

**“THAT’S THE WAY I GROOVE”:  
REPETITION AND MEANING IN ANI DIFRANCO’S *EVOLVE***

by

**ROBIN ELIZABETH STURTON ATTAS**

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## Abstract

Ani Difranto is a contemporary singer/songwriter who draws musical influence from folk, rock, pop, jazz, and funk to create a unique personal style. Her music employs short, repetitive grooves as the primary means of song structure, while her lyrics explore a broad range of themes and are more poetic than most popular lyrics. This thesis examines three songs from her 2003 album *Evolve*, “Evolve”, “In the Way”, and “Slide”, which incorporate Difranto’s musical idiom of voice and guitar as well as a more expanded instrumentation of lead and backing vocals with a seven-piece band. These songs will facilitate both an exploration of Difranto’s music specifically and a consideration of some general analytical issues in popular music.

Difranto’s musical style suggests a dual analytical focus. The first consideration is the concept of repetition in popular music, manifested most prominently in the repetitive grooves that structure each song. Each groove is examined in isolation for salient qualities that promote or inhibit repetition, and studied in context for instances of variation and development. Changes to the structure of the groove itself, its orchestration, and the interaction between the groove and other musical elements are also considered.

The second major focus is text-music relations in popular music: the ways in which a listener’s interpretation can be shaped by music and lyrics together. To this end, the lyrics are considered as a poetic object, and all musical parameters (including texture, vocal timbre, meter, hypermeter, pitch form, and the groove). Themes or images in the text may be reinforced by one or more of these musical features, and vice versa.

Each of the three song analyses focuses attention on different issues within these two domains.

“Evolve,” orchestrated for voice and guitar, presents a strongly autotelic groove frequently varied in terms of rhythm, pitch, and timbre for meaningful effect, and also showcases DiFranco’s diverse range of vocal timbres. “In the Way” is orchestrated for a full band, engaging issues of instrumentation and texture. The discussion will also demonstrate the role of the musical setting in suggesting or reinforcing a certain reading of the lyrics. Finally, “Slide” presents a more varied groove structure in which a linear groove alternates with a homophonic progression, and also recasts repetition, in multiple musical parameters, as an interplay between expectation and reality.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction and Background

Ani (pronounced AH-ni) Difranc0 presents a world of contradictions, a rare example of a well-known folk singer, with musical influences encompassing folk, funk, jazz, and everything in between. Difranc0 (or just Ani, as she is typically called by her fans) falls into the broadly-defined musical category of singer/songwriter: she writes and performs her own songs, most often a solo performer but sometimes reinforced with a backup band. The style and content of her lyrics recall folksingers such as Bob Dylan and Woody Guthrie, but with an emphasis on current political circumstances, gender issues, and other challenges of contemporary life. Difranc0's lyrics are almost always paired with music emphasizing finger-picked guitar riffs and grooves repeated throughout the course of a song, although standard pop harmonic progressions still occur in the texture as well. Difranc0's primary instrument is guitar, and this instrument appears in almost all of her songs. However, she sometimes makes use of instrumental combinations ranging from minimal additions (drums, bass, keyboard) to a full jazz ensemble (keyboards, clarinet, flute, saxophone, trumpet, trombone, bass, drum kit, and auxiliary percussion).

This instrumental timbral diversity is matched by an incredible range of timbres in Difranc0's vocal style, a style that is both unique and difficult to describe. It is a mix of singing and spoken word, jazz scat and pop-star belting, growls and hisses and sighs all incorporated into melodies with indistinct pitches, unpredictable contours, and intervallic content unusual for the standard pop repertory.

The three songs analyzed in this thesis are drawn from the same album, 2003's *Evolve*. This disc, Difranc0's fifteenth, is one of three released during a three-year period in which the normally-

solo songwriter was touring with a seven-piece jazz ensemble. The use of such a large ensemble allows for a range of timbres far more diverse than Difranco's normal guitar-and-voice arrangement and provides many opportunities for textural development and change; however, the fundamental elements of her musical style (poetic lyrics and groove-based music) remain unchanged from earlier work.

On the whole, Difranco's musical style suggests further consideration of grooves specifically, and musical repetition more generally. Issues of timbre and orchestration also become important as a result of the wide range of instruments at her disposal on *Evolve*. Difranco's lyrics, in their emphasis on poetic constructs, deserve isolated consideration, but with an aim to ultimately connect potential meanings in the text to the music it is paired with, raising issues of text-music relations in popular music.

My analytical work in these areas has been informed by a wide variety of sources, reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of the study of popular music. Three main areas of research have been most influential: general writings on popular music from a musicological or sociological perspective; writings on repetition and grooves; and studies on the relationship between text and music. At this point it would be appropriate to briefly review some of the existing work in these areas.



## **Analysis of Popular Music**

The academic study of popular music began in sociology; it was only in the 1980s that musicology and, eventually, music theory, began to treat popular music seriously. Despite a drastic increase in articles, books, journals, and research groups devoted to the topic over the past twenty years, the field could still be considered to be in its infancy, particularly in the discipline of music theory. This sense of something recently come into existence is both a blessing and a curse, as it leaves a great deal of room for innovative research that more easily bypasses the conventions of art music theory, but leaves analysts with fewer examples of past research to learn from and build upon.

Two texts in particular have been important references and sources of personal inspiration, and should be regarded as essential reading for anyone seeking to begin a musicological study of popular music: Richard Middleton's *Studying Popular Music* and David Brackett's *Interpreting Popular Music*.<sup>1</sup> Middleton's book approaches the study of popular music from almost every conceivable angle, demonstrating an incredibly detailed knowledge of theories of sociology, philosophy, musicology, ethnomusicology, semiotics, aesthetics, and media studies in a largely successful attempt to place popular music within a cultural context. Middleton intersperses summaries of the writings of such classic pop music and culture theorists as Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and Marshall McLuhan with further work done by their supporters and detractors, as well as his own well-crafted critiques.

Numerous musical examples, and a large section devoted to different existing analytical approaches, ensure that this book remains focused on the music under study. As an approach to popular music in its cultural context, the book is second to none. However, discussions of specific

<sup>1</sup> Richard Middleton, *Studying Popular Music* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1990). David Brackett, *Interpreting Popular Music*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

musical features as sound objects removed from their cultural context are few and far between. This reveals Middleton's interest in combining sociology with musicology. *Studying Popular Music* is an excellent guide to the vast amount of background reading across the many disciplines engaged in popular music studies, but offers little in the way of extended engagement with the musical sounds themselves.

David Brackett's *Interpreting Popular Music* fills in this gap. Like Middleton, Brackett adopts a multidisciplinary stance with ample consideration of cultural context, but places equal emphasis on musicological and music-theoretical approaches in his analyses. Brackett states this aim explicitly: "...as a musician, I remain convinced that the *sounds* of music—the way they are produced, the way they differ from one another, the way they resemble each other, the relationship between specific gestures and their effects—are important."<sup>2</sup> This philosophy will resonate well with most music theorists (this author being no exception) for its direct engagement with the music itself.

Brackett's analytical approach is particularly interesting for its eclecticism, in terms of the musical parameters he considers in any one analysis. Depending on the song under scrutiny, he considers timbre, meter, hypermeter, rhythm, and texture as well as the traditional musicological foci of pitch, harmony, and lyrics. Each analysis also draws on knowledge from the same broad repertoire of cultural studies as Middleton's study, but this knowledge does not overpower the stated goal of focusing on musical sounds. Brackett's work is quite similar to my goals in this study, and as a result his methodology has been highly influential.

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<sup>2</sup> Brackett, *Interpreting Popular Music*, ix-x.

Walter Everett is a third senior statesman in the field of popular music studies, having written widely on a range of popular music topics.<sup>3</sup> In particular, Everett's essay "Confessions from Blueberry Hell, or, Pitch Can Be a Sticky Substance" presents a useful summary of analytical approaches to popular music, considering form, orchestration, timbre, rhythm, and tempo before concluding with an extensive survey of the domain of pitch.<sup>4</sup> This strong emphasis on pitch and harmony is quite common in Everett's work. His approach to popular music harmony and voice-leading is derived from Schenkerian analysis, which works well for pop music that contains clear tonal prolongation and complex melodic design. However, the music of Ani DiFranco does not fall into this category, and so much of Everett's work is not directly relevant, but is inspiring for its thoughtful discussion of so many different musical parameters, and for its overall breadth and scope.

Ken Stephenson takes an alternative approach to popular music harmony in his book *What to Listen For in Rock*. Stephenson's theories are notable in that they are derived in part from the terminology and notational conventions used by popular music players themselves.<sup>5</sup> Thus he can treat pop harmonies such as "sus" chords (adding an interval of a second or a fourth above the root, e.g., Csus2 is a C major chord with an added D) and chords with added ninths or elevenths as norms in popular music harmony, rather than as distortions of tonal harmonies. Where Everett's method might suggest a sense of dissonance requiring resolution in triads with added notes, Stephenson's system allows for a second option: the explanation of these chords as stable entities unto themselves. Stephenson ultimately suggests three basic harmonic systems, but includes the possibility that they are loose categorizations only. Whether or not one agrees with

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, his two-book study of the music of the Beatles: *The Beatles as Musicians: Revolver through the Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) and *The Beatles as Musicians: the Quarry Men through Rubber Soul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> Walter Everett, "Confessions from Blueberry Hell, or, Pitch Can Be A Sticky Substance," in *Expression in Pop-Rock Music*, ed. Walter Everett (New York: Garland, 2000), 269–345.

<sup>5</sup> Ken Stephenson, *What to Listen For in Rock* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

his organizational strategy, I believe that by considering popular music harmony as its own system, his approach holds great potential for further development.

## **Repetition**

The phenomenon of repetition in music has received scant attention. The prevailing aesthetic in art music and its analysis seems to be that repetition is a negative trait, or at the very least, a phenomenon that can be overlooked. This attitude reached its peak in the avant-garde music of the early twentieth century, when the underlying compositional goal seemed to be the continual presentation of new material. In popular music, however, repetition is a fundamental compositional procedure, and analytical approaches need to address this fact.

The different uses of repetition in art and pop music is linked to the structural principles underlying each genre. Andrew Chester describes this difference as a dichotomy between two categories. *Extensional music* is built “diachronically and synchronically outward from basic musical atoms. The complex is created by combination of the simple, which remains discrete and unchanged in the complex unity.”<sup>6</sup> Extensional music is epitomized by Western art music. In contrast, with *intensional music*, “the basic musical units (played/sung notes) are not combined through space and time as simple elements into complex structures [as in extensional music]. The simple entity is that constituted by the parameters of melody, harmony and beat, while the complex is built up by modulation of the basic notes, and by inflection of the basic beat.”<sup>7</sup>

Refining these definitions further, extensional music features long-range, developmental structures, with repetition occurring only on a larger level (a rounded binary dance form, for

<sup>6</sup> Andrew Chester, “Second Thoughts on a Rock Aesthetic: The Band,” in *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*, eds. Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (New York: Routledge, 1990), 315.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

example). Intensional music establishes some kind of unit (for example, a groove, or a twelve-bar blues chord progression), what Chester calls "the simple entity" in the above quotation, and then repeats this unit, making variational changes *within* a repeated framework. Rather than a strict binary opposition, it might be more helpful to think of extensional and intensional as two ends of a continuum, with the majority of popular music towards the intensional end, and the majority of art music towards the extensional end (although there certainly exists extensionally-oriented pop music, and intensional art music).

Moving away from the classification of musical repetition, articles by Peter Kivy and John Rahn have approached repetition in music from a more philosophical position.<sup>8</sup> Kivy's article considers historical approaches to the subject of repetition in philosophy, both generally and with specific regard to music. Rahn focuses his attention on the experience of repetition: the processes that potentially take place when we expect to hear something again, and how our experience changes when we actually hear its repetition. This is an interesting consideration, particularly in light of musical expectation and reality, something which will be important in my own analyses.

In two separate essays, Richard Middleton uses such philosophical work on repetition as a starting point for actual musical analysis.<sup>9</sup> Both essays are deeply contextualized in typical Middleton fashion, considering various aspects of repetition from multiple academic standpoints, and in musical contexts ranging over a wide variety of pop music subgenres. Middleton makes useful critiques of other work on repetition in music, and offers some analytical suggestions which are of interest in the present study. In " 'Play it again Sam': Some notes on the productivity of

<sup>8</sup> Peter Kivy, "The fine art of repetition," in *The Fine Art of Repetition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 327–359. John Rahn, "Repetition," *Contemporary Music Review* 7(1993), 49–57.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Middleton, " 'Play it again Sam': Some notes on the productivity of repetition in popular music," *Popular Music* 3(1983), 235–270. Richard Middleton, " 'Over and Over': Notes towards a politics of repetition: surveying the ground, charting some routes," paper presented at "Grounding Music" conference held by Institute for Popular Music Research, Humboldt Universität, Berlin, 1996.

repetition in popular music,” he proposes two basic categories of repetition based on the length of unit that is repeated: *musematic* (short units such as riffs) and *discursive* (longer units, encompassing phrases or sections). Middleton traces the use of these two broad types in popular music throughout the twentieth century, but focuses primarily on melodic repetition, with other musical parameters given short shrift. Although Middleton does consider the physical effects of repetition on a listener (in a similar manner to Rahn’s consideration of expectation and reality), he seems to forego detailed discussion of the musical processes that promote the creation of such expectations (meter, harmonic progressions, and so on). This emphasis on the socio-cultural implications of repetition in music is even more evident in his second essay on repetition, “‘Over and Over’: Notes towards a politics of repetition: Surveying the ground, charting some routes,” which focuses more exclusively on musical repetition in culture. As with Middleton’s other work on popular music, the depth of awareness of existing literature on his subject is second to none, giving an excellent contextualization for my own primary interest in the musical sounds and processes themselves.

