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The recurring iconography of witches in the collections of Alexander McQueen, Rei Kawakubo, and Rick Owens, the tarot theme in Dior's designs, and the occult and pagan motifs at Schiaparelli seem to be more than just another attempt to use exoticism or foreignness as fashion inspiration. They remind us of the connections between magic and fashion described by fashion researchers, as well as expressing a broader cultural trend. Taking the field of fashion as a starting point, the article focuses on analyzing the trend of the revival of esotericism and dark romanticism, as well as the emergence and functioning of groups organizing rituals and ceremonies based on traditional beliefs (neo-pagan, neo-shamanic, or Wiccan groups). The analysis of case studies shows that magical practices are treated as tools for social transformation, deconstruction of established hierarchies and stereotypes, and building communities based on inclusiveness, egalitarianism, and solidarity, which is supposed to be an alternative to the dominant capitalist and authoritarian paradigms. Analyzing the interrelationships between magic, fashion, and capitalism from the perspective of anthropology and fashion studies, the article attempts to answer the question of whether the analyzed solutions constitute a better response to the challenges of contemporary social crises and whether the fact that they are fashionable may be a manifestation of resistance to the typical principles of capitalism, or whether they are rather used in a different (instrumental) way by the mechanism of capitalism to reinforce its status quo.

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Magic, Fashion, Alternative Societies and Capitalism

Fashion and Magic

The figure of a witch is gaining prominence in uncertain times and in the highly masculinized political climate of recent decades. As Kristen Sollee writes: "Film and television are filled with tales of witches and otherworldly women, visual art and literature are plumbing the depths of pagan lore, and runways are replete with occult symbolism."[1] At the end of the twentieth century, images of witches appeared in fashion magazines and designers' work, reshaping the culturally ingrained imaginarium of witchcraft that had developed over centuries. In 1983, British designer Vivienne Westwood presented her autumn-winter fashion collection *Witches*, drawing on the 'magical, esoteric language' of Keith Haring's work.[2] Ten years later, at a show by French designer Martine Sitbon, known for her darkly romantic aesthetic, Kate Moss walked the runway as a witch, wearing a pointed hat and a black tunic-like dress, and holding a cigarette mouthpiece in her fingers instead of a wand.[3] Many avant-garde designers of the 1990s, including Alexander McQueen, John Galliano, Gianni Versace, Yohji Yamamoto, and Thierry Mugler, interpreted the idea of *glamour* and the figure of the *femme fatale*witch, the fallen woman, or the madwoman. They drew on the imaginarium of pagan folklore, Hollywood cinema, and an aesthetic of mystery, melancholy, and spirituality shaped by nineteenth-century Dark Romanticism[4] and Gothic novels.[5] These multifaceted fashion images of liminal postmodern femininity, ethereal, alluring, unsettling, condemned, dysfunctional, and even macabre, not only responded to the social anxieties of the era including AIDS, the crisis of femininity, postmodern nihilism, technological change, and life's instability, but also revealed the

connections between femininity, modernity, and the commercial culture of capitalism.

In the twenty-first century, fashion has repeatedly expressed a longing for a darker, more mysterious, and supernatural aesthetic inspired by elements from the past. Many avant-garde designers have made witchcraft and magic the central themes of their work. Paganism, occultism, and witches frequently reappear in the collections of British designer Alexander McQueen, known for staging spectacular fashion shows featuring strong female figures radiating power and sexuality, and for exploring motifs of Dark Romanticism and challenging, provocative social themes through the language of fashion. Presented in 2007, the collection *In Memory of Elizabeth How, Salem 1692* commemorated designer's distant ancestor accused of witchcraft and hanged following the infamous Salem witch trials. The collection featured garments incorporating historical symbols of witchcraft, paganism, religious persecution, and magic, i.e., leather corsets, pointed dresses with sarcophagi prints, and motifs of stars, moons, and silver bird talons, among others. The runway's black floor displayed a monumental blood-red pentagram, above which hung an inverted pyramid projecting images of locusts, fire, and skulls.[6] Occult aesthetics also appeared in the work of British designer Gareth Pugh, known for his fascination with the macabre, particularly in the video promoting his 2015 collection inspired by the mystery of Stonehenge, the film *The Wicker Man*, and druidic magical practices.[7] We also come across the figure of the witch in the work of American designer Rick Owens, e.g., in his 2019 collection *Babel*, whose runway, according to the designer himself, evoked a "witches' sabbath searching for order amidst chaos."[8] Witches also appear as one of the tribes adapting to a harsh post-apocalyptic reality through a spiritual connection with their environment in the collection *Mind, Melange, Motor* (FW 2020)[9]

