Typography

Typographers’ Inn
Peter Flynn

1 The superscripted ordinal
I’ve been ranting about this for years but it still pops up on comp.text.tex with depressing regularity, and I think it’s probably common enough nowadays to rate a FAQ all of its very own.

Microsoft Word and its ilk reintroduced this fetish from the Victorian era and made it the default, so any ordinal number (1st, 2nd, etc) gets the ordinal indicator as a superscript instead of the normal 1st, 2nd, etc.

In some western typographic cultures, notably those with a Latin-based linguistic root, it is common to distinguish ordinality from cardinality with a superscript (the masculine and feminine ordinal indicators like 1º and 2º) because of the way the wordform distinguishes gender. In others it is equally common to use a period, as in 31. Jänner 2006. English is, I think, virtually unique in having multiletter ordinals, and in deriving them from the ending of the alphabetic form (‘first’, ‘second’, ‘third’, ‘fourth’); but the use of the superscript form seemed to have disappeared around the 1940s and 50s — until its corpse was reanimated by Microsoft.

Perhaps it had been lingering, zombie-like, in rural and provincial corners of Britain, North America, and elsewhere in the English-speaking world. But I suspect it was the spread of the manual typewriter since the 1920s, and of the electric one immediately after WWII, that put paid to the superscripted ordinal which had been common — even elegant — in handwritten documents. I can’t believe anyone with a fixed-size typeface, even with the sophistication of half-line spacing, would willingly perpetrate an obscenity like 31st by disengaging the platen clutch, rolling the paper back, typing the superscript, and then resetting the paper position — every time an ordinal was needed.

Granted, the arrival of the IBM Selectric (‘golf-ball’) typewriter, and the later development of the standalone wordprocessor with a daisywheel printer, made it easier to allow this antiquarian curiosity to reappear, but I still don’t recall seeing anyone who ever did it. Even the arrival of the synchronous typographic display on early graphical user interfaces for wordprocessors, with arbitrary font-change, size-change, and placement features, failed to resurrect it. Someone (or some committee) somewhere decided that Word would herald its reawakening, and I’d be interested to know what they were smoking.

2 E-books, e-articles, e-theses
It’s sometimes difficult for those of us who have grown up with computing all around us to remember (if we’re old enough) that for most people, reading a book on-screen or submitting an article or a thesis online is new.

E-books died a death because some publishers insisted on a proprietary format, and the Open E-book Initiative (or Forum as they later were) went for a kludged-up form of HTML because they felt (possibly rightly) that the other publishers would not stomach anything more sophisticated or sensible like XML. Unlike most silly ideas, however, instead of rolling over dead by itself, it was taken over by an industry ‘consortium’, the International Digital Publishing Forum (prop. Microsoft, Inc.), in order to ensure the idea stayed dead. The formatting quality of the readers I have seen is abysmal, no better than Word: I get better results using the PDF viewer on my PDA than I do from most E-book readers. HTML won’t help, of course. So quite apart from the lack of any decent reader hardware, the resulting plethora of incompatible proprietary binary formats is almost as good a guarantee of unusability as the ludicrously crippled Digital Rights Management (DRM) legislation which US and UK publishers are paying their legislators to foist on an unwilling word.

