


“Both Sides Now”: Articulating Textiles and Fashioned Bodies in the Works of Joni Mitchell, 1968–1976

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Abstract

The singer–songwriter–artist Joni Mitchell (née Anderson, born on November 7, 1943) is recognized in the worlds of music and fashion alike for her creative influences since the late 1960s. In this article, we share the findings from a critical discourse analysis of the lyrics and album art produced by Mitchell between 1968 and 1976. We consider how she represented a philosophy of “Both Sides Now” (i.e., both/and thinking) as she articulated—in words as well as visual art—three dynamic and unresolvable contradictions that provide new insights for fashion theory: (a) domesticity and worldliness, (b) bourgeois capitalism and bohemianism, and (c) beauty and destruction. In the process of articulating ambivalences and contradictions, Mitchell reveals how cultural power relations associated with gender, sexuality, age, and class (and their intersectionalities) intervene through textiles, clothing, and fashioned bodies.

Keywords

ambivalence, contradiction, fashion theory, music, lyrics, both/and thinking, fashion influencer, articulation, Joni Mitchell, critical discourse analysis

The singer–songwriter–artist Joni Mitchell (née Anderson, born on November 7, 1943) is recognized in the worlds of music and fashion alike for her creative influences since the late 1960s. In this article, we share the findings from a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of the lyrics and album art produced by Joni Mitchell between 1968 and 1976. We consider how she represented a philosophy of “Both Sides Now” (i.e., both/and thinking) as she articulated—in words as well as visual art—many of the cultural tensions and contradictions of the late 1960s and 1970s. In so doing, she developed what we call “fashion philosophies,” as she conveyed aesthetics and sentiments of style to her generation and generations to come.

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Mitchell is remembered as a “1970s style icon,” and her personal appearance from this period has endured in the collective conscience (Willingham, 2015, para. 2). Popular-culture celebrities have long held influence over Euro-American fashion trends (Green, 2017; Jules-Rosette, 2007; Kellner, 1994; Norwood, 2009; Plunkett, 2003). Celebrity fashion influence is typically aided by visual representations, primarily photographs and film (Plunkett, 2003). Joni Mitchell’s image first appeared in *Vogue* on February 1, 1969: stick-straight blond hair and gaze turned upward beneath blunt-cut bangs; she was described “with lake-blue eyes, hair like poured Chablis, and a voice that echoes through invisible hills, who writes and sings with her guitar” (“People Are,” 1969, p. 191). Mitchell’s enduring status as a style icon is evident through her modeling for fashion companies like The Gap (in 1990) and Saint Laurent (in 2015; see https://www.ysl.com/us/shop-product/unisex/jonimitchellmusicproject_section).

While images of Joni Mitchell (including films of her live concerts) have circulated in the press and on the Internet, Mitchell is better known for her musical talents than her fashion. In fact, the first reference to her in American *Vogue* begins with a description of her singing rather than her fashioned appearance: “Her voice, firm, flexible, and joyful, rises and falls rapidly, striking a bass note then leaping tall octaves in a single bound” (Jahn, 1969, p. 130). Mitchell’s music circulated widely on the radio or the record player, and with the latter came the packaging—that is, the album art—which Mitchell herself carefully designed.

In the mid-1960s, Joni Mitchell began captivating listeners with her poetic lyrics, unusual melodies, and a voice “made of contradictions: it warbles with vibrato but is astringent and harsh, too; it’s acrobatic yet grounded; vulnerable yet indestructible; mannered and octave-straddling, yet also as natural as breathing or speech” (D. Mitchell, 2017, para. 2). During the period of 1968–1976, seven of the eight albums Mitchell produced went gold, platinum, or 2× platinum on the U.S. Billboard charts. *Rolling Stone* magazine recently listed her as number 9 of the “100 Greatest Songwriters of All Time” (2015), while *LA Weekly* listed her as number 8 (Pell, 2014). In both cases, Mitchell is the most highly ranked female artist, not only of her time, but of “all time.” Despite the idiosyncratic nature of her music, it was influential, conveying the tenuous and ambivalent sentiments of her era and contributing to the latter years of the 1960s “Youthquake.” All the while, Mitchell fueled social and aesthetic changes that would come into being in the 1970s.

Mitchell’s openness and ability to capture cultural contradictions and her own ambivalence about them are conveyed through the narrative nature of her songs: She is telling stories (Gates, 2016, p. 711). Through storytelling, the use of metaphor, rich description, haunting melodies, and an unbounded voice, she conveyed her opinions about appearance and fashioned bodies. In the artwork on her albums—sometimes paintings, collages, and/or photographs—she often used self-representation alongside landscapes and places of inspiration.

While Mitchell has continued to make music after 1976—indeed, receiving a Grammy award for Best Pop Album of 1996 (Weller, 2008, p. 491)—the period of 1968–1976 constituted her most sustained mainstream cultural influence. Arguably, this influence continues through ongoing airplay of her songs on the radio and Internet platforms like Pandora, iTunes, Spotify, and other online streaming services. In our study, we wanted to understand what ideas about fashion, style, and bodies were conveyed through her lyrics and album art, and secondly, what fashion philosophies and themes emerged from her vocal and visual arts.

