Traversing the distance between known and unknown: Fastening one's seatbelt in postgraduate creative-practice research supervision

A.-Chr. Engels-Schwarzpaul

AUT University, Auckland

Abstract

Practice-based research in art and design is only partially amenable to discursive explication. In an educational framework that relies on notions of master/student relationships, in which the former is supposed to pass knowledge on to the latter, this fact often creates anxieties for both.

From Jacques Rancière's point of view, the master's ignorance is important for the student's emancipation. In his book on The Ignorant Schoolmaster, *Joseph Jacotot, he claims that learners become emancipated through their own activities of observing, retaining, repeating, verifying, doing, reflecting, taking apart and combining differently. In support of this* method of the riddle, *the supervisor can teach best by not knowing the subject matter but, instead, providing positive constraints to help keep the researcher on her own path, acknowledging that no two orbits are alike.*

For any researcher to be able to discover anything new, she has to learn the different languages of theories, things and media. The foundation of such knowledge is, however, not the supervisor/master. Her role, in contrast, is to claim the equality of each intelligent being, to discourage false modesty in students, and to encourage them to make discoveries through experiment and experience: to be attentive and use their own intelligence. For this to happen, master and student need a thing in common *that establishes an* egalitarian intellectual link *between them. In practice-based research in design and art, the thing in common emerges largely through non-discursive media and modes of thought. Here, what can be seen, what can be thought about it, and what it can mean is also matter of translation, which Walter Benjamin, in* The Task of the Translator, *described as a mutually complimentary relationship between the languages of original and translation. No language in itself can give form to truth – and the task of a translation is to reveal what remains repressed in the original.*

In the many forms of translation involved in creative-practice research, candidate and supervisor work 'between the lines', in the interstices between the unknown and known, translating and re-translating. This paper explores, drawing on concepts by Benjamin, Rancière, Dewey, Wittgenstein and Kleist, which aspects help or prevent a situation in which students can respond to someone speaking to them, rather than examining them, under the sign of equality.

Introduction

> Intellectual advance occurs in two ways. At times increase of knowledge is organized about old conceptions, while these are expanded, elaborated and refined, but not seriously revised, much less abandoned. At other times, the increase of knowledge demands qualitative rather than quantitative change; alteration, not addition. (Dewey, 1917, p.3)

Research in art and design education, when it concerns specific ways of knowing through creative practice, is problematic on several counts. There is, on the one hand, an enduring sense on the part researchers/practitioners that this kind of research cannot properly develop within the framework of "old conceptions". On the other hand, an insecurity prevails about how a qualitative change could be articulated to frame new conceptions. When research is carried out by postgraduate students under the supervision of academic researchers/practitioners, yet another facet makes this process problematic: once intellectual and creative advances have "crystallized into material of instruction" they begin to resist further change (Dewey, 1917, p.4). The knowledge gained from creative advances, once absorbed into a canon, serves "ideas *forced into* experience, not *gathered from* it" (p.13). As objects of teaching, previously explorative practices that are largely reliant on responsive immediacy as well as reflection can become stultifying precedents.

Some, though not all, aspects of knowing through creative practice are difficult to fit into discursive modes of articulation. Getting-to-know through creative practice is at times even dependent on not-knowing, or not-yet-knowing, how to speak. Explication, therefore, is rarely a successful approach to creative practice research. It too easily stands in the way of experimentation and experience. How can supervisors in such contexts help candidates to develop new conceptions and articulate processes of coming-to-know in ways that will make their explorations stack up as research in the academy?

Anxious questions arise: is creative practice-based research even a legitimate form of research? What is its disciplinary field? How much can a supervisor know of what the candidate needs to learn? When these anxieties and insecurities lead to disciplinary entrenchment and an insistence on what is perceived to be a discipline's objects or methods, the supervisor becomes, willingly or not, a master of her field, who 'gives' knowledge, defines goals and deficiencies, and explicates knowledge to always lacking students.

