

that the reading is pleasant and fluid; as a university professor myself, I know the difficulty we have (in my country) in writing informally, because the tradition of Italian academicians is just the opposite, that is to be formal in every circumstance. The informal attitude is achieved also with the help of a couple of characters, Mr. Tizio and Mr. Caio (who, together with Mr. Sempronio, make up the triad of persons that, since Roman times, have always been used in all examples of legal cases — you see, the academy shows up again!); Tizio is a  $\TeX$ guru, or at least a  $\TeX$ wizard, while Caio is a stubborn and clumsy beginner who makes a lot of mistakes, and is always asking Tizio for help. These two guys are also depicted in an appendix,  $\TeX$ grafica, that displays the graphic capabilities of plain  $\TeX$  without the help of special fonts.

The book is completed with a short guide: an appendix where a list of  $\TeX$  commands is associated with the most common typesetting tasks identified by simple keywords, so that if you look for, say, “page numbering” you find `\folio`, `\nopagenumbers`, `\pageno`. The instructions for this short guide say that you must use it in conjunction with the analytical index where every command (primitive, plain, or defined in this book) is reported and marked with the page references where the greatest part of the information about that command can be found.

The book does not contain important errors; there are very few typos, and for what concerns  $\TeX$  I could notice only the following (minor) ones: the commands `\smallbreak`, `\medbreak`, and `\bigbreak` are described as doing the same as the corresponding `\dotskip` commands with the addition of inviting  $\TeX$  to break the page there; on the contrary, the former macros clearly test the last skip amount before doing anything. Further on, `\smash` is described as operating only in math mode, while the definition of `\smash` clearly contains `\ifmmode ... \else ... \fi`.

In conclusion, I find this book a very valuable one for beginners, who may become, with its help, good  $\TeX$  users with relatively little effort; I recommend it also for those  $\LaTeX$  users who want to start writing for themselves option or style files containing macros of a good level of sophistication; chapter four might be very helpful.

I regret that the book does not spend a word<sup>1</sup> about the language facilities offered by  $\TeX$  3.x;

<sup>1</sup> This is not completely true; languages associated with counters are used for showing how to use `\ifcase` and `\ifnum` in an example macro that sets the date for several languages.

in the United States this problem seems to be not so important but in Europe we use several languages for all purposes — technical, scientific, business, tourism, etc.; we must use at least the national language and English (the variety defined as EFL: English as a Foreign Language) as the *lingua franca* of every international activity. Therefore a section on language shift and customization might have been of great help.

◊ Claudio Beccari  
Dipartimento di Elettronica  
Politecnico di Torino  
Turin, Italy  
beccari@polito.it

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### Book review: *Stop Stealing Sheep*

Merry Obrecht Sawdey

Erik Spiekermann & E. M. Ginger, *Stop Stealing Sheep & find out how type works*. Adobe Press, 1993; 174 pp. ISBN 0-672-48543-0. \$19.95.

The significance of the title of the book *Stop Stealing Sheep* is revealed in the sidebar on page 7 of the book. The authors quote Frederick Goudy, an American type designer, as saying, “Anyone who would letterspace black letter would steal sheep.” They point out that they have also seen “lowercase” used in the quote instead of “black letter” but that the idea is the same. Mr. Goudy was given to making broad-based, opinionated statements. He eventually apologized for this one, but this is the kind of passion that the subject of design and typography elicits in a great many people.

Design, typesetting, and printing used to be fields limited to a chosen few who demonstrated the skill, experience, learning, and compulsiveness to work at it. If you ever get a chance to work in a letterpress studio with printers who print using traditional methods, you’ll experience this fervor firsthand. It’s not something that is taken lightly by those who indulge in it.

In recent years, with the advent of highly accessible computers and software almost anyone with an inkling to tinker with page layout software is able to participate in the great publishing frenzy. More people than ever before are producing brochures, signs, their own business cards, self-published books, whatever printed material can be

done with 4 megabytes and access to a printing device. Academia has embraced the new technology not only for use in writing papers (no more dissertations stored in the icebox), but for mailing them electronically to journals and conferences.

One difficulty with typography and design is that we're talking about something that hovers on the edge of being an art and a craft. We need books, advertisements, labels, brochures, mailings, and so on that are legible, readable, and communicate the intended message with elegance and style. With all the magical software available we find people going a little crazy making their text go in circles and wavy paths, shadowing the letters with bright colors and sparkles, filling every piece of available white space with type and illustrations. The ability to do this with all the available powerful, creative software brings out the budding artist in all of us. This isn't always helpful at putting the message across.

Another complication is that with typography, we're basically talking about working with illusion, "optical space," not mathematical precision. Mathematical precision and specifications are possible (and practical), but not always appropriate. While there are many rules, guidelines, and (strong) opinions about good typography, it basically comes down to what looks good. Printing is an old and time-honored craft; rules for what is right and wrong have evolved over many generations of printers and their presses. New technology has jostled those traditions and our understanding about what is readable, legible, and attractive.

*Stop Stealing Sheep & find out how type works* by Erik Spiekermann and E. M. Ginger was written to help us look at one of the tools we use to transmit information, namely, type. Their goal, as they state it, "is to clarify the language of typography for people who want to communicate more effectively with type." The text of the book is written for people who have little or no experience with typography. The information in the sidebars is "[f]or those who already know something about type and typography and who simply want to check some facts, read some gossip, and shake their heads at our opinionated comments..." The illustrations are "familiar images used ... to show that typography is not an art for a chosen few, but a powerful tool for anyone who has something to say and needs to say it in print."

