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## (An Analysis of) Jewelry Making and Language

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(AN ANALYSIS OF) JEWELRY MAKING  
AND LANGUAGE

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A Research Paper  
Presented to  
The Graduate Faculty  
Central Washington State College

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Education

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by  
Lee Whitley  
August 1962

THIS PAPER IS APPROVED AS MEETING  
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Ramona Solberg  
FOR THE GRADUATE FACULTY

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Jewelry is a most fascinating type of merchandise. It appears before the consumer in many forms, humorous, semi-precious, and precious. Jewelry making is perhaps the oldest craft in the world, and the articles are generally so small that they seem insignificant for reasons other than personal adornment. The purpose of this paper was to clarify the significance of jewelry by showing it to be like a language, both in past history and today. Jewelry is divided into two general divisions, that mass-produced industrially at a relatively low cost and that individually-produced by craftsmen at considerable expense. It was not the intention of this paper to separate the two, merely to explore the language of jewelry through the medium of symbols.

#### I. WHAT IS JEWELRY?

The primary use of jewelry in all societies is personal adornment for men or women and, in some societies, even for animals. "Personal adornment," according to Franz Meyer (14:478), "is as old as mankind itself; as proved by the relics preserved from the earliest times." Aside

from personal beauty, jewelry adornments may be used to symbolize the Diadem, Insignia of Orders, Chaplets, and many other things. Combs, miniature scent-bottles, seals, or virtually anything that is highly decorated and worn may be classified as jewelry. For instance, aside from the common articles we think of, girdles for holding robes, ankle bracelets, toe rings, and, in some societies, nose rings are considered jewelry.

The methods and materials now available for jewelry-making are numerous, due largely to science and technology. The industrial jeweler capitalizes on the many discoveries, but the individual craftsman often reverts to materials discovered and used centuries ago. The ancient masters had gold, silver, copper, enamel, bone, wood, and semi-precious and precious stones, to name only a few. Methods such as casting, plaiting, forging, and soldering were used in the most primitive manner. Today in Europe, the craftsman still grinds his own glass for enameling, primitive peoples still in existence use stone knives for cutting, and until seventy-five years ago the silversmith of Norway had to prepare his metal from the raw state. Today's jewelry appears in assorted materials, processed through many methods and designed for a variety of purposes.

## II. TODAY'S CONCEPT OF JEWELRY

The average American is influenced by the technological era, and, as one of the outcomes, he is a consumer servant to mass-production. It has become the practice of the machine age to produce a desired article in quantity so that all members of a society may buy. This basic idea has fostered the attitude that Charles Kettering (10:69) so aptly describes, "Mass-production is the key to quality and quantity at a low price." The need for mass-production is not argued, but the results of meeting the great demand of inexpensive jewelry today has impaired the quality of the jewelry produced. This is the argument of Nikolaus Pevener (15:109): "The demand for high-priced jewelry appears to be dying out. To wear glass chains and cheap imitation broaches or clips has become the habit of all classes . . . ." Herbert Reed (17:36) adds: "The crafts have declined, the indigenous folk arts of all civilized countries have disappeared, and what we have . . . is a mass-produced, insensitive fabrication of the machine."

Mass-production is not the only influence which has impaired the quality of jewelry. Today, more than ever before, jewelry is dominated by the trend of fashions. The combination of industry and fashion has made jewelry a common article, purchased to match a particular costume

and then cast away with a new fashion. The result has not only been a common, insensitive fabrication of the machine, but an insensitive people.

For some, however, jewelry is a living thing that involves beautiful forms and combinations of materials, created by the craftsman and showing the effect of the physical and cultural environment on his personality. Jewelry is a symbol of the concepts, attitudes, and philosophies of our times. To this type of consumer, jewelry is the craftsman's language.



## CHAPTER II

### JEWELRY AS A LANGUAGE

That many accept jewelry as merely a visual object may be due to the ever increasing demand for material things. Most consumers do not regard jewelry making as an art, a creation expressing, through sensitivity and perception, a man's interpretation of his environment. This, however, is the basic value of jewelry, a language from the craftsman to the consumer. Jewelry is and should be a creation and a reflection of the creator's personality. The consumer should understand the silent language conveyed through a tangible object.

