



REVISTA
DE
**CULTURA
VISUAL**

e-ISSN 2184-1284

No. 15 | 2025

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<https://doi.org/10.21814/vista.6182>

e025003

Suellen Cristina Vieira



Supervision, validation, writing – review & editing

Beatriz Aguiar



Visualization



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Vista No. 15 | January – June 2025 | e025003

Submitted: 10/01/2025 | Reviewed: 25/02/2025 | Accepted: 17/03/2025 |

Published: 23/04/2025

Suellen Cristina Vieira

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3121-2316>

Programa de Pós-Graduação em Ciências da Linguagem, Universidade do Sul de Santa Catarina, Tubarão, Brazil

Supervision, validation, writing – review & editing

Beatriz Aguiar

<https://orcid.org/0009-0003-6114-0007>

Universidade do Sul de Santa Catarina, Tubarão, Brazil

Visualization

This study applies the theory of the imaginary, as developed by Gilbert Durand and Michel Maffesoli, to examine the Versace brand. The primary objective is to explore how the brand's imaginary has been sustained following the death of its founder, Gianni Versace, who was murdered in 1997, and the subsequent leadership of Donatella Versace, then responsible for the brand's public relations. The research employs a symbolic hermeneutic analysis to investigate how the brand's imagery is projected through its designers' collections. The interplay between symbolic imagination and hermeneutics provides insights into the creative process and the brand's continuity over time. To this end, eight representative images from Gianni and Donatella's collections were selected to identify the symbols and creative processes that bridge the brand's past and present. The analysis explores Gianni's enduring influence on Donatella's work

and the perpetuation of the brand's imagery in postmodern society. The findings contribute to the broader academic discourse on symbolic imagination from a multidisciplinary perspective, offering a foundation for future research in both symbolic imagination and the historical continuity of the Versace brand.

Keywords: fashion, social imaginary, Versace, brand

De Gianni a Donatella: O Imaginário Perpetuado na Versace

O presente estudo tem como metodologia a teoria do imaginário, apresentada por Gilbert Durand e Michel Maffesoli, aplicada no estudo da marca Versace. O objetivo central é compreender como o imaginário da grife foi perpetuado após a morte de seu fundador, Gianni Versace, assassinado em 1997, e sua substituição por Donatella Versace, então responsável pelas relações públicas da marca. A metodologia adota a análise hermenêutica simbólica, buscando identificar a projeção do imaginário da marca nas coleções dos estilistas. A articulação entre a imaginação simbólica e a hermenêutica possibilita responder aos questionamentos acerca do processo de criação e da continuidade da marca ao longo das décadas. Para tal, foram selecionadas oito imagens representativas das coleções de Gianni e Donatella, com o propósito de identificar os símbolos e processos criativos que conectam o passado e o presente da marca. A análise visa explorar a influência de Gianni no trabalho de Donatella, bem como o imaginário perpetuado na sociedade pós-moderna. Os resultados obtidos contribuem para o desenvolvimento de construções argumentativas, que ampliam o debate sobre a imaginação simbólica de maneira pluridisciplinar, fornecendo subsídios para futuras pesquisas, seja no campo do imaginário simbólico ou na história e continuidade da marca Versace.

Palavras-chave: moda, imaginário social, Versace, marca

Introduction

This article examines the perpetuation of the symbolic universe associated with the Versace brand, founded in 1978, by exploring the transformations it underwent following the transition of creative leadership from its founder, Gianni Versace (1946–1997), to his sister, Donatella Versace, in 1997. Recognised as an icon of luxury, glamour, and art, the Versace brand has established a distinctive aesthetic identity defined by daring, vibrant colours, bold prints, and sensual patterns, often juxtaposed with soft tones and strategic simplicity. In this context, this study analyses the defining elements of the “Gianni era” and its prominence in the 1990s, as well as the creative direction pursued by Donatella following her brother’s death.

At the time of Gianni Versace’s death in 1997, the brand had grown into a global empire valued at US\$ 807,000,000, comprising 130 boutiques worldwide and an elite clientele that included Prince, Madonna, Princess Diana, and Elton John. The overarching objective of this study is to analyse the signs and symbols

embedded in the brand's design and to investigate how its symbolic universe has been sustained in the absence of its founder.

The theoretical framework for this study is grounded in Durkheim's classical thought, alongside the contributions of Michel Maffesoli and Gilbert Durand, who examine the social dimensions of postmodern life. Their analyses draw on key movements in art, music, and literature, including fashion. According to Maffesoli (2004/2010), the postmodern era is characterised by futility, appearance, and the banality of all aspects of society. These traits, however, often provide structure and meaning to everyday life, ultimately leading to the construction of the imaginary. In this sense, the imaginary is understood as the production of images, ideas, conceptions, and visions by individuals or groups as a means of expressing their relationship with the world and its inherent otherness.

