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In-Between Spaces: Reflections on the Emerging Scholars Workshop

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ABSTRACT The *Design and Culture* editorial team initiated the Emerging Scholars Workshop in 2020 as part of a broader effort at reimagining knowledge production and dissemination within design research. The workshop was designed to support and guide authors with limited experience in academic publishing due to issues such as access, language, and academic hierarchy. Its goal was also to diversify the types of articles submitted to *Design and Culture*. This paper reflects on the workshop, drawing on the experiences of workshop coordinators/peers, and participants selected through an annual Call for Papers. It presents the tensions embedded in shaping the workshop and its aims, including the challenges of defining the term “emerging,” the constraints of traditional article formats, and the difficulties of changing an existing publishing infrastructure. The paper also offers suggestions for how similar workshops can cultivate opportunities for

Press, 2023), *Wild Things: The Material Culture of Everyday Life* (Bloomsbury, 2020), *Design and Culture*, and *The Avery Review*.

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mutual support and care among communities of interdisciplinary researchers to promote diversity in scholarship. It advances the idea of the “in-between space” of the workshop as a source of potential for designing more community-oriented approaches in publishing that prioritize relational interdependence over individual competition.

KEYWORDS: academic publishing, care, design research, emerging scholars, interdisciplinary research, knowledge production, workshop methodology

Introduction

In 2019, *Design and Culture* introduced readers to a new editorial team led by co-editors Barbara Adams, Mahmoud Keshavarz, and Jilly Traganou. The change in editorialship was only the second term of editors in the journal's history, following founding editor Elizabeth Guffey's tenure from 2008 to 2018. In their introduction to the readers, the editors stated their collective vision for the journal, which “imagine[d] the journal as a forum that can foster rich and provocative conversations across power-differentiated communities, geographic distances, and disciplinary divides” (Adams, Keshavarz, and Traganou 2019, 159).

The context for these concerns emerged from the many interpretations that the journal's subject matter, “design” and “culture,” absorb “as active practices that are unavoidably political” (Adams, Keshavarz, and Traganou 2019, 159). The editors acknowledged this moment in the field of design studies as being increasingly diverse in subject matter and scope of research. Because of this, journals that encourage a variety of (sometimes contradictory) perspectives with the mission to understand how design is both subject to and the result of socio-political and cultural issues continue to attract interdisciplinary perspectives.

Adams, Keshavarz, and Traganou outlined specific initiatives that would help steer the journal toward more diversity, including expanding the journal's editorial and advisory boards, attending to the politics of citations when it came to knowledge production, encouraging different submission formats, and, finally, “nurturing the work of emerging authors by offering peer-to-peer support” (Adams, Keshavarz, and Traganou 2019, 155). The last initiative was formally launched in 2020 as the Emerging Scholars Workshop (ESW) with a Call for Papers that sought to foster a more collaborative and transparent process toward publication.

The editors appointed an initial international group of scholars (referred to as peers in this paper) to plan and organize the workshop methodology.¹ Henceforth, new peers have joined the organizing team either by invitation from editors or returning to the ESW as peers after their own participation as authors. The workshop is

designed to have no “place.” We wrote this article collaboratively from global contexts in Croatia, Turkey, Spain, and the United States, and our cultural positioning reflects more diverse perspectives than “Western” alone; a condition established by the intersection of our cultural backgrounds and various locales. English became the common language for the workshop as it is the language *Design and Culture* is published in, and meetings among peers and authors were organized remotely using video conferencing platforms such as Zoom or Google Meet.

Since 2020, the ESW has received between 10 and 20 submissions per annual call. Peers select a group of authors to work with through a review period during which we consider the submissions’ level of completion, scope of research (and whether or not it aligns with the aims of *Design and Culture*), and the author’s CV, reflecting a status as an “emerging scholar” in order to qualify for the workshop. We seek to identify authors who have produced work that can benefit from feedback and support in the editing process (especially in terms of content, structure, and grammar), and who can potentially greatly improve their chances of being published as a result of the guidance peers can provide.

Selected authors participate in at least two remote meetings with ESW peers to discuss the article’s strengths and weaknesses, identifying potential directions the work can take through editing. Toward the end of the workshop, the authors meet with a member of the journal’s editorial board, who offers additional insights into the journal’s selection process and submission guidelines. Depending on scheduling, a workshop cycle typically spans between five and eight months. This is a significant challenge in organizing the workshop, as peers and authors are often in different time zones around the world. Participating as a peer inevitably calls for an ethos of care, as in every cycle at least one member has had to forgo sleep or extend beyond traditional working hours in order to take part. At the time of writing this article, ESW ran its sixth cycle and plans to continue running throughout the journal’s transition to a new editorial board. Thus, we have identified an opportunity now for a critical and reflexive examination of ESW so far in order to effectively respond to challenges and evaluate the potential impact of these types of programs.

