

Summer 2017 Edition

MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN

For us artists, teachers and scholars, summer is often a time for research and reflection after the intense rush of the academic year. This is a propitious moment to think about what David W. Orr, in the *The Nature of Design* (2002), defined as “slow knowledge.” Orr built his argument on chiseled oppositions: Fast knowledge gathers “growing mountains” of unconnected data; slow knowledge favors the creation of “patterns that connect.” Fast knowledge emphasizes problem solving; slow knowledge focuses on preventing problems. Fast knowledge is characterized by linear thought, power and impermanence; slow knowledge by “elegance, complexity and resilience.” Fast knowledge is all about individual profit; slow knowledge about community prosperity.

Orr’s thoughtful aphorisms continue to be relevant today. Yet, his praise of the communal ethos that produces slow knowledge rests, somewhat paradoxically, on a binary logic (you are *either* on the side of slow knowledge *or* in that of fast knowledge) that narrows the potential for collaborative innovation. Knowledge is often a matter of commingling voices and tempos; of overcoming oppositional thinking in favor of complex and diverse understanding.

A number of recent publications have moved beyond these binary structures by questioning the “faux opposition” between what Scott Hartley calls the “fuzzy” and the “techie”— the practitioners of the soft and hard sciences, respectively. “Really,” Hartley argues, “it’s about the merging of these two worlds [...]. It is important to engage with people from various disciplines and backgrounds to be part of this conversation” in a “pluralistic approach” no longer limited to “a couple of white, young men making [. . .] decisions.”

It is reasonable to hope that contributions like these will help level the playing field in our STEM-centric culture. But a merger between equal partners will fully succeed when our humanists’ “fuzzy” competencies will be granted the appropriate weight, and when *balanced* knowledge will be shared across diverse meaning-making communities committed to innovation, wisdom and empathy. Only then will our artists and scholars be valued for the foundational, transferrable, and enduring skills that define the future of humanism as knowledge for the common good.

There is no better place than a public university like UC San Diego to shape this crucial debate through the initiatives that our Division is spearheading, often in dialogue with other campus partners. Wishing you a restful and productive summer, I am pleased to offer you a snapshot of these initiatives.

- *Dean Cristina Della Coletta*