

FROM CRAFTS TO COMMERCIALISM - THE MEDIASURFACES AND SPOKEN REALITIES OF INDUSTRIAL DESIGN

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Industrial design is conducted in the realm of the economic world, as well as in the context of local prevailing cultural environments. This paper shows how the designers present themselves, how the economical press represents industrial designers, and how these two worlds - the mediasurfaces and the spoken realities - differ from each other.

These two spheres, the private and public, are compared using two extensive sets of data, about 600 articles from the Finnish economical press and in-depth interviews with 25 industrial designers. This paper suggests that although these two realities might differ from each other, they are also interconnected and in constant interplay with each other. The public image influences the way industrial designers present themselves, and the presentations of the designers influence the way the press writes about them.

INTRODUCTION

Media culture continues to be a central organizing force in economy, politics, culture, and everyday life. Especially in product promotion, media culture drives the economy, generating ebbing and flowing corporate profits while disseminating the advertising and images of high-consumption lifestyles that help to reproduce the consumer society (Kellner 1995; 2003). The practice of industrial design is conducted in this economical realm, and frequently represented in the context of economical or business press (Ryynänen 2006a). Albeit this, the designers have constantly had to position their practice in this realm, emphasising the strategic importance of their work (Valtonen 2005).

The purpose of this paper is to study how designers are represented in economical press in Finland and to compare that representation to how the Finnish industrial designers would want to present themselves. Is there a difference between their own perception and the public image, and how do these two realms diverge?

Media culture provides fashion and style models for emulation and promotes a celebrity culture that provides idols and role models (Kellner 2003). Industrial designers have traditionally considered themselves anonymous team players and condemned personal promotion (Kruskopf 1989). As it seems, in the context of economical press journalists still tend to represent designers as interesting individuals. This relates partly to the new coming of media spectacles and the audiences' "human interest" or interest towards personal life of

people (see Uimonen and Ikävalko 1996).

The concept of the "society of the spectacle", developed by French theorist Guy Debord, has had a major impact on a variety of contemporary theories of society and culture. In general, Debord describes that a media and consumer society is organized around the production and consumption of images, commodities, and staged events (see Debord 1994). In short, a spectacle is a relationship of people transmitted through media. In spectacles the picture has become independent and replaced the real action and interaction between people. The reality of life has been replaced with the images of how things look. This is also the process in which the media image of the industrial designers is created and presented to the audience. In the same process the media has a particular role in communicating the overall image of industrial design to a broader audience. Experiences and everyday life are thus shaped and mediated by the spectacles of media culture and the consumer society (see Baudrillard 1998; Stevenson 1995, 145-158).

RESEARCH DATA AND METHOD OF ANALYSIS

This article is based on two extensive bodies of data collected in the research programme "The shaping of the professional designer", funded by the Academy of Finland in 2004-2006. The research programme aimed to get an overview of what industrial design is in Finland today and how design is represented the economical press.

The first set of data used in this paper embodies several half-structured in-depth interviews with 25 industrial designers (Valtonen 2007). The other part of the data includes approximately 600 economical or business press articles describing broadly design in Finland from 1988 to 2005. The articles used in this study are collected from the three largest economical papers published in Finland (Kauppalehti, KL; Taloussanommat, TalSa; Talouselämä). Collecting the economical press articles is based on the topic or the frame of private sphere. This means that especially articles describing designers private life or personal interviews were included in this analysis. Credibility of the study is primarily produced through prolonged engagement with the informants (interviews) and triangulation of the other parts of the data (articles). Both of the data sets were collected for the doctoral dissertations of the authors.

The suggested research approach is qualitative and the nature of inquiry is aiming to produce interpretations and understanding about the designers from different point of views. Triangulation is applied as a research method. Basically, triangulation means using various materials or data, theories, and methods in the same research (see Brewer and Hunter 1989; Denzin 1978). Using triangulation is usually preferred when it would be difficult to get an extensive picture of the subject under study applying only one method. In addition, one method or data describes the subject only from one angle. Using various methods or data sets it is possible to correct to some extent this reliability issue. In researcher-triangulation the researchers have to negotiate their perceptions, findings and differing aspects. Researchers have to reach the agreement or common ground for the end results, gathering the data, classification and interpretation of the data. Triangulation diversifies the research by offering broader views to the researchers (see Eskola and Suoranta 2000, 68). In this research the forms of researcher and data triangulation were applied.