Research Questions

During the period of 1968–1976, Mitchell’s lyrics and album covers are replete with references to fashion, textiles, dress, and appearance; however, these have not been critically analyzed in relation to her status as a style icon during this period. In our research, we asked: (a) What does Mitchell’s music convey about fashion, textiles, dress, and appearance? (b) What fashion philosophies and

themes are found in her albums during the period of 1968–1976? Through a CDA of her lyrics and album art, we uncover her implicit and explicit commentary about fashion, textiles, and appearance.

Literature Review

Becoming Joni Mitchell

Understanding Mitchell's biography is important for contextualization of her creative work. From childhood onward, Mitchell was fascinated by dress, as she explained to biographer David Yaffe (2017): "I drew clothes. I was going to be a fashion designer" (p. 12). After contracting polio 1 week before her 10th birthday, she became "an artist of her own expressive body" (Yaffe, 2017, pp. 21, 22). During her stay in a polio isolation ward in Canada, she "drew like crazy and sang Christmas carols" (Weller, 2008, p. 68). After her recovery, she explored painting and dancing, which became lifelong passions. In Grade 7, Mitchell met Mr. Kratzmann, her English teacher (to whom she dedicated her first album); drawing on Nietzsche, he encouraged her to "paint" with her words: to write more autobiographically, as if she were painting "in her own blood" (Yaffe, 2017, p. 15).

As she developed her artistic skills—both visual and written—Mitchell continued her fascination with fashion and clothes; she modeled locally in her teen years and dressed "to the T, even in hat and gloves" due to her sewing skills and access to sample clothes (Crowe, 1979, para. 37). In high school, Mitchell had a regular column in her school newspaper called *Fashions & Fads*, and she claimed, "I started fads and I stopped them. I knew the mechanics of hip" (Yaffe, 2017, pp. 23–25).¹

Throughout her musical career, spanning and fusing folk, rock, jazz, and other genres, Mitchell—in her own words—has sought "beauty, but of an unusual nature" (Marom, 2014, p. 121). She has always been "troubling"; Mitchell has said, for example, that she was always both inside and outside the countercultural world of the late 1960s:

I was the queen of the hippies in a way, but in a way I wasn't really a hippie at all. I was always looking at it for its upsides and downsides, balancing it and thinking, "Here's the beauty of it and here's the exploitative quality of it and here's the silliness of it." (Hoskyns, 2009, p. 201)

Philosophies of textiles and fashion echo this "troubling" nature of Mitchell's songs, which "ask us to welcome trouble as a friend, as the challenge that animates life" (Powers, 2018, para. 2).

Music and Fashion in the Late 1960s and 1970s

The year that Joni Mitchell released her first studio album, *Song to a Seagull* (1968), was the same year that historian Bruce J. Schulman called a "cultural divide." He wrote, "Nineteen sixty-eight marked simultaneously an *annus mirabilis* and *annus horribilus*, a year of miracles and a year of horrors" (Schulman, 2001, p. 1). It was the year that, according to historian Jules Witcover, optimism died and a more conservative America began to take hold (Witcover, 1997). According to Sonenberg (2003), this shift in cultural sentiment affected the artistic world too, and people changed their "emphasis from political to personal revolution [. . .] self discovery came to be regarded as the surest way to countermand the structures of a rigid society" (p. 63). In this period when the personal became political, the intimate world of self-realization and self-actualization was made possible through a variety of means—including psychedelic drugs, consciousness-raising, meditation, moving "back to the land," and other forms of spiritual and intellectual enhancements (Schulman, 2001, p. 91). From this revolutionary moment came Joni Mitchell, singing with the metaphors of fashion and textiles.

Sonenberg (2003) argued that Mitchell's records during the period of 1968–1976 were "philosophically, if not stylistically, indebted to the rise of rock and its apparent disdain for social

mores and conventional behavior,” and her lyrics and songs more specifically “emphasized non-conformity” (p. 6). Like music, fashion also responded to shifts in cultural sentiments and arguably was part of the production of a new culture of self-actualized individualism (Wilson, 2003, p. 178); however, this self-actualized individualism was still individualism, with many of the attendant values embedded in capitalism and “the system” (Wilson, 2003, p. 178).

By the 1980s, “a jocular term” had emerged to characterize members of “a socio-economic group comprising young professional people working in cities” (Ayto & Simpson, 2008, p. 369): the “yuppie” (Yuppie, 2018). Cultural discourse had already been developing in the 1970s about the dilemma of “selling out” to bourgeois and upper-class values after experiencing the countercultures of the late 1960s and early 1970s (Van Tyne, 2017). But arguably, this must have been more intense among countercultural artists and musicians resisting the status quo and then finding themselves being driven around in limousines, as J. Mitchell (1970a) wrote about in her song “For Free” on the album *Ladies of the Canyon* (track 2). In this song, and others, Mitchell has been refreshingly self-reflexive about her ambivalence: her misgivings about, combined with the aesthetic pleasures of, luxury and material life. Writing from a feminist critical discourse perspective, Karppinen (2016) submits that Mitchell’s music in the 1960s and 1970s was autobiographical, although Mitchell eschewed the “confessional” label that some rock music critics assigned to her. Most likely, Mitchell’s objections were at least partially gender-based because “confessional” represented a condescending tendency by male rock critics to characterize music by female artists as self-indulgent (p. 26).

