } and varied		4 4	A

Table 1 outlines the discursive structure based on the repetitions of X and Y as basic syntactical building blocks of the song's structure, not taking into account the

“connotative” parameters that also characterize each large section. These, along with the relation of text to musical structure will be considered presently.

Within this discursive structure the goal-orientated motion of harmonic relationships is stilled by harmonic musematic repetition that lacks the directional pull of traditional chord spellings and voice leading (Ex. 2). The prominent pounding motto on A, the vocal melody that stays fairly consistently within the narrow range of the A Major triad, the fact that the song ends on the pounded A motto, and a vocal allusion to the dominant in the final two instrumental strophes (see Ex. 5) allow us to hear that the key is clearly centred around A. The grouping of measures in X suggests a binary form in miniature, with xb, on D Major, heard as the departure, and the low A pounding motto as the return. The articulated structure of A as tonic and D as subdominant is somewhat contradictory to the actual pitches we hear in the chord. The tonic A chord is almost never articulated with its third (the only exception is the bass line in the second instrumental bridge), and the dominant only occurs as the aforementioned vague vocal reference in the final instrumental sections. In fact the tonic A chord is most often destabilized by the presence of its lowered seventh, as if implying the dominant of D. The third of D, F#, is always strongly articulated in the guitar figuration and D is even tonicized in Y. Clearly the assertion of the tonic key has more to do with repetition, motive, and structural position than with harmonic function. And the purpose of the harmony is not to depart, meander, build, climax, and return in the traditional teleological fashion but to rock gently back and forth within a generally homogenous continuum. The rocking between I and IV that occurs within X is seen on a larger scale between the sections X and Y (and perhaps by analogy in the alternation between verse with text and instrumental interlude).

In light of the choice common to popular genres of I and IV with their common-tone of the tonic note, as opposed to I and V, we may say that the harmonic structure of this song privileges a static field of equivalence, rather than a field of alternating contrasts.

The idea of goal-oriented motion, of “narrativity,” is left entirely to the text. The text states a setting of time and place; makes an address, “every song has a you/the you the singer sings to/and you’re it this time”; progresses through both critique of the addressee and self-reflection by the narrator, revealing more and more the nature of their relationship; returns to the original setting; and makes a conclusion. True to the nature of the narrative mode, and very unlike the accompanying music, the text lacks repetition, there is no chorus, no reprise to a repeating motto of word or phrase. The only exception is the one line “i wake up in the night” which occurs in the first and last verses. But this is not so much a function of repetition—such a small phrase with so much happening in between does not even sound like a repetition—as a function of the *narrative* goal to bring the story full-circle to the setting from which it started. But even as the words and their meaning constantly change, some elements of the textual delivery, the “musical” elements, those that are rhythmic and sonic, remain fairly static. There is a loose rhyme scheme (though varied in each verse) within a mostly consistent numbers of lines per verse and numbers of syllables per line. The vocal melody to which the text is sung is recitative-like and generally uniform, taking relatively the same contours from line to line and verse to verse, and staying within the same three to six notes between A and F# around middle C. All this is to say that the non-strophic text is delivered in a strophic musical setting, and thus, a linear semantic meaning, a narrative, is conveyed through a repetitive vehicle. Of course DiFranco is improvisatory in her vocal delivery of the text,

inflecting pitch, rhythm, timbre, dynamic, phrasing, and contour in her voice according to the moment and feeling. However these kinds of changes are like minute inflections in a static field, they are like ripples in a pond, within which the moments of musical/vocal articulation stand out even more strikingly.

And yet these units of static equivalence, xa, xb, and y, with their accompanying vocal melody, build a foundational structure that is dressed in continuous change, at times gradual, at times abrupt. The music of this song is actually all about building intensity and moving towards a climax. The climax headed for is of a viscerally emotional nature. The goal-oriented motion of the music, like the key, has little to do with internal musical relationships, and everything to do with the variation of surface characteristics through the layering on of the connotative, non-syntactical musical parameters. If, for the sake of argument, we're calling the elements discussed so far—xa, xb, y, the discursive structure, and the text-melody—the syntactical primary signifiers, the non-syntactical connotative parameters used to effect in this song are vocal delivery, dynamic, and varied textures created by the addition of instrumental timbres, registers and rhythmic density, and the juxtaposition of different musical “voices”.

A closer look at the music will explore how all these elements fit together. Within each xa and xb unit there is a musical relationship of difference. The pounding motto on the low A contrasts with the more delicate, picked chordal figurations in the higher register of the guitar. This contrast is important in creating the significance (in the semiotic sense) of the pounding motto by separating it from the musical texture. The performing body is articulated by that motto. The listener hears the physicality in all the differing ways DiFranco strikes that note. He or she also hears the varying levels of

aggressive emotion behind it and senses the subject speaking through that motto and making her confrontation. As mentioned earlier, that motto is also an important articulator of musical structure as the defining characteristic of xa and the key centre of the song.

Between xa and xb the relationship is one of relative equivalence. Built on the same rhythmic motive, the differences are only in pitch, and more subtly, in mood. DiFranco varies the accompanimental figuration in xb and the aggressive bodily emotion of the pounding motto, now on D, is so toned down, that in xb it is no longer “pounding”. But the sense of “bodily” accentuation differentiating xa from xb that this accomplishes is smoothed over by the syntagmatic continuity of xa moving to xb, giving X as a whole a static character in the larger structure.

As X moves into Y we see more distance along the variative continuum. The bass movement through B, C#, D, on every other beat creates a moving harmonic rhythm that was not there before. Y also emphasizes a prominent, repeated melodic half-step figure in the guitar. In most of the verses Y brings a contrast in the connotative parameters of dynamic, mood, and texture, where DiFranco’s playing and vocal phrasing take on a more song-like and lyrical quality. However other parameters such as accompanimental figuration and melody (one of the denotative parameters) remain relatively constant throughout. Y’s contrast with X in the syntagmatic flow is therefore mild.

The song starts quietly, just the guitar repeating the hypnotic motto of xa. Then the voice comes in, softly with the guitar, and not yet too emotionally charged.

xa life used to be lifelike
 now it's more like showbiz
 i wake up in the night and i
 don't know where the bathroom is

xb and don't know what town i'm in
 or what sky i am under
 and i wake up in the darkness
 and i don't have the will anymore to wonder
 y everyone has a skeleton
 and a closet to keep it in
 and you're mine
 y every song has a you
 a you that the singer sings to
 and you're it this time
 baby you're it this time...

The voice articulates with an intimate, quiet sort of sing-speech, somewhat recitative-like but lyrical. The way DiFranco uses her voice is always sincere: she is not so much an actress, but rather she is expressing how she genuinely feels and how the music is making her feel. By reciting words at a faster or slower pace, she increases or decreases the amount of words fit into musical units of the same time-span. By the former she increases the sense of urgency, and with the latter she gives pregnant pause that adds emphasis to the line following. She also often anticipates the beginnings of words before they are expected, lending a stuttering sense of eagerness and anxiety.³¹ Different phrases have different qualities. “Everyone has a skeleton and a closet to keep it in” is almost nasal and contemptuously ironic, while the words “and you’re mine” are whispered, almost tender but resigned and vulnerable, seemingly echoed for emphasis by the guitar’s repeated half-step figure (Y).

Through verse two the contained anger begins to tremble and spill over just a bit.

xa when i need to wipe my face
 i use the back of my hand
 and i like to take up space
 just because i can
 xb and i use my dress to wipe up my drink
 you know i care less and less what people think
 y you are so lame
 you always disappoint me

³¹ Thanks to Vera Micznik for her observations on pace of text-delivery and anticipation of pronunciation.

it's kind of like a running joke
but it's really not funny
y and i just want you to live up to
the image of you i create
i see you and i'm so unsatisfied
i see you and i dilate . . .

A slightly louder dynamic and greater edge to the voice is building up. The voice is still quiet but pouty and defiant. A tremor of sung anger breaks out at “i use my dress/to wipe up my drink.” With the following lines, “i care less and less/what people think,” the voice quivers and breaks with emotion, spitting out the word “people” with contempt. The emphasis on the consonants of “but it’s really not funny” betray the battle to contain the anger, with undisguised contempt as the text becomes more confrontational: “you are so lame/you always disappoint me . . . I see you and I’m so unsatisfied . . .”

All that pent-up emotion is let loose in one powerful word at the end of the verse. “i see you and I *dilate*.” This word, “dilate,” the title of song and album, is articulated in sync with the pounding motive, opening up the first instrumental bridge. It was already discussed how the pounding motto articulates the body of the performer. The word associated with the pounding motto, “dilate,” has several connotations. One definition is “to expand upon a topic of conversation at length,” which corresponds to how the text goes on and on about this difficult lover. (It is also the fitting title for the album which is entirely devoted to this subject.) There is also the sexual connotation of the word. “I just want you to live up to/ the image of you i create,” says the narrator who “dilates” emotionally and physically to receive this lover who falls short, leaving her “so unsatisfied” on every level.

The word, “dilate,” also means to expand in space, which is exactly what the music does upon the word’s violent signal. The pounding with the word is loud and the

guitar can be heard resonating with the impact. The drums enter here for the first time. Drummer, Andy Stochansky, who has played many years with DiFranco, works with her rhythmic guitar playing, echoing, emphasizing, or filling in her riffs. He emphasizes the pounding motive with her guitar, paces out the horizontal progression of time on the downbeats, and often fills in riffs in sync with those of the guitar. As well, the dynamic has gone up a notch to bring us closer to what is to come. The Hammond organ makes its first appearance at this point, adding sustained open fifths and octaves on A and E. Vertical musical space is suddenly opened up between the new pitch ceiling created by the high organ and the low bass, space that defies the constraints of narrative on emotion, creating room for emotion to flow. DiFranco is going to show us how she feels.

The entry of this first instrumental bridge is the most shocking event of the song so far. Strong contrast at this moment (and the even greater one to come with the second instrumental bridge) lies underneath an overall stream of gradually varying and increasing intensity. The entry of the sustained organ signals the next rise in energy level of the song's increasing intensity. The experience of this *moment* is one of abrupt change, but the *overall* temporal experience is one of steady build-up and progression. The next verse rides on this wave, the dynamics are louder and the drums continue their steady groove with the organ remaining sustained throughout the verse.

xa	so i'll walk the plank and i'll jump with a smile if i'm gonna go down i'm gonna do it with style
xb	and you won't see me surrender you won't hear me confess cuz you've left me nothing but i've worked with less
y	and i learn every room long enough to make it to the door then i hear it click shut behind me.

y and every key works differently
 and i forget every time and
 the forgetting defines me
 that's what defines me

A new, slightly altered harmony in the electric bass line in Y (Ex. 3) works with the continued organ to increase intensity not only with dynamics but also by highlighting harmonic motion in this verse, so that more seems to be happening than in previous verses. DiFranco's voice belts defiant strength from the gut: "you won't see me surrender/you won't hear me confess/'cuz you've left me with nothing/but i've worked with less." The advent of the Y section in this verse brings greater contrast than it had in previous verses as the new bass line is made prominent by the addition of the bass-guitar. The voice at Y, "and i learn every room long enough/ to make it to the door," becomes suddenly more sung and lyrical, the vocal quality smoother. Perhaps the more lyrical quality of her voice relates to the fact that at this point she has moved from being confrontational to being introspective—no longer addressing the "you" antagonist but reflecting on herself and on the way in which she has always experienced relationship in general, not just in this specific case. The time mode changes here from an absolute present to an everyday present, reflecting not on the moment but on how it's always been.

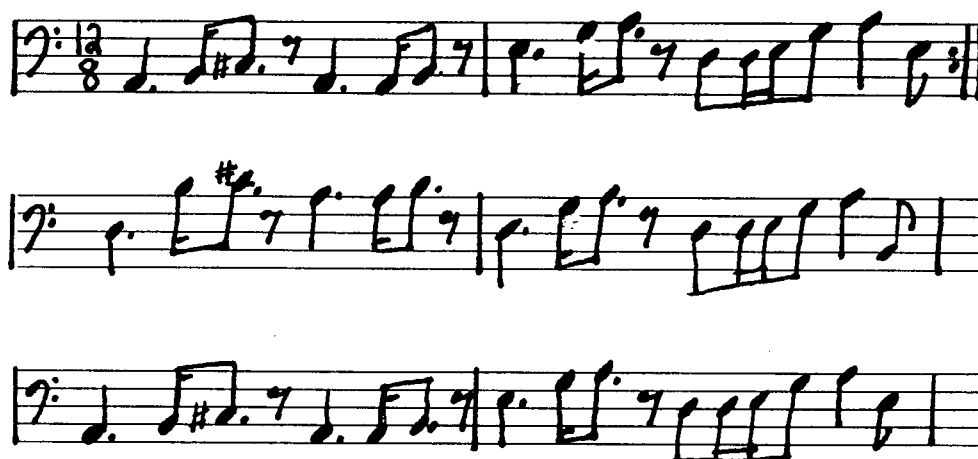
Ex. 3: New bass in Y



The greatest moment of contrast is ushered in with a drum-kick. The second instrumental bridge ushers in the abrupt addition of several new parameters. An active bass line (Ex. 4) brings increased rhythmic density, and the drums are now playing constant eighth notes lightly on the cymbals. The up-beat anacrusis is no longer

emphasized; instead the downbeats are fairly square. The voice wails on a new wordless vocal line (Ex. 5) that is echoed by two interweaving recorded tracks. A descending tritone from G# to D becomes a prominent interval in this new vocal riff, adding to its anguished sound as well as serving to emphasize the A as tonic.

