

contact

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SUN (CREATIVITY AND ENVIRONMENT), by
Trevor Wishart and friends
Universal Edition, 1974 (£1.50)

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One of the major collapses during the past twenty years or so in Western society has been that of social communication. Our almost incredible change in general living standards seems to be the prime factor, and this has taken place in what I advisedly call the working class. For even today there are some who believe that this class still exists. It is apparently distinguished from other classes by a minimal standard of living, which includes, amongst other things, few possessions and a very delicate monetary situation. This statement of course immediately provides a situation for argument. The one thing which usually does emerge is that on average, even in the present financial crisis, our higher standards of living are being maintained.

I mention these points, because Trevor Wishart's book brings back very personal memories of early childhood in a mining community during the late 40s and early 50s. Life then was unnecessarily hard. Large families were prevalent, and children had to be self-sufficient from an early age. But they belonged to a very social community, based on their elders' appreciation of their fellow men. In times of trouble, one could always rely on the neighbour and for that matter almost anyone else in the community. A similar pattern also emerged on happier occasions, which were few. Everyone joined in the celebrations.

Creativity amongst the young was always actively encouraged, in any shape or form, although the surrounding environment did not exactly lend its charm to such activity. In his description of Carnival and Carnival Again, Wishart relates his finally successful, but initially difficult, task of organising a day's outdoor and indoor activities and entertainment on a modern council estate. Parents were encouraged to participate, and to help the children in their preparations for the occasion. The carnival included a procession of children in fancy dress, floats, open houses, displays of handicrafts, an art exhibition and a fete. The day ended with a children's party which took place in a social centre. Food was provided by parents, and in turn the children entertained them. Similar occasions often took place in our community, especially during the long summer holidays. But all that disappeared

when the 'rows' were torn down, and concrete jungles of flats replaced them. Now the children prefer to watch TV and the Mums are too suspicious and envious of their neighbours to risk anything but minimal contact. Jealous competition instead of healthy co-operation is the main issue of the day.

But suspicion seems to lurk everywhere, as demonstrated most effectively by a policeman's response to the performance of Bicycle Music by Wishart and his friends outside a concert hall in Leeds during the Triennial Festival. Inside, Aloys Kontarsky was about to embark on a Stockhausen programme. Bicycle Music consists of creating musical sounds with as many different parts of a bicycle as possible. One obvious example is to pluck the spokes on the wheels.

The book, which is divided into two parts, consists of various creative projects devised and mounted by Wishart and numerous friends between January 1970 and July 1972. There are also essays at the beginning of Parts 1 & 2 and at the end of the book. Between Parts 1 & 2 are two pages which contain some of Wishart's poems, thoughts for projects which were eventually planned and mounted and designs for clothing which he made and wore. There is even a recipe for apple and cucumber pie which sounds most delectable, but unfortunately no oven temperature is given!

I would describe the projects as a series of multiperson co-operative games. I use the mathematical sense of the term: a series of events that occur one after the other, the next event always being dependent on the previous one and on the decision made by that player. A 'player' can be a person or a team. One finds this type of game occurring in many social customs of preliterate societies. Three contemporary comparisons from thirteen described in the book are Found Objects Music, Rain Music and Pied Piper.

In Found Objects the performers search around outside for anything on which they can create and improvise sounds. This can develop into a multi-media operation through the aural-visual situation. A performance can also be given inside a concert hall using similar techniques, and eventually the audience are invited to participate and to integrate with the performers. Rain Music in Part 2 is an extension of Found Objects. Here a constructed object is placed outside in the rain. Performers, with vessels of different shapes, sizes and moulds, try to obtain as many different sounds as possible with rain. They compare these sounds with those made by the object in the middle - the 'cantus firmus'. A version is also given for indoor performance (hose and water) with optional audience. Additional variations are also given, such as the use of electronics to amplify the sounds.

Pied Piper is an environmental game in which a 'public' musical instrument is constructed, placed on a derelict piece of land, performed upon, then left for the locals to use in any way they wish. A comparison can be made with the Australian aborigines' way of creating musical sounds. They are very mobile nomads, travelling light and covering vast distances. They prefer to make use of each new

environment for their everyday needs. Musically they have developed complicated rhythms which they beat on pitched logs. These logs can weigh up to 20 pounds, and they make new ones at every encampment. They could hardly load themselves with such heavy objects on their travels just because the pitches were acceptable!

The essays have the running theme of the stifling effect on creativity and social integration caused by our industrialised society. The urgent message is to convince man that creativity must be a natural function in his life. Audience and performer are one, not separate entities. I must add that these cries are not original. There have been numerous occasions in history when man has tried to create freedom of the individual through artistic freedom. Revolutions and wars have followed, but other hierarchic systems have always replaced the old ones. Perhaps this will always be the fate of both man and the world. Or can Wishart's sincere hopes and aspirations become at last a permanency in our various cultures? I think that whether one agrees or disagrees with the book, it is well worth reading, since it gives one much food for thought on our present life style.

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