

**‘Face Up and Sing’:
Nonconformity, Bisexual Consciousness and
Transversity in the Work of Ani DiFranco**

**Nan Alice Espeseth
154584**

Institutt for Fremmedspråk

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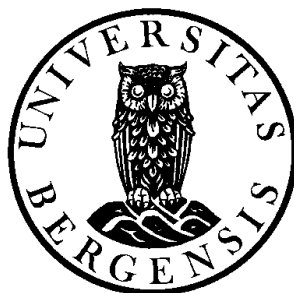


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FOREWORD

The first time I heard Ani DiFranco I was 17 or 18, sitting legs crossed in front of a tape recorder in the hallways of my high school listening to a tape that had been sent to a friend of mine from someone she knew in the U.S. The first song I heard was “The Story.” I read some years later that the way DiFranco’s music had started to spread was by tapes being circulated between campuses in the US and I remember thinking how fittingly it was that it had reached my ears the same way. I also drew the line between DiFranco being only 19 when she released her first album where “The Story” appears and that I had been in my late teens the first time I heard her music. After obsessing a bit with the songs on the tape my friend and I decided to order all the albums that DiFranco had released up until then. She had just released *Not a Pretty Girl*, her seventh album, so the first weeks after I received all of the seven CDs, excitingly sent to me directly from Righteous Babe with my name and address written by hand on the envelope, I completely submerged myself in her music. I think that if it had been any other artist I probably would have soon overdosed and moved on, but DiFranco’s clever lyrics, unusual guitar playing and expressive voice spoke to me in a way I had not heard before. The words she sang seemed to speak directly to me, probably because they came from one of my peers and were different from the words used by artists I had heard before. It was also at that time that I started playing guitar and writing lyrics myself, and listening to DiFranco’s music has taught me more about singing and playing than any guitar or singing teacher ever has. Her lyrics have inspired me to pay special attention to the words I choose when I write my own lyrics: to see that it is possible to focus on both the melody and the words simultaneously and that there is music as well as rhythm to be found in the words themselves.

When it was time to choose a topic for my MA, there was not much doubt that I should to write about the one artist who had stayed with me since my youth. Aside from my personal admiration of DiFranco's work, she is also an interesting figure and her work is very well suited for exploration in American/Cultural studies and in connection to feminist/sexuality studies and an artist that I think truly deserves more attention in the academic world. To the best of my knowledge, there are only eight academic writings on Ani DiFranco's work.¹ However, I both hope and believe there will be more in the years to come. She was also the right figure for me to explore as I know many of her songs by heart and was able to pick and choose from the catalogue of lyrics that was already in my head in addition to my CD collection.

One of the things I did have to battle with in writing this thesis was to stay objective to DiFranco's lyrics and the things she discusses in her songs. The fact that I have been listening to her for almost 15 years now and know many of the lyrics so well, I had to constantly stay alert and be open to the possibility that my former readings of her lyrics were not the only possible ones. I did have some epiphanies along the way when I read at her lyrics through the conceptual frames of the theories I applied and in the process of researching I also visited lyrics that I had not really paid much attention before, thus expanding my understanding of her work. However, the discussions and conclusions found in this thesis will ultimately be a result of my

¹ Guillean, Cindy. *Resistance without Essentialism: A Case Study of Ani DiFranco*. Eastern Michigan University. 1999.; Ginsburg, Robyn Jana. *Music and Interpersonal Communication: an In-Depth View of Ani DiFranco and Her Lyrics*. University of Nevada, Las Vegas. 1992.; Feigenbaum, Anna. "Some Guy Designed This Room I'm Standing in: Marking Gender in Press Coverage of Ani DiFranco". In *Popular Music*. Vol 24. U.K. Cambridge University Press. 2005. 37-56. (Adaptation from M.A. thesis *In a Man's World I am a Woman by Birth: Marking Gender in Press Coverage of Ani DiFranco*. 2003.); Urrutia, Erika. *A Rhetorical Analysis of the Lyrics and Music of Ani DiFranco*. 2004.; Dobransky, Jenn. *Ani DiFranco, Relationality and Passionate Incogruities: Toward a Transformative, Vulnerable Feminist Theory*. 1999.; Waselus, Samantha Michelle. *My Body - Shot Through With Streams of Song: Female Musicians Writing the Body*. Arizona State University. 2003.; Garrett, Charles Hiroshi. *Struggling to Define a Nation: American Music in the Twentieth Century*. University of California. 2004.; Green, Maya Tilton. *We Can Make Something Bigger Than Any One of Us Alone: Using Fantasy Theme analysis and Autoethnography to Discern the Rhetorical Vision of a ...*. 2004

conception and exploration, as I believe it would any other researcher who is passionate about the object of their study.

Although I was tempted, I have not attempted to discuss the musicological aspect of DiFranco's work in this thesis, besides from a brief mention of her use of the sound of words in section 1. 3. as a part of the oral storyteller tradition. I believe this aspect can best be found exemplified in Charles Hiroshi Garret's dissertation *Struggling to Define a Nation* (2004).

I would like to direct special thanks to Lene Johannessen who guided me through the process of researching and writing, without whom I probably would have ended up never finished reading books by Noam Chomsky and others in trying to come to some form of founding truths about the American political and social structures. Nor would I ever have managed to return from any of the other diverting branches I often found my focus wandering off on along the way.

INTRODUCTION:

i speak without reservation from what i know and who i am. i do so with the understanding that all people should have the right to offer their voice to the chorus whether the result is harmony or dissonance, the worldsong is a colorless dirge without the difference which distinguish us, and it is that difference which should be celebrated not condemned. should any part of my music offend you, please do not close your ears to it. just take what you can use and go on.
---Ani DiFranco ²

*generally my generation
wouldn't be caught dead working for the man
and generally i agree with them
trouble is you gotta have yourself an alternate plan*
---Ani DiFranco, "Not a Pretty Girl" ³

Examining Ani DiFranco's work and life choices reveals that she inhabits an ability that can be identified as 'transversal power.' Throughout her life she has continually displayed a conscious resistance to the political and social climate of her location and worked toward creating a space where she and others can freely communicate art, ideas and experiences. By doing so, she has taken part in a particular branch of American nonconformity and the ongoing the third wave feminist battle of changing the pervading discriminative and limiting attitudes toward individuals who do not fit into the mold of ordained social models. This resistance is perhaps especially apparent in when looking at how DiFranco has dealt with working within the music industry, an industry that is, as industries mostly are, saturated with people whose main interest is to make money. The art of making music has been put in the backseat and made to ride along as a mere passenger on the freeway of the capitalist market, reduced to merely one of several components of a product and is often less important than those of image, marketing and salability. It is therefore particularly refreshing to observe the work of an artist such as DiFranco who has continuously rejected offers from major

² Liner notes in *Ani DiFranco*

³ *Not a Pretty Girl* 1995

corporate labels and chosen to stick with the label she started at the beginning of her career in order to secure her independence and artistic freedom. It is also refreshing to see that she has stuck to her initial approach when expanding her company by providing an independent label for artists who seek to be in charge of their own artistic expression. DiFranco's choice of staying independent and inviting others to do the same reflects what can be identified as a conscious act of nonconformity. This nonconformity is not only refreshing but also important and inspiring when dealing with a world where multinational entertainment conglomerates seem to be taking over and create homogeneity.

Nonconformity is a term that is mostly thought of and applied in connection to 1950s America, but the basic core of the term – to not conform to generally accepted patterns of behavior or thought – has in fact a long history in the U.S., going back to when the country was formed, and is still relevant today in the America's political and cultural climate.⁴ The Founding Fathers of the USA displayed nonconformity toward the political authority of Britain when they wanted to break away from its rule. Breaking away from it meant that they would be no longer be controlled by a government where they were not represented and it would free them from participating in the wars of the old world; they would not have to fight on behalf of some proud European ruler who was bound by ancient laws and practices and whom they did not agree with. Their founding idea of democracy was so strong that they saw it as both a right and a duty of the people to overthrow any ruler who acted in self interest rather than in the best interest of the people. As the Declaration of Independence from 1776 clearly states:

... whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends [Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness], it is the Right of the People to

⁴ *Collins English Dictionary* 2003

alter or abolish it, and to institute a new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its power in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. ... it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future Security” (“The Declaration of Independence” *The Essential America*. A25)

More importantly, they knew that this would be a work-in-progress, and, as Mark

Kurlansky writes:

... they knew that they and their work were flawed. Jefferson, too, believed in the perfectability [sic] of humans, or at least that they would steadily grow wiser, and wrote that the Constitution should be rewritten in every generation to avoid having society “remain under the regiment of their barbarous ancestors. (2007 83-4)

Thomas Jefferson, one of the men who signed the Declaration, encouraged the people of America to fight the government whenever it did not work in the best interest of the people. It is perhaps partly because of Jefferson that the history of the people’s participation for the betterment of U.S. politics is as long as the history of the country itself. DiFranco

The nonconformity DiFranco displays is apparent both in her choices in life as well as in her lyrics. Her particular tools, the poetry and music she records and performs on stage, as well as her choices in life are formed in her particular subjective territory. However, by applying what seems to be an inherent ability of transversity because of the nature of who she is and her constant moving from location to location, she transgresses the boundaries of the cellular grid of her location and can apply these tools to comment on and make an impact on the larger location she finds herself in as well as to encourage others to do the same. DiFranco’s choice of staying independent and inviting others to do the same can also be seen reflected in what I have chosen to call the idea of an extended democracy. This is an idea that the concept of democracy can be extended beyond the political aspect of a society to include the social aspect.

Politically, democracy entails both the right and duty of a member of society to be political aware and participate in elections; to discuss political issues with the understanding that it be done in a ‘civilized’ way, i.e. that one should have the right to express one’s opinions, but that it is also a duty to respect the opinion of others, in order to discuss and come to an agreement. The extended version of democracy includes the social aspect: that within a society a citizen should have the right to express him or herself and have the opportunity to be ‘who they are,’ but it also includes the duty to respect others for their expressions and experience of ‘who *they* are.’ Staying independent in terms of not conforming to generally accepted ideas of how social structures should operate while accepting that other individuals have their own ideas of how society should function is an agreement that is inherently democratic and induces respect between individuals who would otherwise not accept difference.

In an interview at Flynn Theatre, DiFranco makes a joke about the fact that people insist on standing while she does her show, saying that they should sit down.⁵ When she notices that some people are still standing, she jokingly starts ranting and to imitate them. The rant ends with the word ‘democracy.’ By doing so, she draws a line from their choice to stand - deciding for themselves and ‘being themselves’ – to the concept of this extended version of democracy – being who you are and doing what you want as long as you respect the space of others. As she sings in “Born a Lion”:

i'm not hurting anyone
i'm just telling my truth
...
why we all gotta look
why we all gotta act the same
i say if you're born a lion
don't bother trying to act tame
...
they should try living

⁵ Interview at Flynn Theatre. Burlington, VT. 11.30.2004.

by my rules for a day
nobody would die
there'd be lots of stuff to say
(*Puddle Dive* 1993)

Nonconformity in this sense becomes part of an extended version of democracy – a new form of conformity which includes the all the variety and diversity of the society, and more importantly respect for this variety and diversity.

In order to try to understand the work of an artist, it is important to try to identify the underlying and surrounding factors which constitute the history of the artist's art. To list all the factors might be an endless task, so in the case of Ani DiFranco I have chosen to focus on how and where she can be situated in the context of American nonconformity, third wave feminism and ideas around sexuality, and how her work can be read as constituted by and constitutive of the element of transversity.

The first chapter of the thesis presents a short outline of the particular branch of American nonconformity where I suggest DiFranco belongs, comparing her work to a selection of important persons of its history, namely Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, Allen Ginsberg, and Bob Dylan. Utah Phillips is added as a present-day comparison and source of influence because of DiFranco's musical collaboration with him. This continuum serves to illustrate that there are particular aspects to nonconformity that hold particular importance as a part of a society. However marginal nonconformers are and have been, they have the ability to shift mainstream perception and open up a space of expression outside the socially accepted metanarratives.

The second chapter provides a brief description of third wave feminism and ideas around sexuality including identification and the effects of these ideas in DiFranco's work. This chapter focuses on how she has gained a continually evolving

third wave feminist perspective and an in-between ‘bisexual consciousness’ through her experiences, which has colored her subjective territory and shaped her perspective and resistance. Feminist thinking, theoretical and methodical strategies, as well as discussions around hegemonic heterosexual and monosexual reign induce individuals to step outside their own comfortable zones and visit spaces of marginality, as well as invite to the erasing of limiting boundaries. Both third wave feminism and bisexual consciousness operate in the in-between of two or more hegemonic spaces. Especially idea of storytelling within the third wave invites dialogue between individuals of different locations and situations, and the in-between consciousness of the bisexual invites dialogue between the various sexes – all on equal ground and with equal fortitude.

Dialogue between different by equally situated individuals and groups of individuals has the element of transversity, a relatively new term which is the focus of the final chapter. The chapter presents why it is important for individuals to acknowledge that they exist and experience within a particular subjective territory within a larger geographical and temporal location. This territory can be traversed by the use of ‘transversal power.’ The chapter presents the idea that it is possible to detect elements of transversity in DiFranco’s work and that the work of DiFranco contributes to the concept. Transversity is also relevant for the aforementioned idea of an extended democracy as it creates a space for different but equal voices to be heard.

Short Biography of Ani DiFranco:

*i make such a good statistic someone should
study me now
somebody's got to be interested in how i feel*

just because i'm here and i'm real
-- Ani DiFranco, "Fire Door"⁶

Ani DiFranco was born Angela Marie DiFranco in Buffalo, N.Y. on September 23, 1970 to an American Jewish mother and an Italian-American father. She began her career at the age of nine when her guitar teacher, Michael Meldrum, organized a gig for her at a local coffee house where she performed a set of Beatles covers. During her high-school years she studied dance, began to paint, and wrote poems that later turned into songs. When she was fifteen she divorced her parents and left home because she felt alienated by her crumbling family structure. She went to live with friends and was making rounds at the Buffalo folk-club circuit. In the early nineties she relocated to New York City for a short while, taking classes in poetry and politics at New School, but her real education happened on the road driving from gig to gig. In the short text "Ani and Sekou Sundiata in Conversation" from *Verses*, a poetry book published in 2007, she admits to being a product of the Old Left, as she spent most of her formative years at folk festivals, community halls, coffee houses, and political demonstrations where she learned about America's radical continuum from those who were still living it. While traveling around America playing her songs, DiFranco learned about the various and diverse cultures that the country inhabits. She was already an experienced performer when she founded her own record company, Righteous Babe Records, in 1989, and had written over a hundred songs. The demo cassette she had made 500 copies of to sell at gigs had disappeared quickly, so 1990 saw the first release of DiFranco's eponymous album on her own label. In "Ani DiFranco and Sekou Sundiata in Conversation" she explains how the name of the record company came about:

⁶ *Ani DiFranco* 1990

The name “righteous babe” came from an ongoing joke between me and my best friend in high school. We thought the constant cat-calling of men funny, as we moved through the streets as young women. “Hey baby! Yo Baby! Wanna ride with me? What’s your name babe?” So we appropriated the term “babe,” and started calling it to each other. It was a wholly intuitive form of self-empowerment, similar to the modern young black man calling his pals his “niggas.” The “righteous” part came shortly thereafter as a way, I think, of expressing that a young woman can be alive and sexual, but also self-possessed and strong. The artificial dichotomy between the stereotypes of the humorless, un-sexy feminist and the boy-toy girlie girl struck me as bullshit. I guess it is fair to say that the recognition of the righteous babe in me was my invocation into a world of political resistance based in body, breath, and consciousness.
(*Verses* 2007 94)

Since then, “The Little Folksinger,” as she is known to describe herself, has continued to release an average of one album per year, which to this date consists of seventeen studio albums, in addition to EPs, live albums, “official bootlegs”, DVDs, poetry books, and scores books. She has collaborated with other musicians as diverse as Prince, Maceo Parker and Utah Phillips, provided narration to films, and lent her songs to numerous compilation albums. Furthermore, her record company has now expanded to provide opportunities for artists, such as Anais Mitchell, Bitch and Animal, Sekou Sundiata and Hamell On Trial, to name a few, to be able to create and release music without having to be under the supervision of and controlled by the mainstream record industry.

Besides this, she can be described as a 5 foot 2 “Amazon warrior”, tattooed and pierced, with forever changing hair-styles; performing percussive finger-picking with fake nails that are attached with super-glue or as stick-on’s and secured with electrical tape; giggling and girly one moment then serious and political the next; a feminist and an activist; seemingly unabashedly honest in her lyrics; sexually fluid; a poet; a painter; pro-choice; and also very recently a mother. She has been named one of the top twenty-five most influential artist of the past twenty-five years by *CMJ New Music* (alongside Nirvana and U2) and one of the top twenty-one feminists of the

twenty-first century by *Ms. Magazine*. She is a singer/songwriter/guitarist who is hard to put in any musical category as she is forever evolving – it has been suggested that the closest might be “folk/punk” as it is guitar and lyric driven music, which aligns with the folk-music tradition, that is at times spiced with the seemingly uncensored rawness of punk. The lyrics to her songs are more similar to poems than those of most of her contemporary musicians, both in form and content. This comes to show visually as they are usually written in long skinny columns in the sleeves of her CDs, are often looser in composition than the usual song lyrics and do not always have end rhymes. She also has the ability to create poignant metaphors and her songs deals with a wide range of topics, from unrequited love and difficult relationships to political and feminist issues. She performs the lyrics both as songs and as spoken-word, both live on-stage and on her albums.

Throughout her career, DiFranco has shared, vividly and candidly, from her experiences and it is possible to detect an evolving process both for the understanding of herself as an individual as well as the society that she lives in. The combination of her work and the nonconformist choices she has made throughout her life shows how it is possible for a person to live ‘on the fringe’ of the American society’s expectations, whilst maintaining a healthy connection to a society that one might not agree with but nevertheless is a part of. This comes to show in her rejection of major record companies and providing new and interesting work spaces for her home town, Buffalo – which was one of thousands of industrious cities that did not benefit from the promised ‘tickle down’ economy. What DiFranco displays is an ability to apply nonconformist actions to better one’s own community, while sharing her thoughts and experiences as inspiration for others. This, as we shall see, has a long tradition.