Karppinen (2016) argues that contradictions abound “in Mitchell’s music, her life and opinions,” as well as in the gendered world of rock music (p. 6). In our article, we extend this theme of contradiction in Karppinen’s analysis to the ways in which gender interacts with class and other identities and issues. Further, we show how J. Mitchell (1974b) used textiles and appearance style between 1968 and 1976 to grapple ambivalently with topics such as “the star-maker machinery” (track 3) of rock music, domesticity, travel, luxury, and suburbia.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

We frame our project around the cultural studies concept/theory of *articulation*. As explained by Stuart Hall in an interview with Grossberg (1996), the word “articulation” has a double meaning: as a process of both expression and connection:

An articulation is thus the form of the connection that *can* make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time. (Hall in Grossberg, 1996, p. 141)

Kaiser (2012) has pointed to the conceptual and practical usefulness of articulation (a kind of both/and thinking) to fashion studies: “Individuals mix and match different elements to form temporary expressions about who they are or, more accurately, are becoming” (p. 5). That is, the concept of articulation not only helps to interpret ephemeral style statements that combine two or more (often contradictory) ideas, symbols, and materials; it also points to what feminist theorists (e.g., Crenshaw, 1991) call the intersectionalities across gender and other identity categories (e.g., “race,” class, age, sexuality), as well as the body itself and issues of time and place (Kaiser, 2012). Hall (2017) noted the important parallels between the feminist concept of intersectionalities and his use of articulation in cultural studies (p. 91).

Hall (2017), like feminist theorists, was concerned with theorizing power relations in directions that moved beyond the prevailing Marxist model of class determinism (p. 241). In particular, Hall pointed to the ways in which systems of oppression revolving around “race,” ethnicity, nation, and

diaspora articulate and disarticulate from those involving social class. Importantly, he identified how the cultural *discourses* (e.g., histories, media dialogue, fashion) circulating through and around these systems converge (or not) at “specific conjunctures,” or times and places (Hall in Grossberg, 1996, pp. 141, 142). For example, in the late 1960s, he demonstrated the ways in which American hippies articulated a new aesthetic of “counter-value” by appropriating (lower and working) class and ethnic (Native American) positionalities other than their own in a search for an anti-bourgeois “authenticity” (Hall, 1968). Underlying these temporary articulations were cultural “contradictions” (Hall, 2017, p. 241): Many hippies had the “race” and class privilege enabling them to enter back into the dominant system when they became professionals in the 1970s and 1980s.

Theoretically, articulation offers a means for interpreting the convergence of discourses that do not necessarily coincide neatly. As such, it offers a lens to think through the contradictions among these discourses and also the ambivalences that become expressed at the cultural (see Davis, 1992; Kaiser, Nagasawa, & Hutton, 1995) and individual levels. For example, those who embraced the values of the counterculture in the late 1960s were also likely to feel ambivalent about what they had to lose (i.e., their middle-class privilege and pleasures, including fashion) if a hippie lifestyle became a permanent part of their lives. Similarly, feminist and fashion scholars have identified the ambivalences feminists of the late 1960s and 1970s often experienced about fashion due to the contradictions between the discourses associated with (a) the pleasures of fashion and (b) the feminist rejection of femininity, which were equated via consciousness-raising sessions with fashion (Evans & Thornton, 1989; Michelman & Kaiser, 2000; Wilson, 2003). In summary, articulation frames our theoretical approach to the study of Joni Mitchell’s lyrics and album covers, which we view as part of larger cultural discourses regarding class, gender, age, “race,” and other tensions and contradictions of the late 1960s and 1970s.

Method

Cultural studies scholar Jennifer Slack (1996) argues that articulation is both a theory and a method, as a “moment of arbitrary closure” (p. 115) that is “not completely sewn-up” (p. 114). Articulation functions politically as a practice that forges connections that may express something new in a particular time and place. It is important to understand what articulation *does* methodologically. That is, it can create a “provisional, practical unity” (Davison, Featherstone, & Schwarz, 2017, p. 4) that brings diverse cultural discourses together in a certain phrase, essay, appearance style, painting, film, and so on. We see articulation, then, as a kind of epistemology: a way of making, creating, and writing that brings together different elements and discourses. In our study, music lyrics and album covers constitute the articulations we examine as units of analysis. The process of *making sense* of these articulations brings us to CDA.

