

Foreword

Gordon Pask was an amazing man with an amazing mind.

When he died on March 28, 1996, he left an extraordinary body of work and a study (room) that those who knew him recognised as both his archive and a map of his brain and person.

For a decade, this archive was kept first in a shed in his widow, Elizabeth's, garden in Kingston-upon-Thames (on the edge of London), and then in his daughter, Amanda Heitler's, family home now in Richmond, Yorkshire, UK. But Amanda and her family realised this was not an ideal arrangement for an archive of such importance, and former students searched for an institution that would provide a more appropriate home, albeit that, unfortunately, the study could not be recreated as an installation. The Institute for Contemporary History at the University of Vienna proved to be this institution and the archive was moved to Vienna (a city of which Pask was particularly fond) in the autumn of 2006, where it sits next to the archive of Heinz von Foerster, Pask's great friend and mentor.

The archive, in its new home, is formally announced on 16 November 2007. The editors decided there should be a book introducing Pask's work to mark this event, and to provide some sort of pathway into Pask's work in order to make the archive material more accessible; and assumed the task of compiling and editing this book. There were already plans for a Reader, complete with commentaries by four of Pask's former students/colleagues, Barnes, Glanville, Pangaro and Scott, so we contacted the other three, Barnes, Pangaro and Scott, to collect together some of the introductory Pask texts and evaluations they had already written. The chapters in this book therefore consist, in the main, of texts that have already been published (although the authors have sometimes slightly reworked them) in our various efforts to make Pask's work, all too often difficult to comprehend, approachable.

There are, however, texts that are new: Graham Barnes' lecture recently given in Zagreb; Paul Pangaro's on the US archive (specially written for this volume); and Ranulph Glanville's discussion of Pask's early book "An Approach to Cybernetics", which has only previously appeared in German translation.¹ Furthermore, Albert Mueller, of the Institute for Contemporary History at the University of Vienna, and Susanne Kratochwil and Karl H Mueller of WISDOM, the Vienna City Statistical Office, have between them written two further introductory texts to the Vienna archive.

These texts have been articulated in the following manner. There are three sections. The first and longest introduces Pask's work. The second discusses the two archives—that in the

¹ It was published as "Lerner ist Interaktion: Gordon Pask's 'An Approach to Cybernetics'" in Baecker, D (ed) (2005) "Schlüsselwerke der Systemtheorie" Wiesbaden, Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften

USA, and the newly located Viennese one. The third section contains a brief biography and as good a list of publications as we have been able to assemble to date (we know it is inaccurate and awaits authoritative modification by the Vienna archivist).

The first section starts with Glanville's critical essay on Pask's early book, "An Approach to Cybernetics". By means of the selection and re-organisation of quotes, this uncharacteristically terse text is argued to explicitly foreshadow all Pask's later pre-occupations. This is followed by Scott's extensive and thorough introduction to Pask (written for the Cybernetic Newsletter shortly after Conversation Theory had been formed), and by Glanville's shorter piece written as an entry for the luminaries section of the International Society for Systems Science (formerly the Society for General Systems Research—of which Pask was at one time President). This piece is included in part for its annotated reading list. Barnes's recent lecture, reworked as a written piece, is published for the first time: it paints a broad picture of Pask's views on education and mind (understanding), relating this to philosophical tradition. Pangaro's discussion of THOUGHTSTICKER, a general term for Pask's technology for assembling the topics to be learnt in some field into what he calls an "Entailment Mesh", follows: Pask and Pangaro collaborated on several versions of this suite of programs and this is as near an authoritative account as there is. The last two pieces offer more general views. Glanville's "And He was Magic" talks of Pask's position in cybernetics, and of the implications of his theories for human behaviour; while de Zeeuw, who created a special place for Pask in his major research project "Support, Survival and Culture" at the University of Amsterdam, explains the manner in which Pask so magnificently exemplified all that is best in the best way of acting in the European Academic Tradition.

The second section introduces the two archives: the newly opened one in Vienna, and Paul Pangaro's one held in trust for Pask in the US by Pangaro himself. First in this section, Albert Mueller and Karl H Mueller, who are (in turn) the archivist for the Vienna archive, and the chairman of the Foerster Society, describe the material in the archive, the story of how it came to Vienna, and how it is being handled. This is followed by Susanne Kratochwil and Karl Mueller's preliminary analysis of patterns in Pask's publications. Although the data on which this analysis is based are neither complete nor entirely correct, there are strong trends which refinement of the data are only likely to modify relatively slightly. This piece also playfully raises the question of the interpretation of statistical results. Finally, Pangaro talks of how the American archive came to be developed and maintained, and the many miles it has travelled: it is almost a portmanteau archive!

The third and final section consists of Glanville and Scott's brief biography, modified from a

version originally appearing in the Commemorative issues of *Kybernetes*,² from which several other items are taken; and Scott and Glanville's List of Publications (developed out of Glanville's earlier *Festschrift* for Gordon Pask,³ which although flawed must be considered authoritative, at least until the Viennese archive corrects it).

To avoid confusion, we have chosen generally to follow English usage (rather than, for instance, American): Pask was English and wrote according to English usage, himself. Even though we have the List of Pask's Publications, we have left the original references in each paper: sometimes they were specially tuned to a particular purpose. Acknowledgements of sources and previous publication appear immediately after this Foreword. We are grateful to the publishers of earlier versions of these texts for so readily giving their permission, where they owned the copyright, to republish. We are also grateful to the Heinz von Foerster Society and edition echoraum, and their joint publishing project staff, for supporting our effort and the physical act of crating and publishing this tangible book.

The reader might wonder why the book focusses on work which reached its peak 20 years before Pask's death, rather than later work. The texts that have been chosen indeed reflect most strongly what we believe is Pask's magnum opus, "Conversation Theory". This radical, cybernetic theory of education and communication could be said to have taken form during the period 1970–1975, the period during which Second Order Cybernetics—of which it is a key component—was developed. Pask's later work was concerned with an attempt to generalise Conversation Theory called Interaction of Actors Theory. We speak for all the authors represented here when we say that we consider the work complex, incomplete and, probably, aiming beyond the currently comprehensible. Nevertheless, some will question the choice not to go beyond Conversation Theory, seeing it as an inappropriate limitation. However, time can resolve this question since the archive makes available Pask's largely unpublished writings on Interaction of Actors Theory, thus for the first time making serious scholarly exegesis possible.

As mentioned earlier, Barnes, Glanville, Pangaro and Scott make up the team that is working on a Pask Reader, in which selected papers will be reprinted, with commentaries we will write, thus giving Pask's work, again, its own voice with which to sing to us, against an orchestration we hope will appear sympathetic, knowledgeable and appropriate. This new volume will also contain a much more detailed account of the Viennese archive, as it settles into use.

² Scott, BCE and Glanville, R (2001) "Gordon Pask Remembered and Celebrated, Parts 1 and 2" *Kybernetes* vol 30 issues 5 and 6, and 7 and 8

³ Glanville, R (ed) (1993) "Gordon Pask, a *Festschrift*" *Systems Research* vol 10 no 3

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