CHAPTER ONE

Ani DiFranco in Context: The Continuum of American Nonconformity

THE INTERVIEW

*how can one speak on
the role of politics in art
when art is
activism?*

*and anyway
both are just a lifelong light
shining through a swinging prism.
-- Ani DiFranco, "The Interview"⁷*

*we have to be able to criticize
what we love
say what we have to say
'cause if you're not trying to make something better
then as far as i can tell
you are just in the way
--Ani DiFranco, "What if No One's Watching"⁸*

The United States of America that we find Ani DiFranco in today is a nation with a relatively short yet voluminous and explosive history. It is nation marked by a rapid creation and with a history that encompasses conquest, manifest destiny, slavery, liberty, wars, persecution, struggles for equal rights and civil rights, resistance to conformity and ideas of individuality. It is a polychromous nation with a variety of immigrants who brought with them their particular cultures and sets of ideologies, who all struggled to find a new beginning, and who took part in creating and defining a nation in what they saw as 'the land of opportunity.' It is a nation that in itself is nonconformist, which, from the nation's very beginning, was populated by a parallel existence of conformers and nonconformers. It is possible to suggest that the very act

⁷ *Verses* 2007 89

⁸ *Imperfectly* 1992

of traveling to and settling in a new land was an act of nonconformity, in rejecting their home-countries and the ways of 'the old world.' So also was the American Revolution, the act of breaking away from the rule of Britain in order to create the United States. It is a nation that is still trying to create and define itself as the world is becoming more and more globalized - trying to create and perpetuate conformity while simultaneously creating nonconformity, and which, throughout its recorded and un-recorded history as well as today, consists of a complex mix of individuals and communities. In such a mix, the emergence of alternatives to mainstream culture is inevitable.

Among those who oppose the mainstream and attempt to carve their own identity from the bedrock of the American society are those who live in the literary and artistic shades. Through their arts they express slices of reality as they see it and apply their particular experience and subjective perception to comment on different aspects of the society they live in as well as contributing to its continued development. Their individual works show the multitude of ideas and the continuous struggle to define themselves and the world around them that come together as a whole in the American literary and artistic history, and in their attempts they partake in unveiling a complex, fluid world.

The continuum that I am placing Ani DiFranco in here includes individuals from various walks of life, whose lives and works are significant parts of the ‘lifelong light’ that shines through the ‘swinging prism’ of time and perception, and who, each in their own individual way, criticize what that they love in an attempt to make it better. There is not sufficient space to describe the continuum in detail on these pages, yet, by highlighting a few examples of individuals and their work, I hope to provide a general understanding of the continuum and some of the key concepts in this continuum which I am referring to.

1. 1. Planting the Seeds for Change: Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman

*i love my country
by which i mean i am indebted joyfully
to all the people throughout its history
who have fought the government to make right
where so many cunning sons and daughters
our foremothers and forefathers
came singing through slaughter
came through hell and high water
so that we could stand here
and behold breathlessly the sight
how a raging river of tears
cut a grand canyon of light
--Ani DiFranco, “Grand Canyon”⁹*

Within the struggle to define a nation, there has also been the task of defining a literature that is distinctly American. Previous to the 19th century New England Transcendentalists, American literature consisted mostly of religious sermons, political speeches and of literature otherwise heavily influenced by or strongly connected to ‘the old world.’ It could therefore not be described as distinctly American. As one of the founders of Transcendentalism, Ralph Waldo Emerson

⁹ *Educated Guess* 2004

advocated for self-reliance and nonconformity which inspired contemporary writers of his time such as Henry David Thoreau, Emily Dickinson, Margaret Fuller and Walt Whitman. He encouraged his readers and audiences to regard nature as the realm of truths as well as the realm of inspiration for poets. In “The Poet” (1844), Emerson, who was a poet himself as well as a lecturer and essayist, sought poets who would take the experiences of the American soil as a basis for their works: “America is a poem in our eyes; its ample geography dazzles the imagination, and it will not wait long for metres” (*Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* 737). Indeed, it did not have to wait long, as exemplified by Walt Whitman in 1855 when his first version of *Leaves of Grass* appeared. Whitman himself seems to agree with Emerson that America was like a great poem. In its preface, he writes: “The Americans of all nations at any time upon the earth have probably the fullest poetical nature. The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poems” (*Norton Anthology of American Literature: Volume C* 21). Thus, it was through the inspiration and the describing their experience of the *nature* of their country that Americans would be able to create their very own poetry. Nature here can be understood as both ‘the natural world,’ the vast and varied landscape and the multi-cultural background of the people, as well as ‘the character’ of the country, the founding ideas and concepts that constituted it, such as ‘manifest destiny,’ and ‘freedom.’

Throughout his whole career, it seems, Whitman attempted to find his place in the American society. His list of employment includes positions as varied as teacher, editor of various newspapers and magazines, politician, carpenter and hospital attendant. In the late 1840s, he was fired as an editor from both *Aurora*, which publicly charged him with laziness, and then the *Eagle*, on the grounds that he had become a Free-Soiler. Self-taught, he studied astronomy and became something of an

expert on Egyptology through trips to the Egyptian Museum on Broadway where he had talks with its proprietor. He also developed a liking for seemingly purposeless walks around the cities he lived in - gathering diverse experiences that made their way into the poem that would define his career. Whitman's poems in general were regarded as rough and unconventional, tiradic and without a set metric, rhymes or rhythm. It is possible, however, to detect internal rhymes and rhythms. Additionally, some of his poems, most notably "Live Oak, with Moss" (1860), include descriptions of homosexual love, for which he had to suffer much critique. However, he eventually gained the respect he sought when he acquired the admiration of Lord Alfred Tennyson and other famous British writers. The section of *Leaves of Grass* that would eventually become "Song of Myself" as part of the final revision in 1881, comes across as a celebration of a country that is rich and beautiful, yet not without danger, sorrow and cruelty; a place where women and men of all races and cultures would melt together - a complex source of natural and distinctly American experiences. Whitman connects with nature as well as the America society and its inhabitants when he begins the poem: "I celebrate myself, and sing myself / And what I assume you shall assume, / For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you" (*Norton* 122). Throughout the poem he describes himself, his country and how he is a part of it: the country and everything in it as a part of him as much as he is part of it, as he exemplifies in section 16:

I am of old and young, of the foolish as much as the wise,
Regardless of others, ever regardful of others,
Maternal as well as paternal, a child as well as a man,
Stuff'd with the stuff that is coarse, and stuff'd with the stuff that is fine,
One of the Nation of many nations, the smallest the same and the largest the same,
....
A learner with the simplest, a teacher of the thoughtfulest,
A novice beginning experient of myriads of seasons,
Of every hue and caste am I, of every rank and religion,

A farmer, mechanic, artist, gentleman, sailor, quaker,
Prisoner, fancy-man, rowdy, lawyer, physician, priest.

I resist any thing better than my own diversity,
Breathe the air but leave plenty after me,
And am not stuck up, and am in my place.
(*Norton* 133-134)

What Whitman exhibits here is the awareness of the diversity and complexity of his country, and he seeks to encompass all of it as natural, and therefore good. He also exhibits an understanding of himself as a diverse and complex being, as someone who cannot easily be categorized:

Do I contradict myself?
Very well then I contradict myself,
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)
(*Norton* 165)

While Whitman's "Song of Myself" is an epic poem that provides a very detailed description of America from the perspective of a white middle-class man during the nineteenth century, a look at one of Ani DiFranco poems shows a slightly different view of America, obviously a more recent perspective and also one which might be identified as more feminine. However, what are striking are the similarities between Whitman's poem and DiFranco's poems, written almost 150 years later, in that they both celebrate America. For instance, "Grand Canyon" (*Educated Guess* 2004) is a poem that touches upon several subjects, most notably third wave feminism. Yet, the core of the poem renders a sense of pride of living in a country which, like a child, was "born of the greatest pain / into a grand canyon of light," of which she can boast: "i mean, look around / we have this." In addition, DiFranco hints to how her country includes every imaginable identities, but unlike Whitman, she does not list all of them; rather, she points to her 'foremothers' and 'forefathers' who came before her: "i mean, no song has gone unsung here." Also, rather than listing everything that is,

DiFranco points to the ones who created everything that is – the founders of the country - and tries to listen to ‘the sound’ of America:

in the american intersection
where black crashed head on with white
comes a melody
comes a rhythm
a particular resonance
that is us and only us

What she hears is the creation of America rather than America as simply an occurrence, focusing on those who actively created the nation rather than describing a passive listing of American elements. Rather than identifying *as* America, like Whitman does, DiFranco places herself as an individual identity *in* American. She does not only celebrate the importance of the wholeness, but also the importance of the difference of the components that came to be the wholeness. DiFranco has the privilege of hindsight and she does not have to concern herself with defining something that is distinctly American. Instead, she can look back at how America got to have its ‘particular resonance.’ Recognizing that America is connected because it is made of the same ‘stuff,’ she also recognizes that this ‘stuff’ is put together in a variety of ways, which should also be celebrated. Rather than identifying herself as the same as all that is and everyone that is, DiFranco voices gratitude towards what those who came before her have achieved, who were different than she is, yet whose coming together created the country she loves. Indeed, Whitman is one of those forefathers that she is able to thank for this creation.

Perhaps “Song of Myself” was an expression of hope and an attempt to gain understanding, written by an individual who did not seem to find an existing place waiting for him in the mainstream of the American society at his time. Whitman’s homosexuality certainly placed him on the outskirts of society and, because of their unconventional form and content, so did his poems. His work inspired other

'outsiders' of his time and later times, especially for one specific member of the Beat generation who emerged in the middle of the following century.

1. 2. Beat but Not Broken: The Beat Generation and Allen Ginsberg

*more and more there is this animal
looking out through my eyes
at all the traffic on the road to nowhere
at all the shiny stuff around to buy
at all the wires in the air
at all the people shopping
for the same blank stare
at america the drastic
that isolated geographic
that's become infested with millionaires
--Ani DiFranco, "Animal" ¹⁰*

Where Whitman seemed to celebrate and express hope for his country, and for himself as a valuable part of it, the Beat generation painted a different picture of America.

This generation, which was more of a small, loosely-knitted circle of friends with similar perception of society rather than a whole generation, appeared in the 1950s. It was a group that experienced the American post-WWII society as a place that made a preference of the white middle- and upper-classes, as these were the classes that experienced a sharp rise in economy and that could partake in an increasingly obsessive consumerism that would make the country money-roll forward. Advertising played a huge role in creating an image for the American 1950s, as it painted a picture-perfect suburban life of compliance and social perfection with everything consumer-goods could offer: the hallmark of the 1950s domestic scene was the nuclear family where the women were homemakers and child-rearers who bought all

¹⁰ *Educated Guess* 2004

the new house appliances that came on the market, and the men as breadwinners who had respectable and well-earning careers.

The Beat generation, however, represented sentiments that were boiling under the surface and that would loom into the larger group of countercultures the following decade. These sentiments were the growing attention to social and political issues that seemed to have been blurred by the post-WWI and WWII culture, and which Allen Ginsberg explosively expressed with “Howl,” first rendered at the infamous Six Gallery reading in 1955, and then in “America” written the following year. The Beat generation consisted mostly of men from middle-class families, which, besides Ginsberg, included Jack Kerouac, William Burroughs, and Michael McClure, but also a few nearly-forgotten women, such as Diane di Prima, Elise Cowen, Hettie Jones and Ruth Weiss. Women who showed resistance to conformity that time, which basically meant not doing what was expected of them - complying with the hallmark - were often regarded as mentally ill and put into institutions.

In her autobiographical novel, *The Bell Jar* (1963), Sylvia Plath describes her experiences as a ‘girl interrupted’ in the 1950s. Plath was not part of the Beat generation, yet her novel, as well as the progression of her life, tells a tragic ‘in-between’ story of the 1950s American society where a young woman seemingly manages to overcome her resistance to conformity in her youth, just to end up battling her inner demons in a cold apartment in London, England, alone with her two children - the setting where she takes her own life. One particular part of the novel epitomizes what seems to have been what pushed her close to the edge as a young woman and perhaps hunted her later in life:

I saw my life branching out before me like the fig tree in the story.
From the tip of every branch, like a fat purple fig, a wonderful future beckoned and winked. One fig was a husband and a happy home and

children, and another fig was a famous poet and another fig was a brilliant professor, and another fig was Ee Gee, the amazing editor, and another fig was Europe and Africa and South America, and another fig was Constantin and Socrates and Atila and a pack of other lovers with queer names and offbeat professions, and another fig was an Olympic lady crew champion, and beyond and above these were many more figs I couldn't quite make out.

I saw myself sitting in the crotch of this fig tree, starving to death, just because I couldn't make my mind up which of the figs I would choose. I wanted each and every one of them, but choosing one meant losing all the rest, and, as I sat there, unable to decide, the figs began to wrinkle and go black, and, one by one, they plopped to the ground at my feet. (1966 73)

In real life, Plath managed to get a hold of two of these figs; however, both of them seem to have been bruised. She married and had children with the poet Ted Hughes, but her marriage was not a happy one, and her career as a poet was overshadowed by the same man she had married. It seems that in attempting to live a life in compliance with society's rules, which in theory should have made her happy, Plath made herself more unhappy and, furthermore, self-destructive. Yet, even if she had stayed resistant in her youth, she may not have been able to escape the mental institution. In Plath's case, it seems, there were no options that could have saved her.

Among the Beats, however, there were women who managed to stay resistant and who did not let the threat of institutions scare them from living their lives the way they wanted. Together with the men of the Beat generation, they were a group of individuals who felt disillusioned by what society had to offer and attempted to detach themselves from it by pursuing a life that was not tied down by conformity. That life involved freedom on every level, including sexual freedom, which was of particular interest to Ginsberg and Burroughs, and a life of unplanned experiences, as vividly depicted in Kerouac's infamous *On the Road* (1957).

One can only speculate where DiFranco would have ended up if she had been born around the time of this generation: whether her seemingly rebellious and nonconformist tendencies growing up would have rendered her a 'girl interrupted' or

on the road with the Beats. It is likely that DiFranco's decision to divorce her parents at the age of 15 would have sparked more reaction in the 1950s than it did in the 1980s. So also would her songs about same-sex experiences in the folk-club circuit when she was 18. Since the 1950s, the American society has become more acceptant of the individualism that the Beats were chasing - in fact it has begun to cherish it, as individualism and the diversity that comes along with it has proven to be good for the American economy, and, as the slogan goes, 'what is good for the economy is good for the country.'¹¹ Similar to the Beats, DiFranco's travels have made their way into her writing, but they differ in that they seem to have been with more ease and less danger than they perhaps would have been in the 1950s. In addition, her constant traveling seems to have more purpose than the more or less unplanned travels of the Beats. Touring the country is how DiFranco does her job, where she performs her songs, and it is how she gets inspiration for the lyrics to her songs. In "God's Country" (Puddle Dive, 1993) she sings:

guess i came out here to see some stuff for myself
i mean why leave the telling up to everybody else
this may be god's country but this is my country too
move over mr. holiness let the little people thru

Here, traveling is a way of placing herself 'out there' in the vast and diverse country that is the United States, both as an outsider and an observer of the country, but also as an individual who can claim it as her own. It might have been defined as 'god's country' by America's forefathers, a reverberation through America's history since the

¹¹ Even though the idea of individualism is, and has always been, part of the foundation of the American understanding of itself - the hopes of freedom and independence brought over by the first arrivers - new forms of individualism have not always been as readily accepted as they (mostly) are today. It might be suggested that it is possible to trace one of the elements which enabled that change to the free-market capitalists who realized that there was money to be made from the idea of individuality; that individuals want to stand out (or at least keep up with 'the Jones's'), and to do this they need accessibility of diversity and variety, and the more diversity and variety businesses can provide the more profit it is possible for them to make. See Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter's *The Rebel Sell: How Counterculture Became Consumer Culture* (2005) for more on how most countercultural activism is counterproductive in a capitalist society.

idea of 'manifest destiny' and other religious chants, but DiFranco's travels provide her with experience and therefore the ability define it for herself.

The writing of the Beats is characterized by a sense of seemingly uninhibited and impulsive writing, yet its composition is similar to Whitman's in some respects. For instance, Ginsberg's poetry, like that of Whitman's, is without a set metric, rhymes or rhythm, yet with internal rhymes and rhythm. The tiradic nature of the work of both writers renders a sense of urgency to encompass a multitude of sentiments, and where Whitman is expressing joy and celebration of being part of a whole, Ginsberg uses this tiradic form to express a fleshier, dirtier, and a less idealistic version of America.

In "A Supermarket in California" (1955), Ginsberg links himself to Whitman by dedicating a whole a poem to him, making clear the influence Whitman has had on him. By applying the loose poetic form that is similar to that of Whitman, he thus places himself firmly in the continuum of a certain branch of American poetic tradition. He also makes clear the close personal affinity he feels with Whitman, viewing himself in a similar situation: "Will we stroll dreaming of the lost America of love past blue automobiles in driveways, home to our silent cottage?" while recognizing that he belongs to a different generation:

Ah, dear father, graybeard, lonely old courage-teacher, what America did you have when Charon quit poling his ferry and you got out on a smoking bank and stood watching the boat disappear on the black water of Lethe? (30)

The America that Whitman had had was certainly different from the one Ginsberg had, and in "Howl," there is a vast gap between the ideal America and its inhabitants, which Ginsberg seemed saddened by: "I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked, / dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix" (1959 9). The poem is marked by how

most of the lines in the first part begins with the ‘who,’ identified in the first lines, followed by a variety of active and passive actions, such as “bared their brains,” “were expelled from the academics,” “chained themselves to subways,” and “vanished into nowhere.” The various actions show the multitude of the American inhabitants who, according to the first lines, have been destroyed – the America that Ginsberg was experiencing was nothing like the life of the picture perfect ‘white-picket-fences’ suburban dream of the 1950s. Ginsberg dedicated “Howl” to his lover, Carl Solomon, and incorporated him into the poem: “ah, Carl, while you are not safe, I am not safe, and now you’re really in the total animal soup of time –” (19). The bond between the two is apparent, and if Carl is ‘in the animal soup of time,’ so is Ginsberg. The ‘soup’ may be read as the messy culmination of the characteristics and regulation that humans attribute and apply to themselves as civilized animals: the laws, rules, hierarchies and ‘truths;’ the organization and the categorization of things – all of which changes and blends over time. It is messy, as it makes it more and more difficult, and perhaps futile, to universally distinguish the concepts ‘good’ from ‘bad,’ ‘right’ from ‘wrong’ and ‘truth’ from ‘lies.’

Ginsberg strips everything down, deconstructs what he sees by describing it, then reconstructs a world of human expression that is less rigid and that accepts that it is flawed:

to recreate the syntax and measure of poor human prose and stand
before you speechless and intelligent and shaking
with shame, rejecting yet confessing out the soul to conform to the
rhythm of thought in his naked and endless head (20)

In Ginsberg’s reconstruction, all human expressions, including those seldom heard, can be found as wordless metaphors in the musical counterpart to Beat poetry of the time, namely bebop jazz. Bebop operated with sounds, not words, and it seems like

what Ginsberg hears in bebop manages to describe what he cannot find words for.

