Typography

Typographers' Inn

Peter Flynn

'C' stands for Euro

Just to take our minds off the Year 2000 problems, here in Europe we have a new currency on the horizon. With effect from the beginning of 1999, banking and commerce can be conducted in a single currency valid throughout the European Union. The old national currencies will continue in use until 2002, when a uniform coinage and set of notes will replace them in most states (a few have opted out for the moment). The whole business will entail lots of dual- or multi-currency computing for the transitional years, and doubtless manufacturers of POS equipment will have a field day, but in the long run it can only benefit the moves towards further integration. It is, after all, only just over 200 years since the United States of another continent replaced the pounds, doubloons, reales, and moidores of their mixed English, Spanish, and French heritage with the pieces-of-eight of Seville and Mexico,

known from their resemblance to an older German coinage as 'thalers' or 'dollars'. However, the task of creating a name for the new European currency was not the only problem: a typographic one has arisen also.

Our unelected lords and masters in the European Commission, ineptly supported by our elected public representatives, demonstrated their feeble grasp on reality by making what is perhaps the most crass naming mistake this millenium: they decided to call the new currency the 'Euro' instead of using the well-established and perfectly adequate ECU. The PR suits claim this was to avoid offending the Germans, who would have been upset at the use of an ostensibly French name (the Ecu was an old French coin, although the modern ECU actually stands for European Currency Unit). I am perfectly sure the modern Germans are far too sensible to be offended by so trivial an excuse, and I'm equally sure many millions of us would have been very pleased to see an historically important name revived. But it was not to be, and we're now lumbered with one of the silliest and most inelegant names ever devised for a monetary unit. End of rant.

However, the Commission have redeemed themselves to a small extent at least by producing an inoffensive design for the Euro which represents a rounded 'E' with a double bar through it, taking the symbology from the double bar through the traditional versions of the £ and the $ (see Figure 1: you can read more at `http://europa.eu.int/euro/`).

Microsoft, in a laudable attempt to keep their fonts up to date and usable by Europeans, rather missed the point, and added a symbol to their serif font files based on a capital C with a single serif at

**Figure 1**: The European Commission's design for the Euro symbol
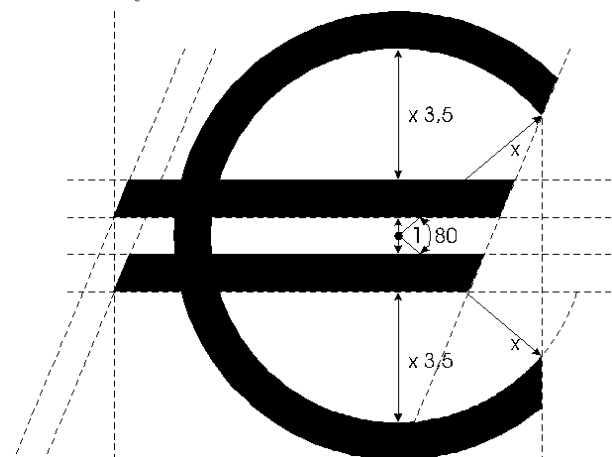
the top (see Figure 2 and `http://www.microsoft.com/typography/faq/faq12.htm`). Monotype were apparently retained by Microsoft to make the designs, which makes it all the more surprising that they seem to have failed to grasp that the Commission's design showed a symbol with the central bars and no serifs, and this seems to have been misinterpreted as being a 'C' rather than an 'E'. In a seriffed font, instead of adding a serif at the bottom to retain the same degree of symmetry, Microsoft left it as a 'C' with a top serif and two lines through it, which unfortunately fails to convey the notion of 'E' — which is (presumably) central to the whole concept.

I griped about this on `TYPO-L` in January, and Simon Daniels from Microsoft kindly brought it to the attention of the people at Monotype responsible for the outlines and hinting. The screen shot in Figure 2 had apparently been on their site for about five months, and no one else had noticed. I haven't seen any designs for Metafont fonts yet: maybe the TEX community can be the first to get it right.

Oops

Christina Thiele and a number of others picked me up on my remark in the *Quote unquote* section of the last *Typographers' Inn* about there being a reverse-quote in the `wsuipa` fonts at `\char'163`. I jumped the gun on that: it's not a reverse-quote, it's there because it's a standard way of representing the Arabic letter 'ain'. . . so it's got zero to do with quote marks and everything to do with transcription. The IPA usage is that it is recommended for 'weak aspiration after voiceless stops'[1]. Sorry about that — but

Figure 2: Microsoft's designs for the Euro symbol
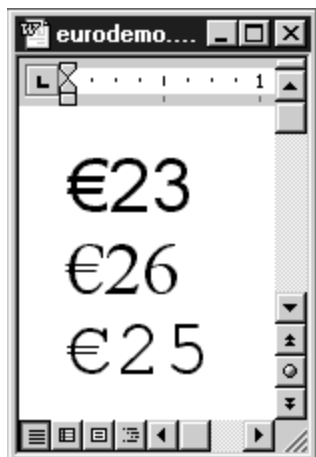
I'm still no closer to finding out where this →'quote (so-called) comes from.

