

The Third Realm of Luxury

Connecting Real Places and Imaginary Spaces



edited by
JOANNE ROBERTS and JOHN ARMITAGE

B L O O M S B U R Y

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Joanne Roberts and John Armitage

The third realm of luxury: Conceptualizing the connections between real places and imaginary spaces

Joanne Roberts and John Armitage

Introduction

The growing importance of luxury in the everyday sociocultural and economic context is promoting the imaginaries of real and aspirant luxury consumers. This volume explores the connection between real and imaginary luxury consumed in what we refer to as “realms of luxury.” We use the term realm for its capacity to denote a domain that may have a real or imagined quality, such that a realm may refer to a territory, as in a specific kingdom (e.g., United Kingdom), or an abstract imaginary sphere, such as paradise. Additionally, a realm may be used to indicate a domain that is not necessarily fixed in time and space. Indeed, realm evokes both real concrete places and imagined, even spiritual or transcendental, spaces. For our analysis we refer to the real places of luxury as the “first realm of luxury” and the imaginary spaces of luxury as the “second realm of luxury.” To these we add a “third realm of luxury” where the first two realms exist and connect to generate a real–imaginary space of luxury. The fact that there are real places of luxury not only fuels the imagination but also creates countless unknown possibilities, some tangible others ephemeral, to be discovered and made “real” in the third realm by, and for, individuals, and, by association, extending to some degree into a collective social consciousness. Unlike luxury in the first realm, which is bound by resource limitations and the individual’s capacity to consume, and luxury in the second realm, which (although limitless) remains in the minds of individuals, luxury in the third realm offers luxury businesses the opportunity to leverage consumers’ imaginations to extend the demand for luxury goods and services that are invested with real–imaginary

qualities to near limitless proportions. Consequently, through the exploitation of the third realm of luxury, the imaginaries of luxury consumers are increasingly being commodified according to the logic of advanced capitalism.

Indeed, we argue that we live increasingly *in* the third realm of luxury. The very idea of the real, how we make sense of place, and the means by which we imagine are all becoming invested in, and developed through, the third realm of luxury. The rapidly developing real–imaginary spaces of luxury are thus becoming a key area for studying the issues associated with luxury. Hence, adopting a critical luxury studies perspective (Armitage and Roberts 2016), *The Third Realm of Luxury: Connecting Real Places and Imaginary Spaces* provides an original and significant investigation of the most important developments in the theories and practices of luxurious real places and imaginary spaces over the last fifty years. In doing so, it draws on issues and concepts from philosophy, visual culture, design history, sociology, literary theory, architecture, cultural anthropology, cultural geography, and critical luxury studies.

Throughout the history of civilization, luxury has held cultural and political significance (Berry 1994; Adams 2012). However, promoted by advocates including Adam Smith (1981 [1776]) and David Hume (1987 [1742]), luxury's economic importance increased, such that it is thought to have significantly contributed to the industrial revolution in eighteenth-century Britain (Sombart 1967 [1913]; Berg 2005). Today, luxury is an important economic sector. Certainly, its growth, fueled by rising prosperity, especially among the emerging countries, is outpacing general economic growth. In 2017, the consultancy Bain & Company estimated that the luxury market grew by 5 percent on 2016 to reach an estimated value of €1.2 trillion globally (D'Arpizio, Levato, Kamel and de Montgolfier 2017). Hence, the production and consumption of luxury contributes to welfare through the employment of hundreds of thousands of individuals across the world. In the UK alone, the luxury sector contributes £32.2 billion to the economy, accounting for 2.2 percent of gross domestic product, directly employing 113,000 people, contributing £5.2 billion to the Exchequer through tax and National Insurance, and generating exports valued at £25 billion (Walpole 2017: 5). In addition to the direct positive economic impact of the production and consumption of luxury on, for instance, employment and taxes, the luxury sector has beneficial indirect influences, through spillover effects, on to other parts of the economy, including through the skills and innovation it promotes. Moreover, through the growing economic strength of the luxury sector and those consuming its products and services, including the growing ranks of the middle classes across the globe, and, importantly,

the super-rich,¹ it has gained renewed cultural and political significance in contemporary society. The rapid rise of luxury business since the 1980s coincided with the economic restructuring, deregulation, and privatization following the widespread introduction of neoliberal economic policies. Such policies accelerated economic globalization and left individuals exposed to the vagaries of international markets. While some individuals prosper in this highly competitive neoliberal environment of reduced government intervention, others struggle without the support of the state. The consequence of growing inequality was further accentuated by the global financial crisis of 2008 (Piketty 2014). The fortunes of luxury brand companies and their consumers are intimately linked to the economic system with all its capacities to shape the sociocultural and political environment. It is for these reasons that a critical appreciation of luxury, including its spatial expressions, is required.

