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Introduction

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This double issue of *Kybernetes* completes a memorial collection in honour of the late Andrew Gordon Speedie Pask, Professor, Doctor of Philosophy and Doctor of Science.

Pask was a remarkable man in many ways. On those who met him he left a lasting impression: eccentric and brilliant. On those who worked with him, he left a deeper impression. He was both caring, supportive and patient (the qualities of a gentleman), and irascible, and yet inclined to adumbrate all he could under the umbrella of his own theories. That grand old man of cybernetics, Heinz von Foerster (whom Gordon considered his mentor), calls him "the cybernetician's cybernetician" and talks of him, in some awe, as a genius who lived on another intellectual plane than we mere mortals.

His work inevitably, and in many ways, reflects the man. He was a pioneer whose astonishing perceptiveness led him to be able to see through clouds of confusion to the simply obvious beyond. He was a prophet, but also a doer who could make his prophecies come true.

Amongst the gifts he offered us are the self-adaptive computer program (which he pioneered with his lifelong colleague, Robin McKinnon-Wood, at the start of the 1950s and which is a prerequisite for learning in a computer); chemical and other non-electronic computers; ways of exploring styles of learning, and how they influence other behaviours; an epistemology of the learnable and its realisation in the vast meshes of knowable topics forming the matter of any subject to be learnt, now roughly and on a vast scale expressed (albeit unwittingly) in the Internet; a vision of communication between individuals which respects difference and the individuality of understanding (conversation theory) with its reification into a formal system realised in part in Pask's own computer systems; the extension of this into interaction of actors theory (in which conversations happen, but without beginning or end) and

a calculus for the inclusion of the newly discovered (the protolanguage, Lp) and last (but not least) novels, lyrics, cartoons, shows.

When he died, on 29 March 1996, he left a far bigger hole in people's lives than he would, perhaps, have imagined. For the last several years of his life he was in bad health and seemed to feel that his efforts and achievements had gone unnoticed. Of course, there was evidence to the contrary: the award from his alma mater, Downing College in Cambridge University, of the degree ScD was a remarkable achievement. This is a degree that recognises achievement of the highest standard over a long period (it is not honorary); only one other living person had been awarded this honour. Gordon's work was considered so wide-ranging that it had to be examined under two university departments (Psychology and Computer Science). Gordon was indeed delighted when he heard that his submission was successful but those close to him at that time know that his great pleasure was not about personal glory but rather for the fact that his achievement placed the discipline of cybernetics firmly in the heartland of conservative, respectable academe.

Equally, the birth of his first grandchild, Nicholas, brought him enormous delight in his family life. And developments in one of the visible aspects of the intellectual world, the Internet, demonstrated the correctness of his theorising and practice, even if it did not, perhaps, acknowledge a progenitor.

Pask was a polymath. He started as a mining engineer, and the engineer's approach and understanding are never far below the surface in his work. But he was also always a cybernetician. In this issue, within the context of the transdisciplinary pursuits of cybernetics (and systems) you will encounter, through the offerings of the authors: geology; medicine; biology; the theatre and cabaret; the fine arts of drawing, painting and sculpture; psychology; architecture; education and educational technology; sociology; androgology; physics; chemistry and pharmacology; cosmology; management science; computer sciences; engineering; logic; mathematics; the philosophy of science; ethics; aesthetics; theology; psychiatry and psychotherapy; music and poetry: and much, much love. You will discover wonder and magic and beauty – words that we have only recently been able to use to describe academic work, words we have become able to use in part because of the life and work of Gordon Pask.

Pask was also a maverick (his own term for himself) and a misfit. Nowadays, in an age of (still) ever increasing specialisation, the polymath is, naturally, a misfit. But Pask's appreciation of the importance of drama, both inherent in the arrangement of ideas and concepts, and in their presentation in public (lecturing is the most difficult of all one man acts) made him seem difficult in an era where a sort of conformist greyness was to be admired. In fact, the drama was not simply a mannerism: it was an honest reflection of inner structure. Pask's presentation in this way (amongst others) reflected the content he was presenting.

And Pask was a teacher. He had a wish to communicate in a manner that helped the development of every individual he met. To see him interact with a waitress in a restaurant or a fruit seller at a market, was to see a teacher, drawing each person out and bringing to them (without their knowing it) wisdom and insight. From the most confused and struggling student of architecture (a field which Gordon had a great feeling for^[1]) to the most erudite fellow academic, Gordon was always, but almost always unnoticeably, a teacher. What he taught was those wonderful insights that cybernetics gave him.

Where Gordon did achieve academic recognition, whether in himself or through his students (to whom he was devoted), his delight was rarely turned towards himself. He was a cybernetician. He would, indeed, wear various hats (as he liked to put it), but the central and dominant one was the hat of cybernetician. His delight in recognition was in the recognition given to and gained by cybernetics. His

commitment to cybernetics was profound and complete: he would and did serve in any capacity that he believed might advance the subject, often at his own expense.

It is in order to try to capture some of this that we have compiled and edited this collection. We have been fortunate that the response to our requests for commemorative writings has been so widely and generously given by his colleagues, friends and family.

We looked to cover the range and depth of his academic endeavour, and, through the generosity of response Pask's work has engendered in so many other outstanding workers, we are able to present a collection that does this, and which acknowledges the work's originality, influence and significance.

We looked, too, to indicate something of his person (although this is not a set of biographical studies), and, again, the generosity of students, friends and family (including academics) has enabled us to present the man, in and through appreciations of his work, but also in and through appreciations of his person and his acts.

Thus, as well as Gordon's intellectual achievements and influence, this collection bears testimony to Gordon the man. In his youth, he was dazzlingly brilliant, a generous and attractive friend and companion. In his prime, he was *tout formidable*: accomplished, witty, perceptive, charming. In later years, he had an elfin gravitas, showed a true humanity and humility, was open, kind, loving and patient. Perhaps only his nearest and dearest witnessed how he suffered in illness and the times when he could be brusque and irritable. They also saw how bravely he faced the world, which so often failed to give his work the recognition that, in his heart of hearts, he knew it deserved.

We were fortunate, in our work in preparing these issues, in the support we received from almost all we asked for contributions and from the family Gordon left, his widow Elizabeth, daughter Amanda, son in law Jonathan, grandson Nicholas, daughter Hermione and granddaughter Olivia May. This issue grew, in some ways, out of the wonderful memorial event to Gordon's life that his family gave on 8 June 1996 at the Architectural Association in London. We thank all these people, and others unnamed.

As to the process of preparing this memorial, we cover that in the Afterword that appears at the end of this collection.

We are honoured that it has fallen to us to be the medium through which so much love and affection, and so much intellectual and personal delight can express itself both as a tribute to the achievement and memory of Gordon Pask, and as a beacon lighting the way ahead for the many paths that stem from him.

Bernard Scott, Ranulph Glanville*Guest Editors*

Note

1. 1.

Glanville once reckoned that of 12 successful students Pask had at Brunel University, eight were architects and six came from the Architectural Association, where Gordon had taught and where he always found a welcome and a home.