Ex. 4: Bass-line: Instrumental bridge 2, and final instrumental section



Ex. 5: Bridge vocal riff



Rocking from I in the first four measures, to IV for two measures, and back to I, the musical turbulence of the second instrumental bridge works over a still harmonic center, but has also brought an increase and heightening of excitement. The song is heading towards an abandonment to immediate emotional and visceral experience that has been building from within verse by verse. The text is caught up in this as well, and the vocal quality at the commencement of the final verse is completely given in to it.

- xa when i say you sucked my brain out
 the english translation
 is i am in love with you,
 and it is no fun
- xb but i don't use words like love
 cuz words like that don't matter
 but don't look so offended
 you know you should be flattered

The word “sucked” is voiced onomatopoetically so great is its force. There is the brief, vulnerable whimper, “I am in love with you,” but for the most part the entire X-section, culminating at “you know you should be flattered,” is sung with a forceful, disgusted, and blatant anger that women in our society often do not allow themselves to emote. At Y everything suddenly softens distinctly.

- y and i wake up in the night
 in some big hotel bed
 my hands grope for the light
 my hands grope for my head
- y the world is my oyster
 the road is my home
 and i know that i'm better,
 i'm better off alone...

Again the softer dynamic, the smoother lyricism, marking a contrast between her confrontational address to “the you the singer sings to,” and self-reflection on her current state, which, as the text tells us, is where she was when the song began, all alone in the darkness, in a strange hotel room.

Ex. 6: Vocal-melodic idea of final instrumental section (rhythm varies)



The closing instrumental section follows, inducted by a melodic idea on the verse's final parting word, “alone,” (Ex. 6) which repeats throughout the section. This is the last added musical parameter to the instrumental sections, DiFranco's bodily voice as pure body and emotion. Simultaneously the vocal riff from the previous interlude is still

heard a tritone above, but the juxtaposition with DiFranco's current voice makes it obvious that it is a recorded track, giving it a quality of being an instrument echoing her. DiFranco's "live" voice is the indicator of her subjective presence. The word "alone" eventually contorts and dissipates, leaving only the pure bodily voice. Moans and groans articulate a body absorbed into music—music as a presence of immediate existence and emotion. It seems that the verses, relating denotative content and providing narrative, build up emotional energy that the instrumental bridges then release, infusing it into the verse to follow so that each successive verse is at a higher energy level than the last. The idea is never to come back down from this energy level; instead the song reaches a height and remains there, cutting off abruptly as though colliding with the end. The opening pounding motto as the final structure is left resonating with the impact.

The quickening multiple layers of the instrumental interludes provide for the listener a pleasure that is emotional and visceral, but there is also an aesthetic pleasure available. By aesthetic I mean an enjoyment of the "appearance," the sensual reality of the musical forms at play in the texture. Perhaps along the lines of the Barthesian notion of *signifiante*, which means to receive a text as a "moving play of signifiers."³² The listener can lose him/herself in that moving play of signifiers in the way that Middleton defines the aesthetic:

The aesthetic may be defined as the . . . manifestation of our love-affair with what is really, physically, to hand (or eye or ear) in our existence as . . . symbol-making creatures. It is that aspect of our 'appropriation' of material reality (of the 'signifier') which in a reversal of the semiotic norm, throws the weight of attention not on the *self* [and] its interests . . . but on the *other* in all its materiality. It is then in the broadest sense, *erotic*, and aesthetic pleasure refers to the *jouissance* resulting from the loss of self in this other.³³

³² Roland Barthes, "The Grain of the Voice," (1977) in *Image/Music/Text*, 179-189.

³³ Middleton, 257.

This is another aspect of the nature of the contrast between the verses and the instrumental interludes. The Barthesian *jouissance* that Middleton speaks of, a pleasurable sense of losing oneself offered by the instrumental interludes, contrasts with the equally pleasurable sense of finding and knowing oneself which is offered by the verses through identification with the speaking subject (or perhaps for some, with the addressed subject). And yet the conjunction of words and music put that subject signified by the verses into a universal and timeless realm: there are many "I's" who have experienced this as this "I" has. The words of the song in the present tense, create a moment in the realm of the everyday present, "I wake up in the night/and I don't know where the bathroom is/and I don't know what town I'm in/or what sky I'm under" And yet the music stills time, obliterating, by harmonic musematic repetition, the sense of a teleological goal in time. A timeless *mythic* mode is instilled as a vehicle for the everyday, and the everyday experience is suspended there. All time planes happen concurrently in the music. The tense of the narrative places us in a setting in the present, which remains, through the accompanying music, static throughout the verses. Upon this static, musical, field of the present, the textual narrative juxtaposes remembrances of the past and decisions for the future. And yet there is still a forward movement towards the dilation of musical space and emotion, actually aided by the stilling of time, which allows us to enjoy this expansion, viscerally, emotionally, and aesthetically, in all of its immediacy.

2.2 “Adam and Eve”

I turn now to a different type of song-structure in “Adam and Eve,” which is of the typical verse-chorus variety. “Adam and Eve” (track #10) holds many strong similarities to “Dilate.” The text through the verses is highly narrative, an injured address to a “you” of a romantic relation, that sets the time and place, and critiques the situation emotionally; and the larger musical structure is built upon repetition of a musematic unit. However there are important differences.

The strophic verses feature repetition of only one single musematic unit, though it is longer and more complex than the musematic units in “Dilate.” This four-bar unit consists of a progressive bass line played on the guitar simultaneously with delicate figuration in the higher register. Example 7 gives a notation of the bass line, above which DiFranco plays figurations slightly varied through the course of the song. These four bars are the only music that makes up the verses and short instrumental bridges.

The text of the verses maintains a normal rhyme scheme in couplets, the second line of each couplet taking the rhyme in an a-a-b-b form. The vocal melody articulates one line of text per measure, so that the four-bar accompaniment phrase will repeat twice in a verse. Each melodic line of text alternates the final note, in general between the notes D and G, though, as Example 8 shows, there is some inflection of this.

In addition, there is a chorus (Ex. 9). Its function is much like that of the instrumental bridges in “Dilate,” articulating visceral and emotional abandonment. But in “Adam and Eve” there is great contrast in the grammatical musical structures between the verses and chorus, such that none of the musical elements of the verses construct the chorus, as was the case in the instrumental bridges in “Dilate,” which were constructed on

variations of xa, xb, and y. Finally, there is no constant buildup of intensity, there is only the alternation between the generally quiet, delicate softness of the verses and the intense, high-level energy of the chorus. The key of the song is d minor, though, much like “Dilate,” the principal relationship is between the tonic and the fourth scale-degree, the lowered seventh of the tonic is common, and we never hear a real dominant.

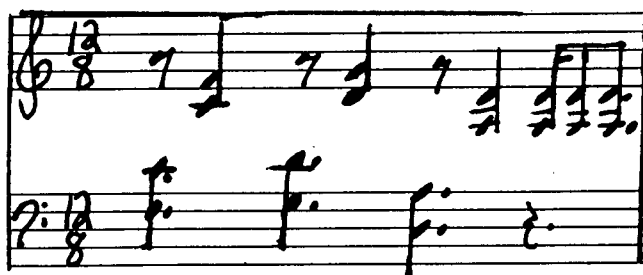
Ex. 7: Repeated four-bar phrase



Ex. 8: First verse with final pitch of each line indicated

tonight you stooped to my level (D)
 i am your mangy little whore (G-A)
 now you're trying to find your underwear (D)
 and then your socks and then the door (G)
 and you're trying to find a reason (D)
 why you have to leave (G-A)
 but i know it's 'cuz you think you're adam (D)
 and you think i'm eve (E)

Ex. 9: Guitar accompaniment in chorus



The repetitive musical structure of melody, accompaniment, and words is enhanced by other musical and performing parameters that assist the creation of musical meaning in three important ways: to express emotion; as aspects of the body; and as evokers of setting, time, and mood. It is this last that operates in the introduction which

opens with low open-fifth chords on amplified guitar. These are the same chords and progression that will later be heard in the chorus, played here without any particular rhythm, savored and allowed to resonate in the low, amplified register, while the pitch is bent and warbled. A high feedback tone like a rusty hinge fades in and out. Fellow students in a seminar course on musical aesthetics were reminded by this introduction of a western movie, or a dark, western bar. Perhaps this is partly due to the open fifths that are associated with “Indian powwow” music in old westerns. There may also be a sort of “ghost town” connotation of desolation with the feedback ring that is like a creaky door in an abandoned house. The open chords, and the span between registers, from high pitches, to low bass frequencies are an obvious spatial metaphor, and create vast spaces of emptiness—a symbol of isolation, and, as we get from the song’s context, abandonment. The wavering and bending of pitches also suggests an “image” wavering in and out of reality, something that is not solid or cannot be focused upon as when the eyes are clouded with tears. The absence of metric pulse in this section extends the spatial metaphor to time (the two are so intrinsically linked in human perception)—time is spread out in the “moment after” which refers to the moment between the “transgression” that the song is about and the reaction that is the song itself. This moment is allowed the contradiction of a timeless present in the introduction. The four-bar phrase, instrumental only, then enters on a measured pulse that is emphasized when it is repeated a second time with the addition of the drums. The drum in the verses always emphasizes the second and fourth large beats while occasionally filling in riffs in sync with the guitar. Example 10 is a notation of the basic drum pattern in the verses. With the addition of pulse, time is suddenly reclaimed from the atmospheric “moment after” and measured as

though moving forward, so that the first two verses (their text in the present tense) place the subject in the immediacy of the present.

Ex. 10: Basic drum pattern in verses



The signifying parameters up to this point are the instrumentation, electromusical treatment, and pulse working as evokers of setting. The parameter that works to express emotion in the verses is the voice carrying the words' meaning. The voice in the first verse is soft and vulnerable with the quietness that characterizes communication in intimate moments. It is also tinged with distress. The tone is thin, allowing the breath to be heard through its thin veneer, the pitch is often warbled rather than precisely attacked, and the breath catches between words. In the second verse,

you rhapsodize about beauty
my eyes glaze
everything i love is ugly
i mean really, you would be amazed
just do me a favor
it's the least that you can do
just don't treat me like i am
something that happened to you

the word "beauty" is swallowed with bitter taste, and DiFranco gasps for air within the following two lines until "you would be amazed" collapses in a gush of air. Then the lines have the edge of someone crying, while "don't" is stammered and forced out with great difficulty so that she can choke on the bitterness of the words to follow. The way DiFranco uses her voice is perhaps what was meant by Barthes when he spoke of the "grain" of the voice as being "the materiality of the body speaking its mother tongue . . . ;

it is the body in the voice as it sings, the hand as it writes, the limb as it performs.”³⁴ “The body in the voice as it sings,” the “limb as it performs,” these are the physical, material presences that make up the essential signifying characteristics of the subject in DiFranco’s music. Physical reality is present in the way she plays her guitar, pounding, caressing, kneading, or slapping it; physical reality is also present throughout “Adam and Eve” in her voice, the grit of the throat, the catches on the air, the sobs and breaths, the choking and the swallowing.

Physical and emotional presence is especially powerful in the chorus. There is a tremendous sense of emotion welling up behind the verses, and here it is unleashed like waters from a dam. Already the dynamic and rhythmic density have increased exponentially. The drum is still emphasizing the second and fourth large beats, but also now beats constant eighths on the cymbals. The guitar playing is now an active chordal comping (see Ex. 10) and it is very physical. But it is the voice that is most gut-wrenching, a howl welling up from deep within the body (Ex. 11). There are myriad ways one can say “I’m truly sorry about all this”—contritely, facetiously, patronizingly. But the words are expressed here in wails of pure anguish. In the second chorus she wails “I am” three times. These are the “I am’s” of eternal damnation, and DiFranco gets into the “grit” of the throat, while pounding on the guitar, open fifth chords tuned low and loose to slap and resonate. Her physical movements on the guitar can be heard and they are her body expressing emotion. The open fifths were earlier associated with the primitive and folk-like—here it is raw emotion.

