



Russell's Law

Article Author:

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Ted Percy on information books which... well, do things.

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Charles 'Pee Wee' Russell was probably the most original jazz clarinettist ever - his playing a perfection of harmonic nailbiting surprises. When, in an oft-quoted anecdote, a fellow musician congratulated him with 'that solo was brilliant?', Russell, with a perceptivity worthy of his namesake 'Bertrand?', replied, 'No, it was *unusual*'.

Surrounded, as I have been, by piles of pop-up, a phalanx of fold-out and whole sequences of see-through, stick-in and cut-up material, it's been all too easy to confuse the brilliant with the unusual. The application of Russell's law has been very necessary as I've tried to establish what information books which 'do things' *achieve* by doing them. Notice I use the word 'books'... for what follows is a look at objects that are books first and foremost - self-contained, sequentially arranged between a front and back, shelvable and re-usable. Kits and games in bags and boxes don't come into it.

One of the things that books with moving parts can do is show how things work. Coincidentally, two of the most approachable here are about aeroplanes. Angela Royston and Colin King's **Plane** (paper engineering by Mark Hiner, Frances Lincoln, 0 7112 0822 0, £8.99) has flaps-a-plenty to show what's behind the many smooth facades featured in air travel - especially the tiny toilet and mini-kitchen. Its basic illustration, though, isn't all that inspiring and a more lasting impression is made by Ken Wilson-Max in his **Little Red Plane** (David Bennett Books, 1 85602 226 9, £7.99). Here, chocks really do come away and the 'plane flies', free of apostrophe, behind buildings and through clouds before being safely landed and refuelled by the reader. Great fun for two at a time. More complex, with helicopter, fire engine and space shuttle is Stephen Biesty's **Incredible Pop-Up Cross-Sections** (eng. by Iain Smyth and Heather Vohs, Dorling Kindersley, 0 75135 342 6, £9.99). Biesty's draughtsmanship is meticulously demonstrative and the text is well-planned so that all the devices used (pull-tabs, vertical and horizontal pop-ups, rotors and slides) amplify it to tell us more about the machines than two dimensions could.

An old favourite of mine is Jan McHarry's **The Great Recycling Adventure** (ill. Edmond Davies and Piers Sandford, Watts, 0 7496 1850 7, £9.99), which uses flaps, tabs and rotors to illustrate fancifully and with great humour the recycling processes for glass, paper, metal and plastic. Here also we find these devices used to reveal parts of the text initially hidden from the reader and to provide the extra surprises which are an important feature of moving-part books. More surprises and adventures in Robert Crowther's **Pop-Up Olympics** (Walker, 0 7445 3734 7, £12.99) to which Bob Hull awarded 13.2 out of 10 in **BfK's** March issue. No apologies for reminding you about it (or about Bob's rib-tickling review) for this is Leap Year and, like it or not, we're all in for the Atlanta High Jump. See the vaulting vicar cross the bar, runners overtake on the home straight and thrill to the Turkish tearaway in this antidote to sports books. Its simple engineering and humour betoken a collection with instant appeal and relative long life.

Thirteen years ago Jonathan Miller and David Pelham's **The Human Body** (eng. by Vic Duppa-White and David Rosendale, Cape, 0 224 04210 6, £12.99) came out - literally. It's a classic of the genre - an anatomy textbook in its own right and the next best thing to human vivisection. The working model of the heart, with accompanying text, is alone worth the price *provided the text is read*, for it's all too easy to be seduced by the moving parts which are, after all, only illustrations and, on their own (as George Hunt observes in **BfK** November '95) are 'ephemeral'. Despite its alluring subject the good Doctor's **Facts of Life** - again with David Pelham (eng. John Strejan, James Diaz, David Rosendale and David Pelham, Cape, 0 224 04680 2, £12.99) - lacks the impact of its all-body predecessor, probably because it's in irreproachable taste, but the fertilisation spread with its crash-diving sperm is memorable.

