

Editorial: Autoethnographies of social design practices.

1. An autoethnography of editing a special issue about autoethnography

The seed that sprouted into this special issue was buried long ago, probably some time in 2018. When we first conceived this Special Issue on *Autoethnographies of social design practices*, our intention was to open a space for methodological experimentation that had long been sensed but rarely legitimised in the design research space. Design research has always occupied a peculiar position, moving between rational, evidence-based models on the one hand, and creative, situated and relational practices on the other. With this issue, we sought to invite contributions that could hold this tension: work that acknowledges the pull of scientific conventions while also resisting their reductionism, insisting instead on the value of lived experience, vulnerability, and reflexivity.

Our call emerged from a belief that introspection is not antithetical to rigour, but rather a condition of it. In an academic landscape where design is often asked to provide impact in ways that mirror scientific generalisation and evaluation, there is a risk that we lose sight of the particularities and nuances of practice. Introspective methods – such as autoethnography, collaborative reflection, and practice-led inquiry – offer not a retreat into the self, but a rigorous engagement with the complexities of positionality, power, and relationality. They allow us to reveal what happens “backstage”: the emotions, negotiations, and ethical dilemmas that underpin design practice but rarely find a place in formal research outputs.

Not writing the editorial of a special issue in a way that leans on the method's strength feels wrong. With that in mind we open this editorial with pieces from the transcript of the debriefing meeting we had when the last paper in the special issue was completed. The goal of this is to share the emotions and thoughts this long, strange journey has elicited to both of us as Guest Editors. The two vignettes are followed by a presentation of our thinking behind the call for this special issue, an analysis of the key themes of the papers submitted and we wrap up with a couple of provocative directions for where this strand of scholarship can go in the future.

David Pérez: When we began this journey, it represented something entirely new for me to explore. While you had more experience in this area—having already written a paper and engaged with the literature—I was embarking on a completely fresh endeavor. The process was genuinely exciting at the outset, particularly as we wondered where this would take us as a learning experience. As time progressed, especially following our conversation at the DRS conference (Bofylatos & Perez 2024), I developed a profound sense of community. It became clear that many others shared this interest.

Reading the papers we ultimately accepted for this special issue revealed why such strong interest existed. While I cannot identify a single definitive reason, I observed numerous compelling aspects that proved genuinely appealing. From the very beginning, we discussed these themes, but the papers made them even more explicit. There existed a kind of latent energy—or perhaps potential energy—among the authors who seemed to be saying: "Look, this is what happens backstage. This is what really occurred. These are my emotions, this is our approach, these are the tools we need for reflection, for engaging with different communities, for being respectful, for acknowledging our emotions." Reading certain passages genuinely delighted me, made me smile, and inspired me. Some of the writing is exceptionally well-crafted, and that's an integral part of this work. As you mentioned regarding structure, we understand conventional paper structure and typically follow it. I found it delightful to read some of the autoethnographic texts, including the play paper, which consists entirely of dialogue. I really enjoyed that, and I'm pleased we pursued it, because that represented one of our most challenging review processes. However, I'm glad we proceeded because it accomplishes the academic requirements while doing so in a different manner.

I found this absolutely fascinating because it acknowledges how much remains unspoken due to existing academic frameworks. For me, this represented the most rewarding aspect of the experience. After reading all the papers, I recognized this as potentially a starting point for acknowledging that these more introspective approaches—we explored autoethnography, though other approaches certainly exist—are genuinely necessary. For an extended period, I found myself reading papers that defied my expectations. I never quite knew how they would conclude. They were full of surprises, rich in detail, transporting me mentally to different contexts and situations, different groups. Sometimes I felt as though I were observing two researchers in conversation; other times I found myself in the midst of a workshop. This richness represents what these approaches bring to design research, rather than adhering to rigid structures that demand you begin with a literature review, explain your methodology, detail your participant numbers, and follow the inflexible conventions of traditional publishing. I wanted to express this because I felt genuinely delighted when reading these papers.