#### I. THE ABSTRACT LANGUAGE

The craftsman is first stimulated through one of two channels: some visible object or some written law, custom, or other intangible thing. Regardless of the channel, the form produced is far deeper in meaning than its visuality. The article carries with it, in varying degrees, the abstract feelings of the craftsman. The original form of the article will exhibit the artist's personality, whether he designs for himself or for the manufacturer of insensitive machine fabrications.

Many believe that materialism buries the craftsman's personality. Language is too often thought to be only a visual and spoken medium of transmittance. On the contrary, language exists in three areas, as stated by Ruth Anshen (1:3):

Language gives evidence of its reality through three categories of human experience; meaning of words, meaning enshrined in grammatical forms, and meanings which lie beyond grammatical form. Those meanings mysteriously and miraculously revealed to man.

Those "meanings which lie beyond" are the abstract language of jewelry passed on in many tangible forms.

The tangible forms become signs reflecting the maker's personality. Jewelry symbolizes the craftsman's interpretation. The language of the arts, which includes jewelry, is defined by Philip Beam (2:3):

In the case of the arts the language is silent and visual. It is, nevertheless, a language in the sense that it is a vehicle contrived by men for two purposes: to express themselves in some more or less permanent medium, and to communicate with other men through signs.

## II. THE LANGUAGE OF SYMBOLS

The need to symbolize is probably basic to man. Through symbols the cultural and physical environments can be exposed to the members of a society. It is a medium by which man rises above the level of animals. Symbolism has many uses for man: it saves him the necessity of describing certain things and it is often sufficient to convey

a story or certain ideas. For instance, in many societies the symbol was a sign language to convey feelings about religious beliefs--animistic, naturalistic, or spiritualistic. In both the past and present it is a sign of status in the social scale and an example of a sensitive awareness to the many beautiful forms and color patterns found in nature.

"A symbol," says Count Goblet D'Aviella (3:1-2), "might be defined as a representation which does not aim at being a reproduction. A symbol only requires that it shall have certain features in common with the object represented." The certain features in common may be the movement of a line, the choice and intensity of a color, or a number of specific parts that make up the total design. An example of this may be illustrated by Felt Lair (13:25-26): "Jewelry by Christan Schmidt is a distinctive pod-like pendant in which precious metals and stone have been worked into an imaginative evocation of the world of nature."

Symbolism takes two distinct courses. As explained by Susanne Langer (12:24), "One concept of symbolism leads to the logic and meets new problems in theory and knowledge, and the other leads to psychiatry, the study of emotions, religion and fantasy." The use of symbols places a premium on knowledge and an ability to perceive

in the abstract. Nevertheless, the craftsman must resort to symbolism for expression if he wishes to convey an idea. It is the only medium available which can incorporate his sensitivity, his esthetic values, and his perception of an environment.

## CHAPTER III

### THE LANGUAGE OF JEWELRY

#### IN ACTION

The language of jewelry in its representative form may symbolize various aspects of a culture. One of the basic forms of symbolization is the perfected skill invested by the craftsman as he develops an idea into a tangible form. The idea may be superstitious or magical, a sign of wealth and position, a reflection of religious beliefs, or the pure love and adornment of nature. The language of jewelry, in its symbolic form, reflects the attitudes and beliefs of each culture.

#### I. THE LANGUAGE IN PAST HISTORY

"The origins of jewellery," according to the Encyclopaedia Britannica (8:32), "are lost in the mists of antiquity. The practice of wearing objects around the neck dates from the stone age." Helen Gardner (6:3) indicates the finding of a necklace ". . . of stag teeth, fish vertebrae and shells." This necklace dates from the Paleolithic age, 500,000 to 20,000 B.C. The original intent, other than adornment, is difficult to determine. However, the way the items are arranged would indicate a growing

sensitiveness to form as a response to superstition, magic, or perhaps the boasting of a hunting skill.

