MARGINÀLIA, Interdependent Design Processes and the Ethics of Care

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Abstract

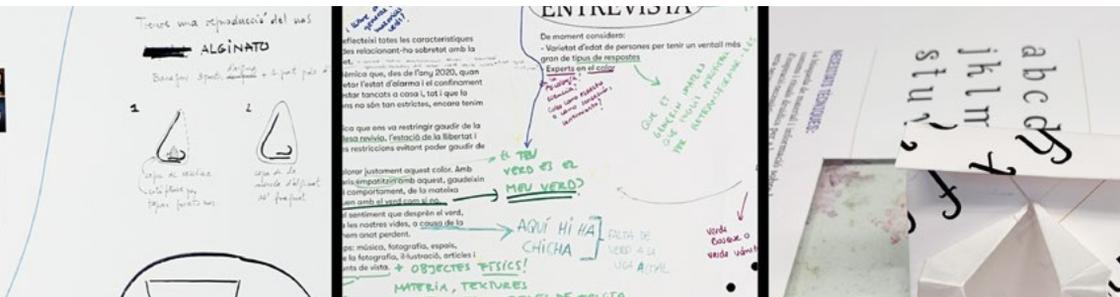In this article we present MARGINALIA, an academic design experience carried out within the context of the final Bachelor of Design project in the Visual Creation specialism. MARGINALIA is a collaborative workshop that aims to be a tool for developing the first drafts of the final Bachelor of Design project. It is a process-oriented, exploratory and experimental design approach. The designers intrude (interfere, involve, intermediate) in the projects of others, developing and extending said projects to areas that the author could barely imagine. By applying the ethics of care to the design project we explore new ways to reinvent the design project and move it from a personal outcome to an interdependent result. We argue that design practices have the capacity to foster cooperation, empathy and shared creation through the vision of ethics of care. We embrace the point of view of the design of care, and we transform the design project into a relational infrastructure and a network of interdependencies. With MARGINALIA we develop a way of projecting by forgetting the traditional design project, which favours abstract principles, formal rules, impersonal duties and deliberative justice, and we promote a new paradigm where the design project is relational based on dependence and vulnerability.

Keywords
care, design, interdependence, project, relational

Resumen

En este artículo presentamos MARGINALIA, una experiencia académica de diseño realizada en el contexto del Trabajo Final de Grado de Diseño en la especialidad de Creación Visual. MARGINALIA es un taller colaborativo que pretende ser una herramienta para la elaboración de los primeros borradores del TFG en Diseño. Es un enfoque de diseño experimental, exploratorio y orientado a procesos. Los diseñadores se entrometen (interfieren, involucran, intermedian) en los proyectos de otros, desarrollando y extendiendo dichos proyectos a áreas que el autor apenas podía imaginar. Al aplicar la ética del cuidado al proyecto de diseño, exploramos nuevas formas de reinventar el proyecto de diseño y pasarlo de un resultado personal a un resultado interdependiente. Argumentamos que las prácticas de diseño tienen la capacidad de fomentar la cooperación, la empatía y la creación compartida a través de la visión de la ética del cuidado. Adoptamos el punto de vista del diseño del cuidado y transformamos el proyecto de diseño en una infraestructura relacional y una red de interdependencias. Con MARGINALIA desarrollamos una forma de proyectar olvidando el proyecto de diseño tradicional, que privilegia los principios abstractos, las reglas formales, los deberes impersonales y la justicia deliberativa, y promovemos un nuevo paradigma donde el proyecto de diseño es relacional basado en la dependencia y la vulnerabilidad.