by French designer Marine Serre, whose recycling-focused designs address themes of ecology, survival, communal identity, and the hybridity of life in a dystopian future. Meanwhile, dramatic collections by Turkish-British designer Dilara Findikoglu are rich in occultism, fierce femininity, and references to horror, Islamic mythology, the Victorian era, and gothic and punk subcultures. Findikoglu treats the runway as a site of revolt, using occult and satanic motifs as symbols of resistance, the empowerment of female strength, and the breaking of unjustly imposed social barriers. Simultaneously, she seeks to expand the concept of witchcraft, because, as she explains: "Witchcraft is in our nature. For me, it's not about negativity. I am using darkness to lighten the world."[10]

Fashion Design and Witchcraft

In fashion design, fascination with magic and the esoteric appeared also in less radical collections that referenced the aesthetics of dark romanticism, medieval mystery, and Victorian grandeur, promoting the image of the stylish witch as a symbol of feminine charm, strength, and style. In the Fall/Winter 2006 ready-to-wear collection, Jean Paul Gaultier explored the figure of a sophisticated witch accompanied by a cat, an owl, a dog, or rag dolls,[11] while British designer Luella Bartley offered in 2008 a sexy, girlish version of this female archetype.[12] The iconography of witches also appears repeatedly in the collections of avant-garde Japanese designer Rei Kawakubo and her brand Comme des Garçons, especially in the Fall/Winter 2004 *Dark Romance, Witch* collection and the Spring/Summer 2016 *Blue Witches* collection,[13] which depict the witch as a symbol of "strong women who are often misunderstood by the world," even though they do good.[14] The airy, magical figure also appears consistently in the work of designer Simone Rocha, whose creations critics interpret as embodying "rebellious romanticism" and "subversive femininity."[15] Her designs feature voluminous Gothic-style

dresses with puffed sleeves, ruffles, gathers, and pleats. American designers have also reinterpreted this archetype, including Thom Browne, particularly in his Fall/Winter 2024 collection, regarded as a fashion incarnation of the "American Gothic fairy tale,"[16] and the Mulleavy sisters from Rodarte,[17] whose work draws inspiration from horror films, fairies, and dark fairy tales. Meanwhile, French designer Julien Fournié, who has spent several years developing the persona of a designer-wizard, drew on the motif of witches in his 2019 *First Spell* collection as "proto-feminist trailblazers who sent shivers through the patriarchy" and women who "knew how to control their destiny."[18]

Alongside the slightly costume-oriented proposals mentioned above, inspirations drawn from witches as strong women appeared on the runways of luxury fashion houses such as Saint Laurent in 2016, Gucci in 2020, Chanel in 2021, and Dior in 2024. Most of these collections presented a visually appealing, market-friendly, but not necessarily revolutionary message. The notable exception is Dior, under the artistic direction of Maria Grazia Chiuri, which embraced the idea of magic and women as witches while engaging with its own heritage and current social trends. From the very beginning, Chiuri made collections inspired by mysticism, astrology, and tarot her signature: the debut Spring–Summer 2017 collection,[19] the 2018 resort collection,[20] and *Château de Tarot* (SS 2021), which



Fig. 1. *Waking the Witch*, Dilara Findikoglu, *Femme Vortex* Autumn/Winter 2024 at *Dirty Looks*, Barbican Centre, London, September 25, 2025- January 25, 2026.

referenced figures from the fifteenth-century Visconti-Sforza Tarot.[21] As the designer suggested, these collections reflected a growing fascination with supernatural phenomena and a tendency to seek meaning and hope in esotericism in an increasingly unpredictable and stressful world.[22] They also formed part of a strategy to reinforce the brand's heritage, continuing Christian Dior's interest in divination and astrology.[23]