TEX and TEXability

I said I was going to use LATEX 2ε for my forthcoming book on SGML[2] to see how it coped. The answer was: pretty well, far better than I had expected. My big concern, coming from nearly two decades of using plain TEX, was that I would find myself being almost forced to use predetermined styles because of the notorious difficulty of making even small changes to the LATEX defaults (if any skeptics disbelieve that, they have only to read `comp.text.tex` for a few hours and count the FAQs about how to make modifications).

As I explained last time, there are still some rough edges to LATEX 2ε, but I didn't hit any major snags. My publisher provided a class file, which was still under development at the time, so I had to make a few changes to it. But I needed 13 packages to enable the things I needed to do, which nicely illustrates what Paul Anagnostopoulos pointed out to me after my last gripe, that 'the reason that there is a tendency. . . to concentrate on the "borderline cases and special parameters" rather than the daily necessities is because most of the people working on LATEX don't know much about books. This is no better witnessed than by the fact that, after 10 years of LATEX development, blank pages still have running heads!' While I would dispute the 'most' — there are several people working on LATEX 2ε who know lots about books — it is still true that book production in LATEX needs better parameterization. There are several style files already in existence to do some of this, but once the current backlog is out of the way it's a project I'd like to look at more closely.

While I'm riding this hobby, is there no way we can get rid of the weird concept that reports have chapters? Very few of them that I have ever seen in business or research have chapters: only a small number of very large ones do; the rest have sections as their major division. It's one of those embarrassing 'features' that lead new users, especially business users, to look at LATEX numbering their first section as 0.1, roll their eyes to heaven, and mutter 'academics!' — a gross slur, but understandable in the circumstances. By all means make it an option, but not the default.

Usage and abusage

The result of my forays into LATEX has been that I've started using it for many more tasks for which I would have used plain TEX before, and I've even

started writing a class file for my in-house memo document type as a way of getting into it. The regularity and consistency of macro-driven typesetting makes LATEX's use of environments an especially attractive proposition if you deal with SGML because of the availability of public-domain packages like jade and commercial programs like Omnimark (which also has a free version), as these make conversion from SGML to TEX (amongst other formats) relatively straightforward. It's clear that for future development we need many more document classes than articles, books, letters, and reports, and I'm getting tired of seeing people doing what I did today, writing an advertising leaflet using the article class.

This is known in markup circles as 'tag abuse', and it's surprisingly prevalent. I'm as guilty as anyone, and I probably rant about it just as much: it *is* frustrating when you want to signal something you consider vital in a document only to find no-one else has apparently ever considered it important before, and has provided no control sequence to do it. This is especially true if the something doesn't actually have a typographic instantiation, such as a personal name. In the days when I wrote directly in TEX, I often used a dummy control sequence such as \person{...} because I use what I write as a database, and it can be very convenient to be able to dig back through files with a tool like *grep* or *Perl* and use the existence or proximity of names to help find what I'm looking for.

I'm happy to make two announcements, therefore: one is for a new (well, 1-year-old) organization, SDATA, the Society for the Definitive Abolition of Tag Abuse. There is a Web site at `http://www.ucc.ie/sdata` and members can contribute lore, suggestions, anecdotes, code, patches, and advice on how to avoid or cope with it. I don't know if it will achieve any major change in the hearts of document type designers, but it may help relieve the annoyance of having to abuse an otherwise inoffensive control sequence — like all those who sedulously use \emph when they actually want italics, because someone told them it was evil to hard-code appearance when you ought really to be using generic encoding, and emphasis is all you've got apart from \textit. In the absence of \linnaean, \product, \citetitle, and \foreign, can we blame them?

The other announcement is for a new journal, *Markup Languages: Theory & Practice*, from MIT Press (ISSN: 1099-6621), starting in early 1999. This quarterly, peer-reviewed technical journal will be the first one devoted to research, development, and practical applications of text markup for computer processing, management, manipulation, and

display. There is a Call for Papers being circulated in the appropriate places on the network: contact Tommie Usdin (`btusdin@mulberrytech.com`) or Michael Sperberg-McQueen (`tei@uic.edu`) for more details (doubtless there will be a Web site soon), and get your fingers working: I'm on the Editorial Board and I'd like to see TEX and LATEX users writing submissions.

H&J revisited

Another point Paul A. (see above) made to me was that some publications (*PC Magazine* was one example he gave; but I've seen it in *Byte* and *Dr. Dobb's* also) have a policy that URL punctuation should *not* fall at the end of a line, but at the beginning of the next (I was recommending the opposite). This is apparently because a period at the end of the line looks like it ends the sentence, and thus the URL. It looks ugly, but may serve a real purpose.

Finally, has really no-one else ever hit the snag with \path I mentioned in the last issue? It's a great concept (the path package), like an extended \verb which lets you define your own set of allowable breakpoints that can break the line without hyphenation. But the list of breakpoint characters is also the list of allowed characters for treating *verbatim*, which means if you want it to handle backslashes as they stand, but not to break a line after one, you're snookered. Suggestions on a Möbius Strip, please: I'm on vacation.

References

[1] Geoffrey K. Pullum and William A. Ladusaw, *Phonetic Symbol Guide*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1986, p. 216.

[2] Peter Flynn, *Understanding SGML and XML Tools*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Boston, 1998.

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