Furthermore, luxury has continued to shape places and spaces. Through its influence on cities, luxury contributes to the construction of what Paris (2017) calls “prestigious places,” improving the built environment with potential benefits for all, directly through an improved quality of life and through attracting overseas tourists and the subsequent creation of jobs in the hospitality and tourism sectors. Accordingly, luxury impacts on real places, including, for instance, the design of retail outlets (Crewe 2016), shopping malls like Crystals at CityCenter, Las Vegas (Sharr 2016), homes (McNeil and Riello 2016), and tourist locations (Thurlow and Jaworski 2012; Calefato 2014). The effect of luxury on real places is of course not novel. For example, Annette Condello’s (2014) *The Architecture of Luxury* elaborates on a range of tangible places of luxury from the Greek colonial city of Sybaris in Southern Italy founded in the eighth century BCE up to late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century locations in the US cities of New York and Chicago. But what is new in the contemporary era is the *scale* of the impact that luxury is having on the built environment. Hence, discussions of luxury and space tend to focus on real places, including how wealthy consumers of luxury, namely the super-rich, affect housing in capital cities (Atkinson, Burrows, and Rhodes 2016) and transform urban and rural landscapes in locations ranging from London and Kentucky to Ireland and St. Barts (Hay 2013). Moreover, while this volume adds to this body of work through consideration of real places of luxury, from the interior of automobiles and apartments to the homes of autocratic leaders, home and hotel interiors, museums and estates, free ports and California vineyards, it goes beyond the contemplation of the real places to consider the imaginary spaces that luxury evokes.

Similarly, luxury in the sphere of the online or virtual world is one form of imagined space of luxury that has received much attention in recent years, with the rise of social media and online fashion retailers like the Yoox Net-A-Porter Group and Farfetch that specialize in the sale of luxury online. Yet, studies focus on concerns such as the challenges of marketing luxury online (Okonkwo 2010) or how luxury is produced and consumed through luxury brand websites (Rocamora 2016). Digital luxury certainly involves an imaginary element of relevance to this volume, which examines how the interaction between real places of luxury such as retail stores can promote imaginary luxury and how imaginary luxury, including that stimulated by digital technologies, influences the real places of luxury. Clearly, real retail environments have evolved as a result of online luxury, by developing and focusing on experiential aspects of shopping, as the case of Burberry, which has been at the forefront of using technologies to enhance its stores and access to its merchandise, so clearly demonstrates (Roberts and Armitage 2017).

However, the aim of this book is to go beyond the interaction of the real and the somewhat limited—and limiting—imaginary stimulated by digital manifestations of luxury driven by marketing and advertising. For the contributors to this volume, the imaginary includes the very nature of being in and experiencing luxury in the concrete exterior and social world to the innermost personal imaginings of the individual. In this way, as editors, we offer an original contribution to appreciations of luxury and its impact on real places and the imaginary spaces of individuals and social groups. Moreover, we argue that the connections between real places and imaginary spaces produce a third realm of luxury, a realm of luxury that has yet to be explored in a systematic fashion and which the contributions to this volume investigate.

In this opening chapter, we examine the interaction between luxurious real places and imaginary spaces and we introduce and expand on our idea of the third realm of luxury. We begin by elaborating the nature of luxury before exploring the idea of connecting real places and imaginary spaces. We go on to argue that the interplay and interdependencies between these two spatial realms of luxury is today exposing a third realm of luxury arising from the nexus of real and imaginary luxury. Through our expansion of the idea of the third realm of luxury in this chapter, then, we offer an original conceptual approach to understanding and analyzing the spatial aspects of luxury. We provide the context for the contributions to this volume, all of which analyze luxury in a real place and its connection to imaginary spaces. We close this chapter by highlighting how each contribution offers evidence of the significance of the third realm of luxury.

