Pivot 2021 Editorial

Dismantling/
Reassembling
Tools for alternative futures

The Pluriversal Design Special Interest Group of the Design Research Society (DRS) and the Public Visualization Lab of OCAD University invited designers, scholars, artists, and changemakers for two days of intercultural conversations about decoloniality and societal transformation. Pivot 2021 aimed to identify tools and practices of dismantling and reassembling that could favour ways of reshaping human presence on Earth and concrete cases of alternative future-making from all around the world.

As the world faces multiple colossal, interconnecting crises — COVID-19, social unrest, climate crisis, ravaging wildfires, the frightening spread of authoritarianism, and so on — there is an increasing awareness that the Western ways of life have reached a crossroads. As a result, what is currently asked from humanity is more than damage reduction but a profound societal transformation: reconceiving cultural and economic models and changing our ways of being, thinking, learning, making, relating, and so on.

The theme of Pivot 2021 focuses on the tools that we might design and use to dismantle the structures of the current civilizational model (aka patriarchal capitalist Modernity) and to reassemble the debris into new models, converting debris into the nurturing humus for worlds in the making. By tools, we refer to not only artifacts but also to services, symbols, rules, institutions, policies, pedagogies, systems, environments, and so on (Illich 1975). Briefly, tools constitute aspects of social life that we deliberately create to (re)shape the tangible reality. We do not suggest that the entire Modernity is harmful. Still, many of its tools and structures have not only failed to deliver their promises but also led us to the verge of a global ecological collapse.

We conceive dismantling and reassembling as the two interactive and complementary movements of social change. First, we need a phase of dismantling
Because design emerged as a recognized expertise and career path in the context of the Industrial Revolution, the foundations of our field are interwoven with the project of Modernity and its worldview. This conference is part of the movement to detach design (as a discipline and activity) from the values and beliefs of patriarchal capitalist Modernity and to redirect it towards new styles of world-making.

But what new ways? How would we like our world to be? What kind of new society? Unquestionably reassembling leads us to unfamiliar and uncertain territories, as we have to design a society that we do not know yet.

Because this conference was organized by designers and design researchers, this discipline or activity was at the center stage. Design is one of the disciplines/activities devoted to creating tools to (re)shape the world, referring to human practices of world-making. As we know it today, design refers to a particular kind of world-making practice that helped shape the modern capitalist world in which we live. Because design emerged as a recognized expertise and career path in the context of the Industrial Revolution, the foundations of our field are interwoven with the project of Modernity and its worldview. This conference is part of the movement to detach design (as a discipline and activity) from the values and beliefs of patriarchal capitalist Modernity and to redirect it towards new styles of world-making.

South-North/North-South

One of the main goals of the Pivot virtual conferences is to create a community interested in innovation theories and practices for alternative futures, especially emerging from the political margins and communities of the Global South. In addition, we aimed to build bridges between Global South and Global North and to diversify ideas, cultures, accents, and voices.

We invited, as keynote speakers, people who really inspire us. We were delighted to receive Dori Tunstall, Arturo Escobar, Bayo Akomolafe, Jason Lewis, Dany Pen, Casey Mecija, Cash Ahenakew, and Sharon Stein. Each one of them brought a different perspective to the discussion on societal transformation.
Call for Submissions and Sub-themes

We invited interested designers, artists, scholars, and changemakers to reflect upon the conference theme (and sub-themes) and submit a long abstract.

On top of the main themes — the tools for dismantling and reassembling and alternative future-making — we also suggested a few sub-themes to challenge participants to emancipate their thinking from the "grammar" lexicon and conventional categories of the Western worldview.

THE PLURIVERSE

The concept of the Pluriverse, a world where many worlds fit, challenges one of the pillars of Western Modernity: 'universalism' — the idea that we all live in a single world (and that the Modern Western world is the ideal) — in favor of multiple possible worlds that nurture and respect life on Earth (Escobar 2018). The Pluriverse framework embraces the idea that significant societal innovations, valuable practices, and alternative futures are emerging from the political margins and communities of the Global South (Kothari et al., 2019).

FROM SEPARATION TO INTERDEPENDENCE WITH NATURE

A pillar of Western thought is the separation between culture and nature that does not find correspondence in many other knowledge systems. As people do not see themselves as part of nature, nature is something to be controlled and exploited. This separation created the conditions for the environmental devastation that we experience today.

How would our tools change if we understood our planet as an interconnected living system?

How would design and our modes of production change from a perspective of interdependence?

LINEAR VS. CIRCULAR TIME

The idea of linear evolution and growth is one of the foundations of modern thought but is also a wellspring of unsustainability. Several non-Western cultures have a circular notion of time. A circular future could be a notion of a future that includes memory and ancestrality.

How would a circular notion of time change our style of world-making, the practice of design and strategic thinking?

How could the knowledges of the rhythms and cycles of life from cultures of the South or even from our ancestors be integrated in the design of the future?
REPAIR AND REPURPOSING AS DESIGN

Our industrial modes of production follow a linear system, in which design refers mainly to the production of the new. In a culture obsessed with novelty, objects are not designed to last, age well, and be repurposed; on the contrary, we get ‘built-in obsolescence.’ There is no need to explain that most industrialized objects do not disappear from the environment (only a small amount of plastic is recycled). Trash is merely moved out of people’s sight, usually dumped on marginalized and vulnerable peoples. Thus we make the case to put repair and repurposing at the center of our thinking of design for sustainability.

In what forms can repair and repurpose serve as tools for design longevity?

What is a design that transforms and evolves with ageing?

