

THE PHYSICS ROOM

CONTEMPORARY ART SPACE

Paper Spines

Melanie Oliver on the work of Daniel Shaskey in *Domino Domino*

Daniel Shaskey's *System to System* features printed sheets elegantly presented on a green moveable stand with enough hooks for eight documents to accumulate over the period of the show, a reference to the eight-track recording tape. There are a variety of texts, a few written by Shaskey and then others in collaboration with artists, including Phoebe Hinchliff and Luke Shaw who are exhibiting with Shaskey in *Domino Domino*.

Each of the text handouts can be simply folded to have a thin paper spine. On my first visit to the exhibition, I take a couple away, delighted that they are designed to be visible on a bookshelf, to live on beyond the gallery space and perhaps become part of a library. Alas when I retrieve them later that evening they had crushed in my bag and are now a little crumpled, much like the other art papers I tend to collect and hoard.

Within Shaskey's project, form and content are intended to have a certain feedback relationship, and as I read the texts I wonder if the idealism and fragility of the paper form may also exist in the written component. This durational publishing endeavor has been undertaken with verve and a clear framework in mind, yet with the very bold proclamations in some of the texts comes the danger they may get squashed if taken out into the world, or reformed like my flattened paper spines.

The first text in the series is *The Hammer and the Blade of Grass*. In this Shaskey outlines the beliefs that underpin *System to System* through a manifesto. The confident statements are about audience, format, content, banality, synchronicity, temporality, and modulation, as well as the idea of a collective "we". These topics are sweeping and complex, and one could spend a long time considering any one of them. Among the various claims, Shaskey states: "we exist as an interwoven community." Some of his observations might indeed be true, but I am a bit overwhelmed and struggle to follow, or to feel a comfortable part of the universal "we".

At this time in our history, it seems extremely complicated to think in broad terms about community: who does this exclude, in what ways, and why? The connectivity

Shaskey proposes seems at once somewhat individualistic and also assumes a level of order or togetherness that is a little out of sync with our current lives. Relationships at the best of times are messy and contingent, contradictory and selfish, with no sense of coherence or likelihood of following a structured system, and perhaps even more so in a post-Covid world.

The systems of *System to System* are the human system, the mechanical system, the virtual system, and the mythical system. I tend to think of these in a less logical way, as irregular, interrelated ecologies, or some sort of an oozing compost. But I don't need to agree with Shaskey's manifesto to see the value in this project, for what he has also done is create a platform or opportunity through which to start conversations and enable us to hear multiple voices. In the words of Céline Condorelli:

A structure of support is a reflexive, performative system—while the structural exists on the level of syntax and grammar, support works on the mode and the operational, both together beyond redemption or a charitable endeavor in a process which, by preceding representation, and working behind appearance, opens-up complex possibilities for multiple, simultaneous authorships.¹

The texts with fellow artists Hinchliff and Shaw elaborate and expand on their surrounding works: the first a beautifully descriptive poetic response, and the latter an enigmatic instructional text: “Walk around the pond for exactly twenty-one minutes.” These each open up the other artist's works and in doing so draw them together; the resonances between them become audible. It is a generous and effective gesture of collectivity.

And then there is *The Stone and the Sunken Pocket Watch*, an interview that Shaskey undertook with artist Ana Iti (Te Rarawa). It is a fascinating exchange that reveals some aspects of their different perspectives of the world, their diverse ways of approaching allegory and distinct relationships to objects. Both artists are engaged with making and have a shared love of specific materials, references, and ideas, but from divergent paths and with dissimilar aims. It is a real dialogue, with misalignment, varied understandings, and perhaps even subtle tension.

Shaskey's project initiates and amplifies this kind of discourse. Providing a space for two people to share opinions and unpack meaning in this way makes the lack of a durable spine inconsequential, and I will carefully keep this handout in my possession regardless, for the content certainly has backbone.

¹ Céline Condorelli, *Support Structures*, (New York: Sternberg Press, 2009), 29.