These sounds are like ‘cries’ and function almost as a primal language of its own:

the madman bum and angel beat in Time, unknown, yet putting down
here what might be left to say in time come after death,
and rose reincarnated in the ghostly clothes of jazz in the goldhorn
shadow of the band and blew the suffering of
America’s naked mind for love into an eli eli lamma lamma
sabacthani saxophone cry that shivered the cities down to the last radio
with the absolute heart of the poem of life butchered out of their
bodies good to eat a thousand years. (20)

Similar to Emerson and Whitman, Ginsberg saw poetry in America and American life, yet he could not let go of his disillusionment. In “America” he clearly felt connection with his country, but the vastness and complexity of it and the wrongdoings of its government seems to render him with a sense of disempowerment: “America, I have given you all and now I am nothing./ ... / Your machinery is too much for me / ... / It occurs to me that I am America. / I am talking to myself again.” (39-41). Still, with the statement: “America I’m putting my queer shoulder to the wheel” (43) he shows that he inhabits a resistance to his disillusionment; that he still hold hopes for change and that he himself can be part of that change by applying his ‘queer shoulder’ – his individual identity as a white homosexual Buddhist nonconformist man – to help push the American society toward changing its overarching metanarratives and to accept diverse individuals as equally valuable.

Disillusionment is also evident in many of DiFranco’s lyrics, she even proclaims “i have earned by disillusionment / i have been working all of my life / and i am a patriot / i have been fighting the good fight.” As much as DiFranco loves her country, there are forces at work that seem to make her swing between despair and hope. The former is very visible in “Serpentine” (*Evolve* 2003).

and i must admit

today my inner pessimist
seems to have got the best of me
we start out sugared up on kool-aid and manifest destiny
and we memorize all the president's names
like little trained monkeys
and then we're spit into the world
so many spinny-eyed t.v. junkies
incapable of unraveling the military industrial mystery
preemptively pacified with history book history
and i've been around the world now
and i can see this about america
the mind control is steep here, man
the myopia is deep here

With these lines, DiFranco admits that at times her 'inner pessimist' wins her over and she would rather stay at home and not have to deal with overwhelming mission it would be to repair the damage 'mind control' and 'myopia' has made in and done to her country. Not only has DiFranco traveled around her own country, she has also 'been around the world now,' and her disillusionment about America seems to have been confirmed by what she experienced and learned while she was abroad.

Yet, DiFranco is a patriot; she loves her country and is grateful for what her ancestors have done for the betterment of her country. She merely carries out her right and her duty to criticize what she loves, as we saw Jefferson insisted a good citizen should to. In the choruses of "Animal" (*Educated Guess* 2004) and "Garden of Simple" (*Revelling/Reckoning* 2001), she renders hope of the ability for her country to change. The former speaks of extending our focus beyond our ordinary perspective.

when you grow up surrounded
by willful ignorance
you have to believe
mercy has its own country
and that it's round and borderless
and then you just grow wings
and rise above it all
like there
where that hawk is circling
above that strip mall
("Animal")

DiFranco's disillusionment in "Animal" can be seen as a result of the culmination of what her 'inner animal' identifies as the tendency humans have of excessive consumption, false justifications for doing so, and the apparently willful ignorance of the harm it is doing - pointing to the willingness humans have to become 'little trained monkeys' who have been 'preemptively pacified by history book history,' as depicted in "Serpentine" (*Evolve* 2003) Because we willingly subdue ourselves to apathy, which entails doing as little as possible to learn about the world around us, we are also willingly subduing ourselves to ignorance. Ignorance again leads to a lack of ability to assess our situation – our role in society and also our society's role in the world – and therefore a lacking understanding of how we can live in harmony with nature and not destroy that which is the very foundation of our existence. While the verses of "Animal" describe the follies of humans, the chorus is hopeful of the possibility of 'a country of mercy' – of another way of living. It ends with: "then you have to grow wings / and rise above it all / like there / where that hawk is circling / above that strip mall," echoing the thought of having to look at the bigger picture, as found in the first verse of "Everest" (*Up Up Up Up Up Up* 1999):

from the depth of the pacific
to the height of everest
and still the world is smoother
than a shiny ball bearing
so i take a few steps back
and put on a wider lens
and it changes your skin
your sex and what your wearing
distance shows your silhouette
to be a lot like mine
like a sphere is a sphere
and all of us here
have been here all the time
yeah, we've been here all the time

In doing so, we can see that in “any eco-system / harm here is harm there / and there and there” (“Animal”) – that our world is an interconnection of such systems. It is possible to compare this thought to Emerson, Whitman and the 19th century Transcendentalist philosophers, who also dealt with the idea that everything is connected and that nature is a source for knowledge.

Believing that ‘mercy has its own country’ parallels with imagining a ‘garden of simple.’ While the chorus of “Animal” offers hope in forms of how we can change the world by imagining it different, the chorus of “Garden of Simple” speaks of how it is possible to free ourselves from the artificial roles assigned to us by society.

we were standing in a garden
and i had a machine that made silence
it just sucked up the whole opinionated din
and there were no people on the payroll
and there were no monkeys on our backs
and i said, baby show me what you look like
without skin
...
but in the garden of simple
where all of us are nameless
you were never anything but beautiful to me
they never really owned you
you just carried them around you
and then one day you put 'em down
and found your hands were free
("Garden of Simple")

The ‘skin’ here does not necessarily mean the skin-color of a person, but can be read as a mask, a stereotype, or a repressive defense mechanism of an individual, as in the saying of being or acting ‘tough skinned.’ The idea of being ‘nameless’ can mean freeing oneself from one’s birth-name, which might be constricting and stigmatizing in itself, but also all the other names - the nouns and adjectives - that a society creates to define individuals: socially, psychologically, within a workplace, in a public setting, and so on. The ‘skin’ and the ‘name’ of a person, then, can be read as the role which is assigned to an individual by a society or the roles we assign to ourselves to

adapt to a society. The ‘skins’ and ‘names’ are artificial and not permanently fixed, so it is possible to free oneself from these roles by looking beyond them; by realizing that “they never really owned you / you just carried them around you.” This realization comes when “one day you put ‘em down / and found your hands were free.” It then becomes possible for that individual to create or define its own role – its ‘skin’ and ‘name’ – that is not as restrictive or repressive.

Imagining a country of mercy or a garden of simple is to offer hope – that it is possible to change your own surroundings, and the first step to make something come into action or to make it real is to imagine it and then believe it. Ginsberg imagined a world of human expression less rigid and more accepting of its flaws by recreating “the syntax and measure of poor human prose” which would “stand before you speechless and intelligent and shaking,” as if this new realization was a rebirth. DiFranco’s realization has perhaps a more mature, less dramatic and of a more a-matter-of-factly air to it, when she in “Subdivision” (*Revelling/Reckoning* 2001) asks: “I’m wondering what it will take / for my country to rise,” and suggests a plain, yet effective plan: “first we admit our mistakes / and then we open our eyes.”

1. 3. Like a Rolling Stone: The Role of Folk Music, Bob Dylan and Woody Guthrie

*people used to make records
as in a record of an event
the event of people
playing music in a room
now everything is cross-marketing
its about sunglasses and shoes
or guns and drugs
you choose
--Ani DiFranco, “My IQ”¹²*

¹² *Puddle Dive* 1993

As America moved into the 1960s, resistance to mainstream culture started to manifest itself in more concrete ways. The discontent manifested by the disillusionment and disempowerment that the Beat generation had started to express the decade before exploded into multiple countercultures, among them the civil rights movement, which especially focused on the African-American rights; the human rights movement, which included women's liberation, gay rights and free speech; the anti-war movement, which expressed opposition to the U.S. involvement in the Vietnam war and military actions in other third-world countries; in addition to other socio-political issues, such as brinkmanship, pre-WWII conformist lifestyle, and conscription. The American 60s generation was a very large and a very visible nonconformist generation, and the most visible group were perhaps the so-called "flower children," who followed the mantra of Timothy Leary to 'tune in, turn out, drop out,' doing so by forming their own communes on the outskirts of society.

It was in this setting that a man by the name of Robert Allen Zimmerman emerged, who after trying on several pseudonyms settled on the now infamous Bob Dylan. Dylan turned out to become one of the most influential folk-singers of his time, with strong ties to his precursors of nonconformers, which earns him a substantial space in this continuum. Unlike his precursors in this continuum, Dylan regarded himself first and foremost as a folk-singer which has its roots in oral storytelling rather than written poetry. In 1961, he came to New York to meet his greatest inspiration, namely Woody Guthrie. Guthrie, who by then had been hospitalized with Huntington's Chorea, had lived through some of the most significant historical movements and events of the 20th century: the Great Depression, when he saw the oil-infused economic rise and fall of his hometown Okemah, Oklahoma; the Great Dust Storm, after which he joined thousand of desperate farmers

and unemployed workers towards California in search for work to support their families, as vividly depicted in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*; and WWII, when he served both in the Merchant Marines and the Army. In addition, he experienced the political upheavals resulting from Unionism, the Communist Party and the Cold War, and had been working against the Red-Scare tactics, such as the blacklisting of Leftist and progressive-minded Americans. These movements and events had been absorbed by Guthrie and released in forms of songs, ballads, prose, poetry and paintings. Guthrie's constant traveling throughout the American landscape between the 1930s and the 1950s had allowed him to see the country through various times and from various perspectives. His work has therefore left us with a lasting and important voice for the marginalized and oppressed who struggled during and through these historical movements. His songs are 'people's songs,' infused with Guthrie's deep and passionate belief in social, political, and spiritual justice, and are important contributions to American culture as well as important inspiration for Dylan.

In 1973, Dylan was asked to write a brief note on what Guthrie had meant for him, which resulted in the poem "Last Thoughts on Woody Guthrie," first released on *The Bootleg Series Volumes 1-3* in 1991. The poem is written in a form that can perhaps be called 'folk-beat' poetry, which shows how Dylan saw Guthrie's life as a Beat-like continuous 'hard travelin' search': "lookin' for somethin' you ain't quite found yet." All the way through the poem Dylan is referring to a 'you,' which is directed at Guthrie, but also most likely a general use of the pronoun. This general use produces a sense of community, of connection between Dylan and Guthrie, but also with everyone else who have ever pondered the meaning of life and one's own role in the world:

And you say to yourself just what am I doing

On this road I'm walking, on this trail I'm turning
On this curve I'm hanging, on this pathway I'm strolling
In the space I'm taking, in this air I'm inhaling
Am I mixed up too much, am I mixed up too hard
Why am I walking, where am I running
What am I saying, what am I knowing
On this guitar I'm playing, on this banjo I'm frailing
On this mandolin I'm strumming, in the song I'm singing
In the tune I'm humming, in the words that I'm thinking
In the words that I'm writing
In this ocean of hours I'm all the time drinking
Who am I helping, what am I breaking
What am I giving, what am I taking

The search Dylan is describing is like that of an addiction, as if the 'you's' search for meaning is like that of a junkie's search for the ultimate fix:

You need something to open up a new door
To show you something you've seen before
But overlooked a hundred times or more
You need something to open your eyes
You need something to make it known
That it's you and no one else that owns
That spot you're standing, that space you're sitting
That the world ain't got you beat
That it ain't got you licked
It can't get you crazy
No matter how many times might you get kicked

Where Ginsberg saw the best minds of his generation in search for 'an angry fix,' most likely in form of narcotics, the ultimate fix for the meaning-seeker in Dylan's poem can be found in science, represented here by medical science, or in religion - the two major 'provider's of meaning' of our time:

You can either go to the church of your choice
Or you can go to Brooklyn State Hospital
You'll find God in the church of your choice
You'll find Woody Guthrie in Brooklyn State Hospital
And though it's only my opinion
I might be right or wrong
You'll find them both
In the Grand Canyon
At sundown

For Dylan, however, meaning, thus God and Guthrie, seems to be found by experiencing and reveling in nature, represented here by Grand Canyon at sundown, which came before and will – hopefully – exist longer than any scientific or religious paradigm. Again, parallels can be drawn to the thoughts of the 19th century Transcendentalists that nature is the source of knowledge and that the individual person is a part of it.

Ginsberg's thoughts on the fate of 'the best minds' of a generation and their need for a 'fix,' reverberates into DiFranco's time and can be found in "Garden of Simple" (*Revelling/Reckoning* 2001), where:

science chases money
and money chases its tail
and the best minds of my generation
can't make bail
but the bacteria are coming to take us down
that's my prediction
it's the answer to this culture
of the quick fix prescription

Where Ginsberg seemed to regard 'the best minds' of his generation to be great thinkers and possibly his artistic friends, DiFranco describes the best minds of her generation as scientists who have fallen under the spell of capitalism and arrived at a place where the price of getting out is too high. In addition, where Ginsberg's 'best minds' were looking for an 'angry fix,' a desperate and possibly illegal action, DiFranco's generation has created a whole arsenal of 'legal fixes' available for the whole American culture. These are legal because they are officially recommended and prescribed, but the description of them as being 'quick fixes' points to how they are made to, not fix the problems, but merely smooth them over for a short amount of time. Thus, a 'quick fix prescription' is not an actual viable solution to any problem. It echoes Ginsberg's 'fix,' in that it seemingly seeks an escape – a numbing-of-the-

senses – from real problems, not to find true meaning, as in Dylan’s poem. Yet, it echoes Dylan in that it seeks escape from the problems through science - or indeed religion, if that is your drug of choice - which in DiFranco’s lyrics is misguided because it comes second to capitalism. Suggesting that ‘bacteria are coming to take us down’ can be read a warning to not overlook or downplay what are obvious, however small, dangers to our continued survival and welfare. There are no ‘quick fixes’ in dealing with these problems in the same way that there are no ‘quick fixes’ in dealing with bacteria, nor are they going to go away however much we ignore them.

Dylan’s ability to write articulate and accessible songs that contained sentiments that the members of his audience perhaps were unable to express themselves, made him a somewhat reluctant spokesperson of the American countercultures at the time. The film, *No Direction Home* (2005), tells the story of Dylan’s rise to fame - from the beginning of his career in 1963 through his transformation from ‘the folk-singer with an acoustic guitar’ to ‘the folk-rocker with an electric guitar,’ which made many of his fans feel betrayed, until his motorcycle accident in ‘66, which forced him to stop his constant touring. It tells the story of how he involuntary, yet progressively, went from being a more or less regular folk-singer to becoming an iconic voice of a whole generation at a time when the oppressed and overlooked were waking up and standing up for themselves.

One of the reasons why Dylan became such an iconic voice might be because he, unlike Whitman and Ginsberg, put on various ‘masks’ in his songs, where he assumed the identity of various individuals within the American society other than himself. In the film, Liam Clancy calls Dylan a ‘shape-shifter.’ Sean Wilentz calls him a ‘modern, white faced minstrel,’ and even Dylan himself puts his own identity into question: “... ‘I have my Bob Dylan mask on,’ he told his New York audience, off the

cuff, on Halloween night, 1964 ...” (<http://bobdylan.com/etc/>). In *Hip: The History* (2004), John Leland calls him a ‘trickster.’ He explains: “He absorbed the folk myths too well, plucked from their authentic archetypes a series of inauthentic identities. He told people he was a hobo, a drifter, a motherless child, a carny tramp - any version of the *real deal*. Like tricksters past, he played with the difference between the word and the thing, saying one thing and doing another” (Leland 183). In the true sense of the word ‘hip,’ - which derives from the African language, Wolof, the verb *hepi*, meaning ‘to see,’ or *hipi*, meaning ‘to open one’s eyes’ - Dylan was able to open the eyes of his audience by distorting the truth or tell lies through his choice of various identities, thus ‘tell the truth’ by the way of deception (5). Whichever tag people put on him, he has kept changing his public image, creating ‘new Dylans’: the Buddhist, the Judaist, the evangelical Christian, and he recently endorsed the corporate symbol of imperialist America, namely Starbuck’s. These changes always stirred reactions among his fans, yet, as depicted in *No Direction Home* after he had replaced his folksy acoustic guitar with an electrical one, they would give him an earful for ‘betraying them,’ then ask for his autograph and probably go out and buy his next album.

Any artist who receives attention from the media is going to be assigned a tag of some kind, as the media often needs to deliver short, concise and easily accessible information, and DiFranco is no exception. In the media, DiFranco is often portrayed in a certain way, for instance the ‘angry-chick-with-a-guitar.’ Anna Feigenbaum mentions this in her article “ ‘Some guy designed this room I’m standing in’: marking gender in press coverage of Ani DiFranco” (*Popular Music* 2005), where she discusses how female musicians are marked by their gender when described in the media and how this leads to a two-dimensional and usually degrading portrayal compared to their male counterparts.

[W]omen - under some heading - become a genre to which DiFranco and her music belong. Some of these groups include: 'white chick[s] with guitar'... 'grrrls' ... 'pissed-off-woman genre' ... 'angry females' ... 'angry female singers' ... and my personal favourite: 'guitar-slinging chick[s] chirping Lilith Fair anthems' (Feigenbaum 2005 42-3)

The degrading and limiting 'angry-chick-with-guitar' media-tag stuck to DiFranco for a long time and whatever the media assign to someone is no easy to shake. Other, non-degrading tags and definitions, such as 'lesbian,' 'feminist icon,' and 'heroine,' have also been assigned to her by her fans. Yet, also these tags work in a limiting way and do not give justice to an individual's multi-layered personality. In addition, they help to create what is a well-known concept within the music industry, namely 'image.' Many artists work hard on creating an image for themselves that will appeal to a large audience or viewers. However, when the aim to one's work is not fame and fortune – and it does not seem to be for DiFranco – having an image assigned to you can be rather troublesome. In "Little Plastic Castle" (*Little Plastic Castle* 1998), she comments on the wrongful and limiting effect of 'image.'

people talk about my image
like i come in two dimensions
like lipstick is a sign of my declining mind
like what i happen to be wearing the day
that someone takes my picture
is my new statement for all of womankind

Unlike Dylan, DiFranco seems to have various 'masks' assigned *to* her rather than having created them for herself. The tags and definitions that she receives function as masks that are superimposed onto her identity. Even when she seemingly puts on the 'masks' of various identities, a closer look reveals that these are 'masks' others have attributed to her, which she points out by singing about them, or they are various aspects of her personality that she herself highlights and that function as

superimpositions, yet stay within the realm of her own personality. By doing so, she gives the impression that she would rather define herself and the various aspects of her own identity than attempt to assume the identity of others. DiFranco's 'shape-shifting,' then, occurs in the rejection of the 'masks' – the tags and definitions – that are put on her. For instance, in "Origami" (*Educated Guess* 2004) she sings:

i am an all powerful amazon warrior
not just some sniveling girl
so no matter what i think i need
you know i can't possibly have a need in this world

The sarcastic tone in the last two lines are saying that whatever someone might think they know about her, they do not know at all. She might appear to be strong and tough-skinned, but even if this might be true in some cases, it is not 'the whole truth and nothing but the truth.' This 'all powerful amazon warrior'-tag is a mask attributed to her by someone who does not know her and functions as a limitation and simplification of the complex individual that she is.

