This is not a Paper

Applying a Design Research lens to video conferencing, publication formats, eggs… and other things.

YOU STURDEE REVIEWERS PLAYERS MIRIAM ME LINDLEY JOSEPH HAYLEY GREEN FRIENDS DAVID ALTER[1]

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This is like an abstract to a paper, but it is *more* abstract. In fact, it is the introduction to something which is a ***not paper***. The global Covid-19 pandemic of 2020 represented an inflection point for our post-post-modern world, a moment where our old normal was dramatically arrested. We are now in a state of comprehensive flux as 'new normals' emerge, begin to solidify, and may evolve into an—as yet undetermined—futures. This ***not paper*** is a facet and exploration of that flux as it relates to publication and conference culture, video conferencing systems, and how we both conduct, and share, research. You should read the whole of this abstract, but then you should take a step inside the ***not paper***, it lives on the web over here https://designresearch.works/thisisnotapaper/

1 WELCOME TO THE 🥚

There are metaphors throughout this work. They are not to be taken too literally or seriously, but perhaps they will inspire you in the same way they did us. 🥚s have long been used symbolically to represent new life, resurrection, and as sacrificial offerings to the dead. The tradition of hiding and searching for 🥚s at the Easter festival gave rise to the term 'Easter 🥚' in video games. Easter 🥚s are features which are not immediately

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[1] This line contains all of the authors given and surnames arranged in reverse alphabetical order. The reason for this is that we all contributed to this work, in different and unquantifiable ways, arranging our names in such a way that one of us should be assumed to have contributed more than another would be misleading. We've also listed 'reviewers', 'players', 'friends' as authors.

obvious, but by engaging in game worlds players can discover and enjoy them. To symbolize newfangled fun, an unhackneyed exploration, and to post-modernly ask "Why not?", the content of the paper is hidden inside an ⬤. That ⬤, in turn, may reveal further Easter ⬤s. By pursuing these Easter ⬤s, you can participate in this ***not paper***[2]. We encourage you to enter the ⬤ — https://designresearch.works/thisisnotapaper/

2 YOU'RE ON MUTE

HCI research is evolving. As a dynamic and adaptive community (a dedicated follower of fashion, if you like [17]) the SIGCHI family of conferences are, in fact, reflecting a profound shift in the broader scholarly landscape. The methods and epistemologies we rely upon are invariably characterized as inter- cross- and anti-disciplinary. We cross social, professional, and sectoral boundaries and necessarily adopt post-modern yet pragmatic positions—this the reality of third wave HCI (and as Bødker points out "throwing the baby out with the bathwater" is always a bit of a risk [1]). The boundaries between creative practice, research practice, and technical work are collapsing and in order to address matters of social, environmental and technological justice we need to embrace and thrive among that collapse. Of course, we still need to produce data and analysis that contribute toward our understanding of phenomena and address the challenges they surface, and we must have effective means of sharing that (i.e. "publication"). But, in a post-collapse world, and to ensure the resilience of our community, we must challenge the status quo. Our research should not only study situated plans but should question its own situatedness. Critical design shouldn't just be critical, it must constructive. Human-Centered Design can't be a dogma, but an aspiration. We need to reflect on the mess of the real world in the messiness of our research [12], how we talk about it, how we share it, and what it means to publish it. We are hopeful, and optimistic. Unmute yourself. Enter the ⬤.

3 IS THAT A LEGACY HAND?

The so-called 'publish and perish' culture which is underpinned by the pioneering work of Eugene Garfield toward "a system for information retrieval to a tool for research evaluation" [5] has its roots in an era before the internet, and now pervades and defines academia through the imposition of institutional publishing-related metrics [2]. Wrong-footed in particular, are those whose research is best described outside of a traditional paper. Professionals who are forced to conform to the system and resolve what might be creative, iterative, highly situated, collaborative research into an introduction, description, and discussion. These are incongruent pseudo-scientific means of representation. Whilst the global Covid-19 pandemic has catalyzed us to delineate between legacy hands and digital hands, should we not distinguish between legacy means of publication, and 'digital' means of publication—as with hands, both are useful, but one must choose one's tools pragmatically. Raise your hand. Enter the ⬤.

