

Trevor Wishart's

# SPANNER

MIXED-MEDIA PARTICIPATORY PROJECT  
FOR A LARGE GROUP

(1977)

*Spanner* was first devised for and presented as part of the “*New Music in Action*” Summer School at the University of York, in 1977.

## OBJECT OF THE PROJECT

Given an arbitrary set of unusual aural and visual materials, and a set of strange instructions, devise a coherent performance using *all* of these. The project is really an exercise in creative or synthetic thinking and aims to break down conceptual barriers between the Arts, and between “Art” and “Reality”.

## PARTICIPANTS

For a large group (40+) of participants, aided and abetted by (at least) one organiser and (at least) one amateur.

## SPACE

The participants will be divided into groups of (c.) 8 people. So the number of participants, divided by 8, gives the number of working rooms required. In addition, a largish space is required for the initial storage of materials, and as a final performance-area for the final presentations. (The large space might double as one of the working rooms).

## MATERIALS

Before the project can begin, the participants will be asked to bring with them to the venue various visual and audio materials. For the sound materials, decide on a **format** (CD, minidisk, cassette-tape, computer-data, etc.) acceptable to all the participants, and ensure all recordings are delivered in that format. **Each group must have some means to play back the sound materials.**

There should also be a stock of general construction materials (such as might typically be available in a school, college, arts centre, or other venue) e.g. paper, card, pens, pencils, paints, glue, tape, string, cloth etc. etc.

**Musicians should bring their instruments.**

## DURATION

A whole day should be set aside for the preparation and presentation of the various group-projects.

## **OUTLINE OF THE PROJECT**

- 1) **MATERIALS AND SOUNDS ARE COLLECTED**, before the project, by each participant. The materials and sounds to be collected are specified in special lists (see later) and the assignment of material-collection (which participant brings what) should be masterminded by the Organiser.
- 2) **MATERIALS AND SOUNDS ARE ORGANISED AND ASSEMBLED** in the initial storage space.
- 3) **PARTICIPANTS ARE DIVIDED INTO SMALL GROUPS (of c. 8 PEOPLE)**
- 4) **MATERIALS ARE ALLOCATED TO EACH GROUP**. Allocation is done by a chance procedure. Each group must utilise *all* the materials allotted to it.
- 5) **INSTRUCTIONS ARE ALLOCATED TO EACH GROUP**. The instructions are also put together using a chance procedure. The group must (try to) interpret the instructions as a 'serious' gameplan (and not in a humorous way!). *Instruments and Voices may always be used.*
- 6) **AT THE END OF THE PROJECT, EACH GROUP PRESENTS ITS PERFORMANCE TO THE OTHERS.**

# DETAILS OF THE PROJECT

## 1) ORGANISING THE COLLECTION OF MATERIALS

**Materials, objects, sounds and texts** to be collected and brought to the event are specified in the **Materials Lists** (see later). Deciding which participant brings what is masterminded by the *organiser*, to ensure that each participant is able to (and does) bring the material allotted to her/him. Once the date of the project has been fixed, and the participants have selected themselves, the organiser sends a **Spanner letter/email** to each participant (shown on a later page) requesting s/he brings various items. Each letter requests the participant to bring *specific* materials, objects, sounds and texts. As you fill in each letter, tick off the items selected for that participant on the **materials lists**. This provides a check on what materials have been requested already. (Note especially that some materials have *more than one* box to tick, as several 'lots' of the same material are required). Depending on what **format** you chose for the sound materials, ensure you have enough sound systems (1 for each group).

Bear in mind the cost (and the heaviness or bulkiness) of the materials requested, the distance each participant must travel (and their mode of transport), and any other relevant factors, when allotting material-collection to participants. For example, it's easier to find out which participants *own* a wheelbarrow before deciding who should be asked to bring one. Similarly, it's unlikely that anyone will have 3 wheelbarrows, so 3 different people need to be asked to bring 1 wheelbarrow each (!). This preliminary organisation is vital. The project will only succeed if good quantities of diverse materials are brought to the event!

You may not have enough participants to collect all the materials on the list. In this case ...

- 1) Assemble large quantities of whatever materials you decide to use (rather than having small quantities of every material on the list).
- 2) Ensure you have the most varied categories of materials.

Or you may have too many participants for the materials on the list. In this case, add new materials to the list, bearing in mind...

- 1) Any new material must be easily accessible (e.g. cheap to buy, or easy to collect at home or work or elsewhere).
- 2) You need a large quantity of it.