Luxury: From an idea to a reality

In the present-day developed nations, luxury is ubiquitous in the sense that the term luxury is attached to an increasingly wide array of objects, services, and experiences. For instance, in London, as elsewhere, it seems that every new apartment or housing development is marketed as luxury real estate. Whether marketers' use of the label luxury is always valid is of course debatable (Roberts 2018). Luxury is usually associated with expensive, rare, and refined products and services of the highest quality consumed in the context of a rich and comfortable lifestyle lived in sumptuous surroundings, from the plush interiors of luxury homes to affluent urban districts and comfortable rural locations. Luxury as "luxus" in classical Latin implies effeminate sensuality, a passion for splendor and pomp, and "luxuria" indicated excess, extravagance, and moral weakness (Adams 2012: 7–8). Luxury is also viewed as unnecessary, superfluous, or an indulgence and, as such, its moral justification is open to question (Roberts 2019). Christopher J. Berry's (1994) seminal study, *The Idea of Luxury*, defines luxury as the antonym of necessity, in that luxury is distinct from basic needs, which are non-intentional and universal. For Berry (1994), luxury occupies the realm of wants and desires. Yet, he also argues that luxuries must be the object of socially recognized desire, and, as such, capable of giving pleasure rather than merely relieving pain. Luxury is relative and therefore cannot be objectively defined because it depends on cultural, social, and individual contexts and meanings. Hence, a luxury can range from a small box of Charbonnel et Walker Champagne truffles costing £14 to a £32 million Sunseeker 155 private yacht. For those with busy lives, quality time of one's own or shared with loved ones can be a luxury. Luxury is, then, more than a term to describe a group of objects or services; rather, it is an idea.

Furthermore, though a luxury is normally something that one desires for reasons other than necessity, some luxury is consumed *as* a necessity to demonstrate one's position of power in society. Such conspicuous consumption was first analyzed by Thorstein Veblen (1899) in his study of the leisured class in the United States during last decade of nineteenth century. Contemporary luxury consumption of this sort is evident in, for example, the lives of heads of state and those among the top echelons of major businesses. This instrumental consumption of luxury may have its origins in desire, but, as individuals reach positions of power, what was once desired becomes a necessary accessory and, in some cases, is transformed into the authoritarian luxury elaborated by Featherstone (Chapter 3) in his study of the homes of autocratic leaders such as

Adolf Hitler and Donald Trump. Moreover, some luxuries may be necessities because they are the object of intense desire or intense identification. Therefore, Berry (1994: 41) defines luxuries as “*those goods that admit of easy and painless substitution because the desire for them lacks fervency*” (original italics). Consequently, not all unnecessary goods or services are luxuries to everyone.

For most people, desire, rather than necessity, drives the consumption of luxury. But whether such desire originates with the individual is doubtful given the promotion by advertisers and the mass media of the false social needs identified by Herbert Marcuse (1991 [1964]). Distinguishing between “true” and “false” social needs, Marcuse (1991 [1964]: 5) describes true needs as “the vital ones—nourishment, clothing, lodging at the attainable level of culture.” In contrast, false needs are

superimposed upon the individual by particular social interests in his repression: the needs which perpetuate toil, aggressiveness, misery, and injustice. . . . Most of the prevailing needs to relax, to have fun, to behave and consume in accordance with the advertisements, to love and hate what others love and hate, belong to this category of false needs. (Marcuse 1991 [1964]: 5)

Discriminating between true and false needs is important because, in advanced capitalist societies, where most true social needs have been fulfilled, the satisfaction of false social needs drives major segments of the economy. This is clearly illustrated by our analysis of the role of new media in promoting false needs for luxury goods and services (Armitage and Roberts 2014). Of course, in the contemporary era, luxury brands are active in cultivating the desire for their goods and services by deploying the full range of stimuli available in contemporary visual culture including fashion, photography, works of art, television, cinema, and social media (Armitage 2019).

Luxury as a branded good or service has attracted much research attention from scholars in the fields of marketing and consumer behavior. A luxury brand refers to a commercially provided good or service rather than an idea of luxury. Hence, a leisurely bath might be someone’s idea of a luxury, but it would only be the outcome of a luxury brand if it were taken in a luxury bathroom, hotel, or spa or if luxury bath products were part of the experience. There have been many attempts to define luxury brands (Ko, Costello, and Taylor 2017). For instance, in relation to luxury brands, Chevalier and Mazzalova (2012) argue that a luxury product must have a strong artistic content, be the result of craftsmanship, and be international, while Allèrès (1990) identifies luxury in terms of three levels of accessibility: inaccessible—exclusive unique items; intermediate—expensive

replicas of unique items; and, accessible—factory produced in large production runs. Drawing on a review of the luxury brand literature, Ko, Costello, and Taylor (2017: 2) define a luxury brand as a product or service that consumers perceive to:

1. be high quality;
2. offer authentic value via desired benefits, whether functional or emotional;
3. have a prestigious image within the market built on qualities such as artisanship, craftsmanship, or service quality;
4. be worthy of commanding a premium price; and
5. be capable of inspiring a deep connection, or resonance, with the consumer.