The scope of this article took shape over multiple video conferences during the research process, during which we could report and debate our impressions of the ESW since our mutual involvement began in 2021. We identified recurring themes and tensions from these meetings and assigned each other sections to further research and elaborate on before editing the sections in pairs. The themes we identified in organizing and running the workshop also resonated with our manifold academic experiences across different parts of the world. While we acknowledge the cultural, economic, and political specificities of each context in which design exists as an academic field, our main argument highlights these collective challenges as

part of broader global phenomena, such as platform capitalism and the role of care in an increasingly competitive society.

In transitioning from writing the article to giving feedback to each other, our role as simultaneous peers and authors ended up mirroring the ESW process. We cross-referenced each other's sections, left comments, scheduled new meetings to discuss possible directions, and supported each other's editing process by sharing resources, perspectives, and suggested edits.² In the first half of this article, we address recurring dilemmas such as the commonly faced tensions between adhering to established academic standards and the need to challenge those standards in order to create an environment for honest and diverse scholarly communication, the challenge of defining "emerging" scholars while maintaining the plurality and open-ended nature of this term, and the difficulties of promoting change within infrastructures shaped by neoliberal thinking. The second half of this article addresses outcomes and potential models for the future of similar workshops. We argue that these challenges were shaped by the "in-between space" of the workshop, which presented a double-edged sword: on one hand, it lacked the power to enforce radical change, on the other, it provided a unique opportunity for autonomy and the cultivation of a more academically interesting space of mutual care in research. This intermediary position enabled ESW to foster a community-oriented approach that prioritized relational interdependence over individual competition.

Overall, we hope to provide an answer to the question of whether these kinds of workshops can sustain meaningful new scholarship and de-center established narratives of design as it operates in social, cultural, and material contexts. By sharing our experiences, we aim to contribute to a critique of academic publishing. Hopefully, these reflections benefit the broader academic community, highlighting the importance of developing alternative programs and initiatives that actually support diverse voices and experimental approaches to producing scholarly work. The field of design, in particular, stands to benefit from these experimental approaches, as the consequences of mutually exclusive theory and practice threaten to render academic publishing a "pseudo-aristocratic alternative to work" (Kendall 2014, 365).

The Publishing Crisis

As we worked on this paper, one of the authors came across a dilemma. For financial reasons, her current institution, located in southern Europe, did not provide access to some of the journals and papers she sought to read. Many were locked behind costly paywalls. This restriction drove her to "sci-hub" – the "pirate" website – that has already become well-known among precarious scholars. Even so, her access to critical papers remained inadequate. This personal experience evoked mixed feelings: a blend of guilt due to

the controversial legal status of the platform and frustration over the injustice of the academic publishing system.

Unfortunately, this issue affects an increasing number of scholars and the interested public in general. The production and circulation of knowledge have changed dramatically, consolidating a non-inclusive system shaped by neoliberal logic, where market forces and profit incentives often dictate what can be published, how it can be published, and who can publish it (Kawa 2022). Since the mid-1990s, journals began migrating online, gradually consolidating into a few academic publishing conglomerates that dominate the sector, including multinational publishers such as Taylor & Francis, Sage Publishing, Wiley-Blackwell, RELX, and Palgrave Macmillan. In design, this phenomenon can be observed in well-known journals such as *Design and Culture*, *The Design Journal*, and *CoDesign* partnering with Taylor & Francis.

The digital turn has led to inflated subscription prices, which outpace library budgets and create what is currently known as the “serials crisis,” as libraries struggle to afford essential journals (Jurchen 2020). The cost to read one article in *Design and Culture* or *The Design Journal* now, without access to a subscription, is almost EUR 50. The cost of making an article open access in a journal like *Design Studies*, for example, requires the author to pay USD 4,570 (Science Direct n.d.). For context, this last figure represents nearly two times a full-time starting professor’s monthly salary in Brazil, the home country of one of this article’s co-authors.

This crisis also hides a highly unfair business model. As it is widely known within the academic community, many research costs are publicly funded, with researchers commonly encouraged to offer their work for free. The same is true of editors and peer-reviewers. And yet, although academic publishing rests on voluntary labor and public funding, paywalls prevent scholars and the general public from accessing this knowledge. This reflects two competing value systems: knowledge as a public good and knowledge as a commodity. Significantly, it also reflects how academic publishing, including design publishing, is complicit in platform capitalism (Srnicek 2016), where digital platforms facilitate the production of global financialized monopolies. For example, RELX, parent of the Dutch academic publishing company Elsevier, made almost GBP 9.4 billion in revenue in 2024, with a nearly 34% profit margin (RELX 2025); numbers close to those of big tech giants such as Google or Apple in the same year (Paul & Helmore 2023). Mainstream anglophone academic publishing has become a profitable business based on extractive and exploitative practices (Cardozo 2017). In our view, participation in the system poses a fundamental moral dilemma of what happens when public investment is transferred into private hands.