**Also**, assemble yourself...

- 1) Quantities of glue, tape, string, (coloured) pens, pencils, paints, brushes, and miscellaneous materials (paper, card, cloth, etc. etc.)
- 2) **6 Large Hats** (rigid hats e.g. bowler hats, top hats, strong straw hats or etc.)

## SPANNER LETTER / EMAIL

Dear

Every participant in the **Spanner** project is being asked to bring 4 lots of materials to this project. The project will not work unless each participant bring with her/him what is asked for. Could you therefore please bring with you, to the project ....

**Visual Objects** .....

**Visual Materials** .....

**Sound Materials** .....

**Text** .....

**Please also bring a musical instrument (or a domestic object that makes sounds .... electrical, mechanical, human agitated).**

### **Notes on Recording Sound Materials...**

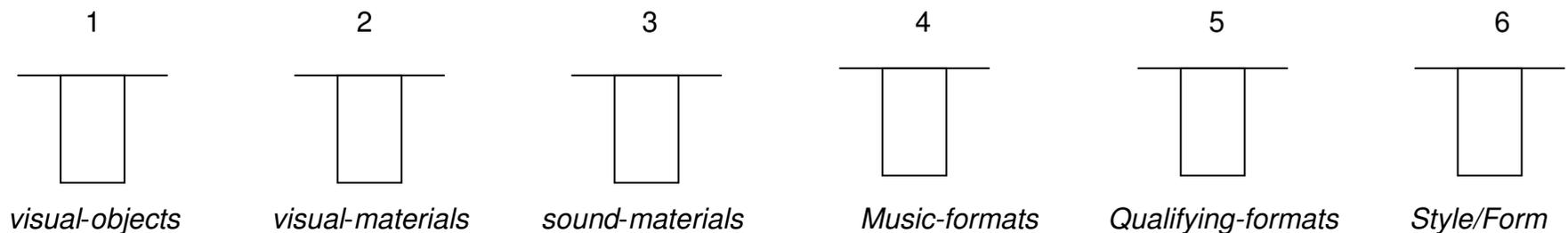
- a) Ensure you hold the microphone close to the source, to obtain a good level.
- b) But, don't distort the sounds!
- c) More than 5 minutes, please.
- d) **Don't compose!** No pitch patterns, rhythms etc. ... just sounds.
  
- e) **Bring your sound recordings in the form of a .....**
- f) \*Please bring a portable sound-system to play back your recordings.

(\*organiser delete where inappropriate)

**Spanner Project Organiser**

## 2) ORGANISING MATERIALS, SOUNDS & INSTRUCTIONS

- a) Assemble collected materials, objects, sounds & texts in the storage space. Put all the shoes together in one pile, all the bread together in another pile, gather all the wheelbarrows in the same place, put all the dog-sounds together in one pile, and so on.
- b) Make **two** copies of **each** set of **number tokens** (see later pages), mount them on card, and cut out the individual tokens. Don't mix up the two copies!!
- c) Use **one** set of *visual-object* number-tokens to label each set of *visual-objects* (e.g. Umbrellas might be number 1, wheelbarrows number 2, and so on). Use **one** set of *visual-materials* number-tokens to label each set of *visual materials*. Use **one** set of *sound-materials* number-tokens to number each set of *sound materials*.
- d) Put **the other sets** of number-tokens in three of the **large hats**. Put the *visual-object* number tokens in the 1<sup>st</sup> hat. Put the *visual-materials* number tokens in the 2<sup>nd</sup> hat. Put the *sound-materials* number tokens in the 3<sup>rd</sup> hat.
- e) Make **one** copy of **each** of the **Music Format**, **Qualifying Format**, and **Style/Form** tokens, mount them on card, and cut out the individual tokens.
- f) Place Music Format tokens in the 4<sup>th</sup> hat, Place Qualifying Format tokens in the 5<sup>th</sup> hat. Place Style/Form tokens in the 6<sup>th</sup> hat.



- g) Shake each hat to mix up all the tokens in it.

### **3) DIVIDING THE PARTICIPANTS INTO GROUPS OF c. 8 PEOPLE**

Each group should have around 8 people. Try to ensure a good mix within each group (e.g. if you have e.g. instrumentalists, or actors among the participants, ensure they are spread between the groups; if several institutions are cooperating, mix participants from different institutions; mix people who spend too much time thinking with people who act first and think later; manage managers ....)

Assign a working-room and a sound-playback system to each group.

