Foreword

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Pivot is a series of virtual conferences organized by the Pluriversal Design Special Interest Group (SIG) of the Design Research Society (DRS) — co-chaired by Lesley-Ann Noel and me. Our main goal has been to connect designers, researchers, and changemakers across the world who share similar interests and values. We are interested in decoloniality, societal transformation, and practices for alternative future-making, particularly those that emerge at the political margins. We understand that significant social change takes place at the margins—even if the Center prefers to position itself as the great savior and the source of any kind of innovation.

Since last year’s conference, PIVOT 2020: Designing a World of Many Centers, I learned that there are many of us, pluriversalists, spread all over the world. We gathered on June 4th, 2020, at the beginning of the pandemic and a few days after the murder of George Floyd. Our world has changed since then. Not only is Covid-19 still here, but we had a very intense year with ravaging wildfires and social unrest in many countries. It seemed that our planet is was on fire. People have never talked so openly about diversity, racism, decolonization, decoloniality, pluriversality, and environmental issues.

In late 2020, we realized that we needed to organize a second conference to keep the conversation going. We had to organize a Pivot 2021. I’m grateful to Immony Men for joining us as a co-chair. I’m grateful to the Organizing Committee (Laura, Nicholas, Pawel, Mari, Maria, Michele, Sucharita, Manuela) for embarking on this adventure and offering support and creative input. Pivot 2021 would not have happened without our conference coordinator, Jananda Lima.

This year, we launched a call for papers with the theme of dismantling and reassembling, tools for alternative futures. Why dismantling
and reassembling? People have never talked so much and openly about decolonization and decoloniality. Nonetheless, I started to worry about the emphasis on dismantling as the pathway to change. In other words, I have seen much more criticism than generative conversations. Certainly, there is a lot to be dismantled. And trying to create something new without dismantling the old smells like denial and greenwashing. However, decolonizing our society or generating new models of life cannot be a simple removal of Eurocentric, patriarchal, or capitalist elements—i.e., the same world we are familiar with, minus the troublesome pieces. Change is about leading our thinking and practices towards unfamiliar pathways and possibilities, something that entails discomfort and doubts.

We are trying to create a world that we do not know yet, new patterns, new ways of making and being. It seems that people know the general direction we should go, but there is the challenge to create the pathway towards there—where to step, how to step. Therefore I believe reassembling is crucial, enabling us to engage with materiality and create actionable propositions. Reassembling is not the same as creating “solutions”, but the explorational practice that leads to new (not-yet-known) tangible experiences.

We saw Pivot 2021 as a chance to walk our talk, designing a conference that would allow people to get in contact with multiple worldviews, ways of knowing, voices, and accents. Reassembling for us includes the re-organizing of spaces, resources and networks for designers, researchers, artists, and speakers by offering a discursive platform for sharing their perspectives on transformative gestures and models for practice and thought. We invited people we deeply admired as keynote speakers with the concern to bring together different perspectives from people of color and from the Global South. We were delighted to receive Dori Tunstall, Arturo Escobar, Bayo Akomolafe, Jason Lewis, Dany Pen, Casey Mecija, Sharon Stein, and Cash Ahenakew.

To begin these conversations we launched a call for papers inviting people to reflect and to submit abstracts based on the conference theme–tools for dismantling and reassembling and alternative future-making– and to submit abstract. We were thoroughly surprised by the response to the call for participation. We received 126 submissions from 28 countries. Through a peer-review process, our board of reviewers worked hard to offer useful feedback to everyone that participated. Several folks who had unsuccessful submissions emailed us to thank us for the careful process and generous feedback. I am very
grateful to all the reviewers who dedicated their time to making this conference possible.

We also aimed to create a format of virtual conference that enabled meaningful and accessible conversations. After over one year of working online, most folks were familiar with Zoom meetings. We decided to hold keynote presentations and parallel panels on Zoom and as a way to reserve informal conversations for the SpatialChat rooms. I believe that conferences are not only spaces to present and discuss ideas, but opportunities to make friends, bonds, connections, and enjoy each other's company. We included a lunchtime musical presentation each day featuring Brazilian musicians, Nicholas Torreta and Juliane Gamboa & Léo Brum. It was a very enjoyable experience to dance, celebrate and have fun together (special thanks to the organizers of the conga lines).

For me, it was important to give Pivot 2021 a Brazilian flavor, since I am Brazilian, as well as Jananda and part of the conference committee (Nicholas and Manuela, Lesley studied in Brazil). In common, we four have worked and lived in the Global North for many years. My brazilianness is present in everything I do and create. After the conference, Immony expressed similar sentiments about forming these meaningful bonds during the conference, he mentioned his excitement and honor to moderate and a unique panel discussion with Casey Mecija and Dany Pen, both highly-respected (Khmer and Filipinx) leaders and peers.

We have to acknowledge the outstanding work of our graphic design team. Jananda Lima created the visual identity for the conference and played an important organizational role in guiding design decisions with the team. Dorsa Kartalaei created captivating virtual environments on SpatialChat, including the beautiful Green Room and the Stage, and promotional social media posts. Jonathan Silveira offered his specialties with video production for online events by creating the video bumpers and the Zoom background that were used for presentations. Lilian Leung designed and developed the digital infrastructure for our website. Thank you everyone for offering an overwhelming level of care and attention for this conference!

We had a great team of graduate assistants and OCAD’s AV support staff who helped the conference happen: Abedar Kamgari, Candide Uyanze, Mairead Stewart, Renzi Guarin, Sayeda Akbary, and Omar Qureshi. Thank you! We would like to thank the conference committee and all the reviewers for their valuable time and contribution. We are grateful for the support we received from OCAD University, particularly from the Research Office (Leila Talei and Heather Robson) and from the Design Research Society. Special thanks go to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Finally, we thank the authors and participants of PIVOT 2021 who responded to our call, sent us their contributions, and participated in the conversations.

We hope you enjoy these proceedings!