In the contemporary era, we are also witnessing a proliferation of terms, such as “new luxury” or “mass luxury” resulting from the efforts of traditional brands to trade up as well as the drive for profits among luxury businesses by offering products and services to a wider global market (Kapferer and Bastien 2012). Such changes also reflect the fragmentation of the production process, such that the design process may involve significant artistic inputs and craftsmanship, but the final luxury goods and services can be mass-produced in low-cost locations without any loss of quality (Thomas 2007). The democratization of luxury (Kapferer and Bastien 2012), characterized by the shift to mass luxury, has been accompanied by the emergence of the idea of “meta-luxury” (Ricca and Robins 2012) and “über luxury” (Quintavalle 2013) to make a distinction between mass-produced luxuries and those luxuries that remain exclusive, often because they are rare or the result of high levels of skill and craftsmanship, and their cost renders them accessible only to the super-rich. Examples of such luxuries include bespoke tailoring, haute couture, and individually designed items from jewelry to private jets and yachts. Despite the rhetoric of exclusivity, however, the major luxury brands identified in, for example, Deloitte’s (2018) annual report on luxury goods operate in mass markets, albeit in international rather than national markets.

The academic literature concerning luxury is expanding rapidly, reflecting its growing importance in the economy and sociocultural contexts. Nevertheless, as Gurzki and Woisetschlager’s (2017) analysis of this literature suggests, research continues to focus on luxury’s history as a social phenomenon and as a means of signaling status, as a cultural product and carrier of cultural meaning, and marketing and consumer behavior issues, including luxury brands as a source of identity and brand equity, and how to create a luxury brand as well as issues

concerned with authenticity including counterfeiting. Research that considers its real and imaginary spatial dimensions is underdeveloped. This is no doubt because, in today's economically developed nations, the idea of luxury is overwhelmingly associated with the very real luxury goods and services available in specific local and global markets. While this market manifestation of luxury dominates luxury discourse, there is also another dimension of luxury that is imagined by the consumer. This imaginary luxury, though having the appearance of independent creation by the individual, is no less commodified than the mass-produced luxury branded goods and services available in the marketplace. Indeed, the real luxury goods and services distributed by the luxury brand companies depend on the allure of luxury created in the imaginary. Hence, the imaginary fuels consumers' desires for luxury goods and services in specific places.

As noted, the neoliberal market system has supported the expanding demand for luxury and the growth of the luxury sector. This growth not only results from the increased prosperity and therefore the ability of individuals to afford luxuries but is also stimulated by the promotion and privileging of the individual's desires above the needs of the community and society. No longer viewed as excessive in the face of poverty and growing inequality, luxury becomes an expectation for the successful individual. Luxuries, like the Rolls-Royce Ghost Black Badge automobile described by Armitage (Chapter 2), become a reward for successfully competing in the neoliberal market system. Moreover, luxury brands, through the construction of "heritage stories" (Cox 2013) and present-day associations, support identity formation (Belk 1988; Brewer 1991) and appeal to the individual's simultaneous need for a sense of distinctiveness and belonging. Rather than engaging in real local communities, consumers seek, through the consumption of luxury brands, to identify with the set of values proclaimed by Chanel and Patek Philippe, among others, as well as with the virtual and often imagined luxury brand communities that are stimulated by the marketing departments of multinational corporate luxury groups like Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton (LVMH), Richemont, and Kering. Hence, branding and marketing promote an imaginary sense of belonging and community, senses that have been lost in the atomized competition that drives the neoliberal market economy (Bauman 2001). This imagined sense of community is aptly demonstrated by Samuel Austin and Adam Sharr (Chapter 7) who focus on the production and marketing of luxury in imagined notions of home and community in the "The Collective"—student-style housing for professionals priced out of London's housing market.

