

Listening

Ben Sweeting

Ranulph often emphasised the importance of listening as part of conversation (Fantini van Ditmar & Glanville, 2013; Glanville, 2001). Where we are overly focused on what we are saying, we miss the significance of what is said by others. This is partly an ethical matter, concerning our respect for others, and partly a practical one, as without listening conversation cannot occur. Indeed, as Ranulph has noted, ethical qualities such as respectfulness are required in order to sustain a conversation, something which unites practical and ethical considerations (Glanville, 2004; see also Sweeting, 2018).

Listening is a key part of what makes conversation creative. This is made especially clear in the analogy Ranulph developed between Gordon Pask's (1976) conversation theory in cybernetics and characteristic design activities such as sketching (Glanville, 2007, 2009). Part of the distinctive quality of sketching is that it is driven not just by the way we draw but also by the way we look at what we draw. When we return to a drawing, we often see something not previously intended in it and to which we can respond through more drawing (and so on). When sketching, designers quickly move between these two modes, alternating between looking (listening) and drawing (speaking). This process takes a circular form and is often thought of as a conversation that designers hold with themselves.¹ While we tend to focus on the making of the marks that compose a drawing, it is the way we reinterpret the marks that we have already made that helps us to create new possibilities and reframe the questions we are exploring. Through this, design, much like conversation, leads us to places we did not expect or foresee. It is important, therefore, for design students to learn not only how to produce drawings to present their ideas but also how to develop creative ways in which to look at (listen to) what they make. Similarly, in face-to-face conversation, listening is not only a matter of respectfulness but also what sustains a conversation and moves it on. We often think of speaking as the creative part of conversation. Yet, we generally know what we are going to say when we speak, whereas when we listen to what others say (and also when we listen to ourselves) we are always constructing a new understanding. We can even see speaking (and drawing) as part of listening (and looking). Just as designers make models with which they can explore new ideas not just to represent existing ones,² so too we can learn to speak in ways that help us to listen rather than only to express our ideas.

Listening was a key part of Ranulph's manner as my PhD supervisor.³ Many of our meetings would take place sitting outside at a café at the back of the Royal Festival Hall, where we would meet after Ranulph had arrived from Portsmouth to nearby Waterloo station and before he headed to the RCA or elsewhere. I would often find myself talking and talking and, whenever I talked myself out, Ranulph would somehow set me going again with some simple comment or by putting something I had said into question for me to respond to. This took on a more intense form on the few times I went to Portsmouth to meet Ranulph at his home. We would have tea or lunch with Ranulph's partner Aartje who would ask me the sort of simple, direct questions that are the hardest to answer (such as "what is your PhD about?"). I would then speak about my research to Aartje while Ranulph would quietly listen. In this careful listening Ranulph was primarily doing something that is important to all teaching: taking care to understand what I was doing and what I understood of this so he could better advise and challenge me in my work. There was also something more to this in the specific

¹ This understanding of design in terms of conversation is relatively common. See for instance Schön (1983/1991), who characterizes design as a "reflective conversation with the situation" (p. 76).

² See the distinction between "models of" and "models for" (Glanville, 2005).

³ My PhD research was funded by an AHRC doctoral scholarship and supervised by Ranulph and Neil Spiller at UCL (Sweeting, 2014a).

context of design research. Ranulph's listening to me also encouraged me to listen to what I was saying and doing. In this way I came to a deeper understanding of my own project and its possibilities. Similarly to the way that the importance of the conversational setting of design tutorials is as a performance of design's conversational structure (Sweeting, 2014b), Ranulph's listening demonstrated the kind of reflective conversational thinking that is so important in design and in practice based design research.

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