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[2] To allow you to get an essence of the paper despite any accessibility concerns you may peruse the rest of the PDF, however in order to experience the content of this ***not paper*** as it is *intended* you must enter the ⬤ via https://designresearch.works/thisisnotapaper/. Please note that you must use a Firefox or Chrome based browser to ensure compatibility.

Figure 1: Map of the Egg with the abstract, keywords and authors at the top, main content in the middle, references at the bottom and numerous Easter Eggs strewn throughout.

4 PLEASE WAIT FOR THE HOST TO START THIS MEETING

The prevalence of conferences as the preeminent route to publication is a unique aspect of the computing discipline. While many disciplines prefer journals, we have tended to use conferences. The essence of a conference is its attendees, hence during a global pandemic which restricts travel, the essence of our conferences has been under threat. Of course, the problematic aspects of international travel have been discussed before, vis-à-vis the climate crisis, yet the Covid-19 pandemic has made very immediate concerns which ordinarily we defer judgement on out of convenience. But let's assume that, Covid-19 aside, we might need to reimagine what a constitutes a conference, and what we wish to get out of it. We now know it is possible to hold a large international conference entirely remotely. You are 'at' one. That said, the transition from conference in person to one mediated by video conferencing apps can problematize engagement, from homogenizing engagement to needing to manage issues of presenteeism, absence of social cues, anxiety, overly dominant contributors and so on [13, 14, 23]

However, we know that the digital tools we have at our disposal afford us the potential for mediating so much more than pale imitations of what we otherwise do in person [4, 18]. During what we could call a post-pandemic Renaissance, there has been no better time to call for those long-entwined structures of 'present and publish or perish' to be called into question. Whilst we're at it, why don't we ask about the structures behind the conferences—what's their role now, and what was their role before? We're only just beginning to imagine how to run conferences online; let's not stop, there is space to innovate. Whatever norms emerge could (and arguably should) impact upon the long-held structures which tie conferences to publications and in turn keep publications (and their associated presentations) in easily manageable categories and boxes. Please start the meeting with yourself and search for a new balance between the value of physical presence, the value of virtual presence, the expense of travel (environmentally and economically), and the value-add of organizations which run the conferences which we build our careers around. Please don't wait for the host to start the meeting. Enter the 🥚.

5 HANG ON A SECOND… I'LL JUST SHARE MY SCREEN

This year's conference is not a conference as such, and it involves video conferencing. As if to echo, reflect and imitate this edition of the conference's divergence from the norm, this paper is not a paper as such either and it involves video conferencing. Our ***not paper*** exists, primarily within an interactive space, built using Gather Town[3]. This allows readers to be present within the paper, and to interact with each other via video—as if in some kind of throwback to being in the room together at a traditional conference. To access the content of the paper – readers—who should arguably be referred to as *players*—must navigate around a virtual space (comprising several 🥚s). This ***not paper*** makes several departures from the limitations of normal publishing paradigms: the document evolves, it need not be read in order, you can speak to others 'reading' it, it requires no presentation but just needs to be lived in, it has more than enough 🥚s (un oeuf, is after all, un oeuf). These little differences are intended to embody some of the rhetoric of the ***not paper*** itself, but also play provocateur and serendipity the imaginations of the players—to help *you* to imagine how things could be different. This is reminiscent of, but a little bit more than, the moment where the presenter says "I'll just share my screen". Enter the 🥚.

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[3] We have no affiliation with Gather Town, for the record.