The book contains samples of different typefaces and some samples of different handling of wordspacing, letterspacing, and font choices. The sidebars contain insights into the purpose the designer might have had when he or she designed a particular typeface as well as a few other histori-

cal tidbits. The authors use common metaphors to aid our understanding of the function of type such as highways, music, running races, and furniture. There are even good discussions of type used for business forms, faxes, and road signs.

The goals of the authors are admirable, and even to some extent accomplished within the pages of the book. The subject is handled with creativity and humor. Anyone who reads the book, previously intimidated by the handling of type and all the myriad decisions that go with it, will find themselves a little more comfortable with typography and its rules and guidelines. The reader will look at advertisements, road signs, magazine layouts, even fax forms with new intelligence (and criticism, probably).

While the intent of the book and much of its information is welcome and helpful, I have a few reservations about the book that keep me from recommending it wholeheartedly. First the layout of the book is intricate and complicated. There are many elements: figure captions, sidebars, the text, type samples, examples of text in different fonts, and the photographs. Many of the photographs are busy with texture and objects. The layout is set up on a specific grid system (as explained in the text), but there is a lot of information being communicated in a relatively small amount of space. Page numbers aren't used on all the pages because the layout doesn't leave room. The text on some of the pages extends almost to the very edge of the page, making it difficult to hold the book and look at the type at the same time. Much of this could have been helped if the book were bigger and allowed for more white space and better organization. As the information is presented, it would probably be overwhelming or confusing for the beginner.

There is a different color used in each chapter of the book. The second color is used consistently from chapter to chapter, making the color change attractive and entertaining, even helpful as a way of distinguishing between sections. However, the sidebar type always appears in this second color in a fairly small type size. There are two chapters in which the second color is yellow or mustard. The second colors used in these two chapters make the sidebar information difficult to read, especially since, due to the vagaries of the printing process the second color fades in and out over the course of the pages. There is also a color screen used in all the chapters behind some of the type samples that is a very light screen in the second color. The color of this screen is often so light it adds to the confusion of the page rather than illuminating.

The book is entertaining and interesting, but there isn't a huge amount of practical information in the book. That may or may not be a problem for you, depending on what you're interested in; not everyone wants or needs to delve deeply into typography and design. If you're just interested in an overview of typography to gain a simple awareness of what is available and how type is used, this might be a good book for you. If you're at all serious about the use of type in your work, I recommend reading more widely. There are vastly diverging points of view and perspectives on design and typography. The authors include a bibliography at the end of their book for further reading, and many bookstores have books on design and typography in their art sections. I've had good experience with the selection in university libraries as well.

There are myriad opinions about what is good, right, and true about the use of type, and it helps to get a sense of the range before you make your own decisions. I find a historical understanding of typesetting and printing helpful (usually given in the introduction or first chapter of many books on design or typography) to understand where we've been, past and present assumptions about what is readable and legible, and what's been done and what's available with design and type. Once you're done some background checking, just pay attention to the print around you: movie titles and credits, advertising, labels, books, brochures, forms, whatever you see that uses type. Develop your own list of fonts you like to use, your own tastes, stay open, and keep experimenting.

◊ Merry Obrecht Sawdey  
3532 Bryant Ave So.  
Apt. 112  
Minneapolis, MN 55408  
sawdey@denali.ee.umn.edu

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## Pre-publication review: *Practical SGML*

Nico Poppelier

Eric van Herwijnen, *Practical SGML*. Kluwer 1994, 284 pages (including indexes). To be published.

In my review of the first edition of *Practical SGML* by Eric van Herwijnen (*TUGboat* 13, no. 2), I praised it as 'one of the best books on SGML currently available.' It still is one of the few books on the practical application of SGML, by someone who has used SGML in practice rather extensively. The new edition has undergone significant changes with respect to the previous one. Unfortunately, they are not all changes for the good: the book still contains a lot of practical information — more than the first edition — but it is not a *better book*.

As a reference work the quality of the book has certainly improved. More material has been added, and the book has been largely re-structured. The previous edition consisted of three parts, *Getting started with SGML*, *Advanced SGML* and *SGML implementations*. The new edition has more chapters, grouped together in four parts, *Getting started*, *Writing a DTD*, *Customizing SGML* and *Special applications*. Especially the second part, about how to write a DTD (document type definition), has improved a lot, with chapters on document analysis, structure diagrams, and the various declarations one can find in a DTD. Part III, about customizing SGML, describes the SGML declaration, and SGML features such as minimization, marked section and short references. It also describes the problems that can arise with ambiguous definitions, and gives advice about how to avoid ambiguities. Under the heading of 'Special applications' (part IV) Mr. van Herwijnen discusses SGML and EDI, SGML and mathematics, and SGML and graphics. He also explains the relation between SGML and other ISO standards, such as, e.g., DSSSL and SPDL. In all the examples in the book the public-domain SGMLs parser is used, which makes it possible for most readers to try the examples for themselves.

On the negative side however: so much material is now contained in the book, especially in the form of figures and tables, that the book, in my opinion, is not a *pleasant-to-read* introduction to SGML any more. Another thing which I find rather distressing, at least in the pre-publication copy the author kindly sent me, is the design: the book uses too many fonts, in sometimes unharmonious combinations, the distribution of vertical space is uneven, and the placement of tables and figures leaves a lot to be desired. A possible explanation could be that this new edition of *Practical SGML* was prepared