This reality goes hand-in-hand with wider phenomena, such as the neoliberalization of universities and the rise of journal impact factors (Gusterson 2017), along with other quantitative measures that

increasingly frame academic work in regions where the ESW peers predominantly worked (North America, Europe, Australia, and Latin America). A clear example of this is the widespread use of PURE – a Research Information Management System created by Elsevier – in faculty research pages, where numbers are automatically populated to highlight researchers' work. As noted by different authors, those metrics function as a governing and control practice attached to the new managerialism ethos (Lynch 2015), an audit culture (Shore and Wright 1999), and the “publish or perish” mantra (Beck, Gjesfjeld and Chrisomalis 2021). The reliance on metrics to evaluate knowledge, including alternative metrics, may underscore factors other than quality, creating an unfair and distorted system. Numbers sensitive to manipulation include the decision over formats to be included (book reviews, editorials, etc.), citation windows (e.g. a two-year window), the number of articles published per year, a focus on trending topics, or the practice of citation cartels and stacking to boost specific articles (Forsyth 2020).

One concrete impact of this paradigm on publishing is standardization. The current digital industry promotes the homogenization of journals not only to facilitate the efficiency of production at scale but also to reduce costs. As reflected by the editors of *Cultural Anthropology*, if a journal wants to increase the number of words for each article (or to allow videos, images, or any other alternative format), production costs are bound to increase (Kelty et al. 2008). As a result, a paper published in a medical journal will resemble one published in any other discipline. This standardization model has an obvious impact on innovation in design publishing, a field defined by its creative nature.

Any attempt to innovate within the industry, then, inevitably raises the question of “who will pay for this innovation?” This brings up the issue of governance and the real possibilities of promoting change in the sector. Decision-making is hierarchical, guided by conflicting views among different actors beyond a journal's editors. To enact any change, it is necessary to obtain support from stakeholders such as scholarly societies and publishing houses, who may not share the same interests.³

At the same time, the above problems are exacerbated by a scientific paradigm already evident in many fields related to design studies. This paradigm valorizes quantifiable metrics and standardized knowledge, following established scientific norms, such as rigid textual formats, linear thinking, or systematic and inquiry-led investigation (Gaver et al. 2022). This impacts research reporting and makes it increasingly difficult to validate critical scholarship that wishes to deviate from these norms. We should also not underestimate how this same paradigm impacts how research is conducted. The current research system often privileges compartmentalized and discipline-based knowledge and, as part of a broader neoliberal logic, encourages individualistic competition and the search for distinction. This, in

turn, hinders collaborative and transdisciplinary approaches and the forms in which we produce and circulate knowledge.

Finally, the current knowledge economy has not adequately reckoned with its colonial roots. It is no surprise that the aforementioned publishing conglomerates are headquartered in the US and UK, following metrics and standards that often privilege researchers and universities from the Global North and, more specifically, English-speaking institutions. As a result, eight out of the top ten positions in the 2024 Performance Rankings of Scientific Papers for World Universities were universities in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom (National Taiwan University 2025). This ranking considers citations, number of publications, and journal impact factors, highlighting the dominance of the English language in the sector and its impact on the marginalization of non-English-speaking scholars. In design, this reality is no different, with the dominance of journals like *Design and Culture* (UK), *Design Studies* (UK), *Design Issues* (US), *Journal of Design History* (UK), or *The Design Journal* (UK). A few exceptions, such as *Strategic Design* (Brazil), *Diseña* (Chile), and *She Ji* (China), offer alternatives in terms of language and open access, though they still primarily publish articles in English. This linguistic dominance has a great impact not only on the topics being investigated but also on epistemic traditions. After all, language is known to shape the ways in which we think and perceive the world, ultimately affecting the form, but also the content, of knowledge (Boroditsky, Fuhrman, and McCormick 2011).

The issues discussed in the previous section surfaced with new prominence in 2020, as decolonial, feminist, and decommodification efforts came to the fore in forums, calls for papers/proposals, conference themes, and collective efforts to diversify research with new perspectives, challenging the design canon's European origins. For example, the 18th Biennial Participatory Design Conference was held for the first time in South America in 2020 with the theme "Participation(s) otherwise" (Design Research Society 2020). That same year, a group of design historians created an open bibliography aimed to decenter whiteness in design history courses.⁴ This shift in focus is also reflected in the increase of Call for Papers and published articles on these topics in established design journals since 2020. It is no coincidence that the most cited article in *Design and Culture* since 2020 was on decolonial design (Taboada et al. 2020).

The ESW was founded in this complex cultural, social, political, and economic landscape as a small drop in the ocean attempting to "hack" the system.⁵ Despite the restricted framework we deal with, we believe there is still some room to support the emergence of high-quality research willing to challenge established norms and lead change from within. It is certainly not an easy task. As we go along, we find ourselves balancing a need to reproduce some of these norms in order to retain legitimacy while simultaneously trying to transform others. Identifying the in-between space of practice that a

workshop like the ESW creates, as well as a commitment to an ethics of care, were two driving forces for its continuation.