Spyros Bofylatos: I absolutely share that feeling. Finally getting to read all the papers together completed what initially was quite a fragmented perspective during the making of the special issue, navigating through reviews, reviewing the reviews themselves and seeing different versions of papers. Finally having the time and mental space to simply sit down and read through everything, I experienced that same sense you described. I particularly appreciated what you said about reading papers without knowing where they would lead. This represents something unusual; typically, we know from the abstract exactly what we're reading.

For me, this work is partly activism and partly an effort to create space for researchers interested in similar topics, so they won't have to fight the battles I had in the past while conducting this type of research. I had faced a constant pressure to present everything as science. Being able to leverage my position as a designer-researcher in an editorial capacity, to create that space for others—aligns with both research programme and my values.. This special issue illuminates aspects traditionally absent from papers, and it should serve as an invitation: conduct the science, but also discuss your positionality. We can do both. This isn't a war against science; it's about selecting the appropriate tool for each task.

Not everything is a nail requiring a hammer, sometimes you need to "sidestep the positivist apparatus." (Alzate 2024)

Reflecting on the abstracts we received, I believe we curated this collection well. We selected the right type and mix of papers, which speaks to the broader community. Many of the paper proposals we received took a more scientific approach to framing autoethnography rather than actually being autoethnographic. They were typical papers about education or ethnography, attempting to create scientific methodologies for introspective design, which I don't believe addresses the core issue. There's no precise science here; it's a practice. That word is difficult to define precisely, yet it's almost tacit. People who have practiced it immediately recognize it: "Yes, of course, practice—I understand." The only way to build practice is to engage in practice. That's the nature of this work.

This applies equally to researchers and practitioners. Conducting research can be frightening, especially when beginning. The scientific method can serve as a convenient excuse to avoid taking risks. It's easier to do science than to engage in introspection because rigour in the context of the scientific method is extrinsic—you don't need to create your own method. If you remain within the established program, you'll obtain some results. Regardless of the result, its value derives externally from the process, not the result itself. This dampens people's willingness to pursue more creative approaches.

The papers we selected present a fascinating mix of autoethnography veterans—and we must thank them for their pioneering work; they walked so we could fly—alongside people just beginning to engage with this approach. This tension permeates much of the writing. I'm particularly proud of everyone who practiced vulnerability. It's profoundly difficult to say, "I conducted a co-design workshop with children with brain cancer"—that's already an immensely heavy topic. And then to add: "Here are my feelings." We're supposedly objective research machines, and research machines don't have feelings, which I consider a tragedy because emotions constitute an equally important part of the practice.

3. Rigorous Introspection in Design Research

The idea of introspection has always been present in design research, albeit unevenly. Since Donald Schön's reflections on the "reflective practitioner," (1983) the field has acknowledged the centrality of the designer's own experience and situated judgment. Yet, for decades, much of design research has borrowed its legitimacy from the sciences: adopting notions of objectivity, generalisability, and systematicity that often sit uneasily with design's creative, improvisational, and situated character. This tension has shaped what is considered valid design knowledge, privileging external observation and replication over embodied insight and reflexivity.

Our Special Issue sought to challenge this imbalance by repositioning introspection not as anecdotal or subjective, but as a robust scholarly practice. Introspective methodologies – autoethnography, duoethnography, collaborative autoethnography, playful and speculative autoethnography – make the ways in which knowledge emerges from within design practice itself visible. They draw attention to how designers navigate intuition, imagination, power relations, and ethical responsibility, and in doing so they expand the boundaries of what counts as research.

This move is not without precedent. In the social sciences and humanities, autoethnography has long been used to synthesise personal narrative with cultural critique. In feminist theory, reflexivity has been embraced as a strategy to account for positionality and situated knowledge. In anthropology, the turn toward reflexive ethnography revealed how the researcher is never outside the field but always implicated in it. Our contributors draw from these traditions, but also rework them in ways that are specific to design: combining written narrative with artefacts, workshops, playful encounters, and speculative futures.

What emerges from the contributions is a portrait of introspection as both methodological and political (Adams & Herrmann 2025). On the one hand, introspective accounts deepen our understanding of design practice by opening windows onto the lived experiences of researchers and participants alike. On the other, they challenge dominant epistemologies by insisting that vulnerability, emotion, and relationality are not weaknesses to be excluded from scholarship, but vital sources of knowledge. As one of us remarked in our editorial conversations, reading these papers was to witness a latent energy made explicit – an insistence from authors that “this is what is happening backstage... these are my emotions, this is how I tried to navigate the situation.”

