

In his chapter on tree houses in the 1973 bestselling eco-anthology *Shelter* Hugh Brown noted with interest his enforced 'co-existence with insects'. As ants marched through his tree dwelling, he decided to let them 'do their thing', only once intervening – by putting out a dirty saucer in the vain hope that they would 'eat it clean'. Torsten Lauschmann's work creates an opportunity for similarly intense scrutiny, moments where mechanically marching ideas seem to be deliberately diverted into a cul-de-sac in the middle of a street party. He dismantles natural phenomena into twitchily refracted Techno doodles; willing technology to do what he wants and become part of a body of objects in revolt. *Shelter* was a seminal bringing-together of ideas for the self-build generation (today reawakening like a hippy Kraken), in much the same spirit as *The Whole Earth Catalog* (published biannually between 1968 and 1972) attempted some kind of cosmic summation of mankind's endeavour. Unlike Apple founder Steve Jobs' bewildering assertion that *The Whole Earth Catalog* was a conceptual forerunner of Internet search engines, this kind of unwieldy venture is something to which Lauschmann brings a sympathetic 21st-century understanding. His meandering 'trans-Europe busking tour' as *Slender Whiteman* (2001–ongoing), with solar-powered music-making equipment, has often been documented in amusingly King Canute style. In one photograph we see the artist squatting in front of the Matterhorn in the classic electro musician's hunched pose, a background of awesome crags towering over him. In another image he looks out across a lazy Mediterranean sea from an improvised cliff-top stage.

Not to insinuate that Lauschmann is some sort of blessed-out shed dweller, but there is a Professor Brainstorm-ish character to his skewed endeavours and art career-taunting leaps from project to project. His lack of a singular art-making mode operates in tandem with a doubter's fascination with science's lofty structures. Take Lauschmann's quasi-Utopian viral jam *World Jump Day* (2006), for instance. As fictional academic 'Professor Hans Peter Niesward of the Institute of Gravitational Physics in Munich' he suggested that the world's orbit could be altered to halt global warming by a collective jump on 20 July 2006 at 11.39 am and 12 seconds – something that people appeared to want to believe and that Lauschmann, allowing himself a wry smile, describes as 'successful'. There is such a delicate balance of whimsy and optimistic longing in these works that confirms these subjects are close to Lauschmann's heart and that a shared experience is important to him. Critic Neil Mulholland has noted the Glasgow art scene's debt to his influence – not just effusive hyperbole when you sift through his projects with their variously democratic outpourings and myriad locations, their brows both high and low. Among a dizzying output in 2004 his show at Transmission Gallery, *Suburbia in 3D: Chasing Butterflies*, included the typically inclusive basement performance *WUNST*, where musicians and non musicians alike were invited to step up and play an unfamiliar instrument.

His recent explorations in new software have prompted a body of work that removes the need for him to appear; in his place haunting hybrids of digital and sculptural media assume an anthropomorphic presence. I'm no expert, but a programme called Cinema 4D sounds pretty daunting (an extra dimension anyone?), yet Lauschmann has used it and other tools to curiously human effect in his latest works. Further exploring his interest in science, Lauschmann uses the voice of Hungarian mathematician Paul Erdős in the unfussily titled *The Mathematician* (2006). With the wit of a Saul Steinberg illustration, the film uses letterforms to imagine a face; we have to join up the dots to make a head with a recumbent infinity sign for eyes. It's consciously like calling a constellation of stars 'the plough' when it looks more like a runaway shopping trolley: we put ourselves in a fragile state of simultaneously knowing how something functions and just guessing. The soundtrack of Erdős's implausible chuntering has a beguilingly similar effect. In the film he tells the story of Jack and Jill in a version where they are awarded new names: mystifyingly Sam and Joe. We know the 'process', but we still need to do some decoding to make a successful, but no less bewildering, connection. The strength of these kinds of links seems to be determined by a comically skewed system. Erdős' friends invented the Erdős Number to describe just such web of convoluted referencing. Erdős was represented by a zero, with direct collaborators on papers getting a one and so on. The theory eventually circulated that most mathematicians could have an Erdős Number of eight (I guess Lauschmann might already get a three or four). Like *World Jump Day*, the joyous and

improbable connection between people around the world is made apparent. Erdős mutated into Dean Martin and Julie London for Lauschmann's multiple-screen work, *Sway* (2007), in this year's Beck's Fusions. The numbers and letters gained three dimensional volume to dance in space, spinning, fragmenting and reassembling to the verses of a remix of Martin and London's song of the same name (1954) in a studiedly enhanced manner for its outdoor location in London's Trafalgar Square.

Music of a more unpredictable kind forms the core drama of *The Piecework Orchestra* (2007), an installation that uses the base units of music and rhythm as a starting-point. *The Piecework Orchestra* was part of the 'Locws' festival this year in Swansea, and Lauschmann's work was located in a Norwegian church there. It takes an enormous jumble of elements (from vacuum cleaners to drills) and harnesses them as a whimpering, whining orchestra. As the beats per minute increase, each sound becomes smaller and quieter, the pitter-pattering of curious electronic whispering. Like many of his pieces, the *Piecework Orchestra* performers are part of a modular system (the documentation of Swansea is subtitled '*performing Comfort Killed the Cat*', which suggests that this band has quite a repertoire), and as each musician makes his signature sound the camera zooms in as though capturing the nimble guitar-widdling hands of some obscure axe hero.

Lauschmann professes a suspicion about work that is 'fixed' or over-expunged of excess meaning, preferring instead to develop pieces each time they are reshowed until they seem to achieve some level of acceptability for him. Advances in the availability of domestic computer data storage devices have enabled artists such as Lauschmann to keep hours of moving image footage on a home computer – an ability that seems to invite endless tinkering. This restlessness is evidence of a questioning sensibility whereby multiple readings can be grasped momentarily, only to become part of another enfolding of meaning, as we delightedly watch Lauschmann knead and shape recurring elements for each new project.

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