Who, or What, Is “Emerging?”

We found ourselves wrestling with the word “emerging” and its connotations at multiple steps throughout the research process. The attention to emergence found in a program such as *Design and Culture*’s Emerging Scholars Workshop is particularly worth teasing out because it is a feature of design itself. Described as an “‘open secret’ in practice-based design research,” emergence represents “the ability to adapt and learn as one engages with materials and settings,” which is a quality researchers Gaver et al. claim is “integral to good design,” and should be incorporated into research as well (Gaver et al. 2022, 517). “Emergence-friendly research [...] is responsive to external influences, material potentials, new learning, ideas, and inspirations. [...] This is an exploratory form of research, not a predictable one, and one which values surprise” (Gaver et al. 2022, 518). The definition of emergence here may apply more directly to the ESW as a form of practice-based research in design publishing. The first group of ESW peers considered emergence not only as a way to describe the kinds of writers they hoped to reach, but also as a way to describe the method and values of the workshop itself: “Just as practices of design and cultural processes are ongoing projects, this initiative and selection process is also an ongoing effort from which we will collaboratively learn as we go” (Uribe del Águila et al. 2021).

During the process of writing this article, we had to ask ourselves as peers, at what point do we stop seeing ourselves as “emerging” as well? The question came up in response to the peer review process for this article, which suggested we contextualize our role and relationship toward participant authors as emerging scholars helping other emerging scholars. In our decision to identify ourselves as peers, we are perhaps self-evidently identifying as “emerging,” considering we are not on the editorial board or have any say in the outcome of the paper. However, the comment of framing elicited a conversation among the four of us that revealed how an assumption of this kind can inhibit a designer or writer’s sense of legitimacy when engaging with academic publishing.⁶

For emerging scholars, one of the things at stake is the matter of audience. On one hand, there is an undeniable divide between the privileged space of academia and everyday life. In response to Richard Buchanan’s assertion that contemporary design is a “liberal art of technological culture” (Buchanan 1992, 5), Stuart Kendall considered the challenge of positioning design studies by describing a double-edged sword: “To speak of design as merely functional is to betray it as aesthetic; to speak of it as technological is to betray it as symbolic” (Kendall 2014, 350). Kendall acknowledges, however, that the public also plays a significant role in this positioning when it

comes to issues of access. The public, which includes designers, does not encounter the types of compelling journalistic or academic design writing in the space of consumption/everyday life, where it counts. His proposed solution relates to the goals of the ESW:

“Academics likely should embrace more appealing and diversified strategies of communication, if not in fact be required to do so by the promotion and tenure requirements that bind them, *and*, simultaneously, some means should be found to raise design consciousness among the educated general public.” (Kendall 2014, 347)

The ESW’s primary goal is to facilitate actionable change in publishing design research from underrepresented contexts. One of our internal challenges was deliberating if we were considering a scholar to be “emerging” based on academic hierarchies and cultural bias, which the journal and workshop try to position themselves against, or if “emerging” was based on factors such as time, experience, or even subject matter.

Moreover, the question of “access” and the differences between faculty, graduate students, and independent researchers made its way into evaluating submissions. We recognized our own bias in distributing the Call for Papers primarily to the networks of *Design and Culture* editors and ESW peers.

As an interdisciplinary field, design studies faces the challenge of attracting design-specific research from researchers who often engage with design indirectly. It is not uncommon to incorporate research from the fields of anthropology, sociology, political science, or art history, for example, into design in order to gain a necessary wider perspective of the role it plays. It is just as necessary for interdisciplinary research to be funneled back into design to create specific meaning for designers. In other words, producing research about design without specific attention to how such research is contextualized by the people, economies, or places that produce it does a disservice to recognizing the role design plays in shaping political and social phenomena.

The aforementioned “politics of citations” that Adams, Keshavarz, and Traganou mentioned in their introduction to readers relates here as design scholarship commonly frames research through citation networks in areas of research that imprecisely measure influence or academic standard. Carrie Mott and Daniel Cockayne describe such practices as “citation cartels (informal agreements between authors to continually cite one another’s work) to boost ‘impact,’ or to only cite established scholars” as a way of establishing legitimacy within a field (Mott and Cockayne 2017, 955). This critique does not seek to destabilize the role of peer review, but rather acknowledge that the references that peer reviewers might require an emerging scholar cite in order for their research to be seen as legitimate reproduces hegemonic knowledge. The ESW attempts to address this bias by inviting applications from authors whose first language is not English

and whose work therefore may be engaging with distinct global design contexts.