³⁴ Barthes, “The Grain of the Voice,” 182, 188.

Ex. 11: Vocal line in chorus



I am I — am — I am truly sorry a- but all this

DiFranco sings the wail of the damned after the fall from paradise. In the second chorus two text lines are added, "I envy you your ignorance/I hear that it's bliss." "Bliss, bliss, bliss" she wails three times. The sex act can be a bliss of losing oneself in the pleasure of the moment. "I just happen to like apples/and I'm not afraid of snakes." And yet her voice mourns on the word "bliss," heavy with the weight of the price. In "Adam and Eve," like the mythical association of this title, there is something about the archetypal experience of man and woman in this culture. The woman, seen as the site of the fall, the woman's body as the reason, "just don't treat me like I am/something that happened to you" she implores. And here is that very body and voice exclaiming to all the world her anguish at being used thus, the weight of body a woman carries as a man goes free in "ignorance and bliss."³⁵ For in this Adam and Eve narrative, the fall is only for the woman: "as I leave you to your garden/and the beauty you preferred." And the paradise lost is the love that was not. As her "big red balloon" deflates and she tries to "let go the ratio/of things said to things heard" she wonders "if this will have meaning" for him. Or if alone she will carry the crosses of shame ("I am your mangy little whore") . . . and loss.

In the final repetition of the chorus the wail of the voice is replaced by the electric guitar, an "electric wail" on the same music. The acoustic guitar continues and there is some subjective continuity in the presence of that instrument. However, the human

utterance has disappeared, substituted by the utterance of an electronic instrument. And perhaps that instrument takes on the subject for there is a real psychophysical presence in that sound, the “singer” is now the electric guitar, and the listening subject is still invited to feel even more powerfully than before. In the distorted, sustained, resonating feedback of the instrument we hear the physical identity of that instrument, perhaps even the physical identity of the sound. In the mix of electric and acoustic, the acoustic remains the body as it was before, the pounding making the listener aware of the body playing it. But the electric wail seems disembodied, the voice of a suffering, screaming mind. This separation of the screaming, emotive mind/voice and the pounding body is all the more accentuated with the knowledge that DiFranco cannot be playing the two parts simultaneously and that they thus consist of separate recorded tracks. The song text is itself about the separate realities of male and female, mind and body: “tonight you stooped to my level” says the body of Eve, to the mind of Adam that would like to “rhapsodize about beauty.” When the electric wail dies out to only echoes in the ending moments, the player, though electrified, is still left; the body is left just as it always is when strong feeling has channeled through it and passed away . . .

i wonder if this will have meaning for you
when you've left it all behind
i guess i'll even wonder
if you meant it
at the time

If the performance-related, connotative parameters, such as DiFranco's voice, her physical playing style, electromusical effects, and variations in rhythmic density, were to be stripped from this song, leaving only the grammar of text, melody, and

³⁵ Even if we were not to assume from the title and references to Adam that this song was addressed to a man, it is public knowledge that the entire album, *Dilate*, is addressed to a single man. See

accompaniment, the song would still have basic denotative meaning. We would still understand a semantic meaning of the words, still recognize the tune, the harmonies, and the structure. However the *emotional* subject would not appear so readily, and neither would the *bodily*. We would have a text of unembodied meaning with only symbols left for feeling that is unengendered. We would have the signified with very little signifier, and signification with bare *signifiante*.

2.3 “Shameless”

“Shameless” (track #7) gains its power from strong contrasts between sections within which there is incessant and unbroken musematic repetition. The ubiquitous musematic unit is a funk riff (Ex. 12) based around four even beats aggressively measured by the drum. The guitar elaborates somewhat syncopated rhythms around the steady 4/4 beating—the bass line is the main articulator, accompanied by rhythmic chordal comping above (roughly transcribed in Ex. 12). A short-long anacrusis leads from upper neighbors to the downbeat, E, thus emphasizing it. The vocal melody (Ex. 13), outlines an e-minor triad and interlocks rhythmically with the accompaniment, starting on the off-beat of the third beat in sync with the bass. The vocal melody repeats the same rhythmic/melodic riff for every line of text, locking in with the accompaniment as part of the apparatus of unvaried musematic repetition. A strong textual syllable (both semantically and syntactically), usually part of a verb, lands on each downbeat. The following syllable, usually the subject of the verb, is syncopated after the second beat. (See Table 2).

Ex. 12: Funk Riff 1



Ex. 13: Vocal melody of A-section

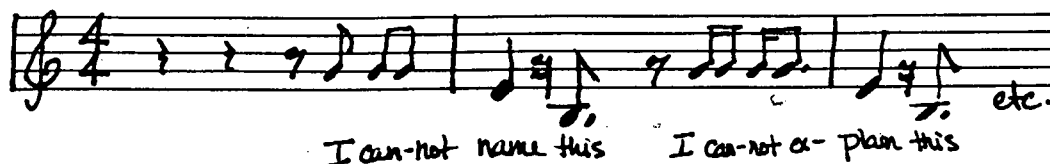


Table 2

The first word of each pair lands on the downbeat, the second on the off-beat of beat two.

name this
(ex)plain this
want to
shame less
slow this down
stop this
looking round

The repetition of this riff, alternating with its absence or transformation, delineates the large-scale sections of an ABABCA form as outlined in Table 3. Abrupt contrast occurs at the choruses, where the funk riff repeated incessantly in the verses disappears entirely, replaced by an ostinato of rhythmic guitar comping on a straightforward harmonic pattern with now no lower bass (Ex. 14). The chorus relates registrally to the verses as a third higher. The vocal line, which is now much more fluid and melodically sung, ends each phrase on F# moving to G (Ex. 15). The progression of the syntagmatic continuum within the B (chorus) section contrasts with that within the A (verses) section. Whereas the latter is constructed with unvaried musematic repetition, the B section chorus is a continuum of gradual variation in the melodic, rhythmic, and textural parameters, in the traditional rise-and-fall arch shape. Throughout the entire

sixteen bars the rhythmic density of the vocal melody increases slightly at the beginning of each text line and then tapers out again at the end of the chorus. The drums in this section play a gradually increasing rhythmic density and dynamics in a pattern beaten lightly on the cymbals. (See Ex. 16).

Table 3 "Shameless"

Section	Number of Measures	Musematic Unit
A		
Intro: guitar solo	4	Funk riff 1
add drums	4	
Verse 1	8	Funk riff 1
Instrumental refrain	4	Funk riff 1
Verse 2	8	Funk riff 1
Instrumental refrain	4	Funk riff 1
B		
Chorus	8 + 8 (music repeats twice with different words)	Chord comping
A		
Instrumental refrain	4	Funk riff 1
Verse 3 +	8 +	Funk riff 1
Verse 4 (no interlude)	8	
B		
Chorus	8 + 8 (music repeats twice with different words)	Chord comping
Instrumental refrain into...		
Instrumental refrain into...	4	Funk riff 1
C		
Instrumental intro	4	Funk riff 2
Verse (new music)	10	Funk riff 2
Bridge: vocal		
Bridge: vocal	8	Funk riff 2 gradually dissipates into...
Instrumental	8	
Drum solo		
A		
Instrumental refrain	4	Funk riff 1
Verse 1 (imperative context)	8	Funk riff 1
Instrumental refrain	4	Funk riff 1

Ex. 14: Harmonic rhythm of chorus (B-section)

Ex. 15: Vocal melody of chorus (B-section)

We're in a room with-out a door and I am sure with-out a doubt

they're gonna know how we got in here + they're gonna know how we plan to get out

Ex. 16: Cymbal pattern for first eight measures of chorus

etc.

In terms of aesthetics, the textural contrast between the two sections is a pleasurable one to experience. The conflagrant, choppy, and confrontational repetition of the verse sections (A), gives way in the chorus section (B) to a no less exciting but more smooth-traveling lyricism that seems to soar rather than to beat. In terms of the articulation of subjective experience in the song, these contrasts in syntagmatic flow, aided by the parameters of rhythmic density and voice, work to signify emotional and physical meanings beyond the text.

“Shameless” is a song that provokes bodily participation. The repetition of vocal line and funk riff in the verses creates a strong “groove” which the listening body can easily fall into, “mapping, tracing, and filling out the patterns of rhythmic movement” as

Middleton put it.³⁶ Furthermore the assertive, steady 4/4 and the bodily syncopations make it a groove that connotes an aggressive power and an immediate and participatory sexual presence. The words explain an uncontrollable abandonment to this beating groove that envelops and permeates narrator and listener. The immediacy of the experience, the potentiality of melting into it and dissolving one's self in the *jouissance* of it, is too overpowering and pleasurable to be resisted, despite the disconcerting awareness of transgression and its consequences. The funk groove is a mechanism that, once set in motion, seems to run on its own, taking our minds and bodies with it. This ride out of control—the “this” for which the narrating protagonist may be called “shameless”—works in perfect tandem with the text which here serves as a simultaneous explanation for the music: the narrator “can’t even slow this down/ let alone stop this.”

i cannot name this
 i cannot explain this
 and i really don't want to
 just call me shameless
 i can't even slow this down
 let alone stop this
 and i keep looking round
 but i cannot top this

if i had any sense
 i guess i'd fear this
 i guess i'd keep it down
 so no one would hear this
 i guess i'd shut my mouth
 and rethink a minute
 but i can't shut it now
 cuz there's something in it

The aggressive vocal quality of DiFranco's utterance in these verses defies shame to constrain her *jouissance*. Her defiant tenacity is foreshadowed in the audio at the beginning of the track before the song starts where we can hear her growling and snarling at her guitar in the first few unsuccessful attempts to “kick-start” the groove. That same

³⁶ Middleton, 251.

snarl kicks off the first verse. But the tough stance of her fierce emotional quality is colored with pleasure. On the final words of each of the first two verses, “top this” and “in it,” which should fall on the downbeat according to pattern, she catches her breath for a moment and allows these words to be syncopated off the downbeat, savoring the words, dragging out the “s” of “this” and allowing the utterance to trail off for a sensual effect.

The premise of the text is that very conflict between powerful transgressive desire and knowledge of the consequences. The lyrics express the confusion felt by the speaking subject caught between the opposing tensions of that conflict. The narrator and the addressee (and in the larger picture this is the listener who identifies with the addressee) are conspirators in a pleasurable relationship that will be seen from the outside as iniquitous. The narrator is aware that she should perhaps be concerned about the implications of her transgression but she flies in the face of external morality, refusing to resist the call of desire. And yet neither is total abandonment possible. The abrupt musical contrast brought by the chorus breaks us out of the “pleasure groove” to focus on the anxiety of punishment felt by the transgressors.

we're in a room without a door
and i am sure without a doubt
they're gonna wanna know
how we got in here
and they're gonna wanna know
how we plan to get out

The transition from percussive aggressiveness in the verses to the sung melody of the chorus, with its higher register and smooth contours, expands the narrative voice, breathing into it the vulnerability that accompanies any meeting of souls, and the fear of persecution for following one's desires. At the eighth measure is an abrupt drum-roll kick into the next eight measures which now feature the loud, straight four beats of section A,

with a typical rock groove emphasis on beats two. The forward impetus of the drum rhythm and the dynamic, registral, and rhythmic arcs of the vocal line allow an increasing sense of urgency. “They” are coming for us, we will be “caught in the act,” and “they” are “going to be mad.”

we better have a good explanation
for all the fun that we had
'cuz they are coming for us
baby, they are going to be mad
yeah they're going to be mad at us

But for a space of time, “they,” the outside world, can, with the return of the verse, be shut out as the focus reverts back to the intimate meeting of narrator and addressee. We are back to the act itself, down to the E in the bass, and our original repetitive funk riff. Our bodies slip again into the pounding rhythmic groove that articulates the sexual nature of that relationship and a mutual nakedness is unveiled. The narrator reveals herself to the addressee: “this is me, as I am.”

this is my skeleton
this is the skin it's in
that is according to light
and gravity
i'll take off my disguise
the mask you met me in
'cuz i got something
for you to see

and demands the same in return.

just gimme your skeleton
give me the skin it's in
yeah baby, this is you
according to me
i never avert my eyes
i never compromise
so never never mind
the poetry

"I got something for you to see," she says to the listener, promising to reveal herself in body and spirit, and promising that, just as she can show her nakedness in the light, she can look upon another's unflinchingly and without embarrassment: "I never avert my eyes/I never compromise." She assures us that there is no shame or dishonesty beneath her gaze, and that indeed she has, as narrator, the power to author us as she sees us, nakedly and honestly: "Yeah baby, this is you/ according to me." The music too is "stripped" to its bare essentials—the unadorned, throbbing 4/4 beat, the incessant repetition, and the complete lack of harmonic change allow room for nothing but to focus on the drama of this mutual gaze.

