



David Report 1/2005

Liberate design

– Time to kiss the copyright goodbye?

Our keynote

In this first issue we discuss the issue of plagiarism and copying, and having curious thoughts of using a “new” mindset in an old industry.

We want directly mark that our discussion is out of a humanistic, ethical and democratic point of view. We do not intend to discuss or evaluate it out of economical, juridical or other “hard” facts.

A Better World

It must be clear from the beginning: we at David Report strive after a better world out of all perspectives. We want a better environment for business, innovations and design-focused contexts. We want a better world to live in, with more humanism and less greed. We are looking forward, not backwards. We want less regulations and obstacles, less pessimism and prehistoric narrow-minded thoughts. We want more companies' flourish, getting profitable and working fair and responsible against anomalies and misbehaviour. We want companies working and acting with “Good Karma” as Steve Jobs at Apple puts it. We believe in the moral of the individual, that people “do what's right” and in common sense.

Further, we can't go on like we used to do: think of our food, our health and our environment. We want to accelerate evolution. We want to be free in mind and have the possibility to commercialize our thoughts in a positive way. We want up and forward, that's the only way! We want a better life for ourselves and everybody else. We want life enrichment everyday. We want quality in life, not a stressful and quarter-based economy.



Plagiarism and Copies

What about plagiarism and copying, is it all bad? Why not pass this discussion? Why put energy to maintain legal barriers as copyright and patents, instead of creating an own unique aura and identity in your company, that can't be copied?

Duplication has always existed and will always exist. We learn through copying each other, every parent knows that. Let plagiarism and copying free, everybody copy anyway. Laws that can't be maintained undermine the belief in the society, why feed this thought? Let us use our energy to be more innovative inventing more creative solutions. Let us dictate the direction!

Copying is in itself a creative process that gives birth to more. Which of today well-known designer has not copied anything during their lifetime? It is natural to find your style and identity through copying. You copying pieces and segments all around. You see something here and hear something there, and so further. All together this get something new, based on old.

What's the difference between copying and being inspired? It's seldom something entirely new arises, and when it does, it's by hazard - think of the penicillin. Most research, development, design and music builds on that someone add something new to something already existing. There has not been many new chords invented lately within the pop music, and a stool has still most often four legs!

Why wasting time inventing the wheel again? Why pending for patents and protect things, that you have been inspired to do by others? Commercialize on it, absolute! But let others in to develop it further. This will get more better products/services and life more worthy for even more.

Patents paralyse to a certain extent the design collective today. By fear of being sued, the designer doesn't dare go all the way. With a more flexible solution, this will never happen.

The substitution effect (ex. Replacing butter with margarine due to less income) or the Diderot-effect (ex. If all your clothes are HM and you buy a Gucci robe – you then change all to Gucci) gets impact on customers/ copy-cats. After having the copy, many want the original.

Then it's a question of democracy, the plagiary and the copies increase knowledge about the origin. And, for example, gives more people possibility to wear fashion clothes for less money (HM etc.). But most of all, producers of plagiary and copies will loose all credibility if they continue. The consumer wants to know who made the product. They would like you to have a transparent agenda. You may say the copycat's bites itself.

Our private eye

The Design ATM

by John-Michael Ekeblad

In a perfect world, the designer is the catalyst of innovation and a purveyor of new thinking. In every part of the planet there are city wide experience hubs where a designer with a temporary braindrain can go to get inspired and encouraged to expand the boundaries of design. Almost like a Design ATM. Here you gain access to enjoy free range picking from a bank of ideas and concepts. You put some ideas in and you take some ideas out. Your new re-defined design vocabulary is tainted by influences from all over the world and You feel connected with like minded that just like yourself inserts the most interesting and personal thoughts into the ATM idea inventory...

