

Helvetica and Beyond

Caleb Spalding

The objective of this project was to solely use type to communicate an idea. In my project, the goal was to firstly show the history of the typeface Helvetica. This typeface is significant to the world of modern design. Then the goal was to give the viewer an opportunity to experiment with individual Helvetica letters in virtual reality.

The project begins by showing the beginning of Helvetica and the history behind was it was developed in the first place. Then as the viewer walks through the space, various examples show the characteristics of the font. Next the viewer learns how Helvetica transitioned to a digital typeface. Following that scene, the viewer walks into a large field of various letters. These letters are enlarged into three-dimensional form so that the viewer can walk through around the letters and see them backwards. Next viewer is led up a ramp to a higher platform to see over the field of individual letters both in the upper-case and lower-case forms.

Some of the interactions in this project include collisions to trigger type throughout the scene. Other collisions include a collision to trigger a voice to speak some information to the viewer. While standing on the platform late in the scene, the viewer can click on the right-mouse button trigger a cascade of letters. Finally most of the letters in the letter-field are available for the viewer to pick up and place where he likes. This flexibility of letters allows for endless experiments with different letters. Classic typographic adjustments like tracking and kerning are no longer restricting the viewer. Each letter can be placed by the viewer to create a specific result. In addition, the three-dimensional letters allow for the viewer to arrange the letters at unconventional angles which would not be possible in two-dimensional typography.

This project was inspired by Legible City by Jeffery Shaw as the larger-than-life letters in that project were quite interesting. Other sources of information included Wikipedia and aiga.org.

