'The Man Has Gone — The Dream Lives On': The Palazzo Versace and the Re-branding of the Gold Coast

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Paris, London, Milan, Tokyo, New York, the Gold Coast — the Gold Coast? The Gold Coast may not rank as an international focal point for high fashion, but it can claim the distinction of hosting the world's first major hotel named after, or more accurately branded by, one of the big names of the international fashion industry — Versace.

The Gold Coast's main claim to fashion fame — at least until Versace arrived on the scene — was the local surfwear company Billabong, whose sporty and mildly non-establishment product has successfully penetrated the global youth market. Treated with much less respect by the rest of the world are those other fashion icons of the Gold Coast: the white shoe, the mythical must-have item of all shonky Gold Coast businessmen and boosterists; the gold bikini made notorious by the meter maids of Surfers Paradise; and, continuing the theme, the chunky gold ornamental jewellery supposedly beloved of socially mobile ladies with artificial suntans and mannerisms to match. These actually rather whimsical fashion statements are met with gleeful derision by those who claim that they illustrate all that is tawdry, vulgar and meretricious about the Gold Coast.

As might be expected of a middle-to-top-ranking international tourist, leisure and entertainment destination, which depends on overseas as well as local tourists, the Coast has its share of boutiques, salons and galleries selling prestige designer clothing and other luxury commodities to wealthier visitors. Nevertheless, a prevailing image of the Gold Coast is one of mass-packaged budget tourism and economical family-oriented leisure, entertainment and spectacle centred on the beach, shopping malls and theme parks. Surfers Paradise, the Coast's main tourist centre, did enjoy a period of relative sophistication and cosmopolitanism in the 1960s and 1970s, but from that era until recently. Surfers especially has been stigmatised in the popular imagination as suffering a decline towards tackiness

ameliorated only slightly by its one natural advantage — the proximity of beach and surf.

Despite the persistence of this negative image, especially among cultural and intellectual elites, the Gold Coast is now a major city, the sixth largest in Australia, with a population of over 450 000. It is also one of the fastest growing cities in one of the country's fastest growing regions. Rapid population increase is due to a number of factors. The first is an influx of mainly Japanese tourists and investment from the 1980s to the mid-1990s and the accompanying building and services boom which has attracted in-migrating workers. The decline in Japanese tourism has since been balanced by visitors (including backpackers) from other Asian countries, Europe, America, New Zealand and the Middle East. Second, there has been in-migration of retired and semi-retired people and welfare-dependents who are attracted by the climate, casual lifestyle and (at least until recently) relatively cheaper housing at the lower end of the market. More recently, there has been an assumption based mainly on media reports and the press releases and advertisements of developers and estate agencies that wealthier 'baby boomer' retirees and pre-retirees are buying into the top end of the market, particularly 'off the plan' high-rise apartments. Third, there is a related influx of the relatively unskilled or unemployed seeking casual or part-time work in the lower-service areas such as waiting, cleaning and security.

But the Gold Coast is not Utopia. Problems include over-dependence on the somewhat fickle industries of tourism, building construction and real estate speculation; a highly casualised labour force; relatively high unemployment; growing polarisation of rich and poor; traffic congestion due to limited public transport and poor infrastructure planning; an increase in some crime rates — particularly drug-related; and a growing fear of crime leading to a preoccupation with public surveillance and private security, including gated and guarded housing estates and fortress-like high-rises.²

In an attempt to offset these problems by broadening the city's economic base, city politicians and business leaders, with the support of local media, have been attempting to attract additional tertiary industry in the form of health and higher education, and information and high-tech enterprises as well as culture-based industries, particularly film and television production. There is much discussion and debate, relayed and enhanced by the local newspaper, the *Gold Coast Bulletin*, about the Gold Coast's 'identity' crisis', or what kind of identity (rarely identities) is required by the Gold Coast if it is to be successfully promoted to the world as a special location clearly distinguishable from Brisbane, despite the latter's southward creep. Battle lines are drawn between those content to rely on the traditional image of the Gold Coast as tourist city — but one that is still family-oriented in the Disney mould — and those who want to diversify the image to attract wealthier, more sophisticated tourists and retirees along with start-up 'smart industry' entrepreneurs and the clever, well-educated people who will be employed by them.

Similarly, to entice the 'sea change' generations who, according to KPMG lifestyle guru Bernard Salt, are looking for the mixed-mode experience of proximity to the natural charms of beach and ocean combined with the cultural advantages

of inner-city living, these Gold Coast promoters favour idealised images of the region's natural attractions, combined with the promise of the sophisticated pleasures of up-market urban consumerism.³ In particular, Surfers Paradise has been the focus of attempts at regeneration or 'renaissance' (one of its latest massive high-rise developments has been named the 'Chevron Renaissance' in homage to a long-demolished landmark building). In keeping with the Gold Coast's tradition of feminised promotional imagery,⁴ Surfers is accused of 'showing its age and being in need of a facelift or makeover' in order to reveal its charms to new generations of tourists and retirees, as well as to an apparent influx of young professionals who can afford to invest in the expensive new apartments of Chevron Renaissance, Circle on Cavill and Q1, as well as enjoying the surrounding public and private spaces newly aestheticised by streetscaping, traffic controls, al fresco dining and themed consumption sites.

