

APPROPRIATION, PLAGIARISM AND REDEMIATION IN MARIMEKKO'S DESIGNS AND IMAGE

Rebekah Rousi
University of Jyväskylä
Finland

Abstract: *Marimekko is one of the hallmarks of Finnish modern design. As a national symbol, Marimekko is significant in its own right. Its bright and bold patterns recognized worldwide, were once termed pendants among the sea of wartime greys. It linked to the European Crafts Movement, while carrying on deep rooted traditions in Finnish handicrafts. Connections were tied to International Modernism and American intellectualism through networking and promoting the use of the designs among architects, scholars as well as other cultural and political figures. Marimekko's history, its public representations, discussions and its designs are riddled with contrasts and contradictions. Its aesthetic sensibilities draw on the naïve, the bold, the childlike and the primitive, while being consciously linked to the Finnish modernist. These aesthetics, in light of Finnish design's reputation, particularly on a Scandinavian level, tied into the notion of the exotic, mystic, naïve and original. Over recent years Marimekko's reputation has been tarnished by scandals concerning plagiarism and the public watches closely, comparing traits and similarities, which may also be linked to the creations of those before. What many do not realize is that, as with design in general, the company was founded on utilizing imitation as a device to connect to traditions through pattern and style. This paper discusses the history of remediation in light of plagiarism and appropriation in the designs of Marimekko. The paper discusses scandals involving Kristina Isola and Maija Louekari, while reflecting on the company's stylistic foundations – under the leadership of Armi Ratia – imitation of Nordiska Kompaniet designer Viola Gråsten's work. The paper characterizes the slippery boundaries between appropriation and plagiarism, and concludes through observing plagiarism itself as not only a form of remediation, but also remedi(y)ation.*

Keywords: *appropriation, plagriarism, remediation, Marimekko, design, tradition*

INTRODUCTION

Marimekko has been at the center of scholarly and design curiosity since it hit the runway in a fashion show in Kalastajanokka, Helsinki, 1951. Since then numerous studies have been published on all levels of education from Bachelor's to PhDs, characterizing its:

business (e.g. Ainamo, 1996), design aesthetics (e.g. Svinhufvud, 1998), public representations and gender (e.g. Rousi, 2007), cross-cultural issues (e.g. Jackson, 2003), and even scandals (e.g. Teider, 2013). While, in turn, the media is saturated with news of scandals, particularly recent ones involving Marimekko's designers and cases of plagiarism, no one has attempted to look at the dynamics between plagiarism and appropriation - their prominence in design and brand-building, and the semantic significance of imitation, which is stylistically important in communicating values and connecting to societal discourses. Thus, this working paper attempts to address this gap through using both Marimekko's scandals, and stylistic history as an example.

The act of appropriation has been typified as a core trait of postmodernism (Greenberg, 1992; Gude, 2004). The act of taking someone else's design or intellectual product and reapplying it for other purposes, became notably pronounced in the work of artists such as Marcel Duchamp and his '*ready-mades*', and among others such as Andy Warhol, Gordon Bennett, Pablo Picasso and Barbara Kruger, who contested the idea of the original (Kellingley, 2016; Rowe, 2011). The Oxford English Dictionary (2016b) defines 'appropriation' as "the act of appropriating something". To appropriate in itself meaning to acquire something of someone else's for one's own use, often without permission (Oxford English Dictionary, 2016a). Appropriation within the realm of art has been used as a powerful tool for commentary - commentary regarding questions of ownership as seen predominantly in the work of Kruger for example, as well as for critique of the elements, works and devices used within the nature of the appropriated material itself, such as cultural, racial or gender power relations. As Kruger states in an interview with Jeanne Siegel (1987):

"...I'm interested in *coupling* the ingratiation of wishful thinking with the criticality of knowing better. To use the device to get people to look at the picture, and then to displace the conventional meaning that an image usually carries with perhaps a number of different readings."

Thus, as a didactic tool, appropriation has served to question previously intended meanings through imposing and provoking new meanings and interpretations, a phenomenon that runs deep in discourse and scholarship of cross-cultural encounters, exchange and exploitation (Schneider, 2007). In fields of postcolonial criticism, cultural appropriation has been particularly scrutinized in all areas of the media and arts for both unfair use and exploitation of other(ed) individuals' intellectual property, as well as de-contextualized and mis-contextualized portrayal of the appropriated content and earlier creators (Schneider, 2007; Ziff and Rao eds., 1997).

