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MATTERS OF JEWELRY AS INFORMATION CARRIERS

APPROACHING WEARABLES FROM A MATERIAL-
BASED PERSPECTIVE

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Author: Elena Luisa Tezak

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a contemplation of the physicality of electronic objects, in relation to social functions, information, and values inherent in jewelry. It started from the premise that the rapid progress in the field of micro-electronics will lead to a multiplicity of personal computing devices that can be worn directly on the body. These wearables are garments or accessories which are equipped with digital functionality. Jewelry wearables are devices that look like and/or are worn like jewelry. Because these wearables superimpose a functionality to an object genre that is commonly conceived as non-functional, it raises the question of how they relate to jewelry. I approach the question of whether a wearable can be jewelry through a material based perspective, as all functions and values that are attributed to an object are inextricably linked to its material.

In order to forge a bridge between these seemingly contrasting foundations of jewelry and wearable I draw upon perspectives from social sciences, anthropology, philosophy and design, as well as my own background as a jeweler and industrial designer. Throughout the thesis I present examples from jewelry and jewelry wearables as well as the case study of my own analysis and experience of the Leaf Chakra wearable by the company Bellabeat.

I conclude by arguing that wearables are not in fact jewelry, but they also cannot be merely consumer electronics. In order to move onto the body and be worn like jewelry they have to form a new genre which relates to the functions of jewelry. In order to do so, jewelry wearables have to gain a new materiality which is "real" and not a casing.