ConTEXt for 'Zines
Elektronický časopis ConTEXtem

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Abstract: The article describes the design of the New Escapologist magazine, our motivations for using ConTEXt, some of the typographical features of the magazine and my experiences with using the ConTEXtMark II macro package.

Key words: electronic magazin, ConTEXt, typesetting.

Abstrakt: Článek představuje sazbu elektronického časopisu New Escapologist. Jsou popsány důvody užití systému ConTEXt, typografická úptava i vlastní zkušenosti autora s ConTEXtem Mark II.

Klíčová slova: elektronický časopis, e-zin, ConTEXt, sazba.

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ConTEXt for 'Zines

Based on a poster presented by Tim Eyre at the Fourth International ConTEXt Meeting.

NEW ESCAPOLOGIST [1] is an Epicurean and mildly political amateur magazine edited by Robert Wringham of Montréal. Its general theme is escape from the daily monotony of office work by means of unconventional lifestyles such as minimalism and entrepreneurship. Issues appear approximately twice a year, with Issue Five nearing completion as I write.

Although I have written a few short articles for *New Escapologist*, my primary involvement is with the technical aspects of production. Specifically, I typeset the magazine and to do this I use ConTEXt. This article describes the design of the magazine, our motivations for using ConTEXt, some of the typographical features of the magazine and my experiences with using the ConTEXt Mark II macro package.

PAGE DESIGN

I met Robert Wringham on the Internet blogging site LiveJournal. One day he sent me a physical copy of the new magazine that he had conceived. This was the first issue of *New Escapologist* and Robert was interested in any feedback I had on the publication. Robert was clearly serious about the project: he had endowed it with an ISSN and had solicited a foreword. I did not consider myself qualified to comment on the content. However, my long-standing passion for typography caused me to wince at the layout (see Figure 1). The articles had been prepared using Microsoft Word and were printed in 9pt Arial on A4 office paper. The pages were crudely side-stapled together. The presentation did not do justice to the concept or the content.

Robert agreed with my comments on the typography and asked me to take on the rôle of typographic advisor to *New Escapologist*. I agreed and shortly afterwards Robert sent me a valiant initial effort at typographical quality that he had painstakingly prepared in Microsoft Word. I quickly replied with an improved version of the layout, which TEX had enabled me to produce in a few minutes. This example of my work caused Robert to immediately promote me to the rôle of Chief Typographer.

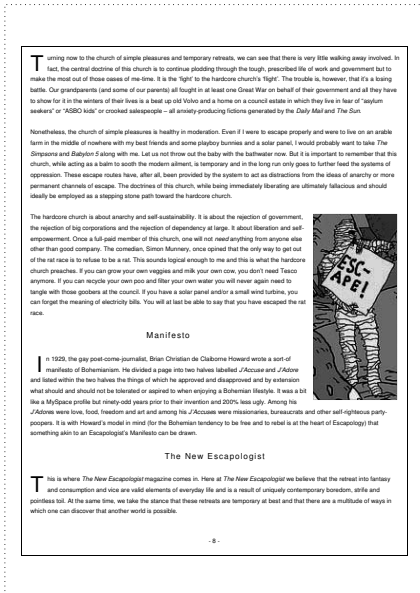The page design that we devised between us consists of a square page with two columns of

FIGURE 1: The weak typography of the original design for Issue One. Each page included a frame, perhaps to stop the words falling off.

ragged-right text and no hyphenation. We use a paper size of 51pc×51pc, which is one of the two square sizes offered by the on-demand printing service Lulu. (*New Escapologist* uses Lulu for all its printing.) The main body of the text is set at 12pt with 19½pt of leading. These dimensions mean that a standard column holds 25 lines.

Robert selected the font Adobe Jenson, which is the sort of font that Bringhurst classifies as 'Humanist' [2]. This font was, like Adobe Minion, designed by Robert Slimbach of Adobe Systems and is inspired by the Renaissance types of Nicolas Jenson and Ludovico degli Arrighi. Jenson is subtly eccentric in its design, which fits in well with the gently radical ethos of the magazine. To start with I considered using the sans-serif font Adobe Myriad for the headings, but in the end we decided to use Jenson only. The bold version of Jenson did make an appearance in Issue Two (the first one I typeset), but we did not use it in any subsequent issues. This includes Issue One, which we re-set in the new format and re-released after Issue Two, declaring the original A4 version to be apocryphal. Continuing the theme of typographical parsimony, I restrict myself to just three text sizes: \tf, \tc and a locally-defined \Tfe. This avoids the trappings of ransom-note typography and recognises the magazine's ethos of minimalism and simplicity.