This paper is structured into five sections, beginning with the introduction (Section 1) and concluding with the final considerations (Section 5). Section 2 explores Gilbert Durand and Michel Maffesoli's theory of the imaginary, providing a brief overview of its conceptual foundations, including symbols and visual narratives through the diurnal and nocturnal regimes of the image. Section 3 traces the brand's trajectory and its consolidation in the luxury market, analysing the aesthetic and symbolic elements that define the creations of Gianni and Donatella Versace. Section 4 presents a comparative analysis of the collections, examining the processes of re-signification and continuity within the brand's imaginary, as well as their impact on Versace's identity and positioning in contemporary society.

From this perspective, and drawing on the theory of the imaginary, this study aims to examine the evolution of the social imaginary surrounding the Versace brand over time. It seeks to understand how the brand's symbolic universe is constructed through its creations and to determine whether the images and elements contribute to the perpetuation and/or preservation of its visual identity from the "Gianni era" to the "Donatella era".

The research methodology adopted in this study is based on symbolic hermeneutics, wherein the symbol functions as a bearer of meaning, emerging from an object situated in space and time. Through this approach, the true significance of the symbol is uncovered, allowing for a coherent plurality of interpretations. This plurality becomes possible only when examining the dialectical activity of symbolic imagination — where explicit meaning, as a manifest representation, interacts with figurative meaning, akin to poetic creation. The fundamental nature of the symbol lies in its capacity to evoke transcendence. Accordingly, symbolic hermeneutics can be understood as an interpretative process of an anthropological nature, one that "seeks the meaning of human existence in cultural and artistic works through the symbols and images structured within their narratives" (Ferreira-Santos, 2004, p. 144).

Finally, by examining the symbols embedded in the brand's visual identity, this study seeks to analyse eight pieces from different fashion shows that encapsulate

both Gianni and Donatella's creations, bridging past and present. The goal is to address the key questions surrounding Versace's shift in creative direction and its evolving positioning in relation to consumers and the fashion industry.

The Imaginary

Imagination is commonly perceived as the opposite of reality — something fictional or unreal. However, the concept of the imaginary has evolved through numerous theoretical perspectives across disciplines such as anthropology, psychoanalysis, and hermeneutics. Throughout the 20th century, scholars such as Gaston Bachelard, Gilbert Durand, Michel Maffesoli, and Jacques Lacan explored the imaginary, each offering distinct interpretations and extensions of its meaning. According to Durand (1960/2002), the imaginary encompasses the totality of human imaginative processes that lead to the production and reproduction of images, symbols, myths, and archetypes. Expanding on this notion, Maffesoli (2004/2010) argues that the imaginary is inherently collective, forming part of a group's cultural heritage. In this sense, the social imaginary consists of shared representations, symbols, myths, and meanings that shape and give coherence to social life. It operates as an underlying force influencing culture, social interactions, and behaviour — often at an unconscious level.

In this sense, the imaginary can be defined as the essence of spirit, as the act of creation, an unconscious impulse derived from the complete (individual or collective) being — body, soul, feelings, sensitivities, emotions — serving as the root of everything that exists for humanity (Pitta, 2005b). Thus, the imaginary can be understood as the symbolic and intrinsic force of both individuals and civilisations, shaped by a combination of historical, sociological, and cultural elements, as well as personal and intimate dimensions of being. This interplay ultimately contributes to the formation of human sensibility.

According to Durand (1960/2002), the imaginary in postmodern society has re-emerged through the civilisation of the image and the influence of mass media. It functions as an intermediary space between different forms of knowledge, akin to an extensive library of images produced by humanity across various times and places. These images are rooted in the unconscious, shaped both by the archetypal structures underlying universal human behaviour and by the idiographic domain, which reflects the specific cultural contexts and modulations within distinct social groups.

The imaginary consists of a network of images that shape individual and collective thought, encompassing poetic, artistic, scientific, philosophical, and ideological expressions, among others. “A symbolisation that is sometimes completely involuntary, as in a dream, sometimes organised and integrated into a system of collective beliefs, in myth, sometimes sought out or at least controlled by a conscious theme, as in the arts” (Malrieu, 1967/1996, p. 105). Rather than being defined by a fixed structure, the imaginary is characterised by its dynamic

and figurative nature. Thus, it should not be understood as a mere classification of images, for “this classification only makes sense if we understand that it is cultural gestation, the dynamic process of creating, transmitting, appropriating, and interpreting symbolic goods, that lends meaning to symbols” (Ferreira-Santos & Almeida, 2012, p. 38).

Moreover, the imaginary serves as both the counterpart and complement to what we call “real”; without it, there would be no reality for humans, nor would human reality exist. It can be defined as the faculty of symbolisation through which fears, desires and cultural perceptions are given form and meaning. Rather than being merely a collection of images, it should be understood as something broader, transcending various forms of life and extending beyond culture while encompassing wider dimensions of human experience. Thus, it is in the interplay between biological and cultural drives that aesthetic sensibility and the imaginary emerge.