The articles from the economical press illustrate the research questions from a public sphere. Articles are indirect and at least partly independent from the designers' actions. In other words, designers have only partial and limited influence over journalists. The other data was collected through interviews, which is a method widely used in qualitative research. By analyzing press articles it is not possible to get the designers' point of view or their own descriptions concerning their roles in various processes (for example: course of events, factors and circumstances affecting issues, personal experiences and feelings, different views and assumptions). Researchers can only conclude and interpret such things from the article data, but still the interpretations could be skewed. The interviews concentrated on design related phenomena in Finland and on themes that were close to the designers themselves. Through the interviews it was possible to get personal views and insights that would be difficult to acquire by using some other data collection method. The interviews provided valuable data about the private sphere of the designers. These two sets of data provide an interesting comparison material between the public and private spheres of the designers.

Firat and Dholakia (2003, 154) have presented the metaphor of the theater as a medium of cultural interaction that is different from the medium of economic interaction, the market. Although design and particularly media are inseparable parts of the economic system,

meaning making processes are also culturally determined. How and why designers are represented in certain ways in economical press and how they feel themselves is connected to a variety of culturally determined issues. What will be the consequences and what will be gained? Basically the media processes are not controllable or manageable in terms of creating a desirable media image and maintaining it. Instead, as this paper suggest, knowing the system and the picture it gives out helps the designers to manage their own appearances in the media.

The material that these two sets of data – the mediasurfaces and the spoken realities of the industrial designers – will in the following be compared. Firstly, industrial design is discussed in the context of professionalisation history. Secondly, the interview data is interpreted, and thirdly the economical press data will be introduced. Lastly, the interplay of "surfaces" and "selves" are discussed with concluding remarks.

THE ASPIRATIONS OF INDUSTRIAL DESIGN

Industrial design as a professional practice originates from the tradition of arts and crafts. The education is conducted in schools of art and design, and the industrial designers are taught the basics in many art-based topics, such as drawing, painting and sculpture in Finland. Albeit this, the industrial design professionals have during their entire history aimed to position themselves rather as a part of the industrial and economic realm than the artistic.

According to Adrian Forty in the history of every industry, design has become necessary as a separate activity in production once a single craftsman ceases to be responsible for every stage of manufacture from conception to sale (Forty 1985, 29&37). Seen in this way, the birth of design in industry is closely related to the arrival of industrialization and mechanization, and more precisely to the mechanization of production, particularly during the late 18th century and the 19th century (Giedion 1948, 37). John Heskett has claimed that the commercialization of production was even more important for the need of design in industry than mechanization (Heskett 1980, 18). The new middle classes required industrially produced products that would proclaim their taste and standing, and design became a crucial element in creating products that would show the social distinction of the customers

(Heskett 1980, 19; Forty 1986, 63). Design became a tool for differentiation, rather than a mere result of mechanisation or standardisation. The Finnish art historian Erik Kruskopf emphasizes that the industrial designer does not only need to take in consideration functionality and quality, as would any other designer in the area of applied arts, but also commercial profitability (Kruskopf 1989, 239).

The very fundamentals of industrial design thus lies in the world of industry, business and commercialism. Kruskopf continues that industrial design is not about industrially produced objects of arts and crafts. It is design of more technically oriented products: office machinery, tools, technical equipment, and means of transportation such as cars and aeroplanes (Kruskopf 1989, 15). As an occupation Kruskopf sees industrial design as rather different from the traditional craft design. The biggest difference is the fact that the industrial designer does not work alone, but in co-operation with other experts. In general, the industrial designer works together with professionals from several other fields of competence, such as engineering, marketing and management (Heskett 1980). Typically the name of the designer is not emphasized: the product is anonymous and represents at most the corporation that produced it (Kruskopf 1989, 239).