Journal articles and conference papers, however, are increasingly not subject to the same types of restriction. Journal publishers will still try to prevent electronic distribution to protect their dwindling paper revenues, and seem not to have learned from the experiences of the physicists that prepublication on the web does not have to affect journal sales, but their writers are beginning to revolt. Perhaps it would be different in a slower-moving field, but from where I sit with one foot in academia and one in business, most authors now want to put their writing on the web whatever the publisher says about it, and many of them just go ahead and do it. Journal typography is usually of a high standard, but at a high cost in manually reformatting all the garbage formats authors send them. However, when authors want to put their work on a web site, there are still technological barriers to getting the typography right. \TeX helps, of course, if you want to generate PDF, and \TeX4ht does a nice job of producing web pages, but it still needs more knowledge than most users want to acquire.
Theses, by contrast, are not sold for publication, except in more corrupt situations, where professors steal their graduate students’ work and pass it off as their own. I was once asked by one such unfortunate student from a Mediterranean country how she could stop this. She was thinking of sending her lawyer a copy by registered mail, with instructions not to open it, so that any subsequent challenge could use a verifiable date (how she intended to square getting her PhD with suing her professor for plagiarism was not clear). But she eventually settled on a quasi-typographic solution, the details of which she would not part with; but it involved some formatting which was invisibly preserved in the conversion from \LaTeX{} to HTML and thence to Word, such that the editors in a journal who were stripping formatting from an article by her professor revealed her name and the URI of her web site where she had published the relevant portion of the thesis. She was lucky: submitting her thesis on paper to her university authorities for the formal copy, and in Word format to her professor for plagiarising, meant that she had the opportunity to act; and the long time-delay at the journal meant she had her PhD before they found her traces.

So what has all this got to do with typography? Well, electronic submission of academic material, using mediation systems like Blackboard, Moodle, or WebCT, means that more and more unnecessary administrative restrictions get placed on the file format by university authorities, especially where the documents have to pass through anti-plagiarism software to detect the exact reverse of what I described above. Increasingly, this means Word only — a frightening thought for any student using \TeX{} or Con\TeXt{} here. I’m not talking about the Annual Report, which is not usually in the class of continuous-text document that \TeX{} excels at, and which is usually done as manually-imposed facing-page pairs. You certainly can use \LaTeX{} or Con\TeXt{} for these, and they’d do it well, and I’m sure some have been done this way, but Glossies are a special class of document. And I’m not talking about the two-page Sales Summary hammered out between 2.45 am and 3 am by the unfortunate sales or support employee in some airport lounge, delayed for five hours on the flight back from some industrial heartland. I’m talking about white papers, manuals, guides, introductions, references, handbooks, and booklets that get generated all the time, right down to the statements of the obvious from HR about how we mustn’t mock the afflicted (Word users?), and the dross from H&S about how we mustn’t operate the water-cooler left-handed.

From observation, these seem to fall into three classes:

‘Typewriter-derived’ — These seem to be based on documents originally done 30 years ago or more, and very simply laid out, with minimal typographic variation. Some would call them boring or unimaginative, others would just call them plain, but they have the advantage that no-one has been trying to pretty them up unnecessarily, and the disadvantage that no-one has bothered to check if they can actually be read sensibly, so inconsistent spacing and alignment are common. Typically 10 pt Times

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1 The \TeX{} Users Group, being ahead of the game as usual, already publishes all the articles from TUGboat on the TUG web site, and authors retain rights.
throughout, not even bolded headings, and often underlining instead of italics.

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**Modern** — A style which appears to have been influenced by the Bauhaus school, but filtered through some of the clean lines of late letterpress corporate typography in the 1950s and 60s, often involving wedding an antiqua body face to a sans titling. UK government agency booklets of this period are a good example.

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**Radical** — Influences of the ‘New Style’ in unusual or experimental placement, and a self-conscious avoidance of the banal (fear of word-processors?).

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identification and significance of the problem

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Related Work

Of central importance to the work proposed herein, JTAN has written many proposals directly related to The WinCS trimetrope. As a result, no one is more familiar with these proposals than JTAN.

Other related proposals by JTAN include

- The interconnected crosstalk
- A vulnerable beamwidth that identifies configurationally

Relationship with Future Research and Development

Therefore, an orthonormal crosstalk is the modem, because the eigenvector and an aperture are a subsystem. The Ncube is a

A next-generation affiliation that delays is the superimposed throughput, although an aperture stabilizes quadratically. A massively parabolic band

[Autogenerated drivel courtesy of Chris Nadovich’s Automatic SBIR Proposal Generator, used by kind permission. All examples were constructed directly in \texttt{\LaTeX}.]