The recent history and current conditions of the Gold Coast are not unique. They exemplify — and perhaps magnify — the economic and cultural transformations that urban political economists and cultural theorists have been discussing for some time under the rubrics of post-industrialism, post-Fordism, postmodern urbanism and globalisation. The accompanying dilemmas and debates come down to such issues as the decline of manufacturing and the growth of information, entertainment, tourism and consumption-based activities and industries, as well as the need to project positive lifestyle, image and identity of place through the process of regeneration or rebranding in order to attract investment capital and highly skilled and paid workers — and tourists. And yet the Gold Coast is different, if only in degree, for reasons already alluded to: its phenomenal population growth and accompanying property investment boom; its role as Australia's foremost resort city and exemplar of the conditions and processes of tourism urbanisation; its preoccupation with identity and imagery, urban entrepreneurialism and place marketing.⁵

By charting the evolution of the Palazzo Versace, this article taps into current economic, cultural and demographic issues impacting on the Gold Coast. It highlights the pivotal role the Palazzo has played as a 'signature' building and as a catalyst in the rebranding of the Gold Coast in general and the renaissance of its coastal strip in particular. It examines the ambiguities and paradoxes surrounding the Palazzo's short history within the broader context of luxury product branding, the intersections and interactions of themed consumption spaces, fashion, architecture and interior design, and the cultural meanings of space, place and built environment as they circulate around an attempted reimagining and rebranding of Australia's foremost city of fantasy and spectacle.

So how did the Gold Coast become the site for the first Palazzo Versace, a repository and expression of Versace style, brand image and product, and precursor of a new wave of hotels built by and for the international fashion industry? The initiative did not come from the Versace organisation itself. Palazzo Versace was and is the dream and brainchild of Gold Coast-based architect and developer Soheil Abedian, founder and principal shareholder of the Sunland Group, a company mainly involved in the construction of Gold Coast high-rises and housing estates. Sunland

can now boast two flagship or signature buildings for the Gold Coast, the Palazzo and, under construction in Surfers, the Q1 which is slated to be the world's tallest residential building and a major player in the current high-rise boom. Such landmark buildings are a worldwide phenomenon, bringing 'instant identity and prestige to new districts that seek to compete competitively in the world economy'⁶. While cities such as Bilbao build monumental buildings by celebrity architects associated with traditional culture, the Gold Coast has built a hotel with a fashion brand name and is building the world's tallest residential building. Here is the synthesising of a different kind of culture and consumption — in Sunland's case, the sleek 'high-tech' residential 'resort' and 'lifestyle' towers are shooting upwards to accommodate the expected waves of retiring and cashed-up baby boomers as well as the 20- and 30-something service and information economy professionals, the 'symbolic analysts' who — or so we are told — are signing up for the same apartments. This is part of a life-plan to take advantage of an incipient 'new look' Gold Coast where chic new pads can be bought at half capital city prices and a sophisticated urban lifestyle enjoyed, underwritten by a local economy expanding into education, health and IT, and the service, information and creative industries in general.

In what is already emerging as a media-fuelled legend, Soheil Abedian, thinking laterally and with an eye to the main chance, began making overtures to the Versace organisation in 1997 — not long after the death of Gianni Versace — with a view to Versace endorsing and branding a five-star, 205-suite hotel with an attached complex of 72 condominiums to be built on the Spit just north of Main Beach on the Gold Coast. As Abedian tells the story, here was a \$60 million dollar unknown Australian company approaching a \$2 billion dollar global company to persuade it to put its name to a building in a country which only Santo Versace had visited when he spent a brief holiday at Hamilton Island. The building would be in a location Santo and Donatella had barely heard of. But Abedian had the persuasive and staying power to eventually prevail. The resulting franchise deal was that Sunland would acquire the equity and build and manage the hotel while Versace would license Sunland to use the Versace name as label or brand to identity and distinguish the hotel. Under the agreement, Versace was to design and supply the interior of the hotel as well as being granted the opportunity to sell its 'lifestyle package' of furniture and fittings to owners of the condominiums. Versace was also provided with a 200 square metre shop in the hotel lobby for the sale of its products ranging from clothing and accessories to homewares and home fittings. Naming rights were also to bring in royalties as an undisclosed percentage of the hotel's gross turnover.⁷