Within design, and particularly recent developments in interaction design, in addition to the trans-creator perspective (intellectual material taken from one creator and used in another's work) appropriation has been discussed from the user standpoint, and how often objects developed for one purpose are utilized and interpreted in ways outside

the designer or developer's intentions (Kellingley, 2016). One particular aspect of the act of appropriation is the re-use of distinct, familiar or recognizable material within a new context (Rowe, 2011; Siegel, 1988), thus creating a touch-point or anchor through which audiences can connect with the new piece through previous experiences in a different way. The world of fashion has both strategically and ruthlessly utilized appropriation and if one could call it, plagiarism, from the perspectives of: a) careful and conscious brand-building internally and externally to the company (e.g., see the designs of Luis Vuitton and Burberry); and b) through cheaper 'rip offs' of these more expensive brands and their designs (Jørgensen & Di Liddo, 2007). This fashion perspective is important to consider, particularly in relation to Marimekko's current developments under the creative leadership of Anna Teurnell, and its fashion house branding strategy.

Plagiarism has been described as "the intentional appropriation of the creative output or scholarship of another without attribution" (Stearns, 1992, 514). According to Laurie Stearns (1992) the key ingredient of plagiarism is the pretention of the plagiarizer passing the work off as their own. Art has by many including the ancient philosophers, Aristotle, Plato and Plotinus (Jones, 1989), been considered an imitative process (Stearns, 1992). On this note, discussion has taken place amongst designers on the fine line between imitation and inspiration, and that the role of the designer is to steer clients away from what is known and liked, towards accepting new ideas (Brown, 2014). While both may be inspired by previous works (logos, business cards, websites etc.), there is a difference between blatant imitation and using the aesthetics of one piece as platform to endeavor upon a new creative process. Moreover, it was Plato who argued that given art's capacity to influence society, the responsibility of artists was not to imitate or incite powerful emotions, but rather to project the "Perfect Idea of an object" (Jones, 1989, 33). Thus, according to Plato, objects portrayed in art should embody *Kalokagathia* - truth, beauty and goodness. Interestingly, in his observations on the use of G.D. Birkhoff's (1933) work which uses mathematics to analyze art, Anthony Hill (1979) mentions that numerous authors who seem to appropriate the thoughts of Birkhoff, may not necessarily be influenced by Birkhoff himself, rather are similarly engaged in attempting to discover the secrets and solutions to the same problem (in this case mathematic universals for aesthetic objects).

In this context, remediation which is defined as the act "of remedying something" by Oxford English Dictionary (2016b), is quite interesting to consider. Appropriation in the context of postmodern art can be considered an act of remediating not simply the physical aesthetics of another author's work - on the contrary, often appropriation serves to problematize the earlier piece (see for example Jenkins, 2010; MoMA Learning, 2016; Rowe, 2011) - but rather, remediating the social, political and cultural contexts and dynamics through which viewers previously encountered the works. In the context of the creative and cultural industries remediation has also been defined as the "redefinition of the real" (Remshardt, 2006, 41). This is instilled with Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin's (1999) speculation that in order to realize the representational potency of one medium, it

needs to reference another. This holds true not simply on the level of physical media (e.g., television, internet, cultural institutions etc.) but also of the levels of narrative and stylistic media - re-application, re-usage and re-articulation of styles, symbols and forms from specific traditions. The importance of re-presenting and re-mediating imagery, colors and materials are often important for the physical alignment of products and brand identity, within the larger discourses of not simply design or artistic niche, but also culture, national and industrial narrative. This is where the Marimekko story begins.

MARIMEKKO AND ITS LEGACY OF APPROPRIATION

The interrelationship between appropriation, plagiarism and re-mediation is complex when considering the history of Finnish design house Marimekko's designs. As the story has it, Armi Ratia, one of the founding owners of Marimekko, and then Artistic Director, had shown a copy of Viola Gråsten's *Oomph* (1952) pattern to artist-designer Vuokko Nurmesniemi and ordered her to imitate it (Jackson, 2003). While the act of ordering a designer to imitate another's design seems a simple one, the decision itself can be considered in terms of a complex and sophisticated network of interrelations between Marimekko, Ratia, Nurmesniemi and Gråsten themselves, in addition to the interaction between Finnish and Swedish culture and industry. Viola Gråsten, while serving as a designer for the Swedish Nordisk Kompaniet, was in fact a Finnish native born in the town of Keuruu and educated at the Central School of Crafts in Helsinki as a textile artist (Jackson, 2003). The similarities in background between Ratia and Gråsten are one matter: both trained in the same field at the same institution, and both uprooted from their home nations due to either shortage (Gråsten) or war (Ratia). Commonalities and connection to the stylistic language articulated, or catching on from Kruger (1987 cited in Siegel; Stiles 1988), re-articulated, by Gråsten are another. Her patterns were identified as colorful, childlike, primitive, feminine and naïve, traits which were inherently applied to describe Finnish design particularly in the context of the *Design in Scandinavia Exhibition* during 1954-57 (Hawkins, 1998).