DiFranco struggles with being wrongly defined by her fans and the media, as she clearly states in "Joyful Girl": "everything i do is judged / and they mostly get it wrong" (*Dilate* 1996). The most striking example of this came with the media's reaction to "Not a Pretty Girl" (*Not a Pretty Girl* 1995). Ironically, when this album came out, the media was speculating that DiFranco might be insecure about her looks and might feel that she was, quite literally, 'not a pretty girl.' It seemed that they had only looked at the title of the album and not actually listened to any of the songs on it, thus completely missing out on the second line of the verse of the song: "that is not what i do." In the song, she continues:

i am not an angry girl
but it seems like i've got everyone fooled
every time i say something they find hard to hear

they chalk it up to my anger
and never to their own fear

This mistake from the media's side revealed that when others try to define her, it in fact says more about her definers than it does about her. In "Willing to fight" (*Puddle Dive* 1993), she is quite direct in that she thinks it is absurd that anyone tries to define her at all, when she sings:

tell me who is your boogiem
that's who i will be
you don't have to like me for who i am
but we'll see what you're made of
by what you make of me
i think that it's absurd
that you think i
am the derelict daughter

In "Minerva" (*Knuckle Down* 2005), she sings: "you want me / to tell you a story / but i am weary / of entertaining," giving the impression that after 15 years of telling her stories she is tired of being the vault of misinterpreted information which seems to serve as entertainment for her audience. She also tells her audience that:

you confused your journey
with my journey
you tried to nail me
like minerva to your bow
but my job here
is not to deliver you
but to hold a mirror
till you see how
...
oh say can you see me
oh say can you see me
oh say can you see me over here?
over here
way over here

Her audience, both the media and her fans, still have not managed to define her - 'nail her to their bow' - because that is not the reason for why she tells her stories. In addition, they have been mistaken in trying to make her into someone one should

aspire to be, rather than listening to her stories as stories of individual experience. Her audience has still not seen her the way she really is, or alternately, how she wants them to see her. The last line of the song is “way over here,” indicating that the distance is great between where her audience think she is and where she actually is – *who* she is and who they *think* she is. Thus, trying to emulate her journey is fruitless, both because they do understand what it really is, and also because they are supposed to find their own journey. This thought echoes Whitman, where he in Section 2. of “Song of Myself” says:

Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the origin of all poems,
You shall possess the good of the earth and sun, (there are millions of suns
left,)
You shall no longer take things at second or third hand, nor look through the
eyes of the dead, nor feed on the spectres in books,
You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me,
You shall listen to all sides and filter them from your self.
(*Norton C 123*)

Whitman told his own story, DiFranco tells her own, and the audience is supposed to listen to these stories, not try to make them their own, but find them in their own journeys.

Dylan managed to create his own journey, and in *No Direction Home*, Ginsberg comments that when he met Dylan he could see the next generation in him. The next generation that Ginsberg could see in Dylan was the parallel evolution of a particular branch of American poetry and the urge for nonconformity. Nonconformity can be found both in the themes of Dylan’s lyrics as well as their composition. However, because Dylan is a singer, he can also be placed in a long tradition of oral story-tellers. The techniques of oral story-telling differ from the written story-telling on several levels, most notably, and noticeably, that the oral performer can make use of the sounds of the words in a completely different way than if the same words were

merely written down. When the oral story-teller plays with the sounds of words in a performance, it can have as much relevance for the stories that are being told as the meaning of the words themselves.

Dylan's lyrics often rhyme in an ABAB formation, and often consist of a more steady rhythm than the poetry by Whitman and the Beats. However, more often than not, there are internal rhymes that coincide with the rhythm of his songs, independent of end-rhymes, which come out more clearly when he performs his songs. For instance, in "Hurricane" (*Desire* 1975), the words to one part of the song are:

So they took him to the infirmary
And though this man could hardly see
They told him that he could identify the guilty men

"Hurricane" is a song about the wrongful conviction of the boxer Rubin "Hurricane" Carter. He was famed of shooting three men in a bar, and one of the men who had been shot was asked to identify Carter, though he could hardly see. In the performance of this song, Dylan plays with the sound of the letter 'i' in 'identify' to point out the weak eyes of the man, while simultaneously create a rhyme of the 'i' with the word 'identify' itself. Likewise in the seventh verse, Dylan lengthens the stress of the first vowel of 'murder' to make it rhyme with 'stir,' while still managing to keep the rhyme of 'him' and 'Jim' in the verse:

We want to put his all in stir
We want to pin this triple murder on him
He ain't no Gentleman Jim

The same way of manipulating the words can be found in DiFranco's performances of her songs and poems. For instance, in 1993 remake of the spoken-word piece "The Slant", originally from *Ani DiFranco* 1990, and further developed in the live version

from *Living In Clip* (1997), DiFranco imitates the sound a hammer makes when she spits the word ‘pounding’ into the microphone.

the sound of them strong
stalking talking about their prey
like the way hammer meets nail
pounding, they say
pounding out the rhythms of attraction

By applying a staccato effect on the words in the couple of next lines, she imitates a sound that can be similar to either drums or gunfire.

like a woman was a drum like a body was a weapon
like there was something more they wanted
than the journey

Another example of how DiFranco manipulates words to enhance their meaning can be found in “Good, Bad, Ugly” (*Imperfectly* 1992), where she creates the visual effect of a neon sign when she sings:

and it's bad
to have eyes like neon signs
flashing
open open open open open open open open
open all the time

Both these examples show how DiFranco carries forward the inheritance from an oral tradition of story-telling, which the Beats used to perform their poetry, and which Dylan also applied in his songs.

The early Dylan was a part of a generation of countercultures that kept ‘counterculturing,’ that is, whenever his audience thought they had him pegged, he would shift and change shape to become someone else. His actions spoke as loud as his words, and accepting Dylan meant accepting his fluidity: he was more than met the eye and rarely what met the eye for very long. Similar to Whitman, he contradicts

himself because he contains multitudes, and similar to the Beats he applies the experience he has had through living and traveling into his lyrics in a raw, impulsive yet poetic way. In addition, he threw the trickster element – masks of various identities – into the mix, applying imagined selves to expand the understanding of the complexity of his self. In maintaining his individuality and making his individual experience as both a space of catharsis and as a learning ground for his audience, Dylan opened up a space for future generations to do the same.

1. 4. Fellow Worker: Utah Phillips and Ammon Hennacy

*the president assured us
that it was all gonna trickle down
like it'd be raining so much money
that we'd be sad to see the sun
mr. wilczewski's brother
had some business out in denver
so they left town
everybody knows they were the lucky ones
--Ani DiFranco, "Trickle Down" ¹³*

*i will not lie down
on the wrongful groundwork laid
while it's still a radical sound
just to call a spade a spade
--Ani DiFranco, "A Spade" ¹⁴*

Looking back in time in order to describe, analyze and define what has already happened is far easier than to try to describe, analyze and define what is happening at any present moment. The world we know today is becoming more and more globalized; the jungle of civilization has become deeper and darker; and its inhabitants are still trying to find the best way to exist, whether it is on a micro or a

¹³ *Up Up Up Up Up Up* 1999

¹⁴ *Reprieve* 2006

macro scale. On a local macro scale, the Americans are still battling with some of the issues that the previous generations battled with, in addition to the emergence of new ones. The issues we hear about in political campaigns still include human and civil rights, such as gay marriage, abortion and health care, but new issues, such as global warming and terrorism, have also made the agenda. Terrorism has become the Cold War of our age. Globalization has made the world smaller, but has also made it more complex. We now realize that there really is such a thing as a action/reaction-butterfly-effect, not just within a closed society, but on a global scale. Al Gore made that frighteningly clear in his film about global warming, *An Inconvenient Truth*, for which he together with Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2007. On the largest macro scale, the process of creating a better world for all of earth's inhabitants – which one should think would be the ultimate humane goal – is hindered by the disagreement between the world's political and religious leaders on so many levels that individuals who live in democracies are dizzied and disempowered, and those who do not simply do not seem to have relevance. The truths and realities that supposedly exist are distorted by the media and by people who are trying to protect their political and/or religious power, and/or their financial interests. On a micro scale, individuality has become a capitalist commodity. When the capitalist institutions caught on to the diverse demands of the countercultures, it became possible to 'buy your own,' and it is now sold on every street corner, in every mall, and, even more conveniently for those who surf the web, it is available on-line. There is also the intense focus on an individual's abilities, development, realization and pursuit of success – today's version of the pursuit of happiness – which turns the individual into a commodity that can be traded in the work market. The individual is so immersed in the rapid global growth that, as Ani

DiFranco sings: “you are like fish in the water / who don’t know that they are wet,” adding: “but as far as I can tell / the world is not perfect yet” (“Lost Woman Song” *Ani DiFranco* 1990).

This is the world DiFranco exists in and where she is trying to perpetuate her nonconformist/individualist/containing multitudes/traveling/experiencing-and-lives-to-tell-about-it way of living. What she is communicating through her work and the way she chooses to live her life can be understood as a way of reclaiming her identity from the mall, while at the same time appreciating that the mall is there. She seems to communicate a continuous act of nonconformity in hopes of a new kind of conformity - a conformity where the accepted norms and standards of a society becomes inclusive of all the realities and experiences of the vast variety of individuals who exist in a democracy - in addition to the understanding that this variety always will be there, that it should be noted and respected, and above all, in an Whitmanesque tradition: celebrated.

This extended understanding of democracy and celebration of community can be traced back to the anarchistic and pacifistic philosophies of a folk-singer by the name of Bruce Phillips (1935-), also known as U. Utah Phillips. Phillips is a gifted storyteller and monologist who applies clever and witty language to tell his stories, of which he is better known for than his songs. If persons like Emerson, Whitman, Ginsberg and Dylan function as more or less distant inspirations to DiFranco, then Utah Phillips is an individual that has been an up-close inspiration – a teacher. He has worked with Ani DiFranco on two albums, *The Past Didn’t Go Anywhere* (1996) and *Fellow Workers* (1999), and it is possible to markedly detect Phillips’ influence on DiFranco’s work: the themes, concepts and metaphors that Phillips use in the stories reoccur in DiFranco’s later songs and poems. For instance, in Phillips’ story about

‘the crooked profit system,’ he tells of a lecture he had where he tried to teach his students to be resistant rather than passive in dealing with capitalist America. He argued that big corporations would take advantage of them:

... unless you learn to resist, cuz the profit system follows the path of least resistance and following the path of least resistance is what makes the river crooked! (“Natural Resources” *The Past Didn’t Go Anywhere* 1996)

In “Serpentine” (*Evolve* 2003), a poem inspired by the event and aftermath of 9/11 and written parallel with “Self Evident” (*So Much Shouting, So Much Laughter* 2002), DiFranco uses the same metaphor almost to the letter:

we don’t even know we’re slaves
on a corporate plantation
someone say hallelujah!
someone say damnation!
cuz the profit system follows the path of least resistance
and the path of least resistance is what makes the river crooked
makes it serpentine

DiFranco adds to Phillips’ concept the sentiment that the way the profit system works has not changed since the days of the slave-plantations, but what has changed is that with the spread of consumerism, and the growth and centralization of corporate power, we are now all affected and have unwillingly and unwittingly become slaves of this system. Calling this system ‘serpentine’ is saying that it is capable of slithering its way around rules and regulations – the same way water is capable of finding its way around obstacles in the terrain – to find the best places to expand and make profit disregarding of what kind of impact it might make.

The Past Didn’t Go Anywhere consists of stories performed and recorded over the years by Phillips, compiled and set to music by DiFranco. The selection, Phillips commented, were: “just the right stories, the ones I wanted to stick to people if I wasn’t around anymore” (Liner notes 1996). The stories tell of Phillips’ personal

experiences and philosophy, varying from stories about what kind of impact participating in the Korean War in the late 1950s had on him, to stories about how he came to discover and articulate his own version of anarchy – a version inspired by the rebel Ammon Hennacy. Phillips describes Hennacy as “... a Catholic-Anarchist, pacifist, draft-dodger of two world wars, tax-refuser, vegetarian, one-man revolution in America – I think that about covers it” (“Anarchy” 1996). After the Korean War, Phillips spent eight years with Hennacy at Joe Hill House of Hospitality outside Salt Lake City. From this experience, Phillips learned about being a pacifist and an anarchist:

He [Hennacy] said: You were born a white man in the mid-twentieth century industrial America. You came into the world armed to the teeth with an arsenal of weapons. The weapons of privilege: racial privilege, sexual privilege, economic privilege. You wanna be a pacifist, it's not just giving up guns and knives and clubs and fists and angry words, but giving up the weapons of privilege... and going into the world completely disarmed - Try that.

...

[A]narchy is not a noun but an adjective. It describes the tension between moral economy and political authority. Especially in the area of combinations: whether they are going to be voluntary or coercive. The most destructive coercive combinations are arrived at through force. Like Ammon says: Force is the weapon of the weak. (“Anarchy” *The Past Didn't Go Anywhere* 1996)

Despite common belief, anarchy is not merely a state of total chaos and absence of rules, but a state of conscious radical resistance to political authority as a result of an opposing moral economy. It also relates to the basic foundation of democracy in its fullest sense: that it is the people that should be in charge of their own country and that the government should serve the people, not the other way around.

One of the biggest democratic fights the American people has had with the government since the break from Britain was the Labor Union's struggle to ensure safety and happiness for workers at the turn of the 20th century. Phillips tells stories

of this struggle on the second collaboration between Phillips and DiFranco, namely *Fellow Workers*. The album is a recording before a live in-studio audience at Kingsway in New Orleans, Louisiana, which captures Phillips' ability to render stories and interact with his audience. The title, as well as the stories and songs on the album, gives homage to the workers who organized the Labor Unions, who can be credited for the better and safer work conditions that exists in the U.S. today. They include stories about Mary Harris 'Mother' Jones, who the President Theodore Roosevelt insisted was the most dangerous woman of her time (at the humble age of 83!), the suspect relationship between the so-called 'labor sharks' and various foremen around the country, Joe Hill, one of the most important folk-singer of his time, who told the history of the people, and the resistance of the workers and townspeople against Rockefeller's militia. Of the songs, there is "Pie in the Sky," which comments on the religious organizations, such as the Salvation Army (ironically called the Starvation Army), tried to guilt the citizens into giving all their money to them in order to secure themselves a reward and a place in heaven, and "Bread and Roses," about the women who let it be know that earning merely enough money for food was not enough; that they should be able to afford more than that.

The title, *Fellow Workers*, also signifies the need for coming together in general; that we, as social humans, are all workers whose job is to cooperate in a democracy if we are to make things better and safer for ourselves. The most notable story about working together is a story Phillips got from a man by the name of Jack Miller about 'the Everett Massacre.' In Everett, Washington, there was a weaver's strike on, and several 'wobblies' came up there from Seattle on a steam boat called *The Verona*.¹⁵ The sheriff in town had gathered up some deputies who tried to stop them coming off the boat, and when the 'wobblies' were asked who their leader was,

¹⁵"Wobblies" = Members of the Industrial Workers of the World

they answered “We are all leaders here!” The deputies then opened fire and several men were killed, including some of the deputies. The ‘wobblies’ who survived managed to return to Seattle, but were then arrested and put in a new jail, all made of steel. Once in jail, they passed a note from one cell block to the other and agreed that the next day, when the noon whistle blew, they would all start jumping and singing, and by doing so they managed to crack the south wall. The moral of the story, as Phillips quotes Miller, was: “Thus proving everlastingly what a union is. A way to get things done together that you can’t get done alone.”

In the liner notes to the album, Howard Zinn, the author of *A People’s History of the United States*, writes:

The songs in this disk, the stories told in Utah Phillips’ extraordinary style, brings back the history, but even more, the feelings of people struggling together for a better life. Those feelings connect with us today, because all of us live in a society dominated by corporate power, where profit comes before people.

In this situation, we need to join together to defend our humanity, our dignity as individuals. We need to remind everyone of what the Declaration of Independence promised, that all human beings, here and everywhere in the world, have an equal right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. And we will use our energy, our talent, to achieve those aims, with all the good feeling that people have always had when they worked together for justice. (Howard Zinn. Liner notes in *Fellow Workers*)

In “Anarchy” Phillips quotes Hennacy who told him: “[y]ou know you love the country. You just can’t stand the government. Get it straight.” Then Hennacy quoted Mark Twain to him: “Loyalty to the country always. Loyalty to the government when it deserves it.” This distinction is an important one, and one that is systematically and especially blurred whenever the U.S. enters into a new war. If anyone dares to speak against the government it is seen as an attack on the country itself. During the Cold War, the act of speaking against the government was equal to being a communist, and today, if you do not ‘support the troops,’ you might very well be a terrorist. DiFranco

comments on this wrongful equation of the latter in “Alla This,” where she sings: “and i can’t support the troops / cuz every every last one of them is being duped” (*Hamburg Germany 10.18.07 2007*). This comment points to the aforementioned ‘willful ignorance,’ where the average Joe or Jane would rather accept what is being told to them rather than make the effort to connect the dots for him- or herself, when in fact the Founding Fathers encouraged criticism of any oppressive government.

In addition to being a musician, part of DiFranco’s job is raising awareness. For instance, before the Presidential election in 2004, she was part of the VoteDammit tour, which informed people of the history of democracy and how to go about registering to vote. It acted as an encouragement for people to partake in the election, as a reminder that their votes act as their voices in the democracy. A quick peek at her website shows that she recommends a variety of alternative information sites. The “Action” section lists independent and alternative media sites, such as “Democracy Now!”, “Alternet” and the feminist “MsMagazine”; human rights and anti-war sites, such as “Southern Center for Human Rights” and “Not In Our Name”; pro-choice sites, such as “NARAL Pro-Choice America”; and sites for political awareness and voting, such as “MoveOn” and “DrivingVotes.”