In contrast, the 2024 ready-to-wear show featured "Dior witches" marching along a fuchsia-and-yellow runway surrounded by an immersive video installation displaying misogynistic advertisements and feminist slogans, e.g., "Capitalism won't take her where she truly wants to go," "The game is not her"[24]). Although the press described the show as a "grungy, witchy show"[25] and "an ode to dark femininity,"[26] Chiuri's presentation should rather be seen as a deconstruction of both Christian Dior's heritage[27] and the prevailing images of witches as evil, seductive, and rebellious figures. The show's protagonists were not only models in lace and ruffles but, above all, practical yet elegant corporate workers (in oversized white shirts or worn off one shoulder), laborers (in jeans, aprons, or technical parkas), and herbalists (in outfits and carrying bags printed with suns, moons, and medicinal plants). Thus, Chiuri's feminist collection provided a counterpoint to the elegant, almost costume-like proposals of the previously



Fig. 2. Maria Grazia Chiuri for Dior, Haute Couture Collection Autumn/Winter 2017 inspired by the tarot of Visconti di Modrone, at *LOUVRE COUTURE. Art and Fashion: Statement Pieces*, Louvre, Paris, January 24, August 24, 2025.

discussed romantic rebels, expanding the fashion imagination of the witch to include the figure of a leader in everyday life, working for her community and integrated into the male-dominated world. The ambivalent reception of this collection,[28] along with Chiuri's departure from Dior in 2025, sheds light on the tensions at the heart of witch culture when confronted with fashion (the blunting of oppositional edge, the dominance of the charming witch image over others) and on the problematic nature of its absorption by brands that epitomize the establishment and neoliberal capitalism.

Of course, these examples do not exhaust the question of the popularity of dark, mysterious, or magical motifs in contemporary fashion, but they do capture the main ways in which witches and esoteric aesthetics are presented, reflecting contemporary sensibilities and resonating with the intensification of global crises and social turbulence. In reflections on fashion, critics commonly argue that fashion serves as a "measure of time"[29] and "the most convenient cultural mirror we have."[30] However, Renate Stauss rightly notes that "specular reflections are optical illusions based on light and its energy," providing "not only a virtual image, but also a fundamentally distorted one." Trapped between magical knowledge and objectivity, the mirror of fashion thus shows a distorted, simplified, and far more subjective, even misleading, reflection of reality.[31] The witch reflected in this mirror in recent years is certainly a complex figure; yet it is striking that her youthful, independent, strong, and increasingly beautified version dominates.

Magical Thinking

The figure of the witch also reflects the connections between magic and fashion, which reach deeper than the current trend of supernatural symbolism on clothing or in enchantingly illusory runway spectacles. Fashion's very logic and system operate according to magical thinking. First, fashion works with the language of spells, alchemy, and transformation. In popular magazines such as *Vogue*, *InStyle*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Elle*, and *Marie Claire*, magic intertwines with discussions of style and self-development, and editors often draw on its vocabulary when describing the world of fashion. A few examples: "Whether you're drawn to magic that nurtures beauty itself, you seek spells to encourage self-acceptance or you want to use your daily beauty routine to spread magic into other areas of your life, beauty witchcraft is one glow-up practice that's never simply skin deep;"[32] "The designer conjures a reality suspended in time and space, within reach yet hidden from the gaze of ordinary mortals;"[33] "Lanvin today is all about magical realism."[34]



Fig. 3. Maria Grazia Chiuri for Dior, Haute Couture Collection Autumn/Winter 2017 inspired by the tarot of Visconti di Modrone, at *LOUVRE COUTURE. Art and Fashion: Statement Pieces*, Louvre, Paris, January 24, August 24, 2025.