The lift-flap's potential to show 'What's inside?' makes it a natural device for Body Books. In **Your Senses** (0 7112 0736 4) and **Getting Better** (0 7112 0911 1) both from Frances Lincoln at £8.99 each, Angela Royston and Edwina Riddell show beginner-explorer's bits of their insides, how they work and how they go wrong: 'Lift up the flap to see how Sarah's tummy is pushing up everything she has eaten.' These two graft painlessly onto the initial keystages of NC Science. A look at the senses in greater depth is afforded by Jenny Bryan's **Your Amazing Brain** (ill. Graeme Chambers, Joshua Morris, 1 85724 189 4, £8.99) which uses successive transparent overlays to dissect and rebuild cranial contents. The transparencies - not whole pages but panels inlaid into robust card - show the structure and the accompanying text - straightforward and accurate - explains the function. This, and its companion **Miracle of Birth** (1 85724 985 2) demonstrate what can be done with careful planning of text and an unhysterical approach to the added overlay device - nice to see that the impressive array of consultants has resulted in something really useful.

The benchmark for effective see-throughs was set some years ago by Gallimard with their 'First Discovery' series which, published in the UK by Moonlight at £6.99 each, now extends to over 50 titles. These use a small square format with a spiral spine in a hard case to provide ease of use, and, at their best, employ the transparencies to show change within a given situation. For example, in the recent **Plant Atlas** (ill. Sylvaine Perols, 1 85103 228 2) and **Animal Atlas** (ill. René Mettler, 1 85103 229 0), when a transpage is turned a flower turns into a fruit or an animal is placed in its habitat. Clever stuff, dead simple to use and understand, very durable, quite cheap and really pleasant. Adding a considerable dash of humour to this mix is Tony Ross's **Animals** (1 85103 201 0) in the 'First Discovery' Art collection. Here insight into artists' minds is provided by an enlightening dissection of artistic achievements from Lascaux to Giacometti - all properly documented at the back.

And, talking of painters, who better to talk of than the Impressionist of the Year. In **A Walk in Monet's Garden** (Frances Lincoln, 0 7112 0961 8, £14.99) Francesca Crespi has delivered an open-out, set-up tableau of the famous Giverny acres with Claude himself dabbling away by the lilypond. The whole thing is a delight to assemble and look at - an engineering lesson in itself - but there's not a lot about the man or his paintings in the little booklet that accompanies the model. It's fortunate then, that the tableau's publisher has produced Carole Armstrong's **My Sticker Art Gallery - Monet** (0 7112 0962 6, £4.99). Here you get a good selection of the master's finest. Some are reproduced straight onto the page and others onto stickers that can be chosen to match the clued frames on the pages, which are initially blank. A Monet scrapbook? Yes, but more than this, for the stickers really are as re-usable as claimed so the discovery experience is repeatable. It seems to me that this is a really good way of encouraging second and third looks at subject and treatment in preparation for an eventual look at the real thing. Next stop l'Orangerie!

The fold-out handily provides a bigger than normal page in a book. Viking's 'World Unfolds' titles at £8.99 have one page each, but what a page! - seven feet long and double-sided. The idea is you unfold it and learn as you go and the Big Picture gradually establishes itself, with many minor illustrations and lots of (very) small-print captions. **Aircraft** (ill. Martin Woodward, 0 670 86228 2) and **Dinosaurs** (ill. Steve Kirk, 0 670 86230 4) unfold horizontally, while **Human Body** (again!), (ill. Debra Woodward, 0 670 86232 0) and **Skyscrapers** (my favourite), (ill. Stephen Conlin, 0 670 86229 0) do it up and down. When fully extended their natural habitat is the wall, but then you lose the other side and the case becomes too heavy to hang. I wouldn't give them long (despite their length) in a family or classroom but they're a good way of getting a really big picture. Added luminescence distinguishes the foldout in Anita Ganeri's **Creatures That Glow** (Gollancz, 0 575 06147 2, £12.99). Actually this isn't so much a fold-out as a tear-out - it's called a poster - which you hang in a dark place to observe the phosphorescent outlines of some deepest-sea fishes. Very

much a one-off gimmick, this, and non-swimmers shouldn't switch the light off.