Palabras clave
cuidados, diseño, interdependencia, proyecto, relacional

Introduction

In this article we present MARGINALIA, an academic design experience carried out within the context of the final Bachelor of Design project in the Visual Creation specialism. We are an artist (Mar Saiz) and a graphic designer (Anna Pujadas), and we carry out MARGINALIA in the workshops of EINA University Centre of Design and Art attached to the UAB. MARGINALIA are collaborative series of workshops that aim to be a tool for amplifying the first drafts of the final Bachelor of Design project. We have completed two editions: the first during the 2021-2022 academic year, and the second during the 2022-2023 academic year. MARIGNALIA is a process-oriented, exploratory and experimental design approach. The students intrude (interfere, involve, intermediate) in the projects of others, developing and extending said projects to areas that the author could barely imagine. The outcomes are interdependent projects instead of independent ones.

The framework for MARGINALIA workshops is the ethics of care. We follow the recent article by one of us entitled *Designing from the Perspective of Care, or How to Repair the World* (Pujadas, 2022). This article considers what it would be like and what it would mean for contemporary design to take, as part of our definition of good design, the values of caring (attentiveness, responsibility, nurture, compassion, meeting others' needs) traditionally associated with women and traditionally excluded from design considerations seriously (Pujadas, 2022, p.22). By selecting Joan Tronto's criteria, the qualities that designing from care should manifest are brought together and the postulates of the philosophy of care applied to design are outlined. The first postulate is that care is relational and accepts that human beings, other beings and the environment are interdependent (Tronto, 2012, p.32). The approach to the ethics of care states that kindness, empathy and compassion are feelings that arise from specific situations in life that are integrated into relational infrastructures and local networks of interdependencies. Consequently, any design project should bring these values together.

MARGINALIA workshops are a methodology where we design by applying the values of care and the ethics of care. MARGINALIA participants nurture their classmates' projects, pay attention to the works of others and try to meet their needs always with compassion and empathy to achieve a network of interdependencies.

In MARGINALIA workshops, students and the teachers work together without hierarchy or distinctions. As teachers, we are neither the leaders of the course nor the directors of the students' final project, nor are we their advisers or their assessors. We are creators who design with students during a temporary break. The goal is to interfere in the designs of classmates to develop said designs. MARGINALIA seeks to push the student outside the

established rules and encourage them to play conceptually. The workshops last between 3 and 4 weeks, with 12 to18 students and 2 teachers. The workshops are held with students of the final Bachelor of Design project in the Visual Creation specialism, once they have drafted their preliminary design. During MARGINALA workshops, the teachers act as facilitator designers and drive the student to be able to insert their designs into one of their classmates' designs creating a continuous, combined and merged collaborative and collective design. In MARGINALIA the student has a reflective experience that forces them to abandon a linear path. MARGINALIA workshops are about questioning, disturbing, disrupting an individual design project to amplify it, intensify it and strengthen it through cooperative work.

Where do the elements we develop with students come from? They come from a seeding and harvesting process: The students tell us about their preliminary projects and their work processes and from there we collect, capture and assemble. And, as teachers, we give shelter to this harvest in the sense that we take care of it, cultivate it and grow things from it. That which grows can be a technique or it can be a performance, or it can be a material, or it can be any design element. We ourselves don't know what will happen and how it will evolve when we begin a MARGINALIA.

At MARGINALIA 2023 the cyanotype was one of the elements we collected. Someone asked for brief training on the cyanotype technique and we captured that fact and then the cyanotype became a medium, an environment within which to cultivate and develop anything. It served the student in the sense that using the cyanotype gave them new opportunities (it also closed others). In return, students also collect and shelter. They take what the teachers have deployed, they also collect what their colleagues are working on and what they have gathered, they develop what they want, cultivate what interests them. There are many possibilities when being a gleaner. Everything is an opportunity. The students are free to capture something or not.

All these elements are part of the possibilities. MARGINALIA can offer you a technique and from there you can use it to think about a dimension or about a space. And then it can become a relational element. For example, in MARGINALIA 2022, a student wanted to do a final project questioning the canons of beauty by highlighting the pride in large noses. One of the teachers in MARGINALIA offered her a margin note that was a technique: mould a nose with alginate and then make a plaster model. With the help of the teacher and the workshop manager, the student learned this sculptural process. Then for weeks she went around asking different people in the university community who had big noses if they would let her take a mould of their nose. These collected noses did not end up actually being part of her final project. But the technique became a relational tool. Because

the student would invite people to make the mould and would talk to them and the proximity and intimacy of the procedure broke the ice and encouraged the person to express themselves and open up freely. With this technique, the student managed to summon a network of relationships, which did serve her for his final project. The student decided what to collect and how to apply it.