Second, like myths and folklore, fashion reflects the belief that clothing can be charged with emotional energies and possess special properties that empower their wearers, enhancing their agency and attractiveness. The foundation of a magical perspective lies in perceiving the world as full of

energies, whose flows one can participate in, interact with, influence, or shape according to one's will.[35]

Third, following Marcel Mauss' line of thought, for whom magic is connected to the power to resolve a specific problem causing collective anxiety or uncertainty,[36] fashion responds to the social desire to look good, attractive, or appropriate, providing concrete material solutions, i.e. clothing or accessories, to societal concerns about appearance. Like magic, fashion also functions as a self-referential system: it creates its own field of influence and legitimacy, sets the conditions for its effectiveness, and answers the questions it has generated.[37]

Fourth, just as alchemists were preoccupied with the pursuit of eternal youth, the essence of fashion lies in constant transformation and the renewal of customs and styles, allowing it to elude death. Developing in his famous *Arcade's Project* the work of Italian thinker Giacomo Leopardi titled *Dialogue Between Fashion and Death*,[38] German philosopher Walter Benjamin emphasizes that fashion seeks to triumph over death, flirting with it, teasing it, and making jokes at its expense, and each time it escapes through rapid change: "This is why fashion changes so quickly: she titillates death and is already something different, something new, as he casts about to crush her."[39]

Fifth, as the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu argues, in modern societies, fashion constitutes a magical practice. Following Marcel Mauss, who understood magic as a social system that brings together the magician, magical representations, rituals, and a socially shared belief in their effectiveness,[40] Bourdieu conceives of the fashion field as a system of relations among social actors, objects, ideas, and imaginaries. He demonstrates that within this framework, the fashion field produces and mobilizes belief in the ideology of creation; this process unfolds through the consecration of designers as genius creators and the elevation of their designs to the status of the sacred.[41]

In the 1975 article *Le couturier et sa griffe: contribution à une théorie de la magie*, Bourdieu, together with Yvette Delsaut, analyzes how haute couture designers become the medium and the chief alchemists of fashion.[42] Public opinion operating within this field consecrates designers as magicians endowed with charisma and extraordinary powers (skill, craftsmanship, vision). During rituals such as seasonal shows, they appear before an audience and, by playing with fantasy and reality, transform garments into Fashion, i.e., into a sacred "signature" object In this way, they perform a genuine transubstantiation of all their creations, which now acquire transcendental value. According to Bourdiey, the fashion system functions thanks to collective "misrecognition:" an unconscious game of mutually casting spells and illusions and leading one another astray: "What makes the value, the magic, of the label is the collusion of all the agents of the system of production of sacred goods. This collusion is, of course, perfectly unconscious."[43]

Finally, we may associate fashion with *glamour*, i.e., charm, allure, prestige, and splendor. However, let us recall that the term originally had ties to magic and the practices of witches, namely, to casting spells. We may trace its etymology to the Old Scottish *glamer*, meaning "magical charm," "enchantment," "bewitchment," "a spell that dazzles the eye."[44] Scholars generally agree that the novelist Sir Walter Scott introduced the word *glamour* into literary English in the eighteenth century, using it to denote an illusory, seductive charm that leads one astray. As late as the nineteenth century, literary works warned against a dangerously tempting allure that diverted innocent victims from virtue.[45] However, in the twentieth century,, the term began to acquire positive connotations, becoming synonymous with refined beauty, allure, and luxury, embodied above all by the world of celebrities and high fashion. Within *fashion studies*, the concept is associated primarily with the

emergence of Hollywood's "dream factory" and the system of screen and photographic stardom in the 1930s.[46] Scholars examine female *glamour*, its connections to fashion, and the significance it held for women in modernity.[47] They understand it as something artificial and performatively constructed, and they often use the term "*glamour* labor" to refer to the ongoing, usually invisible work required to create and sustain a particular image.[48] Finally, there are also, though largely outside fashion studies, analyses that link glamour to modernity and capitalism, treating it as a form of "secular magic" and as a product of systematic commercial seduction of consumers through "glamour technologies" that emphasize mystery and refined allure. Judith Brown draws attention to the complexity of glamour, which functions simultaneously as a delicate promise of something beyond capitalism and as a capacious aesthetic technique that serves to further reinforce it.[49]