6 ARE YOU THERE? CAN YOU HEAR ME?

According to Hobbes definition of the 'social contract' in Leviathan (1651), the *strong* protect the *weak* from the *exploitative*. Our conferences, publication norms, and even our disciplines play out as similarly well-meaning—similarly patriarchal—social contracts. Under the auspices of intellectual stewardship, knowledge collected by experts is bestowed upon the ignorant and, paper by paper, we crawl out of the darkness. Taking a cue from Hobbes' philosophical antithesis, we may choose to consider how a Rousseauian publication system might be different. Rousseau's philosophy—that we are born free and limited by structures imposed by society—appeals to a more egalitarian model, where openness *is* scientific integrity (see *On the Social Contract; or, Principles of Political Rights—French: Du contrat social; ou, Principes du droit politique*—1762). It's time to leave Hobbes behind, and, perhaps disavow ourselves of the polarized discourse altogether and synthesize something new, something built from the flux of our contemporary and the tools of our time. We don't have concrete answers, but we have moments of inspiration: Mark Pagel argues that we are *wired for culture* [15] and it is widely accepted that telling stories is a universal human trait [7]; our perception of space is also widely mooted as playing a key role in our cognition [16] a matter which is of particular *relevance* when it comes to how we interact with computers [21]; lest we forget that metaphors (frequently food-based) are our 'bread and butter' they are the means by which we linguistically 'digest' the world around us [11]. As we consider alternatives to the orthodoxies of 'science' then stories, space, and metaphor are some of the raw materials we should leverage for the means of empowering our work. Are you there? Can you hear me? Enter the ◗.

7 OH GOOD, I CAN SEE YOU CLEARLY NOW

The relationship between what constitutes research and how to communicate it is not straightforward. Process is as important as outcome [19] and experiment, evidence, and 'scientific method' are all up for grabs; in the words of John Constable, "may not landscape be considered a branch of natural philosophy, of which pictures are but experiments". We need to make more materiality, and whilst Research through Design (the conference by the same name gives equal weight to the exhibition element of the publication process as it does the paper part) goes some way to do that, we need to make *more* of it. We need to make more of imagery, and we need to make more of art. It's tricky though, this tends to be a co-produced space and may leverage process or outcome more or less depending on the situation. Creative outputs—sketches, sculptures, drawings, film, and ironically, code—suffer the effects of a 'category error' when compared to text-based research outputs. They cannot be counted in the same way, despite the fact that they offer alternative ways of exposing the work to the reader and the effort that goes into them is equitable to that which goes into writing and editing a paper or proposal. In fact, the craft of these activities lays the researcher bare, it exposes them, it performs them in a unique and material way—*this* is the beauty of practice-based research. Oh good, I can see you clearly now. Enter the ◗.

8 PEOPLE ARE STARTING TO ARRIVE NOW

The boundaries of knowledge-sharing are collapsing. In this ***not paper***, we have gathered the rubble and scrambled it for fun. We've used Gather (http://gather.town), an online platform where you can create virtual environments and—therein—interact with various elements, including other users (as avatars and via video chat). In an eggshell, it combines role-playing, game mechanics and video conferencing. It is nostalgic, contemporary and futuristic. It brings people together at a distance. It taps into our desire to share social spaces.

It facilitates serendipitous encounters. Gatherings can be magical. Our 'Gather Town' is under construction. It is non-monolithic. It's a way to stick with the problem for a while [8].We invite you to pick it apart. Imagine what an escape room would feel like in there. Could you communicate your research that way? It's flexible, but is it flexible enough to be useful? Maybe your gather town would be a repository for anecdotes, annotations, or something unpublishable. Who would you invite? Peel the shell, re-scramble it. You could maybe think of this *non paper* as an 'interactional' - like a pictorial, but different - but also similar. Think of how it conveys knowledge in different formats and how these forms sit alongside each another. Your participation is a commentary – literally, or metaphorically. So is non-participation, for that matter. It will take off, or it won't. Give it a try! People are starting to arrive now. Enter the ◗ .