CDA is concerned with the ways in which power becomes exercised and resisted through written texts (e.g., music lyrics, news articles, novels) and visual culture (e.g., art, appearance style, photography). Originally developed as an analytical tool in linguistics, CDA is concerned with the study of ideology, or ideas and cultural expectations (e.g., gender and class relations) that have become “naturalized” and taken for granted as normative (Fairclough, 2013, p. 26). The goal of CDA is to “denaturalize” and expose such ideological expectations or assumptions; CDA may also involve the study of how cultural discourses become materialized or challenged/changed through style (Fairclough, 2013, p. 28), including “the co-occurrence of contradictory or inconsistent elements” (Fairclough, 2013, p. 64). Here, we find close affinities between articulation as a constructive epistemology and CDA as an analytical tool. The latter relies upon specific methods such as close readings and descriptive coding of written and visual content and can be seen as an iterative process of “formulating critical goals” in relation to that content (Wodak & Meyer, 2016, p. 3).

We analyzed two sets of primary sources: first, the lyrics of Mitchell's songs and, second, her vinyl record album art between her first album in 1968 and her eighth album in 1976.² We conducted two-staged "close readings": For first-cycle coding, two researchers used a "descriptive coding" approach to analyze 84 songs across eight albums produced between 1968 and 1976 to identify specific mentions of textiles, dress, appearance, appearance perceptions, body parts, and so forth, and for thematic representations of identities, place, and ideologies.³ "Descriptive coding" is explained by Saldaña (2016) as finding the basic topic of a passage (p. 102); therefore, after the first cycle of coding was completed, the researchers reconciled their differences and agreed upon the final code attributions and themes. Researchers then conducted a second cycle of coding, which involved "close readings" of the textile- and appearance-related lyrics with a specific eye toward moments of articulation, including contradictions and ambivalences. As an iterative, interpretive process, we also referred to the album cover art as another form of primary data that informed, and articulated with, the lyrics. The album art was more diverse in terms of media (e.g., painting, photography, collage, drawing), and included the album cover, the backside, and any additional artwork on the inside of the album and graphic design related to lyrics and liner notes. A total of 25 images across eight albums were analyzed.⁴ Rather than consider each album as a single unit of analysis, each image constituted a unit of analysis. Like the lyrics, researchers performed a close reading of the album art and identified themes related to the body, textiles, self-representation, and the body's relation to place; these were separately coded for the overarching themes of articulation, ambivalence, and cultural contradictions.

We also drew upon a number of secondary sources, such as biographies of and interviews with Mitchell. We made every attempt to understand the textile- and appearance-related lyrics in the larger contexts of (a) the songs in their entirety, (b) the albums in their entirety, including the album cover art, (c) Joni Mitchell's life and career trajectory as linked to her lyrics 1968–1976, and (d) cultural discourses during the period of study.

Results and Discussion

In the following section, we use the results of our CDA to discuss the emergent fashion philosophies found in Mitchell's songs and album art between 1968 and 1976. We discuss how she used textiles, clothing, and other fashion-related references as metaphoric and literal articulations of her overarching philosophy of "Both Sides Now," which is supported by the ongoing, unresolvable tensions between (a) domesticity and worldliness, (b) bourgeois capitalism and bohemianism, and (c) beauty and destruction. Many fashion theorists have argued that ambivalence—both at an individual and cultural scale—is an important promulgator of fashion change (Bucklands, 2000; Davis, 1992; Kaiser, 2012; Kaiser et al., 1995). Our visual content analysis and lyrical descriptive coding revealed that Mitchell articulated cultural contradictions and personal ambivalences through the body, its appearance, and the materials used to adorn it. She made these articulations through lyrical descriptions of her own and other peoples' appearances and how others interpreted her appearance (e.g., "weighing the beauty and the imperfection"; J. Mitchell, 1974f, track 5); therefore, these tensions of appearance sometimes related to the watchful, judgmental eye of others.⁵

Self-reflection and self-representation were major themes in Mitchell's work during the period of study. She famously considers herself "a painter first, and a musician second" and thus puts significant consideration into her album art ("Paintings," n.d., para. 1). Her first three albums, *Song to a Seagull*, *Clouds*, and *Ladies of the Canyon*, all include graphic self-representations (either drawings or paintings). Three of the eight records include cover photographs of Mitchell (*Blue*, *For the Roses*, and *Hejira*). Only two of the eight covers—*Court and Spark* and *The Hissing of Summer Lawns*—do not appear to be representations of Mitchell on the cover;⁶ however, both of these albums include photographic self-representations on the interior. In addition to the album art, Mitchell articulated

ambivalence and its cousin, the contradictions associated with culture and power relations, by making use of textiles and other material aspects of style and appearance. Mitchell's positionality, particularly her self-representation, helps to contextualize the philosophies we present in the following subsections.

Mitchell's Overarching Fashion Philosophy: "Both Sides Now"

I've looked at life from both sides now
 From win and lose and still somehow
 It's life's illusions I recall
 I really don't know life at all. (J. Mitchell, 1969b, track 12)⁷

Although the lyrics of "Both Sides Now" do not directly reference textiles, garments, accessories, or other fashion-related items, we contend that they convey her overarching fashion philosophy because they revolve around ambivalence: the articulation of both/and insights that reveal the contradictions and mysteries of everyday life but ultimately do not attempt to synthesize or resolve them neatly or permanently. Through the use of *articulation*, Mitchell conjoins and expresses contradiction in a way that resonates with others who have had similar experiences; textiles, style, and fashion afford means to make these connections.