The Ignorant Schoolmaster

Jacques Rancière, in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, recounts the story of Joseph Jacotot, whose extraordinary teaching practices upset the educational environment of Europe in the 1820s and 30s (Ross, 1991, p.58).[1]

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Jacotot fled the political turmoil in France and subsequently became a lecturer in French literature at the University of Louvain.[2] There, necessity "constrained him to leave his intelligence entirely out of the picture" (Rancière, 1991, p.9). Jacotot spoke no Flemish – and a number of his Flemish students spoke no French. This impasse led him to develop a method which reversed the roles of passive students and "master explicator": Jacotot gave the students a bilingual edition of Fenelon's Utopian novel *Telemaque* to compare the Flemish and French words, thereby learning French through this comparison. When the students had read the first half of the book, he tested them and made them repeat it over and over. That they succeeded in learning French in a remarkably short time convinced Jacotot that teachers can teach what they don't know, and that individuals can instruct themselves "by observing and retaining, repeating and verifying, by relating what they were trying to know to what they already knew, by doing and reflecting about what they had done" (p.10). In so doing, they

> moved along in a manner one shouldn't move along – the way children move, blindly, figuring out riddles. And the question then became: wasn't it necessary to overturn the admissible order of intellectual values? Wasn't that shameful method of the riddle the true movement of human intelligence taking possession of its own powers? (p.10)

This intellectual emancipation can liberate students from the pedagogies of explication which hinder, rather than help, their learning. It is the explicator who needs the student, rather than the other way round. He therefore creates a constant and structural gap between the student's incapacity to understand and the established knowledge of the discipline: "To explain something to someone is first of all to show him he cannot understand it by himself." (Woodill, 1993, p.6) By assuming superiority over the student, the educator renders the student's knowledge inferior, divides intelligence into two (Rancière, 1991, p.7).

Since the learned master's knowledge gets in the way of the students' emancipation, it is better if he knows nothing of the subject he teaches. Otherwise, even if he wants to draw out the students' knowledge by questioning, his Socratic approach to learning would be "the most formidable form of stultification". It would be yet another form of instruction that "pretends to lead the student to his own knowledge" but is, in reality, the "method of the riding school master" (p.59). The latter orders turns and detours, after each single one of which the student discovers something that he increasingly feels he would never have discovered by himself. But not only the student is stultified in this pedagogical relationship: so is the educator, who deprives himself of equals who could understand him (p.39).

Instead, what can be passed on is "not the key of knowledge, but the consciousness of what an intelligence can do when it considers itself equal to any other and considers any other equal to itself" (p.39). In a "community of equals", a "society of artists", the division between who knows and who doesn't know would be repudiated (p.71). This community would only know "minds in action":

people who do, who speak about what they are doing, and who thus transform all their works into ways of demonstrating the humanity that is in them as in everyone. Such people would know that no one is born with more intelligence than his neighbour, that the superiority that someone might manifest is only the fruit of as tenacious an application to working with words as another might show to working with tools; that the inferiority of someone else is the consequence of circumstances that didn't compel him to seek harder (p. 71).

Rather than by knowing the subject matter best, the educator/supervisor provides positive constraints to help keep the researcher on her own path, acknowledging that "no two orbits are alike" (p.59).

What makes a supervisor? The institution? The discipline? The candidate?

The vast differences between art and design students' orbits, particularly at postgraduate level, make supervision sometimes appear daunting and frequently stretch the supervisor's resources.

At AUT University, we worry perhaps more than educators in other institutions about our lacking capacities. We see ourselves as constantly grappling, more than others, with multiple levels of change – which, to an extent, is correct. AUT cannot rely on established traditions in postgraduate education and its relatively recent past as a technical institute is still palpable. The anxieties over what counts as knowledge, and how much it is constantly in flux, are therefore bound to be higher than elsewhere and seem to produce doubt about interdisciplinary approaches. The latter can produce stress, and many supervisors feel ill at ease when they have to operate out of their disciplinary comfort zones. Under stress, it may be difficult to realise that a discipline is "always much more than an ensemble of procedures which permit the thought of a given territory of objects" but is, first of all, "the constitution of this territory itself, and therefore the establishment of a certain distribution of the thinkable" (Rancière, 2006, p.8). When words, images and objects circulate freely, outside of the control of a master or a discipline, disciplinary thought "must ceaselessly hinder this haemorrhage in order to establish stable relations … and the modes of perception and signification which correspond to them". It must claim back its territory, its objects and its methods (p. 9) to stabilise always uncertain boundaries (p.11). A recent experience in that field (defined by notions of mastery and disciplinarity) persuaded me to write this paper.