As the chapters in this volume illustrate, advertising and marketing are important for the creation of certain imaginary spaces. The skillful construction of visual and textual representations of luxuries in real places disseminated through traditional and new media stimulate imaginary spaces of luxury in individuals, fueling the false needs upon which the luxury brand business is crucially dependent (Marcuse 1991 [1964]; Armitage and Roberts 2014). Through advertising and the promotion of luxury, the personal imaginings of individuals are commodified. By extending their markets from the real into the imaginary realm, luxury brand companies expand the finite real consumption capacities of the individual to near infinite imagined possibilities. Luxury as a commodity is, then, constructed and consumed in specific real places, and it is also an idea, an aspiration, an illusion, produced and consumed in abstract spaces. Increasingly, luxury brand companies are harnessing the commercial potential of these imaginary spaces of luxury to sustain above market rate returns for their shareholders.

Connecting real places and imaginary spaces: Toward the third realm of luxury

From real places and imaginary spaces to a Thirdspace

To expand further on the connections between real places and imaginary spaces, it is necessary to explore the distinction between place and space. The terms place and space are often used interchangeably and regarded as synonymous, yet they can also be used to conceptualize two very different spatial phenomena. The nature of place and space as well as the relationship between them has been much discussed in the field of human geography (Hubbard, Kitchin, and Valentine 2004), and it is from contributions to this field that we take inspiration for our conceptualization of the spatial realms of luxury that we elaborate here.

Place represents a distinctive type of space that is constructed and defined by the lived experiences of people. In a sense, a place is named space like a specific city, park, building, or room, that is associated with distinctive activities. Place involves embodiment, of being in a place (Thrift 2003), and places are fundamental to belonging and a sense of identity (Hubbard, Kitchin, and Valentine 2004). In contrast, space is a much broader term that can be conceived of as an abstraction, for instance, as in Euclidean geometry. Additionally, space

may be a function of social relations, socially produced and consumed (Lefebvre 1991a).

Henri Lefebvre (1991a) argues that spatiality goes beyond the dialectic between place and space to a “trialectics” of spatiality, which captures the differential entwining of cultural practices, representations, and imaginations (Hubbard, Kitchin, and Valentine 2004). In so doing, Lefebvre offers a three-way dialectic between spatial practice (perceived space), representations of space (conceived space), and spaces of representation (lived space) (Soja 1996). Building on Lefebvre’s idea of a trialectics of space, Edward W. Soja (1996) proposes the notion of Thirdspace. He notes that, until the late 1960s, mainstream spatial imaginations revolved principally around a dual mode of thinking about space. The first mode he described as a Firstspace perspective and epistemology, “fixed mainly on the concrete materiality of spatial forms, on things that can be empirically mapped”; the second mode he described as Secondspace, “conceived in the ideas about space, in thoughtful re-presentations of human spatiality in mental or cognitive forms” (Soja 1996: 11). Soja goes on to argue that “an-Other” form of spatial awareness began to emerge from the late 1960s, which he referred to as Thirdspace. For Soja, this Thirdspace is a product of a “thirling” of the spatial imagination:

the creation of another mode of thinking about space that draws upon the material and mental spaces of thinking about spaces of the traditional dualism but extends well beyond them in scope, substance, and meaning. Simultaneously real and imagined and more (both and also . . .), the exploration of Thirdspace can be described and inscribed in journeys to “real-and-imagined” (or perhaps “realandimagined”?) places. (Soja, 1996: 11)

Furthermore, Soja includes among the defining qualities of Thirdspace:

a knowable and unknowable, real and imagined lifeworld of experiences, emotions, events, and political choices that is existentially shaped by the generative and problematic interplay between centres and peripheries, the abstract and concrete, the impassioned spaces of the conceptual and the lived, marked out materially and metaphorically in *spatial praxis*, the transformation of (spatial) knowledge into (spatial) action in a field of unevenly developed (spatial) power. (Soja 1996: 31; original italics)

We take inspiration from the understanding of real and imagined space developed in the work of Lefebvre and Soja to develop our idea of the third realm of luxury. This is because, in their spatial analysis, they identify the illusory nature of space and the interplay between real, concrete, places, such as

six-star hotels and luxurious country houses, with imaginary, abstract spaces, including fantasies stimulated by depictions of luxury in advertising and other media, to create an-Other, which is simultaneously both real and imaginary and more. Yet, our idea of the third realm of luxury differs from Lefebvre and Soja's ideas in that our spatial analysis not only foregrounds the concept of the realm but also concentrates exclusively on the realms of luxury, and it is to these that we now turn.