Near the latter centuries of the Neolithic age, jewelry making became a prominent, perfected skill of the Egyptians. Many new materials and processes were developed in response to their sensitive feelings. H. Wilson (22:25-26) noted, "The exquisite jewellery of Egypt, work so fine as almost to appear miraculous, was the outcome of centuries of development." The Egyptians were great lovers of the outdoors, and they keenly observed forms of nature, especially the lotus flower. The forms and flower became symbolic representations of all the arts. The craftsmen developed rich color contrasts, and simple, refined, and graceful contours to express their interpretations of nature, fertility, and a better life. Probably for the first time in history jewelry became significant as a mark of wealth and position.

The influence of the graceful contours and the importance of color permeated Greek culture. Although the Greeks were not as observant of nature as the Egyptians, they still maintained the simple curved line. The forms created contrasted metal against metal, and the color emphasis led to the development of fusing glass to metal. Grace Kaler (9:50) states, "Greek goldsmiths inlaid flowers and other small designs in white or pale blue enamels, with

fine wires of gold outlining each detail of the design." This process of fusing glass, known as the "cloisonne," preceded all other forms of enameling. The importance of jewelry during this era actually decreased because of the expansion of other arts. The articles did not carry the elegance of the preceding culture, and their primary use was to accent the beauty of the women.

Jewelry gained importance with the advent of the Roman Empire. Semi-precious and precious stones became important along with the bold and vigorous curling lines that developed the forms. Simplicity gave way to elaborate decorations symbolizing the myths and superiority of the people. The forms were representative of birds, reptiles, and Cupid. Aside from wealth and position for those of means, jewelry became significant of the type household to which one belonged. The elaborate decoration and the use of precious metals and stones of this era permeated nearly all of Europe for many centuries.

When the Roman Empire fell, the predominance of such symbolic forms gave way to a new symbolism. The dominance of ornateness and precious materials remained, but the forms symbolizing animism, superstition, and mysticism gave way to the circle and the dove as symbolic of Christianity and the hereafter. Helen Gardner (6:162) stated, "The craftsmen of this period flourished greatly with the

influence of Eastern Courts and the Church." The craftsmanship and materials involved had to be worthy of the influences, and again wealth and position were of greater importance.

The importance of jewelry was not only significant to the upper classes. The common populace used articles, although of lesser quality, to symbolize many aspects of their culture. In Norway, for instance, as explained by Janice Stewart (19:131-142), ". . . rings were added to silverwork as a protection against evil spirits. The bracteate was decorated with heathen symbols." And in India, according to Helen Gardner (6:422), "It was not only used for personal adornment but for the trappings of state elephants and for palace hangings." The Indians of North, Central, and South America used jewelry as symbols of healing, protection from harm, and "ceremonial purposes, conveying messages, ratifying treaties, making records and . . . in place of money" (18:107).

Nearly all cultures through the Byzantine era symbolized traditional beliefs, and some societies still do. But the advent of the Renaissance broke the traditional dominance, and all the arts developed a new attitude. Allen Leepa (11:57) describes this attitude: "With the advent of the Renaissance, lay patronage came into prominence. The stylized and dictated forms which expressed



asceticism of the Church . . . gave way before humanism." Throughout the ages jewelry has been important as a tangible means of symbolizing the ways of life. With today's new attitude toward life, jewelry has developed a new meaning.

## II. THE LANGUAGE OF JEWELRY TODAY

Of all the jewelry in the world, none is more exciting, appealing, creative, and criticized--than contemporary jewelry. The influence of a new life, a new recognition of the individual and a greater stimulation of curiosity and discovery have led craftsmen into a new dimension. There is no limit to the combinations of materials and processes other than the limitation of the material itself. The new forms created lead the consumer into a deeper sense of abstraction than ever before. The forms are less representative of life than those of the past. Regardless of whether the new forms are accepted or rejected by the populace, they are symbolic in a new dimension, symbolic of individual creative abilities stimulated by the need for emotional expression.