In AUT's off-campus delivery of the Master of Art and Design course, normal conditions are exasperated in ways that sometimes remind me of Jacotot's exile in Belgium: in each regional 'pod', teams of two lecturers share the delivery of studio practice and theory in the first year. In the second, the thesis year, supervisors are allocated partially on the principle of continuity, and partially on the base of specialist knowledge.[3] With fewer supervisors available to deal with a wide, and often interdisciplinary range of concerns, and with limited face-to-face contact, off-campus students have to work more independently from the start. Consequently, the projects of off-campus students are often rather unconventional. This can be intimidating for supervisors, whose acquaintance with a project is always limited and who engage with candidates mostly on-line and via telephone calls. What we, as supervisors, can see on a computer screen is a far cry from the 'real thing' (unless the project is about digital design). With very limited control over the students' working habits and research methods, we have to muster the courage to let students go their own way and trust their intelligence. Their work, as we witness it evolving, becomes the thing we have in common.[4]

A thesis, entitled *Urban Voodoo*, by a candidate from Whangarei dealt with possibilities of upsetting existing semiotic systems, produced by a society which has no place for some of its members (see Rancière, 2001). The material articulation of this exploration involved multilayered encodings of graffiti and tagging found in a local skate park – presented finally as a series of eight large-scale wooden '*pou whenua*', alongside more than one hundred digitally manipulated/coded images displayed in cd jewel cases along the gallery walls, and annotated in pencil with quotations from Gothic Rock or Heavy Metal songs. As the supervisor, I was out of my depth concerning much of the content, and most of the media of the final installation.

On the day before the candidate's examination and subsequent exhibition opening, I flew up North, full of confidence in one respect ("He will have pulled it off, I'm sure") and nervously doubtful, in another ("What if I let him down by not breathing down his neck enough? Have I overstepped my competence or neglected my duty?"). The nervous doubt disappeared as soon as I saw the installation of Israe Paraone's final work. While I could not judge some singular aspects from an expert's perspective, the whole was convincing and seemed thoroughly thought out and worked through. After all the risks Israe had taken in his research process (there were so many that I sometimes felt I had to fasten my seatbelt – not knowing where we were going and how we would arrive), the multiple and sometimes disparate aspects of his work had come together. He had successfully enacted his research questions of the last two years and offered provisional suggestions. All that was left for me to do was to ask clarifying questions, talk through the anticipated choreography of the examination, and make minor suggestions about changing one spatial aspect.

The following day, Israe told me that the examination had been an incredibly rewarding experience for him – no matter what the grade might turn out to be. Israe almost used Rancièrian language: he felt that the examiners and he had wanted to recognise and respond to the situation – "not as students or as learned men, but as people; in the way you respond to someone speaking to you and not to someone examining you: under the sign of equality" (Rancière, 1991, p.11). Clearly, the interest in his work, and the confidence placed in him, was also the main reason why his two years of masters studies had been rewarding for him. The active presence of two fellow students at the subsequent exhibition opening, who had started the course with Israe two years earlier, was another indication of the development of a *community of equals*, that *society of artists* which can potentially render irrelevant the division between who knows and who doesn't know.

On the way back to Auckland, I realised that my initial nervousness had had a lot to do with ongoing discussions in our School, particularly in postgraduate studies. A lot to do with questions of how competent one has to be, and can be under the prevailing conditions, and what it takes to support students in their projects. Disciplines can provide comfort zones, and being stretched too far, and too often, can make people retrench into disciplinary comfort. An educational framework that relies on notions of master/student relationships, in which the former is supposed to pass on knowledge to the latter, often creates anxieties for both. However, observing Israe Paraone completing his unusual project with such insight and confidence, like several other students on the off-campus programme before, persuaded me that disciplinary knowledge is not the most important characteristic of a good supervisor but, rather, the ability to oblige students to use their own intelligence, to give them confidence, but also to compel them to seek harder through a "tenacious … application to working with words", materials and tools.

Practice based research – head and hand

While any researcher, to discover anything new, has to learn the different languages of theories, things and media, the foundation of such knowledge, for Jacotot, is not the supervisor/master (as in Donald Schön's studio master).[5] Her role, in contrast, is to claim the equality of each intelligent being, to discourage false modesty in students, and to encourage them to make discoveries through experiment and experience: to be attentive and use their own intelligence. For this to happen, master and student need a *thing in common* (for instance, as in Jacotot's case, a book) that establishes an *egalitarian intellectual link* between them (Rancière, 1991, p.13).[6]

> The thing in common, placed between two minds, is the gauge of that equality, and this in two ways. A material thing is first of all "the only bridge of communication between two minds." The bridge is a passage, but it is also distance maintained. The materiality of the book [or, sculpture, painting, design …] keeps two minds at an equal distance, whereas explication is the annihilation of one mind by another. But the thing is also an always available source of material verification … (p.32)

This source of material verification is crucial in creative practice-based research with its partially non-discursive nature.