Thus, here the stylistic sensibilities were to be deliberately connected to the international paradigms and discourse of Finnish design. The outcome however, was not so much a direct imitation of the imagery itself, but rather utilization of the mechanisms involved in creating its aesthetics such as freehand drawn lines (see e.g. the *Piccolo* patterns in *Joka poika* shirts). Furthermore, of significance here is not simply the stylistic re-appropriation of a seemingly Swedish product with Finnish origins, but an exchange that can be seen from the level of business itself, the business of beautiful aesthetics for people's everyday lives as exemplified in IKEA and influential art and home of Carl and Karin Larsson (Sarje, 1986).

Interestingly, in recent years remnants of Gråsten's designs have resurfaced in Marimekko's catalogue through the patterns of Maija Louekari whose *Ruutukaava* (2008)

strongly resonate with the colors and lines present in Gråsten's *Casa* (1954, see Figure 1). While the imagery is not directly re-applied, the realization of the design clearly indicates from where the inspiration was sourced. This, as with Ratia's initial orders to imitate Gråsten can be seen as an allegiance or stylistic manifestation of the traditions, cultural values and discourse towards which the company was and to some extent still is directed. The following examples are of instances in which the limits of appropriation were exceeded and instead plagiarism served to tarnish the company's authenticity¹.

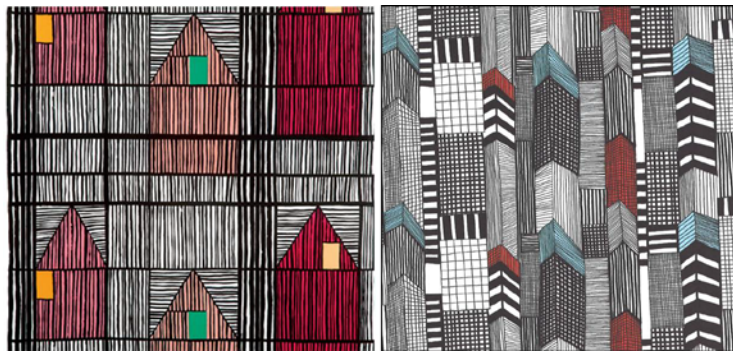


Figure 1. *Casa* - Left; *Ruutukaava* - Right

PLAGIARISM - APPROPRIATION GONE WRONG

In May 2013, Marimekko was caught in a scandal - reports that veteran designer Kristina Isola (Maija Isola's daughter) had plagiarized an image created by a Hungarian artist were posted throughout Finnish and international media. What was thought to have been Isola's *Metsänväki* or *Forest Dwellers* (2007) was in fact copied from a painting by the late Maria Pryimachenko entitled *The Rat on Her Travels*, a naïve painting featuring trees with distinctive leaf patterns, trunks and branches (see Figure 1, Markkanen, 2013).

¹ Please note the avoidance of using the term 'originality'.



Figure 2. *The Rat on Her Travels* - Left; *Metsänväki* - Right (image source: Markkanen, 2013)

The textile pattern contains some differences such as the absence of the rats, paths and horizon, and the nature of the media - screen print as opposed to the gauche of the original, gives the pattern more solidity in its coloring. In addition to the quantities of the pattern available on the market, on various types of products, one of the greatest repercussions of this plagiarism scandal was its involvement with Finnish airliner Finnair. The *Metsänväki* design was featured on a long-haul Airbus 330 (see Figure 2).



Figure 3. Finnair Airbus 330 featuring *Metsänväki* - Right (image source: Selkosanommat, 2013)

More plagiarism scandals plagued the company (Seppänen, 2013) involving the designers Teresa Moorehouse and Maija Louekari. Moorehouse's accusations were dropped after an expert's assessment deeming that the pieces *Rosie's Walk* (by Pat Hutchins) and *Isoisän puutarha* (by Moorehouse) were created by two different artistic perspectives (see Figure 4; Yle, 2013). Furthermore, the company stood behind Moorehouse in terms of her design's originality and its creation story.



Figure 4. *Isoisän puutarha* - Left; *Rosie's Walk* - Right (image source: Yle, 2013)

Louekari however, had a longer lasting and more arduous controversy surrounding her design *Hetkiä* (2003), as the same pattern was found on a fabric bag purchased in Barcelona in 2001. It turned out that while Louekari's originality was in question it was later confirmed that she had used Finnish photographer Markus Leppo's image published in the book *Helsinki and Helsinki's People* (Mäkinen, 2013) and taken from North Esplanade, Helsinki (see Figure 5). Many of Louekari's research drawings were published during the controversy, and it was later reported that the owner of the bag only claimed that she thought the bag was bought in 2001, yet certainty of the validity of this statement was in question. In fact, there is a history nationally and internationally of people copying Marimekko designs, rendering the likelihood that someone else plagiarized Louekari's work highly likely. (Mäkinen, 2013; Ratia, 1986)