Many of DiFranco’s songs include political thoughts; however, calling the lyrics purely political is a simplification, as, in DiFranco’s opinion, the line between political and personal is a blurry one. In the interview at Flynn Theatre, Ani DiFranco explains what she means by the idea that art and activism are both “a life longlight / shining through a swinging prism” (“The Interview” *Educated Guess 2004*):

Um, well, I guess I was just commenting on the age-old, I think somewhat, artificial distinction between the personal and the political. People ask me about “the two” all the time and I just don’t really ... I’ve never felt a line between them, you know. I think that there are many factors of our personal life that have great political significance, especially as a woman, that is so inherently apparent, and I think that ... you know ... Um, I guess the reason

that I write about “politics”, big P politics, is coz I take it personally, it’s coz it’s personal stuff too. Like, you know, if my government is out perpetrating violence around the world, and it’s my responsibility, you know, and they’re supposedly representing me, well ... that’s ... I take that pretty personally ... myself.

It seems that for DiFranco, thinking in political terms and being a political activist comes as natural to her as any other thought or action as a human being. With this she displays that she is conscious of being part of a democracy as well as being a part of the human race. The idea that the personal and the political are intertwined can be included in DiFranco’s version of an extended democracy in that democracy must occur on the social level as well as on the political one.

Not parts of this continuum but also relevant to the idea extended democracy and acts of nonconformity are the thoughts and issues concerning feminism and sexuality, which DiFranco, being a woman, a feminist and with a seemingly fluid sexuality, have dealt with throughout her life and career. These thoughts and issues and how they emerge in her lyrics are the topics of the following chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

Feminism and Sexuality: The Third Wave and Bisexual Consciousness

*the answer is in the intention
that lies behind the question
put that on your standardized multiple choice
i mean, how's this supposed to look to me?
but half of divinity
out there trying to make harmony
with only one voice
--Ani DiFranco, "A Spade"¹⁶*

When listening to DiFranco's songs, it soon becomes apparent that feminism and issues concerning her sexuality are important to her. Many of her songs discuss feminism either explicitly or implicitly: it seems that it is important for her to discuss these issues to try to make sense of the struggles on both a small and a large scale – both in her personal life and her relationships, and in the American society.

DiFranco's lyrics tell stories from an individual perspective, where it is possible to identify a personal form of feminism and a personal form of sexual politics. Within the third wave of feminism, where DiFranco can be placed, it is the sharing of individual experiences that is important rather than trying to describe a generalized, 'true' female experience. This way of regarding each experience as equally valuable and true can be said to be more democratic than the prescriptive feminist writing by the preceding two waves of feminism. Sharing individual stories can also be said to help counter some of the ruling metanarratives in the American society that have been inherently patriarchal. In addition, it seems that DiFranco has felt the need to comment on what seems to be a confused topic: her undeterminable sexuality. Ever since her first album, she has told stories about her relationships with both men and

¹⁶ *Relieve* 2006

women, which places her in the category of 'bisexual,' a rather ignored category in the struggles of the umbrella group Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender (LGBT). There is also an important element to this category which seems to have been ignored until recently, pointed out by Jennifer Baumgardner in her most recent book, *Look Both Ways* (2007), namely that of the 'bisexual consciousness.' This chapter focuses on these topics and explores how ideas of feminism and DiFranco's experience of bisexuality have shaped her art, and how these topics can be further linked to her extended idea of democracy.

2. 1. *The Third Wave*

*feminism ain't about equality
it's about reprieve*
---Ani DiFranco, "Reprieve" ¹⁷

people, we are standing at ground zero of the feminist revolution!
---Ani DiFranco, "Grand Canyon" ¹⁸

Feminism is something individual to each feminist.
---Jennifer Baumgardner. ¹⁹

Feminism today has reached its third wave, preceded by what are considered to be the first and second waves: the suffragettes during the turn of the 19th - 20th century, and the 1970s equal-rights movement. Though there is some debate, the beginning of feminism's third wave can be dated to 1992, when Rebecca Walker published the article "Becoming Third Wave" in *Ms Magazine* as a response to the outcome of the case of Anita Hill versus Clarence Thomas in 1991. Hill claimed that she had been

¹⁷ *Reprieve* 2006

¹⁸ *Educated Guess* 2004

¹⁹ In *Metro Santa Cruz* 2000

sexually harassed by Clarence Thomas while she was his assistant a decade earlier. Thomas won in the Senate, and the debate that followed brought attention to the issue of ongoing presence of sexual harassment in the workplace and consequently helped to raise awareness of other feminist issues that many people thought had been resolved by the second wave. However, the roots of the third wave stretches back to the 1980s, when women of color, such as bell hooks, Gloria Anzaldua and Audre Lorde, called for a new subjectivity in the feminist voice, since then women of various backgrounds have come forward to tell their individual subjective stories.

The third wave seems largely to consist of women who have grown up with feminism already present in their lives, possibly with feminist mothers or relations. Within academia, they have had access to feminist issues through women's studies, and in addition, they have had access to other areas of study, such as Marxist theory, postcolonialism, postmodernism, communication studies and popular culture studies, as well as an increasing number of interdisciplinary studies that transfer and combine thoughts and theories between the various areas of study. Outside academia, third wavers are equally present within popular culture forms, and, through cultural engagement as political activism help to raise feminist consciousness and awareness among the people. In fact, to be able to inspire change, it is equally important, if not more so, that awareness occurs in the cultural realm and not merely within academic study. Academia is to some degree, an isolated area, and it is not until it reaches 'the masses' that it can make its most prevalent impact.

Within feminism there are moreover several directions and it has become common to speak of feminisms rather than regarding them as one single theory. The various directions, outlines of their specific characteristics, similarities and differences, are too numerous to list here, however, there is a focus among third wave

feminists on the individual experience and a notion that feminism is something individual to each feminist. Some the most dominant traits can be identified within the third wave as a whole, however, and they can be found in the work of DiFranco.

In very simplistic terms, feminism is the belief that women are as valuable as men and should be treated as such. In today's Western society, this belief has more or less become the norm, and to suggest otherwise is usually regarded sexist. Despite this, most women and men for various reasons do not refer to themselves as feminists. In the spoken-word piece, "Grand Canyon", Ani DiFranco asks: "why can't all decent men and women call themselves feminists / out of respect / for those who fought for this," adding: "i mean, look around / we have this" (*Educated Guess* 2004). The reasons for why most women and men do not call themselves feminists are many, but one may be that most people believe that what the first and second wave of feminists fought for has already been achieved. Evidence of the contrary, such as the fact that women in general are still earning less than men or the continuous reports of sexual harassments and rapes, seem to be downplayed or go more or less unnoticed. Another reason may be that feminism tends to be associated with the radical feminists of the 70s, who often are remembered as caricatures: women who burned their bras, stopped shaving their legs and armpits, hated men and were mostly lesbians. The extreme nature of some radicals has the potential to scare people away, thus having their messages overshadowed by their extremity. A third reason may be that, as there are so many various forms of feminisms, some people might not be comfortable with calling themselves feminists because they are not quite sure of what it entails. Calling oneself a feminist seems to carry the responsibility of knowing the history of feminism, and also one's own opinion on both traditional and contemporary feminist issues. On the flip-side, many people today, both men and women, hold feminist values without

recognizing them as such because these values have become accepted as standard values in society. This shows the degree to which some of the work of previous feminist movements has succeeded, much in the same way the issues of other movements, such as civil rights, now are considered resolved. Yet, similar to civil rights issues, there are many issues that are still unresolved and that still require attention.

Third wave feminists deal with a variety of issues, among them race, class, gender, sexuality, reproductive rights, global/foreign politics, women in the workplace, sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape, motherhood, women in politics, women and the intellect, the media and media portrayal, and reclaiming derogatory terms. In short, what third wavers deal with are all the mechanisms that seek to control, limit and oppress women.²⁰

Where the perspectives of the first and second wave feminists mainly came from white, middle-class women of the western society, the stories and the perspectives of the third wavers come from women from a wider specter: from various countries, classes, races, sexual and gender identities, and various religions. When women from these various positions, either geographical or social, speak out their stories also reveal newer forms of criticisms. Gender studies, postcolonialism, postmodernism, and communication studies have expanded the realm of feminism, and one woman's story from one position may shed light on, give strength to, and provide other women with the language to articulate their situation of limitation and/or oppression.

²⁰ It is worth pointing out that in extension, some of the issues that are discussed among feminists, especially those of race and class, overlap with issues that are discussed by other groups in society. These groups may concern themselves with issues of general human oppression in society where feminist issues are a natural part, which goes to show how some feminist issues are not merely feminist issues but are parts of a much larger debate concerning individual human freedom and rights.

When Ani DiFranco shares her stories she does so in the cultural realm, outside academia. A large number of her stories, her lived experiences and thoughts which she communicates through the songs on her albums and through her performances, concern either feminism, individualism, or a combination of the two, and function as feminist activism in the cultural realm. The knowledge, insights, and conclusions she arrives at and communicates are rooted in self-discovery and her own particular experiences rather than as part of any particular academic philosophical discussion. In addition, they are often descriptive in order to help raise awareness rather than prescribing one particular form of feminism:

oh to grow up gagged and blindfolded
a man's world in your little girl's head
the voice of the great mother drowned out
in the constant honking
haunting the car crash up ahead
oh to grow up hypnotized
and try to shake yourself awake
cuz you can sense what has been lost
cuz you can sense what is at stake
("Reprieve" *Reprieve*. 2006)

What seems to be DiFranco's urge for discovering 'what has been lost' and 'what is at stake' seems to have come before any thought of feminism, but has become a decisive part of her particular version of feminism. She seems, however, to very early be aware of the importance of sharing stories, and one of the songs from her first album, the eponymous *Ani DiFranco* (1990), is in fact called "The Story." In the third verse, she sings:

my father, he told me the story
and it was true
for his time
but now the story's different
maybe i should tell him mine
all the girls line up here
all the boys on the other side
i see your ranks are advancing

i see mine are left behind

Maybe it is time for her to tell her own story, as an individual, to mark a shift of ‘the times,’ suggesting that it is time to tell the story of someone who, unlike her father, is a woman. She is observing that there is a battle between the sexes where the male army is well organized and steadily advancing, while the female side seems to be standing still. DiFranco seems to express that she feels that she is the only one fighting on the female side, a sentiment that is also echoed in “Willing to Fight.”

i was a long time coming
i'll be a long time gone
you've got your whole life to do something
and that's not very long
so why don't you give me a call
when you're willing to fight
(*Puddle Dive* 1993)

In DiFranco’s earlier albums, she consequently feels quite alone in her feminist battle, and in “Face Up and Sing” (*Out of Range* 1994) she is reaching out to her audience with a humorous yet somewhat annoyed air:

some chick says
thank you for saying all the things i never do
i say
the thanks i get is to take all the shit for you
it's nice that you listen
it'd be nicer if you joined in
as long as you play their game girl
you're never going to win
...
i need backup
i need company
i need to be inspired

This is an appeal to her female audience to take part in criticizing whatever they experience as limiting and oppressive, to take control of their own situations, to speak up – indeed, ‘face up and sing’ – and not be afraid of what will happen if they do so.

To reveal one's stories may be difficult, especially when these stories are critical or oppositional of the current social and political climate in a society. In DiFranco's case, the society she speaks from and in is the American society, which, despite its efforts to promote equality and freedom, has from its very beginning predominately been shaped and controlled by white middleclass males, resulting in social structures and moral evaluations being inherently patriarchal. DiFranco makes it very clear that in order to feel that she is making an impact and to give her the strength to go on, it is important that other women partake in continuing to create awareness; that they are out there telling their stories as well. This aligns with DiFranco's idea of an extended democracy: that in order for social structures and moral evaluations in a society to change to suit its inhabitants it is important that they use their voices as votes; their stories as ballots. For third wave feminists it is important that stories from every geographical and social position are heard, not only those from a few selected positions, which often were the case in the first and second waves, and which made it less 'democratic' among women.

DiFranco shares her stories in a similar way to how the previously mentioned Utah Phillips shares his stories. Both share them to raise awareness: in Phillips' case, his stories tell among other things of the importance of remembering how the labor unions applied the founding ideas of democracy to make changes in the American society and that this is still a relevant tool today. DiFranco stories often seem to be rooted in the idea of an extended democracy and they tell of her own situation and issues that have come to be important to her, as an individual, a woman and as part of the American society. In an extended democracy the social aspect of a society is as important as the political aspect, and sharing these stories may help raise awareness around what the social aspect of an American democracy could be. The difference

between the two is that Phillips often shares stories that have been told to him by others in addition to his own experiences while DiFranco usually applies her own personal experiences.

Both approaches can be conceived of as tools that counter what Jean-Francois Lyotard calls ‘grands récits,’ which can be translated as ‘grand narratives’ or, perhaps more illustratively, ‘metanarratives.’²¹ Lyotard applies this concept in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, when defining the term ‘modern’:

...any science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse ... making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative, such as the dialectics of the Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth. (1984 [1979] xxiii)

In the book Lyotard discusses how the condition of knowledge has changed in the most highly developed societies since the onset of what he identifies as the postmodern age. He does so in the context of what he calls ‘the crisis of narratives’ and defines the postmodern as “incredulity toward metanarratives” (xxiv). John Storey defines metanarratives slightly differently, as “the overarching and totalizing frameworks which seek to tell universalist stories: Marxism, liberalism, Christianity, for example” (2001 150). He explains:

According to Lyotard, metanarratives operate through inclusion and exclusion, as homogenizing forces, marshalling heterogeneity into ordered realms; silencing and excluding other discourses, other voices in the name of universal principles and general goals. Postmodernism is said to signal the collapse of all universalist metanarratives with their privileged truth to tell, and to witness instead the increasing sound of a plurality of voices from the margins, with their insistence on difference, on cultural diversity, and the claim of heterogeneity over homogeneity. (150)

This description of metanarratives can be compared to Michel Foucault’s concept of ‘panoptic discourse,’ as discussed by Bryan Reynolds and Joseph Fitzpatrick in an

²¹ ‘meta-’ = occurring or situated behind or after (sense 3, *Collins English Dictionary* 2003).

article entitled “The Transversality of Michel de Certeau: Foucault’s Panoptic Discourse and the Cartographic Impulse” (1999).

‘Panopticism’ is a concept Foucault adapted from the omniscient perspective of the Panopticon, an ‘all-seeing’ structure at the center of a round model prison proposed by Utilitarian philosopher and theorist Jeremy Bentham in 1787. Foucault explains that:

[t]he Panopticon is a machine for dissociation the see/being seen dyad: in the peripheric ring one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without being seen.
(<http://www.cartome.org/panopticon1.htm>).

Certeau applies this discourse in an analogous discussion of the creation of a universal ‘utopian city’ by cartographic and panoptic procedures. In this city, the panoptic view from the top of a tall building provides an ‘all-seeing’ perspective and organizes the city thereafter. The panopticism of the ‘utopian city’ provides a totalizing perception that creates its own space where rational organization represses “all physical, mental and political pollution that would compromise it” (69). It also creates a synchronic system which omits traditions and practices that do not fit in and it creates “a universal and anonymous subject which is the city itself” (69-71).

Postmodernist critique of previous theories and methods provides tools of which to dismantle dominating panoptic metanarratives. Very briefly, postmodernists generally propose that we have entered into a new age where we become aware of our own illusions - which the metanarratives provide - and consequently feel disillusioned, alienated, experience the human existence as meaningless, and so on. Also, postmodern critical schools include deconstruction, which ascertains the ‘undecidability’ of texts, essentially making it impossible to find one ‘true’ meaning of a text. These concepts, as much as they may rock the boat of or overthrow

oppressive and limitative metanarratives, may render a sense of hopelessness in attempting to communicate and search for meaning. However, Lyotard points out that even if “[m]ost people have lost the nostalgia for the lost narrative” since modernism, “[i]t in no way follows that they are reduced to barbarity. What saves them from it is their knowledge that legitimation can only spring from their own linguistic practices and communication interaction” (41). It is still possible to make sense of things when applying “[t]he little narrative, [petit récit]” which “remains the quintessential form of imaginative invention” (60). He explains that:

A self does not amount to much, but no self is an island; each exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever before. Young or old, man or woman, rich or poor, a person is always located at “nodal points” of specific communication circuits, however tiny these may be. ... No one, not even the least privileged among us, is ever entirely powerless over the messages that traverse and position himself at the post of sender, addressee, or referent. (15)

For feminist critics it is interesting to investigate these metanarratives, for instance the hegemony of the patriarchal structure, to look at the ‘truths’ it has arrived at. A postmodernist attitude towards such a metanarrative creates a space for others than the so-called ‘middle-aged Western white males’ who, historically, have had the privilege of constructing these metanarratives. As Angela McRobbie claims:

...postmodernism has enfranchised a new body of intellectuals: ‘the coming into being of those whose voices were historically drowned out by the (modernist) metanarratives of mastery, which were in turn both patriarchal and imperialist.’ (In Storey, 151)

To rid the world of all its current metanarratives is an impossible task, since some form of framework is necessary in order to have a structured society and to abandon all metanarratives before new and possibly better frameworks are established might be as dangerous as attempting to repair a boat by completely taking it apart while it is

still on water. It is, however, possible to realize and keep in mind that current metanarratives only function as working theories, that their parameters are only provisional, so that they cannot provide absolute, unchanging truths. Barbara Creed suggests that:

Perhaps Lyotard is 'correct' to recommend at least the provisional abandonment of all 'Truths' in favor of the short narratives which the master discourses have attempted to suppress in order to validate their own positions. (1998 364)

The act of listening to all these voices, all the 'short narratives,' that come out of the space opened up by postmodernism - and perhaps especially the voices that do not conform to a current metanarrative - points back to DiFranco's idea of an extended democracy. This extended version would encompass variety and diversity, including voices that have previously been drowned out, and would make for a more balanced society and closer to a realization of an extended democracy. The next part of this chapter will look at how the 'short narratives' that DiFranco provides by sharing stories of sexual harassment and violence countermand the metanarrative that feminism has achieved what it set out to do.