When something cannot be rendered discursive, the ways of knowing about it must be different. Both Walter Benjamin and Ludwig Wittgenstein insisted occasionally on not having anything to say but only to show. But, unlike Wittgenstein, who held that a gesture "*tries* to portray, but cannot do it" (1958, S.434), Benjamin thought that gestures could, at least, be made quotable. This is not done by talking, but by carefully interrupting a context to create space for them (Benjamin, 1969b, p.151). Creative practice-based research deals with what Benjamin once, according to Theodor W. Adorno, defined as the "ability to interpolate in the smallest dimension". There is "something inherent in the materials and forms that the artist receives … something that manifests itself in them as a clearly articulated problem. Creative fantasy … awakens what has been accumulated. Its steps, always minimal, respond to the wordless questions posed by the materials and forms in their silent language of things" (Adorno, 1967, pp.117-8).

To articulate these questions and responses within academic frameworks requires access to particularly appropriate forms of expression. Language, when used for this purpose, can be an awkward externalisation of half-understood knowledge. However awkward, though, language is intermittently necessary to co-produce and co-create, initially, the material one can learn from. In grappling with always insufficient language, in disturbing and spacing the flow of historical time, many researchers in art and design endeavour to find or create images "wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation" (Benjamin, 2002, N2a,3) which may "attain to legibility" (N3,1), and, then, quotability.[7] Benjamin's interest in pedagogy led him to look closely at images, his visual thinking combining with discursive reflexivity.

Experience and reflexivity, translation and story telling

> "But experience in its vital form is experimental, an effort to change the given; it is characterized by projection, by reaching forward into the unknown" (Dewey, 1917: 7)

In comparison with explicatory instruction, project based approaches to teaching and research, such as reflection-in-action (Schön, 1985) seem to give far more control over their projects to students. However, at closer range, the disparity between teacher and student seems even greater in Schön's framework (see Newman, 1999, pp.49ff). In practice, it is problematic simply to demand self-reflexivity from students or even strongly recommend it without a substantial explanation of what self-reflexivity is. Schön's concept of reflection-in-action has been repeatedly criticised for a lack of understanding of the simultaneity or sequentiality of reflection and action (e.g., Hatton & Smith, 1995) but remains a widely accepted model for creative practice and theory. There is even a greater problem when the self-reflexivity demanded of students is not matched by an equal self-reflexivity on the part of lecturers (Webster, 2005, p.281).[8]

No doubt, it is on occasion helpful to show a student something, rather than talk about it (e.g., demonstrate conventions and methods). But such demonstrations can also foster a mastery/mystery relationship that makes students dependent on the master (who cannot explain, only show) and thereby stifle students' own explorations.[9] Much of studio teaching, alternatively, consists of asking the student questions about their intention, method, choices, etc. Again, these questions can support candidates' own efforts to clarify their project, position and pathway. Heinrich von Kleist (1982), for instance, shows how the expectant look on his sister's face spurs him on to develop thoughts that are only vaguely formed. Interestingly, Kleist's sister is not an expert in the matters that concern him. However, questions can equally contribute to a student's sense of being led by the nose.[10] The Socratic inquiry is an entirely different situation from one where the master's role is primarily one to observe, witness and act as a reference point.

Benjamin and Dewey attempted to think in an anti-dualistic manner about experience. They both questioned how subject/object and mind/matter relationships have long been portrayed in Western thought. Dewey noted that, when we do something to a thing, in creative practice and elsewhere, the thing then does something to us in turn ("Experience and Thinking" in 1916). Experience is a process in which the agent/patient undergoes "a process of standing something; of suffering and passion, of affection" (1917: 10).

Simultaneously doing and suffering, experience consists of experiments, active trying and tests of oneself (p.11).