We know from the verse in which DiFranco sings that she "covet(s) another man's wife," that this song, unlike most of the album, may be inspired by a woman as the object of her affections.³⁷ It is within the context of the mutual gaze, exemplified by this song, that one reviewer characterized DiFranco's relationship to her young, female audience: "She turns to look at these girlfriends, takes their palms. The girls know that there is lust between Ani and themselves . . . A god this is that a girl could be—and that a girl could also f—."³⁸ And yet "they," the rest of the world, will still be watching, just as anyone outside of an unusual connection of people looks upon it with fascination or moral condemnation. Whether this be read as a homosexual encounter between women, a relationship of infidelity, or the seduction of an adoring subculture by their idol, the

³⁷ It could be argued that the words "another man's" place DiFranco as speaking from a male perspective. In my opinion, the words "another man's" relates to her position as the assertive sexual initiator in this song, is used generally to refer to another "person," and happens to be the word that best fits as an idiomatic phrase, "another man's wife," in the text and in the rhythm of the melody.

³⁸ Terri Sutton, "Girl Uninterrupted," *Village Voice*, 3 October 1995, 51-52.

chorus returns to reiterate how poorly “they” will view this special and unsanctioned relationship.

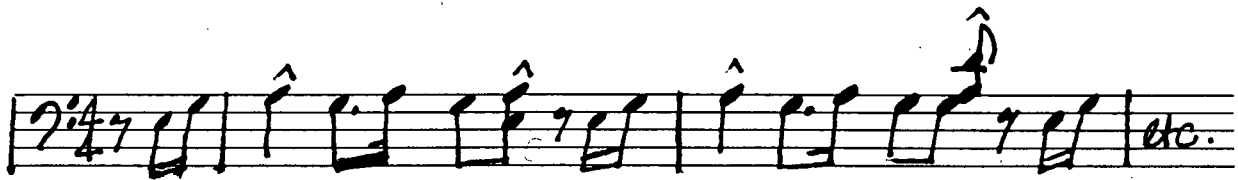
The moral and emotional vulnerability of the second chorus leads into a third event of textural contrast in which DiFranco as our narrator turns her penetrating gaze onto the judgments made by conventional morality.

i gotta cover my butt 'cuz i covet
another man's wife
i gotta divide my emotions
into wrong and right
then i get to see how close i can get to it
without giving in
then i get to rub up against it
till i break the skin
rub up against it
till i break the skin

At the end of the chorus the funk riff returns for four bars and then metamorphoses into a new riff (Ex. 17). The C-section brings about a striking contrast. There is change texturally, dynamically, tonally, timbrally, rhythmically and vocally. The dynamic immediately becomes soft. Paradoxically, what makes the contrast so striking is the continuity underlying it: while the forward motion and tempo of the pulse, and the rhythmic style of Funk Riff 1 continue, their connotative surface features have changed. The new riff, like the first, emphasizes a duple-sixteenth figure anacrusis into the downbeat, but it also features an accented staccato in a higher register on the off-beat of the third beat. The drums no longer play the straight four pattern on the snare but synchronize with the guitar rhythm and hit the cymbals lightly on beats two and four. The guitar chord on the off-beat of three and the cymbal beats interplay with each other as a counterbalance to the bass line. As opposed to the pounding of the first funk riff in the A section verses, the overall feel here is still repetitive, but lighter and more delicate.

Although E and G are still integral notes here, the addition of A is prominent. The off-beat of the third beat in each measure alternates from A to D, giving a back-and-forth bounce to the accompaniment. The relation of emphasized notes E, G, and A in the A-section, B-section, and C-section respectively is reminiscent of the penultimate chord of the harmonic ostinato in the chorus (see Ex. 14).

Ex. 17: Funk Riff 2



The vocal rhythm of each line of the C-section starts on the off-beat of beat three, as it does in the A-section, but here it is more melodically monotone and far more dense rhythmically. The voice moves forward rapidly bouncing along on the numerous consonants. DiFranco lightens and softens her voice to savor the tongue-on-teeth, lip-on-lip, and soft-palette consonants. The listener is very aware of the sensuous physical mouth articulating the words. The multiple c's, v's, double t's, b's and occasional internal rhymes make good traveling terrain for the text across the static terrain of the accompaniment, and it is only in the text that we get any sense of forward motion. All of this creates a pleasing sonic effect, especially in the last four lines where the words "rub" and "break" alternate on the downbeats. From here the syntagmatic chain flows immediately and effortlessly into the bridge.

they're gonna be mad at us
they're gonna be mad at me and you
they're gonna be mad at us
and all the things
we wanna do

The drum now takes off, filling horizontal rhythmic space with increasing rhythmic density while the guitar continues with the second funk riff. The vocal verse repeats twice, the word “mad” falling on every downbeat which gives it a special emphasis. Although the basic beat and musical control is always consistent, the increasing rhythmic density allows us to enjoy a symbol of things now racing pell mell, gradually picking up momentum. Like an amusement park ride, rhythm can allow us to feel the thrill of acceleration and speed overcoming gravity in what is actually a precise and controlled situation. It is precisely the kind of buildup that DiFranco makes excellent use of in many of her songs and the music turns us over to this thrill entirely when guitar and voice make way for the drum solo. As the eight-bar drum solo goes all out, the guitar occasionally accents the procession, comping a single chord on the downbeats of measures one and two, filling in measure four, and comping again single chords on the downbeat of measure six, and beats one and three of measure seven. The whole ride slams to a halt at the downbeat of measure eight. There is a moment of stunned silence to catch our breaths and then we are back at the first verse, right where the song started from.

2.4 “Going Down”

“Shameless” is a track with one of the strongest signified presences of body on this album. In contrast, the track “Going Down”(#9) is distinctive from the rest of this album as a song with a greatly downplayed human performative presence. I mentioned previously that the album *Dilate* was a transitional foray for DiFranco into greater utilization of the studio concept. “Going Down,” (along with “Amazing Grace”) stands out as one of the most complete realizations of this. “Going Down” is a song created for

recording and is an example of where a recorded song is most like a plastic art: where the finished product is meant to stand autonomously from the human agency that created it.³⁹ Although all the songs on this album are of course recorded, they are done so as reified *performances*, such that the human agency working within them is inseparable from the finished product.⁴⁰ What makes “Going Down” different from the other songs on the album is that the idea of performance is downplayed in favor of the finished product—the representation of human agency is superseded by the sonic “images” making up the composition.⁴¹

In some such works the connoted presence of performing bodies and personalities might not necessarily be desired.⁴² But a disembodied type of subjectivity is often present and consciously manipulated, especially in popular music, as in “Going Down,” often to create a type of autonomous subjective voice that is meant as a caricature of the performer, a disguise, or as a representation of someone else entirely.⁴³

In “Going Down” the markers of the subjective presence of body and personality—DiFranco’s guitar playing and certain uses of her voice—are overshadowed

³⁹ Even when the plastic arts are meant to carry the imprint of the human agency at work creating them—such as violent brush strokes and gobs of paint—the final product is still viewed independently of the physical act of creation.

⁴⁰ See note 11.

⁴¹ It is through recording that music becomes a “thing” rather than an event. See Evan Eisenberg, “Music Becomes a Thing,” chapter in *The Recording Angel: Explorations in Phonography*, (New York: McGraw Hill, 1987), 11-33. Eisenberg is referring to all instances of music recording, but in the cases where subjective presence is erased the idea of “thingness” is taken to the extreme.

⁴² In popular music the desire to erase the presence of body would generally be a conscious aesthetic choice which contrasts with the norm, but in the performance and reception of Western art music erasure of body was often a moral imperative. See Susan McClary, “This Is Not a Story My People Tell: Musical Time and Space According to Laurie Anderson,” in *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 136.

⁴³ For a discussion of varying perspectives on subjectivity, narrative, and body provided by the use of technology in and as performance, see Andrew Murphie, “Negotiating Presence - Performance and New Technologies,” in *Culture, Technology and Creativity in the Late Twentieth Century*, ed. Philip Hayward (London: John Libbey, 1990), 209-226.

in favor of the electronic soundscape. In place of body or emotion, the experience of subjectivity in “Going Down” is structured through character roles and setting, which are connoted by the use of electromusical parameters. Multiple trackings allow DiFranco as the single author/performer not only to function as the entire band—which she can practically do anyway on her own with her guitar—but to split her own subjectivity into multiple textual voices, juxtaposing them against each other in simultaneous utterances, and imbuing them with autonomous existence.⁴⁴

“Going Down” is not so much a forward-moving narrative as a juxtaposition and superimposition of layers. If one were to make an analogy with the visual arts, the canvas would be the electronic drum sequence, whose one-measure march-like 4/4 pattern repeats over and over (Ex. 18). The bass, always present with the drum sequence, plays whole-notes in the first four measures, E-flat to D-flat. At m. 8 the bass pattern becomes more active (Ex. 19). It is not strongly suggestive of any one key however: it might connote a-flat minor (as some of the vocal melodies do), a D-flat mixolydian mode, or even G-flat major. The tonal centre is not nearly as relevant an issue as the establishment by drum and bass of an insistent groove, repeating ad infinitum for the entire song. Upon the drum and bass “canvas,” decorative “blocks” or “snippets” of other musical events that contribute to connotative meaning are layered in successive entries. These include mainly a synthesizer, warbled and wavered for a spacey effect on a high D-flat; what I call the “springboard” motive (so named for its ascending leap and its timbral quality that

⁴⁴ Similar issues of the conflict between the human and the technological in reference to the presence of the gendered body in performance, the splitting of subjectivities, and alternative concepts of musical space and time all appear in Laurie Anderson’s work. See Susan McClary’s analysis, “This Is Not a Story My People Tell,” 132-147.

sounds like a springboard after someone has taken off of it); a thumb piano riff; snippets of text; and the late entry of a sparse acoustical guitar riff.

Ex. 18: Drum sequencer pattern



Ex. 19: Bass line



As in “Adam and Eve”, the electromusical parameters are used to set a scene in the introduction. This time it is, as the lyrics state, “just like in a dream,” and each musical effect contributes to that evocation. The lack of motion created by insistent repetition, the endless march of the drum sequencer, the “spacey,” inhuman, disembodied electronic effects of the synthesizer together with the “springboard,” and the general lack of any tangible human presence for the first twenty-two measures, all create a dream-like suspension in an “alien” world. The voice that eventually enters chants rhythmically in a speech-like monotone around the note C-flat. Electronic alteration makes it sound distorted, as though emanating from an enclosed space. It creates a robotic, alien speaker that seems to carry the connotations of omniscience.

The voice’s text can be divided into three separate sections, each representing through musical and vocal means a different persona or emotion of the musical/textual subject. I label these sections A, B, and C (Ex. 20).

Ex. 20: Entire text of "Going Down."

A you can't get through it
 you can't get over it'
 you can't get around

 just like in a dream
 you'll open your mouth to scream
 and you won't make a sound

 you can't believe your eyes
 you can't believe your ears
 you can't believe your friends
 you can't believe you're here

 and you're not gonna get through it
 so you are going down

B i put a cup out on the window sill
 to catch the water as it fell
 now i got a glass half full of rain
 to measure the time between
 when you said you'd come
 and when you actually came

C little mister limp dick
 is up to his old tricks
 and thought that he'd call me
 one last time
 but i'm just about done with
 the oh-woe-is-me shit
 and i want everything back that's mine

The A section opens up several possibilities as to who the narrating voice is intended to belong to and to whom it is addressed. The texts of sections B and C make clearer that the speaker is DiFranco as narrator and that she is addressing a faithless lover as she is throughout the entire album. But the narrative of the A-section, "just like in a dream," emanates from multiple perspectives. From one point of view A is similar to B and C, having DiFranco as the subject speaking from within the narrative, addressing her betrayer in a cold, antagonistic address: "you are going down." From another, she is commiserating with the general "you," the social group of the audience she is speaking to, about a commonly felt sensation in its everyday occurrence. The common sensation

seems to be a shock of some kind: "You can't believe your eyes/you can't believe your ears/you can't believe your friends/you can't believe you're here . . . you are going down." From yet another perspective, one must note that the lyrics of the A-section are a rare example of a DiFranco text completely lacking the first-person pronoun, and it is possible that DiFranco has created this voice as some other that is speaking to herself (or the listener identified with her), commenting on her condition as the one who has experienced the shock and what it will do to her: "you're not gonna get through it," "you can't get over it," so "you are going down." All of these possibilities can be seen as operating simultaneously, allowing the pleasure of playing on multiple subjectivities.