An important factor in the design of *New Escapologist* was that it is not a money-making venture. As such, we were neither required to cram as much text as possible into a given space, nor were we required to pad out the text to create an illusion of value. Instead our design decisions could be made primarily on the basis of æsthetics.

This freedom is a great luxury for a typographer and one of the joys of being an amateur.

A further advantage of the non-commercial nature of *New Escapologist* is that it carries no advertising. This enables us to maintain a high level of design consistency throughout each issue, and indeed through successive issues. This design consistency now extends as far as the magazine's website and blog [1], which Robert had re-designed to echo the design of the magazine.

As Bringhurst writes in [2], historical manuscripts are a valuable resource for typographers to draw upon when designing layouts. As I developed Robert's initial layout, I used as inspiration an ancient Ge'ez liturgical text that I had seen in the Matenadaran Manuscript Museum (Մեսրոպ Մաշտոցի անվան հին ձեռագրերի ինստիտուտ) in Yerevan, Armenia. Indeed, well before I became involved with *New Escapologist*, I created a mock-up of this page layout using X⅃TEX, complete with fidäl (ፊደል) script, as an exercise.

We typeset *New Escapologist* articles in two different flavours of layout: 'Articles' and 'Anecdotes'. Articles tend to be longer and are supported by a dedicated title page with an illustration (see Figure 2). Anecdotes tend

An Invitation to
New Escapology
by Robert Wringham
Illustration by Samara Leibner
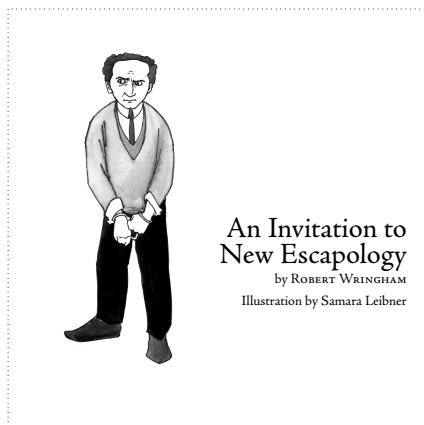
Figure 2: An Article title page.

to be shorter and have no separate title page (see Figure 3). The macros that I developed to produce these two layouts provide a sound framework that makes it easy to achieve consistency. I typeset the present article using the Anecdote layout adapted for A4 paper.

WHY CONTEXT?
The main reason that I chose ConTEXt is simply that I am more experienced with ConTEXt than I am with LATEX and I couldn't face writing everything from scratch in plain TEX. However, I understand that the emphasis of LATEX is on the efficient production of technical papers

Escaping distractions

NEIL SCOTT demonstrates how to achieve mindfulness.

YOU ARE sitting down. You hold a magazine in your hands. Your fingers caress the pages as you begin reading this article. As these words reach your retina, electrochemical explosions light up your brain and attempt to assign the words meaning. You breathe in. Your heart beats. You are alive, but you are not really living. You look, but you do not see.

Like most people today, you are a slave to distraction, incapable of *engaging* fully in your life without drifting off, worrying, or checking the Internet. This can't go on. For those who want to escape the banal elements of modern life, I have five steps that will enable you to actually experience your life, rather than merely watch it pass by.

1. ESTABLISH PRIORITIES It's not that you can't see the wood for the trees: you can't see the trees for the leaves. You need to take several steps back to remind yourself of your priorities. You never stop to think whether what you're doing is of any value. Secretly, you worry that, if you did step back to see what it all amounts to, you'd realise that you'd wasted your life. You did what others expected you to do, rather than creating your own hierarchy of values that would allow you to make more informed decisions. But where to start?

You could begin by fantasising about your death. What eulogies would you want at your funeral? What virtues and achievements would you want people to praise? Because you are the one doing the imagining, you can make them as outrageous as you like. After all, you are the person that is going to have to live the life that will make those things possible. From this, you can begin to understand what you really value, be it kindness, intelligence, material success, creative fulfillment or whatever.

2. KILL COGNITIVE DISSONANCE Now you have your priorities, you will find that it is much easier to make good decisions about what to do from moment to moment. If, however, you still find

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FIGURE 3: The start of an Anecdote.

whereas ConTEXt is more orientated towards non-technical publications. Furthermore, I had already written a ConTEXt-based format that I could use as a starting point for developing the macros for *New Escapologist*.

I chose to use XƎTEX as the typesetting engine rather than pdfTEX. The main reason for this was to make it easy to access Adobe Jenson as a TrueType font. I am a fan of the microtypographic features of pdfTEX but these are less relevant in a ragged-right layout. However, Robert and I did once create an A4-format promotional pamphlet containing two sample articles from Issue Two of *New Escapologist*. To make the most efficient use of the limited space available I set the text fully justified and hyphenated and therefore was able to use the margin kerning and font scaling capabilities of pdfTEX. I considered feeding the code I had developed through to the main magazine but decided against it.

