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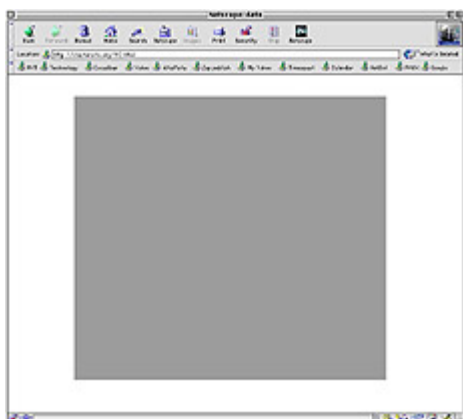
An Antidote to Infoglut: 8 Hours of Web Minimalism

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Jeff Zilm is ready for his eight hours of infamy.

Zilm, a digital artist in Houston, has transformed Andy Warhol's epic film "Empire" into "Film Task," an online art work that lasts every bit as long as its 480-minute source.



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Jeff Zilm's "Film Task" is not a project for those with short attention spans.

Neither project is likely to appeal to fans of "Gladiator." For his 1964 opus, Warhol focused a camera on the Empire State Building and captured the ensuing action, such as it was, from dusk into the night. For "Film Task," launched last month on the Web, Zilm digitally extracted 1,000 different shades of gray from the black-and-white "Empire" and arranged them in order from dark to light.

On the computer screen, "Film Task" appears to be a simple black square that, over eight hours, gradually turns white. Since it takes about 30 minutes for the eye to discern a change, patience is required (along with the Shockwave plug-in). A monotonous sine wave serves as the soundtrack, the only accompaniment.

At first, Film Task seems like a programming exercise or, like the all-white painting in the play "Art," the kind of conceptual piece whose very blankness could be taken for a joke. As with "Empire," though, the work becomes something more as the minutes pass: a visual oasis on a Web overstuffed with imagery, a commentary on how the digital alters the real, and a meditation on time in an era of immediate data gratification.

"One doesn't have to sit down and look at this in its entirety to get the idea that this is a different kind of digital object," Zilm said in a telephone interview. "On the surface, it gives the illusion of doing nothing, but in fact it's doing a lot."

To make "Film Task," Zilm, who supports himself by freelancing as a CD-ROM producer, captured one frame per second of "Empire" onto his computer and, using software that analyzes an image's color palette, extracted the movie's full range of gray tones. Even though Warhol's film progresses into the night, Zilm chose to move from black to white. "I wanted the presence of that black square there, to be dealt with immediately," he said.

For a second work, called simply "L," Zilm applied the same technique to a television commercial for GTE Corp.'s wireless services. It yielded a colorful 5-minute animation that resembles a kinetic version of a work by the Abstract Expressionist painter Barnett Newman. Zilm is also in the process of converting the film "Paris, Texas" into an Internet work.

By Zilm's calculations, "Empire" would consume 7 gigabytes on a digital video disk. In contrast, "Film Task" has been distilled into a half-megabyte file that does not include a single image of the Empire State Building.

It is a step beyond the [ASCII History of Moving Images](#), in which the digital artist Vuk Cosic presented classic movies with their images composed entirely of textual characters. In the age of sample-based creativity in both music and the visual arts, both projects ask viewers to consider the point at which the digital transformation causes an original work to become something completely new.

Geralyn Huxley, the film and video curator for the [Andy Warhol Museum](#) in Pittsburgh, which owns the rights to "Empire," was initially wary of "Film Task."

When told about the project, Huxley said, "The first thing I'm hearing in my mind is copyright infringement, big time." But after the project was described to her, she said, "It doesn't sound to me like he's used the film in any way. It's not like he's using the image."

Huxley said that Warhol employed his own form of data manipulation in "Empire." The film was shot on 10 33-minute reels, but is screened at a slower speed so that the five-and-a-half hours that were recorded are viewed over eight hours.

The experience provokes "a phenomenological reaction," Huxley said. "You really get into it. The grain becomes really important. You can perceive subtle gradations much more acutely. Of course, you end up thinking about yourself."

"Empire" also serves as a reminder that Warhol, who famously proclaimed in 1968 that "in the future, everyone will be world-famous for 15 minutes," could claim to be the father of the Webcam aesthetic.

Huxley said Warhol often had audio and video recorders on hand to capture the quotidian world around him. "A lot of his films were about everyday life," she said, "and I think that's a lot of what Webcams do, turning the picture on what people actually do instead of the selective editing of Hollywood movies."

Zilm and Huxley both said they have seen most, if not all, of "Empire," although not in one continuous showing.

But Zilm said: "It would be hard for me to recommend an uninterrupted viewing of 'Film Task.' I'm wholly satisfied with the idea that such a thing exists."