The agreement had distinct advantages for both parties. From the Versace perspective, it was another step in the journey towards globalisation and diversification being undertaken by all the big-name fashion houses. These days it is axiomatic that fashion is a global business enterprise. However, media and publicity focus on the celebrity-studded catwalk show, and the individual designer 'genius' side of the business has drawn popular attention away from the fact that the typical elite fashion house is really a giant corporation whose profit derives from the mass production, marketing and consumption of ready-to-wear clothing.

and accessories such as shoes, handbags and jewellery along with perfume and make-up for the world's upper, middle and aspiring classes whose purchase of a haute couture gown would be beyond their dreams or bank accounts and best left to film stars on award nights. These are the classes, though, who can afford a leather belt, a pair of designer jeans or bottle of perfume — and thereby dream a little dream and accumulate a modicum of cultural capital sanctioned by the sure and certain knowledge of authenticity and reliability provided by the designer's name on the label.

And now the fashion corporations are branching out into delivery of the full lifestyle package, with the latest move incorporating hotels where such packages can be put on display and sold to guests. As well as Versace, Ferragamo of Florence is acquiring hotels in that city, Bulgari is in partnership with Marriott, Ralph Lauren is planning to open luxury hotels in Mexico and the Caribbean, while Giorgio Armani has teamed up with a Dubai property developer to construct ten hotels and four vacation resorts in the next seven years. These are not meant to be boutique hotels which adopt an independent style based on individual artwork or handcrafted furniture distinctive to each hotel. They are fully fledged branded hotels, 'themed' to the extent that they are designed to showcase the range of products available under the same brand name or logo. In the case of Versace, this includes a cornucopia of items from bathrobes to bedheads, all on display and for the use of guests, and all for sale through the lobby shop — with bathrobes priced at \$750.

The advantages for Versace, then, are manifest. It gains royalties from naming rights while at the same time delivering a venue for the permanent exhibition and marketing of its products, which also receive pictorial coverage in real estate advertisements whenever a lifestyle-packaged condo comes on to the market.

The arrangement with Sunland has also been described as an experiment for Versace. It might not be too cynical to suggest, therefore, that this is a testing of the waters in a global backwater where failure is unlikely to lead to reputation-shattering repercussions. In the first flush of the deal, there was talk of Sunland building a further six Versace hotels worldwide, but tourist downturns due to the usual suspects have put the plans on hold.⁸

From Abedian's perspective, the deal was a coup, as he and Sunland had much more to gain from it. And in pulling off the almost impossible, Abedian managed to create more than plentiful and favourable publicity. He became overnight a contributor to the mythologised ethos of the Gold Coast, the latest luminary in a line of entrepreneurial movers and shakers — local businessmen and leaders, all rugged individualists with drive and foresight who have put the Gold Coast on the map through imaginative and sometimes bizarre promotional projects (including the meter maids) which created national — and even international — publicity for the Gold Coast and brought the tourists and their dollars streaming in.

Some Gold Coast analysts have encouraged the rebranding movement by arguing that the Gold Coast needs to develop a more cosmopolitan and multi-faceted image, backed up by conventional market research and strategies because the days of the seat of the pants movers and shakers have ended.⁹ As an Iranian with a Masters

degree in architecture from a Viennese university. Abedian is certainly not from the rough mould of earlier Gold Coast developers. He is a place entrepreneur or, in the words of Logan and Molotch, a 'structural speculator' who 'link[s] parochial settings with cosmopolitan interests, making places safe for further development'.¹⁰ Nevertheless, his innovative and risk-taking international activities have forged a link between the legendary old-style Gold Coast enterprise and an imagined new-style Gold Coast — educated, urbane, polished and worldly. And, of course, it is this new style Gold Coast, with the linkage to past triumphs still intact, that it is in the interests of Abedian and Sunland to promote. So, in building a five-star hotel and adding the name Versace to it, Abedian was doing more than simply investing in and erecting another 'trophy' tourist and residential development. He was value-adding symbolic appeal to this building by vouchsafing it the mantle of Versace and all that is conjured up by that name. By aligning himself with fashion, he was reinforcing the feminised imagery of the Gold Coast. At the same time, he was helping to create an image and identity that would not only rub off on his other key developments such as the Q1 and Circle on Cavill,¹¹ but also produce wider resonances with the growing rhetoric pushing for transformation of the identity of the Gold Coast itself. He was helping to accumulate at the city level the 'intangible capital of knowledge, networks, reputation and brand' which John Daley argues is required at a national level if Australia is to compete internationally.¹² Palazzo Versace therefore materialised at a propitious time for the Sunland Group and other key instigators of the high-rise and image-building boom — a propitious time too for the Gold Coast in general as it faces the challenges of a period of re-enchantment based on the vicissitudes and imperatives of a city of fantasy and desire.