Tim Hughes’ 2003 dissertation on the music of Stevie Wonder is vitally important to this study because it addresses some of these repetitive processes directly.<sup>10</sup> Hughes deals with a specific manifestation of repetition in popular music, the groove. Elaborating on Mark Spicer’s definition of a groove as “the complex tapestry of riffs—usually played by the drums, bass, rhythm guitar and/or keyboard in some combination—that work together to create the distinctive harmonic/rhythmic backdrop which identifies a song,”<sup>11</sup> Hughes adds that a groove is “designed to be repeated.”<sup>12</sup> Much of his dissertation explores the different types of grooves that may

<sup>10</sup> Tim Hughes, “Groove and Flow: Six Analytical Essays on the Music of Stevie Wonder” (Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 2003).

<sup>11</sup> Mark Spicer, “British Pop-Rock in the Post-Beatles Era: Three Analytical Studies” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 2001), 10.

<sup>12</sup> Hughes, “Groove and Flow,” 14.

potentially exist in pop music. Hughes advocates for three types: grooves that have musical features promoting their own repetition (a type he calls *autotelic* grooves), grooves that create a sense of completion at the end of each repeated unit, and grooves that are “designed to progress away from the beginning and then abruptly snap back when repeated.”<sup>13</sup> Hughes then finds examples of each of these grooves in the music of Stevie Wonder.

In my experience, actually applying these categories to the music of Ani DiFranco has been somewhat problematic. In particular, the category of autotelic grooves presents difficulties: since every groove is inevitably repeated, there must always be some feature in every groove promoting its repetition. Certainly, every groove will establish some sort of meter; the listener will expect this meter to continue, most likely by further repetition of the groove. I have difficulty determining whether or not Hughes considers meter to be an autotelic element, or if he considers it to be a phenomenon apart from other musical features, such as an ascending or descending scale that only arrives on the tonic on the downbeat of the groove, or a harmonic progression that suggests resolution with the opening chord.

As a solution, I have decided to consider the autotelic and non-autotelic qualities that promote or inhibit a groove’s repetition, rather than attempt to classify each groove into one of Hughes’ categories. I have limited autotelic elements to musical phenomena such as pitch, harmony, and rhythm, and have left meter as a separate element in the groove’s repetition.

### **Text-Music Relations and Musical Meaning**

Traditionally, the analytical relationship between words and music has been explored within the domain of art song. The available literature on the subject is thus quite vast and well-developed; I

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<sup>13</sup> Hughes, “Groove and Flow,” 15.

will merely highlight a few studies that have provided contextualization for my own work.

Lawrence Kramer's chapter entitled "Song," in *Music and Poetry: The Nineteenth Century and After*, gives insight into the relationships between art music and the poetry it sets.<sup>14</sup> As Kramer points out, there are conflicting views amongst scholars, composers, and poets as to the relationship between music and poetry in art song. Does an art song totally subsume the poem it sets, such that they are no longer two separate entities but something new, of the composer's creation? Or does an art song merely present one reading of the poem, with other readings possible when the poem is considered as a separate object?<sup>15</sup> Popular music could conceivably present a special case, because the lyrics of a pop song rarely have an independent life before being set to music. However, it seems logical to maintain an open mind, and to still consider both points of view. The first experience of a pop song would have the lyrics completely subsumed within the overall entity of the song, but further consideration could certainly separate music and text, with the possibility of changed readings of the text in the absence of music.

Kramer also discusses instances in which music and text seem to conflict in their implied meanings. This is certainly conceivable in popular music as well as the art song that Kramer is considering; however, in my own research I have focused more on instances of text-music congruence rather than conflict and so have not delved deeply into this phenomenon.

In *The Composer's Voice*, Edward T. Cone explains the relationship between poetry and music in terms of potential speaking voices.<sup>16</sup> Expanding on T.S. Eliot's notion that there are three

<sup>14</sup> Lawrence Kramer, *Music and Poetry: The Nineteenth Century and After* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 125–170.

<sup>15</sup> David Lewin has aptly compared this latter phenomenon to different actors performing the same text, in "Auf dem Fluss: Image and Background in a Schubert Song," *19th-Century Music* 6:1 (1982), 48.

<sup>16</sup> Edward T. Cone, *The Composer's Voice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).



possible speaking voices that a poet may adopt, Cone considers the voice and accompaniment in art song as two separate voices, with the composer's voice acting as an all-encompassing third voice behind these two. This decision places too much control with the composer as sole creator of meaning, ignoring the possibility for the different interpretations of musical meaning by listeners in suggesting that a single (composer's) voice ultimately controls all meaning(s).

However, by initially acknowledging the existence of various speaking voices, exploring the ways in which they complement and contradict one another, Cone does present some influential ideas, and even addresses the idea of the pop singer/songwriter (albeit briefly).<sup>17</sup>

Music theorists have also addressed some issues of text-music relations in popular music in recent decades. Returning to the work of Walter Everett, his article "Swallowed by a Song: Paul Simon's Crisis of Chromaticism" presents one possible approach to text-music relations.<sup>18</sup> As part of a survey of Paul Simon's work in the 1970s, Everett begins with a look at Simon's overall harmonic idiom in the period before focusing on specific songs. Within each song analysis, Everett takes an approach of integration, interspersing comments about the lyrics and their implied meaning with commentary on the musical phenomena (primarily pitch-based, commensurate with his interests) that support his interpretations.

Taking a somewhat different approach, Lori Burns' "'Joanie' Get Angry: k.d. lang's Feminist Revision," chooses to examine the lyrics in isolation at the beginning of her analysis.<sup>19</sup> She considers how lang's cover of the 1962 song "Johnny Get Angry" (originally sung by Joanie Summers) constructs new meanings for the song, by considering lang's stage demeanor, the

<sup>17</sup> For a more extended critique of Cone's work, see Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991).

<sup>18</sup> Walter Everett, "Swallowed by a Song: Paul Simon's Crisis of Chromaticism," in *Understanding Rock: Essays in Musical Analysis*, eds. John Covach and Graeme Boone (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 113–153.

<sup>19</sup> Lori Burns, "'Joanie get Angry': k.d. lang's Feminist Revision," in *Understanding Rock: Essays in Musical Analysis*, eds. John Covach and Graeme Boone (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 93–112.

altered musical setting of the text, and lang's personal comments relating to the performance. Burns also links specific musical phenomena to interpretive ideas; for example, linking harmonic progressions perceived as weak or strong with characters and attitudes at different moments in the text. I have followed Burns' example in my own work, as I have found that considering the lyrics independently helps clarify ideas before engagement in a close reading of text and musical meanings.

Some popular music scholars have turned away from the lyrics entirely in their search for musical meaning, taking inspiration instead from the field of semiotics. Here, the music alone is considered as text, and theories of language bear a strong influence on determinations of the music as meaningful.

Middleton's *Studying Popular Music* devotes a lengthy chapter to a fairly comprehensive survey of current (as of 1990) approaches to semiotics in popular music, but Middleton never moves beyond the level of survey to suggest how these ideas might be applied in musical analysis.<sup>20</sup> The reader is left with excellent summaries of primary and secondary levels of signification, and of syntactic and semantic analysis, but little idea of how to apply such thinking to popular music analysis.

Philip Tagg is the principal scholar working specifically on semiotic elements in popular music. His lengthy studies on the theme from the television series *Kojak* and Swedish band ABBA's "Fernando" are not widely available, but Tagg has summarized his ideas in other articles,

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<sup>20</sup> Richard Middleton, " 'From me to you'. Popular music as message," in *Studying Popular Music* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1990), 172–246.

including “Musicology and the semiotics of popular music” and “Analysing popular music.”<sup>21</sup>

Throughout these two articles, Tagg raises interesting points that I feel worthy of further consideration, notably the notion that popular music study (and perhaps all musical study) should focus on norms before moving to particular cases: music theorists too often focus on idiosyncratic music, neglecting research into the normative elements in a certain musical style as a means to discover how individual pieces break these norms.

Using this philosophy as a starting point, Tagg’s method of analysis for popular music focuses on the division of any given song into smaller chunks, the “minimal units of expression in any given musical style.”<sup>22</sup> These units, called *musemes*, can then be analyzed to determine two things: firstly, exactly what emotion is being expressed; and secondly, what musical parameter is creating the effect. Tagg provides an exhaustive list of musical parameters to test according to his method of “hypothetical substitution,” a method in which some parameter (e.g., pitch, tempo, articulation) is mentally altered by the analyst, who then hypothesizes as to whether or not the original emotional meaning is still present, or if the parameter just changed was responsible for its presence. After determining the emotional effect of each *museme* in isolation through such tests of hypothetical substitution, the analyst must then consider larger musical groupings, as well as the likelihood that *musemes* are layered within a piece, acting simultaneously for different effects.

This method is commendable in its incredible attention to the minutiae of musical meaning. It also allows Tagg to link emotional experience with a diverse range of musical parameters, showing that popular music (and in fact, all music) is about more than just pitch, form, and lyrics. However, his methodology is so time-intensive that to employ it fully and on a regular basis for

<sup>21</sup> Philip Tagg, “Analysing Popular Music,” in *Reading Pop: Approaches to Textual Analysis in Popular Music*, ed. Richard Middleton (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 71–103. Philip Tagg, “Musicology and the semiotics of popular music,” *Semiotica* 66:1–3(1987), 279–298.

<sup>22</sup> Tagg, “Analysing Popular Music,” 83.

musical analysis seems unrealistic. Even so, I have found inspiration in his list of musical parameters as a reminder to look past traditional theory boundaries, in his celebration of musical norms before exceptions, and in the technique of hypothetical substitution as a more general thought experiment that can help the analyst discern what musical element(s) might produce a specific emotion or interpretation.

My own hypotheses on text-music relations have developed out of all of these studies, as well as through my own encounters with popular music. The method for discerning potential meaning in popular music that I will employ in this thesis has three main tenets.

Firstly, all musical elements in popular song must be considered as potential carriers of meaning, an opinion particularly influenced by the work of David Brackett in *Interpreting Popular Music*. Although only certain elements may figure in the final analysis, scholars would do well to consider such diverse parameters as vocal timbre, hypermeter, form, orchestration, rhythm, and texture (and many others) when making the first forays into an analysis. Vocal timbre in particular deserves attention, since in popular music it is generally the vocal quality of the singer that both receives the most attention from listeners, and is fundamental in defining the overall style. With Ani DiFranco in particular, her timbrally-diverse singing style results in a complex palette of sounds that encourages a consideration of vocal timbre, something I address specifically in the analysis of “Evolve.”

Secondly, I believe that it is the interaction of text and music that suggests meanings in a song as a whole. To this end, although I spend a portion of each analysis discussing both text and music in relative isolation, I ultimately recombine the two elements in the final analysis. This emphasis on meaning, particularly as found in the lyrics, is appropriate for a singer/songwriter such as Ani

Difranco, but is not necessarily the best approach for all pop music.

Finally, I hold strongly to the view that the meanings I do suggest are ultimately my own. I have refrained somewhat from pinning down specific readings for each of my three case studies, advocating instead for interpretations that identify overall thematic areas. In this way, I recognize that some interpretations are more plausible than others, but also acknowledge that the meanings of a song are ultimately personal, and constantly subject to change, even in a single listener.

### ***Evolve***

With all of these analytical perspectives at the ready, let me turn now to the analysis of my three chosen songs. Each analysis engages different issues of repetition, expectation, and the groove; and different approaches to text-music interactions and the suggestion of meaning.

“Evolve” is a solo piece for Difranco, with guitar laying down a groove over which Difranco sings (a second guitar is overdubbed towards the end of the song). The simple overall instrumental texture will allow a good introductory focus on groove structure, particularly in terms of discovering autotelic qualities and the ways in which they can be manipulated over the course of a song. Vocal timbre will also receive rigorous consideration. From these two main foci, various thoughts about the creation of meaning in text-music relations will emerge.

“In the Way” further develops analysis of the groove, as it maintains a single groove throughout, but adds a new element with a musical texture encompassing the full seven-piece band. Issues of orchestration and texture thus become important elements to consider in a search for meaningful moments in both music and text. Ultimately, musical interpretations help to solidify an interpretation of the text that would be difficult with lyrics alone.

