



Damir Očko  
**Studies on Shivering**

TK, the two letters that make up the title of Očko's work as part of the exhibition *Studies on Shivering*, are stamped at the beginning of the film's opening sequence. These letters are white on black, capitalized and serified, and are set against the silence that precedes the film itself. As titles go, the two letters don't lead us to anticipate much. They might be the initials of a special person to whom the work is dedicated or perhaps the initials of the film's primary character. They might abbreviate the film's narrative, its metaphor, its setting or its atmosphere—as if it were possible to stretch apart the T and the K and reveal it all.

The film begins. Nothing settles. We see the hand of an elderly man hover a pencil over a piece of paper and begin to draw in a nervous, sharp series of actions that we soon realize is the writing of a sentence. All that we see of this writing body is a hand, reaching out of its sleeve, either holding a pencil or else shaking with the identifiable effects of Parkinson's disease. Certain words become clear, the word *Tranquility* repeats, but the action of writing obscures the camera's view. We see other sequences where a number of young men stand naked in a white frozen landscape, holding still as best as they can while their muscles contract, their lips quiver, and their breath steams from their mouths. The camera – as though it was immune from the effects of the cold – smoothly and steadily tracks past their bodies, occasionally focusing on the details of their skin. We are in this darkened envelope of a screening space for approximately 20 minutes as the film alternates between scenes of young and old, exposure and withdrawal, inside and outside, light and dark. All the while, a soft and Irish-accented voice provides a poetic narrative—a rhythmic and circuitous co-mingling of bodies, landscapes, and everyday incidents.

*TK* might consist of contrasting conditions and apparent opposites, but the elderly and young protagonists of Očko's film share in their struggle against the body's afflictions, whether these afflictions are external and environmental (the task of standing naked in the cold) or are those that emerge from within the body itself (the task of writing text under the malignant conditions of Parkinson's disease, a degenerate disorder of the central nervous system). There are other afflictions upon the body if we include the mediums of representation, if we think of how each physical task commits to the spatial and temporal authority of the camera and the page. We can see how the elderly man's sentences attempt an even and straight line, but veer off and clamour at the edge of the paper. Likewise, how the involuntary movement in the bodies of the young men acts against the photogenic stillness of the frozen landscape. Očko's 'shivering' bodies might extend themselves, metaphorically at least, to Walter Benjamin's notion of an 'oscillation' between the violence that posits the law, and the violence that preserves it, as he describes in his text *Critique of Violence* (1921). The camera and the page provide a way of apprehending the body, while also enforcing the body's expressible and representational limits with square edges and other medium-specific conditions of possibility.

The camera and the page are not the only compositional frames that affect the body in *TK*, however. What can we say of the low tremolo of strings that suspensefully follow the voice? Or the dictation of text that is being spoken? Or the intimate harbingers of poetic description? Aren't these also frames, oppressions, instrumentalizations of the physical? Outside of the film's screening space, a series of collage works (*TK Scores*, 2014) are presented on the gallery wall. These works consist of poems written by the artist, the same that feature as the narrative of the film. These are printed on paper, with graphic elements that

fizz around the text like a form of dramatical grammar or musical score. Their counterparts, presented at the opposite end of the gallery space, are the drawings of the elderly man that we see under production in the film (*Untitled (writings on Giuseppe Ianuzzi)*, 2013). As drawings, they are more visible here as statements that put forward (against the struggle of a shaking hand) assertions of physical status under the conditions of tranquility: 'In Tranquility each stone has a purpose', 'In Tranquility the word is shivering, Tranquility is the shivering word', the writing goes. Both the drawings and the collages that we see operate within *TK* and that take part in its filmic structure, now hang in their own skin (as it were): on paper, on pins and in frames, on the gallery wall.

The layers of *TK* are all 'shivering' in their own way. They carry the imminence and precariousness of being both inside and outside the folds of the work. It's an artistic approach that Očko may prefer to compare to a symphonic or polyphonic arrangement, given the musical structures that have been foundational to previous works. In his *The Age of Happiness* (2009), for instance, that draws upon the unrealised work of Russian composer Alexander Scriabin. Or his *The Moon shall never take my Voice* (2010), a film of three songs performed in a distorted sign language, related to historical silences experienced by composers Gustav Mahler, John Cage, and astronaut Neil Armstrong.

Like the final notes, reverberating into the silence that will soon swallow them up, Očko's exhibition also features two black and white photographs taken during the production phases of *TK*. We see one of the young male actors with a duvet wrapped around him, walking through the woods towards a warmer interior, his task now complete. We see another scene of several men in the landscape. The photograph is partly obscured by traces of paper fibre, as though something that once masked the image has been ripped away.

In Očko's work, there seems to be more than one way to withstand the cold.

© Matt Packer, 2015

1. Installation shot, *TK*, 2014, 4K transferred to HD, 19'48"  
Left: *Untitled (writings of Giuseppe Ianuzzi)*, 2013, Pencil on Paper, Group of 16 pieces, each 50 x 70 cm  
Right: *Untitled*, 2014, Photograph, 54.7 x 80cm
2. Installation shot, *Untitled*, 2014, Photograph, 54.7 x 80cm
3. Installation shot, *TK*, 2014, 4K transferred to HD, 19'48"

Damir Očko's work appears courtesy of Yvon Lambert, Paris and Tiziana di Caro, Salerno.

Installation photography by Kasia Kaminskaw

