



Holy Open Source Batman!

CRIME-FIGHTING PROJECTS, TOOLS &
RESOURCES FOR DESIGN EDUCATORS

GOTHAM City is in trouble. By distracting young designers from creative concepts and strong typography, the Joker plans to take over the world—or at least the AIGA design awards. Who will help us in our fight against mediocrity? What’s that up there, flashing across the sky? It’s the copyleft logo, defender of collaboration and symbol of the open source movement.

This paper will examine online tools and resources, and how they can be used to create portfolio pieces that serve the greater good. When a design course is complete, these projects can continue to be exhibited, critiqued, and downloaded from the internet. And by using “real world” text, these projects can help address the lack of typographic knowledge addressed in Jan Conradi’s paper “Stewards of the Typographic Landscape: A Model for Education.”¹

Open source advocates use *copyleft*, to mean “... a general method for making a program or other work free, and requiring all modified and extended versions of the program to be free as well.”² The open source philosophy encourages sharing intellectual property for creative purposes. Eric S. Raymond first introduced the

1. Jan Conradi, “Stewards of the Typographic Landscape: A Model for Education,” presented at the AIGA FutureHistory Conference in October 2004. http://futurehistory.aiga.org/resources/content/2/2/6/8/documents/j_conradi.pdf (March 29, 2007)

2. Pescetti, “What is Copyleft?”, 1996, <http://www.gnu.org/copyleft/> (March 29, 2007), Free Software Foundation

term in February 1998.³ The best-known open source product is Linus Torvalds' Linux operating system, developed by a young computer geek and thousands of collaborators worldwide. Torvald turned his little 64k operating system into a widely-used platform through a chaotic-but-effective social network that Raymond calls a bazaar⁴.

Originating in computer programming, the open source philosophy has grown to encompass fields as varied as photography and beer brewing.⁵ Simply put, open source allows free access to both the means and the results of creative production. There is much in the open source movement to excite design educators

"HOLY COMPLICATIONS INDEED, ROBIN."

The first open source student project I have created uses public domain literature to create a complete book design. Students create a book cover design, then design and typeset the entire text. The project is inspired by Project Gutenberg, a non-profit project begun by two educators which has become the largest online repository of electronic books.

Two years ago I was teaching a special topics course on Adobe InDesign, and wanted to create a text-heavy project that would allow students to learn both the subtle nuances and dramatic gestures of typography. Since I am a book designer in professional practice, I thought I could steer students through the technical and creative process. I wanted to have them design the whole thing using real manuscripts, and not just *lorum ipsum* text.

Project Gutenberg looked like the solution. I wrote up a project sheet, students downloaded a few hundred kilobytes of text and were off to the races. As any editor will tell you though, it takes a fair amount of work to get a book-length manuscript ready for typesetting. Luckily they began with cover designs, and the students were hooked well before they encountered the tedious details of proper typesetting.

After two or three weeks working on covers, we returned to endless pages of text. Students discovered that Gutenberg is an incredible resource, but its ebooks

3. Eric S. Raymond, "Goodbye 'Free Software'; Hello, 'Open Source'" February 1998 <http://www.catb.org/~esr/open-source.html> (March 29, 2007)

4. Eric S. Raymond, "The Cathedral and the Bazaar," 1996, <http://www.catb.org/~esr/writings/cathedral-bazaar/cathedral-bazaar/> (March 29, 2007)

5. "Free Beer for Geeks," *Wired News July 18, 2005*, <http://wired-vig.wired.com/techbiz/media/news/2005/07/68144> (March 29, 2007)

are not perfect. They are scanned and edited by volunteers, have hard breaks in the middle of paragraphs, double hyphens instead of em dashes, and file formats that don't support italics. Simply put, Project Gutenberg is about text, not typography. The pages we scrolled through looked more like Charlotte Brontë's e-mails than the manuscript for *Jane Eyre*.

Using Adobe InDesign and (shudder) Microsoft Word, students learned find/change editing. They knitted together broken paragraphs, corrected dumb quotes, and gradually massaged hundreds of pages of text into book-quality typography. They also realized that *Huckleberry Finn* has 42 chapters no matter what typeface is used, and that the whole thing had to be italicized by hand.

After a few days of copyediting we plunged into page layout, fixing widows and orphans, positioning folios, and paginating chapters. Gradually my students were becoming real type geeks, and those who stuck with it had sample pages for their portfolios and book-length PDFs they could download from my blog.

Having taught this project for three years now, I look forward to it with anticipation and dread. In our two-year design program students take only one typography course, and I throw this complex project at them during their second semester. Still, many do quite well at it, and enjoy working on literary classics that then carry their design credit, and can easily be added to online portfolios.

"IT'S NOT DIFFICULT, IF YOU
HAVE STEADY NERVES AND A GOOD EAR."

Last summer I found LibriVox, a great new open source project allowing volunteers to record audio books that are then distributed as free MP3s. I thought it would be a valuable experience to have students design CD packaging so the audio files could be burned to CDs and made more permanent. I had bigger ideas too.