Finally, “Slide” abandons the use of a constantly-repeated single groove to incorporate both a groove and a contrasting harmonic progression. This presents challenges to the notion of a groove as sole agent of repetition and continuity. A full-band setting is also used here and its effect will be explored further, while the song’s complex and oft-times ambiguous lyrics provide new challenges in discerning text-music relationships.

## Chapter 2

### “Evolve”

“Evolve” is something of a musical anomaly on *Evolve*, despite its status as title track. On this track Difranco chooses a stripped-down texture of guitar and voice that contrasts with the full-band orchestration of other songs. This simplified texture makes the song an excellent starting point for examining groove structures in Difranco’s music, and for looking at the extended use and transformation of the groove throughout a song. Additionally, with only guitar accompaniment the voice is brought to the fore in the texture, allowing a focus on issues of vocal timbre in Difranco’s idiom. Observations about both of these musical elements will contribute to a discussion of text-music relations in the song, particularly with regard to repetition and contrast.

#### Text Meanings

The text of “Evolve” focuses, appropriately enough, upon the idea of evolution, of change. Difranco’s own take on the song is that it best encapsulates the themes of the album as a whole.<sup>23</sup> For her, the song represents the shift from a songwriter with a seven-piece band to a songwriter with only her own resources at her disposal, reflecting Difranco’s subsequent return to solo performer status after the release of *Evolve* in 2003. It points “in the direction that I’m going now, finding my own voice in the wilderness of all of those people [her bandmates]. This record represents the culmination of a certain musical era....”<sup>24</sup> “Evolve” also engages larger themes that recur in much of Difranco’s work: dichotomies between nature and technology, individuals and institutions, the people and the government.

<sup>23</sup> Joe Sweeney, “Ani Talks About Evolve,” in *Righteous Babe Records* [Online], available: [http://www.righteousbabe.com/ani/evolve/evolve\\_interview.asp](http://www.righteousbabe.com/ani/evolve/evolve_interview.asp); accessed 21 November 2004.

<sup>24</sup> “Ani Difranco: More About Evolve,” in *Righteous Babe Records* [Online], available: [http://www.righteousbabe.com/ani/evolve/more\\_info.asp](http://www.righteousbabe.com/ani/evolve/more_info.asp); accessed 21 November 2004.

Figure 2.1 reproduces the lyrics to the song, with spacing and punctuation reproduced from the CD liner notes. The left column of the figure uses abbreviations to indicate sectional divisions: I for instrumental, V for verse, C for chorus, and R for refrain. (Refrains are not seen in “Evolve” but do occur in a later analysis.) On the right side of the figure, track times pinpoint the location of each section and give a sense of the overall temporal proportions of the song.

**Figure 2.1 Text of “Evolve”**

[Introduction]		[0:00]
[V1]	i walk in stride with people much taller than me and partly it's the boots but mostly it's my chi and i'm becoming transfixed with nature and my part in it which i believe just signifies i'm finally waking up	[0:16]
[V2]	and there's this moth outside my kitchen door she's bonkers for that bare bulb flying round in circles bashing in her exoskull out in the woods she navigates fine by the moon but get her around a light bulb and she's doomed	[0:31]
[C1]	she is trying to evolve she's just trying to evolve	[0:48]
[I1]		[1:05]
[V3]	now, let's get talking reefer madness, like: some arrogant government can't by any stretch of the imagination outlaw a plant! yes, their supposed authority over nature is a dream c'mon people, we've got to come clean	[1:12]

(continued)



[V4]	cuz they are locking our sons and our daughters in cages they are taking by the thousands our lives from under us it's a crash course in religious fundamentals now let's all go to war get some bang for our buck	[1:28]
[C2]	i am trying to evolve i'm just trying to evolve	[1:46]
[I2]		[2:02]
[V5]	gunnin for high score in the land of dreams morbid bluish-white consumers ogling luminous screens on the trail of forgetting cruising without a care the jet set won't abide by that pesky jet lag and our lives boil down to an hour or two when someone pulls a camera out of a bag	[2:19]
[C3]	and i am trying to evolve i'm just trying to evolve	[2:43]
[I3]		[3:00]
[V6]	so i walk like i'm on a mission cuz that's the way i groove i got more and more to do i got less and less to prove it took me too long to realize that i don't take good pictures cuz i have the kind of beauty that moves	[3:16]
[C4]	i am trying to evolve i'm just trying to evolve	[3:32]
[I4]		[3:49]

V1 establishes nature as a positive force that deserves attention and awareness. With the lines “i’m becoming transfixed/with nature and my part in it/which i believe just signifies i’m finally waking up,” the narrator implies that awareness of the interconnectedness of humans and their environment should be the primary focus of her existence, and that if it isn’t, she’s not truly aware of reality, merely walking in a dream.

In V3, dream imagery returns, this time to indicate that human control over nature is illusory. The imagery of modern life as a dreamlike state reaches its height in V5, where Difranco’s negative vision of modernity is most dramatic. Here, a warlike, consumerist society more interested in fragmented images of itself than a complete reality is presented as residing in “the land of dreams,” in sleeping denial of reality.

Difranco presents several examples of the interaction between humans and nature throughout the text of “Evolve.” In V2 a moth, well-adapted for survival in its natural environment, is defeated by the human technology of a lightbulb. V3 continues this thematic trend, where human-created governments and laws regulate and control nature, as represented by cannabis plants. In V5, the natural phenomenon of jet lag that results from the unnatural traversing of time zones is negated as merely “pesky” to those who experience it.

So how does the idea of evolution, presented most strongly in the repeating chorus (“i am trying to evolve”), figure in the analysis? The narrator uses herself as a positive example in the first and last verses which frame the text. As an individual, she has become aware of her place in nature, placing greater importance on her own interactions with it, and believing that her own true beauty is multifaceted and not capturable by technology because it is “the kind of beauty/that moves.” However, the narrator also realises that her personal growth is an ongoing process, that

she is “*trying* to evolve” [emphasis added] and that change and adaptation are the only true constants.

Looking at the larger song structure, the interior verses, then, are the narrator’s vision of modern life, replete with problems: fundamentalist religion, war, domination, and arrogance. However, these problems are solvable, set up in a dialectical opposition to their solutions. After every verse decrying the foolishness of society, back comes the repeating chorus “i am trying to evolve,” a reminder that the narrator is trying to change things, and suggesting change as the answer to the problems of humanity. This idea is presented more explicitly in the final verse, when she says “i walk like i’m on a mission”: a mission for change. Change can occur, if individuals own up to their responsibilities to nature and make the attempt at personal evolution.

### **The Groove**

It is worth considering the music for “Evolve” as an independent object before examining how the text and music interact to suggest meanings. The song has only three instruments: Difrancò on lead vocal and two guitar parts. One guitar, present throughout the song, is most likely in an open, dropped-D guitar tuning (alternate tunings are typical for Difrancò). This guitar plays a two-bar guitar riff to create the groove that forms the basic musical structure for the song. The second guitar enters in the fifth verse and adds interjections and counterpoint for the remainder of the song.

Although on first hearing, the primary guitar’s groove may seem static and unchanging due to its incessant repetition, upon closer inspection, the high degree of structural repetition is merely a foil for variational subtleties. Shown in its most basic form in Figure 2.2, the groove consists of two parts, hereafter referred to as Bar1 and Bar2. Each bar has a main riff, shown with

downward stems; and a subsidiary commentary, less consistently heard, shown with upward stems. The x-head notes in the commentary line represent unpitched sounds of picking or plucking the strings.

**Figure 2.2. “Evolve” basic groove**



The upward arrow above the F2 also requires explanation. In “Evolve,” Difrancio’s guitar riff draws heavily from the blues idiom, and includes what is commonly referred to as a “blue note” on the fourth beat of each bar. This pitch phenomenon, found in the blues, jazz, pop, and rock repertoires, has been explained in different manners.<sup>25</sup> Some theorists, such as Naphtali Wagner, prefer to think of blue notes as a product of harmony and melody together, created via the juxtaposition of a flattened third or seventh in the melody against a major harmony.<sup>26</sup>

Ethnomusicologist Jeff Todd Titon conceptualizes the blue note as a range of sounds encompassing the major and minor scale degree, calling the note in question a *complex*, named after the lower pitch within the range.<sup>27</sup>

This notion of a pitch complex well-represents what I hear on a close listening of “Evolve”: the

<sup>25</sup> For an excellent overview, see Hans Weisethaunet, “Is there such a thing as the ‘blue note’?” *Popular Music* 20:1 (2001), 99–116.

<sup>26</sup> Naphtali Wagner, “‘Domestication’ of Blue Notes in the Beatles’ Songs,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 25:2 (Fall 2003), 353–365.

<sup>27</sup> Jeff Todd Titon, *Early Downhome Blues* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 157.

pitch has elements of both bend and vibrato, continually oscillating among F2, F#2, and the microtones in between. However, with less concentrated listening I find that my ears focus only on the upward pitch bend from F2 to F#2, ignoring intermediary pitches and any subsequent oscillations. In an effort to incorporate both of these hearings, I have notated the blue note as an F2 with an upward arrow (reflecting the less concentrated hearing), but refer to the pitch as “the F2 complex” to include the more detailed conceptualization.

Bar1 and Bar2 are both strongly autotelic, with several features combining to create a strong desire for the groove to return to its beginning. The overall contour, rising in the first half of the bar and falling in the second half, encourages a return to D3 as both the beginning and end of the melodic contour. The F2 complex also leads strongly back to D3, not only because of its mid-point position in the downward part of the melodic contour just described, but also because of its frequent durational and dynamic accents in performance. Additionally, the complex, with its microtonal oscillation, creates a sense of constant motion that is only resolved with the D2 downbeat, a clear pitch played on an open string.

Apart from the clearly audible pitch structure, Bar1 of the groove has two other consistent elements. One is the quieter D3 on the fourth sixteenth note of the bar, a subtle commentary on the main riff which adds variety to the surface rhythm and further reinforces D as the root of the harmony. The other is the numerous rhythmic attacks (not always transcribed in following examples), generally produced by the sounds of the guitar pick or fingers on the strings. These sounds are usually used as a rhythmic fill between notes of the main riff, taking on a role that might normally be played by a drum kit. Difranco’s guitar technique thus fills in textural holes that might be experienced by listeners used to a full band setting rather than a solo performer (a listener experience that would be quite probable given this track’s mid-point placement on the

CD as a whole).

Figure 2.3 shows all Bar1 variations with alphanumeric labels. The letter indicates the order in which each variation is first heard in the song, and the number reminds the reader that all fragments are Bar1 variants. Cue times refer to the first time each variant is heard in the song. Separating the Bar1 and Bar2 variants reflects the two-part sense of the groove, and will also present some interesting findings, as will soon be shown.

Several variational patterns are easily discernible. Most generally, it is always the section after beat one and before beat four that is transformed: the initial D2 attack and concluding F2 complex remain essentially unchanged. This implies that these two features are the fundamental identifying features of Bar1, the features that will distinguish it from its counterpart, Bar2. In addition, any variations deal only with rhythm and pitch. Rhythmically, notes may be shifted by a sixteenth or eighth note, repeated, or truncated (see, for example, variant 1E) to achieve a greater attack density. In terms of pitch, there are a few small variants in the pitches used (see variant 1G); however, the most notable change is in the number of pitches on each attack. At times, multiple pitches will sound on a single attack. This is a reflection of Difrancò's tendency to strike multiple strings in moments of greater emotional intensity; the additional pitches are most likely open strings in the alternate tuning used for the song.

**Figure 2.3. “Evolve” Bar1 groove variants**

1A (0:00)      1B (0:04)      1C (0:08)      1D (1:05)

1E (1:09)      1F (2:11)

1G (2:19)      1H (2:27)      1I (4:02)

Turning to the second part of the groove, Bar2, we can see that the basic form is quite similar to Bar1, with the notable difference of attaining D3 as part of the main riff. This completion of the octave is a strong gesture in both pop and art music, and suggests a hearing of Bar1 as an opening, antecedent, gesture; and Bar2 as a closing, consequent gesture. However, the overall groove is designed to loop indefinitely as a single unit, with the F2 complex inevitably leading back to the D2.

As is clearly evident in Figure 2.4, the number of variants of Bar2 drastically exceeds those of Bar1 (the alphanumeric labels are applied using the same method as in Figure 2.3). These variants are also more complex. For example, several variants eliminate the F2 complex entirely, thus removing an important autotelic element, the push by pitch, rhythm, and timbre to return to the beginning of the groove (see, for example, variants 2F and 2K). Variant 2G is particularly unique, as it not only eliminates the F2 complex but introduces a completely new timbre in the form of harmonics.

There is one final variant of Bar2 that has not been transcribed. At the end of each verse, the final statement of Bar1 connects a pure F#2 pitch to a whole-note G2 in place of a traditional groove variant that would preserve some semblance of the original structure of the groove. This creates a sense of suspension at the end of each verse, and a heightened expectation for the groove to continue.



