Design Rational

In my Design Analysis document I briefly outlined my plan for creating a unique metaphorical interface for Albert Einstein's Project Guttenberg page. The main purpose of the web page is to provide a place for people to download their collection of Einstein books. Beyond this it needed to present each of his books, as well as information about Einstein in clear yet visually stimulating way. The idea would be that the web page would be made specifically for Einstein so should be unique and recognizable to him. My chosen metaphor was to present the relevant information on a chalkboard similar to one Einstein may have used and is often pictured in. I wanted to subtly create an atmosphere of physics and maths, which should appeal to those, interested in Einstein's books. Whilst I wanted to create the illusion of an old fashioned classroom, I still wanted it to feel fluid and modern.

Chalkboard

The idea of the chalkboard came from researching the life and works of Einstein. Nearly all of his books are non-fiction physics studies often regarding the theory of relativity and he is frequently depicted in front of massive chalkboards awash with complex mathematical formula. I thought that the large open space offered by a chalkboard would provide a physics classroom like vibe without decreasing the functionality of the website. This was something I was keen to avoid as if you look at websites that offer similar services to Project Guttenberg, such as Amazon.com's Kindle store, they are extremely function heavy, with many filters and options. I did not want the use of a metaphor, used primarily for aesthetic reasons, to mean that the primary functionality of the website was decreased. As part of the brief of this project is to provide the user with information about the author, I decided it would be informative to display an image of Einstein but needed someway of showing him that tied in with the chalkboard metaphor. There were two options, to have him in a picture or poster stuck onto the board, or have him in the foreground of the image, writing on the chalkboard. After some initial prototyping the later was chosen as he gave the chalkboard interface a sense of realism and depth. For the final interface he is pushed right to the edge of the screen taking up relatively little space, it was important that he did not interfere with the usability. The chalkboard is dynamic and changes depending on what the user does. This slightly contradicts the metaphor; this is acceptable as the metaphor is used for visual affect and as a way of portraying information rather than provide instruction to the user.

Layout

At first glance the layout of the page seems counterintuitive. It is found that people are naturally drawn to the top left of websites; so many websites put their most important information here. Despite this the title, Einstein's name, is actually located at the bottom right of my interface. This was intentional, the primary usage of the website is for people to find and locate Einstein's books, so I decided to put these in the most prominent position. Those who have the time and desire to read about Einstein himself can then find that on the rest of the page, but the core functionality is not affected and is most easily accessible. The layout consists of four distinct parts. The books are displayed as posters along the top, the most noticeable position. Directly beneath the books, is a box displaying basic book information, which depends on which book is currently selected. At the bottom of the page is where the author's information lives. Finally the image of Einstein exists in the foreground to the bottom left. The book and author information box spaces are interchangeable and each can expand into the other one when the button is pressed. A more conventional layout would have perhaps been clearer to operate to a complete novice as it they are already familiar with common layouts from other sites. So the core functionality, accessing the books, is made as easy and obvious as possible.

Book Display

The books are displayed along the top; each was made to look like a battered old poster pinned up by Einstein, and this is in keeping with using Einstein's chalkboard as a metaphor. This was achieved using a clipping mask and a drop shadow to make them appear to stick out from the wall. I have been critical of many Apple

designs during my research but the inspiration for the way the user interacts with the various books came from their Cover Flow interface. There are multiple pages of books accessed by sliding across in either direction, or by using the arrow buttons provided. The page dots in the middle indicate which page the user is currently on. When an image is selected it gets a white chalk border and basic information and download links are displayed beneath. Alternatively the books could have been available in a list, which would have allowed me to display more books on a single page. However I felt that having large cover images of each book actually allowed for quicker access, especially as you would be able to speedily navigate through the pages with a track pad or touch screen. It is more stimulating for the user has they have more interaction with the page and are not just looking at a load of primarily text, as with the current site. Using book covers added colour to the otherwise grey scale interface, so they really stand out. This is intentional, the books should be centre of attention and other information can be found if desired.

Book and Author Information
The information for a selected book id is displayed beneath each book and it changes to reflect the book that is selected. It provides basic information and a button to download or get more information. Rather than open the link in an entirely new page, clicking it will simply expand the individual book information box over the author information box, which will provide more space to show more information and various download links. This method saves space and reduced clutter by only showing information about the book the user has specifically selected and then if necessary the user can get even more information without even leaving the page. Beneath this is information about Einstein himself, which can be expanded with a click to display even more information. This time the author information expands upwards to cover the book information box. The expansion of both boxes will be done with a quick smooth animation and can just as easily be compressed in the same way. This is designed to work particularly well on touch screen devices but will also be a smoother experience on traditional operating systems as each new click doesn't require a new page to be loaded, thus speeding up the work flow.

Colour Set and Style
Many alternative websites use bright, simple and minimalist colour sets in their designs, which is in contrast to the dark black of the chalkboard that dominates my interface. The reason that I went against the norm here is that other websites have to cater for many different authors and the colour scheme has to be appropriate for all. In the case of this project I am creating a bespoke page to embody the life of Albert Einstein, so the darker, mathematical feel is in fact more appropriate. Due to the black background there are only a limited number of colours that are bright enough to stand out and complement the black. I experimented with various common chalk colours such as yellow and blue but concluded that a grey scale colour set looked more professional and actually fitted the metaphor better. When using different colours to draw on the chalkboard it began to look more childish, which was something I wanted to avoid. As much as possible I wanted things to look like they hade been drawn in a white chalk, so lines and symbols have a slight charcoal feather affect added to them. This intended to be noticeable but subtle, which keeps with the minimalist design. The various symbols such as the arrows and page buttons are kept minimalist but are designed to provide clear instruction as to the functionality. I wanted to keep in line with the metaphor but keep a clean contemporary feel. In many websites there is a trade of between usability and the aesthetics, this was an attempt to strike a balance.

Typography
Initially, once I had decided on using the chalkboard metaphor, I wanted to have a handwritten font to create the illusion that Einstein was writing the information on the board. Having tried out several I felt that none of them looked professional enough nor looked as if Einstein had written them. I wanted the webpage to remain modern and contemporary whilst hinting at an old fashioned lecture theatre, this looked childish and unrealistic. I eventually decided on a font that was simple and elegant without standing out, Cambria Math. It does not realistically look like its hand written on the chalkboard but looks neat and professional, the chalkboard metaphor is still noticeable and effective.