What if the designer makes more withdrawals than idea deposits? What if that low-2-no-ethic corporation can't resist to capitalize on the un-affiliated individual and make no deposits at all, quickly turning the ATM into an empty red figure balance box? Look at Coroflot.com, initially an amazing place to find creative talent, now a site where many log on to copy and pinch from the work samples of job searching designers. Add to that a patent registration scenario that allow corporations to take ownership over virtually anything and everything. The prospect for a new designer to expose ideas and achievement without being discouraged by legal battles and copy sharks shrinks by the day.

The designer mind is driven by a sense of solution and interpretation, and I believe true knowledge sharing actually begins at the point of abstract inspiration from non-explainable details and components that can be deconfigured and reconfigured in endless ways. So instead of an ATM we want a jukebox with parts that randomly merge into shapes just to suddenly implode into something new. The aspect of the un-controllable is the key to new knowledge. Sort of like having a field day on grandma's forgotten attic.

One company that fully explores the effect of explorative design componentry is Material ConneXion in NYC. Their material library is a haven for any creative individual that wants to depart on an sensorial journey through arrays of unexpected textures and formats. For a small service charge, that is.



The New clothes of the Design World

We mean that companies and organisations must concentrate on their brand, identity and culture together with their values and ethics in the future. When a product easy can be copied, must the producer create a unique advantage throughout is identity and values. This unique "DNA" will be extremely difficult to copy and gives thereby a strong competitive advantage. Then, of course, the customer must like this "DNA" in order to buy the product or be a fan of the company. Producers must in their "DNA" build in desire and passion. Remember that copycat companies is anonymous, have no identity etc., they act in the shadow!

If companies and organisations have their unique advantage in their brand, their values and other soft association's, would copyright or patent "rules" have a function then? Out of a humanistic perspective, will not various legal rights for software, pharmacies or design prevent development and evolution? Instead of paying "licences-money" to Microsoft and/or Merck/Glaxo/AstraZeneca/Bayer/etc. could this money build up health-care, education or/and a whole society. For example, how many people in Africa would be saved if prices on drugs (HIV etc.) were lower? This will be favoured by all in the long run, but now it is favoured by a few, that maintain an unfashionable undemocratic power structure.

As Martin Raymond at The Future Laboratory puts it in an interview (ICON): "Copyright inhibits creativity". That is strong laws-of-patents undermine creativity and, for example, producers in the furniture industry are afraid that plagiarism and copies decreases their market. It's all around! It increases their market. Compare this with cell-phones with built-in-camera. In the beginning the camera industry thought there where domed. But what happened?

When consumers find out the benefits with the camera, and its limitations, they buy an ordinary camera as well! The consumer behaviour changes! Everybody wins!

Is patent and other legal "rules" today a way for the developed world to distance itself from the less developed world? Is it a system like, or worse than, cynical investment banking where rich countries lend poor countries money for "exorbitant rents"?

Use the mindset from another ("new") Industry

Some say, "it's a war going on", talking about plagiarism and copying. But as we discussed above, is it not just evolution? One way to go further is to see what's going on in other industries. A quick trip into the world of software, we find a "movement" called open-source. Our thought is as simple as clear: why don't use this idea in other industries? The design industry, as well as many more, is an old industry. What would happen if a different mindset were imported, or more right, another culture were adapted into the design industry?

"The basic idea behind open source is very simple: When programmers can read, redistribute, and modify the source code for a piece of software, the software evolves. People improve it, people adapt it, people fix bugs. And this can happen at a speed that, if one is used to the slow pace of conventional software development, seems astonishing." (www.opensource.org)

Is this the ultimate product development method? What will happen if hundreds or thousands of dedicated contributors, that share the vision and the idea, developed drilling machines or dialyse-equipment? For example, how much would the speed of development increase?



Our interview

To explore our thoughts we had interviewed Mr. Claes Magnusson, which has a long and wide background in the software industry. He is a "serial" entrepreneur and a guru in media- and information. Today he's focusing on "Ubiquitous Computing" which, according to Claes Magnusson, will be the most valuable knowledge in a couple of years. Read more at <http://claes.com> (only in Swedish unfortunately).



How does the software industry look at copying and plagiarism?