**Figure 2.4. “Evolve” Bar2 groove variants**

2A (0:02)      2B (0:06)      2C (0:14)      2D (0:55)

2E (1:03)      2F (1:07)      2G (1:11)      2H (1:15)

2I (2:01)      2J (2:05)      2K (2:13)

2L (2:17)      2M (2:26)      2N (2:58)      2O (3:35)

The figure displays 15 musical variants of a Bar2 groove, arranged in four rows. Each variant is written in bass clef and includes a time signature of 7/8. The variants are labeled 2A through 2O, each with a corresponding time stamp in parentheses. The notation includes various rhythmic values (eighth, quarter, half, and full notes), rests, and accents (marked with a small 't' above the note). The variants show a progression of rhythmic complexity and melodic development from 2A to 2O.

The Bar1 and Bar2 variants, taken abstractly, relate to the overarching themes of the text. Bar1 is a prototype, a model of the way things are. Although there is some degree of change, things stay essentially the same, with clearly defined limits (the contour limits of D2 and C3). Bar2 is the groove “trying to evolve,” in a multiplicity of ways, to varying degrees of success. These changes involve fundamental musical shifts: expansions of the overall register, marked changes in rhythm or timbre, and so on. At this abstract level, Bar1 might represent the current world, society, as the narrator sees it; Bar2 represents attempts at change, and an evolving moment.

It is also possible to link changes in the groove to specific moments in the text, by considering the groove’s evolution over time. One can see not only how the idea of prototype and variants is reinforced at various moments throughout the song, but also how the groove is used to reflect other elements of the text.

In the introduction, even before the text begins, the groove presents the idea of attempting to adapt to a changed environment, through either simplification or greater complexity. As Figure 2.5 shows, there are four statements, increasing in complexity and variation until the final statement which simplifies to an even simpler version than the initial one. Even before the first line of the lyrics, the music presents constant attempts at variation and change.

**Figure 2.5. Introduction of “Evolve” (0:00)**

The musical score for the introduction of "Evolve" (0:00) is presented in four systems. Each system consists of a vocal staff (Lead Vocal) and a guitar staff (Guitar). The guitar part is the primary melodic and rhythmic element, featuring a complex pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together. The vocal part is mostly silent, with some notes appearing in the later systems. The score is written in a key with one flat (B-flat) and a 4/4 time signature.

**System 1:** The guitar staff begins with a bass note, followed by a series of eighth and sixteenth notes. The vocal staff is silent.

**System 2:** The guitar staff continues the rhythmic pattern. The vocal staff is silent.

**System 3:** The guitar staff continues the rhythmic pattern. The vocal staff is silent.

**System 4:** The guitar staff continues the rhythmic pattern. The vocal staff is silent.

In V4, changes to the groove occur in response to specific ideas in the text. In the lyrics for V4, the narrator expresses outrage at the behaviour of governments, acting against the people in the name of the people. In Difrancò's vocal delivery of V4, this anger is clearly evident: louder dynamics and an emotion of rage permeates her singing. The groove in V4 reinforces this anger with downbeats made stronger by including more open strings in the initial attack, resulting in a strong, full chord rather than a single note. The fact that these added tones are likely open strings in Difrancò's alternate tuning leads one to believe that these additions are a result of a more intense emotional state leading to a stronger strum and less precise picking. Physical gesture thus reinforces the emotion of the words.

A second example of concurrent lyric-groove meaning is found in V5. In this verse, loosely connected images replace the more concrete narrative structure of earlier verses. The verse is also without clearly connected subjects (who is it that is "gunnin for high score in the land of dreams" and/or "on the trail of forgetting"? and does the verse discuss one person, a specific group of people, or different people/groups?). The ambiguity, confusion, and overall dreamlike quality of the verse is reflected in the groove. Due to the continuous presentation of the groove to this point, the listener has a very clear sense of the groove's components. In V5, this knowledge leads to the sense that parts of the groove are actually missing, or hidden by the second guitar part. This is particularly prevalent in the music accompanying the words "ogling luminous screens." In addition, a sense of disorientation is created at the end of the verse, where the groove would normally cadence on G2 after a final statement of Bar1 of the groove. Here, the groove does cadence on G2, but after a statement of Bar2, sustaining G2 for two measures rather than one. Again, the impression is disorienting, as if the music is incomplete.

The groove tends to be most varied in the instrumental passages. From a practical point of view,

this makes perfect sense: without text, and without other instruments (with the occasional exception of the second guitar), it is left to the groove to maintain the listener's interest during these passages. However, additional meaning can be inferred, in keeping with the earlier idea that the introduction presents attempts at evolution on the part of the groove. The later instrumental passages continue these evolutionary efforts, as Bar2 of the groove in particular makes repeated attempts at escaping the constrictions imposed by its attainment of the octave and its continual autotelic return to Bar1 via the F2 complex. Attempts such as variant 2F, which emphasizes D3 in a way which could suggest bashing oneself against the limits of a cage (the cage being the registral limits imposed by the groove itself) in an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to overcome that boundary, as the song continues unabated.

If the multiple groove variants are indeed continued attempts to escape the repetition of the groove itself, one can hear the instrumental close of the song as containing an element of hope amidst the mostly negative imagery of the text. Variant 2G has already been introduced earlier in the song, using harmonics on the open strings for beats 3 and 4, completely surpassing both the registral limit of Bar1's C3 or Bar2's D3, and eliminating the F2 complex that continually returns the groove to its beginning. Additionally, the use of harmonics provides a timbral contrast: a sonic escape from the consistency in the rest of the groove. Due to its attenuation of the autotelic elements of the groove, which encourage its repetition, variant 2G is an ideal candidate to end the song. Metaphorically, concluding with a variant that utilizes a relatively new and distinctive musical element suggests that it is possible to evolve, to supersede the restrictions of the groove and the negativities of controlling governments and consumer culture. Both the upward contour and the use of harmonics which present tones much higher in register than the majority of the groove pitches suggest a potentially positive change. Amidst so much negative imagery, so many

failed attempts at evolution, so many moths fixating on so many lightbulbs, breakthrough is still possible, and hope remains.

### **Vocal Timbre**

“Evolve” is an excellent example of how Ani DiFranco uses rapid changes of vocal timbre to great effect, and also how specific timbres are used to reinforce meaning in the text. Listening to her vocal delivery in “Evolve,” I hear ten distinct timbres. (Other listeners may classify things differently.) Some of these timbres are common to her usual vocal idiom, while others seem chosen to reinforce specific emotions and musical needs in this song. The categories are listed in Figure 2.6, with a colour assigned to each category.

**Figure 2.6. Vocal timbre types**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Description</b>
basic singing	pitched speech, the most basic timbre which will be added to or elaborated
breathy high note	lots of air going through the pitch, allowing the breath and mode of sound production to be heard
scat high notes	similar to a breathy high note, but for quicker rhythms
chesty low note	the sound resonates primarily in the chest (the tone singers would call “chest voice”), is at the lower end of the singer’s range, with a feeling of being forced out
belt note	the same power and mode of production as a chesty low note, but in a higher register
gulp note	produced at the back of the throat, almost like a swallow or a gulp
vowel-focused vibrato:	places more emphasis on the vowel in a word rather than the consonant; also has a lot of air moving through the note
closed/consonant sounds	the opposite of a vowel-focused sound; often produced at the end of a word with a closed mouth or used as a vocal fill mid-word
growl	adds a rough sound to the basic singing style, often for moments of emotional anger
combined scat high note and closed/consonant sound	the pitch has the high/pure sound of the scat high note, but the mouth is closed or tightened

Figure 2.7 shows the application of these timbres in “Evolve,” to aid in determining whether Difranco’s use of certain timbres reflects a specific interpretation of the text, and therefore influences how a listener will find meaning in the song. The lyrics are reproduced here closer to the way they are actually performed on the CD.

**Figure 2.7. Vocal timbre types in “Evolve”**

[Introduction]

[V1] i walk in stride with people  
much taller than me  
and partly it’s the boots but  
mostly it’s my chi  
and i’m becoming transfixed  
with nature and my part in it  
which i believe just signifies i’m finally waking up

[V2] and that moth outside my kitchen door  
she’s bonkers for that bare bulb  
flying round in circles  
bashing in her exoskull  
and out in the woods she navigates fine by the moon  
but get her around a light bulb and she’s doomed

[C1] she is trying to evolve [vocal fill]  
she’s trying to evolve  
she’s trying to evolve  
she’s trying to evolve

[V3] now, let’s get talking reefer madness, like:  
some arrogant government can’t  
by any stretch of the imagination  
outlaw a plant!  
yes, their supposed authority over nature  
is a dream  
c’mon people, we’ve got to come clean

(continued)



- [V4]      cuz they are locking our sons  
             and our daughters in cages  
             they are taking by the thousands  
             our **lives** from under us  
             it's a **crash crash** course in religious fundamentals  
             now let's all go to **war**  
             get some bang for our buck
- [C2]      i am trying to **evolve**  
             i'm trying to **evolve** [**also evolve**]  
             i, i, i'm trying to **evolve**  
             i'm trying to **evolve**[**also evolve**]
- [V5]      gunnin for high score in the land of dreams  
             **morbid** **bluish-white** **consumers** **ogling** **luminous** screens  
             on the trail of **forgetting** cruising without a care  
             the **jet set** won't **abide** by that pesky **jet lag**  
             and our **lives** boil down to an hour **or two**  
             when someone pulls a camera  
             out of a bag
- [C3]      i am trying to **evolve**  
             tryin to **evolve**  
             i'm tryin to **evolve**  
             tryin to **evolve**
- [V6]      so i walk like i'm on a mission  
             cuz **that's the way** i groove  
             i got more and more to do  
             i got less and less to prove  
             it took me too long to realize  
             that i don't take good pictures  
             cuz i have the kind of beauty  
             that moves
- [C4]      i am trying to **evolve**[**also evolve**]  
             i'm trying to **evolve**  
             i, i'm trying to **evolve**  
             i'm tryin to **evolve**[**also evolve**]

The classification helps two patterns to emerge. One concerns the chorus and its essentially unchanging message, while the other concerns the verses.

With each chorus statement, Difranco is fairly consistent in her use of vocal timbre. “Evolve” is always the key word, the only word that is altered in any way from the basic timbre. In the first and third lines of each chorus, “evolve” is sung with a breathy high note timbre: a more recessive, passive, and quiet sound likely produced with little engagement from the abdominal muscles. In addition, the pitch stays consistent; Difranco only sings one pitch for each syllable. In contrast to these lines, the second and fourth lines of each chorus use a belt note timbre, with the addition of closed/consonant sounds emphasizing the “l” of “evolve,” and long melismas on the second syllable of the word. This duality, an alternating pattern of model and variation, recalls the alternation in the guitar groove between Bar1 which receives few variations throughout the song, and Bar2 which is varied more dramatically. Just as Bar2 of the groove came to represent attempts at evolution and change, so too do the second and fourth lines of the chorus. Again, the listener is presented with a dichotomy between the status quo and the possibility of change.

The final chorus does not adhere precisely to this pattern: it uses the same timbres, but varies the order. Instead of strict alternation, the timbral variations are more improvisatory, coming closer to the variational freedom heard in the instrumental passages. This new freedom reflects the final words of the narrator: that she has indeed evolved, made personal discoveries, changed her personal state (“it took me too long to realize/that i don’t take good pictures/cuz i have the kind of beauty/that moves”).

The verses follow their own timbral pattern distinct from the choruses, with both an overall progressive increase in timbral variety, and changes in the timbres that are used to reflect isolated

moments in the text. With respect to the former phenomenon, V1 and V2 only rarely depart from Difranco's normal singing timbre, and do so predominantly only at the ends of lines. This limited timbral variety reflects the corresponding text, which for the most part outlines social and personal norms, the way things are prior to evolutionary behaviour (for example, the moth unable to adapt to the presence of the technology of the lightbulb in her environment). In contrast, most of V6 is sung in alternate timbres, and the text suggests change and a shift from how things are to what they could become.

The timbres used in the verses also vary increasingly as the song progresses. The timbral changes often reflect the text and the type of emotional expression intended by Difranco. Such clear gestural correspondences between music and text are examples of what Lawrence Kramer calls imitation: "the creation of sonorous images that mimic the kinetic quality of a feeling or a natural process."<sup>28</sup> Vocal timbres such as the belt note, growl, and the combination scat and closed/consonant tend to be used for expressions of anger, outrage, and confrontation, sometimes heightening the onomatopoeic elements of the text. This is particularly evident throughout V4, and in V6 for the line "i got less and less to prove."

V5 demonstrates how the choice of vocal timbre influences and reinforces meaning. In this verse, the subjects of the text are difficult to determine and various images suggesting the dreamlike detachment of humans and technology are presented. Here, Difranco uses a wide range of very distinctive timbres: chesty low note, scat high note, breathy high note, and gulp note. The result is a disorienting array of sounds presented in quick succession, matching the technological disorientation dominating humanity.

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<sup>28</sup> Kramer, *Music and Poetry*, 146.