In order to explore further the significance of the Palazzo Versace in the Gold Coast context, we need to take a brief look at the meanings and images surrounding the name Versace. A shorthand approach is simply to list the plethora of adjectives that always seem to accompany the label, the organisation and the man Versace. Here is a selection comprising two lists. The first list contains more generic terms that could be applied to any big-name contemporary fashion designer; the second list contains terms that are applied more specifically to Versace:

- *List 1:* glamorous, luxurious, sensual, alluring, opulent, expensive;
- *List 2:* flamboyant, ostentatious, glitzy, flashy, brash, excessive, hedonistic, paganistic, decadent, barbaric, vulgar, raunchy, sexy, populist, eclectic.

All these descriptors can be juggled and manipulated in any conceivable and perhaps ultimately indeterminate way — which is exactly what Gianni Versace himself was a master of. 'I hate good taste,'¹³ he would say in his iconoclastic, avant-garde guise, while he and his publicists flung together strings of pseudo-cultural and historical references and citations extracted from art and architecture to explain his personal tastes and the myriad influences on his oeuvre ranging from classical and neo-classical to Renaissance and neo-Platonism through to the baroque and neo-baroque. Eclectic as he was, Gianni could never claim to be a modernist or minimalist.

But in true *pomo* and *bricoleur* fashion he would add to his heady brew a rich dollop of pop with allusions to Warhol, MTV. 1950s gladiator movies with a touch of Fellini, almost extending to self-parody when he linked Batman to Proust to justify his latest profound thought. All this was reinforced by the cultivation of model superstars and celebrity friends and admirers — Princess Diana, Madonna, Elton John. Sting, with Donatella Versace now carrying on the tradition via her entourage of 'mini-mes', including Chelsea Clinton, who adorn her Paris shows.

It is easy to lapse into academic snobbery — with a just a hint of envy — when relaying the kind of stuff that is pretty well known anyway. But there is no doubting Gianni's (and now Donatella's) skills as a reader of postmodern times and as a promoter and publicist. (And, from my own personal and untutored perspective, I have to admire Gianni's creative design skills and the seductiveness of his gorgeous creations and creatures.) By luring celebrities and popular movie and rock stars, Gianni was able to deploy them as symbolic go-betweens, bridging the gap between the unattainable world of haute couture and the lives and pockets of the consuming masses. This is what has been called the 'paradox of accessible exclusivity' which, as Buckley and Gundle argue, creates the 'paradoxical combination of the elegant and the vulgar'¹⁴ — luxury and exclusivity made accessible to the masses, or rather the masses who can afford a brief taste of the high life through the 'sympathetic magic' encapsulated in the purchase of a handbag, a bathrobe or bottle of perfume.¹⁵

Where does the Palazzo Versace stand in relation to the kaleidoscopic Versace image? First, there is the material presence of the building itself. Anyone expecting a degree of flamboyance, daring, innovation or even a touch of creative vulgarity in the outward manifestation of the building (see Figure 1) would be sorely disappointed. And it is difficult to attach any formal meaning to the architect's statement that it is neo-baroque in style. Again, one suspects that here is an expression plucked indiscriminately from the Versace lexicon in order to surround the building with the Versace aura of art appreciation and expertise. Actually the front facade of the hotel has a marked resemblance to Versace's Milan residence and workshop, and to his Lake Como villa, with echoes of Monte Carlo thrown in for good measure. (According to Abedian, the Gold Coast reminds Santo of Monte Carlo 20 years ago.) It's also interesting to note that Gold Coast real estate rhetoric has latched on to Versace art-speak: a recent advertisement for a villa of immense proportions described it as 'neo-baroque'.

The Palazzo's facade is just that — a fa9ade. The basic plan of the hotel and condominiums is pure modern resort style comparable to a host of up-market resorts in similar locations worldwide. The Palazzo's principal architect, Desmond Brooks, was also responsible for Christopher Skase's Sheraton Mirage resort across the road. The floor plan of the Palazzo is remarkably similar to that of the Mirage. Brooks, a senior partner in the local firm Desmond Brooks International (DBI), has worked mainly on resort design both in Australia and Hawaii, and word has it that he will be designing Ralph Lauren's new hotels.

The outcome of all this designing and planning is a rather low-key, derivative affair, lacking any hint of boldness — entirely safe *and, pace* Gianni, in good taste. Critical discourse directed at the Gold Coast, led by intellectual elites, bristles with

Figure 1: Palazzo Versace facade

allusions to the Coast's egregious bad taste in architecture, its preoccupation with size, its superficial eclecticism (Tuscany one year, Santa Fe and Bali the next) and the vulgarity of ostentatious display in its canal-side mansions. In contrast, and perhaps mindful of the intellectual elites waiting to pounce, the Palazzo — or, more accurately, the Palazzo facade — wants to symbolise a more refined, less gaudy-Gold Coast. But in playing down the more exuberant elements of the Versace brand image, it has also rejected its more imaginative and adventurous side. It lacks the flair that the avant-garde Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas has given to Prado stores.