To whomever the address is directed, the utterance "you are going down" retains the quality of an ominous mantra, emanating from its prophetic, supernatural speaker in every alternate measure until the end of the song. "Going down," in the sense of being the one who loses, seems to be the common fate for every participating perspective in this song. The narrator is "going down" victimized by betrayal, she warns that her betrayer will be "going doing" in recompense, and the collective group of listeners identify with a familiar experience.

The B section conveys a different voice from the A-section, one more melodic and lyrical. The protagonist now addresses a definite "you" with whom she is in conflict, and the listening subject will fall into identification with one of the two positions, narrator or addressee. The first-person pronoun in the text gives the sense of the narrator's presence speaking as herself rather than as an electronically distorted external subject. The singing quality that contrasts so much with the other sections, and the unmanipulated timbre of the voice both connote the vulnerable human aspect of the narrating voice. Especially the

line “and when you actually came,” which is repeated twice and is prominent later in the song, carries the pain of being hurt, in the more natural vocal quality, the melodic inflection, and the chesty timbre with which DiFranco sings it.

After each text section comes an instrumental interlude in which lines of text are used as decorative sonic elements. In the interlude after the A-section, text lines are layered together as follows (reading vertical stacks as happening simultaneously with the horizontal spacing indicating how they overlap in the temporal sequence):

Ex. 21: Sixteen-measure interlude

m. 10

just like in a dream
you are going down

mm. 11-12

can't get can't get through it
just like just like in a dream
you are going down

mm. 13-14

you can't get, can't get through it
just like in a dream
you are going down

mm. 15-16

you can't get through it, get through it, get through it
just like in a dream
you are going down

The use of the text as musical syntax here does not divest it of its semantic meaning. In fact it does the opposite, the musical syntax providing an additional level of connotative meaning supplementing the primary meaning of the words themselves. The juxtaposing of the same voice saying the different text lines, the repetition of words, and the effects of the surrounding sonic canvass evoke the meaning of the line “just like in a dream.” Moreover, the semantic meaning of the line “you can't get through it” is connoted musically by the fragmenting of the line and the repetition of those fragments. These

lines sound somewhat like DiFranco's real, human voice, though dazed and confused as in a trance-like, somnambulistic state. They contrast with the still repeating line, "you are going down," the electronically manipulated timbral quality of which makes a loud and reverberative pronouncement of authority.

At the end of the B-section another voice enters—the guitar. For those familiar with DiFranco's music, the guitar is an indicator of her corporeal presence, a presence that in this song has heretofore been concealed or disguised in the electronic landscape. Of course DiFranco is playing the bass guitar as well, but its constant repetition with the drum sequencer, the fact that she could not physically be playing both at once, have already associated the bass with the electronic soundscape rather than with the body or personality of the artist. Furthermore it is her idiosyncratic, rhythmic guitar playing that DiFranco is known for, not the bass line.⁴⁵ Her bodily presence is then manifested in the guitar, and though it is not nearly the all-encompassing presence that it is in the other songs on this album, it still makes its appearance to mark the song as hers and remains constant throughout the rest of the song.

This corporal presence also heralds the transition into section C where the artist's personality and emotion are even more palpable. In this section the vocal line is more rhythmic than melodic. The inflections that occur in the vocal line are more emotional than melodic utterances. The voice speaking is now one of defiant, fed-up anger and the timbral articulation of this is most prominent from the word "shit," where the voice suddenly drops pitch like a punch in the stomach, through the strident edge of the next line, "and I want everything back that's mine." At the same time this is juxtaposed over

the B-section music running faintly underneath and greatly slowed down so that the only line of the B-section that is clearly audible is the inflected line “and when you actually came.” Juxtaposed are the voice of hurt and the voice of defiance, the vulnerable voice and the assertive voice. The simultaneity both separates and joins the two voices: it separates them in the fact that two voices are heard to speak simultaneously as separate entities, and it unites them in the fact that the emotions are causal and intermingled, the hurt behind the anger and the vulnerability behind the strength.

The piece concludes like the earlier instrumental interlude with a layering of “voices,” the vocal text again fragmented, with pieces of each section acting as elements of the sonic fabric. The voices are layered as follows (over the continuous drum sequencer, bass, guitar riff, and, on each alternate measure, “you are going down”):

Ex. 22: Last 16 measures (indicating which section each text line is from)

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| m. 1 | “little mister limp-dick is up to his old tricks” (C) } over
“and when you actually came” (B) |
| m. 2 | full guitar riff |
| m. 5 | “just like in a dream” (A) |
| m. 7 | “I put a cup out on the window sill...” (B)
“you open your mouth to scream” (A) |
| m. 9 | “now I got a glass half full of rain” (B) |
| m. 10 | “I want everything back” (C) |
| mm. 11-12 | “I, I want, I want everything back” (C) |
| m. 14 | “everything back” (C) |

The three different voices from each text-section are again both separated and united. A dream-like setting is still evoked with the electronic repetition of words that trails away at

⁴⁵ However, DiFranco told a reviewer that she wants to be a bass player, and demonstrates her competence on this album. Amy Ray, “The Untouchable,” *The Advocate*, no. 708, 1996, 61-62.

the ends of phrases, and the continued sound effects of the “springboard” and synthesizer. It seems though that the unity of identities is stronger than previously. The signified presence of the artist in the guitar riff—absent or faint before, and now brought up in dynamic and given prominence—gathers the voices together as differing aspects under the umbrella of a single subjectivity. Even the elements of the A-section which were of an ambiguous subjectivity seem more clearly to belong to DiFranco. The only thing remaining truly autonomous is the still repeating phrase “you are going down.” But the final section is as if the singer gathered all the pieces of herself together from the atmosphere to make her final stand. In doing so, the imperative “you are going down” seems to be redirected from addressing the narrator of the song to addressing solely the narrator’s antagonist. At the final measures the bass and drum sequencer repeat as if they are going to continue forever only to be shut off abruptly by a sound effect much like a metal door slamming shut. This sound effect ends the entire song after the words “everything back” as though to say “that’s final”: debate over, relationship over, song over.

Chapter III Ani and Her Fans

The above analyses have sought to illuminate the structural, performative, and corporeal principles operating in DiFranco's music and how those structures are connected to connotations of subjective reality provided by the music. The illusion of subjectivity (in the views of McClary and Walser quoted in the introduction) is one of the aspects of musical experience that is most prized by society, especially in respect to popular music. The enhanced experience of subjectivity, replete with all its emotion, sensuality, and desire, is one of the chief pleasures offered by DiFranco's music to her audiences. In terms of musical values it is likely that this pleasure is what the majority of her fans prize most highly.

3.1 Desiring Ani: intimacy, identity, and lust

Self-confessional intimacy is the trademark of the singer-songwriter, and for DiFranco, an artist who professes that her music comes from a desire to express herself and connect with people, all musical effort up to now has been directed toward this end. But what separates DiFranco from many other artists is the magnitude of her ability to do so. It is not merely autobiography powering the "DiFranco phenomenon," but the depth and extent to which she takes self-revelation. It is her self-proclaimed goal to spare little in her confessional:

The notion of hiding, or privacy, of things that are too personal to put in songs . . . I gave that up years ago . . . I realized that the more honest I was the more relieved people were to hear what came out of my mouth and the more connection I was making with people. And I thought 'Wow, so maybe all these, like, embarrassing, unacceptable, unattractive parts of my life are kind of useful to talk about . . .'⁴⁶

⁴⁶ DiFranco quoted in Alexander Varty, "Ani DiFranco Has Nothing to Hide," *The Georgia Straight* (Vancouver), 9-16 July 1998, 65.

She takes things way beyond the lyrics in earning her renown as an artist who is truly “laying it bare.” We have already explored how the physicality of her playing style and the abandon of her vocalizing directly communicate the sensuality, the pathos, the vulnerability behind the words she speaks. For her fans the listening experience does not represent an act, pose, or passing amusement, but rather a deep engagement in a relationship with a genuine, feeling human being.

This way to experience music is what music aesthetician Jerold Levinson termed “The Reward of Emotional Communion.”⁴⁷ DiFranco’s style of “laying it bare” provides her audiences with an experience of emotional communion and this quality, whether or not it is accompanied by identification with the speaking subject, can hold universal appeal. As one reviewer explained about the song “Untouchable Face” from *Dilate*:

An essential part of the DiFranco phenomenon is that you don’t necessarily have to relate to feel the sting . . . “Untouchable Face” . . . the lead-off lament about a soulmate who turns out to be spoken for, is unforgettable . . . DiFranco revels in the lovelorn injustice that roundly returns to her tearful repetition, ‘F— you.’ Even if you haven’t been there, your heart will break for [her], not because of her bitter fate but because of her shivering courage in laying it bare.⁴⁸

Of course there are many people, mostly young women, who do relate, and the emotional intermingling that they experience with DiFranco’s music is like finding a soulmate who understands their deepest, most private needs, wounds, and desires. From the communal participation of her shows—which to one reviewer are “like a private audience with a punky dream girl”⁴⁹—to the intimacy of solitary listening to an album, in

⁴⁷ Jerold Levinson, “Music and Negative Emotion,” chapter in *Music, Art, and Metaphysics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 329.

⁴⁸ Diers, 17-18.

⁴⁹ Stovall, 133-134.

the words of one young female fan, "you feel like she's talking to you, girls feel that if only they could just meet then they'd be best friends."⁵⁰

For many of these fans, the self DiFranco reveals could be their own. Middleton wrote: "Popular music has always been concerned . . . with offering ways in which people could enjoy and valorize identities they yearned for or believed themselves to possess."⁵¹ In terms of identities yearned for, DiFranco's music offers a gamut of emotions and experience that others may not feel able or permitted or express in their own lives. The experience of the music allows them to take on characteristics unmanifested in their own personalities and DiFranco is well aware of this as she says herself: "Part of my job is letting everybody project things onto me. I symbolize their own self-empowerment or possibilities."⁵²

The young woman in the audience or listening to a CD gets for a time to be the one who is "headstrong, mercurial, sensual, edgy, alert, pissed-off, affectionate, waggish empowered, needy, indomitable, fierce, left-wing, hyperemotional, supercompetent"⁵³ or whatever trait stands out for her the most. The individual fan can feel as if she is the one speaking, the one acting on her lust, the one telling off the person who has hurt her or the power system that has repressed her.

The identified fan may feel her inner life encompassed in DiFranco's uncensored expression of difficult emotions, receiving from it an "invitation to feel" in full depth and breadth. Songs such as "Dilate," "Adam and Eve," and "Shameless," unabashedly revel in feelings like scorn, anger, anguish, and lust, and embrace the ambivalence and

⁵⁰ Teenage fan interviewed in Christgau, 64-65.

⁵¹ Middleton, 249.

⁵² DiFranco quoted in "Ani DiFranco," *Rolling Stone*, 6 February 1997, 22.

conflicting desires of a young life, making DiFranco's presentation all the more realistic and deeply convincing to her fans. Even though the emotions expressed may be unpleasant, there is a sense of great power and cathartic pleasure in what Levinson called "The Reward of Expressive Potency," where the exposition of feeling

will begin to seem as if it issues from oneself . . . one receives an impression of expressive power—of freedom and ease in externalizing and embodying what one feels. [One seems in oneself to have] . . . the adequacy, grace, and splendor of the exposition . . . which is obviously founded in the abilities of the composer [performer].⁵⁴

It is also the frank exploration of delicate, or even taboo, subjects that enlarges the relationship between DiFranco's music and her fans. DiFranco's lyrics narrate openly on her sexual relationships with both men and women. The music, as we have seen with "Shameless," amplifies physical connotations of feminine sexual desire, even sexual aggressiveness—areas in which common media portrayal and societal attitudes still deny women a proactive role. Women know how to be *objects* of desire, and most commonly popular media images of femininity, especially in pop and rock music, play deeply on a narcissistic *desire to be desired*. Feminine desire takes its form in preening for the "male gaze," and many female celebrities have made their careers accordingly. So when artists like DiFranco break the mold of feminine *narcissism* to celebrate feminine *eroticism* it provokes a shock in relation to the prevailing norms. A song like "Shameless" is an expression of a woman's ability to experience the agency of desire rather than just being its object. The female artist here is not simply performing as the entertainment in a peep-show but looking forth upon her audience in a mutual gaze. To reiterate and conclude the earlier quote in the discussion of "Shameless" about the lust between DiFranco and her

⁵³ Christgau, 64-65.

audience: "A god this is that a girl could be . . . and that a girl could also f—. In the teen idol sweepstakes that's like winning yourself."⁵⁵

And yet her songs are never just an unambivalent glorification of unbridled desire. DiFranco is ever aware of the politics and pitfalls of feminine desire, which, like any desire, always encounters barriers and conflict. In "Shameless," the desire of one woman for another smacks into societal ethics. In terms of the issue of marital fidelity the transgression of desire is no different from that of a man for a married woman, but the condemnation is compounded by society's opinion of its homosexual nature. "Adam and Eve" explores the deep mythical stigma attached to female sexuality as the site of sin, and the emotional risks involved in following desire. And "Dilate" is honest about the ease with which desire can lead to disappointment. Instead of white-washing romance, the songs grapple with the conflicts and thus offer a site of resistance to the homogenization of desire offered by much popular media. Women hear through this voice confronting the barriers, that desire can be a force of empowerment belonging to them. The direction of their desire does not have to be dictated by myth, societal imposition, or those with whom they are intimate.