Aesthetics is the relationship established between the human being and a particular combination of forms. (...) Aesthetic sensitivity is essentially the ability to resonate, to find “harmony”, to be in synchrony with sounds, smells, forms, images, and colours, which are profoundly produced not only by the universe but also, from now on, by *Homo sapiens*. (Morin, 1999/2000, p. 103)

As elucidated by Durand (as cited in Vieira, 2020), the imaginary is dynamic and evolving, undergoing wear and tear with time. The transition from modern to postmodern is understood through the metaphor of the flow of water within the semantic basin. In this context, the author explains that many trends and small elements may wear away over time, potentially transforming into more significant aspects akin to an incessant flow. This process can be understood in six phases: first, the “flow”, where small currents create new imaginaries and instigate changes within social structures; second, the “division of the waters”, marking the moment when opposing flows merge and challenge previous imaginary states; third, the “naming of the river”, which occurs when the semantic basin becomes a unified whole; fourth, the “organisation of the river”, where the flows of the imaginary are theorised; fifth, the “banks of the imaginary”, which refers to the mythologies and philosophies underpinning the imaginary; and sixth, the “deltas and meanders” phase, where the imaginary wears out and becomes saturated, allowing the flows to penetrate it gradually. This saturation process signifies that each era anticipates its own apocalypse, waiting for its transformation, its change of form, and its end.

Based on Maffesoli’s (2004/2010) explanation, myths play a crucial role in societies, as they serve as a means through which the natural dynamics of the imagination are manifested in narratives and stories. These myths provide a form of knowledge that traces back to the dawn of humanity, acting as symbolic narratives that represent the first attempts to articulate the experience of existence in the world. In other words, they represent a quest to structure and make sense of human experience in the tangible world.

According to Maffesoli (2004/2010), the postmodern imaginary is characterised by the shadow of Dionysus, who influences and shapes certain social behaviours, such as the pursuit of unchecked pleasures, the celebration of the erotic body, the vital force of nature, animality, and presenteeism. However, it is important to note that these Dionysian values are anthropological constants and, with varying degrees of emphasis, have always been present in society throughout history. In this regard, Vieira (2020) argues that research into the concepts of “modern” and “postmodern” is crucial for understanding the manifestations tied to the imaginary of each era, people, or tribe. Such manifestations are seen as reflections of the prevailing paradigms and cultural climates in specific historical periods of a society or community.

Postmodernity is situated within the “culture of feeling” where “the atmosphere, the intensity of shared emotions, and the necessary abundance of the superfluous” dominate (Maffesoli, 2016/2016, p. 72). This assertion highlights the critical role that the production and dissemination of images play in postmodern society. In this context, by recognising the regimes of the imaginary and the sensory system of reflexes in which mental images emerge, the goal is to explore and identify the elements that shape archetypes in contemporary fashion creation, thereby enabling a more detailed analysis.

The imaginary, when rooted in a complex subject, does not revolve around free images but is instead structured logically, allowing for the synthesis of seemingly incompatible singular images into symbolic constellations and meanings. For this reason, it is possible to argue that the anthropological journey enables us to express and identify these constellations of images, which are conveyed through the subjective drives of individuals and the world in which they are immersed. In this way, “symbols constellate because they are developed from the same archetypal theme because they are variations on an archetype” (Durand, 1998, as cited in Vieira, 2020, p. 45).

Regarding Durand’s (1960/2002) definitions, it can be highlighted that the image regime will be classified as either diurnal or nocturnal. In the diurnal regime, we encounter the postural reflex. In contrast, in the nocturnal regime, we observe the swallowing reflex and the rhythmic reflex, which are expressed in the actions of the heroic, mystical, and synthetic regimes. These structures, in turn, facilitate and guide the understanding of socio-cultural phenomena, offering insights into the cultural universe of knowledge and self-awareness within individuals and groups.

The Diurnal Regime

According to Tonin and Azubel (2016), the diurnal regime and schizomorphic structures are characterised by geometry, antithesis, historicity, and pragmatism. Positive science, rooted in the diurnal regime of consciousness, belongs to this domain. It functions as a polarising structure within the realm of images — certainly dominant in contemporary societies, yet relative from a broader

perspective. This regime shapes social attitudes that manifest in a detachment from reality, fostering an abstract mindset and a tendency towards withdrawal. It is marked by an obsessive preoccupation with distinction, which Gilbert Durand (1960/2002) termed “morbid geometrism” — an intensification of dualisms.

Within this perspective, the symbolic constellations organised around the symbols of the sceptre and the gladius, which correspond to the gesture of the postural reflex, are particularly noteworthy. “This is the archetype of light, ascension, and separation, characterised by symbols such as the wing, the arrow, the chief, the king, weapons, and fire” (Vieira, 2020, p. 41).