Image 1. Photo credit: the authors. February 2022. The picture shows a student voluntarily getting a mould of her nose, the process for that sculptural technique and the final reproduction of the nose.

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Design Project and the Ethics of Care

MARGINALIA's workshops are organised in 3 simultaneous processes: Process 1. Printing the student's preliminary final project design on paper with very wide white margins and writing down any comments; Process 2. Opening an online whiteboard where students post their preliminary designs and where the group develops the different proposals; Process 3. In the workshops, making and producing design prototypes based on classmates' final design projects to modify the designs of others or to develop their own design taking others' design projects as a starting point.

Carol Gilligan, the pioneer of ethics of care research, says that we live in a world that is increasingly aware of the reality of interdependence and the price of isolation. We know that autonomy is illusory, and that people's lives are interconnected, and that we are caught in an inescapable web of reciprocity. When something affects one person directly, it indirectly affects everyone (Gilligan, 2013, p.44). In as much as care is relational and accepts that human beings, other beings and the environment are interdependent, the ethics of care directly criticises the assumption of the moral Self as independent and autonomous. Instead, it understands the Self as existing through a series of networks of relationships with others. From the point of view of ethics of care, human vulnerability is generic. It is considered that all people are beneficiaries of care (either children, elderly or "competent" adults). In this way, research on care implicitly blames the model of full autonomy, for considering it partial and, above all, precarious and provisional (Molinier & Legarreta, 2016, p.5). Therefore, the main point in the ethics of care is that people need each other in order to live a good life and that they can only exist as allegedly independent individuals through caring relationships with others (Scuzzarello, 2007, p.5).

In this respect, MARGINALIA sullies the rigid and individualistic notion of authorship. It is not even co-authorship because the notion of authorship gets lost. With MARGINALIA everything is so hybridised that individualities cannot be identified and if somebody tries to trace the path to the origin of ideas and processes, they end up lost in a labyrinth of affiliations. There's still Self, but not independent and autonomous, rather us existing through a series of networks of relation to others.

For example, during MARGINALIA 2022 there was a student who wanted to create a transgender fashion collection for his final project. Another student did Marginalia for him (a side note, a comment on his project). She was a graphic designer carrying out a project making craft paper. Her proposal was to invent a new transgender fabric using the same technique that she was using to make craft paper. The special feature of this fabric was that it was made from a mixture of fibres from men's jeans and fibres from

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women's jeans. The idea was very interesting because the transgender property wasn't in the categories of the clothes or in the clothing patterns but in the material itself. It was the destruction of the categories themselves and the extinction of the discrimination thorough the body figure. In the new fabric the two genders were merged and were no longer distinguishable. This was a completely new path that the fashion designer perhaps would have never come up with.

Image 2. Photo credit: the authors. February 2022. The picture shows a preliminary design by a student. In the top right of the picture we see a piece of fabric. This is marginalia from another classmate. In the top left of the same image, we can see some rings made with a glue gun laying on the paper. This is another marginalia from another classmate who was working on jewellery. The gifted idea was a net of little rings, like a mesh fabric.

 MARGINALIA's goal is to intertwine the projects with each other. And this can basically be done in two ways: the designer can develop another's project based on their own project; or the designer can develop their own project based on another's project. In both cases you can't stay with the thought, you have to go into action, you have to develop materially, so that the grafting, the implant of the designs is not a thesis, a barely glimpsed idea, but has the consistency and the weight of materiality. It is then that the possibility of project interdependence becomes unavoidable, the projects have been hybridised. When the series of workshops end, students pursue their design processes alone until their final presentation. But what they pursue is their previous design embedded with the interventions of the other participants and the teachers.