One of the co-authors of this paper shared her perspective of the professional risks design researchers take when stepping outside of the field of design studies to contribute similar research in more established disciplinary fields. During one of our research Zoom calls, she reflected on how design anthropologists are professionally discouraged from publishing their research in design journals due to a perception that they are less rigorous or taken less seriously than anthropology journals.

A former author who participated in the ESW explained their decision to apply for the workshop because they still considered themselves an emerging scholar despite having research and design experience and being a professor in a Latin American university for the past seven years:

I've been writing, but I have found it very difficult to publish in that kind of journal, maybe because I also sometimes feel insecure. I found the Emerging Scholars Workshop as the middle step between a written document and publishing the document. Also, because [the article] is in English, and English is my second language. So I feel like I was considering myself as an emerging scholar because I don't have much published and also because [*Design and Culture*] is a journal that is a reference for me but that is also in another language. I wasn't quite sure about myself and my writing.⁷

The ability to share information about the publishing process in an organized way through group mentorship was one of the agreed-upon successful outcomes and defining features of ESW as it progressed and evolved. While the editors of *Design and Culture* intended the workshop to funnel emerging scholarship into the journal, authors were encouraged but not required to submit their article to the journal for publication. As peers, we could not guarantee publication as an outcome of the workshop. This condition carried a particular responsibility for peers toward the authors who participated in the workshop, one that can only be described as occupying the in-between space of peer and peer reviewer. While our feedback could not be considered a true peer review (we were not editorial board members, and the workshop was not designed as a double-blind process), our experience as published authors and our commitment to this project carried considerable weight. We were able to anticipate what kinds of comments might come up in peer review, exposing any holes in research that needed to be addressed, as well as translating some of the institutional practices of academic publishing and design studies research to authors who were not familiar with these habits. This type of care work has the potential to be significant enough to make an impact in design publishing by navigating writers through the editorial process, decoding established ways of

researching design in order to disentangle scholarly conventions from the journal's desired push for new voices and perspectives in the field.

Experimenting with Form

The Emerging Scholars Workshop not only wrestled with its scope and definition but also its complex relationship with non-traditional forms of research and writing. Institutionalized demand for measurability in academic publishing often leads to a homogenized process of writing that prioritizes conformity over exploring ideas and showcasing personal writing styles (Yoo 2017). The conventional system can suppress different forms of writing by emphasizing individual authorship, strict citation conventions, a preference for linear narratives, and clear outcomes (Cheang et al. 2023).

One of the workshop's objectives was to transcend what we perceived as the binaries of scholarly and creative expression by supporting and encouraging diverse styles of writing. *Design and Culture* is well-suited for such explorations, as it aims to embrace socially, culturally, and personally embedded research with critical and provocative perspectives. The journal accepts various types and formats of manuscripts, including original papers, statements of pedagogy or practice, visual essays, conversation pieces, book reviews, exhibition reviews, conference reviews, and media reviews. For instance, in its COVID-19 special issue, the journal published multimodal works ranging from text to audio and visual work to capture the different affective and material dimensions of the pandemic (Adams et al. 2021). The ESW also aimed to welcome submissions falling under any of these format types. As peers and organizers of the workshop, coming from diverse geographies and varied design sub-disciplines, a common question and an issue we all experienced was "how much room do we have to experiment with different forms of research, writing, and expression?" This question became a focal point for collective reflection within the ESW cycles.

In this workshop, reviewing carried a different responsibility due to its nature as an in-between space. Ultimately, peer-reviewed publications are highly valued in academia, and the workshop's primary aim was to assist emerging scholars in getting published. This created a dilemma in the workshop's review process regarding how to handle different scholarly writing styles and formatting. One of the main discussion points during our participant selection process was evaluating the potential directions each paper could take, what could be accomplished within the workshop framework, and whether we had the necessary resources, time, and expertise to guide participants in navigating the balance between adhering to expected norms and embracing their unique ways of operating. We sometimes opted for a safer approach than necessary due to this sense of responsibility.

In early calls, we were very open and flexible regarding the maturity level of submissions, accepting full papers of nearly 8,000 words

as well as 900-word author statements addressing critical and/or aesthetic issues with a bibliography. Author statements provided an opportunity for individuals who were unable to draft a full paper for workshop submission to still share research work they believed was relevant to the *Design and Culture*. This flexibility presented both advantages and challenges. The author statement submissions often involved reviewers in discussions about format and style, fostering more discussions from the early stages of writing. On the other hand, selecting papers for the workshop became more challenging, as the timeframe of a workshop cycle sometimes felt insufficient to help an emerging scholar develop a 900-word author statement into a manuscript. Consequently, we became more inclined to select full paper submissions for the workshop, believing we could be more helpful that way.

Recognizing this inclination, we changed the Call for Papers and started to only accept “completed or near-completed papers and reviews under 8,000 words, following the formatting instructions for submitting to *Design and Culture*” (Design and Culture 2024). This made our selection and reviewing processes more efficient. All submissions were in the same format, making them easier to evaluate comparatively. However, this likely also reduced the potential for more experimental formats. We continued to receive submissions in diverse forms of expression, such as personal essays, yet their structures were largely conventional.