According to the Encyclopedia Americana (7:56), "The making of jewelry is one of the oldest trades of which the American historian can find record." The craftsmen who emigrated from Europe brought with them many skills

and concepts developed in the old country; the forms of many articles were traditional. The development of science and technology uprooted traditional patterns in nearly every phase of American life, not only in jewelry, as is made evident by Ernest Mundt (15:45): "Western civilization is passing through a period in which man is rapidly abandoning concepts and forms that have outlived their usefulness; at the same time he is creating new ones more appropriate for his needs."

Form is merely the shape or structure of any piece of jewelry. It is composed of various elements resulting in a design. The elements are described by Joshua Taylor (20:55):

. . . color, both as establishing a general key and setting up a relationship of parts . . . line, both as creating a sense of structure and embodying movement, . . . light and dark, which creates expressed forms and patterns . . . volume or mass, contrasted with space . . . plane which is necessary in the organization of space . . . .

It is not the assumption that all articles created will be good or expressive, but the manipulation of the elements, properly relating to each other, will result in a design of unity, balance, rhythm, and proportion. These basic elements of design and the principles achieved were defined in the 1930's, but master craftsmen used them since the beginning of man. The idea that an object can be beautiful in an expressive form is not new.

The importance of jewelry in past ages has influenced contemporary jewelry in several ways. The geometric shapes used by the Chinese in symbolizing the Temples of the Sun, Moon, Earth and Heaven are a dominant character today. The importance of pure and contrasting color probably was passed from the Greeks. And the simplicity and refinement of line came from the Egyptians and the Japanese. To these influences we have added functionalism, so important to our society. Arthur Drexler (4:18) noted: "The attitude of functionalism has swept our continent to the extent that it has affected manufacture, distribution and maintenance." Walter Teague (21:53) adds: "The function of a thing is its reason for existence."

The style in jewelry is simplicity, refinement, and functionality with a great emphasis on color. The craftsman expresses his experience in a way that will arouse similar feeling in the consumer. The development of materialism and fashion has blocked an understanding of the esthetic quality of jewelry and resulted in a great deal of criticism from the populace. There is no rational appeal from the individual taste, and no standard of judgement.

The understanding of jewelry today really does not involve a great deal of knowledge and perception. The forms imposed upon us in nearly every field, based on simplicity

and functionality, result in an expression of beauty. Most Americans see so much that they overlook the real beauty of things. Philip Beam (2:7) expressed this attitude, "The critic is concerned with realism, the underlying importance of realism rather than surface appearances and the validity of human experience." The form of our jewelry today is an answer to the hunger for beauty. "The forms are bright, clean and functional" (5:146).

## CHAPTER IV

### SUMMARY

Jewelry is an article of personal adornment. It may be used to accent beauty alone or to signify orders, religious beliefs, wealth and position, or the pure love of beauty. Today's jewelry is considered merely a visual object, mass-produced for quantity and influenced by fashion trends. This overlooks the fact that jewelry expresses the personality and sensitivity of its maker. The language of jewelry has been lost to contemporary society.

The language of jewelry does exist, not in the meaning of words or through grammatical form, but through the meaning involved in the suggestive power of the lines, individual shapes, and color combinations that comprise the total form. The language is silent, yet visual in a tangible medium. The use of signs conveys these underlying meanings.

Evidence of the symbolical language of jewelry can be traced throughout history. Prehistoric man expressed a sensitivity to his environment through the symbols of necklaces. The Egyptians, in their love for nature, fertility of the soil, and the good life, symbolized with

the use of simple and refined line movement and color. The Greeks also emphasized their sensitivity to form and color in the world about them. The symbol of beauty was used to accent the beauty of womanhood, and the Romans, with all their ornate and vigorous decoration, symbolized their wealth and importance to the world. In more primitive cultures jewelry was symbolic of evil spirits and heathen myths or important as the medium of exchange, as in the American Indian culture.

In contemporary America, for both men and women, jewelry is symbolic of wealth and position, religion, orders, and in a new direction, the creative abilities of the individual. The language is stylized by simplicity and function of the geometric shapes and intense colors that continually surround us. The language is evident in the self-expression, originality, and strong individuality evident in jewelry today.

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