The realms of luxury

For our purposes, the first realm of luxury includes real concrete places of luxury, such as a spacious luxury penthouse apartment in a desirable location, while the second realm of luxury refers to the imagined space of luxury, like a small apartment marketed and imagined as luxurious despite its confined size and less desirable location. The real places and the imaginary spaces overlap, one influences the other and vice versa, but their existence also affords a third realm that is more than the two together. Thus, since it is more than the sum of the first two realms, the third realm of luxury is where the first two realms exist as illustrated in Figure 1.1. In the third realm, the real and the imaginary connect to realize the real-imagined space of luxury as a "real" place where, for instance, the lived experience of the luxury consumer is played out in the small apartment packaged as luxurious. The fact that there are real places and concrete forms of luxury not only fuels the imagination but also creates countless unknown possibilities, some tangible, others ephemeral, to be discovered and made real in the third realm by individuals. It is in this way that property developers are able to sell what would once have been regarded as serviceable social housing as a luxury abode. Indeed, the third realm offers a multitude of opportunities for individuals and luxury businesses alike to discover new luxury possibilities.

Gaston Bachelard's (2014) philosophy of imagination in *The Poetics of Space* also contributes to our understanding of a third realm of luxury. He argues that spaces, such as those of the house, with its cellar and attic, of drawers, chests, and wardrobes, of nests and corners, and of nooks and corners offer images that bring together memory, perception, and fantasy that intersect and reverberate in unpredictable and unrealized ways. Hence, for Bachelard "imagination augments the values of reality" (2014: 25) such that we remake and reinhabit imaginings in our own unique way. Moreover, through the creation of such personal interpretations of luxury goods and services, individuals find a foothold

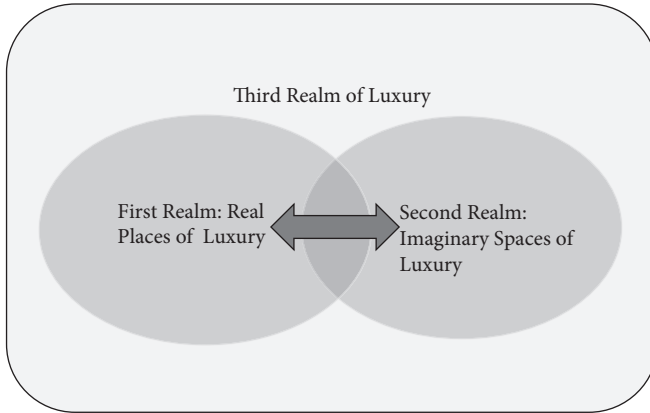


Figure 1.1 Connecting real places and imaginary spaces in the third realm of luxury.

in the advanced capitalist system, which, in this personal imagining, offers positive futures achieved through hard work and compliance with neoliberal market norms. In this way, resistance to the contemporary economic system is dissipated and gives way to imaginings of the possibilities of comfort and security available in the third realm.

Similarly, in the second edition of *Critique of Everyday Life* (1991b), originally published in 1958, Lefebvre points to what we refer to as the third realm in relation to the adoption of what would have been luxurious technologies at the time, such as washing machines, television sets, and electric cookers, in the sometimes dilapidated or squalid homes of French workers and peasants in the immediate post-1945 period:

Far from suppressing criticism of everyday life, modern technical progress *realizes it*. This technicity replaces the criticism of life through dreams, or ideas, or poetry, or those activities which raise above the everyday, by the critique of everyday life from within: the critique which everyday life makes of itself, the critique of the real by the possible and of one aspect of life by another. Compared with lower or degraded standards of living, everyday life with all the superior mod cons takes on the distance and remoteness and familiar strangeness of a dream. (Lefebvre 1991b: 9–10; original italics)

Moreover, Lefebvre goes on to comment directly on luxury:

The display of luxury to be seen in so many films, most of them mediocre, takes on an almost fascinating character, and the spectator is uprooted from his everyday world by an everyday *other* than his own. Escape into this illusory but present everyday world, the fascination of ordinary objects which scream

wealth, the seductive powers of the apparently profound lives led by men and women who move among these objects, all this explains the momentary success these films enjoy. (Lefebvre 1991b: 10; original italics)

Such insight remains relevant today; in a world characterized by depleted resources and pressures on real concrete places, the imaginary space and the allure of a life lived in luxury become ever more attractive. Hence, the spatially limited luxury real estate explored by Conley (Chapter 4) connects real places and imaginary spaces to produce a third realm of possibility and potential in the minds of consumers and the real places of the apartments presented as luxury despite their small size and less desirable location.