### **4) USING THE HATS, ALLOCATE MATERIALS TO EACH GROUP**

- a) Decide how many types of visual objects each group will work with (e.g. if you have 20 types of visual objects, and 5 groups, you can allocate 4 types of visual objects to each group).
- b) Let us say that 3 objects are to be allocated to a group. Without looking at the numbers, draw three numbers from the Visual-Objects hat. If these are the numbers 3, 7 and 17, allot the visual objects labelled 3, 7 and 17 to that group. Continue, for each successive group, until all the visual objects have been allocated.
- c) Proceed in a similar fashion to allocate the Visual Materials, and the Sound Materials to the groups.
- d) Send the groups off to their rooms, with their allocated materials.

## 5) USING THE HATS, GIVE INSTRUCTIONS TO THE GROUPS

a) Make one copy of the **project sheet** (see later) for each group. Hand out one copy to each group.

b) For the first group...

- i) Pick a number-token from the **Music-Format** hat and read it out. The group should write this down at (A) on their project sheet.
- ii) Pick a number-token from the **Qualifying-Format** hat and read it out. The group should write this down at (B) on their project sheet.
- iii) Pick a number-token from the **Style/Form** hat and read it out. The group should write this down at (C) on their project sheet.
- iv) Select, at random, **any one of the texts** provided by the participants (and, if relevant, open it at an arbitrary page). Select one or two sentences of technically descriptive or critical prose and, leaving out any specific terms or storylines, read it out. (The aim is to find a text that might be used as generally descriptive of a 'performance' or activity in the widest possible sense ... it may take three or four attempts to find a passage that can be used in this way).

e.g. "A pair of lacquer-red vases above the bath help impose the discipline of symmetry so apparent throughout the house. Roland had the bath surround made up to his design, and asked for a blond wood to match the surround of the picture on the wall. He loves the picture now, but shamefacedly admits he once made his parents banish it to their attic as far too fusty and old-fashioned."

**might become ...**

"... Impose the discipline of symmetry so apparent round the house .... Far too fusty and old-fashioned."

e.g. "How much simpler it is to be lectured by Shirley Conran in "Lace" (Sidgwick & Jackson, £7.95). She turns out a very professional example of the lucrative school of designer-label fiction, full of snob appeal, brand names, luscious sex and the fashionable themes of incest and sisterhood."

**might become ...**

"...a very professional example of the lucrative school ... full of snob appeal, brand names, luscious sex and ... fashionable themes"

The group should write this down at (D) on their project sheet.

c) Repeat this process for each group.

d) Explain to all the groups that they must use **all** the materials allotted to them, plus (perhaps) their voices and any musical instruments they may play, and that they must try to interpret the instructions as a serious game plan ... and *not* in a humorous way.

## THE WORKING DAY

During the course of the day, the animateur should visit each group, paying special attention to those who fail to get started (conceptual, personal or other problems). Some groups think for too long - encourage them to try things out. Some people can't see the point of it all - you have to encourage and enthuse. Some people are too literal – encourage them to think laterally, or metaphorically, or to draw structural parallels with other things. Some people like to be in charge, but this doesn't always go down well with the rest of the group - try to ensure that everyone's ideas are at least considered. Also, try to divert participants from 'obvious' or mundane solutions ... have lots of suggestions, but be careful not to overrule the group, or (continually) particular members of the group ... try to develop the ideas from the group members themselves. At the same time groups should not be allowed to avoid problem-solving by "doing anything ... it doesn't really matter". The task is to transcend the instructions to achieve some kind of original synthesis and produce a coherent end-product.

## THE PERFORMANCES

The final performances should be presented **without** any 'explanation' of what is (supposed to be) going on, what is aimed at, or what the instructions were. The goal should be to make a performance that is coherent in its own right, and regardless of the process that brought it into being.

# PROJECT SHEET

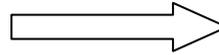
USING ALL THE MATERIALS YOU HAVE BEEN ALLOCATED and, if you need them, materials such as card, glue, string, paint etc. provided by the organiser), and possibly voices or musical instruments, YOU ARE ASKED TO DEVISE .....

(A) .....

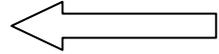
(B) .....

.....

EITHER  
in the manner of



OR  
in the manner of



.....

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.....

.....

having the following STYLE, MOOD or FORMAT ....

(C) .....

bearing in mind the following ....

(D) .....

.....

.....

EACH GROUP WILL PRESENT ITS PRODUCTION TO THE OTHERS, at the end of the day, WITHOUT PRIOR EXPLANATION