9   CAN YOU CHECK YOUR CONNECTION? YOU'VE GONE A BIT ROBOTIC

This *not paper* takes our shifting lived experiences as an opportunity to evaluate and blur boundaries between traditional categories of archival and non-archival works. To do this, we prototype an approach (inspired by other communities of creative practice [e.g. 22] which aims to privilege the collectivized nature of HCI research, eliminating boundaries: reviewers, students, funders, investigators, coordinators and associates—all of you are the *players* in the context of this *not paper*. This is not 'paper as statue' but instead is 'paper as material' to facilitate interaction. But if the medium is the message and this medium is a material, we must remember to explore its limitations, and be aware that by being reflexive [3] we stand the best chance of having a substantive positive influence. This *not paper* has significant accessibility concerns; the text is hidden in images and the Gather Town only works on some platforms. Analogous to the open data movement, the 'data' of this paper can only ever be as open to those with the tools and literacy to access it [6, 9]. Beyond the practicalities of *access,* the thornier issue of *style* comes into play here too. The tone of this text is a statement, electing to use ◗ -as-metaphor says something, the intentional and overt irreverence of this entire endeavor, and the very fact that we are intentionally departing from the conceit of *a paper*—there is a deliberate challenge to authority here. But perhaps we are challenging the authority of our own intervention as well, replacing an old gatekeeper with a new (less accountable) one under the auspices of cooperativism. If so, will 'publishing' this work expose it, us, and the community to the disruption caused in bad faith or open to corporate influence [10, 20]. The *not paper* also upsets the apple cart of attribution too, and that is why the 'authors' of this paper is a legion and not a series of distinct entities—and that legion includes all the players, of which *you* are one. We have deliberately included a feedback mechanism *into* the *not paper* itself, this work will perpetually be under review, but how does this relate to authorial intent, ownership, and attribution? This isn't the 'death of the author'—far from it, this work is very much dependent on the identities of those who contribute to it—but, that isn't to say that jumbled and flattened landscape of endless attributions without a clear and accessible way to search them isn't something of a limitation. Can you check your connection? You've gone a bit robotic. Enter the ◗ .

10 THAT AWKWARD FACE PEOPLE DO AS THEY SEARCH FOR THE 'LEAVE MEETING' BUTTON

In this section we aim to explain what this is about, and why we've instigated it, and what we hope to achieve with it. Of course, the backdrop of this *not paper* is the—ongoing—global Covid-19 pandemic. In a matter of weeks, the virus changed the world, and one aspect of that was the rapid adoption of video conferencing by hundreds of millions of us. In some ways then, this work is 'not another autoethnographic study of video conferencing'. The ripples of our unplanned shift to remote working are having impact far and wide; friendships

have been rekindled, communication skills rapidly adapted, and in the academic realm we've finally managed to eliminate vast amounts of travel (to conferences) in an instant, instead presenting our work through the menagerie of video conference options. How quickly people adapted to this reality was a testament to human adaptability—we should be proud of that. But, perhaps, we should ask for more as well. The titles of the sections in the ***not paper*** are intended to remind us all of how imperfect video conferencing systems are, and of the huge limitations they impose on us. While we need to be responsible to the climate emergency, and a reduction in conference travel should be part of that, we must not neglect the sanctity of in-person interaction. We need to find a balance between the new normal catalyzed by the 2020 pandemic, the customs we are used to, and the possibility to reimagine how we live and work.

The platform we present this ***not paper*** to you within—Gather Town—is a video conferencing service. However, by implementing a spatial metaphor the experience of the service is quite different to traditional video conferencing and a unique flavor, reminiscent of 'proper' in person interactions, is imbued into it. Of course, Gather Town is not a perfect solution to socially distanced interaction, but it does attempt to work around some of the shortcomings of traditional video conferencing. We advocate for considering the structures that we work within—societies like ACM, special interest groups like SIGCHI, conferences like CHI, peer review communities, publish-or-perish cultures, etc—but to strive to promote and maintain the worthy kernels of what each is trying to achieve, but *also* to release ourselves from the limitations of presumed constraints. From the flux we find ourselves in we should allow the knowledge, traditions and skills we have to flow into a new, more robust, resilient, and sensitive, reality. This ***not paper*** is trying to encourage all of that to happen, or, at the very least, to encourage our players to think about what that world would look like. We hope you enjoy your time in the ⬤.

