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COMD 1112 Digital Media Foundations

Assignment – Helvetica Film

According to Rick Poynor, a design writer, Modernism was a movement that started in the 1950's. It embraced idealism in design. Modernism design was more open, more democratic, embraced social responsibility. During that period, the international typographic style was the Swiss Style. The embodiment of the Swiss Style was Helvetica which was created in 1957. It was a rational typeface. Rick Poynor states that "Helvetica was a rational typeface which could be a visual expression of the modern world to the public in an intelligible, legible way. It was underpinned by the great feeling many designers had of idealism."

Helvetica was a product of a collaboration between Eduard Hoffman, owner of the Haas Foundry, and Max Meidenger, a graphic designer and type salesman. Helvetica modernized the traditional 19th century sans serif Akzidenz Grotesk. According to Alfred Hoffman, former director of the Haas Type Foundry, Helvetica was created in Munchenstein, Switzerland.

Linotype owned the Haas and Stempel Foundries and is the owner of Helvetica. Helvetica was originally supposed to be named after the Latin word for Switzerland. The creators decided that the Latin word for "the Swiss type" was more marketable and choose the name Helvetica.

The original created name of Helvetica was Die Neue Haas Grotesk. This information was from Matthew Carter, a type designer. His father was Harry Carter, a typographer. Matthew believes that Helvetica's strength lies in its' horizontal terminals.

Lars Muller states that "Helvetica is the typeface of Socialism, not the typeface of Capitalism". Lars said that "Helvetica is the perfume of the city." He explains that statement by saying that "Helvetica is something we don't notice usually but we would miss very much if it wasn't there. It's amazing that a typeface can advance to such a status." He walked around the city and pointed out an abundance of Helvetica signage.

Mike Parker, former director of Typographical Development of Mergenthaler Linotype USA(1961-1981), states that "Helvetica is all about the interrelationships of the negative shape, figure ground relationships. The Swiss pay more attention to the background. Each letter in Helvetica lives in a powerful matrix of surrounding space."

Massimo Vignelli loves Helvetica. He states that "Helvetica provided better legibility, was a modern type, a very clear type. It was loud and clear Modern." He helped to create the original AmericanAirlines logo using Helvetica where the two words were combined as one word.

Win Crouwel loves Modernism. He states that "creating order is typography". He believes that computers speed up your work but can't do your design for you. He worked with a grid to create typefaces. He loved type that has clarity, is clear, readable, and straightforward. Win states that "Helvetica was more machined, and did away with manual details. Helvetica embraced neutralism. Typeface shouldn't have a meaning in itself. The meaning is in the content of the text and not in the typeface."

Erik Spiekermann, a self-described "typomaniac", doesn't like Helvetica. He calls it a meta typeface. According to Erik, "Helvetica is a default. It was the "default" on the Apple system. Windows used it because Apple used it. Arial is the cloned version of Helvetica. Helvetica is air, so you have to use Helvetica." Erik feels that people who have no vision use Helvetica.

I'll finish off with Neville Brody, a graphic designer. He states that "the way something is presented will define how you react to it….So you can take a message and use three different typefaces and the emotional response will be different. The choice of typeface is the prime "weapon". The way a message is dressed will define our reaction to it. Helvetica is clean, will fit in and not stand out. It's a club, a mark of membership, a part of modern society, where we share the same ideal. Helvetica is well rounded, not damaging or dangerous."