2. 2. The Individual Experience: DiFranco's Stories

*don't tell me what they did to you
as though you had no choice
tell me isn't that your picture
isn't that your voice
if you don't live what you sing about
your mirror is gonna find out*
-- Ani DiFranco, "Million You Never Made"²²

there are some things that you can't know

²² *Not a Pretty Girl* 1995

*unless you've been there
but oh how far we could go
if we started to share*
-- Ani DiFranco, "Work Your Way Out"²³

True to the third wave technique of consciousness-raising, Ani DiFranco's apply her lyrics as a tool to express examples of individual female experiences. She displays both the consciousness of being an individual human with an urge for self-preservation through the sharing of experiences, and, in order to be true to her individual self, makes clear that her experiences are inherently female. In "Hour Follows Hour" she sings: "cuz i have had something to prove / as long as i know there's been something that needs improvement / and you know that every time i move / i make a woman's movement" (*Not a Pretty Girl* 1995). In "Looking for the Holes" she is commenting on the importance of a pro-active engagement in society: to 'look for the holes,' ask questions about them and not simply ignore them. In an attempt to explain the perspective from where she speaks, she sings:

oh, do your politics fit
between the headlines
are they written in newsprint
are they distant
mine are crossing an empty parking lot
they are a woman walking home
at night alone
they are six string that sing
and wood that hums against my hipbone
(*Not So Soft* 1991)

Here we find that she expresses an emotion inherent to women, namely the unease a woman feels being alone in an empty parking lot at night; the fear that (almost) only a woman can have of becoming the victim of sexual assault or rape. The feeling is as familiar and as close to her as when she plays her guitar and can feel the sound of it in her bones. Her personal politics are thus bound to be marked by the fact that she is

²³ Ani DiFranco 1990

defined and categorized in a specific gender group by society, in a similar way that the politics of a person of color or a person with a disability are bound to be marked by their social definitions and categorizations. Her politics are also marked by how she socially defines herself.

Gender theorists speak of ‘embodied discourses’ to explain the frame of individual communication. The term derives from Michel Foucault, who spoke of a “simultaneous process of subjectification and embodiment” in criticizing Marxist and psychoanalysis. In their book on gender communication, Charlotte Kroløkke and Anne Scott Sørensen explain how Foucault argues that:

...our current ideas, institutions, and behavior patterns are to be understood as discursive regimes. These regimes structure our existence as a series of historically and culturally situated interpretations of what is to be human, which we simultaneously live and become by choosing and inhabiting the embedded subjective positions. (2006 34)

For their analyses, they choose to draw on the performance turn theory and third wave feminist transversal politics to arrive at what they call ‘transversal discourse analysis’ (TDA). The theory of performance turn in their discussion is built on performance theory, cyborg theory and transgender theory.²⁴ They explain how performativity shows “gender/sex as a complex set of discursive practices ... that produce the effect that they are said to name” (157). Kroløkke and Sørensen further explain that:

[t]he performance turn marks a move away from thinking and acting in terms of systems, structures, fixed power relations, and thereby also ‘suppression’ – toward highlighting the complexities, contingencies, and challenges of power and diverse means and goals of agency. ... [t]he performance turn is connected to a broader intellectual transformation. (21)

Focusing on and turning the performativity of sex/gender highlights embodied discourses that frames individual thinking and behavior. Concrete examples of

²⁴ Concepts applied by Judith Butler, Donna Haraway and Judith Halberstam respectively.

'embodied discourses' can be found in Anna Mehta and Liz Bondi's article "Embodied Discourse; on gender and fear of violence" (1999), where they apply the concept to discuss how men and women speak when describing their experiences and actions in dealing with violence and fear. They do so consciously or unconsciously, or perhaps semi-consciously, according to their gendered identities.

Their article is an analysis of how a sample of male and female students at the University of Edinburgh experience physical and sexual violence in urban space. They emphasize that although gender is generally thought of as being the product of social construction "it is possible to think about gender identity as both constructed and lived" (68). A person's gender identity is thus both a product of a general social construction as well as a product of their own experiences. They furthermore suggest that it is possible "to interpret gender identity as neither fixed within existing systems of meaning nor freely chosen" and "to think of actors as agents capable of both resistance and compliance" (68). Mehta and Bondi find that the gender identities of the respondents in their study is reveal "in their accounts of their experiences of physical and sexual danger" as well as "the strategies they employ to guard their safety" (67). Both their language and their actions "can [thus] be understood in terms of the discursive production and reproduction of gendered identities" (67).

Although Mehta and Bondi's empirical study was relatively small, they found that the men and women who responded to the questionnaire answered according to their designated gender groups. They suggest that:

... women's fear of violence and especially sexual violence, can be understood as embodied discourse forged at least in part by experiences (or the experience of women close to them) of intimidating and/or violent sexual behaviour, as well as experiences of themselves as physically vulnerable. (78)

This study serves as an example of how individuals embody discourses based on the

discursive regimes that structure individual's existence and where discourse becomes both subjective and material. Mehta and Bondi's article show how their respondents maintain their gendered roles in society by performing according to their designated gender groups. Thus, their performativity is both a result and a comment on the discursive regimes that surround them.

Transversal politics, the second concept Kroløkke and Sørensen derive their analyses from, is a term applied by Nira Yuval-Davis in *Gender and Nation* (1997) which is based on the possibility of dialogue between women across national, ethnic, and religious boundaries. Kroløkke and Sørensen explain that:

[w]hat defines transversal politics is not only the fact that differences in nationality, ethnicity, or religion - and hence in agenda - are recognized but also that a commitment to listen and participate in a dialogue is required. Yuval-Davis has qualified these methods as 'pivotal,' because they encourage participants to participate in a process of 'rooting' and 'shifting' and thus to explore different positions, engage in different negotiations, and eventually join different alliances. (20)

Yuval-Davis calls this form of dialogue 'transversalism,' a term that will be discussed further in connection with location and third space in the succeeding chapter.

In describing her personal experiences of sexual harassment, sexual abuse and rape, DiFranco is able to raise consciousness and potentially educate her audience. Such references are especially visible in the songs from her earlier albums. The songs "The Story", "Talk To Me Now" and the spoken-word piece "The Slant" from her eponymous album from 1990 describes how she "in a man's world / [is] a woman by birth" and that "in this city / self-preservation / is a full time occupation" ("Talk To Me Now"). In "The Story" she describes experiencing the predatory eyes of men passing on the street, stating that "this street is not a market / and i am not a commodity." Furthermore, she explains that "there are some places that i can't go / as a woman i can't go there / as a person i don't care / i don't go for the hey baby what's

your name.” She makes it clear that these types of advances are not the result of the way she behaves, it is because of the simple fact that she is a woman - as she sings: “when i’m approached in a dark alley / i don’t lift my skirt” (“Talk to Me Now”). The unease she feels when in the presence of a group of men is further explained as:

the sound of them strong
stalking talking about their prey
like the way hammer meets nail
pounding, they say
pounding out the rhythms of attraction
like a woman was a drum like a body was a weapon
like there was something more they wanted
than the journey
like it was owed to them
steel toed they walk
i’m wondering why this fear of men
 (“The Slant” *Ani DiFranco* 1990)

The men’s behavior connotes some sort of an animalistic form of behavior – hungry, desperate, primal, and intimidating. A woman here is not simply an object, robbed of her person and worth, but a prey that can be hunted down and ‘slain’ to satisfy the pack’s hunger. “[W]hy this fear of men” DiFranco wonders, not without irony: it really is no wonder she is afraid of men, but at the same time they do not really scare her at all, because she can see right through them. The passage also contains a genuine contemplation of what it really is that has made men so scary to her, and by extension, to all women. For herself, she has had plenty of learning experiences that might explain this.

“Hide And Seek,” a song that only appears on the live album *Living In Clip* from 1997, describes incidents that seem to have occurred during DiFranco’s adolescent years:

strange men would stop their cars at the curb
say hey sweetheart come here
and i’d go up to their window they’d have their dick out in their hand
and a sick little sneer

...
they say what would you do for a quarter
come on we don't have much time
and i'd think a minute and i'd say
ok, give me the quarter first, fine
...
i remember my first trip alone on a greyhound bus
a man would put his hands on me as soon as night fell
and i remember when i was leaving how excited i was
and i remember when i arrived i didn't feel so well
("Hide And Seek" *Living In Clip* 1997)

In "Letter to a John" she describes another incident that can be added to her list of 'learning experiences': "i was eleven years old / he was as old as my dad / and he took something from me / i didn't even know that i had" (*Out Of Range* 1994). Such experiences are very likely to leave an emotional scar and might explain her often sarcastic tone in descriptions of harassment or abuse. In "Talk to Me Now" (*Ani DiFranco* 1990), she sings:

self-preservation
is a full time occupation
i'm determined
to survive on these shores

Sarcasm can be a way of self-preservation, a tool with which to deal with the scars, and using irony in describing these experiences might be a way of giving herself the strength to share stories of experiences that might otherwise be difficult to speak of. It is also a tool to open up spaces for empowerment, as Kroløkke and Sørensen explains: "Mimicry, irony, and parody now serve to open up spaces for feminist empowerment ... in which women can subvert dominant culture and open up to other ways of acting and thinking" (158). For instance, in "Gratitude" from *Not So Soft* (1991), DiFranco describes an experience she had in London while having to sleep in the same room as a man. On the official bootleg *Carnegie Hall 4.6.02* (2006) she explains how she had lucked out and found a room that she had been offered to sublet from a man who was

going away. The only problem was that he would be staying in the room for two more days (“Anybody female at this point has translated that into two more nights” *Ibid.*).

DiFranco describes the incident as follows:

we can sleep here like brother and sister,
you said
but you changed the rules
in an hour or two
and i don't know what you
and your sisters do
but please don't
please stop
this is not my obligation
what does my body have to do
with my gratitude?
look at you
little white lying
for the purpose of justifying
what you're trying to do
i know that you feel my resistance
i know that you heard what i said
otherwise you wouldn't need the excuse
(*Not So Soft* 1991)

As the situation changes, she becomes less human and more of an object: her qualities as a woman become those of a commodity which can be exchanged. In describing a concrete situation, such as this one, DiFranco is not groundlessly and generally labeling men abusers. She rather creates a valid argument for calling this particular man one, thus arguing for the fact that they exist. Adding the humorous but sharp “i don't know what you and your sisters do” to the description works as an empowerment in a situation where she as a woman is presumed to be the weaker sex. The statement that “this is not my obligation” further empowers her by placing herself as the educator. Describing a situation where she has had to say ‘no,’ the act itself of saying ‘no,’ and then sharing the experience with the audience are acts of removing women from the role of silent objects to becoming audible subjects that can be sympathized or empathized with – they are acts of placing women as equals to men in

relationships as well as in society. DiFranco describes the incident of abuse with the strength and the language of a feminist, seemingly adding it to her list of learning experiences to be remembered and shared. More generally, it is a small narrative that pierces a hole in the metanarrative of social hierarchy where men rank higher than women.

By providing small narratives that counter the metanarratives, DiFranco shifts the focus. It is not that men are the villains; it is that they have been molded into villains by the metanarratives of society. In “A Letter to a John,” DiFranco sings: “women learn to be women / and men learn to be men” (*Out Of Range* 1994). Implied here is the thought that it is not the male sex that oppresses women, but the social structure of our society, where both men and women are placed in categories with adherent and limiting roles of masculinity and femininity. In describing situations where she has been oppressed, harassed, or abused, DiFranco is not simply placing blame on the other sex, but on the underlying structure. This is an important distinction which some earlier feminists as well as some critics of feminism have failed to make, and crucial for the ongoing process of creating a better society.

In “Hour Follows Hour” DiFranco describes a difficult relationship between herself and another person - presumably a male - which can be paralleled with the relationship between men and women in general:

hour follows hour
like water follows water
everything is governed by the rule
of one thing leads to another
you can't really place blame
cuz blame is much too messy
some was bound to get on you
while you were trying to put it on me
and don't fool yourself
into thinking things are simple
nobody's lying still the stories don't line up
(*Not a Pretty Girl* 1995)

These lines points to the difficulty of determining ‘truth’ when dealing with human interaction. Individuals speak and act from their own convictions and one individual’s conceptions and perspectives are ultimately different from another’s, which results in their ‘stories’ not lining up and furthermore makes blame very difficult to place. Instead of trying to determine who is ‘right’ and who is ‘wrong,’ the solution is rather to take responsibility for our own actions, accept that we have different ‘stories,’ compare these ‘stories’ with one another - these ‘small narratives’ that surround us - and then discuss them:

we just call it like we see it
call it out as loud as we can
and then afterwards we call it all water over the dam
maybe the moral higher ground
ain't as high as it seems
maybe we are both good people
done some bad things

Underneath, it is possible to sense a wish that women and men should not be afraid of each other, but should try to get to know each other and work together to make a better society. When DiFranco sings: “nobody’s lying still the stories don’t line up,” it is with the understanding that we are all different and that we experience things differently, thus have different narratives. No one experience is more important or more real than the other, but must be added to the collective human experience. For most of our Western history, however, this has not been the case. In “Ani DiFranco and Sekou Sundiata In Conversation” in *Verses* (2007) she explains:

When I look at things like peace and justice in this world, naturally, it is my womanhood that looks. And I see patriarchy at the root of social injustice and war. Patriarchy, an undisputed fact of human society, is inherently imbalanced, and nature favors balance. I believe the shift in consciousness that is a prerequisite to peace is the very one that will occur through the empowerment and participation of women in society. When we will finally incorporate ideas like personal freedom and autonomy, with the

understanding that no one exists except in relation to others (sic). This interplay between masculine and feminine wisdom, in the world around me and within myself, is at the core of my writer's voice, my life experience, and my political ideals. (93)

In Ani DiFranco's feminism, the patriarchal system is the real villain, placing one sex above the other and reducing the importance of the female. It is that we learn our designated roles and are made to believe that they are true. As a woman she is able to see the harm patriarchy has done and is continuing to do to our society from the perspective of an oppressed. To move beyond this realization is not to forgive and forget, but to move on with the knowledge we have and to use that knowledge to make a better society because as we "try and keep our eye on the big picture / the picture keeps getting bigger" ("Hour Follows Hour" *Not a Pretty Girl* 1995). May we note that in the quote above DiFranco identifies both masculine and feminine wisdom within herself - that even though her biological sex is that of a 'woman,' she is in possession of gender characteristics that are adherent to both of the dichotomous genders groups. In doing so, she blurs the meaning of these adherents. In the spoken-word piece "A Spade" from *Reprieve*, she asks: "how's this supposed to look to me? / but half of divinity / out there trying to make harmony / with only one voice." It takes in other words the voices of both groups to make harmony, because if one is silenced or choose not to take part, all we have is a solo act.

This type of feminism, where through the act of telling stories aims to dismantle hierarchies, to make space for individual differences, and to make a harmony of different but equally valuable individual voices, rests on an inherently democratic notion. However, in order to be able to accept individual voices as equally valuable it is important to allow oneself to be open and try to understand these individual voices. Baumgardner argues for the importance of what she calls a 'bisexual consciousness' and that 'looking both ways' can have a bridging effect in

the gap between men and women, queers and straights - politically as well as socially - which would raise consciousness and acceptance of individual voices in a society. It is important here to point out the distinction of bisexuality, the sexual orientation of a person who is physically and emotionally attracted to persons of both sexes, and bisexual consciousness, which describes the psychological state a person acquires when experiencing both sides of the divide. DiFranco is a person who has looked both ways and can speak first hand with a bisexual consciousness.

2. 3. The Bisexual Consciousness

*guess there's something wrong with me
guess i don't fit in
no one wants to touch it
no one knows where to begin
i've more than one membership
to more than one club
and i owe my life to the people that i love
---Ani DiFranco "In Or Out" ²⁵*

*Because there is no single queer or straight experience, we have no choice but to exploit our individual strengths and stories for the betterment of gay rights and feminism. Bisexual women have a particular role in this struggle.
---Jennifer Baumgardner ²⁶*

Baumgardner argues that it is the LGBT (Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender/sexual, also GLBT) movement that is changing the world of gender thinking today, not feminism²⁷. The reason is, as mentioned initially in this chapter, that feminism has become so embedded in our culture and legal system that it in many ways is less visible (35). Very briefly, the roots of the LGBT movement stretches back to the

²⁵ *Imperfectly* 1992

²⁶ *Look Both Ways* 2007 221

²⁷ LGBT/GLBT are the most common acronyms for the movement which sometimes extended to include other sex/gender preferences and identifications that are outside the norm, such as Q for 'queer' or 'questioning,' I for 'intersexed,' U for 'unsure,' P for 'pansexual' or 'polyamorous,' and so on.

sexual revolution of the 1960s when the various groups began to define and give names to their sex/gender preferences and identities, but it was not until the 1990s that the various groups began gaining equal respect within the movement and outside it. The movement deals with many of the issues that the third wave of feminism which might lead people to view it as a part of the third wave. However, while LGBT mainly deals with the acceptance of sex/gender preferences and identities, the third wave deal with a wider range of issues. They do overlap in emphasizing diversity and equal difference.

Of the four identities in the LGBT umbrella group, the least conspicuous one is perhaps the bisexual. This group still mostly goes under the clinically sounding term 'bisexual' and does not have its own term such as the 'gay', 'lesbian' or 'straight'. According to Baumgardner, the other words that have been attributed to bisexuals have generally been negative.²⁸

It might be useful to mention that 'queer' sometimes is applied by people who do not identify themselves with terms offered by the mainstream rhetoric.²⁹ Some people who could be placed in the category of 'bisexual' find the term too limiting and that it connotes to an inherently either-or way of thinking, and dismiss 'bisexual' completely. Yet, it might be possible to argue that 'bisexual' connotes to a 'both/and' way of thinking; as occupying a consciousness that is in-between as well as inclusive of both of the ordained monosexual orientations. It can then offer a different

²⁸ Ironically, the term 'lesbian,' coined in 1951, comes from the Greek island of Lesbos, the home to lyrical poetess Sappho who once wrote about her love for women. However, Sappho had both male and female lovers, so, to be accurate, both 'lesbian' and the adjective and noun Sapphic should describe bisexuals. (Baumgardner, 50)

²⁹ In short, the term 'queer' is applied in queer theory, which grew out of gender criticism. It is a contemporary approach to literature and culture which dismisses essentialist views of sexuality. Queer theorists argue that sexual identities are fluid, that sexuality is performative, and that the contours of sexual identity are defined by representation. Furthermore, they claim that gender and sexuality, as well as their respective binary oppositions of masculinity/femininity and heterosexuality/homosexuality, are social constructions. Queer theory has been important in the theoretical work of dissolving dichotomies, questioning categorization and for opening up a space of discussion about the variety and diversity of human identity.

perspective than either of the monosexual sides or the queer perspective, which seems to dismiss any sides. This perspective can be applied as a tool to counter mainstream rhetoric. Also, as Baumgardner chooses to speak of a 'bisexual' rather than a 'queer' consciousness, it might be worth exploring shortly what bisexuality means as it does describe a group within the queer universe that holds certain characteristics. It can also function as an example for what happens in general when monosexual orientation takes precedence over less conventional orientations in society.