In 2024, two out of three ESW authors submitted to the journal within a month of completing the workshop and are now undergoing *Design and Culture*’s regular peer-review process. In previous cycles, submissions to the journal were less frequent. While preparing for the 2025 Call for Papers, the peers⁸ of the 2025 cycle discussed whether the last workshop could be considered more successful than previous years and, more broadly, what “success” means for the ESW. This prompted us to revisit the objectives and origins of the workshop. We reflected on how to better accommodate authors working in non-traditional formats, styles, and forms of scholarly communication in the new Call for Papers while also narrowing the types of submissions we could feasibly work on during the workshop time frame. As a result, alongside completed papers, we added the statement:

We also welcome diverse types of submissions that fall outside of traditional design research, including visual essays, media essays, statements of pedagogy or practice, and other creative/alternative approaches to design research and writing that align with the scope of *Design and Culture*. (Design and Culture 2025)

With this, we aimed to emphasize the value of alternative formats and approaches to design research.

Each year, the peers meet to reflect on previous rounds and reconsider our goals. The Call for Papers evolves annually;

sometimes incrementally, sometimes more drastically. This oscillation is not only necessary but intentional, as it allows us to navigate and maintain the workshop as a dynamic, in-between space. This approach applies not only to research and writing formats but also to all other aspects of the workshop.

An In-Between Space

The Emerging Scholars Workshop was envisioned as an experiment in creating a nurturing space for the development of scholarly work, free from some of the pressures of the academic market as experienced by the organizing team in their various working geographies. We positioned the workshop as an in-between space, in the interstices between the institutional site of the journal and the individual work of the author.

From the outset, we defined the workshop by what it was not. A key part of this involved how we defined and positioned ourselves: as peers rather than peer reviewers. This distinction was in part structural. As noted earlier, we were not involved with ESW participants' articles after the workshop. Some authors chose to submit their workshoped papers to *Design and Culture*, following a formal submission and publication process. Others chose to submit elsewhere or continued editing their papers after the workshop ended. The terminology of peer review was also rejected with the awareness that a wide range of topics addressed by the participating authors extended beyond our immediate field of expertise. Instead, the peers' role was to offer meaningful guidance and support to the paper and author. We envisioned the workshop not as a space of review and evaluation, but as a collaborative, iterative process of shared making and remaking. The peers' role was to invest their time and knowledge in supporting the author and the work.

This peer dynamic was crucial to the workshop process. ESW consistently involved a selection of scholars who had gone through the workshop themselves and therefore had insights into the entirety of the process from writing to publishing in *Design and Culture*. Given their experience, the peers also facilitated participant access to the often-murky waters of institutional knowledge. Cognizant of the key role played by informal social networks in generational access to academia, the peers leveraged their (albeit limited) institutional know-how to help make up for systemic barriers often experienced by emerging scholars, in particular first-generation students and academics outside a Western, English-speaking context. The peers based the workshop on a foundation of camaraderie and care, reenvisioning participation in academic publishing – too often marked by competition and undervaluing – as a space for thriving and collaboration.

Above all, the peers considered the work done in the workshop as adhering to an ethos of community responsibility, a part of a broader attempt to transcend the constraints of individualism and

shift towards relational interdependence. As one of the key methods in this effort, the peers took up care as a transformative ethic and embodied practice of relationality.⁹ They built on the work of theorists who extricated care from its associations with the private and domestic realm and reframed it as both an ethic and practice of great potential.¹⁰ In recent years, researchers from numerous disciplines, including design, architecture, and science and technology studies have foregrounded care as a building block towards transforming our ways of interacting with ourselves, others, and the world.¹¹ Positioned as a way of understanding and relating to others, it is not surprising that care, as a term and method, has found particularly fertile ground in design fields.¹²

The ESW peers based their understanding of care on Berenice Fisher and Joan Tronto's widely adopted definition that describes it as "a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible" (Fisher and Tronto 1993, 10). From the outset, we also followed Carol Gilligan's (1982) positioning of care as not only a disposition but a capacity that finds its truest expression in action. This understanding merged care as an interpersonal affective practice with larger social and political implications. We deliberately used the term expansively and instrumentalized it in opposition to systemic disinterest, neglect, and refusal of messy and complex dynamics of research and publishing, particularly for early career researchers with non-traditional career pathways.

In the context of the workshop, care meant a voluntary investment of attentiveness, effort, and concern into the editing process. Our responsibilities and accountabilities were self-defined since we had no institution or authority exerting power over us to ensure the work was being done. However, we ensured we met the set deadlines, provided in-depth feedback, and upheld similar commitments, primarily out of respect for the participants and for the work itself. This involved small-scale adjustments in putting aside one's own work to invest in someone else's. It also meant occasionally having to prioritize the needs of the workshop to the requirements of one's everyday life; a commitment that spanned managing small children during meetings and attending to the needs of the workshop while navigating large-scale disruptions in the form of climate crisis events. And finally, care also involved the act of letting go when the authors decided to take the project in a different direction or to a different publication.