We also observed how introspection, when practised rigorously, is rarely solitary. Even when an account appears to be written in the first person, it is always in dialogue: with participants, with colleagues, with theoretical traditions, with communities of practice. Many contributions highlight this relationality explicitly – through collaborative or duoethnographic formats, through playful co-writing, or through reflexive dialogues that span cultures and contexts. This makes introspection not only a matter of looking inward but of attending carefully to the relational webs in which design unfolds.

3. Introspective Currents Across the Special Issue

Rather than grouping the contributions by type of autoethnography or by context, we read this collection as a set of intersecting *currents* that together shape what rigorous introspection can mean for design research. These currents do not map neatly onto single papers: they flow across the issue, intersecting, diverging, and occasionally colliding. We discuss five of them below – **(1) reflexivity as method, (2) navigating power and ethics, (3) relational and collective selves, (4) affect and emotional labour, and (5) experimenting with forms of design scholarship.**

3.1 Reflexivity as Method

Across the issue, authors take introspection not as a post-hoc reflection but as the core engine of inquiry. *Rolfe & Bradford* turn their own shifting professional identities in healthcare into an analytical lens, while *Saad-Sulonen & Watkin* use duoethnography to unfold design’s multiple temporalities. *Poulsen & Skovbjerg* propose “playful autoethnography,” showing that reflexivity can be light-footed and improvisational rather than solemn or self-absorbed. In

Hornbuckle's “quasi-autoethnographies” and *Holman Jones et al.'s* speculative “tomorrow stories,” reflexivity becomes both inquiry and creation – a way of generating knowledge through narrative performance.

Together, these works reframe introspection as a **situated methodology** rather than a personal confession. They demonstrate that systematic self-reflection, when made transparent and theoretically grounded, can generate insights equivalent in rigour to more conventional empirical methods.

3.2 Navigating Power and Ethics

Ethical awareness is the connective tissue of the collection. Nearly every paper treats responsibility and positionality as constitutive of rigour. *Xue et al.* articulate this most explicitly through their *Introspector's Toolkit*, yet similar sensitivities are found throughout. In *Alzate's* feminist autoethnography with Dalit girls, ethics is inseparable from social justice; in *Miller et al.'s* healthcare collaboration, it emerges from everyday negotiations among professionals and patients; and in *Teerapong et al.'s* transcultural mentoring of women, it manifests as the careful tending of safe relational spaces.

These accounts reject the idea of a detached ethical protocol. Instead, they foreground what María Puig de la Bellacasa calls *matters of care* – ethics as a practice performed in situ, moment by moment. Rigorous introspection, then, demands more than honesty; it demands an ongoing attentiveness to the consequences of one's actions, emotions, and representations within the communities we study and design with.

3.3 Relational and Collective Selves

A striking characteristic of this Special Issue is how few papers are written from a singular “I.” Even when authored individually, they speak with and through others. *Saad-Sulonen & Watkin's* duoethnography exemplifies dialogical reflexivity, while *Lamping et al.* and *Miller et al.* develop collaborative autoethnographies that weave multiple voices into shared accounts. *Poulsen & Skovbjerg* treat play itself as a relational medium of knowing, and *Gümüş Çiftçi & Aktaş* extend this relationality to the non-human through their attention to the agency of materials in acts of repair.

Through these polyphonic forms, introspection becomes a **collective act of sense-making**. The designer–researcher is re-imagined not as an autonomous author but as part of a constellation of actors – human and material, present and remembered. The implication for design research is profound: knowledge is not produced by isolated reflection but by *co-reflection*, emerging through encounters, correspondences, and the affective ties that sustain collaboration.