The Nocturnal Regime

In the nocturnal regime, the imagination adopts an attitude of receptivity and understanding, engaging with the natural and vital forces of becoming, which transform temporal aspects into beneficial virtues (Durand, 1960/2002). Unlike the diurnal regime, which employs antithesis to balance opposing elements of time, the nocturnal structure emphasises inversion and euphemistic language, giving rise to figures with ambiguous meanings. Here, distressing symbolic expressions are de-dramatised by inverting their meanings: the abyss is no longer a bottomless pit where life is lost but a receptacle — a vessel, a cup. “It is no longer about polemics but about stillness and enjoyment. In order to achieve this, the process involves euphemisation and the inversion of symbolic meanings” (Pitta, 2005a, p. 8). Accordingly, the nocturnal regime is associated with images and symbols that evoke intimacy, warmth, the maternal womb, home, and the tomb.

The History of the Versace Brand

Founded by Gianni Versace in 1978, the brand has become synonymous with power, authority, and visual provocation, embracing freedom in the female silhouette as a symbol of extravagance and sensuality. Versace’s aesthetic draws inspiration from Ancient Greek history, Roman architecture, and Andy Warhol’s pop art. Over the decades, the brand has remained renowned for its bold designs, vibrant prints infused with pop art references, form-fitting silhouettes, and striking contrasts of black and gold, evoking elements of punk and rock and roll. Signature pieces, such as dresses with geometric cut-outs, metallic mesh, deep necklines, and seductive details, continue to define Versace’s identity (Martin, 1997/1999).

In 1972, Gianni Versace made his debut as a fashion designer in Milan, following an apprenticeship in his mother’s atelier. Six years later, in 1978, he launched his first women’s collection under his own name. In the early 1980s, Gianni expanded into costume design, creating pieces for Richard Strauss’s ballet *Josephslegende* at La Scala in Milan, Gustav Mahler’s *Lieb und Leid*, Donizetti’s *Don Pasquale*, and Maurice Béjart’s *Dionysos*. In 1985, he delivered a lecture at the Victoria

& Albert Museum in London as part of the *Art and Fashion* exhibition. The following year, he was awarded the Grand Vermeil Medal in Paris by Mayor Jacques Chirac for his contributions to the *Fashion Dialogues* exhibition. By the end of the decade, in 1989, he opened the Versace atelier to produce haute couture designs and simultaneously launched his youth line, Versus. A year later, in 1990, the San Francisco Opera inaugurated its season with Richard Strauss's *Capriccio*, featuring costumes exclusively designed by Versace ("A Extravagância de Versace", 1996).

By 1991, Versace had reached new heights with the *Versace Theatre Exhibition* at the Royal College of Art in London. The following year, he designed the complete wardrobe for Elton John's world tour, one of his loyal admirers. In 1993, he received the American Fashion Oscar in New York while simultaneously launching Home Signature, a luxury homeware line. In 1996, Versace sponsored *Weber Versace Viaggi Vogue*, the first Bruce Weber exhibition in Italy. That same year, the brand expanded into South America with the opening of its first boutique in São Paulo.

Tragically, in 1997, Gianni Versace was murdered outside his mansion on Ocean Drive, Miami, at 11 a.m. Following his death, his sister, Donatella Versace, took over the creative and managerial leadership of the brand.

In 2004, Versace underwent a major restructuring with the appointment of Gian Carlo Di Risio as CEO. This period saw the closure of several stores, the opening of new branches, and the brand's expansion into sectors such as hospitality and interior design. With significant investment, Versace continued its global expansion, opening new boutiques worldwide. Today, Versace products are available in over 350 branded stores, as well as at select airport retailers, department stores, and luxury outlets. The brand entered the Brazilian market in 1996 and, by 2017, operated seven stores across the country. However, in 2018, Versace unexpectedly ceased its operations in Brazil without providing an official explanation. The closure of its last store came just four months after the brand was acquired by Michael Kors (*Grife Italiana Versace Encerra Atividades no Brasil*, 2019).

Versace's visual identity has evolved significantly over the decades. In the early 1980s, the brand's logo consisted solely of the designer's name. After several modifications, Versace adopted the Medusa from Greek mythology alongside the brand name as its signature emblem. The Medusa has since become a universal symbol of the house, appearing on accessories, garments, and prints. According to historian Richard Martin, Medusa's choice was not inspired by a Renaissance revival. Close friends of Gianni Versace recall that he first encountered the symbol upon visiting an 18th-century palace in Milan, which he purchased in 1981. Struck by the image of Medusa on the latch of the entrance door, he decided to incorporate it into his brand as a sublime representation of his fashion house, embodying its classical ideals of sensuality and theatricality ("Versace: Uma História de Amor e Morte", 2019).

Half-monster, half-goddess, Medusa petrified men who dared to meet her gaze. In Greek mythology, her severed head, taken by Perseus, became an amulet against evil in Ancient Greece and later emerged as a feminist symbol in the 1970s. Today, it has been reclaimed as an emblem of empowerment. In this context, Versace incorporates this mythological figure into both its logo and brand narrative. According to Vieira (2020), “myths play a crucial role in societies, as they channel the natural dynamics of the imaginary into narratives and stories” (p. 22), offering a form of knowledge that dates back to the dawn of humanity. This symbolic narrative represents the earliest formulations of existence. “The meaning of myth, in particular, is nothing more than a reference to the meaning of the imaginary in general” (Durand, 1960/2002, p. 374). In other words, they represent a quest to structure and make sense of human experience in the tangible world.