Over my 2006 Spring Break I took a group of students and faculty to New Orleans to help clean up houses damaged by Hurricane Katrina. We saw the breeched levees and flooded homes first hand, and I heard the city's libraries were badly damaged. During my summer vacation, I travelled back to NOLA. I had contacted Jan Barnes ahead of time, and met with her in a downtown library that had literally been commandeered by FEMA and its Blackwater private security force. She was enthusiastic about my idea, and agreed that we could donate Libri Vox CDs to help rebuild their flood-damaged collections. That would be another benefit to our student project.

In the fall I assigned the audio titles to my students, who designed CD packaging that I have since uploaded in PDF form. They worked through research, thumbnails, roughs, and final art that we then critiqued in class. As a final step, the students and I printed, burned, labeled, and assembled a box full of CDs to send the New Orleans Public Library. Students have their own design credit listed on each CD, and PDFs will be available for download. Assignment sheets for both of these projects are available online at open door design.

"THE TRUE CRIMEFIGHTER ALWAYS CARRIES EVERYTHING
HE NEEDS IN HIS UTILITY BELT, ROBIN.

There is a number of tools and resources that are valuable for educators and students developing open source projects. First, I would encourage educators to set up their own free blog through edublogs. Edublogs offers flexible well-designed blog themes, free server space, and WYSIWYG editing tools that allow non-web designers to easily publish projects and writings. The blog structure also allows for comments and e-mail replies. I have used my blog to have students comment on roughs outside of class, share information on design competitions, and archive finished work.

Online student portfolios are also an important asset, and for that I suggest carbonmade.com. Students and others choose a theme, upload JPGs of their work, and join a social network where they may comment on other artists and designers' projects. Carbonmade members can interact with art and design students from all over the world.

Type, images, audio, and text are available from various open source sites. Free fonts used to be limited to knock-offs of foundry type digitized from old print samples,⁶ but today more type foundries are giving away better type designs. In her *Free Font Manifesto*, Ellen Lupton suggests free high-quality fonts be made available "as a gift to humanity."⁷ Victor Gaultney is one type designer who has taken up that challenge. Gentium is an open source text typeface designed to help preserve endangered languages, many of which use diacritical variations on Latin script. Dafont is a free font site that is well-organized and includes design credits and comments.

6. David Rakowski discusses his early shareware fonts online at http://home.earthlink.net/~ziodavino/album1_009.htm

7. Ellen Lupton's *Free Font Manifesto* is online at http://www.designwritingresearch.org/free_fonts.html

The Library of Congress has a rich tradition of making historic content available for scholarly use, and its American Memory site contains high-resolution scans of FSA posters, Victorian typography samples, photography, as well as downloadable audio and video. I encourage design educators to use American Memory as a resource for student projects and their own work. Although all Library of Congress documents are not in the public domain, they remain a rich resource that can be legally published.

Stockxchn9 is a photo sharing web site distributing free high-res photos. The site modeled on social networks like Flickr and MySpace. Stockxchn9's rich collection of images is tagged and well-organized for fast, easy image research. It is a valuable source for creative contemporary stock photography.

Open source music, art, research and writing need a new and more flexible kind of copyright licensing: enter Creative Commons. Launched in 2002, Creative Commons allows users to assemble their own licenses that have been reviewed by attorneys. Users create a free account and click through well-designed forms to allow or restrict commercial use, sampling, modification, and attribution of their work.

Lulu is another innovative resource. This online for-profit publishing company allows users to do on-demand publishing production and distribution. With no up-front fees and a high-quality product, Lulu is perfect for smaller publishing projects.⁸

Besides open source content and web resources, there are now graphic design computer applications. These include GIMP for raster art, Inkscape for vector art, and Scribus for page layout. These are being developed into an important set of tools that could one day compete with proprietary software. We educate students using industry-standard tools however, and for the foreseeable future those will continue to be Adobe products.

Open source has much in common with with higher education, offering shared tools and resources for a better final product. Open source design projects can include credits for students and schools, promoting our programs in a competitive marketplace and giving us new ways to connect with and learn from each other. Better studio projects, simple digital portfolios, and free downloads: open source just might be the secret weapon we need to restore peace and prosperity to Gotham City.

8. Ellen Lupton's typography class calendar is available through Lulu.

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Resources

WITH CLICKABLE LINKS IN PDF FORMAT

Open Door Design: my blog with examples of these projects

Open Source Initiative: for the final word in most things open source.

American Memory from the Library of Congress

Project Gutenberg: 17,000 free public domain books and counting

LibriVox: free public domain audio books

Stockxchng: free online photo sharing community

Creative Commons: Share, reuse, and remix – legally.

Edublogs: free blogs and web sites for educators and students

Lulu: Publish and sell easily online within minutes.

Carbonmade: free online portfolios

Free Font Manifesto: Ellen Lupton's open source proposal

Gentium: an open source typeface for the nations

dafont: free legal fonts organized by style

GIMP: open source photo manipulation application

Inkscape: open source illustration application

Scribus: open source page layout application