According to the feminist writer and second wave icon, Gloria Steinem, bisexuality suddenly became 'okay' in 1990 (Baumgardner 2007, 150). Jennifer Baumgardner writes that for her it "coincides roughly with the last days of the first Bush administration and Ani DiFranco's rapid permeation of collegiate record collections" (*ibid*). The two women locate the beginning of acceptance of bisexuality to between 1990 and 1993, which interestingly coincides with the time of Ani DiFranco's emergence as a recording artist. It also coincides with the emergence of third wave feminists who insisted on subjectivity in feminist voice. Subjectivity opens up for speaking outside mainstream rhetoric, and a bisexual subjectivity thus has the possibility to describe experiences from both sides of the monosexual divide as well as comment on this division.

DiFranco released her first album *Ani DiFranco* in 1990 which included not only songs about romantic love for both women and men, but also the difficulty and conflicting notion of having to choose. Already then DiFranco subtly expresses bisexual consciousness in her songs, in addition to identifying the lack of understanding in society:

we are all polylingual
but some of us pretend
that there is virtue in relying

on not trying to understand
we're all citizens of the womb
before we subdivide
into sexes and shades
this side
that side
("Work Your Way Out" 1990)

On her next album, she sings: "love is loose / it shifts each time you move" ("Make Me Stay" 1991). On *Imperfectly* (1992), however, there is also a whole song dedicated to in-between sexuality. In "In Or Out", DiFranco comments on the demand she experiences is put on her to answer whether she is straight or lesbian: "their eyes are all asking / are you in or are you out / and i think, oh man / what is this about", and in resisting being categorized, she sings: "tonight you can't put me / up on any shelf / because i came here alone / and i'm going to leave by myself." Her description of her own sexuality is both humorous and serious: "i guess there's something wrong with me / i guess i don't fit in", and:

some days the like i walk
turns out to be straight
other days the line tends to deviate
i've got no criteria for sex or race
i just want to hear your voice
i just want to see your face

It is as if she with this song, once and for all, states that she cannot be categorized by the two main groups of human sexualities; that it is possible to exist outside the hegemonic idea that the only option is to choose. In "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," second wave feminist poet and thinker Adrienne Rich calls for moving the focus beyond the realm of heterosexuality, suggesting that:

... heterosexuality, like motherhood, needs to be recognized and studied as a *political institution* – even, or especially, by those individuals who feel they

are, in their personal experience, the precursors of a new social relation between the sexes. (1980 637)³⁰

Questioning that heterosexuality is a 'preference' or 'choice' will require "a special quality of courage in heterosexually identified" but that the rewards will be "a freeing-up of thinking, the exploring of new paths, the shattering of another great silence" and a "new clarity in personal relationships" (648). Thinking outside the realm of the heterosexual paradigm and between the two ordained sexes allows for a new form of consciousness, and although DiFranco never applies the word bisexual to define herself, her resistance of categorization displays a consciousness that can be identified as in-between or bisexual.

In order to understand what this consciousness entails, it is worth looking at bisexuals as a group within the LGBT movement and in society. The bisexuals have been viewed as a third group that is in-between the dichotomous hetero- and homosexual groups, and who can 'pass' as both straight and gay depending on who they are dating at the time. Because of this, their very existence has to some degree either been overlooked or misunderstood. Some of the common worries, or rather misconceptions, among gays and lesbians regarding bisexuals are that they are undecided, unpredictable, unstable, and therefore untrustworthy, and may, when in either a homosexual or heterosexual relationship, at any time simply 'switch' to the other 'side'. A slightly less negative misconception, but no less dismissive, is more common among the heterosexual communities. Bisexuality is often viewed as a temporary stage of experimentation that will eventually end and the bisexual will 'fall' on either side of the 'fence' - most likely on the straight side. Corinne Bedecarré vents her frustration with this view in "Swear by the Moon," explaining that:

³⁰ "Compulsory heterosexuality" was named as one of the "crimes against women" by the Brussels Tribunal on Crimes against Women in 1976. (Rich 653)

... I have a terrible impatience with what I call the "insider dismissal" of bisexuality. I am resistant to having to justify or explain bisexuality to those who can unproblematically acknowledge lesbian and gay realities, and yet roll their eyes and groan if bisexual is added to the list. As if, as if, as if, what?! That is my irritation. What is it-too many?-too complicated-too fence sitting?-too 90's-too trendy?-too designer sexuality?-too wannabe?-too add-on!-too almost het? What is it? (1997, 189-190) ³¹

The conception of temporariness occupies a space Bedecarré calls the “safety of public heterosexuality” (190).

The above misconceptions have led gays and lesbians to view the bisexuals an unreliable part of their struggle. However, if bisexuals are accepted for what they are; that they in fact are bisexuals and not dormant heterosexuals, it would also be in their interest that other sexualities become accepted in society. The question of reliability depends then on which part of the struggle is highlighted. If the struggle of the gay and lesbian communities it is about their specific acceptance in society – to be equally valuable parts of society – it is about changing what can be called the ‘heterologocentric’ paradigm that ‘logically’ only accepts heterosexual relationships. If the struggle is about acceptance for who they are as sexual individuals, however people chose to identify themselves, it is also about changing the paradigm of *monosexualities* as having ontological priority and the hierarchy that places certain sexualities above others, such as heterosexuality above homosexuality - or, indeed, homosexuality above bisexuality. In the latter, bisexual consciousness may have much to offer.

What the communities on both sides of the dichotomy are perpetuating here is the rigid notion of monosexualities; that at any given time it is only possible to be attracted to one specific sex or gender. Lisa Heldke argues that:

[b]isexuality throws into question the legitimacy, rigidity and presumed

³¹ ‘het’ = short for heterosexual

ontological priority of those categories by challenging the notion that bisexuals consists of two 'halves' forcibly glued together to make an ungainly and necessarily unstable whole. It questions the tendency to define bisexuality always and only *in terms of* monosexualities, as if those sexualities were ontologically prior to, and constitutive of, bisexuality. (1997 175)

Heldke rejects the notion of ontologically fundamental categories of sexuality - that monosexualities holds an *a priori* existence to bisexuality - and the subsequent notion that there is therefore a hierarchy of sexuality where monosexuality stands above bisexuality. Bisexuality represents ambivalence, indecision, ambiguity and unreliability, and in order to make sense of, or perhaps to control and contain the danger that fluidity and messiness of human nature and sexuality represent, monosexual thought creates neatly divided, prescriptive and hierarchal categories. As Heldke argues: "[w]e are all expected to enter (or to be born into) a sexual category and stay there" and that "[e]very woman who moves around, who changes her mind, becomes dangerous company" (179). She suggests that theorizing through, with, and about bisexuality can open new ways of thinking about sexuality and human nature that is not readily open to those who theorize only from monosexual identities. Bisexual theorizing can challenge the notion that human desire is one directional and open up to the idea that the monosexual construction of bisexuals as being confused or in transition is in fact a confusion located at the level of categories themselves: "As such, theorizing and acting from a bisexual identity represents a vital - even necessary - part of any project to resist the oppressiveness of traditional (hetero)sexual politics" (175).

In this case, the hegemonic status of monosexualities functions similarly to Lyotard's concept of metanarratives. The rhetoric that revolves around monosexualities provides them with precisely the 'overarching and totalizing frameworks' previously mentioned. Consequently, it functions as a metanarrative

within sexual theory. Theorizing and acting from a bisexual perspective, which has the advantage of perceiving from both sides *and* occupying its own ‘third space,’ can counter the hegemonic status of monosexualities and may provide new insights to discussions of gender and sexuality. In extension, it can offer a new perspective in discussions of human interaction and social structure. This requires sharing and listening to the experiences - the small narratives - of those who do not belong to any ‘mono-’ category. Doing so adds knowledge about the diversity and transversity of human nature, and perhaps even helps shift what some might experience as the oppressive paradigms of society, sexual or/and otherwise. As Jennifer Baumgardner suggests:

[t]o understand women who look both ways requires hearing their stories, not just noting the sex of their current partner. And when you listen closely, it’s apparent these women have learned something crucial in these relationships. For myself, I can say that having had relationships with both men and women has given me information on how to be more liberated with men, and less sexist with women. (10)

Obviously, Baumgardner is not suggesting we all must become bisexual, but that there is much to learn about humans and human relations from those who have ‘looked both ways’; that bisexuality is not simply about being attracted and having sexual relations with both sexes, but about a certain form of consciousness. To make their experiences audible will, hopefully, teach us about diversity and grant us understanding and respect for others - perhaps even to discover something new about ourselves. When DiFranco sings: “tonight you can’t put me up on any shelf / because i came here alone / and i’m going to leave by myself”, she is resisting categorization; resisting being defined by the person she happens to stand next to; resisting being the ‘other.’ She is speaking as a subject who is more than simply ‘straight’ when she is with a man and more than simply ‘lesbian’ when she is with a woman - she is more than meets the

eye; more than the sum of her parts.

If we take Baumgardner's advice and listen to DiFranco's stories, they might teach us about what it is like to be in between the monosexual divide in the American society today - keeping in mind that these are merely stories of one individual. They might also teach us to be honest with and about ourselves and our own experiences, and to accept other's experiences as equally valuable and true. We are after all "stuck with each other (god forbid!)" ("Paradigm" *Knuckle Down* 2005). In addition, identifying DiFranco's stories as stories coming from a person with a bisexual consciousness makes her stories perhaps even more important to listen to, as she inherently have a perspective that covers both 'sides' of the monosexual divide. In fact, it broadens the scope, recognizes the overlapping and intertwining elements that constitutes our societies, and opens up a new space for discussion. This new space can be described as a space of transversity.

CHAPTER THREE

Transversity

Perhaps the most arrogant and malevolent delusion of North American power - of white Western power - has been the delusion of destiny, that white is at the center, that white is endowed with some right or mission to judge and ransack and assimilate and destroy the values of other peoples.
--Adrienne Rich³²

The term *transversity* is rooted in ‘transversal’ is a less common word for ‘transverse,’ meaning ‘crossing from side to side,’ which to my knowledge was first applied by David K. Scott and Susan M. Awbrey in their article *Transforming Scholarship* (1993).³³ Emphasizing on issues of university training/education, they apply the term together with ‘connected university’ and argue for opening up a space for sharing knowledge. Where the term ‘interdisciplinary’ entails transferring theories and methods from one field of study to another, their idea of transversity is to connect and create new interactions and intersections in the spaces of the ‘Multiversity.’ These spaces encompass not only the disciplines, but also the different areas of knowledge, different multicultural groups, linkage to business, industry and society, and multiple missions of teaching, researching, and service. The term thus encourages dialogue between differently situated individuals and groups of individuals within a more or less homogeneous society and also between individuals and groups of individuals of very different locations in terms of class, ethnicity, gender, international relations, and so on. Where postcolonialism and feminism, especially, provided the opening up of spaces where ‘the other’ could have a voice, transversity opens up an inherently

³² “The Location of the Poet” *Blood, Bread and Poetry* 1986 [1984] 183-184

³³ C16: from Latin *transversus*, from *transvertere* to turn around. From Latin *trans* across, through beyond + *vertere* to turn (*Collins English Dictionary* 2003).

democratic space of dialogue which can function as a space where it is possible to speak individually, consciously, and equally; where knowledge crosses over boundaries made by difference on equal terms, is mutually exchanged, and can in the most widest sense provide the foundation for a more democratic world society. The first step for transversal communication between individuals and groups of individuals is the realization of locality and the effect of canopied metanarratives in subjective territories.

3. 1. Location and Subjective Territory

*you know, i've got experience
looking right past the obvious
and i know what is so big and so close
is always the hardest stuff
for us to reckon with
the hardest stuff to know
dear friends, especially the women
tell me are you up to the task
of turning the wheel of human history
at long last
--Ani DiFranco, "A Spade"³⁴*

As previously mentioned, Ani DiFranco's lyrics seem to be derived from her life experiences, often describing situations and her thoughts surrounding these situations. These situations and experiences do not occur independently of time and place. They are framed by a certain geographical and temporal location. They are also processed in her particular subjective conceptual frame within this location. That DiFranco was born in Buffalo, New York, in 1970 (and is still alive today), has lived in New York and New Orleans, has toured the U.S. extensively and also been around the world, situates her in both a particular geographical and a particular temporal location. It is

³⁴ *Relieve* 2006

important to understand this aspect and take it into account in order to be able to extend one's perspective beyond it. This can better be understood if we turn to another nonconformist writer, namely Adrienne Rich. In "Notes Toward a Politics of Location" she comments:

As a woman I have no country; as a woman I cannot divest myself of that country merely by condemning its government or by saying three times "As a woman my country is the whole world." Tribal loyalties aside, and even if nation-states are now just pretexts used by multinational conglomerates to serve their interests, I need to understand how a place on the map is also a place in history within which as a woman, a Jew, a lesbian, a feminist I am created and trying to create. ([1984] 1986 212)³⁵

In "The Location of the Poet," she further explains that:

As a lesbian-feminist poet and writer, I need to understand how this *location* affects me, along with the realities of blood and bread in this nation." ([1984] 1986 183)

By situating herself in a certain geographical and temporal location, 'a place on the map' as well as 'a place in history,' Rich is claiming a space to speak from and to as well as admitting to and defining the limitations of her conceptual perception.

In outlining the history of feminism in their study, Kroløkke and Sørensen emphasize that they acknowledge both the geographical and temporal location of themselves and their study of gender communication. They call it their 'situatedness' and explain how, to them, "the concept 'transversity' presents feminists with a theoretical and practical means by which we, as differently situated women, can simultaneously acknowledge our diverse positions and work across national, ethnic, racial, and gender lines" (2006 23). Being situated differently entails not only a geographical and temporal location but also the social, empirical and epistemic position the individual has within that location as well as the effects of the canopy of

³⁵ Rich refers here to Virginia Wolf's statement in *Three Guineas* that "As a woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world."

metanarratives of that location have on the individual.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Foucault spoke of ‘panoptic discursive regimes’ that structure human existence. The panoptic scope can be read as ideologies or metanarratives within a culture which compartmentalizes and creates regulated and normalized spaces. Certeau calls these spaces ‘cellular grids’ within which an individual exists and experiences. Reynolds gives another name to these grids: ‘subjective territories,’ which he defines as: “the existential and experiential realms in and from which a given subject of a given hierarchical society perceives and relates to the universe and his or her place in it” (1999 72 ³⁶). He also defines the individual’s view from within its cellular grid as:

... the scope of the conceptual and emotional experience of those subjectified by the state machine or by any hegemonic society or sub-society (the university or criminal organizations, for example) ... Subjective territory is delineated by conceptual and emotional boundaries that are normally defined by the prevailing science, morality, and ideology. (72) ³⁷

In this sense, the panoptic ideologies or metanarratives of a society organize the individual of that society and confine the individual’s existence, experiential and conceptual space to a certain territory or even a sub-territory within a larger geographical and temporal location.

A particular geographical and temporal location consists of certain discursive regimes that define the location and consequently consciously or unconsciously affect and frame the individual perception. The previous chapter explained how gender theorists borrowed Foucault’s concept of ‘simultaneous process of subjectification and embodiment’ to explain how individuals embody discursive regimes in terms of gender. This is apparent in Rich’s reflection that: “[a]s a white feminist artist in the

³⁶ Reynolds and Fitzpatrick here quote from Bryan Reynolds’s “The Devil’s House, ‘or worse’: Transversal Power and Antitheatrical Discourse in Early Modern England.” *Theatre Journal* 49. 1997. pp. 143-67. 147

³⁷ Ibid 146

United States, I do not want to perpetuate [the] chauvinism [of white Western power], but still I have to struggle with its pervasiveness in culture, its residues in myself” (1986 [1984] 184). This reflection shows how Rich, through experiencing her location, embodies the chauvinism of a patriarchal society, but it also shows how she is aware of the embodiment and how, by being aware, makes it possible for her to resist it.

The concept of embodiment can also be applied in discussing the discursive regimes of a variety of subjective locations. Reynolds and Fitzpatrick explain that because of the discursive regimes of a location:

[t]he subject territory is in effect realized physically (geographically) as well as conceptually and emotionally; physical constraints influence the conceptual and emotional aspects of subjectivity just as they are symptoms and extensions of these aspects. For example, consider the constructed and monitored life experiences, the subjectivity, of people occupying specific social and class identities (male or female; rich or poor; Catholic, Jewish, or Muslim, and so on). (72)

Consider the embodiment of social gender roles in Kroløkke and Sørensen’s article regarding the fear of violence and sexual abuse, or DiFranco’s embodiment of the inherent and rigid notion of monosexuality in a hegemonic heterologocentric society and her struggle to define a space of her own. Realizing the pervasiveness and admitting to the constraints of the discursive regimes of one’s particular location is useful as it discourages prescription and rather encourages description of one’s own location and the understanding that nothing that is said can be held as unchangeable truths or as descriptions of an overarching reality; that the world of human existence and experience is a complex and often contradictory space. It encourages dialogue between individuals of different locations.

Realizing how location affects an individual is realizing that one individual’s language, knowledge and perception are results of this frame and whatever an

individual may create ultimately comes from a subjective position within this location. This relates to Lyotard's description of the concept of the 'little narratives': the importance of keeping in mind that "a person is always located at "nodal points" of specific communication circuits" (1984 [1979] 15). To explore how the 'little narratives' are created one must understand that the individual is affected by the conceptual frames that encapsulate it. In Rich's case, her location is geographically the U.S. and her subjective territory lies, both physically and mentally, within this geographical location and includes the canopy of discursive regimes that comes with being an American, 'a woman, a Jew, a lesbian' and 'a feminist' in this particular location, all of which provides her with a certain perspective. Rich's writing is thus ultimately a result of her time and place and with the particular understanding she has of this location and cannot be confused with wanting to provide any universal truth or reality; rather it is particular to her existential and experiential realm in a geographical and temporal location. It can, however, be applied as reference for others and provide them with a tool; a language to make sense of their own time, place and individual person.

Similarly, DiFranco can be placed in the temporal frame from September 23, 1970 until the present time. Geographically, however, she is a bit harder to place. She was born in Buffalo, New York, a city that once used to have a steel plant. The city is described in several of her lyrics, among them "Trickle Down" (1999) where she comments on the pollution of the plant that had been the town's main source of income and the increasing poverty that came when the plant was closed and the workers never saw any signs of the 'trickle down economy' promised by the president. "Subdivision" describes the racial split that still exists in her hometown, merely one example of what still happens in most towns and cities in the U.S.

white people are so scared of black people
they bulldoze out to the country
and put up houses on little loop-dee-loop streets
and while america gets its heart cut right out of its chest
the berlin wall still runs down main street
separating east side from west
(*Revelling/Reckoning* 2001)

Buffalo also lies close to the Canada border, the country where her mother was born and where she has visited many times to perform (Garrett 2004 270). In “To the Teeth,” DiFranco comments on gun control in the U.S., or rather the lack of it. Her perception of Canada is clearly expressed at the end of the song:

and if i hear one more time
about a fools right to his tools of rage
i'm gonna take all my friends
and i'm going to move to canada
and we're going to die of old age
(*To the Teeth* 1999)

These issues, although they might exist or have existed in other parts of the world and at other times in history, are issues that are parts of the location of DiFranco’s formative years and that have influenced and continue to influence her subjective conceptual territory.