The overriding theme—or indeed, a fashion philosophy—in this analysis is Mitchell's articulation of both/and ("Both Sides Now," or simultaneous) philosophies. Just as the SI Fashion Theory has focused on ambivalence as an engine of fashion change (Davis, 1992; Kaiser et al., 1995), Mitchell's expressive arts convey more than one feeling or belief at one time, which transform in some way the fashioned body. In the following, we highlight three dynamic and unresolvable contradictions under the umbrella philosophy of "Both Sides Now" that articulate ambivalences and provide new insights for fashion theory: (a) domesticity and worldliness, (b) bourgeois capitalism and bohemianism, and (c) beauty and destruction. We agree with Karppinen (2016) that, although Mitchell has rejected the feminist label, her work tells a different story. Her lyrics are riddled with the kinds of contradictions and ambivalences that have been a key thread in feminist and fashion theory alike (Evans & Thornton, 1989; Michelman & Kaiser, 2000; Wilson, 2003). In the process of articulating ambivalences and contradictions, she reveals how cultural power relations such as gender, sexuality, and class (and their intersectionalities) intervene through the textiles and fashioned bodies that appear in her autobiographical storytelling.

Domesticity and Worldliness

The tension between domesticity and worldly exploration is a recurring theme throughout Mitchell's work between 1968 and 1976, a period of time during which she traveled extensively for musical performances, festivals, concerts, and (importantly) exploration and self-reflexivity. Ambivalent feelings about domestic life and travel are found in both her album art and lyrics: In five of the eight album covers, Mitchell's image is integrated into the landscapes she depicts, blurring the line between foreground and background and between individual and place. In her lyrics, she describes bodies produced, modified, and adorned by changes in space, and clearly travel and place are important aspects of her "style narratives" (Tulloch, 2010, 2016).

Mitchell uses textiles, particularly curtains and lace, to convey her ambivalence about domesticity and worldliness. Lace is mentioned in seven different songs and becomes a potent metaphor that articulates with other materials and concepts; it freely dearticulates and rearticulates in a way that highlights its flexibility in relation to the tensions associated with domesticity and worldly

exploration. In “I Had a King,” J. Mitchell (1968) describes herself as wearing “leather and lace” to represent her lack of “fit” with her first husband, Chuck Mitchell (a folk singer with whom she performed): he “lives in another time,” as evidenced in part by his “drip-dry and paisley” (i.e., preppy, early 1960s) clothing. Here, the articulation of leather and lace (a somewhat unexpected and contradictory combination at that time) alludes to her sense that she needs to move on; she is of “another kind” and doesn’t want to settle down.

Lace also appears in *Ladies of the Canyon* (J. Mitchell, 1970b, track 4) to describe one of her friends “sewing lace on widows’ weeds” (presumably a black dress), in a song that features “antique luxury.” And, as she is breaking up with singer/songwriter Graham Nash after the first moonwalk, describes him “looking thru the lace/At the face on the conquered moon” (J. Mitchell, 1970c, track 5). In 1974, there is “a lady in lacy sleeves” who comes on to a man in a hotel lounge but assures him that “I ain’t asking for no full length mink” (J. Mitchell, 1974e, track 9).

Lace appears again on the *Hejira* album, when “snow gathers like bolts of lace” (J. Mitchell, 1976e, track 5). On the album art, Mitchell wears black and uses her body on the front cover to indicate travel and worldliness by visually depicting a highway running into her chest. In contrast, the backside depicts a far-off (and hence tiny), unhappy-looking woman in a white lace wedding dress. J. Mitchell (1976d) wrote the songs for this travelogue during a road trip across the United States. “Song for Sharon,” the first song on Side Two of the album, contains the following lyrics:

And I saw the long white dress of love
On a storefront mannequin . . .
All for something lacy
Some girl’s going to see that dress
And crave that day like crazy. (track 6)

In small doses, lace can be seen as a charming feminine luxury that articulates with other disparate (more modern, masculine) materials such as leather in a way that connotes chicness or even hipness. But, rearticulated in larger quantities into a white wedding dress (already associated with feminine, heterosexual ideology), it represents “settling” into a domestic life. Mitchell thus uses lace to articulate with diverse materials and contexts across her music.

Curtains are used in a somewhat similarly ambivalent way, but only in Mitchell’s first three albums. In five different songs, curtains mark domestic spaces and their tenuous connection to the world beyond. In 1969 (“Chelsea Morning”), curtains are used in a cheerful, presentist way:

Woke up, it was a Chelsea morning
And the first thing that I saw
Was the sun through yellow curtains
And a rainbow on the wall
[. . .] Now the curtain opens on a portrait of today
[. . .] We’ll put on the day
And we’ll talk in present tenses. (J. Mitchell, 1969c, track 2)

Wearing the day involved wearing the “now,” a sentiment aligned with the “be here now” philosophy later popularized by Dass (1971). Later, the curtain “closes” and J. Mitchell (1969c) begs for domesticity: “If only you will stay/Pretty baby, won’t you” (track 2). In “The Pirate of Penance,” the curtains reveal the “sails unfurling”—yet another textile—that represent the physical departure of a lover (J. Mitchell, 1968b, track 8). Domestic textiles were also used as metaphors for confinement; for example, being held “under the crisp white sheets of curfew” (J. Mitchell, 1976b, track 4).