By considering two strictly musical elements (the groove and vocal timbre) the reading of the lyrics presented in the opening paragraphs of this analysis has been considerably deepened and strengthened. A common undercurrent in the lyrics, the groove, and the use of vocal timbre is the idea of pairings, dichotomies: society versus the individual; Bar1 against Bar2; timbral consistency versus rapid change, and so forth. This reflects what I see as the overarching theme of “Evolve” as a song: the polarization between maintaining the status quo and agitating for change. This polarization is built into the repetitive and variational aspects of the groove and its performance. The desire for change in the groove near the end of the song (in variant 2G), perhaps suggests that this dichotomy will eventually be resolved.

Unfortunately, the influence of the second guitar in suggesting meanings in “Evolve” has been neglected in the previous analysis. However, “In the Way,” the next song under consideration, offers ample opportunities exploration of the role of orchestration and instrumental texture in the construction of meanings.

### Chapter 3

#### “In the Way”

With “In the Way,” Difranto has a full band at her disposal, allowing for greater possibilities of orchestration and timbre. The musical structure for “In the Way” is comparable to that for “Evolve,” since a single groove (and a single harmony) provides the fundamental structure; however, this groove is placed within a somewhat different text structure and a more varied instrumental setting. Instrumental texture plays a fundamental role in the temporal unfolding of the song, and is consequently the primary musical source for interpretations of meaning.

#### **Form**

One of the features that makes Difranto’s music so interesting is how she absorbs wide-ranging musical influences, combining elements from various genres to create an original style. “In the Way” expands upon pop, rock, and folk forms that emphasize various repetitive combinations of well-established formal sections (verse, refrain, chorus, bridge) with a funk-inspired freeform section.<sup>29</sup>

At first, “In the Way” adopts standard forms of the pop, rock, and folk idiom. As Figure 3.1 shows, an introduction leads into a verse-chorus-instrumental structure, heard once and then repeated. At this point Difranto introduces a trumpet solo and then an extended freeform section (with vocal), reminiscent of solo sections in jazz and funk music. Nearly one minute long, this passage leads into a final chorus, followed by a concluding coda in which vocals blend in with the overall instrumental texture.

<sup>29</sup> For a more detailed discussion of common forms in pop and rock music, see Stephenson, *What to Listen for in Rock*, 138-142.

**Figure 3.1. Text of “In the Way”**

[Introduction]		[0:00]
[V1]	no you didn't just leave i actually kicked you out i couldn't hardly believe that the words came out my mouth you couldn't hardly believe what you heard yourself discuss as you packed up all your things and you said goodbye to us	[0:19]
[C1]	tell me what is in the way in the way of my love for you? there's something in the way in the way of my love	[0:39]
[I1]		[1:00]
[V2]	so now there's nothing left to lose and the screen just says fini each night in separate rooms we cry separately and every day we yell down each other's holes two slippery strippers swinging round two poles	[1:24]
[C2]	tell me, what was in the way in the way of my love for you? what is in the way in the way of my love i gotta get it out the way out the way of my love for you there's something in the way in the way of my love	[1:44]
[I2]		[2:05]
[trumpet solo]		[2:28]

(continued)

[Freeform]	<p>we took down all the pictures  then we took down all the walls  packed up our expectations  piled em up in the hall  we bagged our future  and kicked it to the curb  then we stood there unencumbered  and we stood there undeterred  cuz we were done clinging  to the things  we were afraid to lose  and the only thing left  was a breathtaking view  and you looked at me  and i looked at you  and you said  how bout now, baby  what you wanna do?</p>	[2:46]
[C3]	<p>now there's nothing in the way  in the way of my love for you  no, there's nothing in the way  in the way of my love  i had to get it out the way  out the way of my love for you  there was something in the way  in the way of my love</p>	[3:46]
[I3]		[4:07]
[Coda]		[4:28]
[Guitar solo]		[4:38]
	no you didn't just leave	[4:47]

The smooth transition from pop/rock/folk form to jazz/funk form and back again merits further study. The trumpet solo following I2 sets up the transition by introducing two features typical of jazz and funk. One is the solo melody itself: each phrase is rhythmically free and contains a high degree of ornamentation compared to previous horn melodies. The second is the orchestration of

the accompanying groove during this passage. The texture is reduced to fundamental groove-bearing instruments only (drums, bass, and electric guitar), akin to the way jazz ensembles usually reduce the texture during instrumental solos to the rhythm section, those instruments (generally some combination of piano, guitar, bass, and drums) projecting the chords of the piece.

These two features from the trumpet solo continue when the lead vocal begins the freeform section, suggesting that this passage be understood as a sort of “vocal solo.” The maintenance of a groove texture akin to that in jazz solos is aurally obvious; less so is the improvisatory feel of the lead vocal’s melody. To this point in the song, the vocal melody has involved a high degree of repetition, both in terms of specific pitches and more generally in terms of overall contour. Figure 3.2 transcribes the melody for V1 and C1, which is essentially repeated in V2 and C2.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Here, as with much pop transcribing, pitch is an approximation only. Difranco employs many techniques that vary the pitch of each syllable of text, in particular sliding to or from notated pitches, from above and below. The pitches I have chosen are essentially the average of all of those she sings for any given syllable.



**Figure 3.2. Lead vocal, V1 and C1 (0:19)**

Voice

no you did-n't just leave i ac-tu-ally kicked you out i could-n't hard-ly be

lieve that the words came out my mouth you could-n't hard - ly be

lieve what you heard your- self dis - cus - sing as you packed up all your

things and you said good- bye to us tell me what was in the way in the way of my love for

you? tell me what is in the way in the way of my love for you? i got-ta get it out the

way out the way of my love yeah there's some-thing in the

way in the way of my love

It is immediately apparent that V1 uses essentially the same melody for each of four lines of text, marked by stepwise motion around F and Eb for the majority of the phrase with a concluding G-D fragment. C1 uses only two distinct contours, the first two lines with a higher register and a final upward move from G to Ab, and the second two lines with a lower register and a downward conclusion.<sup>31</sup>

The contour of the vocal melody in the freeform section is markedly different. Figure 3.3 gives a transcription, with spoken words represented by x-shaped noteheads.

**Figure 3.3. Lead vocal, freeform section (2:46)**

Voice

we took down all the pic-tures and then we took down all the walls

packed up our ex-pec-ta-tions piled them up in the hall

(continued)

<sup>31</sup> It is interesting to note that these upward gestures coincide with questions in the text, a phrase type often paired with a rise in pitch in spoken English.

Figure 3.3 continued

yeah we bagged our fu-ture and we kicked it to the curb\_

and then we stood there un - en - cum-bered and we stood there

un-de- terred cuz we were done cling ing to the things we were a-fraid to lose and the

the on- ly thing left was a breath breath breath tak -ing view and you

you looked at me and i looked at you

and you said how'bout now now\_ what you wanna do?

what you wanna do? what you wanna do? what you wanna do? now there's noth-ing in the...

Looking at each line of the freeform section, there is some degree of similarity (a preponderance of repeated notes emphasizing Eb4, a great degree of stepwise motion, and a limited range), but the overall contours remain quite different from each other. Even the internal phrase structure, created rhythmically, is inconsistent: although the first four lines all have a consistent two-part phrase structure, this pattern is soon abandoned. This lack of repetition, on both contour and phrase structure levels, is strongly reminiscent of improvised jazz solos, and reminiscent of the preceding trumpet solo in particular. Both features further reinforce the notion of a vocal solo.

In this context of limited repetition, the repeated “what you wanna do?” at the end of the freeform section stands out as significant. There has been essentially no melodic or textual repetition throughout the section, but suddenly a short phrase is repeated four times. This repetition, combined with a denser drum texture and a decrease in the length of durations in the wah wah guitar (from four beats to two), creates increased musical drive and intensity as it guides the listener back into more familiar formal territory. The song moves into a third chorus, part of the original pop/rock/folk form, immediately following this fourth repetition of “what you wanna do?”

### **Text**

Before proceeding further analytically, it would be helpful to consider the text as an independent poetic entity. The text of “In the Way” establishes two characters: the narrator, and her significant other. The song opens with the narrator instigating a separation, a move which seems to surprise both parties (“i couldn’t hardly believe” and “you couldn’t hardly believe”). C1 suggests the reason for such a choice: the narrator constantly asks “what is in the way ... of my love for you?,” implying that she has love for the other person, but something unknown is blocking its expression.

Subsequent verses continue the story, with the couple now apparently separated physically, but still in contact. What little communication does exist between them appears unproductive: they just “yell/down each other’s holes.” However, the obstacle to the narrator’s love mentioned in C1 could be disappearing, as the narrator says “there’s nothing left to lose,” and then compares the couple to two strippers, with all their accoutrements stripped away and their naked selves laid bare. But these strippers are “slippery,” suggesting a reconciliation is still far from easy.

This allegory of stripping things away continues in the freeform section, where an extended image of cleaning house, or moving out, dominates the text. This could be literal, in that the couple was living together but now are living apart; or allegorical: the couple is getting rid of the repressed problems in the relationship. At the end of this section the couple seems to have reached a climactic impasse, where nothing more can be said within the current status quo. At this point two possible interpretations come to mind. One is that the significant other’s “how ‘bout now/what you wanna do?” question negatively provokes the narrator to the point of deciding to cut her former lover out of her life entirely. The final chorus states “there’s nothing in the way ... of my love for you” because there is no longer a need to maintain a pretense for a love that is already vanished.

A second interpretation suggests a more positive outcome. The significant other’s question at the end of the freeform section could be seen as an offer of reconciliation, motivated by the stripping-away that has revealed more truthful versions of both lovers. With this new honesty, the narrator has also removed the obstacle(s) to her love for her partner. The final “no you didn’t just leave” reinforces this interpretation, with its implication that the significant other could have just walked away from the relationship entirely, but instead chooses to work through the difficulties.

Both interpretations are equally plausible with respect to the text alone. But with the addition of music, I find the latter, more positive, interpretation is reinforced. This positive reading is found most clearly in the groove and its varied manifestations throughout the song.

### **Meanings in the Groove**

In “Evolve,” DiFranco conveys a sense of variety in the groove by changing its constituent parts, a technique that reinforces both the general themes in the text and also specific words or phrases.

In “In the Way,” the expanded instrumental and textural resources of a full band are the primary source for musical meaning. However, the groove itself still frames and limits the overall musical content.

Figure 3.4 shows the groove in its most basic form, as a combination of bass and snare drums, electric bass, and electric guitar. This orchestration is the most minimal groove configuration, used throughout the song. The primary element giving the groove its autotelic quality is the bass line’s eighth note anacrusis leading into the quarter note downbeat. The frequent entrances of the lead vocal just after beat three of bar two of the groove further enhance this feature.

However, the autotelic effect is weakened through several factors. Rhythmically, the rests in the bass in the second bar of the groove provide a sense of completeness rather than forward motion (the repetition of the electric guitar riff and drum part in the second bar do little to counter this).

The establishment of Bb as tonic also presents challenges to repetition, as the ascending bass line reaches tonic within a single groove repetition rather than requiring a return to the beginning for tonal completeness.

These closure-promoting features would possibly suggest designating the groove within Hughes’

category of grooves “designed to create a sense of completeness at their end.”<sup>32</sup> However, I prefer to indicate the factors promoting and inhibiting repetition, and categorize this groove only to the point of saying that it is less autotelic than the groove for “Evolve.”

**Figure 3.4. “In the Way” basic groove**

The musical score for the "In the Way" basic groove is presented in four staves. The top staff is for the Electric Guitar, written in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (Bb) and a 7/8 time signature. It features a repeating melodic phrase: a quarter note Bb, an eighth note A, a quarter note G, a quarter note F, a quarter note E, a quarter note D, a quarter note C, and a quarter note Bb. The second staff is for the Snare Drum and Bass Drum, written in a single staff with a key signature of one flat and a 7/8 time signature. It features a repeating rhythmic pattern: a quarter note Bb, an eighth note A, a quarter note G, a quarter note F, a quarter note E, a quarter note D, a quarter note C, and a quarter note Bb. The third staff is for the Electric Bass, written in bass clef with a key signature of one flat and a 7/8 time signature. It features a repeating melodic phrase: a quarter note Bb, an eighth note A, a quarter note G, a quarter note F, a quarter note E, a quarter note D, a quarter note C, and a quarter note Bb. The score is divided into two measures, each ending with a double bar line and repeat dots.

The basic groove also has an interesting rhythmic feature. Although the groove here is notated in 4/4 for ease of transcription, one can also hear a rhythmic subdivision of  $3/8 + 2/8 + 3/8$ , created primarily through the strong downbeat in the bass and bass drum, the contour accent on G2, and the durational accent on Ab2. One could argue that such a division negates the sense of syncopation and off-beat attacks that these longer durations carry in a 4/4 meter; however, in this most basic manifestation the only instrument playing anything contrary to this 3+2+3 rhythm is the electric guitar, and even then, agogic accents support the irregular meter. It is therefore difficult to talk about syncopation against a pulse that, in this most basic form of the

<sup>32</sup> Hughes, “Groove and Flow,” 15.

groove, is only weakly articulated.