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Gilligan's relational understanding of the Self entails that people develop a sense of who they are because there are others who recognise and confirm their individual characteristics. Individuals do not remain fixed and unchanged throughout their interaction with others, but rather they derive their identity from the dynamic processes that are human relationships. Tronto characterises this perspective of the Self that emphasises a sense of cooperation, interdependence, and collective responsibility as "the extended Self" (Tronto, 1987, p.7). Metaphorically we could say that MARGINALIA develop in and evolve as an extended Self.

Process 1. MARGINALIA, the extended Self

The first step of MARGINALIA is to print the student's preliminary design on paper with very wide white margins. And with this white begins the process. In these blank spaces, everybody writes down observations, references, adds drawings, sticks on paper, materials, places objects, an endless number of possibilities. We can also provide actions, events, work processes, techniques. A large amount of talent and creativity is generously added to others' designs.

Image 3. Photo credit: the authors. February 2022 and February 23. The picture shows the basic ideas for 3 preliminary designs with marginalia from classmates and teachers.

Generally speaking, Marginalia is the gloss (text placed at the edges of the page as an explanation or commentary on the main and central text), but it is also the small annotation or diagram recorded in the page borders (Costa, 2010). Since the genesis of the term is associated with the medieval manuscript, what is on the periphery of the page can also refer to images. *Marges à drôleries* were introduced in Gothic manuscripts in the first half of the 13th century. The iconographic repertoire of the margins, full of earthly and seditious images, is essentially based on the contrast and the distance that the secular world takes with respect to the Church. Above all, the place where the marginalia are inscribed suggests an openness that allows transgression or even subversion of the meaning of the central text. That's the core idea of the MARGINALIA workshops.

Why is it written in the margins? Margins can be annotated to comment, to decorate, to provide additional information about the text, about the medium itself, about validation or recording of textual content. Next to the text, the margin appears as a place to complete, question, even challenge this text. The boundary between main information and marginal information is difficult to identify.

The practices of annotations are inseparable from the supports, the gestures made, the goals sought, without forgetting the material, economic and historical contexts. The margin is always a space of relevance. Side notes and embellishments stand out better than text. Its positioning makes it possible to attract the attention of the reader, but also to guarantee its substance. In fact, it is also floating information.

In literature, marginalia might be either exegesis or eisegesis. In our case, MARGINALIA workshops take the eisegesis variant. The word "exegesis" comes from the Greek and it means to interpret, extract the meaning of a given text. Exegesis is usually contrasted with eisegesis, which means inserting personal interpretations into a given text. Eisegesis is the process of interpreting a text in such a way that the reader introduces their ideas subjectively. In general, exegesis presupposes an attempt to see the text objectively, while eisegesis involves a more subjective view. Eisegesis is able to generate several interpretations on the same topic, as well as reaching conclusions or ideas about topics that are not present in the reading as such.

Process 2. MARGINALIA, a world wide web.