Capitalism, Magic, and Neopagan Groups

Considering the famous remark by the German sociologist and economist Werner Sombart that fashion is "capitalism's favorite child," since it "emerged from its innermost essence and reveals its nature in a way that few other phenomena of contemporary social life do,"[50] the operation of this industry according to magical thinking also sheds light on the fact that magic is alive, thriving in modern capitalist societies, and has always been part of modernity, as Peter Pels and Bruno Latour argue.[51] Recently, an increasing number of scholars have been tracing the development of capitalist economy and culture since the 1990s through the lens of alchemy, the magical mandrake, and the logic of the fashion runway.[52] They explore various scenarios of magical thinking and magical practices in contemporary capitalism,[53] or they regard magic as a fundamental aspect of the way power and authority operate in the modern state.[54] Considering the connections between fashion, magic, and

capitalism, we should rethink Sombart's metaphor and view fashion not so much as the innocent and charming daughter of capitalism but as its attractive, yet elusive, agent and partner. This, in turn, raises questions about issues of power expressed through today's popular figure of the witch and the dark romantic aesthetic. Following the line of the above discussion, the remainder of this article traces the emergence of neopagan groups and examines the extent to which they, like witches on the fashion runway, serve to empower marginalized individuals and provide an alternative to the social frameworks defined by the principles of capitalism.

Capitalism is a multidimensional phenomenon, so any study of its economic impact on social life must also consider its other components. The existence of this mechanism is independent of historical conditions, yet it is precisely historical specificity that shapes the particular form of capitalism and the social response to its effects. This perspective is particularly intriguing because, for groups that perceive themselves as excluded from participation in "profits," including non-economic ones, the search for alternatives to development and self-realization can constitute a counterpoint to capitalism. As Kacper Pobłocki notes:

> If … we look at capitalism as a social system, we see that it originates in the institution of slavery, known since ancient times. Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and modernity do not constitute naturally successive epochs or phases of development; rather, they are modifications of capitalism as a system based on unfree labor, regardless of whether the coercion is military, legal, political, or economic in nature.[55]

Thus, can we undersand turning to practices based on magic and rituals that draw on ancient traditions or ceremonies reminiscent of occult practices as a form of resistance against externally imposed rules, in which individual agency loses

significance in favor of an imagined, unceasing drive toward development?

Within social structures and the range of institutions individuals encounter throughout the lifelong socialization process, people produce knowledge about the surrounding reality. They transmit this knowledge and reinforce it through social practices and actions that are collectively accepted and/or expected of the individual. In a similar way, albeit *à rebours*, individuals receive a catalog of information about which behaviors and practices are unacceptable, inappropriate, or improper for them, and, by extension, for society. Such practices also include those that reference more or less distant history, often already subjected by contemporary society to evaluation or critique (not necessarily positive). This simple mechanism of group power over the individual characterizes most human societies, regardless of the historical period in which it occurs or their cultural specificity. Some scholars[56] attribute the so-called "grand social structures," i.e., the state, class, or revolution, to the second wave of historical sociology.[57] In this context, we may analyze the issue of group formation based on traditional beliefs from multiple perspectives, considering diverse approaches to studying interpersonal relations, traditions, or mechanisms that integrate communities. The fashion for witchcraft, manifested not only visually, opens up new avenues for research into the social and cultural conditions conducive to the emergence of neopagan groups. Notably, their visual representation is one of the manifestations of this trend.

In the perspective of Émile Durkheim's theory, it is important to understand ritual as an element that integrates society. We may interpret here collective participation in magical ceremonies as a process that strengthens the sense of closeness between the group and the individual by sharing experiences of the sacred sphere, always defined by the group, which entails transcending

individual experience. An individual may not wish to accumulate goods defined by society as material and may instead focus on acquiring other types of assets: knowledge, experience, specific skills, and practices that constitute a non-economic foundation for self-realization.

Self-realization, whose mechanisms are of particular interest here, does not preclude social participation. On the contrary, interpersonal relationships strengthen and define it. We may connect this search for alternative solutions to an unsatisfactory reality to Max Weber's concept of rationality and rationalization. Adapting it for the purposes of this discussion, we want to emphasize that in modern societies that define themselves as rational, there is no room for elements based on magic or transcendence. The choices of neopagan or neo-shamanic groups can thus sharply contrast with the image of modern society, operating according to widely accepted principles of logic. Moreover, Weber's concept of capitalism contains references to the opposition between the accumulation of goods (wealth acquisition) and self-realization (satisfying non-economic needs). Michał Warchala comments on these threads drawing attention to the interpretation of Weber's thesis:

> According to which the "inhuman" doctrine of predestination … contributes to the emergence of an "unnatural" capitalist ethic of wealth accumulation; unnatural because it goes beyond the mere satisfaction of needs (even the most refined ones)—indeed, it entails foregoing them in favor of tireless labor for the sake of work itself and wealth accumulation for its own sake.[58] .