The actual education in industrial design started fairly late in Finland, in 1961 at the Institute of Industrial Arts in Helsinki. Before this industrial design was typically performed by a few pioneering designers without a formal education in industrial design. Many of them, like Tapio Wirkkala, Börje Rajalin and Ilmari Tapiovaara, had previously gained great fame for their art based products or unique objects of crafts. When these individuals moved into the industrial realm, they were naturally recognized for their earlier work, and hence known as artist in industry.

The educated industrial designers themselves have spent the past forty years trying to revoke this image. As one of the designers put it:

”We were industrial designers then, yes. Our title was industrial designer even if they called us artists in the [corporate] hallways. (laughs)”

There has also been a very inherit aversion for designers that gain publicity through their personal charisma rather than emphasize the anonymity in their work amongst the industrial designers. Some of the professional industrial

designers tend to refer to this type of publicity as “showing your wardrobe” or to the people as “hero designers” in the interviews:

“My former boss called them hero-designers – designers who do not necessarily do good design but who frequently figure in press and have connections. They are good at promoting themselves, but sometimes the design they do is not good design at all. [...] They frequent all sorts of social events and parade everywhere. And then your average designer, such as me, wonders how they have time with all of that. Don't they work at all?”

Besides emphasizing the anonymity of their work the industrial designers have also tried to oppose the image of artists by focusing on the scientific basis in what they do. In the seventies this was largely done by focusing on ergonomics, and in the late 1980s, the theories of design management gained larger attention in the Finnish design field. Design was seen as an important means of unifying a company's product portfolio – and as a part in creating the corporate image. The theoretical framework was adopted from general management theories and the aim was largely to bring strategic value to a company (Blaich 1993, 13). Design Management was particularly discussed in several international conferences, arranged by the University of Art and Design Helsinki (UIAH). The school had arranged conferences also before the late eighties, but these were mostly of a national or Nordic character (Korvenmaa 1999, 174&183). The first international conference was arranged in 1987 (Kulvik 1999, 228&244). The conference was called UIAH 87, and was focused around design management issues. It had an international advisory board with members such as Peter Gorb from the London Business School (Gorb 1988, Kulvik 1999). Several international conferences followed. All in all 22 international conferences were arranged at the UIAH in the 1990s, and the design management discussions became a means of profiling the school and the Finnish design scene internationally (Sotamaa 1999, 269&286).

The design management theories also started the discussion about which was the most appropriate context to discuss industrial design. In newspapers, all applied arts issues had traditionally been discussed on the cultural pages. In several design management conferences and books, it was seen as particularly important that industrial design issues should be discussed in the economic sections of the newspapers,

and not on the cultural pages (Kuusi 1990, 8). The aim was to re-define the role of industrial design, as part of the economic realm rather than only the cultural.

Since these discussions, several Finnish economical papers have written about design extensively. In the 1980s there were very few articles about design in the economic press. During the time period in which the data set for this paper was collected from the economic press, between 1988 and 2005, there was a clear increase in the amount of articles about industrial design from 1998 onwards. This increase illustrates how the main focus of the design policy issues has moved towards an increasingly economical context in Finland.

SELVES - HOW DO DESIGNERS DESCRIBE THEMSELVES?

When the industrial designers describe their own work they tend to emphasize the fact that their work is part of a larger team effort. The designer talks about his position as one equally important part of a product development team, and about his contribution as a part of a better and more economical product development process, largely using technical or economic discourse.

”In the projects – it varies a lot who you have on the other side of the table or as a client – but quite often the designers work with mechanical engineers. [...] Then there is some sort of a project manager and a program manager. [...] And then there is, depending on the product, there might be some UI [User interface] –people. [...] And then there are the hardware-guys, and mechanics. The ones who define what parts are to be included. And marketing.”

In many cases the designers have a tendency to “tune down” the creative part of their design work, and to emphasize that the design activities are activities just as any other in the product development process.

”I'm just the guy who represents design in this group of people who manage the project. There are similar guys for Hardware and Software and Marketing and so on. Guys like me who take care of their own area.”

When the designers talk about their own capabilities they consequently describe them as suited to work in a cross-disciplinary group. Quite often, they also emphasize the versatility of their abilities, in an almost omnipotent way.