At the same time J. Mitchell (1976a) used home textiles to characterize domesticity, she also articulated them—particularly bedding—with travel and worldliness: “I slept on the strange pillows of my wanderlust” (track 2), she wrote in *Hejira*, and later on that same album, “I’ve got a blue motel room/With a blue bedspread” (J. Mitchell, 1976c, track 8).

Curtains, on a large scale, enabled her to travel through “velvet curtain calls” (J. Mitchell, 1970a, track 2). Luxury fabrics typically associated with wealth, high fashion, and urban life, were, on the other hand, often unexpectedly articulated with domestic spaces: “City satins left at home” (J. Mitchell, 1968b, track 8) and “Long silk stockings/On the bedposts” (J. Mitchell, 1972a, track 12). While relegated to the domestic space, these fabrics embodied worldliness in other songs, like when “The Pirate of Penance” would “bring me silks, and sandalwood, and Persian lace” (J. Mitchell, 1968b, track 8). The contradictions between domesticity and worldliness are captured ambivalently through the use of textile metaphors.

Bourgeois Capitalism and Bohemianism

The song “The Boho Dance” (J. Mitchell, 1975d, track 7) is about the ambivalence countercultural artists feel when they realize they might be “selling out” to capitalism. While promoting their songs, they are still trying to represent themselves as “authentic.” Hence, there is a bourgeois-bohemian contradiction, which Mitchell articulates ironically through fashion: a metaphoric “dance” between bohemian and bourgeois inclinations, experienced by artists as they navigate becoming successful without “selling out.” An unexpected articulation perhaps comes through most clearly with the subtle use of lace (a touch of luxury) juxtaposed with denim:

But even on the scuffle
The cleaner’s press was in my jeans
And any eye for detail
Caught a little lace along the seams. (J. Mitchell, 1975d, track 7)

In addition to her use of lace to connote ambivalent (antique) luxury, materials such as jewels and velvet represent bourgeois and celebrity values. In “For Free” (track 2), J. Mitchell (1970a) writes about a street performer who “plays for free,” in contrast to her own reality where she plays if “you have the money” and “went shopping today for jewels.” She also uses jewels to connote the experience of a fictional bourgeois housewife: “He bought her a diamond for her throat/He put her in a ranch house on a hill” (J. Mitchell, 1975e, track 6).

In *Court and Spark* and *The Hissing of Summer Lawns*, Mitchell articulates what Wilson (2003) would theorize a decade later: that fashion is all about ambivalence, “and we love and hate fashion, just as we love and hate capitalism itself” (p. 14). J. Mitchell points out the contradictions of the human experience, as in the case of mixed emotions; for example, “Laughing and crying/You know it’s the same release” (J. Mitchell, 1974d, track 4), or “You taste so bitter and so sweet” (J. Mitchell, 1971a, track 9). J. Mitchell’s (1975) album, *The Hissing of Summer Lawns*, highlights the contradictions associated with bourgeois “selling out” in suburbia. The album cover features a group of people carrying a large snake (presumably a reference to capitalism), and the interior artwork shows her bikini-clad, model-perfect body floating in a luxurious Bel-Air swimming pool. Curtains make another appearance, both in and outside the home in “Harry’s House/Centerpiece”: “Yellow checkers for the kitchen” contrast with “Caught up at the light in the fishnet windows/Of Bloomingdale’s” (J. Mitchell, 1975a, track 8). Both potentially articulate different aspects of bourgeois femininity.

The contradictions of fashion through ambivalences about style and tenuous appearances are actively produced through her lyrics and become especially palpable in her 1970s albums: “My fingernails are filthy/I’ve got beach tar on my feet,” J. Mitchell (1971d) wrote in the song “Carey,”

“And I miss my clean white linen and my fancy French cologne” (track 4). She is of the moment, soiled and stained, but her ambivalence navigating the fragile boundaries between bohemian hipness and bourgeois “selling out” refers not only to cultural gender/sexuality and class tensions: It also points to their intersectionalities. At the same time that Mitchell expresses an autobiographic longing for a clean, perfumed body against luxurious materials (the embodiment of upper-class femininity) in these and other lyrics, she also has a desire to “scuffle,” as expressed in an interview:

I began to feel too separate from my audience and from my times, separated by affluence and convenience from the pulse of my times. I wanted to hitchhike and scuffle. I felt that I hadn't done enough scuffling . . . I felt that I had been deprived of a lot of the experience of people who broke away and tried alternate lifestyles, communal living and that kind of experimentation, which, if I hadn't been successful, I would have been a part of. (Marom, 2014, p. 53)