That leaves us with the Palazzo's interior. A reading of the Palazzo's interior design is a more ambiguous task, for here is the full regalia of Versace products and imagery, a spot-on accurate reflection of Gianni's, and now Donatella's, collections and tastes — somewhat restrained in the lobby and restaurants, considerably more florid and eclectic in the rather small and cluttered hotel rooms and lifestyle-appointed apartments. All this approximates what Jean-Marie Floch calls 'ludic valorization' in his semiotic analysis of the variety of Ikea and Habitat furniture marketed as 'luxurious and refined furniture for indulgence and entertaining'.¹⁶ Whether one might safely apply the term 'refined' to Versace interior design would very much depend on personal tastes and preferences. Suffice it to say that, inside the Palazzo Versace, design has been given a freer rein to the extent that it might easily attract some of those colourful adjectives already listed. Of greater interest is the fact that the lifestyle package offered along with the

residential apartments is so complete and comprehensive (furniture, linen, glassware, cutlery and china) that, having paid the requisite million and a half dollars or so, one can immediately adopt a total Versace look without a time-consuming and perhaps uncertain and risky recourse to individual, independent taste and choice. Here, on a grander scale, buyers of the condominiums and their lifestyle packages might well illustrate Nueno and Quelch's observation that the *nouveau riche* who 'lack the experience and confidence to discriminate' find reassurance in the purchase of a well-known luxury brand.¹

Reactions to the Palazzo Versace expressed through media reports and commentaries have ranged from the usual puff-pieces based on PR handouts to some early nit-picking exercises by Brisbane journalists who delighted in exposing teething troubles and the slow resale of condominiums against the general upward trend of luxury real estate sales on the Coast — due, perhaps, to a 'nouveau riche' stigma attached to the lifestyle packages. The critics adopted the cynical 'outsider' view that the glitz and ersatz glamour associated with Versace and present in varying degrees in the Palazzo were entirely appropriate in a place like the Gold Coast where pretension and vulgarity were said to reign supreme. This, of course, was contrary to Sunland publicity, where such epithets were transformed into expressions that were deemed to reflect a more accurate and positive view of both Versace and the Coast: dynamic, colourful, vibrant, and so on.

And yet the critical comments were an extreme and minority reaction. More common — certainly in the local media — was a positive response born partly out of the Palazzo's providing a constant stream of stories, particularly of the celebrity-spotting variety. Although Donatella Versace has yet to make an appearance, the Palazzo has hosted Prince Albert of Monaco (checking out Santo's claim, no doubt), Mick Jagger, Kylie Minogue, the Prince of Brunei and Buffy the Vampire Slayer, as well as functions for the glitterati of the annual Indy car race and the grand opening of the third *Big Brother* reality TV program. The Palazzo also holds food and wine nights billed as 'Gourmet extraordinaire' presented by professional experts including 'sommeliers' (or as the *Gold Coast Bulletin* described them, 'wine couturiers' — literally wine needle workers). The role of these experts is to educate locals in how to order and appreciate fine food and wine. 'People won't be laughing at the Gold Coast anymore' according to one of these specialist couturiers, presumably because it is reaching a higher stage of maturity and acquiring a heightened sensitivity to the finer things in life. These food and wine couturiers should not be dismissed lightly. They illustrate Soheil Abedian's stroke of luck and genius in being able to create in the Palazzo Versace an educational resource for those (including Abedian himself) who, for commercial and perhaps even cultural reasons, aspire to reinvent the Gold Coast. And the new-look Gold Coast will be not only an up-market world tourist city, but also a place that will attract investment and people — well-heeled and gentrified baby-boomers along with new-rich young professionals and para-professionals who are acquiring their cultural capital not so much in traditional intellectual or creative pursuits, but rather in connoisseurship of wine, food, and fashionable furniture and clothing, as well in the sophistication of a cafe-based society.

The Palazzo has therefore taken on the role of what Douglas Holt calls 'cultural infomediary' — a training and filtering device somewhat akin to the glossy, up-market magazine guide to house, garden, entertaining, food, wine and restaurants.¹⁸ These provide the information and advice needed to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary for upward mobility into the sphere of good and gracious living. But the Palazzo is more than a symbolic device inserted into the discourses that espouse a reinvented, reimagined Gold Coast. It is more than a luxury brand helping to energise the rebranding of the Gold Coast. The Palazzo attracts real people, most of whom are eastern states — not international — tourists,¹⁹ and local residents seeking an opportunity for pampering and self-indulgence in luxury surroundings. These are the kind of postmodern urban residents identified by Richard Lloyd as 'acting like tourists in their own city',²⁰ taking advantage of the leisure, entertainment and consumption pursuits it offers. I have not been able to acquire information on the socio-economic background of hotel guests, but I would surmise (mainly from evidence provided by newspaper reports) that most local guests are far from being fabulously wealthy and are rather, like shoppers, awarding themselves a 'treat'.²¹ That treat is to indulge in the growing leisure-time phenomenon of the well-earned weekend escape in which busy, hard-working people reward themselves with fleeting extravagance as part of an ongoing project of self-enhancement and improvement.