In addition to Buffalo, DiFranco moved to New York in 1989, where she went to college, and she has recently bought a house in New Orleans, making that a city of residence as well. These three geographical locations may be DiFranco’s main locations, but we must not forget that she has also traveled the U.S. thoroughly and repeatedly in addition to traveling abroad on her tours. She can therefore be assigned to more than one particular geographical location and may be viewed as a more expansive citizen of the U.S than most. Her subjective physical territory can therefore be said to be more extensive than that of individuals who live in one place all their lives or who have only occasionally traveled outside their safe locations. This is true

also of her subjective conceptual and emotional territory, as she is influenced conceptually and emotionally by each place she visits – each with its more or less diverse canopies of discursive regimes – which adds to her understanding of what it is to be a woman, a traveling musician, a bisexual, a feminist, a mother, and a citizen of the U.S., to name a few.

The locations that perhaps especially take part in this are the places that are vastly different from where she comes from and what she is used to. In “Every State Line,” DiFranco describes traveling from state to state experiencing one aspect of difference in location: the scrutinizing stare of people that react to the way she looks.

i'm in the middle of alabama
they stare at me wherever i go
i don't think they like my haircut
i don't think they like my clothes
i can't wait to get back to new york city
where at least when i walk down the street
nobody ever hesitates
to tell me exactly what they think of me
(*Imperfectly* 1992)

This experience is also described in “Little Plastic Castle”:

from the shape of your shaved head
i recognized your silhouette
as you walked out of the sun and sat down
and the sight of your sleepy smile eclipsed all the other people
as they paused to sneer at the two girls from out of town

and i said look at you this morning
you are by far the cutest
but be careful getting coffee
i think these people wanna shoot us
or maybe there's some kind of local competition here
to see who can be the rudest
(*Little Plastic Castle* 1998)

Again, DiFranco applies humor and irony to share her experience, which serves both to create distance to the perhaps uncomfortable experiences, but also to emphasize the

ridiculousness of such reactions – as if the way a person looks provides a complete picture; that it is superimposed onto all the other parts that constitute a person.

The particular aspect of experiencing the reaction of other individuals' subject territories in regards to difference in appearance is only one of many. Each of the locations DiFranco visits take part in shaping her subjective territory and provide her with reference points from where and to which to write, speak, perform and act. Understanding one's subjective territory and how it differs from other subjective territories is important for discussing and resisting the discursive regimes of one's location. However, Reynolds and Fitzpatrick emphasize that they do not believe the subjective territory is capable of fully containing the individual.

2. 2. Transversity and Extended Democracy

Transversal politics might offer us a way for mutual support and probably greater effectiveness in the continuous struggle towards a less sexist, less racist and more democratic society, a way of agency within the political, economic and environmental continuously changing contexts in which we live and act.
-- Nira Yuval-Davis ³⁸

*every tool is a weapon
if you hold it right*
-- Ani DiFranco, "My IQ" ³⁹

Being content with the idea that the conceptual and emotional aspects of an individual are the product of the panoptic discourses of metanarratives of its location, and only that, is to ignore that we, as reflective individuals, are capable of 'thinking outside the box' and 'connecting the dots'; that we inhabit the abilities of imagination and association. Reynolds and Fitzpatrick explain how there is a second territory that must

³⁸ "Women, Citizenship and Difference" 1997 22-23

³⁹ *Puddle Dive* 1993

be considered when discussing an individual's conceptual space:

Beyond the limits of subjective territory ... lies the "non-subjectified region of one's conceptual territory," an open space we call "transversal territory."⁴⁰ It contains all of the possibilities that are precluded or excluded by the practices that the state uses to enclose the subject and reduce him or her to the proper. (73-74)

They assert that it is possible to traverse the boundaries of subjective territory to what they call 'transversal territory' and suggest that people occupy transversal territory:

... when they defy or surpass the conceptual boundaries of their prescribed subjective addresses. Transversal territory invites people to deviate from the vertical, hierarchicalizing and horizontal, homogenizing assemblages of any organizational social structure. (74)⁴¹

The transversal territory is influenced, but cannot be controlled, by 'the state' or any metanarratives that canopy the individual's location. In addition, and more importantly, this territory can be influenced by other subjective territories. Reynolds and Fitzpatrick call the deviation from social structures 'transversal power' which they suggests "induces people to transversally cut across the striated, organized space of subjectivity – of all subjective territory – and enter the disorganized yet smoothly infinite space of 'transversality'" (74)⁴². Doing so in a familiar terrain kindles *anamnesis*,⁴³ a means by which transversal power manifests itself: "the remembering of forgotten practices and the subsequent reconstructing or imbuing of them with new meanings" (75). Anamnesis is thus an inherent double ability: it both provides the means by which to deconstruct old structures and to construct new ones based on fragments of the old. I would suggest, however, that transversal territory also includes unfamiliar terrains, whether it is another geographical or temporal location that can be

⁴⁰ Reynolds 1997:149.

⁴¹ Ibid: 149

⁴² Ibid: 150

⁴³ 'Anamnesis' = the ability to recall past events, recollect. C17: via New Latin from Greek, from *anamimneskein* to recall, from *mimneskein* to call to mind. (*Collins English Dictionary* 2003)

accessed through studying works from other geographical locations or through studying the history of one's own location, or the encounter of the conceptual and emotional aspects of subjective territories of individuals other than oneself. To transversally cut across the boundaries of one's subjective territory to this type of transversal territory induces imagination and association in addition to anamnesis. This involves being able to associate elements of another territory with elements of one's own territory – words, metaphors, structures, concepts, ideas, and so on – and to imagine other existences or other structures. The individual has the possibility to transgress the borders of its subjective territory by 'recollecting,' studying and understanding the narratives of its own particular location, and through association and imagination it is able to gain a greater understanding and tools of resistance.

The idea of transversity relates to DiFranco's aforementioned idea of an extended democracy in that it encourages dialogue between differently situated individuals. The inhabitants of an extended democracy can be regarded as citizens whose most efficient and equal means of communication would be transversal dialogue. The concept of transversal dialogue is applied by feminist Nira Yuval-Davis in her discussion of citizenship in her article "Women, Citizenship and Difference" (1997). Yuval-Davis bases her discussion on the idea that transversity is an important tool of which to build coalitions between women of various locations. She argues that in a comparative study of citizenship the discussion should include not only women's citizenship compared to men but also be related to "women's affiliation to dominant or subordinate groups, their ethnicity, origin and urban or rural residence. It should also take into consideration global and transnational positionings of these citizenships" (4-5). As much as there is a need for coalition-building between women, it should not be done in an uncritical and homogenizational way. Women exist in

different locations and occupy different territories, and rather than assume that all women want the same things and prescribe a theory and/or a method that will work for all women, there should rather be made space for dialogue. She explains that the transversal approach:

... is based on the epistemological recognition that each positioning produces specific situated knowledge which cannot be but an unfinished knowledge, and therefore dialogue among those differentially positioned should take place in order to reach a common perspective. (19)

In a similar vein Ruth Lister's "Dialectics of Citizenship" argues that discussing "citizenship provides an invaluable strategic theoretical concept for the analysis of women's subordination and a potentially powerful political weapon in the struggle against it" (6). Lister explains how Yuval-Davis draws on the work of a group of Italian Bolognese feminists and calls this transversality a process of 'rooting' and 'shifting' in which individuals "remain rooted in their own identities and values but at the same time are willing to shift views in dialogue with those of other identities and values" (19). When each individual or each group allow themselves to 'root' and 'shift,' new insights are arrived at, which enables new positions to emerge when these new insights are acknowledged.

The process of transversity makes it possible to widen the scope and creates the possibility for new, diverse and progressive theoretical and practical frameworks. The transversal approach Yuval-Davis and Lister apply in relation to citizenship can however be applied beyond the realm of feminism and women's position in patriarchal societies, from the meeting of two or more individuals within a group to the meeting of two or more groups of individuals, societies, or even nations. It can also work both vertically and horizontally, within and between groups of people. The element of dialogue within transversity connects to DiFranco's idea of an extended

democracy as it encourages the opening up of a space that allows a multitude of differently situated voices to engage in dialogue; where these voices can ring freely and equally; and where new and possibly better arrangements can be discussed and agreed upon.

Although DiFranco never applies the term transversity in her lyrics and may not think in terms of transversity when she writes, speaks or acts, it is still clearly present in the way she approaches and discusses various issues. In “Willing to Fight,” she encourages her audience, and perhaps reminds herself, to be aware of, pay attention to, and search for what exists outside one’s own particular subjective frame:

you got to look outside your eyes
you got to think outside your brain
you got to walk outside you life
to where the neighborhood changes
(*Puddle Dive* 1993)

To encourage trying to discover what lies outside one’s own subjective territory is to encourage openness and acceptance for other territories that one’s own, and to admit the limitedness of one’s own conceptual territory. She is also arguing for working toward equality between different subjective territories and the importance of being open to and accepting difference in “Overlap”:

i search your profile
for a translation
i study the conversation
like a map
'cause i know there is strength
in the differences between us
and i know there is comfort
where we overlap
(*Out of Range* 1994)

DiFranco acknowledges that there is ‘comfort’ where two conceptual territories are similar because similarity creates a ‘comfort zone’ where there is not much that

contradict the 'truths' that exists there, but she acknowledges that there is 'strength' where the two territories are different because it is in the meeting of difference that it is possible to expand one's horizons and gain a greater comprehension. DiFranco is searching for 'a translation,' a means of understanding, it seems, because she senses that the language of her subject territory only provides her with a particular frame of understanding and she is searching to expand her knowledge and learn other 'languages.' In "The True Story of What Was" she comments on the difficulty she has with how words, our most important means of communication, are also a source of misunderstanding, distortion and excess:

real is real regardless
of what you try to say
or say away
real is real relentless
while words distract and dismay
words that change their tune
though the story remains the same
words that fill me quickly
and then are slow to drain
dialogues that dither down reminiscent
of the way it likes to rain
every screen
a smoke screen
oh to dream
just for a moment
the picture
outside the frame
(*Educated Guess* 2004)

However, words are one of the tools she has to work with besides music, so despite her momentary frustration with their inability to render what is 'real' she tries to apply them as pointedly and as clearly as possible:

i build each one of my songs
out of glass
so you can see me inside of them
i suppose
("Overlap")

The opaqueness of her songs invites others to engage in transversal dialogue with her as well as with each other; to study her subjective conceptual and emotional territory as one of many, one that is particular to her but equally relevant to the greater multitude of the ‘worldsong.’⁴⁴

Transversity can work particularly well when applied beyond the cellular grids of subject territories within a society as it induces interaction and dialogue on equal terms between different societies. In “Self Evident” DiFranco encourages celebration of the multitude of voices as she turns the metaphor of drinking whisky to drown the pain of 9/11 to toasting various individuals who should be included in the extended democracy:

so here’s a toast to all the folks that live in palestine
afghanistan iraq el salvador
here’s a toast to all the folks living on the pine ridge reservations
under the stone cold gaze of mount rushmore
here’s a toast to all those nurses and doctors
who daily provide women with a choice
who’d stand down the threat the size of oklahoma city
just to listen to a young woman’s voice
here’s a toast to all those folks on death row right now
awaiting the executioner’s guillotine
who are shackled there with dread
who can only escape into their heads
to find peace in the form of a dream
peace in the form of a dream
peace in the form of a dream
(*So Much Shouting, So Much Laughter* 2002)

By inviting them all into the multitude, DiFranco is extending the fundamental notions of democracy to include the subjective territories of individuals that are vertically and horizontally marginalized, nationally as well as internationally, making them all citizens on equal terms within an extended democratic world society.

⁴⁴ From the liner notes in *Ani DiFranco* referred to in Introduction.

The transversity that is constituted by and constitutive of DiFranco's work is also to a high degree present in the works of the individuals in the particular continuum of American nonconformity described in Chapter 1. It shows itself in the forms of anamnesis, imagination and association and I would suggest this is primarily due to their apparent need for and acts of traveling. It is a continuum where Emerson and Whitman were trying to identify and define America as a whole and DiFranco now is trying to identify and define as being an individual part of. The tension between the overarching metanarratives of their times and locations and their constant moving and experiencing new territories is visible in their poetic renderings. Whitman's incessant walks around the city and his seemingly unquenchable thirst for knowledge continually led him to enter the transversal territory and reshaped his conceptual frame with every turning of corners. It resulted most notably in an epic poem that sought to encompass the multitude of the America and of which he continued to revise throughout his life due to the impossibility of encompassing something that is so vast, complex and forever changing. DiFranco body of work functions in a similar way, but instead of trying to encompass all that is in order to make sense of it, she rather tells stories that describe her surroundings and how she experiences them. These stories function as parts of a larger body of work in the American and even world literature.

In this continuum, the Beat Generation and Ginsberg were trying to deal with disillusionment and disempowerment, elements that DiFranco is still battle with at present time. Allen Ginsberg, part of a generation of discontentment with that which was immediately available in the 1950s American society, was also a restless traveler searching for 'something else,' from state to state in America, then abroad to places such as Paris and Tangier, then back again – and then do it all over again. This is apparent not only in the themes and topics of his poems, but also in their

compositions. Transversality can be found in Ginsberg's poetic renderings of constant encounters with new territories, from the meeting with people of other social statuses and other religious convictions than himself to the meeting of individuals who inhabited other locations, and the dialogues he engaged in, both with himself and with others.⁴⁵

In counterculture era of the 1960s, Dylan applied the techniques of oral storytelling and operated with 'masks' in order to tell lies that revealed the truth. DiFranco can also be found carrying forward in applying these techniques to comment on the masks put on her and offering various sides of her own identity to reveal the complexity of her identity. Also Bob Dylan is a traveler. His initial search for musical inspiration led him to New York and from there Dylan traveled incessantly on his tours, each new location providing fortitude to his transversal power. The lyrics he has written come from the individual receptacle that is his poetic mind and are the results of his subjective conceptual frame encountering new locations and territories, each of the encounters transversal in nature. Similarly to Ginsberg and Dylan, DiFranco's continuous touring has led her to have encounters with a large number of locations and other subjective territories, continuously shaping her own conceptual frame.

These individuals' constant search, experiencing of new locations, encounters with new territories within each new location, and their urge for defining what they experience resulted in works drenched in anamnesis, association and imagination and constantly revised subjective conceptual territories. The works of these individuals are in themselves transversal but can also be transversally applied by other individuals to

⁴⁵ Time Square hustler Herbert Huncke is said to be the source for the word 'beat' "The beats found Huncke a fascinating character. As Ginsberg put it, they were on a quest for 'supreme reality', and somehow felt that Huncke, as a member of the underclass had learned things they were sheltered from in their middle/upper-middle class lives" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beat_generation).

expand and evolve their own subject territory as they open up a space and invite discussion and dialogue about different territories.

CONCLUSION

The poet's mind is in fact a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feeling, phrases, images, which remains there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together.
--T.S. Eliot ⁴⁶

Through circulation the multitude reappropriates space and constitutes itself as an active subject. When we look closer at how this constitutive process of subjectivity operates, we can see that the new spaces are described by unusual topologies, by subterranean and uncontainable rhizomes—by geographical mythologies that mark the new paths of destiny. ... This is how the multitude gains the power to affirm its autonomy, traveling and expressing itself through an apparatus of widespread, transversal territorial reappropriation.
-- Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt ⁴⁷

The idea of transversity is particularly relevant in dealing with a world that is growing more and more globalized. It is important for individuals of all vertical and horizontal positions of all societies around the world to realize that we share the same space; that we are all citizens of larger geographical and temporal location and we inhabit particular subjective territories within this location that do not necessarily coincide, yet are parts of a whole. Transversity is a constructive tool to induce respect and dialogue between differently situated individuals and groups of individuals and it is a crucial tool in the evolution of human consciousness. DiFranco has shown that she inhabits transversal power as she has throughout her life applied anamnesis, imagination and association in her *petit récits* to comment on and resist the social climate of her location in her lyrics as well as to the choices she has made in her life. DiFranco's continually evolving third wave feminist perspective and bisexual consciousness outlined in Chapter 2 addressed the idea of how an underlying transversity can be found in her subjective conceptual frame. Third wave feminist

⁴⁶ T. S. Eliot. *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. 2001. 1096

⁴⁷ Negri, Antonio and Michael Hardt. *Empire*. Harvard University Press. London, England. 2000 397-398

thinking, theoretical and methodical strategies can induce individuals to step outside their own ‘comfort zones’; visit spaces of marginality as well as to invite the erasing of limiting boundaries. Similarly, the awareness of bisexual consciousness can induce individuals to reject the hegemonic heterosexual reign as well as observe and transverse the lines between the monosexual divide. Both third wave feminism and bisexual consciousness are to some extent inherently transversal as they operate in the in-between of two or more hegemonic spaces. Sharing stories from the spaces of the in-between and the margins invites to dialogue between individuals of different locations and ‘situatedness,’ particularly between women but also extendedly between humans regardless of sex/gender or anything else that distinguish individuals. This creates an inherently transversal space where individuals are on equal ground and inhabit voices with equal fortitude: a basic democratic notion.

The continuum of nonconformity in which DiFranco has been placed here is a continuum where the words of the writers of the Declaration of Independence provided a founding idea of democracy but also encouraged continuous revision and resistance to elements that do not serve the people. This is an idea which DiFranco now carries forward in an idea of an extended version of democracy, to be applied not only in political terms but also in social terms: in equal interactions between various horizontal and vertical levels. This version encourages extending our focus beyond our ordinary perspective and to welcome and transversally interact with the variety and diversity that exists outside our own particular subjective territory. The idea of an extended democracy works particularly well in connection with transversity as it is only with freedom of expression and the acceptance of different but equal voices that both democracy and transversity come to their fullest.

There is much yet to be discovered in the space transversity opens, and this

thesis has perhaps only scratched the surface of its potential. The world holds many stories that should be noted and listened to. Perhaps Ani DiFranco says it best:

'cuz somewhere between Hollywood and its pretty happiness
and an anguish so infinite it's anybody's guess
is a place where people are all teachers
and this just one long class
(“Knuckle Down” *Knuckle Down* 2005)

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