In parallel to the design processes performed within the university's workshops, a virtual MARIGINALIA is developed. An online whiteboard is opened where students post their preliminary designs. The group develops the different proposals, in the sense of expanding them, adding elements related to or inspired by them such as comments, thoughts, external links, formalisations, methodologies and/or establishing connections or links between the projects. The virtual MARGINALIA has become a living design space continuously growing and expanding.
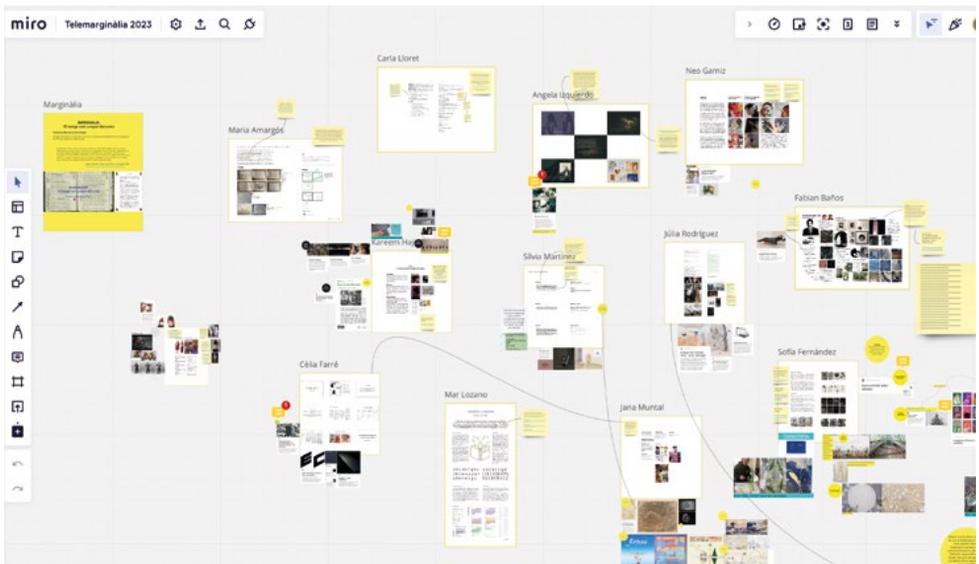
Image 4. Photo credit: the authors. February 2023. Image of the MARGINALIA 2023 online whiteboard.

What happens in the virtual MARGINALIA influences what happens in the material MARGINALIA and vice versa. These two dimensions meet, interconnect and become interdependent. A proposal made in the workshop might be digitally integrated into the virtual MARGINALIA and from there it might be linked to web references setting new parameters from which the proposal might be resumed through material research in the workshop.

MARGINALIA are like different windows that open around your project. The MAR-GINALIA relate to everything that is on the edges of your project and that you have not considered, understood, observed, recognised. This white space protects you from doubt, from confusion, from intrusion, but it is a false sense of security. When the other desig-

ners use MARGINALIA to incorporate elements into this white space, when they start to establish relationships and to narrate themselves through your project, then this almost feels like desecration.

This is what we tell the students, we tell them that we are going to desecrate our projects because they are still preliminary and have not yet been defined. They have to be aware that autonomy is illusory and that everything is interconnected. Interdependence should be the condition of the design project and hence its methodology. With MARGINALIA they can build a criss-cross pattern for their design project embracing divergent visions, assuming emotions and interdependent relationships. With MARGINALIA they are able to escape from the hegemonic system of their own apparent coherence and rationality and break away from their imaginary autonomy to reflect the fragmentation.

Process 3. MARGINALIA, listening to 'different' voices

MARGINALIA workshops are an opportunity: the opportunity to reveal something that the preliminary designs potentially contain and that the workshop and its members simply bring to light. For the participating designer it's like seeing yourself through the eyes of others or being aware of what you could be, but you didn't know. Obviously, being part of MARGINALIA you have to be ready for public exposure you have to offer yourself up to be drawn, cut, pasted, erased, rectified, recomposed, fragmented. MARGINALIA can only be carried out with the brave assumption of one's own vulnerability. The ethics of care claims that the recognition of our own vulnerability and the fact that we are connected and linked to other people changes the way we think about the actions required to sustain our lives and to build a common world, as well as the social responsibility that this inevitably involves (Molinier & Legarreta, 2016, p.6). Therefore, when applied to the project, it also changes the way we think about design processes. MARGINALIA installs a dependency between design projects and reveals students' vulnerability to develop a web of relationships from where design projects evolve.

Vulnerability represents an exposure to the other, a willingness to enter a relationship with the other. This crucial attitude is the sign of the feminine ethics of care that Carol Gilligan discussed in her seminal book, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (1982). In this book, Jake (an eleven-year-old boy whom Gilligan interviews) relies on the conventions of logic to solve his dilemmas. Whereas Amy (an eleven-year-old girl interviewed by Gilligan) sees the people involved in a dilemma as members of a network of interdependent relationships. That's why Amy thinks about a dilemma not as a mathematical problem but as an account of human relationships. Gilligan's findings have been heavily

criticised for essentialising gender differences. However, her work has been crucial as it has embarked on an alternative, feminist perspective to moral problems that questioned moral values and practices which were presented as a given (Scuzzarello, 2007, p.5).