3.2 Politics and identity

What these songs covertly illustrate is that DiFranco is aware of the politics at play in her own personal experiences. As reviewer Tom Smucker put it, DiFranco

has a political and psychological understanding of the power grids people, particularly girls, have to live inside . . . she has a sense of history. And . . . along with her intelligence she has an erotically charged rock-and-roll

⁵⁴ Levinson, 328.

⁵⁵ Sutton, 51.

musical stance and songs that acknowledge need and vulnerability and a voice to get it all across.⁵⁶

Her music has created a sub-cultural site of permissiveness and protest around which has constellated a slavishly loyal group of fans with heavy emotional investment in her work. DiFranco told “tens of thousands of [young women] exactly what they wanted to hear—as individuals first, then quickly as members of a community that functioned . . . as their ‘safe place’.”⁵⁷ And when the personal becomes shared by a group, the personal becomes politicized.

Indeed, social politics were prevalent on the albums preceding *Dilate*. A noted left-wing political critic, her political appeals have ranged from challenging class disparity and political powerlessness (“Coming Up”),⁵⁸ supporting a woman’s right to an abortion (“Lost Woman Song”),⁵⁹ decrying the plight of America’s underdogs: among these the working-classes (“Trickle Down”⁶⁰), sexually-exploited women (“Letter to a John”⁶¹), and death-row inmates (“Crime for Crime”⁶²), just to name a few.

Also fitting into her politics is the way in which she has conducted her career, having remained entirely independent of the record industry’s major labels and mainstream commercial airplay.

“I don’t think the music industry is conducive to artistic and social change and growth,” she [DiFranco] told *Newsday* in 1995, “it does a lot to exploit and homogenize art and artists. In order to challenge the corporate music industry, I feel it necessary to remain outside it.”⁶³

⁵⁶ Tom Smucker, “Y2K Pete: Ani DiFranco,” *Village Voice*, 2 February 1999, 127-128.

⁵⁷ Christgau, 64-65.

⁵⁸ Ani DiFranco, *Not a Pretty Girl*, Righteous Babe Records, Inc., 1995.

⁵⁹ Ani DiFranco, *Like I Said*, Righteous Babe Records, Inc., 1993.

⁶⁰ Ani DiFranco, *Up Up Up Up Up Up*, Righteous Babe Records, Inc., 1999.

⁶¹ Ani DiFranco, *Out of Range*, Righteous Babe Records, Inc., 1994.

⁶² DiFranco, *Not a Pretty Girl*.

⁶³ Janine Jaquet, “Indie’s Reservations,” *The Nation*, 25 August 1997, 10.

This too is material for her work as heard in numerous passing references and in entire songs such as "Napoleon,"⁶⁴ "The Million That You Never Made,"⁶⁵ and "32 Flavors."⁶⁶ In light of her passionate ability to take a stand it is no wonder that groups that feel marginalized and unempowered look to her as their mouthpiece and representative. But it is her expression of female power and female sexuality that constellate the most resonant and militant identity politics around her work. Drawn to DiFranco's frank personal explorations of her bisexuality and self-empowerment, feminists and the lesbian/bisexual community were the ideological groups most visibly associated with DiFranco's early fan-base.

There are however, reasons to question seeing DiFranco's success only in terms of identity politics. *Village Voice* columnist Robert Christgau, asks:

Is [DiFranco's success] the natural growth of an unforeseen core market for feminist postadolescent bisexual protest-confessional? Or has DiFranco generated an intrinsic aesthetic appeal that transcends identity mongering? But this is a false dichotomy. Identity is content for everybody, not just those within its confines.⁶⁷

DiFranco's audience has steadily grown past the confines of feminists, bisexuals, and teen-aged or post-adolescent girls largely because there are values possessed in the music that pass ideological barriers and appeal to a more universal audience. In the words of an older male fan:

I'm not a woman, I'm not young. But when I listen to her, I feel like she's singing about me. She just has a huge heart, and she understands that the struggle involved in trying to make a life is a profound one.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ DiFranco, *Dilate*.

⁶⁵ DiFranco, *Not a Pretty Girl*.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Christgau, 64-65.

⁶⁸ Producer, Chuck Plotkin, quoted in Gardner, 36-39.

As Christgau points out, identity is content for everybody, and we have already spoken of some of the rewards her audiences reap from sharing in her subjective experience. The emotional and sensual experience of an individual body that is articulated in DiFranco's music is possibly a far more potent force than her politics. DiFranco's fans find value in being captured "by the heart," in being invited to feel and be moved emotionally. Further, they value an idealism about the authenticity of the experience—that they are not being manipulated but are rather truly sharing and communing with another.

3.3 Bonds of trust

DiFranco's fans share an idealism that is rooted in the late twentieth-century popular folk-music tradition from which DiFranco claims her roots. It is an idealism that music is valued for its own sake and as a means of expressing some "truth" of value to both artist and audience. The artist's desire ideally should be to render some service to humanity through his/her work, and the act of music making for *itself* as well as in quest for "truth" takes precedence over the desire of the individual artist to acquire fame, status, or commercial success. This selflessness is a professed value of many popular music fans who participate in a genre and a society so thoroughly steeped in commercialism and profit making. For fans of an artist like DiFranco, who has such an intimate hold on them, delving into their most painful and precious emotional and ideological territory, motives matter because wherever there is an emotional investment there has to be trust.

DiFranco in many ways convinces observers and fans that her motives are genuine; that she is in it because she sincerely values the art form, artistic creation, her ideological convictions, and personal freedom. The fact that DiFranco has remained

independent in the music industry, even before it was at all clear that she would become successful, has been regarded as an external proof of the credibility of her ideological commitments, and concomitantly, the honesty of her motives. However, it is through the music first and foremost that she has instilled this trust. Her practice of uncensored emotional revelation has been discussed already, along with the fact that many fans and critics are deeply convinced of its sincerity. The ways in which the narrative exposition of her own story unreservedly makes space for the ugly, the embarrassing, and the ambivalent, along with her human vulnerability, creates a rich authenticity compared to the sugar-coated platitudes that can sell a lot of music. She is not someone who will tell people only what they want to hear—when DiFranco’s fans receive her music they believe that she is “telling it like it is.” The lyrics also, in a self-reflexive manner, make direct statements about her purpose in making music.

I just write about what I should’ve done
I sing what I wish I could say
And I hope somewhere, some woman hears my music
And it helps her through her day
— “I’m No Heroine”⁶⁹

i do it for the joy it brings
because i’m a joyful girl
because the world owes me nothing
we owe each other the world
i do it because it’s the least i can do
i do it because i learned it from you
i do it just because i want to
because i want to
— “Joyful Girl”⁷⁰

if you don’t live what you sing about
your mirror is going to break
— “The Million that You Never Made”⁷¹

⁶⁹ Ani DiFranco, *Living in Clip*, Righteous Babe Records, Inc., 1997.

⁷⁰ DiFranco, *Dilate*.

⁷¹ DiFranco, *Not a Pretty Girl*.

But words alone can be empty and rhetoric hollow. What lends credulity to the story of the words, carries them over from sentiments into an experience of emotional reality, is the setting and techniques of the musical exposition. The above analyses sought to explain *how* the musical structures conveyed an experience of an emotionally and physically subjective reality. In a song like “Adam and Eve,” it is the music that most directly expresses the desolation, the abandonment, the shame and grief that the song is about. Listeners will grasp the connotations of the music even if they do not have the technical knowledge to explain the musical structures that create the connotations. Of course, each song is a performance that has to be constantly recreated in a live situation, even when DiFranco may not be feeling for a particular performance the emotions that inspired the original creation of the song. But technique is a tool to express feeling. She has discovered the emotional connotations of the way she strikes the strings, the timbral inflections of her voice, the tempos, and phrasing, and moments of silence or punctuation. She has absorbed into bodily memory the technical means through which she can create the sound of the emotion that she wants to express. This is an ability of any talented performing musician in any genre, classical or popular, where feeling is the expressive goal of the performance. And when the means to the expression are successful the audience speaks of the performance as “convincing” or “believable.”

3.4 Technical values

The fact that it is musical technique that adds to DiFranco’s credibility was summed up by columnist, Alisha Davis: “all of this grass-roots authenticity might be insufferable if her music weren’t so good . . . you may tire of her message, but her

plaintive voice, and the way she attacks her guitar, stay with you.”⁷² Which leads us to an important category of musical values that has been somewhat neglected in the discussion up to this point—technical values. The value of technical skill is a priority in classical and jazz music where serious fans of these musics do not primarily seek a mirror of personalized experience in their art form. Although emotional affect is enjoyed, it is generally superseded by concerns of form, structure, compositional inventiveness, technical virtuosity and so on.

In popular practices one of the highest values is in how the music makes one feel, and the cult of personality in popular music often has more to do with an individual’s image than it does, as in classical music, with the musical skill of that personality. It is not surprising then that the media’s attention to Ani DiFranco focuses mostly on her image—as a bisexual industry renegade who has achieved tremendous financial and popular success—rather than on her music. This is much to her chagrin.

Mostly what people write about is my independence—the “phenomenon” of little me and my audience, and the scene that I’m supposed to have inspired . . . Oddly enough, the discussion rarely gets to the music or the songwriting. According to the perception of the press, the actual work that I do is incidental.⁷³

In popular music practices in general, less of an emphasis is placed on technical skills. A performer can achieve great success with little more than image or an interesting voice. However in the case of DiFranco, an artist who enjoys the luxury of complete creative control over her work, technical and compositional inventiveness play a dominant role in her success and the value system of her fans. The previous analyses

⁷² Alisha Davis, “You Can’t Fence Her In,” *Newsweek*, 18 January 1999, 56.

⁷³ Ani DiFranco quoted in Jill Hamilton, “Ani DiFranco,” *Rolling Stone*, 13 November 1997, 150-151.

illustrated some of the technical aspects of DiFranco's work such as compositional inventiveness, the skill of manipulation of timbres and the recorded soundscape, techniques of arrangement, vocal dramatization, and linguistic craft. Less was discussed about her unique and rhythmically intricate style of guitar playing which is described by Greg Kot of *Rolling Stone* as

a second voice . . . the most underrated component of her arsenal, a hybrid of rock assault, Eastern drone and folk melodicism . . . her buzzing tone, gossamer delicacy and rub-till-it-bleeds chording could make most back-up bands superfluous.⁷⁴

There are few commercially successful female singer-songwriters who have developed instrumental skill to the level of DiFranco's. Women in folk, rock, and pop are generally recognized as singers, and unlike the classical music world where female instrumental virtuosos are increasingly more accepted, when a female popular musician shows up who can really play, the fact is largely overlooked. "Nobody ever asks me about playing guitar," DiFranco told the magazine *Guitar Player*, in a feature about her playing; "I think it's still a really foreign concept—the idea of women not just playing instruments, but defining them."⁷⁵

DiFranco's technical skills are thus twice overlooked by the media, first because of the genre, and secondly because of her gender. As for fans, technical skills in any genre are most appreciated by those with some level of musical competence and their number is usually a small segment of the total fan base. But as said before, even those fans who lack musical knowledge can appreciate technical skill on an intuitive level. DiFranco's fans know that she is a good player, an eloquent lyricist, and that her music is powerful and

⁷⁴ Kot, 111-112.

⁷⁵ Andy Ellis, "Sonic Alchemist," *Guitar Player* (April 1998), 70-75.

interesting to listen to, even if they cannot specifically explain how this is so. Even though technical values are downplayed in the hype surrounding DiFranco as a personality, they are the foundation behind her credibility as a performer. Indeed, it is her technical skills in composing and performing that help to create her performing persona and deliver her messages. An unmarketed personality like DiFranco could never have achieved such success if there were not something to listen to. Without her unique musical talent, none of the “DiFranco phenomenon” could ever have taken place.