The TEX installation that I use is W32TeX, maintained by Akira Kakuto (角藤 亮) [3]. The reason I use this is not a political rejection of TEXLive but simply that several years ago W32TeX was the only TEX installation I could find that made Japanese typesetting easy [4]. I shall eventually migrate to TEXLive.

TYPOGRAPHICAL FEATURES

In this section I shall describe some of the salient typographical features of *New Escapologist*. None of these features is revolutionary but they do illustrate how ConTEXt and XƎTEX facilitate the creation of typographically pleasing material with indulgent flourishes.

Of initial interest are the drop capitals, or lettrines. For these I used a ConTEXt module written by Taco Hoekwater [5]. I have found Taco's module to be robust and flexible, allowing fine control while still being simple to use and apparently unbreakable. Arguably we make

excessive use of drop capitals in *New Escapologist* as a result.

The most time-consuming typographical feature of *New Escapologist* is the use of pull quotes. Robert Wringham likes to use pull quotes in the interviews that he publishes in the magazine. For maximum impact, we place the pullquotes in the centre of the page and wrap the text in columns on either side around the quote (see Figure 4). Unfortunately I have found no shortcuts for doing this: I typeset the quote as a separate PDF file and then include it as an image in the article using the powerful layers feature of ConTEXt. I then use \startnarrower and \stopnarrower to wrap the text around the quote. This is painstaking work requiring numerous compiler runs and much trial and error. However, the results are worth the effort.

New Escapologist has only once published poetry; this was in Issue Two where Robert included two poems by Edward Lear. This provided me with an opportunity to make use of the more elaborate ligatures provided by the font Jenson: I made use of st, ct and Jenson's ornate variant of Q: Q . While distracting in prose, these ligatures added a typographical flourish to the poetry. TEX macros provided a natural way to robustly implement the complex indenting

Figure 4: Text wrapped around a pullquote. This is painstaking work.

structure of the stanzas in these poems.

Although the layout of *New Escapologist* has stabilized, I continue to refine the macros and add new features. I expect this process of refinement to continue. My most recent development was for Issue Five. Here I introduced spaced capitals for the headings, a feature I have also used in this article. I implemented this spacing by means of the ConTEXt macro \spaced, which makes basic tracking easy. However, I had to break out some typographical heavy artillery to cope with headings that themselves included macros.

Finally, the feature of the *New Escapologist*

macros that I have developed of which I am most proud is not related to typography at all. Instead it is related to ease of use. After typesetting two issues of *New Escapologist* I came to find the grunt work of basic formatting tedious and time-consuming. Robert was willing to take on this work but, as a relatively non-technical person, he was concerned about the difficulty of creating TeX markup. I addressed this by re-working the code I had written into a well-defined set of clearly-documented macros and teaching Robert how to use them. Robert approached the world of TeX with some trepidation at first but was pleasantly surprised at how easy it was to create articles. We have now settled into a productive routine where Robert does the bulk of the work as part of the editing process and I handle only the more technically challenging parts of creating an issue of *New Escapologist*. This is empowering for Robert and allows me to concentrate on the parts of the production process that interest me most. The fact that TeX reliably produces the same output on different machines given the same source files is a major advantage here, as is the fact that TeX and ConTeXt are free (although the font Adobe Jenson is not). Robert is unlikely to have been enthusiastic about paying for a professional typesetting package.

USING CONTEXT

While working on *New Escapologist* the most notable thing I have found with ConTeXt is that it has numerous powerful features built in and fully integrated with the rest of the macro package. First and foremost among these is the facility to typeset on a grid. Grid-based typesetting sits alongside small capitals and old-style numerals as a hallmark of quality typography. However, the mathematical heritage of TeX means that typesetting on a grid does not come naturally to it. After spending hours tweaking the interline space in the first two issues of *New Escapologist* I decided that we should use grid-based typesetting and ConTeXt made it delightfully easy to do so. The simple \showgrid command makes validating the grid simple and is also extremely helpful for widow control.

Another example of a powerful feature of ConTeXt that 'just works' is layers. I have found layers can make what would otherwise be tricky typographical challenges relatively straightforward. They were especially useful for implementing pullquotes.

A major benefit I find to using ConTeXt is the unified documentation set [6]. This combined with the ConTeXt Garden website [7] and mailing list archives [8] means that I can usually

find the answers I need. However, sometimes the trail goes cold and my impatience causes me to use a workaround rather than raise a question on the mailing list.