3.4 Affect and Emotional Labour

Many contributors foreground emotion as a legitimate source of knowledge. *Catoir-Brisson & Paixão-Barradas* craft emotional narratives from healthcare co-design during COVID-19, showing how fear, empathy, and fatigue shape decision-making. *Rolfe & Bradford* describe the vulnerability of occupying multiple professional identities, while *Lamping et al.* confront the frustration of community disengagement. In these and other accounts, emotion is not an afterthought but an epistemic condition – the means through which understanding is felt and articulated.

Across the issue, we see a collective refusal to sanitise experience. Rather than editing out doubt or pain, authors treat them as data, as evidence of the real complexities of designing with and for others. Introspection thus becomes a **practice of emotional literacy**, helping researchers recognise their own affective investments and the social dynamics that produce them. By making emotions visible, these papers also point to the need for institutional cultures that can hold vulnerability safely – in supervision, peer review, and collaboration alike.

3.5 Experimenting with Forms of Design Scholarship

Finally, the issue showcases a remarkable diversity of scholarly forms. Dialogue, poetry, narrative fragments, speculative fiction, and conversational transcripts appear alongside more traditional analytic essays. These stylistic experiments – visible in *Holman Jones et al.*'s speculative futures, *Poulsen & Skovbjerg*'s conversational writing, and *Hornbuckle*'s layered ecosystem of narratives – are not aesthetic embellishments but methodological arguments. They assert that form and content are inseparable: that how we write is part of what we know.

In *Gümüş Çiftçi & Aktaş*, writing becomes a tactile practice mirroring repair; in *Saad-Sulonen & Watkin*, dialogue embodies the temporal rhythms they analyse. Together, these works challenge design academia to widen its understanding of the scholarly object. If research-through-design has long valorised artefacts as carriers of knowledge, these papers remind us that *writing itself is an artefact* – one capable of design, iteration, and affective engagement.

4. What Emerges Across the Issue

Across the thirteen contributions, certain motifs reverberate with striking clarity. Although each paper is rooted in its own disciplinary, cultural, and methodological terrain, together they reveal a collective conversation about what it means to practise design research introspectively, responsibly, and relationally.

4.1 Ethics and Responsibility

One of the most pervasive threads concerns ethics. Rather than treating ethics as a procedural afterthought – a checklist of approvals and consent forms – these authors understand it as a lived practice. *Xue et al.*'s *Introspector's Toolkit* provides an explicit framework for safe and responsible reflexivity, but ethical care also runs quietly through every contribution. *Alzate* writes of her own discomfort as a researcher engaging with Dalit girls in India; *Miller et al.* describe the negotiations of care within healthcare co-design; *Teerapong et al.* foreground transcultural mentorship as a form of ethical relation.

Together, these papers urge a redefinition of rigour: not as the absence of subjectivity but as the presence of care. Rigour in introspective design research becomes the capacity to sustain empathy without exploitation, to open oneself to vulnerability while maintaining responsibility to others.

The emphasis on ethics as lived practice resonates with recent developments in Designing for Care, which conceptualizes care as both a foundational value and a guiding principle that informs caring processes through concrete, recursive practices. This approach, grounded in Care Ethics (de La Bellacasa, 2017) and relational ontology (Vega 2011), mirrors the ethical sensibilities found throughout this Special Issue. Contemporary design discourse has increasingly engaged with questions of conduct and ethics in professional practice, examining how designers navigate responsibilities within complex social and organizational contexts (Rodgers & Bremner, 2025). The shift from procedural ethics toward ethics-as-care that our contributors demonstrate aligns with broader movements in design research to recognize ethical responsibility not as compliance but as an ongoing practice of attentiveness, empathy, and accountability. This reframing challenges the traditional separation between ethical oversight and design practice, instead positioning ethical awareness as constitutive of rigorous research itself.

4.2 Relationality and Collaboration

A second motif is relationality. Many of the papers reject the notion of the solitary autoethnographer. Instead, introspection is presented as a **dialogical and collective** act – a form of “thinking-with,” to borrow Haraway's term. The duo- and collaborative autoethnographies by *Saad-Sulonen & Watkin* and *Lamping et al.* exemplify this approach. Even single-authored pieces, such as *Holman Jones et al.* or *Poulsen & Skovbjerg*, stage the text as a conversation, blending multiple voices and perspectives.