Numerous orchestral variants of this basic groove help shape and augment the meaning and structure of the text. Figure 3.5 provides a guide to the changing textures of the song, indicating the primary orchestral changes to the groove for each section of the piece.

**Figure 3.5. “In the Way” texture map**

	<b>Basic Groove (electric guitar, bass, drums)</b>	<b>full drum kit</b>	<b>organ</b>	<b>wah wah guitar</b>	<b>horns (trumpets, saxes)</b>	<b>solo vocal</b>	<b>harmony vocal</b>
<b>Intro</b>	x		x				
<b>V1</b>	x					x	
<b>C1</b>	x	x		x	x	x	
<b>I1</b>	x	x		x	x		
<b>V2</b>	x					x	
<b>C2</b>	x	x		x	x	x	
<b>I2</b>	x	x		x	x		
<b>Trumpet solo</b>	x	x		x	x		
<b>Freeform section</b>	x	x		x	x	x	
<b>C3</b>	x	x		x	x	x	
<b>I3</b>	x	x		x	x		
<b>Coda</b>	x	x		x	x	x	x



The introduction features the basic groove combined with an organ part—the only time the organ occurs in the entire song. Though the groove itself may not be solidly in the ear at this point in the song, what is clear is that one rhythmic stream, that presented by the instruments forming the basic groove, is working in opposition to a second rhythmic stream, that presented by the organ. Although one could hear the organ as working with the bass line to provide a steady half note pulse, I find this hearing difficult given the marked difference in timbre and register between the two instruments. Figure 3.6 shows the organ with the basic groove.

**Figure 3.6. “In the Way” basic groove with organ, introduction (0:00)**

The musical score is written for four instruments in 4/4 time. The Organ part (top staff) plays a steady half-note pulse in the right hand, with notes G4, Bb4, and D5 in the left hand. The Electric Guitar (second staff) plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes, primarily in the lower register. The Snare Drum and Bass Drum (third staff) provide a steady backbeat. The Electric Bass (bottom staff) plays a steady half-note pulse, primarily in the lower register.

Organ

Electric Guitar

Snare Drum  
Bass Drum

Electric Bass

While the basic groove here has strongly articulates the  $3/8 + 2/8 + 3/8$  pattern, the organ attacks on an offbeat, or perhaps even attempts to articulate a different rhythmic pattern altogether. This rhythmic discord makes the organ, as a single instrument in one timeline against multiple instruments in another, sound misplaced, unpredictable. Two interpretations come to mind. Firstly, if the basic groove represents the narrator's desired state, the organ could represent the "something in the way" of the narrator's love, through its rhythmic opposition to the basic groove. A second meaning is suggested by the organ's subsequent disappearance. The organ and the groove could represent the significant other and narrator, respectively, in the song. When the first verse begins, it describes, in the past tense, a couple separating due to a deep conflict of some kind. The initial presence of the organ and its subsequent disappearance could represent the event of the separation. Following this interpretation through, however, casts doubt on my assertion that the couple reconciles: if the organ represents the significant other, it should return to the musical texture by the end of the song. It does not; however, other instruments with a similar pulsating or wavery timbre (the wah wah guitar, in particular) do occur at the end of the song. This is telling, suggesting that some degree of change or compromise has perhaps taken place.

Once the full drum kit enters to clearly establish a 4/4 meter, the bass line moves from articulating a meter ( $3/8 + 2/8 + 3/8$ ) to merely syncopating against a 4/4 meter. This metrical conflict between the drums and bass further establishes the notion of two characters at odds with each other.

As the song continues, the groove continues to be used as a vehicle for the expression of conflict. Figure 3.7 shows a transcription of the electric guitar, bass, and horns in II. The basic structure of this instrumental, and also subsequent ones, is as follows: two statements of the basic groove

with horn melody overlaid; one statement of the groove (slightly altered) up a semitone with horn melody overlaid; one statement of the groove at its original transpositional level with horn melody overlaid; and a final statement of the original basic groove with no horn melody.

**Figure 3.7. Groove as a source of conflict, I1 (1:00)**

The musical score is written for three instruments: Horns, Electric Guitar, and Electric Bass, in 4/4 time. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The Horns part is in the treble clef and features a melody of eighth and quarter notes. The Electric Guitar part is in the treble clef and plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth and quarter notes. The Electric Bass part is in the bass clef and plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth and quarter notes. The score consists of four measures.

Horns

Electric Guitar

Electric Bass

(continued)

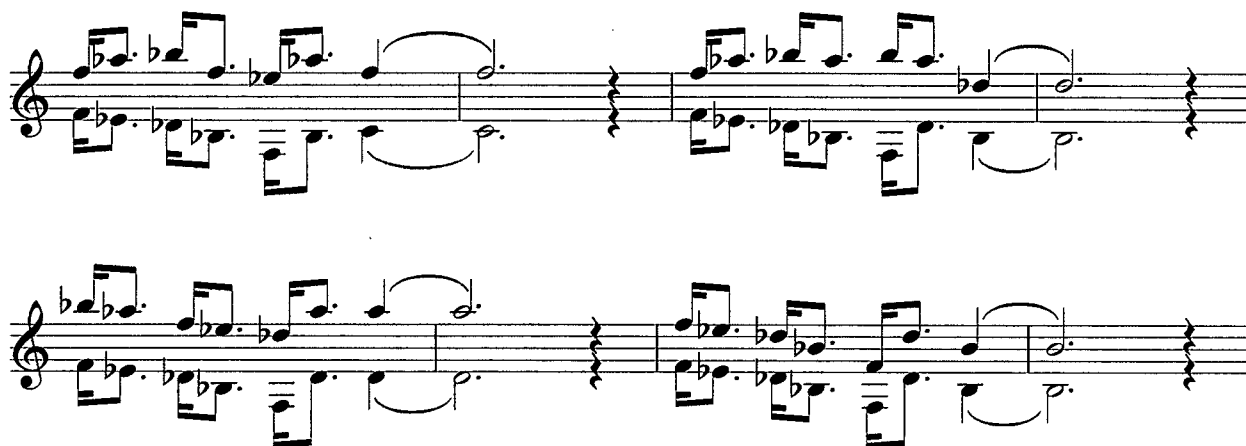
Fig. 3.7 continued



Rather than the whole band moving up a semitone to match the shift in the basic groove, the horn melody does not change transpositional level; rather, it continues to use the same pitches as in previous statements (with the exception of the final note, which changes in each statement). This melodic choice creates greater musical tension, tension between something that wants to move and change (the groove) and something that refuses (the horn melody). The tension is resolved when the groove moves back down a semitone to its original state, a move that could be interpreted as a regression to previous patterns rather than a compromise or change on the part of both parties. These observations fit well with a general conception of the potential problems in the relationship being described in the text: perhaps the couple is struggling to deal with change, or one party wants change but the other is refusing to compromise. A specific matching of character with instrument is less important here than a general musical commentary, reinforcing and suggesting new ideas to complement those in the text.

Looking further ahead at later instrumental sections, we see the same overall pattern occur in I2, suggesting that this is a common response to conflict in the couple's relationship. In I3, however, the horn line breaks into a two-voice counterpoint, shown in Figure 3.8.

**Figure 3.8. Horn harmonies, I3 (4:07)**



Examining the counterpoint closely, and listening to its effect in the context of the song, we can notice something significant. For the first two horn phrases, the upper voice has a fairly similar contour overall, with an exact repetition of the first three notes. If the previously suggested pattern of stubborn resistance to change in the face of the groove's semitone transposition is to continue, the upper voice would likely repeat at least these same three notes in the third horn phrase, staying with the lower voice while the groove moves up a semitone. Instead, the upper voice begins on a higher pitch: in fact, studying the transcription, the first three pitches are a retrograde of the three pitches used in the first two harmony phrases. The general contour of the

added line in the third phrase is also inverted relative to the first two phrases. The fact that all of these changes occur at the same time as the semitone transposition in the basic groove is significant. Although the lower voice of the horn part has not fundamentally changed, the newly-added upper voice does change. This creates a link between the groove and the original horn part: the upper voice has the same timbre and contour as the original horn part, but changes some of its musical features at the same time as the groove changes some of its own. Although specific character-to-musical-feature mappings are perhaps impossible, the overall musical sense can be interpreted as reinforcing the positive reading of the text. The two characters have somehow changed, grown, reconciled some of their differences in order to continue their relationship.

This positive outlook finds further expression in the final horn phrase in this same instrumental passage. Here, rather than continuing in the pattern of two independent melodic lines with little contour similarity and minimal pitch congruence (the two lines rarely, if ever, play the same pitch classes at the same time), both parts play an octave apart for the entire line. The sense of unity is unmistakable.

A final place where the music reinforces a positive reading of the text occurs in the triplet riff introduced as part of the coda to the song, first heard at (4:28) and repeated at (4:33). Here, the basic groove is lost entirely, as horns and bass play three triplets, with cymbals adding emphasis to the first note of each group. The triplet rhythm has been extremely rare in the song thus far, and never prominent. However, it easily substitutes for bar one of the groove, with the second half of the groove returning after each triplet interjection. Perhaps this is suggestive of the future direction the relationship might take: with the barrier to her love removed, the narrator is free to

explore options with her partner beyond the previously established norm, as represented by the groove.

### **Text-Music Correspondences**

As was demonstrated in “Evolve,” Difranto sometimes uses music to express quite specific text meanings, creating gestural correspondences between music and text. The freeform section in particular contains many such correspondences, three of which are worthy of mention. The first example is in the two horn fills after “walls” and “hall.” The first fill consists of two short notes, and the second of two turn figures. One can observe that each fill consists of two statements of a motive, and that there are two fills in total—just as there are two individuals in the relationship. A second instance of text-music synchronicity happens after the third line, “we kicked it to the curb.” A violent cymbal crash and a pause in the groove reinforce the mental image of trash thrown onto a sidewalk. A third example occurs when the horns enter for the words “clinging to the things we were afraid to lose,” doubling the melodic line and also adding more complex harmonies. The horns, used so minimally elsewhere, are suddenly placed in an incredibly prominent position, mimicking the melodic line and matching its rhythms exactly, as though *clinging* to it.

One final text-music correspondence adds further reinforcement for the positive interpretation of meaning in the lyrics. In the final line of C3, Difranto’s vocal line trails off after “i had to get it out the” into a laughing, rhythmic vocalization with joyous emotional inflections. This joy is tied directly to eliminating the thing “in the way” of her love; and, by extension, could be a positive reaction to the couple’s reconciliation.

The single-groove structure of “In the Way” is varied in two main ways by Difranto and her



band. First, the full-band orchestration allows for greater instrumental variety in the presentation of the groove. Second, the formal structure of the piece, as a fusion of pop and jazz idioms, leads to music on top of the groove that is sometimes soloistic, other times metrically conflicting. Both of these features forge strong correspondences with the text and its themes of conflict and change, of being together or going solo.

More importantly, “In the Way” gives a clear example of how lyrics and music suggest meanings together. A positive-outcome reading of the lyrics is reinforced by the music more strongly than is a negative-outcome reading. This interaction between music and text as a means to nuance a particular reading of a song will continue to be important in the final analysis of this thesis, “Slide.”

## **Chapter 4**

### **“Slide”**

Unlike “Evolve” and “In The Way,” “Slide” does not have a single groove continuously repeating through the entire song. After a brief introduction, the song alternates between two kinds of musical material. The verses use a groove based on a four-note linear motive, while the refrains use a longer chord progression. This alternation does not, however, undermine the strong repetitive elements in both the groove and the overall musical structure of the song. And, as in the two other songs discussed, both text and music present objects rich with interpretive possibilities, informing and complementing one another in the production of meaning.

Figure 4.1 supplies the lyrics with cue timings and formal divisions. Instead of choruses, as in the two songs previously discussed, “Slide” features refrains that are closely tied to each verse in terms of text subject yet clearly establish a separate musical section with new text for each repetition. A chorus would stand apart from the verse, both in text and music, and would be more likely to maintain the same words on each repetition.

In the verse marked “V4” in the figure, a melody played by the horn section replaces the lead vocal melody over the verse groove. The groove is repeated the same number of times as in previous verses, implying that this formal unit is indeed meant to be similar to a verse, and not an entirely new kind of section.