The area where I had the most significant difficulties was with footnotes. When setting single-column text I have few problems with the footnote features in ConTEXt. However, after prolonged wrestling with the macros in the dual-column format of *New Escapologist* I eventually gave up and asked Robert to avoid footnotes where possible. I set the few footnotes that remain by placing the text by hand rather than using any footnote macros. Hans Hagen himself acknowledges footnotes as being a tricky area in [9]. A major difficulty with footnotes in a multi-column environment is establishing what a sensible and æsthetically pleasing layout should be.

I find font control in ConTEXt documents to be intuitive and easy, especially in *New Escapologist* where we use relatively few fonts. The difficult bit was setting up the typescript in the first place; I still find typescripts to be something of a black art when I make minor tweaks.

The complexities of the ConTEXt macros mean that multiple compiler passes are necessary for a single build. Furthermore, the columns feature of ConTEXt seems to slow down the building process considerably. However, compiling only a few articles at a time is a perfectly acceptable workaround.

CONCLUSION

ConTEXt has been crucial in turning Robert Wringham's vision of *New Escapologist* into reality. It has provided a sound typesetting platform for our completely non-technical publication and, being free, it is within the budget of our non-profit amateur venture. The advanced typographical features of ConTEXt enable us to produce a 'zine with outstanding typography. Furthermore, the power of ConTEXt has enabled me to create macros that make production of new issues a process simple enough to be largely undertaken by the non-technical editor. I have encountered some technical niggles when using ConTEXt but overall it has proved to be a package that enables the creation of material of high typographic quality without compromising productivity.

New Escapologist

Or: Goodbye to all that!

Typeset in ConTeXt by Tim Eyre
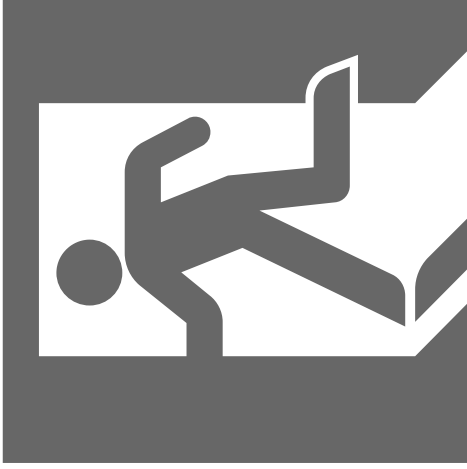
tim@newescapologist.co.uk

- Political magazine published about twice a year.
- Typeset using ConTeXt MkII, including the multi-column feature.
- Engine is XeTeX to allow easy use of TrueType fonts, the full range of Unicode characters and UTF-8 encoding.
- Layout based on an ancient Geez liturgical text located in the Matenadaran Manuscript Museum, Yerevan, Armenia.
- Macros designed to be simple enough for Rob (the non-technical editor) to do most of the typesetting and then for me to do the tricky bits.
- Typeset on a 25-line grid.
- Only uses the font Adobe Jenson in four variants and three sizes.
- Printed by Lulu.
- The website uses a similar design: WWW.NEWESCAPOLOGIST.CO.UK.

New Escapologist

Issue 4

The Bad Faith Issue

Edited by Robert Wringham

Typeset by Timothy Eyre

MMXI

Editorial

A note on the new edition

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About this publication

What is Escapology?

What is Escapology?

Why make a print magazine in the digital age?

Issues and subscriptions

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Issue One: An Invitation to New Escapology

Issue Two: The War Against Jobs Issue

Issue Three: The Pursuit of a Lost

Issue Four: subscriptions

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Editorial

A note to the new editors

You may in your books when her dust some content can be found a few others. In addition, the ... of New Escapology has this. The text of the original manuscript has changed, but it is when the recentation occurring. The late in her...

"The time that you spend doing nothing, lying in bed, is when the creative ideas are coming."

Robert Wringham, 2013

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by ROBERT WRINGHAM

Illustration by Samara Leibner

Escaping distractions

New Year's Resolutions that we abhor mindfulness

You can achieve, then. You hold imagine it too much from those that take you to get a prescription by the needs. As these words...

Colophon

New Escapologist is published by the Ashdown Press for a sprock of Oxygen Press, English. Robert Michaels of Ashton designed the house. O.

The House Staff of New Escapologist

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[9] Hans Hagen: *ConTEXt the Manual*, November 12 2001. http://www.pragma-ade.com/general/manuals/cont-enp.pdf

CONTACT

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FIGURE 5: The house staff of *New Escapologist*, as illustrated by Samara Leibner. I stand third from the right.