

Friday 18 September 1981
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Greetings--

Up at the market yesterday some strange boners on the bulletin board--poster announced a Benefit Square Dance, in 4 rounds.

Then an elderly radio announcer/commentator the other day said "Half of each marriage in California ends in divorce".

Then first thing this morning the news broadcast carried something about Creative Financing. From the description I can't figure out just what is created.

I told you a couple of months ago about the xeroxing places all going to 5¢--well the most distant one for me is back down to 4¢ while a brand-new place opening up near the stockbrokers and jewelry stores is 6¢. The PIP store near here had a sign, only recently taken down (they always charged 6¢ so I never went there at all) saying "We do not guarantee our Xerox machine, only the offset printing."

Another place near the library which recently started copying, primarily a typewriter shop, does guarantee--they will immediately do over anything that goes even slightly wrong. Perhaps it has something to do with the different expenses for running the various machines or makes.

Since you are running a magazine, there is a situation usually called "style" that concerns us: various books on publishing and writing and grammar and editing get very authoritarian at times. The silliest rule is that most newspapers and magazines will forbid beginning a sentence with numerals. They damn demand that all numbers be spelt out in words if they happen to come at the beginning. In newspapers this results in a comical situation where numbers must begin a headline to save space and then the first sentence in the article below spells it out and wastes all the space that has been gained. I think it has something to do with the idea that there are no capital numbers. Anyway it is nonsense and a damned nuisance at times. Of course one can rewrite a sentence to get rid of the initial numerals and so put them elsewhere. But I am forced at the present time to deal with lots of numbers and it is annoying to readers to have to make a comparison between two numbers, one of which is spelt out and the other in figures. 17 is less harmonious than 19, as against Seventeen is less harmonious than 19.

Look for yourself at the extra space consumed. If I took the silly rule very seriously, I would have to spell out my phone number in all letterheads and cards and spell out my house number in all envelopes since it begins the address. Wouldn't it look silly:

Three hundred forty-nine and a half west California Avenue?
Two hundred thirteen, 225-3477 ? (It begins a line)

When this rule is applied unthinkingly to mathematical texts it can really garble things up because it gets the letters of the spelled out numbers mixed up with algebra letters--the Translo problem aggravate

I have seen this happen. There is another such rule that is strictly followed by many publishers in the US but most Europeans do not: Spell out all numbers less than 100. Or less than 20.

The poor boobs can't ever agree on what number is the cutoff point. But it results in atrociously confusing comparisons such as seven and 17 or eight and 81 or ninety-five and 310 which slows down the reading.

Some of these people would spell out every number in a fretting table if they dared.

What will happen to you is that no two typesetting firms or word-processing outfits or secretaries or compositors or publishing companies or print-shops will agree on the exceptions to the first rule nor the cutoff point for the second rule, nor what to do about decimals and common fractions.

I recently changed one of my practices because of the Metric Conversion and SI new rules. In numbers with more than four digits, the American practice has been to put commas, so that really large numbers like 10,000,000 can be peppered with them. It so happens that commas are decimal points in most countries except the British Empire. France, Germany, Spain, South America for the most part, all of Europe so far as I can find out. That is, 3,587 in a European book or newspaper or magazines means our 3.587 and the British often write it 3.587 with the raised dot. At least they did till this new metric affair started. The new practice which is supposed to be all countries, is to leave a space where the comma used to be: 3 587 10 000 000. In actual printing with different-width characters, this space is narrow. As wide as the comma's space or maybe just a shade wider like the letter r in some typefaces of regular print.

The metric conversion rules do not ask Americans to abandon their period for a decimal point--that may remain--but merely to remove all commas. I am sure lots of people will put commas into my numbers in the future, and resent anything having to do with SI or any changes that smack of European practices. This space business would be universal if this new rule is followed, in all countries.

What makes it important is that as we go into the electronic and computer age we start dealing with very large and very small numbers. It surely would help if a long series of decimals could be spaced in groups of three, which American printers forbid.

In some math tables, groups of five are used--this has been for a long time.

I almost lost one fellow about three years ago, a friend of Clyde Corson who does office typing, mostly in lawyers' offices in West L A--he refused to believe me when I said that the number 1 000 000 000 is called a milliard in Britain--he denied there was such a word. I don't think he ever forgave me for ruining his ignorance. Is that what they mean by ignorance is bliss?

I also follow the British and European practice about quotes. This gets me in a peck of trouble with anybody who follows American printing rules. But logic is on my side, not theirs.

That is the beauty of self-publishing and self-typesetting. I don't have to knuckle under to authoritarian Mickey-Mouse rules. But many people who are supposed to be college educated, know nothing about the universal punctuation rules and numeral customs of other languages around the globe. Not even about the British.

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"Style" often refers to consistency within one item, such as an article, a magazine, or a book. That is, not changing the rules in the middle of this letter, not changing them in any one magazine article, or in a formal journal, they would not be changed in the entire 300 pages. In Interval you probably would not have to keep it absolutely the same through all different authors of different articles. You don't have to keep the same rules for every issue, but within one issue you would and actually have normalized various things so that the issue isn't a patchwork quilt. Xenharmonikōn was often a patchwork, since pages were printed in different parts of the country.

But I see no reason why I have to teady to the University of Chicago when I never went there and never will teach there and don't write for their journals at all. Or to the U. S. Government Printing Office when practically nothing of mine will ever appear in their publications!

Rules of grammar slowly change. "They" for he or she is becoming more acceptable--my father used to scold me every time but that was the year 1926 and a lot of time has passed since then.

I wouldn't dare correct somebody who wanted me to Tell it LIKE it is, even though my grade-school books fussed and drilled us on like as not being a conjunction. I guess it is now. The rule has been buried with the people who died before 1940!

Somebody told me, back in 1947, that being totally consistent meant one was already dead. So style must be flexible if it is to be alive at all.

I am trying to reassure you because Chalmers has been raising quite a bother about Interval and so long as his writing is so terrible and ambiguous, he forfeits his right to criticize me or you or anybody else. Let him put his own house in order first! If Buzz Kimball and Mrs. Morrison and Clement Terpstra can write legibly, he could if he wanted to and obviously he takes refuge in being ambiguous.

I am forced to various expedients since the Selectric quite and I have no plus or equal sign or certain other things. I may have to repair the Varityper and use that if I can't afford the enormous expense of fixing the Selectric. It looks much more serious now that I have re-examined it w twice. Even if I can get it fixed, I may be two months or more without it. This causes apparent changes in my typing style. These actually are circumstances beyond my control. But some people will scold me.

Another real nuisance in the hands of egotistical pests is the many optional spellings, such as programing-programming, czar tsar and so on, especially for rare words. Ellis was a phonetician and translator and had the right to spell xhisma but everybody else corrects him posthumously as though he hadn't known exactly what he was doing and why. Somebody looks in a schoolbook and thinks that God Himself wrote it. I really detest those people!

As the weeks and months go by, I get into more and more complicated legal situations. Did I or did I not create wealth when I built dozens of instruments and modified others? If what percent do I own of the 8-foot Megalyra? Or it is technically all Glen's? Not that he would make any trouble, but the various governments might. A few objects around here are beginning to appreciate--i.e. become collectibles. If I get

involved with people and synthesizers and organs, what is my legal

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