While it's difficult to assess the full impact of our efforts, informal discussions with participants suggest that the labor of care did not go unnoticed. One of the peers later reflected on her experience as a participant:

I appreciated that the people in the workshop took the time and effort to give me feedback that went beyond what was expected.

At the time, my PhD advisor had not read anything I submitted for months, which made me feel isolated and frustrated. While I was angry with my advisor, I was even more disheartened by the broader system, knowing that she was also overburdened due to a personnel shortage. Having the support of ESW during that time, I felt very grateful.¹³

While the ethics of care have been increasingly posited as an answer to many of the problems of contemporary social dynamics, the peers were careful not to mistake it as a panacea for larger, systemic issues. We acknowledged that care adds work, both in the amount of time dedicated to the project as well as in the accompanying emotional investment. Indeed, in the academic setting, the question that is perhaps most urgent is whether care is being instrumentalized as another way of extracting labor from the already precariously employed ranks of contingent faculty. When extended with no expectation of return, especially outside of the immediate familial and social circle, care – as a form of material and emotional labor – is a draining practice. Perhaps this can account for the recent promotion of acts of self-care by academic universities, administrators, and media. It remains vital not to extol care as a catchall solution, as the practice can just as easily be appropriated by hegemonic ethics as it can be a matter of transformative feminist politics (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017).¹⁴

While cognizant of the limitations of care, ESW peers foregrounded this practice as a building block towards transforming our ways of interacting with ourselves, others, and the world. The in-between space of the workshop proved particularly conducive to this way of doing and being, allowing for flexibility, individuation, and mutuality.

Conclusion

The Emerging Scholars Workshop, as an initiative of *Design and Culture*, aims to support and build camaraderie with scholars and practitioners in developing their work for publication. Over the years, the workshop peers have also comprised emerging academics engaging in dialogue about culture and design. Organizing and facilitating the workshop has been a collaborative process, with at least four peers each year, constantly changing and reconfiguring. Previous participants often became next year's peers. In the context of the workshop, "emerging" refers to those willing to inhabit the space in-between, rather than adopting fixed positions on what scholarly writing and publication should be. We strip away the connotation of lack of institutional recognition from emerging and redefine it through a lens of care and intentional positioning. For us, it is not about lacking power; our role allows us to actively shape design research scholarship.

Having said that, we also acknowledge that the position of care involves labor, and it can be unsettling. Peers occasionally took breaks between cycles due to personal or professional demands, sometimes returning and other times not. Many peers completed their Ph.D.s, moved between countries, changed jobs, or started families along the way. This constant rotation of peers, while presenting operational challenges, fostered a strong sense of camaraderie among both participants and peers. The four authors of this paper are just a few of the many who have contributed to the workshop over the years. In this text, we reflected on some of the dilemmas we faced, contemplated, and struggled with and how we addressed them by positioning ourselves, the workshop, and our approach to these challenges in an in-between space.

Up to now, the workshop has had five rounds, working with thirteen authors situated all over the world. We mediated between the *Design and Culture* journal and individual authors, navigating between academic demands and emerging formats, and attended between emerging scholars and their desire to get published. We approached the workshop with care: care for the participants on what could be a daunting journey toward publication as well as self-care as peers balanced various commitments. This concept of turning an in-between space into an intentional place of care helped us avoid romanticizing our efforts or becoming discouraged by the many unresolved challenges of staying in-between.

Finally, reflecting on five years of practical experience and engagement with new forms of peer relations and publishing, we see some tentative pathways for the workshop and the broader practice of scholarship. The future of the workshop requires constant questioning of how to balance established publication norms in our working contexts while also transforming these norms to allow for innovative formats. The aim is to continuously foster dialogue, exploring and expanding the space of in-betweenness to create a more inclusive and welcoming workshop for those navigating and publishing on issues at the edges of power asymmetry, inclusion, diversity, and social justice. As the workshop community grows and multiplies with each round, our platform for discussion and dialogue expands, enabling us to discover new ways of supporting emerging scholars, innovative ideas, and experimental formats.