In the context of ritual groups, we may observe connections with Pierre Bourdieu's concept, who sought to analyze how symbols and traditions translate into symbolic capital, which communities possess both as a whole and as collections of individual members. Within such groups, rituals perform a key function in sustaining communal bonds. In turn, this enables

individuals to participate consciously in experiences defined as transcendental. We may see these practices as mechanisms that build and rebuild (lost) social structures through the repeated enactment of established behavioral patterns, the use of symbols, and the performance of specific gestures. This also entails referring to a shared "heritage" in the practice of magic, exemplified, among other things, by consulting magical books, or grimoires. Knowledge about these texts and the use of the information they contain, most often written in the Middle Ages, serves for many contemporary groups based on magical practices as a kind of guideline for action and a guide for interpreting esoteric themes. Some of these texts have been translated into various languages and are available online, which suggests that members of these communities perceive them as timeless.[59]

Wiccan groups,[60] whose names derive from the Anglo-Saxon word *wicce, which* originated the English word *witch* and the German *wissen* (to know)[61], directly reference traits commonly and historically associated with them. The most distinctive trait was possession of secret knowledge, different from that of the rest of the community and acquired through unconventional means. A witch was also expected to have the potential that enabled her to obtain this knowledge. Such potential could be innate, beyond her control, making her participation in magic, in a sense, a fulfillment of destiny. She could also acquire this knowledge in other ways, most often through contact with "forbidden" representatives of the sacred sphere. Typically, pagan and Christian elements coexist in magical rituals, combining the sacred and the profane in an established, controlled manner. The recitation of spells, specific objects, incantations, invocations, or gestures in magical rituals resembles the circumstances accompanying prayers in religious ceremonies. Founded in 1967, the neopagan group Feraferia, which defines itself as a religion based on balanced relations

with nature, put these principles into practice both through the choice of ritual locations (natural environments), the use of characteristic attire (referencing ancient Greece and priestly robes), and the performance of songs, dances, chants, and the use of ritual objects. In groups of this type, an alternative to actions dictated by the capitalist model is most often following the natural cycle of change, i.e., seasons, observation of the cosmos, and attunement to what resonates with the inner self.

Fashion and following its trends aims, among other things, to enhance the body's appearance. Notably, some of the actions attributed to witches were oriented toward the same goal: they were believed to create substances whose use could, for example, improve beauty or rejuvenate to remove the signs of aging, mask imperfections, deceive... To cover something in the way fashionable clothing does, drawing attention away from what is meant to remain unseen.

We may interpret the actions of Wiccan groups as a rebellion against the effects of globalization and advanced technological processes, and above all, against the rules and norms that prevent individual self-realization:

> Wicca is a religion with a lot of theology (study of the nature of deity) and no dogma (rules imposed by religious leaders). Many people become Wiccans because they're independent souls who don't want to be told what to think or believe. Wicca offers fertile ground and a lot of space for spiritual creativity and independence.[62]

At the same time, no contradiction exists in using modern communication tools and social media within this rebellion to expand one's influence and pursue emancipation in a new way in the digital era.

Such an organization can take various forms: an association based on loose connections or a local assembly of "faithful followers." It can also develop elaborate structures built on dependencies with clearly defined leaders, priests, or spiritual guides. These hierarchies often rest on the idea of traditional authorities who transmit and interpret beliefs and rituals, while individual development within these structures follows successive circles of initiation (similar to advancement in a capitalist sense). Wiccan groups gather in covens, typically small groups of up to a dozen members, led by a guide-teacher or High Priest or High Priestess.

