



JOINING RESEARCH, ART & DESIGN

by MARIA LANTIN

In the last ten years the word Research has become an increasing part of our vocabulary. Wielding the word like a talisman, we seek to reframe what we do to join with what have been largely science and humanities groups in the conversation of knowledge and artifact production. It can feel like cozying up to an elephant. How does an old word like research even begin to soften to incorporate new models of knowledge production? Methodologies, dissemination, evaluation processes and metrics - these all need to wedge themselves in. And what of our context? We are small and the teaching load is higher than regular Universities. It's an ambitious goal to make ourselves visible beside large comprehensive universities. But it's clear that we have increased the visibility of great work in art and design. The tri-council has integrated art and design in their new frameworks and the GRAND Network Centre of Excellence recently joined forces with the Canada Council to recreate a version of the New Media Initiative NSERC/CC grant which was discontinued in 2009. However, the context of funding in Canada has also shifted significantly towards partnerships and industry-funded projects with commercialization potential. In the background there is the anxious hum of job creation, skills training, growth, and innovation. In fact, research is sometimes put in opposition to the practical. I see the changing landscape of government funding as an opportunity for art and design universities. We offer fresh ideas and methodologies that can directly speak to the needs of our communities and environment. Socially engaged art practices are catalysts for innovation. Design is a unified approach to solving very complex problems for long-term sustainable and stable systems. More than ever new ways of being are essential to health on all levels.

We are entering an already established community of research and are blending ways of speaking about knowledge production. By joining a conversation we will change what we do, how we do it, and how we talk about it. In building a culture of research that includes art and design, I see the most pressing needs as communicating our successes, teaching each other how to frame the value of our chosen research programs, and advocating for a more balanced research and teaching mix. We also need to look for collaboration opportunities with other fields of research. The positioning of art and design research is stronger when looked at from an integrated approach to problem solving. We stay small to retain a unique approach. We partner to have a bigger impact.

Looking to the future, it may be that the word research will phase out as pivotal to the conversation to knowledge production and mobilization. Its meaning does seem to lag behind a social model that increasingly includes groups outside universities and big institutions, and dissemination that focuses on results and techniques rather than methodology. We seem to be in a perpetual liminal space as the voices get more numerous. This is wonderfully fertile ground.