Through these relational modes, authors dissolve the boundary between self and other, showing how knowledge emerges through exchange. Reflexivity becomes less about confession and more about co-presence – about how we attend to each other's voices, silences, and interpretations.

The relational turn evident across this Special Issue reflects growing scholarly attention to how designers and creative practitioners are increasingly applying experimental, relational, experiential and participatory approaches to facilitate collaboration, social change and imaginative world-making, with understandings that go beyond rational thinking and involve emotional and personal aspects (Mattelmäki et al., 2025). Recent methodological

developments have explored relational research methods rooted in Indigenous epistemologies, whereby all living things and the natural world have a shared history and future, offering important frameworks for understanding research as fundamentally interconnected practice (Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021). Emerging protocols for collaborative relational work emphasize material practices that are mindful of the diversity of stakes, opinions and positionalities, enabling navigation through complex relations. The polyphonic and dialogical (Green et al. 2023) forms showcased in our collection thus participate in a wider disciplinary conversation about moving from individualist models of design knowledge toward distributed, collective sense-making that acknowledges multiple agencies—human, material, and more-than-human.

4.3 Emotions and Vulnerability

Emotional honesty threads through nearly all the papers. *Catoir-Brisson & Paixão-Barradas* write of anxiety, exhaustion, and compassion in pandemic-era healthcare; *Rolfe & Bradford* narrate the ambivalence of occupying multiple identities; *Lamping et al.* expose the sting of rejection. These authors collectively refuse the fiction of emotional neutrality.

What becomes clear is that vulnerability is not antithetical to professionalism; it is intrinsic to the ethics of social design. Autoethnography allows researchers to acknowledge the affective weight of their work – to recognise the toll and the tenderness that accompany the practice of care. By making emotions explicit, they transform them from private burdens into shared analytical resources.

The foregrounding of emotion and vulnerability across this Special Issue speaks to an emerging recognition in design research that affective dimensions are not peripheral to knowledge production but central to it. Recent human-computer interaction research has shown growing interest in envisioning, designing, and evaluating technology-enabled interventions that support users' emotion regulation, recognizing emotion as integral to design processes. Scholars have increasingly examined vulnerability and emotions in research contexts, urging researchers to consider the short and long-term effects of research on themselves and recognize the risks involved in emotionally demanding inquiry (Lambley, 2025). This shift challenges the myth of the detached researcher and acknowledges that emotional labor is both an epistemic resource and a methodological consideration requiring institutional support. By refusing to sanitize affective experience, the contributions to this issue align with broader movements toward emotional literacy in design research, recognizing that feelings are not impediments to rigor but essential components of understanding complex social situations and design interventions.

4.4 Epistemic Resistance

A further insight concerns the politics of knowledge production. The diversity of narrative forms across the issue – dialogues, letters, poetic fragments, vignettes, speculative stories – represents an epistemic resistance to the dominant formats of academic writing. The authors do not abandon rigour; rather, they reconfigure it. Their work insists that rigour can coexist with openness, and that storytelling can carry as much analytical depth as theoretical exposition.

This experimentation is particularly evident in the “playful” and “futuring” contributions, which show that introspection can be performative, sensorial, and creative. Through such gestures, these researchers reclaim writing as a site of design: the page itself becomes a space of making and world-building.

The diverse narrative forms represented across this Special Issue—dialogues, poetry, speculative fiction, conversational transcripts—constitute what might be understood as epistemic resistance to dominant modes of academic knowledge production. Recent scholarship has recognized that practice-based design research is often emergent, with methods, tactics, goals and even topics unfolding and changing as researchers adapt and learn in the course of their projects—an adaptability that is one of the strengths of design as an approach to research, even as it seems to contradict assumptions about research planning and control (Gaver et al., 2022). This recognition of emergence as legitimate validates the experimental writing practices in our collection, which resist closure and embrace uncertainty. The concept of “epistemic disobedience” in design discourse offers a framework for understanding how alternative forms of knowledge production challenge the colonial legacy of Western design methodologies (Recklies, 2022), positioning the performative, sensorial, and creative approaches to introspection demonstrated here as acts of decolonial practice. The authors in this Special Issue do not abandon rigour; rather, they reconfigure it, insisting that rigour can coexist with openness and that storytelling can carry as much analytical depth as theoretical exposition. By treating writing as a site of design practice, these contributions expand the boundaries of scholarly communication and assert that how we write is inseparable from what we claim to know.