Holes in pages are nothing new - the autograph **Tristram Shandy** probably had several - but they're used to excellent effect in A J L'Hommiedieu's **Children of the Sun** (Child's Play, 0 85953 931 8, £4.99). This is a spatial catalogue of our solar system done in the form of a cardboard concertina. We journey from the sun to Pluto, finding each planet in its proper sequence and observing details of its vital statistics as we look at both shiny and black sides. A cardboard orrery, almost.

Then there are books you can listen to. **A Young Person's Guide to Music** (by Neil Ardley, music by Poul Rouders, Dorling Kindersley, 0 7513 5320 5, £16.95) was reviewed in the March '96 **BfK**. It's just a book with a CD stuck in the front. Text and disc interact most satisfyingly, but there's a real danger of the disc slipping out irretrievably. My solution is a central perforation of the disc-holder with a treasury tag through it. The other phono-book has a disc permanently attached and a cardboard amplifier to demonstrate the principles of Edison's original record player. Again, we've seen and loved it before, and it's won a prize or two. It contains lots of optical devices as well as a compass. The dense text repays gradual exploration and the 'devices' stand lots of wear. Yes, it's **The Most Amazing Pop-Up Science Book** by Jay Young (Watts, 0 7496 1481 1, £14.99).

Perhaps the most ambitious multi-dimensional effort of recent years is Kingfisher's Gallimard-derived 'Kaleidoscope' (that word again!) series, which cost £12.99 each. At the moment there are about a dozen of them spread evenly through the popular arts and sciences, and inside their board-cased spiral bindings these books do all kinds of tricks. I've looked particularly at two. First, **The Living Forests** (1 85697 283 6), which won the Earthworm Award and the Peter Kent Conservation Book Prize. It folds out, tears off, flap-lifts, has tactile bark-prints, cutaways, see-throughs and a sheet of stickers as it introduces picturesque aspects of the sylvan scene from Arctic to Equator as reinforcement of its conservation message. It's a great appetite-wetter but its arrangement seems arbitrary and much of the paper is so desperately glossy that it's hard to read in a less than perfect light. In all, it doesn't reward the sustained attention span, so bitty is it. If the stickers had made a significant contribution to the experience, I'd worry that they're definitely not re-usable. In contrast, **The Art of Painting** (1 85697 279 8), which does all the tricks, too, is logically arranged, developmentally and technique by technique, and the stickers are definitely contributory to the sense, which of course does mean that the book's less effective when they're stuck. Shiny paper again, much of it black, doesn't help, but the impression here is of a definite treatise rather than the mish-mash of **Forests**.

One device we haven't yet featured is the Rip-Off. Examples are, regrettably, all too common. Not unusual and by no means brilliant; Russell's law finds against them. One such is **The Earth in Three Dimensions** by Keith Lye (Electric Paper, 1 897584 04 0, £14.99). A handsome executive-style, press-studded cardboard folder opens to reveal - a revolving terrestrial globe! Wow! Whatever next!? Very little, actually. An 'atlas' fits into a wallet inside the folder and that's it. Trouble is the atlas isn't an atlas, the axis isn't an axis and the globe isn't globular, not does it contain much information and the most entertaining thing you can do with it is watch the paper globe collapse when you shut the folder. Definitely end of story.

Well, they're all unusual and some approach brilliance. What they all have in common is that they *positively invite and reward curiosity* and they're fun to play with. I think that, when done well, the sort of physical interactivity they demonstrate can do a lot for information-provision. Also, most importantly, here are productions that can often reward skills beyond those of just decoding print and pictures. This immediately gives them a wider reader-scope than their more conventional cousins and an enhanced potential for use amongst those with learning difficulties. Now, looked at conventionally, Pee Wee Russell had learning difficulties - and how! - but, by heavens, he was brilliant, no question.

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