With this book Gilligan challenged a model of moral development put forward by Lawrence Kohlberg that seemed to suggest that girls progress more slowly than boys in reaching moral maturity. As girls relied on relationships, they seemed to reveal a continuing dependence and vulnerability. Women's belief in communication as the method through which to resolve moral dilemmas appeared naïve and cognitively immature (Gilligan, 1982, p.4). Gilligan argued that Kohlberg's model was only valid for measuring the development of one aspect of moral orientation, which focuses on the ethics of justice and rights (reason, mind and emotion). She maintained that there was another, feminine way, the ethics of care (vulnerability, body and relationships), a way of interpreting moral judgments, a way that was more responsible and concerned with actual relationships between persons (Scuzzarello, 2007, p.5 & Gonzàlez 2018, p.15).

This "different" voice of women has been silenced in philosophical theories about morality. Even if it shows a divergent vision when facing ethical conflicts. The "different" voice unites reason with emotion, and the Self with relationships. In its narrative, people's lives are connected and interdependent (Gilligan, 2013, p.42). Gilligan concludes that women's morality does not develop more slowly, but rather that their interpretation of morality is different. According to Gilligan, a more comprehensive understanding of ethics should encompass the feminine ethics of care and the masculine ethics of justice.

How can we develop a design process based on the values of caring? The MARGINALIA series of workshops are one option. During MARGINALIA 2023 there was a student who wanted to develop a design project about the self-awareness of black people focusing on the moment when a black person becomes aware of being black, and thus integrates this identity into their Self. His idea was to collect data interviewing anonymous black people by post. He got a MARGINALIA from one of the teachers: portraying him with the drawing while being interviewed. The unusual thing here was that the teacher was using bleach to draw on black card. So, while the teacher was drawing the portrait of the black student, she was bleaching him. Thus, a peculiar tension emerged between the absent space left by the original black paper and the new white space, which did not replace but overtook its predecessor with a kind of co-dependency. Note that what the teacher was offering to the student as marginalia was an interview method. Because when you portray somebody, you are putting that person in the centre. It is an ephemeral but effective moment because it makes the person feel appreciated and loved by the portraitist and therefore willing to tell them things. Drawing as a medium mediates and the interviewed person is less stressed or anxious. In

the very act of portraying, a relationship is established between the person who portrays and the person who is portrayed. A special intimacy is created that only occurs while the portrait is being done. An intimacy that lends itself to having private conversations. That's why the gifted method of interviewing was so valuable for the student.

Image 5. Photo credit: the authors. February 2023. The picture shows the very real moment when the teacher adds a side note to the design project of a black student. The teacher draws his portrait with bleach during the interview. While she is drawing the portrait of the black student she is bleaching him. Is like a contradiction or an oxymoron.

With MARGINALIA we help to promote, build and evolve the ethics of care in design. Like Amy, we unite reason with vulnerability, and the Self with relationships during the design project, developing a narrative where the designs become connected and interdependent.

Step 3. MARGINALIA, an intertwining practice

MARGINALIA is never a face-to-face action, or a single two-way path. Instead, it's an intertwining practice. MARGINALIA have the power to interweave as muchmany design projects as possible in a community of creative processes where the hybridisation grows in all directions.