Of course, luxury has always coexisted in both the concrete places of, for instance, the opulent domestic interiors of stately homes, as well as in the illusory spaces of the dreams and desires of individuals and groups. But, we argue, it is in the past fifty years that imaginary spaces of luxury have escalated in significance. The end of the post-World War II period of growing prosperity in the advanced nations, following the oil crises and rising competition from the Far East in the 1970s, we suggest, provoked a retreat from the hard times of real lives and fueled the desire for better times played out in the imaginary. This last was an imaginary augmented by affordable goods advertised as luxuries through, for instance, the adoption of the language of Romanticism in the promotion of “cheaper” synthetic materials as luxurious in the context of 1970s’ interior design (Turney, Chapter 5). Moreover, in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis, many consumers have once again turned to the imaginary spaces of luxury as a retreat from the real and ongoing experience of austerity. This more recent mediated engagement with the imaginary has been assisted by the expansion of social media.

Imaginary spaces of luxury are facilitated not only in the individual’s imaginary through the absorption of a host of visual media but also in the virtual environments and communities supported by globally connected digital technologies and social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WeChat, Weibo, and YouTube). Such visual media provide stimuli for the dreams and fantasies of those who engage with them. For instance, social media users can play out their fantasies through the screen of a mobile telephone and share their dreams with an audience of followers. In so doing, they contribute to the promotion of luxury consumption and add to a social imaginary from which individuals draw their own personal imaginings. Undoubtedly, accessible real places of luxury, such as the department stores of Harrods and Bergdorf Goodman, or urban retail locations, like London’s Mayfair or Los Angeles’ Rodeo Drive, feed the dreams and aspirations that create imaginary spaces of luxury, and, in turn, these spaces

fuel the desire for the consumption of luxury in real places. Additionally, through the possession of, or aspiration to own, a globally recognized Chanel handbag or Patek Philippe watch, or to drink a Château Mouton Rothschild 1945, people engage with an imaginary space, and, through engaging in social media, become members of an “imagined community” (Anderson 1991) indulging in the third realm of luxury. Through both the real and the imaginary, individuals attain moments of lavish indulgence such that we might refer to this state of being as luxuriating in the third realm of luxury: a space that is not actually real but is more than merely a figment of the individual’s imagination.

Simultaneously, in search of ever-increasing profits, today’s luxury brand companies are actively encouraging the desire for luxury at a real global and imaginary level. Although the global expansion, particularly into emerging countries, of the largely European luxury brand companies currently offers a means of maintaining their rate of growth, territorial expansion has its limits. In contrast, the spaces of the imaginary are infinite, and they hold the promise of ever-expanding demand for increasingly expensive luxury in a world of diminishing tangible resources. Through the intensification of desires nurtured in imaginary luxury space, consumers seem willing to pay ever higher prices for less and less. Consequently, securing a place in the imaginary spaces of luxury becomes a key objective for luxury brand companies. For, it is through the power of the imaginary that the reality of standardized and mass-produced “luxury” available in flagship stores is evaded in favor of an illusion of rarity and craft production. In such contexts, the often-conflicting realms of real and imaginary luxury coexist in a seemingly harmonious fashion. Indeed, it is here that we see the key developments occurring in the third realm of luxury.

Consequently, the sleek advertising and promotional activities of luxury brands, including product placement in films, stimulate memory, perception, and fantasy, encouraging false needs realized in the desire for luxuries goods and services. Accordingly, luxury businesses commodify not only real places but also the imaginations of consumers. Real places of luxury and imaginary spaces of luxury are combined and play on the individual’s personal experiences of space as well as generic historical and futuristic representations of luxury. Thus, a third realm of luxury is generated, one which has collective and personal dimensions. By retaining the collective element, such as the luxury logo reproduced on multiple versions of the same “unique” handbag, business is able to gain economies of scale in production, while personal interpretation ensures that the individual receives an exclusive product; the mass-produced handbag takes on a unique personal meaning through a combination of the association