Structurally, it is important to encourage collective and democratic debates within the design community on free software movements for publishing, scholarly-run journals, creative commons, and open-access policies to transition to a more inclusive publishing environment.¹⁵ Experiments in this direction have been working, for example, in Latin America through the large-scale and cooperative model of SciELO.¹⁶ Another example worth mentioning is a major journal such as *Cultural Anthropology*¹⁷ adopting the low-cost hosting platform Diamond Open Access in 2014.¹⁸

Alongside this collective effort, it may also be fruitful to build more in-between spaces that promote change from within, providing the necessary material and procedural resources. Finding ways to provide legitimacy for alternative formats and addressing the issue of working with complete manuscripts and the limited space for change and innovation is essential.¹⁹

While we do not claim to have answers to all these challenging issues, we ultimately propose deepening care-based initiatives to overcome some structural dilemmas. This reflection piece presents our humble efforts in this direction. In the ESW, we aimed to build a more direct kind of publishing practice developed among peers while raising questions for the future of academic publishing and knowledge circulation in design studies. We hope these insights will contribute to a critical perspective and practice for design research and beyond.²⁰

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Notes

1. The authors of this paper would like to acknowledge the work of Veronica Uribe del Águila, Teresa Naval, and Anh-Ton Tran during the first year of the Emerging Scholars Workshop.
2. The authors would like to acknowledge the role ESW peer Isabella Brandalise played in developing the paper. Her perspective and contribution to early meetings and discussion about the form and content of this paper were significant in refining ideas presented in these reflections.
3. In a published conversation in *Cultural Anthropology*, for example, authors discuss how the American Anthropologists Association was more aligned with the interests of Wiley-Blackwell instead of those of the editors of the journal. Fundamentally, they argued that the main revenue of this scholarly society comes from publication sales (Kelty et al. 2008).
4. See the “Decentering Whiteness in Design History Resources” https://docs.google.com/document/d/1KiW2ULDFelm_OuvwhM2lygxwhoNddrEFk5tYI9zblbw/preview?pru=AAABdCtQXeg*HYioO3dTyw8m-f9OTS7Rlw&tab=t.0#heading=h.gjitemquyfzp
5. We use the term “hacking” following Otto von Busch’s definition. According to this author, “hacking is an activity to improve things by acquiring and disseminating knowledge of the inner workings of systems and a mastery of techniques that modify these systems. Hacking means to open black

- boxes, reverse engineer their circuitry, and build a new plug-in to the system, challenging it and releasing new capabilities from it" (Von Busch 2014, 51).
6. All authors of this paper have been published in a major journal, most hold Ph.D.s or teaching appointments at universities, and regularly publish new research. Despite these facts, some still consider themselves emerging, while others don't. The issue has more to do with interpersonal politics within the field of design studies as well as the interdisciplinary fields the authors engage in.
 7. María Ximena Dorado Velasco, interview by Claudia Marina, July 29, 2024.
 8. Claudia Marina, Gizem Öz, Lucía Garcés Dávila, María Ximena Dorado Velasco, Zoë Prosser.
 9. Mayane Dore and Gizem Öz, who are also co-authors of this paper, participated in the ESW in the fall of 2020. Peers of the ESW 2024 round, Fani Melles, Lucía Garcés Dávila, María Ximena Dorado Velasco, and Zoë Prosser, were also participants of previous years.
 10. While many researchers trace the emergence of care ethics to the 1980s and attribute its development to white feminist authors, an engagement with the ethics of care can be traced back to a radical black and Latinx tradition (Beauboeuf-Lafontant 2005; Walker and Snarey 2004).
 11. Other key works in care ethics include: Gilligan 1982; Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018; Noddings 1984; Puig de la Bellacasa 2017; Tronto 1993.
 12. In 2018, Shannon Mattern posited care and maintenance as a "framework, an ethos, a methodology, and a political cause" (Mattern 2018). Other recent examples include the "Creative Exchange 2021: Landscapes of Care" event; the virtual symposium "CARE-WORK: Space, Bodies, and the Politics of Care" held at Rice University in March 2021 (Lindén and Lydahl 2021; Manzini 2022).
 13. A workshop participant, direct message to Dora Vanette, January 28, 2025.
 14. Historically, care has been classed, gendered, and raced. It has commonly been identified with feminized subjectivities and conceptualized in maternal terms. As a result, it has been largely undervalued. As a quality traditionally assigned as innate to women, it has been relegated to the familial and social context, one that is positioned as being on the outside of a professional setting. A crucial aspect of contemporary ethics of care is the acknowledgment of the importance of historically marginalized positions and their liberatory potential.
 15. For some best practice examples, see the 2023 MIT Report on access to science and scholarship: <https://access-to-science.pubpub.org/>
 16. <https://scielo.org/es/>
 17. <https://journal.culanth.org/index.php/ca>
 18. For a detailed account of this experience, see Elfenbein (2014).
 19. One example in this direction is the Stanford Digital Project. As stated on the website, the project allowed "to advance a publishing process that helped authors develop their concept (in both content and form) and reach their market effectively to confer the same level of academic credibility on digital projects as print books receive." The outputs of the project include the Feral Atlas or Harlem in Disorder.
 20. It is an open conversation, and the workshop is ever-evolving. We want to invite others who are interested in becoming part of the workshop team: workshop.designculture@gmail.com

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