John Forester does ____.

In these three chapters, excerpted from Forester’s book, Planning in the Face of Power, listening, designing and understanding planning as communicative action are discussed. These three themes relate to Forester’s critical theory on how planning can overcome its inherent obstacles to become a more democratic practice.

Summary

Chapter 7—Listening: The Social Policy of Everyday Life
This chapter addresses the importance of critical listening in the planning field, but the author notes how the skill can also apply to everyday life. Five points about what to do when listening are presented: 1) being attentive 2) questioning 3) exploring meaning and implications 4) acting within a shared language and encouraging the speaker to do the same to prevent illusion, self-deception and solipsism 5) showing respect to the speaker.
Forester concludes the chapter with the claim that listening is a political necessity, a skilled performance and a political action.

Chapter 8—Designing as Making Sense Together
Forester explores the idea of designing as a “deeply social process of making sense together” that uses practical conversation as its medium. To Forester, the conventional view that design is a formal search through a solution space of alternatives is flawed, and in response he presents his thoughts on how form is given by various actors having a “conversation.” Through these various and often multiple practical conversations that take place, planners, architects and residents make sense together in a certain context and in relation to one another while at the same time giving form in the work of designing.

Chapter 9—Understanding Planning Practice
A critical theory of planning is presented in Chapter 9, which Forester claims is what planners need when they have difficulty formulating problems, anticipating outcomes and keeping in mind what is important. He describes his theory as practical and ethically instructive, and as one that allows us to understand what planners do as communicative action. In addition, he claims that “a critical theory of planning must …suggest how existing social and political-economic relations …operate to distort communications” (141). Planners must communicate effectively for two reasons: they have little formal power or authority and the public interest they serve is often the victim of private or class interests that use distorted communication practices (and, planners also face distorted communication as well). Planning practice should be seen as communicative action that allows true alternatives to be revealed, false expectations to be corrected, inquiry fostered and political responsibility, engagement and action to be spread.

No data was used in the article, and logical arguments were used to build and support his theories. Forester does recognize counter arguments, often addressing them first and then using them to differentiate his arguments.