Figure 5. *Hetkiä* - Left; Leppo's image - Right

The *Hetkiä* case is also interesting from the current Marimekko fashion house perspective in its exemplification of the complex relationship between fashion and imitation. As mentioned in the introduction, in the fashion industry there is an inherent utilization of imitation both in brand-building and what could be called brand affirmation through cheap copies (Jørgensen & Di Liddo, 2007). In brand-building, repetition of

pattern and style throughout the portfolio of a designer's work, in addition to connections made to other traditions, designers and values, are used to establish exclusivity in a 'unique' message and product experience. Cheap copies of these 'originals' can then be seen as an affirmation of brand value, through their attractiveness to the mass market, not simply through their economic affordability, but through *their* connection to the brands and the traditions and values for which they represent. Likewise, if looking towards Marimekko's roots in the same traditions, inspirations and values, which stem from those of IKEA, we can see that this *soul cousin*, IKEA, presents nothing but reflections of Nordic welfare aesthetics through its imitations of the classics of Scandinavian Modernism. And, this immaterial quality can be seen as one of IKEA's main strengths.

RE-MEDIATION OR SIMPLY REMEDI(Y)-ATION?

In addition to the fine lines played out between appropriation, plagiarism and their associated politics, what are interesting to note are the messages and allegiances that are composed between the inspired or the copied and the original. Certainly, lack of attribution and wrongful ownership of intellectual property in the case of plagiarism is one of the key differences between the two practices. But, the relationship between the copier and the copied cannot be dismissed as a pure act of exploitation. Firstly, in order to allow audiences (consumers) to connect with any design, or arguably any cultural product, the creator should adopt the language of particular genres, styles or movement, to not only engage these audiences through familiarity, but also to project and expand on the values and communication established previously by practitioners. This is often discussed in the field of product semantics (e.g. Krippendorff, 2005). This not only adds to the understanding, but enables for more things to be said through the piece through association than purely through trying to cram the values and forms physically into one manifestation. Secondly, there is identification that occurs on several levels between the earlier creator and the latter, as well as the institution that they represent. In Marimekko's case we see that the 1960s - the decade in which many of Marimekko's key trademark designs such as *Unikko* (1964) and *Kaivo* (1965), both by Maija Isola, were released and designs such as *Piccolo* and *Jokapoika* took a stronghold for their use among prominent academics, political and cultural figures and activists.

The 1960s was arguably a fundamental decade for Marimekko's image construction and connection to national and international, cultural, political and social movements. Most importantly, it was the era during which the company created firm bonds with modernist design movements. To attempt to reconnect with these traditions through being inspired by, drawing on, or outright copying artworks and images from the 1960s, and particularly imagery resonating with Finnish cultural themes (the forests and Helsinki's high end street) should not be surprising, particularly in the current decade's air of unrest, confusion and disillusionment. Therefore, one could speculate as to whether or not,

Marimekko's scandals implicated through re-mediation of earlier imagery are purely an act of exploitation, or whether in fact, these acts are an attempt at remediation (remedy(y)-ation). Even relatively recent fashion scandals similar to Marimekko's, such as the Marc Jacob, Härjedalen symbols scarf plagiarism case (O'Mahony, 2008) might indicate more of a desire to reconnect with nature and human cultural heritage, than simply the desire to exploit.

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Authors' note:

I would like to thank the University of Jyväskylä for its support and inspiration since I began researching Marimekko in 2005. I would also like to thank the Nordcode network for its openness, friendliness and stimulating discussions and research.

All correspondence should be addressed to:

Rebekah Rousi
PO Box 35
40014 University of Jyväskylä
Finland
rebekah.rousi@jyu.fi

Table 1. Comparison of User Involvement Cases with Entrepreneurs (SMEs) and Large Companies

	Speech recognition	Mobile travel	eGrocery	Mobile video
Setting of involvement	Trial of a service provided by a SME	Trial with two SMEs	Workshops with large retailers	Trial with large mobile operator
Description of involvement and innovation	Scheduling a doctor's appointment on a server using speech recognition	Using the mobile phone as an interactive tourist guide on a walking tour in the city center	Workshop focusing on alternative ways of developing electronic grocery shopping.	Watching videos on mobile phone for one week and reporting experiences in diary
Main target of disruptive nature of innovation	Industry, users	Users	Users	Industry, users
Sensemaking	Test of implementation	Assessment of commercial interest	Articulation of different needs & possibilities	Exploration of new ideas
Action	Better grounds for marketing	Further development of service concept	Improvement of personal expertise	Better understanding of service content
Overall assessment	Convincing business partners in value chain	Direct improvement of service	Understanding the possibilities and limitations of the service	Getting to know a novelty better

Kommentar [bjc1]: If the information is clear enough without the horizontal lines, don't use them.

Also, all tables and figures must be able to "stand alone," meaning a reader can understand what is being presented without having to read the entire paper.