3.5 Personal or political?

The “DiFranco phenomenon” started out as a lone girl with a guitar, a “plaintive voice,” and a lot of poetry, professing values of freedom, self-determination, independence, and speaking up. Beginning with simple ideas of unreservedly exploring her own truth, she became a voice and identity for countless fans. Her “truth” became the icon for identities based around particular sub-cultural groups with particular ideological values. In the early stages of DiFranco’s career her message held no separation of the personal and the political. Politics was just another aspect of her personal journey. “It’s not like I have a [political] agenda in my music . . .,” she said in a 1995 interview:

Politics is music— is life . . . It’s almost more subconscious. I’m telling my story; I’m writing songs about my life. Just like any other personal songwriter or rock musician, I’m a politicized person.⁷⁶

But DiFranco’s truth began to change. Her personal journey took a turn with *Dilate*, away from politics into an introverted and deeply personal exploration of the dark valleys of her love affair with a man. At the same time, the private humanity that had brought the fans aboard—so openly revealed in *Dilate*—was catapulting her into the

realm of celebrity. Her underdog status was beginning to wane. Ironically, it was with *Dilate*, an album through which DiFranco intensified personal expression in a manner consistent with the personal growth and freedom that she symbolizes, that many fans began to attack her.

For those fans with a heavy emotional investment in identifying with DiFranco as a rebel, queer, militant feminist, the heterosexual subject matter of *Dilate*, as well as the album's commercial success, and the recognition it was garnering her, were very threatening. DiFranco described aspects of the situation in an interview with *Ms.* magazine.

I realize that I'm a symbol for a lot of people, for whatever it is they project onto me, what they need me to be. I've always been very open with my sexuality. I've had love affairs and I've known wonderful, wonderful people who are men, women, whatever. The gender thing isn't really primary for me. But the fact that I'm in love with a man now means incredible violation and betrayal for so many people, and it's really scary.⁷⁷

There is a certain volatility in the appreciation of an artist that is based on identification. In the early stages fans will begin to feel that they have a claim on performers, as columnist, Dave Marsh, candidly describes:

Unlike your average consumers, the most committed rock fans, who are both numerous and tend to create the trends, feel empowered by the very rhetoric of the music to make judgments—sometimes punitive judgments—about their heroes. Furthermore, they not only expect to be entertained but expect to have certain “needs” met in the process.⁷⁸

When these fans belong to marginalized groups in society who see the artist as the mouthpiece for their ideological agendas, the demands they place on their heroes can

⁷⁶ DiFranco quoted in Roger Dietz, “Female Folk Artists Fight Pigeonholing,” *Billboard*, 11 November 1995, 13.

⁷⁷ DiFranco quoted in Papazian, 44-45.

become fanatical. MTV journalist Tabitha Soren wrote of DiFranco's fans: "I have never come into contact with such protective—to the point of possessive—fans as DiFranco's."⁷⁹ And with *Dilate*, these fans were standing to lose their hero, they were going to have to share her with a growing and diversified audience of outsiders who would crumble the boundaries of their exclusive sub-cultural group. There are some people out there who are too dependent on their vicarious projections on their idol, or too rigidly bound by their ideological agendas, to appreciate experiences of subjectivity and emotional communion offered by the music outside of their ideological agendas. Or else they are too afraid of losing these experiences that they might feel can be provided nowhere else. he is accused by these types of being a sell-out because she is leaving them behind as she changes and becomes successful. DiFranco:

My idea of feminism is self-determination, and it's very open ended: every woman has the right to become herself, and do whatever she needs to do. But there are all these righteous babes out there who, if I step on-stage in a dress, are infuriated.⁸⁰

In DiFranco's recent albums, the tension between the desire to pursue self-determined artistic growth, and the pressure to maintain the image that helped establish her career, is felt in the growing split between the personal DiFranco and the political DiFranco. Her political songs after *Dilate* are sounding like slightly desperate attempts to hold on to her angry, leftist image without really feeling it anymore. An example is the song "tis of thee," from 1999's *Up Up Up Up Up Up*, which seems less honestly motivated than songs from previous albums or even other songs on this album. The song preaches moralizingly on villains and victims, painted in black and white terms that

⁷⁸ Dave Marsh, "U2's Crash: Why Pop Flops," *The Nation*, August 25, 1997, 18-23.

⁷⁹ DiFranco quoted in Papazian, 42.

completely lack the rich ambiguities of her usual songwriting. Her otherwise critically lauded album, 1998's *Little Plastic Castle*, was also criticized on this score:

there's a didactic, preening bravado to Public [political] Ani that makes her seem almost a third person, a creation that's like DiFranco but not of her. Public Ani's diatribes on things that piss her off lack the depth of field that textures Private Ani's grainy human dramas.⁸¹

In terms of "Public Ani" there is a danger for DiFranco of holding onto something that may not work for her anymore. And what about "Private Ani"? Critics like Christgau are already musing about whether she can keep it up:

[DiFranco] is an underdog no longer, and she's not so young either, two familiar contradictions certain to render her a more distant role model and object of desire. There's no knowing what it [this inevitable development] might mean for a woman who's like nothing the pop world has ever seen. Will she transfer herself from surrogate best friend into tart grand-aunt? Drop confessional irony for role-playing fictionalization? Repersonalize the political? Or will she merely repeat herself for a burgeoning but ever less discerning cult of adoring teenagers?⁸²

3.6 It is all in the music

The question that the above quotation leads to is: "What form will subjectivity take in the course of DiFranco's future work?" The crucial factor in determining the answer, if DiFranco remains true to her talent, will be the music itself. One can see from earlier points of discussion in this paper, that *Dilate* was perhaps even more groundbreaking for DiFranco in terms of musical innovation than subject matter. Innovation with recording techniques and electronic timbres added a whole new dimension of subjective connotation to her songwriting after her previous acoustic recordings. The musical exploration continues in the solo album following *Dilate*, *Little*

⁸⁰ Ibid., 44.

⁸¹ Stovall, 133-134.

⁸² Christgau, 64-65.

Plastic Castle, where the music takes a far more prominent role with a larger instrumental ensemble, recording technology, sound effects, vocal distortion, and characterization to a far greater extent. All of this adds up to highly successful expressive effect, but the aesthetic is changing. DiFranco, as the concrete subjectivity emanating from the work, is more remote. Her trademark playing is veiled under new timbres and woven into the texture of the ensemble and soundscape. Her voice still stands out but the soundscape coats her personal narratives with a slick sheen of more distanced and imagerial forms, and deliberate vocal manipulation allows her to take on personas from the populace of some fantastic inner world. Where personal confessional had emboldened or magnified her subjective reality, a more liminal world is allowed to displace it. There are many artists whose work becomes increasingly sophisticated (and sometimes more abstract) if they unswervingly follow the intuitions of their talent. *Little Plastic Castle* is on this track and were DiFranco to continue on it, one would guess that as she plays more and more with musical forms, her narratives may change and bleeding-heart revelation may not fit as nicely into these glossier sheens.

Sometimes however, artists just rehash what they have always done, perhaps out of loyalty to fans, to the art, or just because they have that certainty that it was once successful. *Up Up Up Up Up Up* (1999), although it tries many new things musically, is not as forward-looking as its predecessor, *Little Plastic Castle*. Some songs, like “tis of thee,” seem to be a step back to what has always worked for DiFranco in the past, rather than a step forward into something new.

Columnist Tom Smucker sees the possibility that both DiFranco and her audience will be able to continue to grow past the tensions between innovation and familiarity. He

believes that this performer/fan connection has already acted out a “successful drama combining autonomy and relationship,” that in fact they have “healed a psychic split,”⁸³ in which performer and fan have voiced through each other both their autonomous and relational voices. He thinks that it may be possible to survive the new split.

Maybe this time, when the core group of fans matured just as the artist felt the need to control the celebrity spotlight, it was [not like Bob Dylan going electric] but a healing of a second psychic split. Maybe DiFranco has the space to maintain a relationship with her fans while they differentiate. Maybe that will form a continuing story, not a break.⁸⁴

Cited as one of the defining voices of the nineties, DiFranco will continue to be an influential presence if she lets the music continue to be the guiding force. As she matures and moves on she has the talent and potential to create new discourses or build upon existing ones, perhaps gaining a larger and more diverse audience in the process. She has already demonstrated her creative talents and independence through her music and through her life, as manifested in both her unwillingness to work within the confines of the music industry, and her resistance to extreme pressures from fans to conform to and maintain their various ideological agendas.

In light of fan pressure, it is yet again clear that society plays a part in shaping musical practices. Indeed, some practices may be said to be shaped almost entirely by the surrounding society, especially those that are more “commercialized.” Furthermore, practices that, unlike DiFranco’s, lack greatly in musical competency, desire, and/or sincerity may depend entirely upon extramusical factors for their survival. But DiFranco’s music, while being appropriated by many sub-cultural groups, has an influence that forms and molds the surrounding culture in return and the above analyses have sought to

⁸³ Smucker, 127-128.

demonstrate the essential signifying power that her music carries in its own right. This music does not need to rest on props of image and ideology, because the musical structures (and I include lyrics as an element of a song's musical structure) offer the pleasure and power that can attract people where image and ideology fall short.

Indeed, the primary offering of DiFranco's music is the pleasure of an enhanced experience of subjective reality. As her music is the artistic mirror of her life experience, it is hard to say how, as her life changes, her artistic output will change. If she refrains from merely repeating herself, the new reflection in the musical mirror may not hold the same interest for some of her fans, but this is just another part of the life experience—connecting with people and then growing apart. Others may be able, as Tom Smucker envisioned, to grow with her, and undoubtedly she will attract new audiences. It is likely that subjective identification will still have a central importance in her aesthetic—she is a singer-songwriter after all—but her musical inventiveness may allow some real innovation in how she pulls it off. However it may go, “grant her this much,” says columnist Christgau, “she’ll do it her way.”⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Christgau, 64-65.

DISCOGRAPHY

DiFranco, Ani:

To the Teeth. Righteous Babe Records, Inc. 1999

Up Up Up Up Up Up. Righteous Babe Records, Inc. 1999

Little Plastic Castle. Righteous Babe Records, Inc. 1998

Living in Clip. Righteous Babe Records, Inc. 1997

Dilate. Righteous Babe Records, Inc. 1996

More Joy Less Shame, EP. Righteous Babe Records, Inc. 1996

Not a Pretty Girl. Righteous Babe Records, Inc. 1995

Out of Range. Righteous Babe Records, Inc. 1994

Like I Said. Righteous Babe Records, Inc. 1993

Puddle Dive. Righteous Babe Records, Inc. 1993

Imperfectly. Righteous Babe Records, Inc. 1992

Not So Soft. Righteous Babe Records, Inc. 1991

Ani DiFranco. Righteous Babe Records, Inc. 1991

DiFranco, Ani and Utah Phillips:

Fellow Workers. Righteous Babe Records, Inc. 1999

The Past Didn't Go Anywhere. Righteous Babe Records, Inc. 1996

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adorno, Theodor. "The Curves of the Needle." [1928] *October* 55, (1990). Quoted in Frith, Simon. *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music*, 238. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996.

Barthes, Roland. "The Grain of the Voice." [1977] In *Image-Music-Text*. Translated by Stephen Heath. New York: Hill and Wang, 1994.

_____. "The Photographic Message." [1961] In *Image-Music-Text*. Translated by Stephen Heath. New York: Hill and Wang, 1994.

Brackett, David. *Interpreting Popular Music*. Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Chanan, Michael. *Musica Practica: The Social Practice of Western Music from Gregorian Chant to Postmodernism*. New York: Verso, 1994.

Corbett, John. "Free, Single and Disengaged: Listening Pleasure and the Popular Music Object." *October* 54 (1990), 84-85. Quoted in Frith, Simon. *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music*, 238. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996.

Covach, John. "We Won't Get Fooled Again: Rock Music and Musical Analysis." *In Theory Only* 13 (September, 1997), 119-141.

- Covach, John and G.M. Boone, eds. *Understanding Rock: Essays in Musical Analysis*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Eisenberg, Evan. *The Recording Angel: Explorations in Phonography*. New York: McGraw Hill, 1987.
- Fink, Robert. "Elvis Everywhere: Musicology and Popular Music Studies at the Twilight of the Canon." *American Music* (Summer 1998), 135-179.
- Frith, Simon and Andrew Goodwin, editors. *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1990.
- Frith, Simon. *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996.
- Hebdige, Dick. "Style as Homology and Signifying Practice." [1977] In *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*, 56-65. Edited by Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin. New York: Pantheon Books, 1990.
- Higgins, Paula. "Women in Music, Feminist Criticism, and Guerrilla Musicology: Reflections on Recent Polemics." *19th Century Music* 17, no.2 (Fall 1993), 174-192.
- Kerman, Joseph. *Contemplating Music: Challenges to Musicology*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985.
- _____. "How We Got into Analysis, and How to Get Out," *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1980), 311-331.
- Levinson, Jerold. "Truth in Music." Chapter in *Music, Art, and Metaphysics*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990.
- _____. "Music and Negative Emotion." Chapter in *Music, Art, and Metaphysics*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990.
- Levy, Janet M. "Covert and Casual Values in Recent Writings About Music." *Journal of Musicology* 6 (1987), 3-27.
- McClary, Susan. "This Is Not a Story My People Tell: Musical Time and Space According to Laurie Anderson." In *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1991.
- McClary, Susan and Robert Walser. "Start Making Sense! Musicology Wrestles with Rock." In *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*, 277-292. Edited by Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin. New York: Pantheon, 1990.