In the software industry copying and plagiarism is daily "un-news". It is a development method. All software is more or less from same systems, UNIX, and how do you think we got Windows, without copying? The software industry is a relative new industry and has "no rules" – in good and bad. One of the good things is that innovation and new development methods has driven the industry forward.

What is the idea behind open-source and where did I started?

The idea behind is that amateurs that love the work do it for free. It all started in the sixties when approx 20 students wanted to change, improve, copy or distribute software with and to each other. Everyone did this just for fun and for pleasure, all except one: Bill Gates – even then he wanted to sell "his" products...

It says open-source is free, is that true?

You can say that open-source is "Free as in speech, not as in beer" or "It's as free as a kitten or a puppy" – The initial cost is zero, but it cost to breed!

Inside the open-source world no-one invent the wheel again; everything is decentralised, you do things 'good enough' and begin with something old and add something new.

What is the pro's and con's with open-source?

The absolute main point with open-source is freedom. You are free to choose whatever you want; you are not forced to one suppliers system. Second is the initial cost. Way pay, if you don't have to? And then you got a quick start – no license to pay before using it.

An example: one county in Sweden pays 2,5 million Euro of tax-money in licences for software. This amount could be used in healthcare instead to reduce years of cueing for an operation. Another example is a school that are in a sunk cost situation. They can't afford teaching in some subjects due to deals with software suppliers (Microsoft). They have no choice anymore!

Who is against open-source solutions?

Guess! Microsoft of course and other software manufacturer. And even the authorities: all kind of services from them must be able to read for everyone. If all companies, organisations and private inhabitant use the same systems – no problem. If authorities need to serve several different systems: then it needs more resources. But remember: open-source is not a religion, it's a business idea.

What is open standard? Is that similar to open-source?

Open standard is an industry standard that companies and developers agree around as FM, VHS, jpeg and many more. The open standard system is today well working and is good news for us consumers: how else could we get better and cheaper products, and the freedom to combine products as we want?

But some industries don't get it. The music industry must be the most stupid people on earth. Right into the death trap! They try to lock in everything that's possible! The cell-phone industry got the picture, they build their software on open-source or/and open standard solutions. Remember what Sony did in the seventies when they launched the VCR and the Film industry sued the hell off Sony. But what happened? Today, it's a VCR in every home. But remember: The open standard or open-source don't have to be free, just fair!

Our windup

Using open-source in the design world?

We strongly believe that intersection over the borders of the industries would benefit all. In development speed, in idea exchange, in problem solving and in motivation. (Think of Frans Johansson and his "Medici effect")

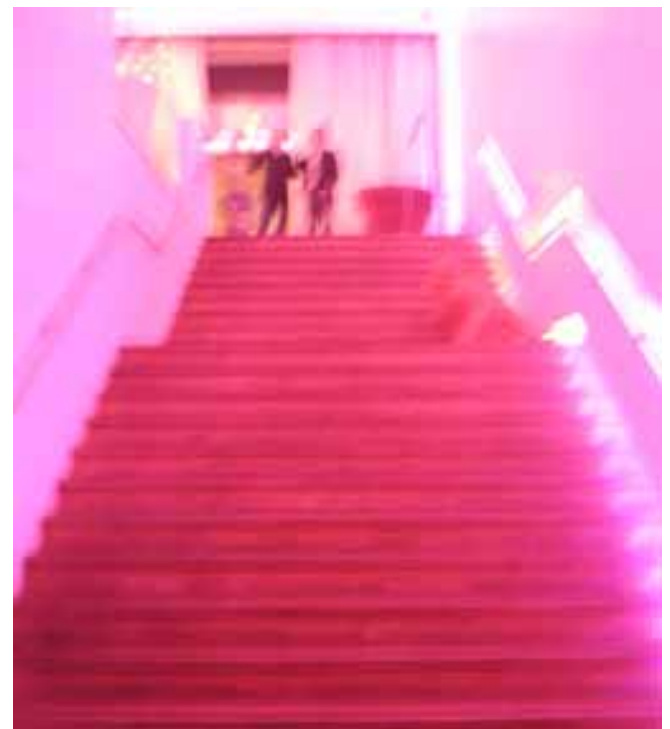
In our information age, where we find world-wide information on the Internet directly, as well as when travelling and when meet people from all cultures, and all happens very fast, all the time.