A coven is more than just a group of people working together. Just as a forest is more than a collection of individual trees, a coven is more than a gathering of individual witches. Just as trees in a forest intertwine through branches and connect through roots, forming a single vast organism, Wiccans in a coven connect through bonds of initiation and a shared group mind. These bonds form during rituals, linking people permanently and creating a new quality, so the coven becomes a unity, like a single organism.[63]

The functions of magical practices, as well as those related to occult content, include social integration, which rituals strengthen by reinforcing communal identity. In turn, this fosters cohesion and a sense of solidarity. Rituals also serve as a form of normative reset, referencing the values and rules upheld within the community and legitimized through the enactment of hierarchical relationships. Moreover, rituals have a practical aspect. The ritual not only relies on theoretical assumptions and relates to the object of worship, but it also produces tangible, measurable effects, perceived and experienced in social reality (even if those effects exist only in imagination). In a similar way, communities celebrate important events or collectively established holidays.

The collapse of the myth of capitalism as a "safe haven," in which critics focused on "challenging the vision of the market as a distinguished sphere of action guided by a specific logic,"[64] has fueled various concepts and social movements. These movements began to emerge from previously known structures, repackaged into recognizable but newly redefined elements. This development gives rise to a form of egalitarianism built on completely different values and assumptions. Rebellion against capitalism, which, through its structure based on competition, private property, and the free market, encourages the creation and perpetuation of inequalities, found an alternative in movements grounded in egalitarian principles. This shift aligns with efforts to equalize opportunities and redistribute resources based on solidarity. When achieving this within the existing legal and political system proves impossible, people seek alternative, sometimes hybrid, solutions. On the one hand, they advocate resistance to the system, while on the other hand, they leverage institutional structures and established systemic mechanisms to attempt effective change. This process evokes the notion of syncretism, blending different religious, shamanic, and magical traditions that, while seemingly competing, in practice share many elements. The contemporary turn toward the paradigm of esotericism, mystery, and associated rituals fits into the natural life cycle of trends that periodically regain popularity in more or less modified forms. The presence of magic and witchcraft topics in numerous academic studies across disciplines such as history, anthropology, law, linguistics, ethnography, and sociology demonstrates both the significance of these issues in human perception and the necessity of organizing knowledge about them methodically. Research on contemporary groups engaging in magical practices shows that people usually treat such activities as a diversion, a hobby, or an additional form of entertainment, while everyday life remains governed by the rules

and demands of capitalism. Even when someone pursues witchcraft professionally, they still operate in accordance with contemporary market principles, managing their own business, marketing, and offering themed services.

The fact that issues related to witches, whose existence and practices people once used to explain difficult phenomena before they understood their origins, suggests that invoking magic and the need to weave esotericism into everyday life had a timeless character and appeared in nearly all historical periods. Historically, people associated groups of rebels against secular or ecclesiastical authority with heretics, whom they saw as a threat to established rules, a sense of security, and social cohesion. Anyone who expressed dissatisfaction with their life situation, challenged the status quo, neglected prayer, or showed excessive zeal, could potentially face accusations of being a heretic or supporting heretics (the latter considered equally serious). A particular case involved accusations of erudite heresy, targeting individuals with extensive knowledge who attempted to reinterpret established dogmas or intellectual traditions. Their views could appear too radical and dangerous. Sometimes, this applied to clergy whose extensive knowledge threatened medieval authorities. Accusations and convictions for heresy served both as proof of theoretical errors and as a warning against destabilizing the existing intellectual and social order. In this way, authorities combined intellectual concerns (fear of those who knew) with political control, thereby maintaining authoritarian order. An example may be one of the first heresy trials: a dozen clergy in Orléans, who were burned at the stake in 1022.[65] Similarly, witches and their actions became effective allies for the emergence of movements opposing dominant intellectual or social currents. This principle continues in contemporary forms, evident in the rise of new neopagan groups, which, faced with the challenges of a technologized world, seek alternatives and a return to connections with nature finding in

ancient magical practices evidence of a human–cosmic relationship.

Groups of this type often emerge or intensify their activities during periods of social change, when existing values and social arrangements no longer satisfy, lose their appeal, or fail to answer key questions. Tensions inherent in the nature of social dynamics also facilitate them. These include the fear of the unknown, dystopian visions of the future, challenges to established forms of social relations, and the creation of global crises, among others. In this context, magical groups also serve adaptive functions, i.e., facing social change, they can act as catalysts that allow traditions to adjust to new conditions while preserving historical continuity, even if that continuity is realized only in selected elements that align with the community's principles.