Another advantage of the Palazzo is that, as well as providing all the physical luxuries and indulgences, it offers a brief experience or glimpse of a more permanent Versace-inspired lifestyle as reflected in the condominiums and in the general atmosphere and accoutrements of the hotel itself. This kind of privileged access, or access to privilege, has its counterpart in the less expensive access provided by 'homes and lifestyles of the rich and famous' TV shows, 'open house' inspections of the grander kind of residences on the market, virtual tours of the same by way of real estate websites, and inspections of the enormous lottery-prize homes that proliferate on the Gold Coast. All of these access activities are very much a part of the Gold Coast property sales and investment scene.

Local residents who seek the self-rewarding treat or the brief glimpse of privilege and luxury at Versace may well be the aspirational or new-wealthy elements of those self-employed or small business-oriented petite bourgeoisie Patrick Mullins identifies as significant contributors to Gold Coast tourism urbanisation.²² Such people might be expected to admire the 'traditional' Gold Coast-style entrepreneurial skills of Abedian while simultaneously being drawn to the promise of instant sophistication offered by the Palazzo. This is reinforced by Douglas Holt's research in the United States, which shows that those on higher incomes, but with lower (traditional) cultural, capital 'express preferences for consumption objects indicative of luxury and material abundance', while their 'tastes are structured around attaining glimpses or simulacra of elite comfort'.²³

This is not to suggest that all Versace guests are immediately and unquestioningly seduced by the Versace ethos and marketing techniques. The ascetic intellectual or middle-class professional might justify a night with Versace by adopting an approach which Crewe and Goodrum call 'irony chic'²⁴ (otherwise known as tongue-in-chic).

This is the possession of codes and practices that encompass both high and low culture and enable 'double access' to Versace's indulgent pleasures on the one hand, ironic distance and bemusement on the other — surely an attribute possessed by Gianni himself.²⁵ And, even if remaining a non-participant (ironic or otherwise) in the temptations offered by Versace, 'the impecunious intellectual can feel socially superior to the man of means', as Veblen put it a century ago.²⁶ Meanwhile, those possessing sufficient means for a temporary indulgence or minor purchase and those aspiring to greater means could find much comfort, reassurance and inspiration 'at home' within the Versace fold.

Where this leaves those with insufficient means is another matter. The 'old' Gold Coast — or at least its beach-side strip — was a polymorphous mixture of wealthy and not-so-wealthy tourists, holiday-making families and residents, both long-term and transient. At the lower end of the economic spectrum were — and still are — the unemployed, casual service workers, old-age pensioners and other welfare-dependents, and local and international students. Both rich and poor contributed to their own 'brand' of lively and gritty street and beach life at Southport, Surfers, Broadbeach and Coolangatta. But now the accelerated rate of gentrification along the 'new-look' coastal strip is forcing up rents,²⁷ replacing the old stock of 'six-pack' home units with up-market 'resort-style' residential apartments and even threatening to force the demolition of older high-rises to make way for the luxury towers of the rich.²⁸ The "other peoples of the city",²⁹ who until recently have survived tolerably well in the rented beach "shacks" and blond-brick units of the 1960s and 1970s, are now being advised to move to the Coast's more affordable outer suburban fringes.³⁰

The 'new-look' strip of Versace, Q1, Circle on Cavill and Chevron Renaissance (to name a few of the more prominent developments) may attract a new kind of tourist and incoming resident. It may also appeal to nouveau riche locals spurred on by a booming property market and intimations of grandeur. It may even temporarily seduce the ironically postmodern intellectual or creative professional. And yet there may be a further irony in the possibility that, if American research" is an indicator, younger members of the creative class sought by the new Gold Coast might shun Versace and all it represents in favour of a more diverse and offbeat street-level culture — the very culture that the new Gold Coast is destroying or dispersing and the kind of culture that beckons from West End or Fortitude Valley in Brisbane.

