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Rigorous Design Practices, Alterity and Multistability.

Since the break from the trend of design science in the early 1970's design research have increasingly come to mean the material handling of wicked problems (Buchanan 1992, Rowe 1987, Pries Heje and Baskerville 2008, Lawson 2005, Cross 2006). The terminology of wicked problems of course come from Rittel and Webber (1973). Donald Schön's practice epistemology, where he criticizes Technical Rationality in many ways is an answer to the work with wicked problems. Schön provides an argument for how a designer might circumvent scientific standards for rigor and still work rigorously. This paper brings Schön's practice epistemology and postphenomenology together, and I argue that rigor in design work is achieved through diligent - if not always conscious - handling of two core notions in postphenomenology: multistability and alterity. Multistability of architectural technology can be both helpful and harmful. A problem of design education is really to learn how to operationalize multistability and rigor in design work is achieved through an alterity relation to the chosen drafting technology. The argument presented firmly sets postphenomenology as a cornerstone in contemporary design thinking, and with the clarity gained through postphenomenological theory, it suggests a path to a more rigorous, explicated and teachable design epistemology, although it still resists the technical rationality implicit in design science.