Middleton, Richard. *Studying Popular Music*. Milton Keynes, Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1990.

Murphie, Andrew. "Negotiating Presence - Performance and New Technologies." In *Culture, Technology and Creativity in the Late Twentieth Century*, 209-226. Edited by Philip Hayward. London: John Libbey, 1990.

Solie, Ruth A. "What Do Feminists Want? A Reply to Pieter Van Den Toorn." *Journal of Musicology* 9 (Summer 1991), 399-410.

Sontag, Susan. *Against Interpretation*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966.

Stefani, Gino. "A Theory of Musical Competence." *Semiotica* 66 (1987), 7-22.

Tagg, Philip. *KOJAK, 50 Seconds of Television Music: Toward the Analysis of Affect in Popular Music*. Gothenberg: Institute of Musicology, 1979.

_____. "Musicology and the semiotics of popular music." *Semiotica* 66 (1987), 279-298.

Van Den Toorn, Pieter C. "Politics, Feminism and Contemporary Music Theory." *Journal of Musicology* 9 (Summer 1991), 275-299.

Whiteley, Sheila, editor. *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender*. New York: Routledge, 1997.

MEDIA COVERAGE, REVIEWS, AND INTERVIEWS (Reverse chronological order)

Smucker, Tom. "Y2K Pete: Ani DiFranco." *Village Voice*, 2 February 1999, 127-128.

Walters, Barry. "Up with Ani." *The Advocate*, 2 February 1999, 63-64.

Davis, Alisha. "You Can't Fence Her In: A new DiFranco CD." *Newsweek* 18 January 1999, 56.

Bell, Carrie. "Righteous Babe's Ani DiFranco Moves 'Up'." *Billboard*, 28 November 1998, 13-14.

"A Note of Fear" *The Economist*, 31 October 1998, 67-68.

Varty, Alexander. "Ani DiFranco Has Nothing to Hide." *The Georgia Straight* (Vancouver), 9-16 July 1998, 65.

Ellis, Andy. "Sonic Alchemist: Ani DiFranco Warps the Acoustic Vernacular." *Guitar Player*, April, 1998, 70-74.

O'Dair, Barbara. "Recordings: *Little Plastic Castle*." *Rolling Stone*, 5 March 1998, 66.

- Stovall, Natasha. "Private Babe: Ani DiFranco." *Village Voice*, 24 February 1998, 133-134.
- "Both Sides Now." *The Advocate*, 9 December 1997, 26-27.
- Hamilton, Jill. "Ani DiFranco." *Rolling Stone*, 13 November 1997, 150-151.
- Jaquet, Janine. "Indie's Reservations." *The Nation*, 25 August 1997, 10.
- Marsh, David. "U2's Crash: Why Pop Flops." *The Nation*, 25 August 1997, 18-23.
- Christgau, Robert. "The Big Girls Understand." *Village Voice*, 10 June 1997, 64-65.
- Morris, Chris. "NAIRD Attendees Lighten Up in New Orleans." *Billboard*, 7 June 1997, 69.
- Kot, Greg. "Queen of the Road." *Rolling Stone*, 15 May 1997, 111-112.
- Gardner, Elysa. "Radical Chick." *Entertainment Weekly*, 2 May 1997, 36-39.
- Gillen, Marilyn A. "Righteous Babe an Indie Success Story." *Billboard*, 12 April 1997, 1-3.
- "Ani DiFranco." *Rolling Stone*, 6 February 1997, 22.
- Papazian, Ellen. "Woman on the Verge." *Ms.*, November/December 1996, 38-45.
- Pareles, Jon. "Feisty, Tender, She Speaks Her Mind." *The New York Times*, 26 November 1996, C16.
- Diers, James. "Reluctant Hero: Ani DiFranco on crossing from neo-folk obscurity to buzz-bin celebrity." *Twin Cities Reader*, 30 October 1996, 17-18.
- Levine, Joshua. "Role Model for Prince." *Forbes*, 23 September 1996, 181.
- Ray, Amy. "The Untouchable: Ani DiFranco, *Dilate* (Righteous Babe)." *The Advocate*, 28 May 1996, 61-62.
- Turner, Guinevere. "Super Girl." *The Advocate*, 30 April 1996, 45-48.
- Dietz, Roger. "Female Folk Artists Fight Pigeonholing." *Billboard*, 11 November 1995, 13-14.
- Sutton, Terri. "Girl Uninterrupted." *Village Voice*, 3 October 1995, 51-52.
- Goodman, Fred. "Recordings: *Not a Pretty Girl*, Ani DiFranco (Righteous Babe)." *Rolling Stone*, 24 August 1995, 102-103.

Appendix A: Song Lyrics

Dilate

life used to be lifelike
now it's more like showbiz
i wake up in the night and i
don't know where the bathroom is
and don't know what town i'm in
or what sky i am under
and i wake up in the darkness
and i don't have the will anymore to wonder
everyone has a skeleton
and a closet to keep it in
and you're mine
every song has a you
a you that the singer sings to
and you're it this time
baby you're it this time...

when i need to wipe my face
i use the back of my hand
and i like to take up space
just because i can
and i use my dress to wipe up my drink
you know i care less and less what people think
you are so lame
you always disappoint me
it's kind of like a running joke
but it's really not funny
and i just want you to live up to
the image of you i create
i see you and i'm so unsatisfied
i see you and i dilate...

so i'll walk the plank
yeah i'll jump with a smile
if i'm gonna go down
i'm gonna do it with style
you won't see me surrender
you won't hear me confess
cuz you've left me nothing
but i've worked with less
and i learn every room long enough
to make it to the door
then i hear it click shut behind me.
and every key works differently
and i forget every time and
the forgetting defines me
that's what defines me

when i say you sucked my brain out
the english translation
is i am in love with you,
and it is no fun
but i don't use words like love
cuz words like that don't matter
but don't look so offended
you know you should be flattered
and i wake up in the night
in some big hotel bed
my hands grope for the light
my hands grope for my head
the world is my oyster
the road is my home
and i know that i'm better,
i'm better off alone...

Adam and Eve

tonight you stooped to my level
i am your mangy little whore
now you're trying to find your underwear
and then your socks and then the door
and you're trying to find a reason
why you have to leave
but i know it's 'cuz you think you're adam
and you think i'm eve

you rhapsodize about beauty
and my eyes glaze
everything i love is ugly
i mean really, you would be amazed
just do me a favor
it's the least that you can do
just don't treat me like i am
something that happened to you

i am truly sorry about all this

you put a tiny pin prick
in my big red balloon
and as i slowly start to exhale
that's when you leave the room
i did not design this game
i did not name the stakes
i just happen to like apples
and i am not afraid of snakes

i am truly sorry about all this
i envy you your ignorance
i hear that it's bliss

so i let go the ratio
of things said to thing heard
as i leave you to your garden
and the beauty you preferred
and i wonder what of this
will have meaning for you
when you've left it all behind
i guess i'll even wonder
if you meant it
at the time

Shameless

i cannot name this
i cannot explain this
and i really don't want to
just call me shameless
i can't even slow this down
let alone stop this
and i keep looking around
but i cannot top this

if i had any sense
i guess i'd fear this
i guess i'd keep it down
so no one would hear this
i guess i'd keep it down
so no one would hear this
i guess i'd shut my mouth
and rethink a minute
but i can't shut it now
'cuz there's something in it

we're in a room without a door
and i am sure without a doubt
they're gonna wanna know
how we got in here
and they're gonna wanna know
how we plan to get out
we better have a good explanation
for all the fun that we had
'cuz they are coming for us, babe
and they are going to be mad
yeah they're going to be mad at us

this is my skeleton
this is the skin it's in
that is according to light
and gravity
i'll take off my disguise
the mask you met me in
'cuz i got something
for you to see
just gimme your skeleton
give me the skin it's in
yeah baby, this is you
according to me
i never avert my eyes
i never compromise
so never mind
the poetry

i gotta cover my butt 'cuz i covet
another man's wife
i gotta divide my emotions

into wrong and right
then i get to see how close i can get to it
without giving in
then i get to rub up against it
till i break the skin
rub up against it
till i break the skin

they're gonna be mad at us
they're gonna be mad at me and you
they're gonna be mad at us
and all the things
we wanna do

just please don't name this
please don't explain this
just blame it all on me
say i was shameless
say i couldn't slow it down
let alone stop it
and say you just hung around
'cuz you couldn't top it

Going Down

you can't get through it
you can't get over it'
you can't get around

just like in a dream
you'll open your mouth to scream
and you won't make a sound

you can't believe your eyes
you can't believe your ears
you can't believe your friends
you can't believe you're here

and you're not gonna get through it
so you are going down

i put a cup out on the window sill
to catch the water as it fell
now i got a glass half full of rain
to measure the time between
when you said you'd come
and when you actually came

little mister limp dick
is up to his old tricks
and thought that he'd call me
one last time
but i'm just about done with
the oh-woe-is-me shit
and i want everything back that's mine

Appendix B: Biography⁸⁶

Ani DiFranco was born September 23, 1970 in Buffalo, NY to mother, Elizabeth who grew up in Montreal and graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology with a degree in architecture, and father, Dante, a research engineer also educated at MIT. She has one older brother. She describes her homelife until her parents separated at age 11, as “a mess,” with “one scary scene after another.”

She started learning guitar at age 9, and befriended then 30-year-old singer-songwriter Michael Meldrum, who became her mentor. Through his contacts as a producer, performers like Suzanne Vega, Michelle Shocked, and Rod MacDonald found their way to the DiFranco household.

She gave up guitar a few years to study ballet, but at 14 picked it up again and started writing her own songs. Meldrum called her “a precocious 14-year-old” writing songs about “alienation, loss, and change . . . she could sing the phone book; she’d sing the most simple, declarative statement and your heart would just wrench.” He organized concerts for her in Buffalo, and by age 15 she was performing every Saturday night in a local bar.

Her parents divorced that year and her mother moved to Connecticut while DiFranco remained in Buffalo living with friends. After graduating from high-school she spent the next few year writing and performing music and had written 100 songs by age 19. In 1988 she briefly studied art at the State University of NY in Buffalo but moved to NYC in 1989 where she attended college classes, played gigs and worked. Local rock critic, Dale Anderson, took her under his wing, introducing her to a lawyer familiar with

⁸⁶ From Papazian, 39-42.

the music industry who “briefed her on what she would face if she tried to build a career, things like losing ownership of her songs or being trapped in unfavorable contracts.”

With Anderson, she recorded 500 copies of a demo, to meet increasing requests for tapes at her concerts. The demo entitled *Ani DiFranco*, of just her and her guitar, was recorded with \$1500 in a studio owned by friends. DiFranco quickly sold them out at club dates.

In 1990 she founded Righteous Babe Records based in Buffalo, which she mostly operated out of her New York City living room, storing tapes in her car. Her recordings circulated by cassette copying and word of mouth. According to Dale Anderson who became her manager: “Whole campfuls of people in Maine had seventeenth-generation *Ani DiFranco* tapes they were playing over and over again. It was not like she was an entertainer...she was a person who changed your life. And people really did feel empowered listening to her music.”

In 1991 she toured the US in her Volkswagen, using “crazy little promoters” to book gigs. The six albums she recorded in the next four years contained her own artwork on CD’s and cassette holders with photos of her as a young, pierced, and tattooed woman with a shaved head. By 1993 she was regularly being approached by major labels, and rejecting them. Danny Goldberg, President and CEO of Mercury Records said, “She’s one of the most brilliant and compelling artists out now... a genius.”

In 1994, Anderson left Righteous Babe and was replaced by Scot Fisher—a longtime friend and lawyer who had worked with death row prisoners in Texas. By this time DiFranco was touring over 200 days a year. In 1996, her album *Dilate* debuted at number 87 on the *Billboard 200* making Righteous Babe one of the few artist-owned,

independently distributed labels to ever have an album on that list. In 1998, *Little Plastic Castle* debuted at 22 and sold 244,000 copies. By the time her twelfth solo album, *Up Up Up Up Up Up*, was released in 1999, DiFranco had sold two-million records total. In 1999 she was rated 90 in *Rolling Stone's* Top 100 Women in Rock.