Analysing the Imaginary Perpetuated at Versace

This section explores the Versace brand through the lens of imaginary theory and symbolic hermeneutics. First, it examines how the symbolic imaginary is articulated in the narratives of collections designed by Gianni and Donatella Versace. Then, through an analysis of eight images from the brand’s collections, it seeks to identify the recurring symbols, their interplay, and how the brand translates its imagery into fashion. Ultimately, the aim is to understand how Versace sustains and perpetuates its distinctive visual identity in the absence of its founder.

In the first image¹, the model is wearing an elongated blazer with a belted design. The blazer, a timeless piece that reached its peak popularity in the 1940s and 1960s, traditionally conveys an air of formality and responsibility. However, Gianni Versace redefined this concept by incorporating innovative materials, a distinctive silhouette, and a contemporary colour palette. The use of red in this design is particularly striking, as it evokes a broad and complex range of associations, including power, desire, temptation, revolution, energy, sensuality, and stimulation — a colour that both excites and provokes.

In addition, the look includes a satin shirt, a waistcoat with straps and buckles, and leather trousers with gold appliqués — elements that evoke power, lust, and ascension. The fetish-inspired outfit, featuring buckles, leather, and a choker reminiscent of a collar, challenges the conservatism of the time. The word “fetish” originates from the term “spell”, initially used to describe objects believed to possess supernatural powers. In fashion, “fetishism” manifests through the appropriation of clothing elements associated with submission, domination, and eroticism, such as leather, vinyl, corsets, thigh-high boots, and metallic accessories (Estevão, 2020).

¹<https://www.gettyimages.com.br/detail/foto-jornal%C3%ADstica/versace-fall-1992-rtw-runway-show-foto-jornal%C3%ADstica/592338299?adppopup=true>.

Building on this idea, the double belt with the Versace logo on the buckle, featuring Medusa's head, draws from Greek mythology and carries multiple layers of meaning. It serves as a guide for fundamental principles, reinforces obedience to authority, and reflects social values that shape the identity of a civilisation or a particular historical period.

The story of Medusa is an emblematic narrative open to multiple interpretations. The snake-haired figure is feared for her ability to petrify with a single glance — an embodiment of the powerful, fatal, and seductive woman. She immobilises, symbolising empowerment in postmodern society. The signs associated with her image, based on their predominant meaning and symbolic analysis, align with the diurnal aspect of the imaginary, which is characterised by notions of ascension and power. As Durand (1960/2002) explains, it represents verticality, enlightenment, rationality, domination, objectivity, display, and freedom.

In the heroic mythical universe of the diurnal regime, the foundational act unfolds through distinction, shaped by the postural reflex and constellating isomorphic images polarised by gestures of separation and ascension. The symbols associated with this regime are linked to verticalisation, vision, and touch, manifesting in theriomorphic images — derived from animal symbolism — nictomorphic images, which represent the temporality of darkness, and catamorphic images, or symbols rooted in the earthly realm. (Durand, 2002, as cited in Vieira, 2020, p. 37)

Therefore, in the next image², the model is wearing a long black dress with a central-front slit, gold pins featuring the Versace logo, and pumps completing the look. The black dress, originally a classic developed by Chanel, was reimagined by Gianni with an innovative and daring approach, incorporating elements of the punk movement and fetishism. In this context, the oversized and extravagant safety pins, characteristic of punk aesthetics, can be interpreted as symbols of rebellion, disrupting the formality of the traditional black dress. From the perspective of the social imaginary, youth subcultures are complex and multidimensional phenomena, and punk is no exception. A key aspect of subcultures is their relationship with the notion of “resistance”. One of the most visible manifestations of this is the use of clothing and style as a means of expressing ideology, as they appropriate and subvert cultural meanings. As Maffesoli (1988/2014) argues, it is through imagery that different cultures and groups establish connections, shape their experiences, and articulate their practices and ideas.

Luxury brands such as Versace exert symbolic domination over the masses by appropriating and re-signifying originally transgressive elements, transforming them into symbols of status and sophistication. This phenomenon unfolds through the aestheticisation of rebellion, in which cultural resistance markers

²<https://footwearnews.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/versace-christy-turlington-safety-pin-dress.jpg?w=1024>.

— such as punk movement pins — are reinterpreted in noble materials and integrated into high-fashion pieces, stripping them of their disruptive character and rendering them socially acceptable. Simultaneously, the commodification of nonconformity emerges: luxury fashion reconfigures the symbolism of protest into a desirable, consumable product, fostering an aesthetic experience of safe, controlled rebellion. Thus, what once signified opposition to the system becomes an emblem of social distinction, reinforcing the brand’s influence on the collective imagination (Bourdieu, 1989/2007).