Gianni Versace's presence, along with his house, in South Beach Miami did for the regeneration of that area what it is hoped Palazzo Versace will do for the Gold Coast — in particular, the heavily populated, high-rise, urban consumption strip from Main Beach in the north to Broadbeach in the south with Surfers in between. This is the epicentre of the Gold Coast social imaginary and identity, the focal point for Sunland development and investment — not only investment in the physical manifestation and the marketing of signature high-rises such as the Q1 and Circle on Cavill, but also investment in a new identity, a new imaginary for this special precinct. These lifestyle residential resort buildings are closely linked to the Palazzo Versace in that they are all seen as essential contributors to the

reinvention and re-enchantment of the Gold Coast, which in turn is seen as being essential if the Gold Coast is to attract the kind of people who, as Bernard Salt tells us, will be seeking out the lifestyles that these buildings symbolise. They may not be searching for the full lifestyle package deal as offered by Versace, and their individual tastes may run in the opposite direction towards the increasingly fashionable minimalist and high-tech styles. On the other hand, Abedian is gambling on the distinct possibility that they may not be immune to the broad appeal of a sophisticated "European" outlook mixed with the promise of luxury (a key word in local real estate jargon) that Versace and Sunland can now deliver to their mutual advantage. Meanwhile, the coastal strip's disadvantaged will have to fend for themselves — preferably, it seems, elsewhere.

Notes

- 1 This expression was used in a series of real estate advertisements for Palazzo Versace condominiums in the *Gold Coast Bulletin*.
- 2 The major source for these observations are non-academic journalistic articles: see, for example, Cameron Stewart, 'Gold Rush', *The Weekend Australian Magazine*, 8-9 September 2001: 23-26; Leisa Scott and Andrew Fraser, 'Paradise Revisited', *The Weekend Australian*, 16-17 June 2001: 24-25. 'Our Community: A Social Profile of the Gold Coast', published by the Gold Coast City Council www.goldcoast.qld.gov.au, is a useful source of statistical information. For a brief academic overview of contemporary Gold Coast conditions, see Patrick Mullins, 'The Evolution of Australian Tourism Urbanization', in *Cities and Visitors: Regulating People, Markets and City Space*, eds Lily M. Hoffman, Susan S. Fainstein and Dennis R. Judd (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003); 126-42.
- 3 Bernard Salt, *The Big Shift*, 2nd edn (Melbourne: Hardie Grant Books, 2003).
- 4 Grahame Griffin, 'Fred and Regina — Beaches and Bodies: A Study of Two Popular Gold Coast Photographers', *Australian Journal of Communication* 29(3) (2002): 1-16.
- 5 On postmodern urban cultures and lifestyles relevant to the Gold Coast, see Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift, *Cities: Reimagining the Urban* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002); John Hannigan, *Fantasy City: Pleasure and Profit in the Postmodern Metropolis* (London: Routledge, 1998); Gordon MacLeod and Kevin Ward, 'Spaces of Utopia and Dystopia: landscaping the Contemporary City', *Geografiska Annaler*, 84B(3-4) (2002): 153-70; Sharon Zukin, 'Urban Lifestyles: Diversity and Standardization in Spaces of Consumption', *Urban Studies* 35(5) (1998): 825-40. For more specific discussion on the marketing and branding of 'regenerated' cities, see: Graeme Evans, 'Hard-branding the Cultural City: from Prado to Prada', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 27(2) (2003): 417-40; Graeme Evans and Jo Foord, 'Shaping the Cultural Landscape: Local Regeneration Effects', in *Urban Futures: Critical Commentaries on Shaping the City*, eds Malcolm Miles and Tim Hall (London: Routledge, 2003): 167-81; Paul Hubbard, 'Urban Design and City Regeneration: Social Representations of Entrepreneurial Landscapes', *Urban Studies*, 33(8) (1996): 1441-62; Miriam Greenberg, 'Branding Cities: A Social History of the Urban Lifestyle Magazine', *Urban Affairs Review* 36(2) (2000): 228-63. 'Tourism urbanisation' was the term originated in Patrick Mullins' pioneering study — centred on the Gold Coast — of cities created by and for tourism: Patrick Mullins, 'Tourism Urbanization', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 15(3) (1991): 326-42.
- 6 Larry R. Ford, 'Midtowns. Megastructures and World Cities', *The Geographical Review* 88(4) (1998): 528-48.
- 7 For background to the Abedian-Versace deal, see Murray Massey, 'How Versace was Lured

