Passwords

Is this a workshop about learning skills? No. The idea of this workshop is to discover a "frame of mind" that serves as a personal resource. The resource is a support for survival in the studio system of education, and it works by giving you a "meditative" way of reflecting on what your doing, converting the anxieties of not knowing what you are doing to the "glass half full" of possibilities.

It moves away from the model where you are expected to bring either knowledge or talent into the room to be judged. Instead, it is a model where you acquire and arrange a mental room, a studio of your own so to speak, that is a means of taking apart problems and putting them together again into new configurations.

Picking up a second language. Key to this exercise is the idea of learning a language. This is not an invented language, but it has words that, although they have been grouped together before, have only now acquired the status of a self-defining system. The idea of both languages and systems is that they sustain themselves. They resist damage and unproductive tinkering from the outside. They maintain their energy from the inside by being "over-determined" (each term reflects and is reflected by the others) and multi-centered (any term can be regarded as primary, or the center of the system).

The language has to be somewhat strange in order to distance itself from ordinary terms and ways of thinking. Just as the linguist-anthropologist Benjamin Whorf argued in the 1950s, each language involves a unique way of thinking and picturing the world. Some things cannot be translated out of any particular language. The word "idiot" originally meant "a private person." "Idiom" is a private sub-category of language that continues this idea in the direction of forming something that is resilient, sustainable, and yet able to evolve.

It's Greek to everyone. The words of this language are all Greek, derived from philosophy, religion, literary criticism, and philology. There are only six of them, and the meanings overlap, so learning this small vocabulary will not be too difficult. The point is to think of each word as having its own central meanings but also, initially, five other meanings when brought in relation to each of the other terms. Also, the meaning of each word changes when it is brought into trios, quartets, and quintets. New examples change the definitions as well, so the vocabulary is better thought to be a kind of echo chamber in which each new consideration is both consolidated within the original system but also initiates a slight change.

What is a password? A password has meaning for insiders that it doesn't for anyone who "knows the system." The point of this workshop is to create a group of insiders who may choose to associate or work independently. It is good to know that there are others who "speak the same language," but it is not necessary to converse with them and only them. It is better to keep thoughts about the system separate, silent, and secret. In any event, the secret is impossible to "give away" because, without understanding the terms as a system, they make only limited sense. You can't define one without thinking about the whole.

Once you're "in" with your password, you can afford to move around freely. The premise of this workshop is that it doesn't take a perfect 4,000 word vocabulary to be functional in a language; neither should designers have to know everything about an issue or problem *before* they begin to work. Art should be a means of provoking, in any given situation, key information about how the point of view functions within it.

A main theme of the workshop is resilience. Resilience is closely related to the "functionality" of knowing just enough of a language to get by — to be able to order food, get directions, be polite, buy tickets, etc. Survival depends on this minimal knowledge, coupled with a positive attitude. With it, you can move, learn, enjoy yourself. And, when the unexpected happens, you won't be swamped or completely isolated. You have your system.