From this perspective, the punk aesthetic embraced by Versace represents a diffusion of the movement’s values and ideologies. The pin, introduced as a luxury accessory by Gianni in the Autumn 1992 collection, illustrates how a rebellious aesthetic can be adapted for mass appeal while retaining its transgressive and provocative essence. By incorporating the brand’s emblem — the Medusa logo — into mainstream fashion, Versace cultivates a desire for luxury tied to its name, reinforcing a sense of exclusivity and power. This interplay between counterculture, freedom of expression, and the imagery of bold, boundary-pushing fashion helped shape the 1990s *femme fatale*.

The dialectical tension that shapes cultural life — between the boundless essence of life and the modes of expression it must adopt — propels culture into states of contradiction, rupture, and even opposition. Thus, “the waning of traditional cultural forms compels the vital force of life to manifest anew in creative expression” (Simmel, 2001, p. 204). In Western societies, punk marked a pivotal rupture and repositioning within the social structure, accompanied by a distinct soundtrack and visual aesthetic. More than just a style of clothing or a genre of music, punk embodied a defiant attitude that challenged the status quo, amplifying the voices of one disillusioned and discontented youth. At its core, punk carries the dual forces of return, resurrection, and renewal alongside those of change, inversion, and subversion (Reynolds, 2007).

The next image³ features the model in a trench coat with military-style pockets, a fastened belt, sunglasses, a crossbody bag, straight-cut tailored trousers, and vinyl boots. The designer embraces a fetishistic reinterpretation by incorporating leather into the design. Originally emerging from a subculture, the trench coat did not originate on the catwalk but on the battlefield. In 1879, Thomas Burberry developed gabardine, a waterproof, breathable, and rain-resistant fabric. The innovation quickly gained popularity among the British, who frequently faced rainy weather and needed a lightweight yet protective coat. By 1912, Burberry had patented his design, initially featuring no buttons and fastening solely with a belt. Shortly thereafter, the British Army commissioned him to develop jackets to shield soldiers on the front lines (Farfetch, 2018).

Thus, the imagery of power, mystery, and the soldier preparing for battle are evoked, mirroring the diurnal imagery, where symbolic constellations centred

³<https://www.gettyimages.com.br/detail/foto-jornal%C3%ADstica/model-georgina-grenville-foto-jornal%C3%ADstica/1430765762?adppopup=true>.

around the sceptre and gladius align with the postural reflex gesture: “verticalisation and the effort to raise the torso, enhance vision, and engage in manipulative touch, enabled by the free movement of the human hand” (Durand, 1960/2002, p. 124). Standing upright enhances vision, discernment, and mobility. Consequently, the heroic posture unfolds imaginatively in the figure of the warrior wielding his sword to conquer the nocturnal threat and defy death. “The imagination attracts time to a realm where it can easily triumph over it. While it projects the terrifying hyperbole of death’s monsters, it secretly sharpens the weapons that will bring down the dragon” (Durand, 1960/2002, p. 123).

In the fourth image⁴, the long, strappy pencil dress embodies Gianni’s tribute to the sacred feminine. The recurring Medusa motif across the garment reinforces the brand’s collective imagery — an object of desire and necessity akin to a gleaming jewel. The gold jacket and accessories contrast with the stark black, disrupting its synergy with strength, formality, and elegance. Meanwhile, the chain belt, originally a symbol of repression and constraint among London punks of the 1970s, is subverted here. Rather than signifying imprisonment, it becomes a statement of defiance. Gianni further inverts its meaning by incorporating gold, transforming it into an emblem of material excess and opulence. “Every symbol has at the same time its part of darkness and its part of light” (Durand, 1960/2002, p. 328).

In the next image⁵, a look designed by Donatella Versace features a military-style jacket, underscoring the significance attributed to the role of women — an ongoing debate and idealisation since the Second World War. Women who donned military uniforms and served their countries played a crucial role in advancing gender equality. The figure of the female warrior is defined by courage and assertiveness, embodying an androgynous, unisex aesthetic that remains infused with sensuality. The blazer, adorned with insignia — symbols of institutional affiliation, rank, or social status — evokes notions of superiority, honour, and strength. In terms of tailoring, the adaptation of traditional men’s military uniforms to a subtly contoured silhouette preserves the fundamental codes of military dress. From the 1940s onwards, women’s military attire began influencing mainstream fashion, introducing a “uniformed” aesthetic, structured shoulder pads, and camouflage tones in place of the pastel shades of the era. By the 1960s, uniforms reappeared in fashion as a form of protest, with demonstrators adopting military-inspired outfits as an anti-war statement (Martin, 1997/1999).

In light of the above, the symbolism of artistic imagery is often obscured by the complex interplay between signifier and signified. In the creative process, the artist responds to a plurality of emotions, “not always fully aware of them, and even if they were, they would be unable to articulate and analyse them without

⁴<https://www.gettyimages.com.br/detail/foto-jornal%C3%ADstica/versace-fall-1992-rtw-runway-show-foto-jornal%C3%ADstica/592338277>.