”The designers in my team are, at least according to

my opinion, a hybrid between a styling designer, a mechanics designer and a project manager.”

The designers also frequently see themselves as the most collaborative person in the corporate context, and prefer to see themselves as an interpreter between the different corporate activities.

”I am the link between mechanics, marketing and product marketing”

Despite this emphasis on team, collaboration and versatility, the designers do not appear to have any need to tune down the importance of their own work.

”I do not do any project work any more. I define the product categories together with marketing and mechanics. And then I do the [corporate X] design direction. We [the designers] are the ones who create it.”

According to the designers, their contribution to the corporate turnover is crucial. However, the creative aspect of their work, as well as the emphasis on the individual, appears to get very little attention in the personal presentations of the industrial designers.

How does then this self-assured but generally not individual focused approach relate to the public image of industrial design presented by the economical press?

SURFACES - THE MEDIA IMAGE

Appearances in economical press are partly defined by other people, for example journalists and other commentators writing the articles. The appearance of things, people and activities becomes the primary aspect of concern. At the end of modernity our culture has become a culture of spectacle (Chaney 1996, 99). The appearance of what is to be seen becomes of crucial importance firstly, because that is the primary source of meaning, and secondly, because awareness of the significance of appearance makes people monitor their own and other peoples appearances (Chaney 1996, 100-101). A surface is a property of some other thing; it is not a topic in its own right. In this case the question is about the public sphere and the ways press articles are describing designers.

The personification of things and issues has a long tradition in the press. An essential part of press articles are descriptions of people, their private life and issues

related to their opinions. Issues connected to people and their fates seem to attract a larger audience than purely factual themes (see Uimonen ja Ikävalko 1996). Articles that are strongly built around individuals are not characteristic only to magazines emphasizing connections between people and popular events. The economical press is also framing individuals through their private life and personality. Generally speaking, presentations of public and common issues have lost their position as popular and interesting topics, and in the same process private as well as personal issues are perceived as increasingly significant (Sennett 1977, 259; Goffman 1979).

The economical press articles and the designer interviews in the articles that were studied in this paper were usually linked to personally achieved recognitions, for example design related prizes or nominations, personal design exhibitions or an otherwise visible personality. On the other hand, in the article texts, the stage has also been given to the designers'. In these cases there are plenty of citations in the article texts in which the designers are describing themselves as private persons and designers, their backgrounds, private histories and everyday life.

In the economical press articles there are thus descriptions of the designers' personal backgrounds as well as descriptions of their missions or personal influences affecting how they practice design. In addition, in this frame the designer's personality and their everyday occurrences are emphasized. Designers are describing their families, personal choices, and private events in their lives. In some of the cases the designer is representing an organization or institution, and in others the articles are constructed solely on a personal profile.

In practice the descriptions of the designers are constructed on four different conventions. Usually in the articles there is a mapping and revisioning of the persons' background. This is usually a historical description of their graduation process, their career development or descriptions of some turning points in their private life. Also pointing out the significant occurrences concerning the designer's career and the discussions about the consequences of these events are prevailing in this type of articles. For example writing about their education, their first place of employment, about people that affected positively their career and coincidental turns of events, are all present in economical press articles.

“In 1972 Kaj Franck hired the young designer Risto

Väätänen to the art department of Arabia. Today the Design Manager of Metso, Risto Väätänen, receives the Kaj Franck award. The award, founded by Design Forum Finland, is awarded yearly to a distinguished designer or design group. Houseware and ceramics have become paper mashines, but Väätänen's enthusiasm towards design has sustained. In the 1970s Väätänen became a pioneer who started orchestrating design work in the metal industry. – To orchestrate is the wrong word, Väätänen remarks – I am more in the background than in front of the team. I do not even use the word artistry. The designers at Metso design products together with engineers. Often driven by cost-related issues, Väätänen diminishes the artistic role of the designer. The first contact with Kaj Franck was in the Institute of Industrial Arts in Helsinki, where Franck taught. –Franck was a big name. [...] Väätänen was surprised by the fact that Franck wanted to award the talented designer. – Franck gave me the book *Transport Design*, with his own inscription. I was even more surprised when Franck as the artistic director of Arabia hired me as his assistant when I graduated. –At Arabia I was able to do anything that Franck told me to do. The job assignments were very diverse – at the time Arabia was part of the Wärtsilä corporation.” (KL 20.11.2003)



Risto Väätänen was nominated as the industrial designer of the year in 1999 (Press image 20.11.2003, Sari Poijärvi/Talsa).

