

Valentin Blank, October 2011

World Premiere: H9 — The power of reduction

An essay on Beat Haldimann's philosophic watch without time indication

How much watch do we need in order to be able to describe something as a watch? The German word for “watch” has its roots in the Middle High German word *ûr*, which is derived from the Latin word *hora*. This word means “hour” in english. Thus, if you were a German speaker, the name of this object would already describe its function: measuring time. How this measurement is to be accomplished is, however, not to be divined from this word. “Uhr” and “watch” are technology-neutral and focused on the object's *raison d'être*. Indeed, many different objects and even machines have resided under the guise of this unimposing moniker over the centuries and even millennia, all of which have measured time using various phenomena: these include sundials, water clocks, candle and oil lamps – all of which have documented the passing of time. As different from each other as these devices may be, they all have one thing in common: they make the documentation tangible for us human beings, whether it is through scales or acoustic signals (such as the sounding of a bell).

Now, what happens when this information is missing, when the time continues to be measured, but not displayed? Can we still call this a watch? And if not, then what?

This borderline area of time measurement has held particular allure for Beat Haldimann for several years. The attraction has culminated in a wave of resonating inspiration, resulting in creations that philosophically and playfully, yet seriously, ask where the border is and what the relationship between the watch and time is. Beat Haldimann does this using his own demanding manner of craftsmanship and aesthetic.

In 2008, Haldimann presented his H8 to an astonished public. “Where are the hands?” was the question that some journalists and connoisseurs from all over the world directed at him – at times in a reproachful tone, at other times in sheer awe. The vehemence of these reactions impressively illustrates how fixed our idea of the watch, and even that of the passing of time, has become. In our generation of electronic agendas, to-the-minute train and flight times and sporting events that are timed to the hundredth of a second, *relative* time is bound to our individual experiences and thus has become our personal time. The monotonous, even-tempered passing of time – *linear* time – has taken over our way of being.

Nonchalantly, the H8 stepped out of line and allowed us to take a look at our personal time. The removal of hands was worth the trouble, as the stage is then entirely dedicated to the grandiose tourbillon in the centre. Justifiably, the H8 can well be described as a sculpture for the wrist.

Famously in art, various paths exist with which one can reach one's audience. Clarity and details are one way, reduction and spiritualisation are another way. The latter ideals are united in minimalism. As different as the works of minimalists are, when one observes their oeuvres it becomes obvious that their remarkableness has not been reduced by leaving out that which was expected. Instead, this reduction sets a thought process in motion with which we instinctively begin to think about that which we had expected.

Experiencing a minimalistic work of art is thus tied to one's own creative outlay. The observer receives the reward for this outlay in the form of personalised enjoyment, which seamlessly fits into his or her own realm of experience. Should this process be successful once, it hardly needs explaining ever again, which is why the alliance between a work of art that can be anonymous and seemingly undercooled at first glance and its observer is especially pronounced.

Before me on the table is the wooden case put there by Beat Haldimann. It is open and my view is directed at the H9 inside. I have occupied myself passionately with watches for the last 25 years. How many thousands of models, styles and concepts have I already seen in my life? Despite this, a look at the H9 leaves me gaping, awestruck. In front of me is a watch with a case and a strap, like we are used to seeing. It also has a sapphire crystal and a crown. But the case does not house a dial; it frames blackness, nothing.



The iconic and mysterious H9, sporting its captivating black dome

And this nothing has a secretive grace about it. A strongly domed sapphire crystal coated with black vaporised colour on the inside pulls my gaze down into its immeasurable depths. This black dome is completely opaque. My eyes futilely search for the usual view of a watch, looking for hands, markers or anything upon which they can rest. Beat's inviting library is mirrored in the round crystal, the sparkling windows reflected. Carefully, I take the H9 from its velvety cushion and allow it to hug my wrist. The presence of this watch is captivating: a black hole on my wrist, sucking up my gaze.



A black hole on your wrist

As I move my arm back and forth to marvel at the black dome from every possible perspective, I suddenly catch a melody.

Memories are aroused immediately. I think back to my first encounter with the H1 and the H8. There it is again, the song of the tourbillon. This song seems purer than ever, an intimate friend whose source is hidden underneath the domed blackness, seeming so familiar.



Nothingness on my wrist

With the H9, Beat Haldimann has reached a final destination in his puristic pursuit. The H9 has something conclusive to it, its endearing presence will suffer no sequel. The H9 is here for eternity.

If you enjoyed this report you may also want to read the article about my visit to Beat's workshop as well as my essay on the Haldimann H8.