Beauty and Destruction

While the lyrics of her first two albums have the greatest array of textile references and carefully described garments,⁸ the later album lyrics transform thick description into complex critique. She begins to sing about aging bodies, a kind of destruction and degradation coupled with feelings of both anxiety and joy. For example, in “Just Like This Train,” J. Mitchell (1974e) relishes in “Dreaming of the pleasure I'm going to have/Watching your hairline recede/My vain darling” (track 9). While she delights in observing the aging of others, she acknowledges later, in the song “Sweet Bird,” her concern about “Power ideals and beauty/Fading in everyone's hand” (J. Mitchell, 1975c, track 9). In “The Gallery,” beauty is a commodity of sorts: “I gave you all my pretty years/Then we began to weather” (J. Mitchell, 1969d, track 6). The song “Harry's House/Centerpiece” highlights ambivalence about aging, alongside a critique of bourgeois suburban domestic life and leisure. She writes about a husband's memory of his wife in her younger days, “With her body oiled and shining/At the public swimming pool” (J. Mitchell, 1975a, track 8). Increasingly, Mitchell critiques the growing superficiality of the fashion and beauty industries by noting “vain promises on beauty jars” (J. Mitchell, 1975c, track 9), and “beauty parlor blonds with credit card eyes” (J. Mitchell, 1975a, track 8). In the latter phrase, Mitchell's surrealist inclinations come forth (Marom, 2014, p. 62): This articulation substitutes plastic dollar signs for natural eyes, and juxtaposes these signs with hegemonic white femininity standards, and in its own way connotes a “check” on beauty.

Mitchell also uses degradation and destruction to textile materials, often in combination with moments of joy and fun, to convey ambivalent sentiments about “beauty.” One of her favorite metaphors seems to be runs or holes in nylon stockings, which she used in three different songs, pairing this form of destruction with joy and luxury: “Alive, alive, I want to get up and jive/I want to wreck my stockings in some juke box dive” (J. Mitchell, 1971b, track 1); “And find a lady in a Paris dress/With runs in her nylons” (J. Mitchell, 1975e, track 6); “You dance with the lady/With the hole in her stocking/Didn't it feel good” (J. Mitchell, 1974c, track 2).

Ultimately, Mitchell engages with the idea of change through what we might call *contradictions of appearance*: for example, “impossibly gentle hands, [with] blood-red fingernails” (J. Mitchell, 1975b, track 5) and “Photo Beauty gets attention/Then her eye paint's running down” (J. Mitchell, 1974d, track 4). Mitchell's contradictions of appearance represent ironic articulations: Beauty and destruction coincide uneasily. In the larger context of the song “People's Parties” on *Court and Spark*, her cynicism is thick: “All the people at this party/They've got a lot of style/They've got stamps of many countries/They've got passport smiles.” Beauty becomes a proper noun, an entity of sorts that Mitchell calls to: “Cry for us all, Beauty,” she demands (J. Mitchell, 1974d, track 4).

Conclusion

“Songs Are Like Tattoos” sang J. Mitchell (1971c, track 5) in her album *Blue*. Through song lyrics and artwork from 1968 to 1976, Mitchell highlighted the critical role of fashion, textiles, and body modifications as filling “empty space”—in other words, the ambivalent integration of body, fashion, and place. Through song, listeners are reminded of different textiles, garments, accessories, and surface decoration, and these, by the mid-1970s, eventually became a metaphor of social relationships, anxieties, and hopes. Mitchell’s propensity to convey “Both Sides Now”—that is, to articulate the contradictions and ambivalences, the surrealist ironies, the ups and downs—points to the openness of tensions in her fashion philosophies that conjoin and yet juxtapose domesticity and worldliness, bohemianism and bourgeois capitalism, and beauty and destruction in the late 1960s and 1970s. Mitchell has not sought resolution to these tensions. In an interview with her friend Marom (2014), Mitchell drew parallels among tensions, open-ended inquiry (i.e., nonresolution), and the guitar “sus” chords she has been so fond of using:

[N]ot knowing what a sus chord was myself, I called them chords of inquiry. They have a question mark in them. Men don’t like them because they like resolution, just like they do in life . . . I stay on sus chords a long time and go from sus chord to sus chord [contrary to musicological principles], and then . . . it builds tension . . . It’s like a complementary color—the sky just opens up. (Marom, 2014, pp. 74, 75)

Suggestions for Future Research

Unresolvable tensions or ambivalences are likely to fuel fashion change (Davis, 1992). Change is, of course, the only constant in the fashion system. J. Mitchell (1974a) sang, “Everything comes and goes/Marked by lovers and styles of clothes” (track 7). Did Mitchell anticipate and influence fashion change through her songs and album art? In other words, was Joni Mitchell a “fashion influencer”? These are questions for future research. The terminology of “influencer” is relatively new and emerged to describe individuals with large social media followings (Abidin, 2016; Luvaas, 2017). It may be fruitful for future researchers to examine both contemporary and earlier periods through the lens of “fashion influencer(s).” Typically, terms such as fashion “opinion leader” or “innovator” have been used by fashion scholars to describe individuals who are early adopters of new styles and contribute to the diffusion of trends (Summers, 1970; Workman & Johnson, 1993; Workman & Lee, 2017). Crane (1999) has argued that popular music stars often qualify as “opinion leaders” if not innovators, and fuel the “top-down model” of fashion change (p. 16). Joni Mitchell is somewhere in between these definitions: most certainly an “influencer” and an “opinion leader” but herself might likely reject these labels. She has been artful, subtle, unassuming, and understated in her appearances (and perhaps this has enhanced her influence—i.e., “not trying too hard”).