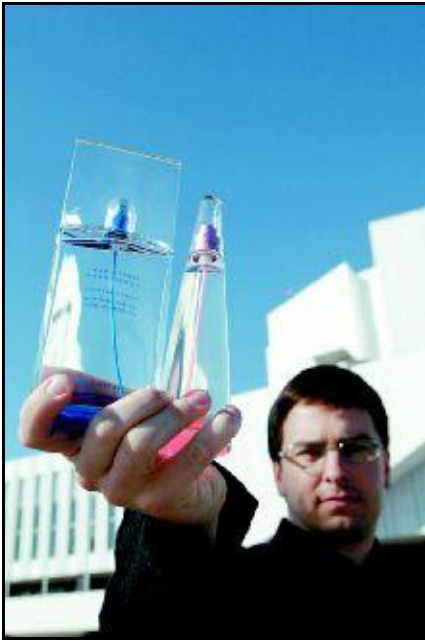
Secondly, the designer's personality or other strong individual characteristics are usually described in this frame. The articles emphasize the designers' personal traits and present the issues as if the events or topics would not be possible without these personal abilities.

”In reality I design any objects smaller than a pig. No material is sacred to me, because I consider

plastic to be just as interesting material as glass or metal, says the designer Jorma Vennola. Vennola was yesterday awarded with the Kaj Franck award. The jury paid tribute particularly to the versatility of Vennola as a designer. Vennola shuns no material or type of object.” (TalSa 12.11.1999)

Thirdly, economical press highlights the designers' personal missions in the field of design. Especially designers considering their design-missions or ambitions, assignments and intentions have a significant role in the economical press data - media describes the feelings of the designers on the verge of personal and broader design challenges. Fourthly, but in a lesser extent, economical press prints also stories concerning the designers' everyday life, hobbies, family life and their human relationships.





Harri Koskinen and the perfume bottles designed for the Japanese fashion-designer Issey Miyake (Press image, Outi Järvinen/TalSa 6.8.2003; 8.6.2002).

“ Harri Koskinen, 34, is one of Finland's best known young designers. – It is impossible to talk about me and Alvar Aalto on the same day, he says. Harri Koskinen looks you in the eyes with an amused smirk when posed with the question of comparing his work to that of Alvar Aalto or Tapio Wirkkala. – Ridiculous, absolutely. You can't talk about me even on the same day with them, he responds. This although he is currently considered the hottest designer in Finland [...] The son of a farmer in Karstula, he graduated from the University of Art and Design Helsinki in 1998 and was immediately selected to work at Iittala as a designer. This ended four years later, when Iittala externalized all their designers. He became a full-time entrepreneur. Friends of Industry Ltd refers to the fact that he “likes to work with friends”. – I am not a natural entrepreneur or sales agent. I dislike promoting myself and a general market orientation. Nevertheless, I have learned to open my mouth in the right places.” (KL 3.2.2005)

In the previous section it was suggested that when appearances are designed for a multiplicity of contexts and or purposes they will become increasingly fragmentary and ephemeral. An emphasis upon surfaces presupposes that meanings of objects, places and people are not stable and are therefore dependent on the arbitrariness of perception and use (Chaney 1996, 112). It could be stated that personal identities

are made less stable and coherent in a culture in which the meanings of objects and practices are continually being re-created. On the other hand there is a move away from more public, communal and collective ways of participating in cultural occasions towards more private, personal modes of participation. It is basically the new coming of the private sphere, which is defined by a designer himself. In this case the designers own descriptions derived from the interviews are employed as examples.