Is it really that revolutionary to say that open-source would change the design industry in its fundamentals? Isn't it cyclic processes were everybody borrows from everyone, through travelling into time, cultures and minds?

We have moved the discussion from the individuals level, i.e. producers or designer, to a society level. Probably all producers, designers, developer etc will then argue: what's in it for us? How may we get an income if we don't "own" our products or service? Naturally they are afraid to loose what they have, and it's both normal and typical behaviour (being afraid of the unknown). But we think it will be the other way around: that all will gain. Compare above cell-phone vs. digital camera. New possibilities will arrive.

We argue that it reflects an old industry, were the issue is to "own". It's an old system that won't work tomorrow. We have to find new ways, new solutions for tomorrow's world.

One way could be the open-source way.



You talk about The Cathedral and The Bazaar, explain?

The Cathedral vs. The Bazaar could be metaphors for the old vs. the new; a hierarchy vs. a flat organisation and many more. We, or rather them, (i.e. all major companies and organisations) need to realize that the Cathedral is dead! The Bazaar rules!

We have reached a critical mass, the cathedrals don't work any further. The large companies, large systems or whatever is too big. Look at Microsoft's new Vista, its replacement to XP. It's, at least a year late, even if thousands of developers work with it. Why? Because it's too complex – it's built upon old systems as windows 98, which are built on Windows 95, which is built on windows 3.1, which is built on...you get the picture.

You can't change the cathedral! Whether you want to move it one meter or two thousand kilometres you have to bring it down. You can see the Cathedral as the feudal society from the dark-ages and the Bazaar as a flat organisation from tomorrow if you like.

The Bazaar is the only way forward. Everything is allowed; there are no rules – in good or bad. The Bazaar is market driven and works after the demand-supply rules. If you are a star to sell or to fix things, you manage perfect in the Bazaar. In the bazaar you make money on services around the product, more than the product itself. Deregulations of authorities and monopolies are parts of the bazaar model. It's down to local...

How does it work in the Bazaar?

Good Karma, as Steve Jobs put it, is necessary in the open-source community. In short, Good Karma is a way of living, some unwritten rules as: share - never just copy, you have to improve and you have to change.

The music industry and the copyright industry misbelieve their customers and want to put them in prison. Instead they should create new business models: maybe let children sell music instead of newspapers. Then they would sell the music to each other instead of just copy it.

What about using the open-source mindset in other industries?

Super! It's about innovation and question standards to bring up this. I think its possible, but remember: open-source is not a religion, it's a business idea, and open standard or open-source don't have to be free, just fair.

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Thanks to Claes Magnusson.

All images taken with a shot from the hip by
David Report Team.

About David Report

David Report covers the intersection of design, culture and commercial life with a creative and humanistic approach. We write about the latest and most interesting news, ideas and concepts concerning art, architecture, culture, design, fashion, music, sustainability and travel with a holistic and culturally connected mindset.

About David Carlson

David Carlson is a figurehead in the international design community as a culturally-connected trend insight specialist and multi-disciplinary design thinker.

He's the publisher of The David Report, a leading trend report highlighting controversial and illuminating observation about design in our lives today. His entrepreneurial ventures include furniture and fashion brand David Design (which he left 2006) and Carlson Ahnell, a lifestyle boutique that recently was regarded as 'one of the top 10 boutiques in the world' by The Observer. As co-founder of Designboost, he provides knowledge and connection for designers, institutions, corporations and governments. He is regularly invited as a speaker, moderator and panel member at conferences worldwide.

David has been playing guitar in bands since the early 80s, most recently with The Happy Four. And last, but not least, he holds a deep dedication to the conservation of nature, and more specifically, old roses.

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