EDITORIAL
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Special Issue: In Pursuit of Luxury
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This second 'In Pursuit of Luxury' special issue for the *Journal of Design, Business & Society* continues to explore the notion of luxury, including its evolving meanings and applications within a contemporary context. The theme for this addition is centred around the space of luxury and has emerged from the *In Pursuit of Luxury* conference. The invitation to interpret 'space' in this context includes considering the physical, digital and philosophical environments that impact on and concern luxury. In response, each author addresses the inconsistencies around the definition, promotion and role of luxury.

Since defining luxury continues to elicit problems and inconsistencies as is evidenced in the continually expanding and changing definitions, it has become apparent that in a contemporary context defining a product as luxury has increasingly become a term used to add value regardless of product category and/or quality. What we have seen, and indeed continue to see, is an attempt, not only by manufacturers, retailers and commentators but marketers as well, to attribute the word 'luxury' to almost anything that adds value, and in turn has the ability to increase sales. Inaccessible luxury, intermediate luxury, accessible luxury, absolute luxury, aspirational luxury, masstige, prestige and premium are all examples of the terminology used to define luxury products and services.

What is evident is that there is no clear definition of what constitutes a luxury product in the contemporary consumer market. It could be said that luxury is in a state of flux or possibly under erasure. This could be seen to be problematic as reclassifying all types of goods as luxury diminishes the value of the historically very clear boundaries and definitions that defined luxury within a framework of connoisseurship and scarcity and set it apart from other goods. A contemporary definition of luxury might be something that defines products as hand-crafted, using the finest materials, and in which artefacts maintain their value outside of the global mass consumer market. What has emerged from the articles in this special issue is that luxury is no longer necessarily referring to the product but rather perceptions thereof. As luxury is understood as something unique and or even special, it is interesting to read how diverse each of the authors' interpretation and understanding of luxury is. The articles also reveal how the appropriation of the term elevates or conversely demotes meaning and in some instances adds value within this varied landscape.

Houy-Towner draws the conclusion that luxury like fashion and technology, within a contemporary context, is changing at an unprecedented rate and that despite the point of origination where a luxury product is exclusive it ultimately loses that exclusivity when it goes mainstream. The chosen example of the collaboration between Hermes and Apple identifies the transient nature of luxury today. Hermes, a purveyor of luxury goods, produces a product that embeds technology into its design – the product that has little material value and in its very nature becomes obsolete as technology changes. We find a luxury item that decreases in value through its limited lifespan. No longer is a luxury product 'timeless' or 'for life'; its lifespan is fleeting as with any other fashion item. In contrast, Carta and de Kock consider the physical space that is created to define an experience as luxurious through the use of materials and technology. This may be a retail environment or indeed a home. But their assertion that digital technology is, through the use of data mining, transforming how the consumer understands luxury is both interesting and contentious. The focus here is on using technology to customize the user experience such that the customization becomes the luxury. Their example of a Renault Symbioz Smart Home raises a number of questions, particularly since, as mentioned above, any manufacturer and/or service provider has the ability to enter the luxury market. This, it could be argued, further dilutes the very core of what luxury represents. Both consider technology, but apply the use and appropriation in very different ways. It is clear that luxury is a loaded term and one that is interpreted in different ways. The South Africa luxury market is also subject to the adoption of global marketing methods. The common thread in this context provides local makers the opportunity to appropriate a term and apply it, despite or because of western trends. Appiah-Nimo raises a different question in his article, one that seeks to clarify the reasoning behind the little consumer support for local luxury brands. Issues around access to fabrication and craftsmanship are acknowledged to be problematic as locally produced products do not in the main meet the required production standards of global luxury brands. This, however, does not appear to hamper the ambitions of the makers. Again, as is common world over, they nonetheless adopt the terminology of 'luxury',

which elevates the product to that status. Appropriation, another common theme running through all the article, is evidenced as Manlow discusses the
Fondation Louis Vuitton and the ways in which it and other luxury brands have created cathedrals of consumption, not necessarily retail outlets but museums and galleries to elevate their stature to that of purveyors of art or philanthropic entities. They commission world-renowned architects and designers to not only embellish their own products but also to showcase their work for show and for sale within a luxury brand environment. Interestingly, art in this instance, it is argued, is utilized to add value to the notion of luxury. Both artist and luxury brand together embark on the mass production of product that defies the traditional modus operandi – producing limited goods and exceptional service. As with Carta and de Kock we see physical space being utilized not only to enhance the experience of the customer but also to sell a product. Marketing and point-of-sale strategies are here taken to the extreme.

Embarking on a voyage of discovery is a concept that both Bloomfield and Calvert address, albeit in different ways. Their philosophical approach adds refreshing insight into the world of luxury through a lens of historical space and language. We might say the former adopts a historical and conceptual overview, a kind of aerial view, while the latter drills down into a particular detail, through examining of the space of language itself. Bloomfield suggests that to define luxury one must embark on a journey of discovery, exploration and curiosity. He asserts that in the current climate of excessive consumption these journeys are perpetuated through visual language, words and imagery in all its guises. These are then adopted by luxury brands and their marketers to promote goods and services to encourage the consumption of their products. His suggestion that this mode of promotion, exacerbated through the constant use of technology, in reality limits rather than expands our choice as
it provides those who mine our data with increasingly more control over the ways we consume. Calvert proposes that language, specifically in this instance the use of the word luxury, is problematic as it has become meaningless. It has become a loaded term used to encourage consumption, despite language, which in its very nature possesses inherent value beyond that of marketing terminology. Both of these perspectives meet in the middle, between macro and micro viewpoints, to critique the wider context in which luxury operates. The authors all acknowledge that luxury is no longer the preserve of those who embark on a journey of discovery. Rather they are confronted with interpretations of a term that was once held in esteem but no longer has inherent value. I propose that as marketing teams continue to create new and evolving definitions of luxury, its pure essence is at risk of losing its lustre, requiring constant attention to focusing on its core values and intrinsic qualities.