

The actors wear makeup. They pose persistently before the camera's flash as if they are the mimes of silent movies, but the notable difference is that they can speak. 1 to 6—German, English, Swedish—count, repeat. This is borrowed from a shooting manual for a Super 8 camera, in which the guidelines state that in filmmaking, six seconds is the proper length of time for a take that is neither too short nor too long. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6—this manufactured suggestion is, in this work, used first and foremost to provide a measure of time. However, it later takes a different shape. The cameraperson films the actors as they slowly, steadily count 1 to 6, but, in a strict deviation from the manual, does not cut the take even once the count has passed. Thus, the viewer witnesses the period between each six second tally—that is, the time that is not counted. The fact of counting serves to expose the time which is, by contrast, uncounted and uncountable.

As if the task of counting were an arduous one, the actors don't speak often. When it comes time to part their lips, they gaze into the lens. When they are not counting, not gazing, they keep the viewer waiting, wielding their own camera toward the cameraperson—in essence, capturing that which captures them. In these moments, the lenses occasionally catch a reflection of one another and flare white, like a needle that pierces a plane. But we are never shown a reverse shot—it is only through the breath and light source of the cameraperson that she is present and together with the actors onscreen. Flash, breath, shadow—these engagements conceal the mediation of the lens and reveal her image subtly, yet clearly. In this regard, the way in which <6> is filmed shares a paradoxical resemblance to the peculiarities of traditional painting in that the eyes—hand—object are directly connected—namely, that the body and object do not pass through the camera.

The human eye sometimes appears red. In the instant of a camera flash, the light reaches the eye faster than the speed at which its pupil is able to contract. Thus, *the light enters the eye through the eyeball, hitting the retina, where it is reflected back before the pupil can seal it in.*¹ If we return to the starting point of the video, the actor looks into the screen—lens—through her sunglasses. Sunglasses, like pupils to a body, have two lenses; they reveal the same landscape twice, one next to the other. Here, they capture two sunsets pouring out behind the lens while all too naturally reflecting the split and doubled image of the cameraperson holding the camera up to her face. As the day darkens, the actor sheds her frames and the cameraperson's passing reflection is no longer visible within them. She thus crosses over into the abstract realm in which light, breath, and shadow are filmed. The distance between the actors' faces, whitened with makeup, and the light source, which emits a stark white, is narrow. The brightnesses seem to overdo one another, making the amount of space between cameraperson and actor appear even flatter than it is in reality. It is difficult to decipher the distance between the cameraperson's exhales and the actor's faces, which are continuously shot close-up. They permeate in a singular layer, at times making it impossible to know exactly whose breath it is we are hearing. The act of piercing a photographer into the field of view of a lens is usually awkward (if not later edited out) or, as in this case, occurs only when reflected upon some apparatus. The reasons for this are twofold:

- 1 Practically speaking, the photographer must stand behind the lens to shoot, and
- 2 structurally, the act of filming has always maintained a hierarchy or promise to capture not one's own image, but rather what is outside and surrounding (in the case that it doesn't, bearing a modification such as 'self-cam'). Though not an actor, the cameraperson continues to participate and intervene alongside those being filmed. The more her body is put in the situation of transgressing this physical promise, used continuously as an offscreen—never fully visible but nonetheless overlapping with the others in the shot—the cameraperson's body becomes that of a performer's.

However, this participation should be considered differently from the prevalent style of Point of View filming. POV values the presence and viewpoint of the body holding the camera over the object being filmed, the cameraperson's perception deemed superior to the conditions for how the object being filmed appears. Thus, the POV photographer more so 'invades' the screen, occupying the field of view of what is usually a wide-angle lens with their own body. Their sight, through its physical attachment to the lens and its vanishing point, is in control of the filmed object or landscape. In <6>, the cameraperson's presence is much more subtle, revealing itself in abstract or figurative ways; she stands invisibly before her subjects, like they are engaged in a staring match. As if by mistake, she leaves traces of light, breath, and shadow upon the beloved actors—they, who are her family, her lover—and thus places herself on the screen alongside them. <6> ends in darkness, as the flash strays from the actors for the first time. The cameraperson backs away, her lens and gaze still directed ahead. The actors, their faces once sharp with makeup, become smaller, blurred, as they stand like bodies in a club, hazy like brushstrokes. The exit of light is a simple gesture that marks the end of counting. But the sound of breathing never does go away. It continues to be heard,

¹ Sjölin, <6>.

demonstrating, for the very last time, how close the invisible body behind the lens has been to the actors before us.

<6> is full of the sounds of mosquitos. Their presence generates the score. Even while counting, the actors brandish their limbs and smack their skin with their hands to avoid being bitten. The viewer is never given an indication as to when the piece will end, and in the meantime, the actors endure the insects as they wait for the next count. They take turns posing in front of the lens, blowing saliva bubbles off the tips of their tongues, hugging one another periodically, and briefly donning smiles, all in a display of the repetitions of sheer boredom. These gestures are the contours of waiting. If they provide the main pace for the time or delay of the six second count, the mosquitos, separate, but imposing, are like the beat. The six second take is never fulfilled—therefore, its ‘appropriateness’ difficult to grasp—and we are always subject to waiting and repetition. The mosquitos divide the delayed time of <6> into moments prompted by nature in which the human body is rendered helpless, driven instead by compulsory response. As if in the keeping of a simple promise, they stare into one another’s lenses and smack themselves repeatedly. The actors’ performances and the mosquitos—score—as arbitrary as they may be, put on display the contrast of the body’s fragility in the face of nature. This goes on to create a kind of simple, obsessive choreography of the relationship between the bodies that stand before and behind the lens, as well as with the environment which observes them. Between each six-second count—that is, “between the moments of proper length,” the time that is uncounted and uncountable is made whole. It is a kind of dissonant choreography created by the incongruity of the staring face, accepting of the fact that it is being untimely filmed, and the rest of the body, which endures in its toleration of the mosquitos’ intrusions. The choreography persists through an indefinite stretch of time. It is filtered, left over, by insects and numbers.

*In Julia Sjölin’s <6> (4K video, sound, 00:23:17, 2020), the actors count from one to six. German, English, Swedish—eins, one, ett, zwei, two, två, drei, three, tre, vier, four, fyra, fünf, five, fem, sechs, six, sex.

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