11 LET'S DISCUSS THIS 'OFFLINE'

The following paragraphs are the post-review reflections on the process of creating this ***not paper***.

"This project—the ***not paper***, its reviews, and the conversations I had, both *in* and *about* 'the egg'—suggests to me that there is potential for 'something-like-this' that unites the social traditions of conferencing and the formal traditions of 'archival' papers. Although our approach was experimental, it was—in many ways—successful, not least in opening up conversations. With hindsight, two key questions stick out for me – 1: how can something like this help maintain vibrant HCI research culture during a pandemic/lockdown? And, 2: how might this 'something' address the widely shared concern that publication traditions (in the ACM and beyond) need revitalising. Reading between the lines, there seems to be some unresolved tensions between complementary values; ephemerality vs permanence; rigour vs levity; authority vs discourse. I have a feeling that one route to resolving these tensions might be to iterate around the concept of *nonlinearity*—a quality that was present in both the social and presentational aspects we explored. I think future research exploring this concept—in the context of research publishing—could be an interesting next step…" **David Green**

"What started as an 'off the wall' idea swiftly became not only a way of making a space to discuss and share research in a virtual world, but a meaningful collaboration where the process of making was as important as the final output. During downtime, I found myself wandering around the egg, trying to remember who put what where, enjoying the transitions, imagining being in other places. On New

Year's Eve I popped in for that exact purpose, only to gate-crash someone else's party inside the egg, other times, I saw fleeting anonymous users flit from the hub outwards into one of the egg environments. We hosted social events, met friends there, enjoyed discussion and input. This work fulfils its purpose as a nod toward the future of publishing and interaction inside and with research, but it also fulfils a human need for exploration, movement and contact." **Miriam Sturdee**

"Collapsed boundaries abounded in the process of making the egg and the accompanying ***not paper***, and then engaging with a review process that served, I believe, to enrich the ideas and intentions we brought to them. More than one of our reviewers joked about making a 'not a review'. Their review became a rich, thought provoking mix of critique, exchange, and performance. Perhaps this is my own relative newness to academia speaking, but I had never before engaged in an academic writing and making process with fellow researchers in which the artefacts emerged and were reviewed through such an extensive degree of play and serendipity. It makes me wonder, what do we share when we share knowledge, and what really sticks? '*Co-produced interactional spaces*' is a very academic, somewhat technocentric phrase for a way of being that's as old as civilisations, if not as old as humanity. It is an expression of what other fields might call an oral tradition. For instance, books like the Judeo-Christian Bible, or Homer's Odyssey are a first attempt at collating stories that people had told each other for generations leading up to that point. Having been written, far from replacing the oral traditions, they provide an encoded touchstone for generations more of exchange. Could the 🥚 be the space for a new tradition of oral research which intertwines with archival papers, enriching academic inquiry, our stories, and collective knowledge by bringing them to life in new ways?" **Hayley Alter**

"This project aims to represents hope and aspiration during a time of trauma. It tries to question the status quo, and to playfully-but-optimistically imagine how things could be done differently. The topics in question sit among the interrelations between HCI research, video conferencing, physical conferencing, and publication traditions. But the unique thing with this work is that the medium of exploration, the issues being explored, and the communication method are all amalgamated into a single 'object of interest'—and it is that object which, as alluded to in the title, is not a paper. The broader takeaway, in my view, is not *really* about repurposing Gather Town, the nuances of running conference events remotely, or publication paradigms. No, what this work is really about is the intention to facilitate new types of solutions to emerging problems, to allow generation and critique to mingle with one another, and to advocate for a Design-led and 'no holds barred' approach to the world's problems... including, but not limited to, HCI." **Joseph Lindley**

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