NON-COLONIAL FUTURE THINKING

Within Modernity, any alternative to an industrial market-oriented future is seen as a return to the past. The hegemonic narrative of the future obligatorily passes through the Global North’s innovation, economic model and modes of production. However, alternatives do not lack in the world.

How to integrate into future thinking the cosmovisions and visions of the future of Indigenous, Afrodescendant and place based-communities?

What tools can be created to facilitate this process?

LEARNING WITH THE SOUTH

As a relic of colonialism, the Global North does not recognize much of the knowledge, innovations, and technologies produced by the Global South as valid contributions to the future. There is a tendency to extract only the bits and parts of the South’s knowledge that fits Western epistemology, without respect for the communities’ knowledge systems.

What ways of using design or teaching design created by and for people in the Global South are deeply rooted in their specific contexts and worldviews?

EDUCATION FOR NEW WAYS OF BEING

The focus of our educational system is still to prepare workers for industries and the professions of modern life without much concern for the mental health and well-being of students and even less for the health and flourishing of the environment and societies.

Our society has tools to educate for the marketplace, but how to educate for other ways of being in the world?
What tools can be created and used to enable the emergence of other styles of world-making and alternative ways of being in the world?

RESILIENCE AS FUTURISM

One could imagine that communities struggling with poverty, violence, and oppression would not be able to (re)design their circumstances and create new forms of life. And yet, it is precisely in those cases that many new visions for the future and life alternatives are flourishing. Nonetheless, it is still difficult to think about the future in contexts of extreme violence or poverty. People living in these contexts often say, “How to think about the future if we are dying today?” or “How to see beyond the circumstances of the present, when it involves pain and trauma in such extreme proportions?”

What are the tools to support the resilience, imagination, creativity, exercise of desire and self-determination of such communities?

COMMUNICATION(S) BETWEEN MULTIPLE WORLDS

We believe the Pluriverse involves reconceiving and redesigning the forms of interaction between different cultures. Therefore, we encouraged the participants to submit videos of their dialogues/collaboration with partners from different worlds.

How to create a fruitful dialogue between partners from different worlds in which both worldviews (or knowledge systems) are respected and deemed as valuable to the creation of the future?

IMPACT OF COVID-19 AND OPPORTUNITIES

There is no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic, with its rupture with normality, created the conditions to accelerate the process of unlearning and dismantling established cultural and economic models and lifestyles.

What new forms of social life are emerging from this crisis?

About the Contributions

We accepted submissions in four languages (English, Portuguese, Spanish, and French) to reduce the obstacles for people who are not native English-speakers — people who can understand English but are not completely fluent.

We received 126 submissions in and from around the world (Mexico, Turkey, UK, Spain, New Zealand, Australia, Colombia, Puerto Rico, Finland, Brazil, India, Sweden, Slovenia, Greece, Portugal, Germany, China, Ecuador, Netherlands, Italy, Argentina, Japan, Pakistan, Paraguay, South Africa, Chile, USA, Canada). We were
impressed not only by the quantity but also by the overall quality of the work. All the submissions were peer-reviewed by our international board of reviewers, receiving at least two reviews each. For the conference, we divided the final 68 accepted contributions into 23 panels.

**About the Conference**

PIVOT 2021 was a two-day event (July 22-23, 2021) held online, using Zoom and SpatialChat platforms. Each day featured three keynote sessions, two musical performances, and 11-12 panels exploring different themes. All the sessions were recorded and are available on our website (pivot2021conference.com).

**About the Conference Proceedings**

This year's contributions span a wide range of subjects from Artificial Intelligence to diverse Indigenous Knowledges. These seemingly unrelated topics are connected through ideas of decoloniality and pluriversality, weaving a beautiful new possible reality. We have organized these proceedings into broader sections to facilitate your searching and reading experience. The introduction includes Keynote Speaker Highlights with carefully curated excerpts from all the keynote presentations at Pivot 2021. The first section of contributions, Repair and Repurposing as Design, gathers projects that questions and proposes alternatives for design practices, tools and methodologies. In section two, Other Ways to Relate, you will find contributions that expand design practices to consider trauma, care, listening and even fermentation. The contributions in the third section, Narratives Between Multiple Worlds, speak about designs that interconnect different worlds spanning diverse cultures, oppressed groups, art, geographic locations or futures. Finally, Learning With the South focuses on contributions that inform beyond the Eurocentric perspective. Short papers, full papers, and visual contributions are spread throughout and can be identified in each contribution's cover header.

**About the Future**

As we know that nothing is permanent, we consider this a journey rather than a project, leading us to the yet unapprehended, where every execution is an experiment that helps us re-calibrate our compass. Pivot 2021 allowed for countless learnings that are being incorporated into the planning of the next conference as well as re-imagining the future of Pivot.

As for Pivot 2023, we want to continue providing an informal space for connections to flourish and radically enhance the participation of community representatives from the margins — committing to putting their benefit first. This is not an easy task, as we have faced when organizing Pivot 2021, but our mission is
to always push the boundaries further. We believe that like us, the entire Pivot community is committed to expanding our capacity to engage with discomfort and with the unknown.

Learnings, connections and inspirations that grew from the open space created during Pivot 2021 are leading us to expand our horizons. We are creating the Pivot Design Research Lab to dive into intercultural and inter-ontological translations dedicating ourselves to making abundant and profound connections. To question, experiment and expand the meaning of connection – from knowledge as connection in itself toward connection in human and non-human relationships.

We are looking forward to being and becoming with you in the near future!