For example, at the beginning of MARGINALIA 2023, we opened with a short workshop on cyanotype because there was a student who wanted to do a final project on photographs of flowers and we wanted to give them the idea of printing the flower (getting its print,

physical replica) with a photosensitive substance instead of photographing it. In fact, the cyanotype is a photo but without a camera. The technique itself, the cyanotype, was the marginal contribution to the final design project. Then another student was working on a photographic final project focusing on the idea of tattooing her skin with light and capturing it in images. She was using ancient knit fabrics on her skin as latticed patterns. We used the knit fabrics and worked with the holes to create a typography and we profited from the cyanotype infrastructure to print some texts on fabric. The texts were from a third student; one that wanted to record fragments of anonymous conversations during train trips and develop something from them. This means two marginalia in one. In addition: other students wanted to work on animations and remember that there was another student working on conversations, but with black people. That made 7 marginalia that combined giving us the idea of making a large marginalia of marginalia; a collaborative work. So, we made a large marginalia created over the course of a performative meal. Why a meal? Because it's the same de-stressing medium as portraying by drawing. In the words of the chef Charlie Trotter: offering a meal is about caring for and loving the people you are sharing it with (Buccafusco 2007, p.1152).

Image 6. Photo credit: the authors. February 2023. Capturing the meal on photosensitised fabric using the cyanotype technique.

The location was significant: we went to an old villa near the university with a big garden inside the city, full of flowers and fruit trees. As it was spring, the trees were in full bloom. We organised a meal under a flowering tree. We lay tablecloths on the floor (a cloth with photosensitive substance), some food and drinks, and the performance began: light conversations and some bouquets made right there with plants from the garden. During the meal some of us were drawing the scenes on methacrylate. After the meal, the cloth had registered the movements, the objects, the events lived. The tablecloths were like a continuous photography of the actions, witness to the experiences lived on it. Afterwards, then already in the workshop, we took the drawings, and we screen printed them on the tablecloths. We also screen-printed fragments of the conversations gathered during the meal. The ink we used to print these silkscreens came from a brick that broke off from the garden wall. Finally, on the bottom of the tablecloths we sewed the cyanotypes of flowers we had previously made for the first marginalia.

Image 7. Photo credit: the authors. February 2023. Collage of 3 different moments for the large marginalia. On the left powdering the brick, in the centre some screen-printed conversations, and on the right some cyanotype on fabric.

The whole piece resulted in a large tapestry. This tapestry was a marginalia of marginalia that we titled *Le déjeuner sous les fleurs.*

Image 8. Photo credit: the authors. February 2023. The large marginalia tapestry *Le déjeuner sous les fleurs*.

As has been pointed out, MARGINALIA is all about listening to the "different" voices unifying emotions, body and relationships amplifying our design projects (and ourselves) through relational communication and dependency.

Conclusions

As we can see, marginalia is a powerful tool once you think about it as a method for new opportunities and new prospects. The margin is not simply white space intended to protect and highlight the surrounding text. It is the white space where the text could overflow and where the reader's eye finds space. A welcoming and dynamic space where things are not yet written and where thought can develop. The margin is not considered as a periphery subordinate to the centre, but as an original space, endowed with its own qualities. It is necessary to look at the margin as a methodological entry to rethink the forms of production and appropriation of written materials. In doing so, it is also about shaking up our disciplinary constructions. It's about us standing at the edges to look at the centre and bringing hidden realities back to the light (Chapron 2020, p.3-4).

With MARGINALIA the solution to the dilemmas lies in activating the network through communication, ensuring the designer's own inclusions are present by strengthening connections rather than removing them. Traditionally in design processes we expect to reach

agreements impersonally through systems of logic and law and preserving our autonomy like the ethics of justice. We call that mindset "problem solving". Instead, applying the ethics of care we expect to reach agreements personally through relational communication and dependency unmasking our vulnerability. Hence the design of care heals instead of delivering justice.

MARGINALIA workshops explore new paths to reinvent the design project and move it from a personal outcome to an interdependent result. MARGINALIA show that design practices have the capacity to foster cooperation, empathy and shared creation through the vision of ethics of care. Embracing the point of view of design of care is possible to transform the design project into a relational infrastructure and a network of interdependencies. With MARGINALIA we introduce a way of projecting by forgetting the traditional design project which privileges abstract principles, formal rules, impersonal duties and deliberative justice (Pujadas, 2022, p.31), and we promote a new paradigm where the design project is relational.

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