There is a tactility in such experience that is not easily amenable to words but does create forms of knowledge. Esther Leslie notes that "to touch the worlds is to know the world" and that, according to Benjamin, the "hand marks out genuine experience" and its touch "fingers the world's textures, and passes on knowledge of those textures" (Leslie, n.d.) Matter, then, can be renewed in presentation, play and memory. These activities in creative practice research are all forms of translation and story telling, in which candidate and supervisor ideally work together 'between the lines', in the interstices between the unknown and known, translating and re-translating. What can be thought about research subject and object is a matter of translation, which Walter Benjamin, in *The Task of the Translator*, described as a mutually complimentary relationship between the languages of original and translation. No language in itself can give form to truth – neither the languages of words nor those of things – and the task of a translation is to reveal what remains repressed in the original (Benjamin, 1969a). Similarly, storytelling or *recounting* presumes a mutuality between storyteller and listeners which is based on a principal equality: that they share the same intelligence (Ross, 1991, p.69). The understanding, which storytelling presumes, is itself

> never more than translating, that is, giving the equivalent of a text, but in no way its reason. There is nothing behind the written page, no false bottom that necessitates the work of *another* intelligence, that of the explicator; no language of the master, no language of the language whose words and sentences are able to speak the reason of the words and sentences of a text. … Learning and understanding are two ways of expressing the same act of translation. There is nothing beyond texts except the will to express, that is, to translate. (Rancière, 1991, pp.9-10)

From the cockpit into the passenger's seat

Certainly, something has to be learned, to begin with, so that further learning can then be autonomously related to it. Some teaching has to take place to provide students with a basis to start from. However, for Jacotot this teaching consisted in supplying resources, encouraging students to discover through experiment, and compelling them to keep on learning when they became distracted and lacked attention. As for the rest, the master's role consisted of discouraging false modesty and, instead, assuring students that they had an intelligence they could use. This is the case for all ages of students and stages of studies.

In the case of postgraduate research, in particular, students have already acquired fluency with regard to content, as well as media, of their disciplines. Given the candidates' increasing degree of specialisation and the variety of their approaches, it would be unrealistic to expect that supervisors have much to pass on to individual candidates in all cases. The usefulness of specific knowledge they do bring to any candidate's project depends on how that knowledge is made available: if a supervisor respects the "lived knowledge and the practical survival skills" (Woodill, 1993, p.53) of his research students, and draws on them as much as on his or her own, then supervisor and student both become simultaneously teachers and learners. A demystification is likely to ensue and both (or all) participants in the research project share responsibility. The supervisor can let go of anxious responsibility and the student take more control of his own project – in a creative practice exploration which involves everyone's knowledge, as well as ignorance (p.51)

References

Adorno, T. W. (1967). Funktionalismus heute. In *Ohne Leitbild. Parva Aesthetica* (pp. 104-127). Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp.

Argyris, C., & Schön, D. (1974). *Theory in Practice: increasing professional effectiveness*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Benjamin, W. (1969a). The Task of the Translator. In H. Arendt (Ed.), *Illuminations* (pp. 69-82). New York: Schocken.

Benjamin, W. (1969b). What Is Epic Theatre? In H. Arendt (Ed.), *Illuminations* (pp. 147-154). New York: Schocken.

Benjamin, W. (1996). Socrates. In M. Bullock & M. W. Jennings (Eds.), *Walter Benjamin. Selected Writings* (Vol. 1, pp. 52-54). Cambridge (Mass): Harvard University Press.

Benjamin, W. (2002). *The Arcades Project* (H. Eiland & K. McLaughlin, Trans.). Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press.

Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and Education*. Retrieved 14 August, 2007, from http://www.ilt.columbia.edu/Publications/dewey.html

Dewey, J. (1917). The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy. In J. Dewey (Ed.), *Creative Intelligence; Essays in the pragmatic attitude* (pp. 3-69). New York: Henry Holt and Company.

Engels-Schwarzpaul, A.-Chr. (2002). *Myth, Symbol, Ornament: the Loss of Meaning in Transition*. Ann Harbour (MI). UMI <http://wwwlib.umi.com/dissertations/fullcit/3029985>.

Gelley, A. (1999). Contexts of the Aesthetic in Walter Benjamin. *MLN, 114*(5), 933-961.

Hatton, N., & Smith, D. (1995). Reflection in Teacher Education: Towards definition and implementation. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 11*(1), 33-49.

Kleist, H. v. (1982). On the Gradual Fabrication of Thought While Speaking. In P. B. Miller (Ed.), *An Abyss Deep Enough. Letters of Heinrich von Kleist with a Selection of Essays and Anecdotes* (pp. 218-222). New York: E. P. Dutton.

Leslie, E. (n.d.). *The World as Thing and Image*. Retrieved 15 June, 2007, from http://www.militantesthetix.co.uk/waltbenj/opticwb.html

Newman, S. (1999). Constructing and Critiquing Reflective Practice [1]. *Educational Action Research, 7*(1), 145 - 163.