⁵https://www.versace.com/dw/image/v2/BGWN_PRD/on/demandware.static/-/Library-Sites-ver-library/default/dw56ffa0ae/images/women/fashion-show/Versace-women-fw19-220219-look-58-front.jpg.

diminishing their work’s element of surprise and its capacity to evoke reverie” (Malrieu, 1967/1996, p. 165). The hero’s imaginary once again emerges within the diurnal regime of the image. In this context, “the heroic figure of the warrior battling darkness or the abyss takes shape — a solar hero, a fierce combatant who often defies authority, breaks oaths and acts with audacity” (Costa, 2000, p. 6).

In the next image⁶, Donatella reinterprets Gianni’s trench coat through a military jacket, reviving the essence of the garment and its origins. The designer balances the weight of leather and the sobriety of black, juxtaposing the visceral strength of femininity with the delicacy of coloured stockings featuring the Baroque print — a signature of Gianni. The Baroque print, developed in the late 1980s, emerged when Gianni drew inspiration from his heritage, transforming the Italian artistic style into pop art by incorporating gold chains, arabesques, florals, and Medusa motifs on pure silk fabrics. Since then, fashion has continuously revisited Versace’s reinterpretation of the Baroque across different eras and contexts (Martin, 1997/1999). With this piece, Donatella unmistakably upholds the cultural and symbolic legacy of the brand founded by her brother. As Malrieu (1967/1996) asserts, “in myths and legends, which serve as a foundation for customs and justification, what is ultimately affirmed is the preservation of tradition. (...) The otherness revealed is, in essence, a manifestation of rootedness” (p. 131).

Hence, Donatella’s trench coat clearly references Gianni. However, it is essential to emphasise that merely wearing or donning a garment does not equate to style. “A process of stylisation is required — that is, a conscious organisation of objects, a repositioning and recontextualisation that removes them from their original setting, allowing for new interpretations and forms of resistance” (Guerra & Figueredo, 2018).

Later, the next image⁷ presents a reinterpretation of the classic black dress from Gianni’s 1992 fetish collection, reflecting Donatella Versace’s continued embodiment of the sexual and empowering Medusa of the 21st century. The asymmetry of the dress lends it a contemporary touch, juxtaposed with the BDSM (bondage, discipline, sadism, masochism) straps and buckles that were a hallmark of Gianni’s creations. The gold chains remain a defining feature — now subtly integrated — yet they continue to evoke an unmistakable sense of luxury and power. In other words, Gianni’s visual language endures through Donatella’s designs, where references to the punk movement, fetish aesthetics, and the femme fatale archetype remain ever-present. Symbols converge to illuminate the unseen. As Durand (1960/2002) observes, the femme fatale is deeply symbolic, embodying “the inescapable femininity of water, where liquidity itself becomes

⁶https://www.versace.com/dw/image/v2/BGWN_PRD/on/demandware.static/-/Library-Sites-ver-library/default/dw6d13b489/images/women/fashion-show/Versace-women-fw19-220219-look-39-front.jpg.

⁷https://www.versace.com/dw/image/v2/BGWN_PRD/on/demandware.static/-/Library-Sites-ver-library/default/dw6993a2f9/images/women/fashion-show/Versace-women-fw19-220219-look-61-front.jpg.

the very essence of menstrual flows. It is possible to argue that menstrual blood represents the archetype of the ominous and aquatic element” (p. 101). Which, in turn, is intertwined with “the image of the terrible, devouring ‘vamp’ mother, linked to animalistic femininity: the spider woman, the web, the binding force that suffocates and ensnares”, as Pitta (2004, cited in Vieira, 2020, p. 39) elaborates.

In this final look⁸, the perpetuation of the fetish aesthetic is once again evident. With the modernisation of the style, the punk aesthetic is refined and democratised through contemporary and minimalist elements. The use of lightweight fabrics and a monochrome ensemble softens the raw aggressiveness of fetishism. The choice of orange not only enhances visual appeal but also conveys confidence, creativity and vibrancy. Bold yet sophisticated, this is the Versace woman.

Finally, the pursuit of luxury and power is evident in the archetypal representation of the brand and its creators through the perpetuation of the imaginary. Maffesoli (1988/2014) highlights that archetypes, operating polyvalently through sensitivity, generate meaning. According to the author, the postmodern imaginary is characterised by the pursuit of unruly pleasures, the valorisation of the erotic body, the vital force of nature, animality and presenteeism. However, as Vieira (2020) notes, “these values are anthropological constants and, with greater or lesser emphasis, have always been present in society over time” (p. 23). Thus, after an in-depth interpretation and immersion in Versace’s collections spanning three decades (1990–2020), it is possible to conclude that the diurnal regime has prevailed in the brand’s identity since its inception. The study of symbolic hermeneutics has allowed for the identification of signs and images that form constellations around symbols of power and ascension.

