

THE PHYSICS ROOM

CONTEMPORARY ART SPACE

Phoebe Hinchliff's *Mush Zone II*: Are we there yet?

John Chrisstoffels on the work of Phoebe Hinchliff in *Domino Domino*

Like every good adventure story, whether it has a Frodo, Jim Hawkins, or Winnie the Pooh, there is map at the beginning of the journey. It's not to scale and might be unreliable since it's drawn from the author's mind; an artist's impression of a location, jotted down to help others find their way. A sketch map of my day's journey might include my place of work or places I try to avoid, or I might leave out the repetition of every power-pole but note with some detail those places where it's good to pick up the walking pace, and others where I should pause to smell the roses.

In a similar way Phoebe Hinchliff creates for us, in *Mush Zone II* (2020), a multidimensional and multimedia map for us to wayfind through a journey (the quality), rather than the destination (the quantifiable thing). *Mush Zone II* is part of the group show *Domino Domino*, a collaborative effort of three artists responding to an initial provocation to "reject time and space as barriers to creative production".¹ Daniel Shaskey frames the show with an overall concept for our orientation within the gallery, which leads to Hinchliff's video works. Luke Shaw teases us with a beguiling, ambient electronic soundscape that fills the gallery.

I was already aware that hiking in the high country of Aotearoa is an important part of Hinchliff's practice. On entering the gallery I immediately made a connection between Shaskey's dark green kiosk as something we might find at a DOC information centre. Instead of suggesting hikes, the kiosk presents us with numerous readings, folded like informational pamphlets to be taken away and consulted as we journey the clearly marked floor. On this visit I have chosen the reading "System to System 03: TWO-WAY via Phoebe Hinchliff & Dead Air".

Red vinyl lines on the floor orient us to Hinchliff's installation at the furthest wall at the end of the gallery, a white void except for two elegantly carved, vertical apertures at eye height. We are compelled to push our faces up against the ungainly eyepieces, only to see a sliver of a projected image in what seems to be another darkened room. Looking through the left aperture we can see, through our severely

reduced field of vision, a vignette of water babbling over a stony river bed. Peering through the right gap we can see part of a panning shot along a ridge featuring high-tension wires towering over alpine forest, a shot that pans and loops like a GIF, suspended in perpetual motion that never rests.

Still standing at the wall I become aware of, and increasingly immersed in, Shaw's electronic soundscape emanating softly from the floor. I then start to read Hinchliff's "TWO-WAY" free verse: poem or manifesto. Her first line instructs me to "Jump into the Radio", which generates thoughts about sound itself.² I imagine the gallery wall as a white sheet of musical notation and the two apertures transform into vertical bar lines on the page—but without a time signature or staves to assign notes. This reminds me of John Cage's famous *4.22* as it is performed live and interpreted by different pianists. Each must interpret the time represented by each rest bar in the score; it is no longer, as the title suggests, a chronological instruction. Time is no longer measured or governed by a clock.

Furthermore, the image of rushing water over rocks in the left-hand video might evoke the hissing sound of white noise, another instance where normal musical notation would not be possible. Conversely, emanating from the right-hand image, we could imagine the aeolian harp like sound of wind whistling through the high-tension wires. Here we would indeed have a notable pitch and, coupled with the image of the stacked cables, it might even be possible to visualise the missing staves. Stepping back from the work, the space between the two apertures becomes a 'Mush Zone', a tension map of a mountainous journey between noise and pure tone.

In life we are always between two things: the last thing that we did and the next thing we are about to do. To be truly in the moment is to be 'in the Zone' an indeterminable duration between destinations. In the same way, Hinchliff's wall renders us temporarily unable to complete the journey. Instead, we are staring at the white void suspended in the immanent moment somewhere between time and space.

¹ The Physics Room Contemporary Art Space, *Domino Domino roomsheet* (Christchurch: The Physics Room Contemporary Art Space, 2020), n.p.

² Phoebe Hinchliff & Dead Air, "TWO-WAY", in Daniel Shaskey ed. *System to System* (Christchurch: Self Published, 2019), n.p.