Rancière, J. (1991). *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five lessons in intellectual emancipation* (K. Ross, Trans.). Stanford (CA): Stanford University Press.

Rancière, J. (2001). Ten Theses on Politics. *Theory & Event, 5*(3).

Rancière, J. (2006). Thinking Between Disciplines: An aesthetics of knowledge. *PARRHESIA*(1), 1-12.

Ross, K. (1991). Rancière and the Practice of Equality. *Social Text, 29*, 57-71.

Schön, D. (1985). *The Design Studio. An exploration of its traditions and potentials*. London: RIBA Publications.

Stoessel, M. (1983). *Aura: Das vergessene Menschliche. Zu Sprache und Erfahrung bei Walter Benjamin*. München: Carl Hanser Verlag.

Ward, A. (1997). *The Social Construction of an Architectural Reality in Design Education.* Unpublished Thesis for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Architecture, The University of Auckland, Auckland.

Webster, H. (2005). A Study of Ritual, Acculturation and Reproduction in Architectural Education. *The Architectural Review, 4*(3), 265-282.

Wittgenstein, L. (1958). *Philosophical Investigations. Philosophische Untersuchungen* (2 ed.). Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Woodill, G. (1993). Bootstrapping the Poor: A Solution for the "Bourdieu Effect"? *The Review of Education, 15*, 49-54.

Notes

[1]: "In summary, the aesthetic, from the beginning of its modern career, has been deeply implicated in what is now termed the political, though in Romantic and Idealist thought this was chiefly designated by way of a vocabulary of pedagogy (*Bildung*, *Erziehung*)." (Gelley, 1999, p..938)

[2] See Woodill (1993)

[3] Thus, I as a designer end up supervising visual arts theses that often only vaguely fit into my theoretical or disciplinary area. This can be exhausting, but it is also extending. I am perhaps less anxious about this challenge than my colleagues, because I can rely on my own Ph.D experience at Auckland University with a supervisor who didn't know much about my subject matter – and didn't worry too much about it. The result seems to have been up to scratch. That, amongst other reasons, makes me think that Rancière (or, more precisely, Jacotot) has a point when he insists that the master's ignorance provides potential of emancipation for the student.

[4] See *Practice based research* below.

[5] See Schön (1985)

[6] "By leaving his intelligence out of the picture, he had allowed their intelligence to grapple with that of the book. … A pure relationship of will to will had been established between master and student: a relationship wherein the master's domination resulted in an entirely liberated relationship between the intelligence of the student and that of the book – the intelligence of the book that was also the thing in common, the egalitarian intellectual link between master and student." (p.13)

[7] See Stoessel (1983, p.161).

[8] "Certainly, if tutors were to become more reflexive about the part they play in the review process then it may be possible for the event to change from being a ritual for the display of tutors'/reviewers' egos and student submission to a celebration of student creativity and personal development through critical engagement with the field of architecture. If not, then the place of the architectural review in architectural education must surely be questioned." (Webster, 2005, p. 181)

[9] Cuff suggests that "the process of mystification and obfuscation to which architecture (and indeed all professions) are prone evolves from the need to mask … contradictions" (quoted in Ward, 1997: 507)}. The argument that some elements of design might indeed only be able to be approximated by language, ought not be used as an excuse for not trying to communicate and theorise about those that can. In a mastery/mystery configuration, students are not supported in exploring questions about the critical context of their work and its wider relevance. In the absence of a shared reference system, design decisions and evaluations cannot be argued and contextualized in experience with 'the world out there', its conflicts and discourses. The mastery/mystery configuration does not lend itself to the fostering of such competencies. It is, indeed, remarkable how Schön can advocate Studio master/student dependency, having stated only eleven years earlier that traditional architectural education fails because of its elusive and mysterious treatment of architectural practice, its division from its clientele, its scanty relationship with various knowledge bases, and its genius cult. This all amounts to a situation where the 'student is expected to acquire competence mysteriously on his own, or by association with extraordinary practitioners' (Argyris & Schön, 1974, pp.142-3). See also (Engels-Schwarzpaul, 2002, pp.275ff).

[10] "The Socratic inquiry is not the holy question which awaits an answer and whose echo resounds in the response. … Rather, a mere means to compel conversation, it forcibly, even impudently, dissimulates, ironizes – for it already knows the answer all too precisely." (Benjamin, 1996, p.53)