**Figure 4.1. Text of "Slide"**

[Introduction]		[0:00]
[V1]	<p>she was hungry so hungry  she was trying to think clear  she kept opening the fridge door  looking at the mustard and the beer  then finally she went out into the rain  carrying her bicycle chain  and her feet worked the pedals  while her appetite steered</p>	[0:16]
[R1]	<p>after that she just followed her nose  and fate is not just whose cooking smells good  but which way the wind blows</p>	[0:47]
[V2]	<p>she laid down in a party dress and never got up  needless to say she missed the party  she just got sad  then she got stuck  she was wincing like something brittle trying hard to bend  she was numb with the terror of losing her best friend  but we never see things changing  we only see them ending</p>	[1:04]
[R2]	<p>and some vicious whispering voice  keeps saying you have no choice  you have no choice</p>	[1:35]
[V3]	<p>cuz when i look at you i squint  you are that beautiful  and my pussy is a tractor  and this is a tractor pull  i'm haunted by my illicit, explicit dreams  and i can't really wake up  so i just drift in between  thinking the glass is half empty  and thinking it's not quite full</p>	[1:52]

(continued)

- [R3]            the pouring rain is no place for a bicycle ride            [2:24]  
                  try to hit the brakes and you slide  
                  and you slide  
                  and you slide
- ["V4" horns over verse groove]            [2:41]
- [R4]            the pouring rain is no place for a bicycle ride            [3:12]  
                  try to hit the brakes and you slide  
                  and you slide  
                  and you slide

Figure 4.2 is a transcription of the two primary musical elements structuring "Slide": the linear groove that accompanies each verse (Figure 4.2a), and the chord progression that sets off each refrain as a distinct section (Figure 4.2b). In both figures, the guitar part has been simplified to essential pitches; less distinct picking of other chord tones has been omitted in the transcription.

**Figure 4.2. "Slide" verse groove and refrain harmonic progression**

**a) Verse groove**

Textless Vocals

Guitar

The musical notation for the verse groove consists of two staves. The top staff, labeled 'Textless Vocals', is in treble clef and shows a melody with notes on G4, A4, B4, and C5, with rests and a final note on G4. The bottom staff, labeled 'Guitar', is in bass clef and shows a harmonic progression with notes on E2, F2, G2, and A2, with rests and a final note on E2. The two staves are connected by a large bracket on the left side.

### b) Refrain harmonic progression

Textless Vocals

Guitar

The groove for “Slide” is the least autotelic of the three songs being discussed in this thesis; that is, this groove has the fewest musical factors promoting its repetition. In fact, several features combine to encourage a non-autotelic hearing of the groove.

First of all, the groove has a strong linear, rather than harmonic, quality. Although a harmonic progression could certainly be imagined or imposed (something that actually happens in V3), the majority of groove iterations present the pitches F-Ab-C-Bb unharmonized, akin to a bass line,

thus reducing the potential for harmonic forces to lead the end of the groove back to its beginning. A clear IV or V chord at the end of a groove could encourage repetition with a return to an opening I chord, but because harmonies are implied but not realised by the groove, this effect is minimized. But quite apart from a lack of clear harmonies, there is a lack of tonic to define them. F could be construed as tonic because of its placement at the start of the bar, and because of the potential for a strong (in pop music) IV–I cadence from Bb at the end of the groove to F at the beginning. But, looking at the broader musical context surrounding the groove, C is strongly emphasized in both the opening and the refrain. With both hearings plausible, the degree of ambiguity is high enough to remove pitch as an autotelic force.

Secondly, the internal rhythm of the groove lacks autotelic qualities. The rhythm in the first bar is repeated exactly in the second, and there is no rhythmic anacrusis to push the groove back to its beginning, as was seen in “In the Way,” where an eighth note at the end of the groove pushed the groove to its beginning despite intervening rests.

Thirdly, the pitches of the melodic line do not clearly lead back to their beginning with either contour or harmony. This occurred in the groove for “Evolve,” where a rise in contour was balanced by a fall that could only be completed with a return to the opening pitch. The notes themselves clearly outlined a chord built on D, with the third of the chord leading back to the beginning of the groove on each repetition. In “Slide,” an initial upward motion from F to Ab is answered with a downward motion from C to Bb, a contour pairing that is completed within a single groove statement.

Despite all of these non-autotelic elements, the groove does repeat. This is caused by the establishment of meter—a separate phenomenon from the question of autotelos. The groove itself,

especially with the addition of percussion, clearly establishes a 4/4 meter that the listener expects will continue indefinitely. This expectation is so strong that it overcomes the non-autotelic features of harmony, rhythm, and contour.

### **Text Themes**

The lyrics of “Slide” do not present a clear narrative, nor even a single persona. V1 seems to outline the story of one individual, a woman embarking on a bike ride to satisfy a hunger that is perhaps both literal and figurative. V2 also makes reference to a female and certain events in her life: but is it the same female as in V1? V3 then shifts to first person to further complicate the issue. The reference to “my pussy” clearly indicates that the narrator is female, but is she in any way related to the female(s) of the first two verses? And could the “you” named in V3 be either of the women from the first two verses? Or perhaps a fourth character of unspecified gender?

The fundamental question is one of connectivity. Are all three verses discussing the same person in three different situations, be they real, imagined, dreamed, or metaphorical? Perhaps the verses are about different people in different times connected only by thematically similar situations. These questions cannot be answered definitively, but my personal proclivity towards a holistic interpretation leads me to interpret the three verses as three separate experiences of a single person, linked by a common theme.

No matter how many distinct characters one might imagine here, the overall thrust of the text is towards considerations of fate and the role it plays in human experience. Fate is mentioned explicitly in R1, with the lines “fate is not just whose cooking smells good/but which way the wind blows.” However, this principal theme is manifested differently elsewhere in the text, much as the single main character experiences different situations. The rainy bicycle ride that frames

the text represents a lack of control, and also a sense of the inevitable and the unexpected as the machine seemingly under human control slides in the rain. A lack of control is also manifested in the dreams haunting the narrator in V3. Both the subject matter and the dreams themselves come unbidden to the narrator in both sleep and waking life.

These ideas of fate, unexpected events, loss of control as outside forces take over, and a sense of the inevitable, can be drawn out of the text. However, these ideas can also be drawn out from an interpretation of the music: in some cases, the music presents these ideas even more clearly than does the text.

### **The Fates: outside observers**

Embedded in the concept of fate in Western societies is a link to Classical Greek and Roman mythology, a sense of the Fates as outside observers of humanity. Applying such a reading to “Slide” would be difficult with the text alone, were it not for the textless vocals heard throughout the majority of the song. These textless vocals are far from standard backup vocals. Normally, as Walter Everett states, “when a solo singer has a choral backing, the listener generally hears all of the vocal parts as representing facets of the same psyche, even when the words and the musical parts are as different as possible.”<sup>33</sup> Additionally, “backing vocalists simply express the ideas and emotions attributable to the lead singer in a varied way, all thereby representing related sides of the same persona.”<sup>33</sup> The textless vocals present throughout most of “Slide” are clearly an exception to this, for several reasons. Most obvious is the fact that these vocals are wordless: the backing vocals that Everett refers to would commonly repeat phrases of text sung by the lead vocalist, or add new text commenting on the words of the main singer.

<sup>33</sup> Everett, “Confessions from Blueberry Hell,” 283.



More importantly, as was seen in Figure 4.2a, the vocals are fundamental in the establishment of the verse groove. Because they are a part of the groove, the textless vocals play a structural role far beyond mere reinforcement. The fact that these vocals create such a fundamental musical element imbues them with a sense of power: the power to influence events, a power also possessed by the Fates.

The textless vocals are further separated from their surroundings (as the Fates are separated from humanity) by the fact that this is the first and only song on *Evolve* to have backing vocals by someone other than Difranto herself. In addition to one or two female voices who may or may not be Difranto, a male voice is present in the texture.<sup>34</sup> The male voice creates an instant sense of distance from Difranto's lead vocals, and the mixture of male and female vocals provides the sense of a group of people (rather than the peculiar sense of singularity that remains when a single singer is multi-tracked for standard backing vocals). With their structural importance in the groove, distance from the lead vocal, and group dynamic, the textless vocals clearly move beyond the normal role of backing vocals, taking on deeper musical significance. Although the text never makes explicit reference to outside observers or the Fates, the music reinforces and extends this idea, and makes it a plausible interpretation.

### **Loss of control**

In "Slide," the use of both texture and pitch over the course of the song can be seen as a reflection of the loss of control thematicized by the text, and epitomized by the imagery of a cyclist sliding uncontrollably on wet pavement. But concomitant to any loss of control is a gain, be it by another person, or the forces of physics. In the text image of the cyclist slipping on wet pavement, gravity overcomes the cyclist's control over her vehicle.

<sup>34</sup> The CD liner notes do not identify the singers by name.

The music further develops this idea of a shifting sense of control in its gradual shift from a texture dominated by vocals to one dominated by instruments—a change that is highlighted by the sudden shift back to vocal-dominated texture at the conclusion of the song. Various musical parameters change as a result of either vocal or instrumental control; one could go so far as to suggest a binary opposition between the two, epitomized in the contrast between V1 (where vocal dominance is most clear) and “V4” (where instruments are most in control). The effects of this polarization will be discussed shortly; however, it would be prudent to first explain how the switch occurs.

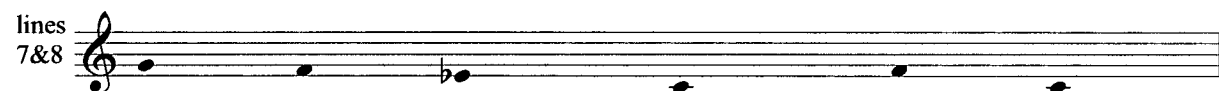
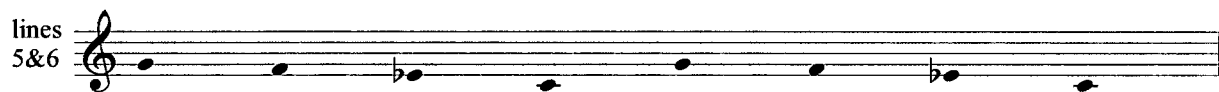
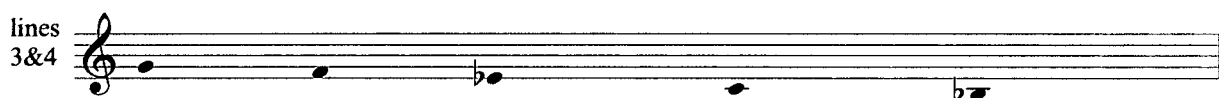
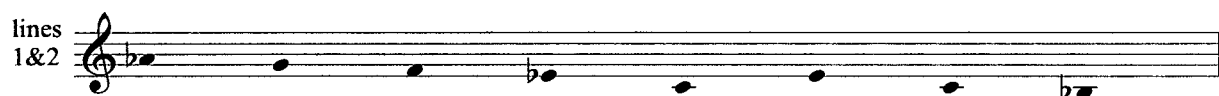
The instrumental texture in V1 is quite minimal—just acoustic guitar and shaker. This allows the lead vocal and textless vocals to stand at the fore of the orchestration, a phenomenon aided by their prominence in the artificially-created sound mix of the recording. At the end of the first refrain, a full drum kit enters, replacing the shaker and providing a firmer rhythmic footing, the first instance of instruments playing a more active role in the music. By the end of R2, bass, trumpet, and organ have joined the texture, while the textless vocals disappear for V3 as a solo trumpet enters. The build-up and increasing dominance of instruments over voices reaches its peak in what I am calling “V4,” as a horn section replaces the lead vocal, applying a new melody to the established verse groove. The end of R4, however, quickly returns to a vocal-dominant texture relatively similar to that of V1.

As the instruments move towards total domination of the soundscape of “Slide,” we can hear their influence on vocal elements; specifically, the lead vocal timbre. The diversity of lead vocal timbres increases over the course of the song: V2 and V3 each expand the number of non-standard timbres (usually the growl or chest timbres discussed more extensively in the analysis of “Evolve”). This increased diversity of vocal timbres suggests an increased use of the voice as an

*instrument*, capable of different sounds, rather than as a melodic vehicle strictly for sung text delivery, either as a form of resistance against instrumental control, or as an indication of stylistic sublimation into an instrumental world.

There is also a marked contrast in the overall timbre for vocally- and instrumentally-dominated sections. The vocal pole is infused with a timbre that could possibly be described as fuzzy or indistinct with air moving through each sung pitch, and a shaker adding a less-distinct rhythmic background. In contrast, for the instrumental pole sharp and precise timbres are the norm.

A comparison of the melodies themselves also identifies a shift in control. The generalized vocal melody of the first three verses, shown in Figure 4.3a, tends to emphasize a mostly stepwise downward contour from G to C, repeating this melodic gesture continuously. In “V4,” a greater diversity of melodic motives is matched with greater variance in contour and larger leaps in the melody. To indicate this, Figure 4.3b shows the horn melody in “V4.”

**Figure 4.3. Verse melodies in “Slide”****a) Generalized vocal melody, V1-V3**

**b) Horn melody, "V4"**

Music score for Horn melody, "V4", featuring Horns and Groove parts.

The score is organized into four systems, each with a Horns staff (treble clef) and a Groove staff (bass clef).

**System 1:**

- Horns:** Starts with a triplet of eighth notes (G4, A4, B4), followed by a quarter note (C5), a quarter note (B4), and a quarter note (A4). The second measure contains a half note (G4) and a quarter note (F#4). The third measure contains a quarter note (E4), a quarter note (D4), and a quarter note (C4).
- Groove:** Starts with a quarter note (G2), a quarter note (F#2), and a quarter note (E2). The second measure contains a quarter note (D2), a quarter note (C2), and a quarter note (B1). The third measure contains a quarter note (A1), a quarter note (G1), and a quarter note (F1).

