

**artist
in
residence**

Printed excerpt from the digital video:
something to think about, 2011
(b/w, no sound, 55 seconds)
courtesy of the artist and von ammon co

**Helmut
Lang
'something
to think
about'**















































Like so much of the artist's practice, *something to think about* by Helmut Lang, resides in the ellipsis of the cultural conscience. The original video work, which runs a mere fifty-five seconds, is simultaneously fleeting and demanding: a black mass with a softened edge slowly rises from the bottom edge of the white screen like mercury in a thermometer. It is one of Lang's rare forays into video art.

One can assign manifold meanings to such an enigmatically simple gesture. The piece tempts the viewer to inscribe whatever sentiment is readily available onto the work, which has lived through various cultural upheavals since its conception in 2011. Despite its glacial pace within the confines of just less than a minute, the work traces the direction of digital culture, which can resemble an upward-scrolling plummet into an oblivion of ever-refreshing, ever-available content.

This is, of course, how the first books were: scrolls that one read by unspooling long, continuous threads

of textual information. *Something to think about*, as a looped video, is essentially discontinuous, with the soft meniscus of white-to-black beginning again every fifty-five seconds. As such, the video stands apart from the infinitely networked, seamless flow of global data and takes on a more ancient texture – a thing unravelling and returning eternally.

If all weights are equal, then the bright white origin of the work could be substance and the black a void, and *something to think about* is somewhat of a curtain that gradually reveals an abyss or a barrier. Is this a giant unassailable mass enveloping the void or a veil being lifted to reveal it? Maybe it is a constant transitional state whose sole purpose is to complete its movement and repeat itself? Maybe it doesn't matter which of these it is?

Like all of Helmut's work, this tiny digital file is a ready-made, derived from the froth of quotidian reality. Then, it is slowed down to a syrupy pace where it can be reconsidered and reimagined,

using only the non-referential rudiments the artist decides to keep.

The work essentialises a key element of contemporary history but does so without polemics or sentiment. It merely challenges the viewer to confront the potentially daunting expanse of fifty-five seconds, and dare to inscribe their own experience of the 21st century upon the simple movement of a greyish meniscus; to feel the acerbic white light become enveloped by its opposite.

Something to think about has historically been exhibited on electric monitors, and its progression involves the extinguishing of thousands of rows of tiny diodes as the black scrolls upwards, essentially putting the screen to rest every minute. It is an overt counterpoint to the culture of media and public relations that was just reaching maturity at the time of the work's making. The work does refresh, but only to its original form.

In its newest iteration in this magazine, the piece inhabits the space of a codex, whose invention

marked possibly the most significant breakthrough in the development of information technology. It was at this point that textual information was no longer required to be continuous, and information began to be stored and disseminated in exponentially larger volumes. It was, of course, a precursor to the modern moment, wherein one flow of information survives only thanks to its codependency to all others.

Since the work is a digital ready-made, it has existed in a latent form until now – like so many other works and ideas – in a frictionless environment. There is a duality between the desire to chart and analyse the abyss of contemporary culture in real time, and to commemorate it in a lasting form and in a safe place. As the work returns to the codex, upon printed pages, the viewer reclaims a grasp upon the work, can feel the presence of ink on the page, and can find one's own level in the rising volumes of black and white.

text Todd von Ammon