4.5 Plurality and Inclusion

Finally, the Special Issue reveals a rich plurality of positionalities. Contributors write from contexts across Europe, Asia, Latin America, and Oceania; some are early-career researchers testing the boundaries of what is permissible in academia, while others are long-established scholars reflecting on decades of practice. This diversity of voices disrupts any monolithic understanding of autoethnography. It affirms that introspection is not a single method but a family of practices – feminist, decolonial, speculative, affective – each tuned to its cultural and institutional conditions.

Through these intertwined threads – ethics, relationality, emotion, resistance, and plurality – the collection demonstrates that **rigorous introspection is not an individual pursuit but a collective orientation**. It is a way of doing design research that is at once accountable, imaginative, and humane.

The rich plurality of positionalities represented across this Special Issue—spanning continents, career stages, and methodological traditions—reflects design research's increasing engagement with questions of diversity, inclusion, and situated knowledge. Contemporary scholarship on relationality in design emphasizes the need for reflexivity and collective engagements to meet the challenges of a damaged and fragmented world, calling for alternative pathways that nurture dialogue across difference. Recent work on pluriversal design education has challenged dominant Western frameworks, proposing alternative futures that center marginalized epistemologies and recognize multiple ways of knowing and being (Noel et al., 2023). Critically, voices from the Global South have emphasized that the

decolonizing design movement must incorporate South American, Asian, and other non-Christian perspectives to expose and rectify the colonial legacy of Northern hegemony in design (Baha & Singh, 2024). The collection demonstrates that autoethnography is not a monolithic method but rather a family of practices—feminist, decolonial, speculative, affective—each attuned to specific cultural, political, and institutional conditions. This multiplicity is itself methodologically significant: it resists any singular "correct" way of doing introspective research and instead embraces methodological pluralism as an ethical stance. By bringing together diverse voices and approaches, this Special Issue participates in ongoing efforts to decolonize design research and create space for epistemologies that have been historically marginalized within Western academic frameworks.

5. Provocations for the Field

If this Special Issue testifies to the richness of introspective methods, it also poses demanding questions for the future of design research. The following provocations arise not as prescriptions but as invitations for continued dialogue.

5.1. Re-imagining Rigour

What counts as rigour when knowledge emerges through narrative, emotion, and encounter? The contributions here suggest that rigour lies in transparency, reflexivity, and ethical depth rather than replicability. Yet institutional metrics still privilege generalisable findings over situated insight. We are thus challenged to articulate criteria that respect both academic accountability and experiential richness – a task that demands collective effort from editors, reviewers, and academic impact frameworks.

5.2. Reclaiming Writing as Design Practice

Several authors blur the boundary between writing and designing, treating the written text as a designed artefact – structured, iterative, and performative. This invites the question: what if writing itself were understood as a legitimate site of design research? Doing so could expand how design knowledge is produced, moving beyond the artefact or the prototype to include stories, performances, and textual experiments as equally valid outputs.

5.3. Teaching and Supervision for Reflexive Practice

Introspective methods are demanding. They require emotional literacy, ethical sensitivity, and critical self-awareness. As educators, how do we prepare students and doctoral researchers for this mode of inquiry? We might need pedagogies that combine reflective journaling, collective dialogue, and peer mentorship, cultivating safe spaces for vulnerability within design education.

5.4. Institutional and Infrastructural Change

The legitimacy of introspection also depends on the systems that evaluate research. Many universities and funding bodies still regard first-person accounts with suspicion. To sustain this methodological shift, institutions must evolve: peer-review processes, ethical protocols, and impact frameworks should recognise reflexive scholarship as rigorous and socially valuable. Otherwise, the affective and political labour celebrated in this issue risks remaining precarious, performed in spite of – rather than supported by – academic structures.

