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Helvetica

What is modernism? Many of us have a difficult time defining this. It's a concept, a movement, a way of life. Modernism looks and feels like different things. One qualification is the capability to shift from tradition. Helvetica embodies modernism, and it is everywhere we go.

If I was asked right at this very moment to name every company that uses the typeface Helvetica, even my list would be off by a handful. Just to provide insight some quick examples are Jeep, Toyota, Target, Verizon, and Fendi. "By using Helvetica you can come off as more accessible, transparent, and accountable," says Leslie Savan. Helvetica originated in 1957, originally called Die Neue Haas Grotesk. The Swiss type designer Max Miedinger is credited for the famous sans serif typeface, assisted by Eduard Hoffmann. In Rick Poynor's words, "there was a need for a typeface that can be applied to all types of sign systems and be legible." Legibility is important when delivering any message to the world.

As a graphic design student, early on professors tend to emphasize choosing Helvetica for projects that must be legible. For Matthew Carter "the experience of reading something as a typeface is critical, that tests how the typeface performs." Like those professors, designer Massimo Vignelli believed Helvetica performs well because he was known for using it quite often. Vignelli used this typeface in the American Airlines logo and the signature MTA subway signs. He did not think that type needed to be expressive. Wim Crouwel who felt similarly said "designers today use all types of typefaces and I don't like that. I'm interested in clarity." These are opinions designers continuously feud about.

Understanding giving your type a visual voice is just as important as the legibility. "If something is an important message and it's said in a boring, nondescript way, the message can be lost" claims David Carson. Meaning the typeface's visual tone contributes to the clarity it holds as well. "You can say the same message in 3 different typefaces, the emotional response will be different. If something says buy these jeans in a grunge font, you'd expect ripped jeans," Neville Brody further explained. This is growing to be more true in a world heavily flooded with advertisements, competing with the latest technologies and businesses.

No matter what the typeface of preference is, "Helvetica is the perfume of the city" according to Lars Muller. Helvetica has transformed the way we determine what type means to us and how it should be used. Helvetica modernized design which influences our perceptions of our cities today, from reading subway maps easily to finding your favorite stores.