**System 2:**

- Horns:** Continues the melody with a quarter note (B4), a quarter note (A4), and a quarter note (G4). The second measure contains a half note (F#4) and a quarter note (E4). The third measure contains a quarter note (D4), a quarter note (C4), and a quarter note (B3).
- Groove:** Continues the bass line with a quarter note (E2), a quarter note (D2), and a quarter note (C2). The second measure contains a quarter note (B1), a quarter note (A1), and a quarter note (G1). The third measure contains a quarter note (F1), a quarter note (E1), and a quarter note (D1).

**System 3:**

- Horns:** Features a triplet of eighth notes (G4, A4, B4), followed by a quarter note (C5), a quarter note (B4), and a quarter note (A4). The second measure contains a half note (G4) and a quarter note (F#4). The third measure contains a quarter note (E4), a quarter note (D4), and a quarter note (C4).
- Groove:** Continues the bass line with a quarter note (E2), a quarter note (D2), and a quarter note (C2). The second measure contains a quarter note (B1), a quarter note (A1), and a quarter note (G1). The third measure contains a quarter note (F1), a quarter note (E1), and a quarter note (D1).

**System 4:**

- Horns:** Ends with a half note (G4) and a quarter note (F#4). The second measure contains a quarter note (E4), a quarter note (D4), and a quarter note (C4). The third measure contains a quarter note (B3), a quarter note (A3), and a quarter note (G3).
- Groove:** Ends with a quarter note (E2), a quarter note (D2), and a quarter note (C2). The second measure contains a quarter note (B1), a quarter note (A1), and a quarter note (G1). The third measure contains a quarter note (F1), a quarter note (E1), and a quarter note (D1).

Just as the two poles have different parameters of pitch, timbre, and melody, they also have different rules governing the sense of harmony in “Slide.” This is epitomized in the changing sense of harmony within the groove itself. When the groove is first introduced, as part of a vocal-dominated section (in fact, primarily presented *by* the vocals) it has only an implied sense of harmonic progression, being first and foremost a linear two-bar unit. In contrast, in V3, where voices have begun to lose control because of the lack of textless vocals, the newly-introduced organ harmonizes each note of the groove with chords placed quite prominently in the overall mix (see Figure 4.4). Where the harmonic context for the groove was initially imprecise and merely implicit under vocal dominance, the instruments make it progressively more clear, with the organ providing a solid interpretation for a previously vague harmonic progression. Where the groove alone could imply four chord tones (F–Ab–C–Bb), but with unspecified roots or chord qualities, with the organ the possibilities vanish as the progression is realised as Fm7–AbM–Cm–BbM.

**Figure 4.4. V3 groove with organ (1:52)**



The initial idea of the musical texture merely being dominated by instruments or voices actually extends deeper, to complete control of pitch, timbre, harmony, and contour. This shifting sense of musical control deepens the sense of the lyrics as examples of humanity's constant battle to control events and emotions that continually escape our grasp.

### **The Unexpected**

The theme of the unexpected is hinted at in the lyrics to V3, which could be interpreted as a realization on the part of the narrator that she has unexpectedly developed an inappropriate sexual attraction towards someone. As with the theme of shifting control, this idea of the unexpected is reinforced in the music.

The repetitions of “and you slide” first heard at the end of R3 and expanded at the end of R4 seem unpredictable, unexpected. The instance at the end of R4, shown in Figure 4.5, is particularly striking, because it renders the ending of the entire song as an unexpected event. Two musical features combine to make the actual ending of the song unpredictable, even on multiple listenings: the hypermeter established through the main body of the song, and the rhythmic structure of the repetitions of the words “and you slide.”



**Figure 4.5. Bass and vocals, end of R4 (3:12)**

Vocals

the pour-ing rain is no place for a bi - cy - cle ride try to hit the

Bass

brakes and you slide and you slide and you slide and you slide (and you)

gliss. gliss. gliss. gliss.

slide (and you) slide (and you) slide (and you)

slide (and you) slide (and you) slide (and you) slide

First, the hypermeter. R1 and R2 share a quadruple hypermetrical structure, with hyperdownbeats occurring every four measures. R3 continues this structure, but presents the first hints of disruption with the emphasis on half-note subdivisions of the second hypermeasure, created by the bass line and repeated iterations of “and you slide.” However, the overall hypermeter remains consistent. In R4, a change in the hypermeter itself takes place: two extra bars are added, starting a third hypermeasure that is left incomplete at the conclusion of the song, an unexpected ending.

In addition to the hypermetrical structure, the repetition of “and you slide” itself further engages the unexpected. The first rhythmic detail that throws off the listener’s sense of expectation is the shift from on-beat to off-beat articulations of “slide” once the bass reaches the pitch C2. Additionally, a rhythmic detachment of “and you” from “slide” changes the sense of the text, to the point where the words no longer seem to be linked in a single coherent phrase. This shift leads to a situation where the bass and percussion continue to articulate the meter established as “correct” in the bulk of the song, while the vocals present a new, contrasting meter.

If we treat the eighth note where the bass reaches the pitch C2 as 0, the vocal “slide” attacks occur as follows:

eighth note =	5	11	15	21	27	31	37	43
distance between								
attack points:	6	4	6	6	4	6	6	

Abstractly, one can create an irregular  $6+4+6 = 16$  eighths grouping (beamed above), contrasting with the more regular  $8+8 = 16$  eighths or  $4+12 = 16$  eighths from earlier refrains. One could then be tempted to suggest that the ending sounds unexpected because the listener expects groupings of  $6+4+6$ , but the third such grouping is incomplete, ending after the second attack.

However, because the entire piece to this point is in a duple meter, and because the drums and bass continue to articulate the duple meter underneath the vocals, the idea that a listener would easily adopt a new, irregular, vocal grouping seems hard to support. It certainly plays a role in creating an unexpected ending, but even more fundamental is the resulting metrical conflict and ambiguity between the new  $6+4+6$  and the established duple meter. With such a metrical ambiguity happening so late in the song, a listener is likely to feel a sense of disorientation and confusion, where any expectations about when the song should end—based on groups of two or three, or on some sort of quadruple hypermeter—have to be given up without a chance of being replaced by a new metrical sense. The ambiguity arises so suddenly, and is over so quickly (the entire excerpt lasts for perhaps thirty seconds at most), that this sense of metric disorientation is likely to continue to the end of the song. Such disorientation will make it impossible to predict the song’s conclusion, so that it ultimately takes the listener by surprise, in much the same manner as

the bicycle slide does for the narrator.

In "Slide," a groove with fewer autotelic features is still the primary source of repetition for the song, owing to its consistent metrical profile. In terms of text-music relations, "Slide" continues the trend seen thus far, in which music and text are equally important bearers of meaning. This is most clearly demonstrated in the deeper associations to the textual suggestion of fate: the notion of the Fates as outside observers would never have been a plausible interpretation without the presence of textless vocals of both genders, completely separate from the lead vocal. Similarly, the notion of shifting control is highlighted with both words and music.

## Chapter 5

### Coda

The primary analytical device linking “Evolve,” “In the Way,” “Slide,” and, in fact, most of Ani DiFranco’s songs is the organizational principle of the groove. We have seen different manifestations: in “Evolve” and “In the Way” a single constantly-repeating groove permeates the entire song, and variations in its texture, pitch, and rhythm provide the repetitive, intensional development so typical of much popular music. In “Slide,” a monophonic groove alternates with a repeated chord progression, and the manipulation of listener expectation through the use of two repeating elements leads to the same sorts of effects as a single constantly repeating groove.

In all three grooves, rhythm, pitch, melodic contour, and orchestration are the primary elements determining the degree to which each groove is autotelic; that is, the degree to which the groove encourages a return to its own beginning. Even within such a small sample size, it becomes quite apparent that although all grooves are repeated and are aided in this by a regular meter, some grooves are heard as repeatable more readily than others. It is the constant tension between a drive to repeat and a drive to conclude that maintains a listener’s interest.

But, as we have seen, the groove is not the only musical element of interest in the work of Ani DiFranco. Vocal timbre, rhythm, pitch, harmony, melodic contour, orchestration, hypermeter, and form are all equally worthy of consideration, at the very least in the first stages of an analysis. As I have hopefully shown, different musical features may be the most worthy of comment at different moments. Vocal timbre is particularly important in the minimalistic texture of “Evolve” but less so within the big-band setting of “In the Way.” The careful manipulation of expectation through rhythmic displacement and a change in the hypermeter at the end of “Slide” is a

phenomenon not matched by either of the other two songs subjected to analysis. This suggests that maintaining a broad approach to popular music analysis, considering all musical parameters before selecting appropriate areas of focus, is perhaps the most fruitful approach.

That said, each of these areas certainly deserves deeper individual consideration and theorization. Vocal timbre is particularly important for popular music, as it is most commonly the lead singer who receives the most attention from an audience. Carolyn Abbate's description of vocal art music in which "the sound of the singing voice becomes, as it were, a 'voice-object' and the sole center for the listener's attention" also describes much popular music.<sup>35</sup> The voice alone can define a genre, set the emotional tone, provide a character with whom the audience may identify, and act as a vehicle for personal expression. With so much importance placed upon the voice in popular music, I feel that my attempts at considering vocal timbre unfortunately remain incomplete. I have used descriptive words to identify timbral categories, but this approach involves highly subjective responses: my ears' categories are unlikely to match exactly with others'.<sup>36</sup> Perhaps a more detailed consideration of the use of specific frequencies, sound quality, the physical process of production, impressions of performers themselves, and identifiable emotional expressive elements could help advance this area of research.

My work on meaning as created by both lyrics and music leaves me somewhat more satisfied. I have shown how the music can reinforce or augment themes suggested by the lyrics, and even suggest a certain reading (as was seen in "In the Way"). I do feel I have limited my discussion somewhat in my desire for a fairly tidy, internally cohesive analysis; other interpretations besides the ones I have presented are certainly possible. However, at some point one must provide one's

<sup>35</sup> Abbate, *Unsung Voices*, 10.

<sup>36</sup> David Brackett has used spectrum photos to discuss vocal timbre more objectively; however, he usually discusses the overtones involved or the overall frequency range rather than the quality of the sound or its mode of production.

own opinion, and I hope that in keeping the thematic decisions fairly broad, I have left room for multiple interpretations while still grounding the discussion in the imagery of the lyrics. I would hope that my method gives the impression of an inclusive form of analysis, where the level of interpretation is general enough to incorporate the multiple meanings that any individual will inevitably bring to the work, but specific enough to allow for concrete discussion of text-music relations.

The question remains as to whether or not such a degree of text interpretation is necessary in all popular music analysis. Certainly, lyrics are an aspect of almost every pop song. However, there are styles where other musical elements are more important, where the lyrics stand back within the overall soundscape rather than dominating the texture.<sup>37</sup> In such cases, I would suggest that the type of analysis I have used is perhaps not the best approach. However, there are a wide variety of popular music performers with music that does place emphasis on the lyrics, and for these, such a consideration is certainly possible, perhaps even essential.

Just as one can question the degree to which text interpretation is the most important area of analysis for all popular music, so one can question if my musical analytical approach is valid for music besides Difranco's. Certainly, her music is quite uniquely sophisticated, particularly in the developmental changes in texture that occur throughout all of her music, whether or not she has a large ensemble at her disposal. I am reminded of Philip Tagg's admonishment of the musicology and theory communities to study truly popular, truly mainstream music before turning to esoteric examples.<sup>38</sup> Is Difranco's music too individualized to be relevant for other studies of popular music?

<sup>37</sup> For example, in much hard rock and heavy metal, vocal timbre, emotional expression, and stage demeanor become far more important signifiers of meaning than the often-unintelligible lyrics.

<sup>38</sup> Philip Tagg, "Musicology and the semiotics of popular music," in *Semiotica* 66:1-3 (1987), 285.

I believe the answer to this query is an unequivocal no. Grooves occur in everything from rap to funk to folk, and are a fundamental structuring element in all of these styles. In particular, the concept of autotelic grooves can be replaced by a broader consideration of musical elements that promote or inhibit repetition, a feature shared by all popular music to varying degrees.

The study of popular music is still a new area of research, particularly as a subject within the discipline of music theory. Music theorists studying popular music have been criticized for their emphasis on sound over social context.<sup>39</sup> However, this proclivity towards the consideration of musical sounds merely reflects a particular approach to music, no more or less valid than any other, and equally open to new research possibilities. Unlike the moth outside Ani DiFranco's kitchen door, the discipline of popular music theory is capable of evolution and change, even if we have to bang our heads against a lightbulb a few times to do it.

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<sup>39</sup> For some particularly biting criticism, see Richard Middleton, "Introduction: Locating the Popular Music Text" in *Reading Pop: Approaches to Textual Analysis in Popular Music*, ed. Richard Middleton (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 6–7.



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