- Down Under', *Business Review Weekly*, 31 August 1998: 35; Matt Robbins, 'The Man from Hotel Versace'. *The Australian*. 28 August 1998: 41.
- 8 The luxury goods industry has been feeling the pinch lately with debt burdens and the fallout from SARS and terrorism. Gucci and Versace both recorded losses in mid-2003. It has been suggested, too, that the 'conglomerate model', which includes both the traditional elite market and the 'mass affluent' market, is yet to be proven ('Oh Dior. Label-bodied Jump Off Band Wagon'. *The Weekend Australian*. 5-6 July 2003: 33). For a discussion of the exclusivity of luxury brands versus the necessity of their appeal to wider markets, see Jose Luis Nueno and John A. Quelch. 'The Mass Marketing of Luxury', *Business Horizons* 41(6) (1998): 61.
- 9 Bill Faulkner and Roslyn Russell, 'Movers and Shakers: Chaos Makers in Tourism Development'. *Tourism Management* 20(4) (1999): 411-23.
- 10 John R. Logan and Harvey L. Molotch, *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987): 13.
- 11 Circle of Cavill, currently under construction, will be two towers — one of 50 storeys, the other of 40 storeys. An advertisement for the development on one of its hoardings shows a 30-something male reading a copy of Bernard Salt's book *The Big Shift*.
- 12 John Daley. 'The Intangible Economy and Australia', *Australian Journal of Management*. 26, Special Issue, (2001): 124.
- 13 Quoted by Judith Thurman, 'String Theory (Literature and Fashion)', *The New Yorker*, 4 November 2002: 78, 33.
- 14 Reka Buckley and Stephen Gundle, 'Flash Trash: Gianni Versace and the Theory and Practice of Glamour', in *Fashion Cultures: Theories, Explanations and Analysis*, eds Stella Bruzzi and Pamela Church Gibson (London: Routledge, 2000): 331-48.
- 15 Lou Taylor. 'The Hilfiger Factor and the Flexible Commercial World of Couture', in *The Fashion Business: Theory, Practice, Image*, eds Nicola White and Ian Griffiths (Oxford: Berg, 2000): 121-42.
- 16 Jean-Marie Floch, *Visual Identities*, trans. Pierre Van Osselaer and Alec McHoul (London: Continuum, 2000): 124.
- 17 Nueno and Quelch. 'The Mass Marketing of Luxury': 61.
- 18 Douglas B. Holt, 'Why Do Brands Cause Trouble? A Dialectical Theory of Consumer Culture and Branding', *Journal of Consumer Research* 29(1) (2002): 70-91.
- 19 Correspondence from Anne Jamieson, General Manager Sunland Group, 6 June 2003.
- 20 Richard Lloyd, 'Neo-bohemia: Art and Neighbourhood Development in Chicago', *Journal of Urban Affairs* 24(5) (2002): 517-32.
- 21 Abedian has commented on the 'shift in emphasis towards the domestic market', with domestic tourism 'account[ing] for 80 per cent of guests' (Jeff Sommerfield, 'Cut-rate Rooms Boost Resort'. *The Courier-Mail*, 10 September 2002: 3). For notions of the Palazzo Versace treat see 'There's No Harm in a Night of Indulgence', *Weekend (Gold Coast) Bulletin*. 16-17 September 2002: 10; Rachael Templeton. 'Doubles Booked for a Pampering'. *Gold Coast Bulletin*. 17 February 2003: 2. On shopping treats, see Daniel Miller. *A Theory of Shopping* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).
- 22 Patrick Mullins. 'Class Relations and Tourism Urbanization: The Regeneration of the Petit Bourgeoisie and the Emergence of a New Urban Form', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 18(4) (1994): 591-608.
- 23 Douglas B. Holt. 'Does Cultural Capital Structure American Consumption?', *Journal of Consumer Research* 25 (1998): 10. 20.
- 24 Louise Crewe and Alison Goodrum, 'Fashioning New Forms of Consumption', in *Fashion Cultures: Theories, Explanations and Analysis*, eds Stella Bruzzi and Pamela Church Gibson (London: Routledge. 2000): 25-48. See also David Chaney, *Lifestyles* (London: Routledge. 1996).
- 25 'Double access' is a term employed by Jostein Gripsrud to describe the 'class privilege' of

- access to both high and low culture. I have taken the liberty of applying it to those possessing high intellectual or artistic cultural capital who might condescend to indulge themselves at the Palazzo Versace. Jostein Gripsrud, 'High Culture Revisited', *Cultural Studies* 3(2) (1989): 194-207.
- 26 Quoted in G. M. Peter Swan, 'An Economic Analysis of Taste — A Review of Gary S. Becker: *Accounting for Tastes*'. *International Journal of the Economics of Business* 6(2) (1999): 261.
- 27 'Rents on the Move', *Gold Coast Bulletin*, 24-25 April 2004: 106.
- 28 Jenny Rogers, 'Acquisition of High Rises "Not Aussie"', *Gold Coast Bulletin*. 13-14 March 2004: 22. Developers have been buying units in old blocks and then using their majority interest to pressure remaining owners to agree to demolition.
- 29 Gerry Kearns and Chris Philo (eds), *Selling Places: The City as Cultural Capital Past and Present* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1993): 16. For further discussion concerning the impact on city 'others' of gentrification and the 'the intense integration of the real estate industry into the definitional core of neoliberal urbanism', see Neil Smith, 'New Globalism, New Urbanism: Gentrification as Global Urban Strategy', *Antipode*. 34(3) (2003): 427-50.
- 30 'Rents on the Move': 106.
- 31 Richard Lloyd, 'Neo-bohemia: Art and Neighbourhood Development in Chicago', in *The Rise of the Creative Class*, ed. Richard Florida (New York: Basic Books, 2002).