Another avenue for future research would be an analysis of Mitchell’s albums produced after 1976. For example, in her 1979 *Mingus* album, Mitchell picked up on the ephemeral aspects of changing styles (as well as lovers and friends) and the underlying ambivalences:

Lovers and friends
 Fade in and they fade out again
 In these daydreams of rebirth
 I see myself in style
 Raking in what I’m worth. (J. Mitchell, 1979, track 4)

She self-reflexively acknowledged that she “sees herself in style” and “rakes in what she’s worth.” However, her worth is likely to be far greater than her skills in what she has called the

“mechanics of hip.” Her ability to articulate—through material as well as metaphysical means—the ways in which unresolved (and perhaps unresolvable) ambivalences reinvent themselves to anticipate and propel change, we suggest, helps to account for her cultural relevance in and well beyond the period of our analysis. And at least in moments of temporary “closure,” she has offered long-lasting opportunities to render meaning to ongoing ambivalences and contradictions.

We would also like to suggest CDA as an approach for use with other artists’ works, in tandem with interviews and biographies, when available. These works could range from other musical lyrics to novels, poetry, nonfiction and other literatures, as well as visual works of art.

Limitations

In this study, we have analyzed Mitchell’s song lyrics and album art from 1968 to 1976, but we did not analyze other kinds of representations of her fashioned body during this period (i.e., photographs, video footage, media representations, or paintings by Mitchell that did not appear as part of her album art). We also have delimited the temporal frame of this study to an 8-year period and therefore have not analyzed albums produced after 1976. These are limitations of this study but create opportunities for future research.

Final Thoughts

In acknowledgment of her junior high school teacher Mr. Kratzmann’s encouragement, Mitchell’s lyrics articulate vivid colors, textures, and patterns, using textiles, clothes, and appearances metaphorically and strategically to convey complex ideas about herself, relationships, places, travels, social issues, power relations, and cultural anxieties. Her album art pursues similar themes with a high degree of self-representation that blurs, especially, an array of places as she becomes embodied in each of them. Understanding the intersectionalities among gender, sexuality, age, and class are key, in particular, to making sense of the cultural contradictions and ambivalences she articulates: domesticity versus worldly “moving on”; bourgeois versus bohemian values; and ephemeral, yet socially constructed ideals of “beauty” versus the “destruction” generated by time/aging, travel, capitalism, and even joy.

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Notes

1. *Urban Dictionary* defines “hip” as “cooler than cool, the pinnacle of what is ‘it.’ Beyond all trends and conventional coolness” (Hip, 2007, para. 1).
2. This resulted in two different units of analysis: the lyrics (verbal) and the accompanying visual images (nonverbal). Joni Mitchell considered herself an artist in the broadest sense: both visual and verbal in her creative articulation. Because her lyrics and music were packaged with her artwork, we decided not to divorce the two and instead consider both forms of expression.
3. In the first cycle of coding, researchers noted references to (a) textile or textile design, (b) garment, (c) accessory, (d) body part, (e) Mitchell’s appearance, (f) someone else’s appearance, (g) Mitchell’s appearance (as perceived by someone else), and (h) changes to appearance.
4. We have 25 images across eight albums, because in many cases, the front, back, and inside artwork were separate images; however, six of the albums included front and back images that were one illustration extending across the entire album cover (*Song to a Seagull*, *For the Roses*, *Hejira*, *Hissing of Summer Lawns*, *Blue*, *Clouds*) and for the other two albums (*Court and Spark* and *Ladies of the Canyon*), the front and back covers had separate motifs.
5. For example, when writing about her mother: “She don’t like my kick pleat skirt/She don’t like my eyelids painted green/She don’t like me staying up late/In my high-heeled shoes” in “Let the Wind Carry Me” (J. Mitchell, 1972b, track 5). Based on interviews with Mitchell (Yaffe, 2017), it is evident that she was writing about her mother, whom she later credits on the same album, *For the Roses*, with teaching her the “deeper meaning” (J. Mitchell, 1972c, track 11).
6. We cannot rule out that they may be highly abstracted images of Mitchell.
7. When Joni Mitchell wrote the lyrics for “Both Sides Now,” she was 23 years old and 26 when she initially recorded it. Mitchell was to revisit, reperform, and rerelease “Both Sides Now” in 2000, when she was 57, in a lower range and with tremendous depth and passion, with the London Symphony Orchestra, bringing tears to members of the orchestra.
8. For example, “taffeta patterns,” “paisley,” “gingham,” “yellow curtains,” “old blue jeans,” “crimson crystal beads,” “stay-at-home shoes,” “coat of flowers,” and so on (J. Mitchell, 1968a; 1969a).

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