Conclusion

According to this analysis, the Versace brand continues to perpetuate elements and symbols of empowerment, fetish and lust in contemporary times, embodying the personification of the Versace ideal: the fatal, seductive and resilient woman. The constellation of symbols observed reveals that the themes explored by Gianni remain present in the brand’s collections — good and evil, the angelic and the demonic, woman and monster. The “Gianni era” was steeped in myths and “Medusa women”. Gianni consistently positioned himself as a bridge between these feminine dualities, reviving debauched beauty alongside classical art and countercultural elements, provoking both fear and fascination in Europe’s most conservative circles.

Medusa’s presence as a central figure in Versace’s visual identity forges a connection between myth and luxury, underscoring the deep historical link between

⁸https://www.versace.com/dw/image/v2/BGWN_PRD/on/demandware.static/-/Library-Sites-ver-library/default/dw82ef895/images/women/fashion-show/Versace-women-fw19-220219-look-03-front.jpg.

opulence and mythology in ancient civilisations (Durand, 1960/2002). By embracing a mythological icon, the brand evokes attributes of power, status and transformation, elevating consumers' self-esteem and transporting them to the symbolic and spiritual realm of the Greek gods. This mythological imagery is embedded in the brand's products, endowing them with meaning and enhancing their allure in the contemporary market.

In this context, an examination of the collections following Gianni's death reveals a continued pursuit of the imagery of feminine strength and virility. Through re-signified collections, Donatella strives to uphold the image of a sophisticated woman — forward-thinking yet contemporary and minimalist — distanced from the excesses of the 1980s. Thus, in the 1990s collections, a fusion of fetishistic empowerment with a restrained and softened aesthetic highlights women's strength in society, honouring their history and sensuality through a non-verbal language that transcends clothing.

Another symbol embedded in the brand's identity is the colour gold, extensively featured in Versace's collections, representing luxury and wealth as a core element in the brand's communication. According to Durand (1960/2002), the association between gold and money is nearly inseparable, reinforcing its connection with value and exclusivity. Beyond its Greco-Roman influences, the brand also integrates elements of Christian culture, particularly Italian Catholicism. It is distinguished by its lavish Baroque prints, inspired by the architectural grandeur of the 17th and 18th centuries. These designs encapsulate the opulence of the era and the deep interconnection between art and religion.

The duality between the creative visions of Gianni and Donatella Versace defines Versace's history. After Gianni's death, Donatella honoured his iconic works while forging her own artistic identity, distinguishing herself from his legacy. The brand continues to exude luxury and opulence, intertwining its symbolism with spirituality and mythological imagery, evoking in consumers a longing for transcendence. This aspiration for elevation and grandeur strengthens the brand's enduring connection with its audience.

The analysis concludes that Donatella Versace has preserved Gianni Versace's imagery within the brand, maintaining distinctive elements such as sensuality, audacity, bold silhouettes, and innovative materials that consolidated the label's place in the fashion industry. However, she has introduced a refined sophistication and restraint in line with contemporary expectations without relinquishing her signature glamour — evident in exclusive fabrics, intricate patterns, discreet gold accessories, and vibrant colours. The study reveals that the symbols embedded in the designs serve to illuminate underlying narratives, sustaining the brand's symbolic and iconic essence. In doing so, Donatella has firmly established her own creative authority, elevating the brand's legacy while re-signifying and ensuring Gianni's enduring influence, even 23 years after his passing.

Finally, fashion visibly and tangibly expresses the inherently dialectical and dynamic reality moulded by interconnections. It becomes a realm of dreams,

where individuals seek their ideal through identification, shaping both their identity and their imaginary.

Translation: Anabela Delgado

Acknowledgements

We thank to the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel for funding the research grant for the Sandwich Doctorate Abroad Programme.

Biographical Notes

Suellen Cristina Vieira is a doctoral candidate in the Postgraduate Programme in Language Sciences. She holds a master's degree in the same field, a postgraduate qualification in Business Management, and a bachelor's degree in Fashion Design from the Universidade do Sul de Santa Catarina, Brazil. She is a lecturer in the undergraduate Fashion Design programme at the Universidade do Sul de Santa Catarina and a researcher affiliated with the Research Group on Imaginary and Everyday Life at the same institution. She is also a visiting researcher at the Communication and Society Research Centre at the University of Minho, Portugal. She is a recipient of a scholarship from the Sandwich PhD Programme Abroad, funded by the Brazilian Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3121-2316>

Email: suellen_zimba@hotmail.com

Address: Av. José Acácio Moreira, 787 - Dehon, Tubarão - SC, 88704-900, Brasil

Beatriz Aguiar graduated in Fashion Design from the Universidade do Sul de Santa Catarina, Tubarão, Brazil.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-6114-0007>

Email: log.bia@msn.com

Address: Av. José Acácio Moreira, 787 - Dehon, Tubarão - SC, 88704-900, Brasil

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