

Movie Review: Helvetica

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The first thing that comes to mind when hearing that someone has directed a film devoted to a specific font is that this film should be boring and monophonic. The same feeling occurs after becoming aware of the existence of the film titled *Helvetica*—a film about the font of the same title, produced and directed by Gary Hustwit in 2007. However, as it usually occurs, the first impression is deceptive.

All in all, the film creates the feeling of the exceptional place of Helvetica in the world of typography. In this context, it is possible to agree with Matt Zoller Seitzsept, who states the documentary depicts Helvetica as “an emblem of the machine age, a harbinger of globalization, and an ally of modern art’s impulse toward innovation, simplicity, and abstraction” (2007). It provides the audience with profound and engaging information about the history of the font, its context, main influences, and its place in the world today. As a result, there is no doubt that Gary Hustwit’s work talks about important matters.

Simultaneously, it is impossible not to note that the film is highly useful for designers, for beginners and experts alike. In some sense, it can even induce people from outside the industry to go deep into the field of design. As it is precisely highlighted by AppsScraps Movie Reviews, “seeing this film, you’ll wander the streets and read all advertising, with a new eye” (2007). In fact, *Helvetica* reveals the secrets of successful typography, simultaneously providing viewers with insights about how complicated and multi-dimensional the design of fonts is.

The distinguishing feature of *Helvetica* is that it contains not only positive feedback about the font, but also a significant part of criticism. The AppsScraps Movie Reviews calls it provocative (2007), and it is worth agreeing with this idea because there are, indeed, two perspectives, which in turn provoke the viewer to hesitate and rapidly change attitudes toward

the place of Helvetica in typography and design. In such a way, Gary Hustwit provides the right to choose the perspective, fully depicting the world of Helvetica and its transformation.

Eventually, at the end of the film, the major intention of the author becomes obvious: the unique structure of *Helvetica* represents its general idea. As it is mentioned by J. & C.'s Movie Reviews, indeed, the film consists of three parts, according to the generation of designers interviewed: the oldest ones are in the first-third of the movie, the rebels appear in the second part, and the up-and-comers are in the last part (2017). Interestingly, each group expresses different attitudes towards the font. While the first one considers it as the ideal and the best font that has ever existed, the second group, including the famous David Carson, are those people that reject it, naming it as boring and too strict. Finally, the third group of designers also finds Helvetica as a universal font that is worth returning to.

Although J. & C.'s Movie Reviews calls such a structure unsuccessful, it is possible to disagree with this opinion. In fact, such a structure represents the cyclic processes taking place in the sphere of design. In such a way, the film touches even deeper matters than simply the existence of Helvetica. As Joy's Film Blog highlights, the film reveals a larger truth about the subject (2017). Therefore, the conclusion points to the fact that *Helvetica* deserves the highest appreciation not only because it provides deep insights into the topic of one font, but because of revealing more complex subject-matter, capturing the overall nature of the design industry as a whole.

References

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