5.5. Towards Collective and Material Introspection

While many contributions focus on personal experience, several hint at broader possibilities. What might *collective* or *material* introspection look like? Could we imagine research practices where the reflection is distributed across people, artefacts, and environments? The repair and play papers point toward such futures: where introspection becomes embodied, tactile, and shared, challenging the anthropocentric assumption that reflection resides only in the mind of the researcher.

5.6. Autoethnography as Activism

Finally, we might read this Special Issue as an act of activism. Each contribution challenges the hierarchies of knowledge that marginalise emotion, culture, and care. Together they create what one might call a politics of presence: making visible those experiences that institutions prefer to keep invisible. To write autoethnographically in design is thus not only to describe but also to intervene – to redesign the very conditions under which knowledge is produced.

6. Closing Reflection

Editing this Special Issue has been for us both a scholarly and an affective journey. In our conversations as editors, we often returned to the sense of surprise and delight these papers produced: *“Sometimes I felt I was observing two researchers talking to each other; sometimes I was in the middle of a workshop. That is the richness these approaches bring.”*

Curating this issue was also an act of creating space – a space where vulnerability is welcomed, where methodological experimentation is possible, where diverse voices can resonate. In doing so, we hope to have contributed to a wider movement in design research: to embrace rigorous introspection not as indulgence, but as method; not as weakness, but as strength.

This is not a conclusion but an opening. As one paper reminded us, we should not aspire to be “stars” but “constellations.” We invite readers to take up these contributions not as final answers but as companions for their own journeys of reflexivity, relationality, and design inquiry.

7. Acknowledgements

First of all we would like to extend our gratitude to CoDesign and namely the editors Liesbeth Huybrechts and Margot Brereton for giving us the opportunity to make this special issue. Also a special thanks to the more than two hundred authors who engaged with autoethnography submitting work to our call for papers, your commitment to this work gives us the energy to take this further. None of this would be possible without the unsung heroes of academic publishing, all of our amazing reviewers, your work helped shape this as much as the authors. Finally we need to express our gratitude to our families for being the foundation and the support structure for us, thank you!

Portions of this editorial were developed with the assistance of OpenAI's ChatGPT (GPT-5, 2025). The tool was used to support drafting, synthesis, and language refinement, under the full direction and critical review of the authors. All conceptual framing, interpretation, and final editorial decisions are the authors' own.

8. References

- Adams, T. E., & Herrmann, A. F. (2025). Making a Case for Autoethnography. *Journal of Autoethnography*, 6(1), 1-5.
- Alzate, C. (2025). Feminist reflexivity and community-engaged design: an autoethnography. *CoDesign*, 1-25.
- Baha, E., & Singh, A. (2024). Challenging the North-South Divide in Decolonizing Design. *Diseña*, (25), 5-5.
- Bofylatos, S., & Perez, D. (2024). Reflective narratives in social design: Towards an autoethnographic approach, in Gray, C., Hekkert, P., Forlano, L., Ciuccarelli, P. (eds.), *DRS2024: Boston*, 23–28 June, Boston, USA. <https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2024.1694>
- Bremner, C., Rodgers, P., Inneilia, G., & Magee, J. (Eds.) (2025). *The Design of Care*. (1 ed.) (Design Research for Change). Routledge.
- Catoir-Brisson, M. J., & Paixão-Barradas, S. (2025). Crafting emotional narratives: autoethnography as a tool for reflexive inquiry in healthcare codesign practice during COVID-19. *CoDesign*, 1-18.
- Ciftci, H. G., & Aktas, B. M. (2025). The communities and materials of repair: collectively reflecting on repair practices of everyday artefacts. *CoDesign*, 1-20.
- de La Bellacasa, M. P. (2017). *Matters of care: Speculative ethics in more than human worlds* (Vol. 41). U of Minnesota Press.
- Gaver, W., Krogh, P. G., Boucher, A., & Chatting, D. (2022, June). Emergence as a feature of practice-based design research. In *Proceedings of the 2022 ACM designing interactive systems conference* (pp. 517-526).