THE INTERPLAY OF SURFACES AND SELVES

In the sixties, a debate flourished about design being more than just the mere product aesthetics or styling. Design was to be done together with the industry, not as a separate aesthetical function or by just adding a designer name on a completed product. The designers emphasised that they needed to come in earlier in the product development process and work tightly together in a team with the engineers and the marketing unit of the company. Design was perceived as one part of the product development process, rather than a function the designer could perform alone. The first industrial designers were during this time hired directly to companies, where the end result of their work was no longer marketed with the name of the designer but with the name of the company.

With the arrival of the nineties, the importance of brands grew for the Finnish companies. Industrial design became a tool in better understanding end-users and building brands for the competitive market. At the same time, design and design management broadened to encompass not only the product portfolio, but the entire end-user experience of the corporate and its brand. During the late nineties, the term strategic design was frequently used (see Zetterlund 2002). In Finland several initiatives, such as the *From Design Services to Strategic Consulting* report (Hytönen & Järvinen & Tuulenmäki 2004), were initiated in order for the designers to participate earlier in the corporate decision making, as early as in the defining of the corporate strategy. This discussion coincided to a large extent with the rise of the ICT industry and the boom of the so-called e-economy in Finland.

Besides the economic situation, also the public opinion on design has changed in the recent years. Design is no longer an issue to be discussed in the outskirts of cultural affairs; it is an important means of achieving national competitiveness (Korvenmaa 2001, Valtonen2005a,

Ryynänen 2006b).

In this study designers are describing themselves in the interviews following this convention: they emphasize the importance of design to competitiveness, the fact that the design practice is done in teams, and anonymity, but do not particularly emphasize the individualistic or artistic traits of the professional practice.

With time, it has become evident that industrial design issues are discussed in economic press. Designers that work in large industrial enterprises tend to argue for their position with rhetoric similar to any other employee in a large enterprise.

In the economical press data, when the private sphere is considered, the designers are emphasizing slightly different issues. There are descriptions of the designers' personal backgrounds as well as descriptions of their missions or personal influences affecting how they practice design. Secondly, the designer's personality or other strong individual characteristics are usually described in this private frame. Thirdly, economical press highlights the designers' personal missions in the field of design. Fourthly, economical press prints also stories concerning the designers' everyday life, hobbies, family life and their human relationships.

Based on this study it can be argued that the quest of the industrial designers of presenting their work in economical press rather than cultural pages of daily press has succeeded, but partly using a discourse familiar to artistic work - focusing on the individual. Although the focus is still on the individual it differs according to the type of work that the designer has done.

Still today, the myth of the individualistic designer seems to be a story that is fairly easy to get through in the press. People tend to be interested in other people, and products with an interesting designer-character behind them get more attention. This approach is particularly used for the broad public having very little previous knowledge in design, or for the sources of information related to it. Many companies use this approach deliberately; by using a famous designer they increase the interest of the general public in their products. Designers, who work with their own name as a brand, actually benefit from the publicity that focuses on them as personalities. Industrial designers' non-

company related issues, for example personal nominations and design prizes, are still presented using a personal frame.

Although the individual industrial designers are the ones that receive these prizes and nominations, the designers themselves tend to emphasize their role in a team. The individual industrial designer often acts as a figurehead for a larger activity in an organization. The initial attention to the individual can in practice act as a lever in approaching the more complex issues of design organizations and procedures.

It is not that those involved in design are not making real choices, but that the play of surfaces creates distinctions that are matters of framing rather than qualitative difference. In the dramaturgy of appearance all actions are basically forms of performance - this applies also in the case of economical press articles.

The ways in which people experience and utilize their self-hood or individuality changes as part of more general cultural changes. The languages of designers' individuality and identity will themselves be part of broader processes of delineating status formation and change. This process seems to be quite slow because the designers themselves and particularly the press are still using discourses from the past, e.g. representations of an artistic designer. In the process of modernization Western societies have developed particular forms of individuality that have been focused upon and expressed through spheres of social action. This applies on industrial designers as well - although trying to describe themselves as anonymous practitioners and team players, they can in the next moment reflect on their own very personal experiences.

The spheres of social action have become increasingly important in mapping social life as the importance of other forms of structural distinction has diminished (Chaney 1996, 116). This affects basically every field of modern life. Or as Debord (1994, 12) put it already in the late 1960s: in the society of spectacle a picture will produce reality and reality will become a picture.

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