In groups organized around rituals and ceremonies invoking magic and mystery, traditional beliefs build a sense of belonging, provide the foundation for legitimacy, and serve as a means of expressing identity. Transmitting tradition constitutes a key aspect of such communities, realized through the socialization process mentioned earlier, in which rituals act as tools for passing on knowledge, norms, and cultural values. Organizing regular meetings and participating in ceremonies is also significant, as new members are introduced to collective experiences and learn the group's symbolism.

Conclusion

The growing popularity of esoteric aesthetics, Dark Romanticism, and neopaganism coincides with the intensification of global crises, i.e., ecological, economic, and migration-related, as well as crises of authority and institutions, and with doubt in rational narratives and principles that, instead of ensuring order and stability, lead to disaster. Such moments stimulate the imagination and encourage the search for alternative ways to

cope with a problematic reality. Modern witchcraft and romantic sensibility offer a strong counterpoint to the darker aspects of modernity and have spread today as an appealing element of identity, a flexible practice of personal anti-establishment empowerment, and a mechanism for building community.[66] By shifting the focus from the collective to the individual and valuing dreams, imagination, intuition, and the personal voice, romantic sensibility promises agency and personal empowerment. The figure of the witch, interpreted as a symbol of personal power, attractiveness, independence, and the struggle for social justice, provides a visually striking expression and a timely marker of identity. Reflection on the revival of neopagan groups suggests that magic and witchcraft also enable the formation of communities grounded in inclusivity, egalitarianism, and solidarity, offering an alternative to dominant capitalist and authoritarian paradigms.

The fashion commodification and popularization of the phenomenon discussed in this article, as well as its integration into cultural discourse and modes of consumption, lead to ambivalent effects and tensions within contemporary witch culture. By definition, the witch symbolizes rebellion against established structures and institutions, a politically engaged figure focused outward, toward the system she intends to challenge. Meanwhile, recent fashion discourse and visual imaginaries present an increasingly "beautified" witch, one that is acceptable and appealing to a broad audience. More importantly, although the contemporary *glamour* witch declares opposition to patriarchy, racism, gender binaries, and hierarchical institutions, she does so in a friendly, attractive, and system-safe manner. She redirects attention to the aesthetic dimension (care for her mysterious appearance) and individualizes witchcraft (a personal practice of self-care that fosters autonomy, agency, and personal power), diverting focus from external conditions and structural inequalities, and

blunting the political edge of "magical rebellion." In this way, the figure of a witch transforms into a version compatible with corporate neoliberal capitalism and market logic, where individual traits and skills such as self-confidence, self-esteem, self-sufficiency, and resilience serve as desirable tools for survival and thriving. The glow of the young, attractive, romantic witch overshadows the historical complexity of this figure and conceals the sexism, racism, and misogyny embedded in the philosophy of self-care and personal responsibility. It is also notable that fashion representations of the esoteric trend fundamentally do not critique the capitalist institutions within which they are created and disseminated.

Similarly, if we consider that rebellion against racial capitalism today also manifests through the rise of alternative and neopagan groups, or more broadly, organizations centered around esotericism, then its definition results from structural and relational aspects rather than the contestation of typical capitalistic mechanisms. Existing social systems mostly operate according to market principles, where everything measurable translates into economic value. This principle does not promote the inclusivity that contemporary groups drawing on magical traditions particularly seek. However, even if they cannot completely separate themselves from capitalism, since these communities do not exist in a socio-economic vacuum, their very existence leaves a mark on the polished surface of capitalism, where everything must balance like a mathematical equation. While it seems that the common denominator in today's magical practices and fashion is the courage to reject established rules of the market and patriarchy, the intersections of magic, fashion, and capitalism prompt a reconsideration of the truly alternative character of these practices.

These reflections lead to the conclusion that contemporary witchcraft plays the role of a double agent: on the one hand, it empowers individuals and groups, helping them navigate

a messy, problematic reality (or at least giving them the comforting illusion that they're doing so); on the other hand, by entangling capitalism with magic, hijacking esoteric aesthetics, and giving the witch a full-on "glam makeover," it ends up reinforcing neoliberal capitalism. Perhaps this is exactly where its mysterious, mysterious power lies.

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