Green, D., Lindley, J., Encinas, E., Dore, M., Benjamin, J., and Bofylatos, S. (2023) Ways of seeing design research: A polyphonic speculation, in Holmlid, S., Rodrigues, V., Westin, C., Krogh, P. G., Mäkelä, M., Svanaes, D., Wikberg-Nilsson, Å (eds.), *Nordes 2023: This Space Intentionally Left Blank*, 12-14 June, Linköping University, Norrköping, Sweden.
<https://doi.org/10.21606/nordes.2023.96>

Hornbuckle, R. (2024). An autoethnography of quasi-autoethnographies: seeding an impact-oriented complex collaborative research ecosystem. *CoDesign*, 1-14.

Jones, S. H., Sumartojo, S., Grocott, L., Doughty, M., & Korsmeyer, H. (2024). Tomorrow stories: autoethnographic futuring and possibilities for co-design. *Co-Design: International Journal of CoCreation in Design and Art*.

Lambley, R. (2025). The challenges of navigating participatory research: the perspective of a doctoral student who co-ordinates a team of researchers with lived experience of mental health challenges. *Educational Action Research*, 33(1), 143-152.

Lamping, S., Chen, J., Dobinson, T., Mercieca, P., Kuzich, S., & Dryden, S. (2024). 'Noted, but not interested': critical collaborative autoethnography and the local politics of belonging. *CoDesign*, 1-14.

Lin, Z., & Wu, Y. (2025). Gaze and identity: unpacking the dynamics of social design in Chinese rural contexts through autoethnography. *CoDesign*, 1-16.

Mattelmäki, T., Light, A., Botero, A., Choi, J. H., & Dolejšová, M. (2025). How to talk of and evaluate relationality in design research and practice? In A. Morrison, A. Culén, & L. Habib (Eds.), *Nordes 2025: Relational Design*. Design Research Society. <https://doi.org/10.21606/nordes.2025.81>

Miller, E., Hayter, C., & Manchester, H. (2025). Facilitating co-design in healthcare: a collaborative autoethnography of personalities, power, and competing priorities. *CoDesign*, 1-15.

Noel, L.-A., Ruiz, A., van Amstel, F. M. C., Udoewa, V., Verma, N., Botchway, N. K., Lodaya, A., & Agrawal, S. (2023). Pluriversal futures for design education. *She Ji: The Journal of Design, Economics, and Innovation*, 9(2), 179–196. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sheji.2023.04.002>

Poulsen, M., & Skovbjerg, H. M. (2025). Weaving with play practices: developing a playful autoethnography. *CoDesign*, 1-18.

Recklies, M. (2022). Engaging in epistemic disobedience: On the decolonization of design discourses. In C. Mareis, M. Greiner-Petter, & M. Renner (Eds.), *Critical by Design?: Genealogies, Practices, Positions* (pp. 94–108). transcript Verlag. <https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839461044-006>

Rolfe, M., & Bradford, N. (2025). 'Hello, I'm me': an autoethnographical account of blurring identities as a health researcher. *CoDesign*, 1-14.

Saad-Sulonen, J., & Watkin, T. (2025). Reframing temporalities of social design: a duoethnographic reflection in hindsight. *CoDesign*, 1-17.

Schön, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. Basic Books.

Teerapong, K., Chen, K. L., Akama, Y., Kushinsky, S., Mah, J. Y., Teasley, S., ... & Kikuchi, Y. (2025). 'คาราม อุณใจ (Kharm Unn Jai)': honouring transcultural experiences in supporting women. *CoDesign*, 1-16.

Thambinathan, V., & Kinsella, E. A. (2021). Decolonizing methodologies in qualitative research: Creating spaces for transformative praxis. *International journal of qualitative methods*, 20, 16094069211014766.

Vega, L.(2021) Distributed thinking through making: Towards a relational ontology in practice-led design research, in Brandt, E., Markussen, T., Berglund, E., Julier, G., Linde, P. (eds.), *Nordes 2021: Matters of Scale*, 15-18 August, Kolding, Denmark. <https://doi.org/10.21606/nordes.2021.29>

Xue, H., van Kooten, K., & Desmet, P. M. (2025). A consent for myself/ourselves: designing for responsible use of autoethnography. *CoDesign*, 1-17.