

PUBLISHING IS SHARING ENTHUSIASM

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In 2022, I was invited by the Portuguese design critic and curator Frederico Duarte to give a lecture at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Lisbon. He challenged me to reflect on my practice through four perspectives: as a **reader**, a **designer**, an **editor**, and a **distributor**. These four words have since become the foundation of how I describe my work.

I have been a graphic designer for almost 20 years, with at least 15 of those dedicated to designing books—or, more broadly, editorial design. Over this time, I've worked on a wide variety of projects, creating layouts for everything: from teen magazines to medieval literature books, as well as children's books, poetry collections, philosophical treatises, romance novels, cookbooks, illustrated works, art books, catalogs, and school textbooks. I have designed books for adults, children, and young readers alike. And most recently, I've been designing books specifically for designers through Clube do Livro do Design. Since 2014, I have run my own design studio in São Paulo, the city I've called home for over 17 years.

The first design book I have ever read

My path into graphic design wasn't straightforward. I began my academic life as a journalism student, envisioning a career writing long-form stories for magazines. Design entered my world as a curiosity during a strike at university.

The year was 2001, a turbulent time for public universities in Brazil. A widespread strike by professors and university employees brought undergraduate classes to a standstill in 50 of the country's 53 public universities. The strike was driven by demands for better pay and against the austerity measures imposed by President Fernando Henrique Cardoso.

For me, however, it also marked a pivotal moment. What initially seemed like an obstacle—a strike that paused my

journalism studies—became an opportunity to explore new interests. At some point in that first year of college, I read this book called *The Non-Designer's Design Book*, by Robin Williams. This book is a controversial title: while it offers tips and makes the subject more accessible to non-designers, it is also often (unfairly, in my opinion) relegated to a lower category of design books and manuals.

Design was an alien word to me. During my teenage years, the closest thing to graphic design was my dad having a pirated copy of Corel Draw installed on our family's first computer. He was always very curious about new technologies. To me, though, it just seemed like some kind of video game.

My first year at design school was somewhat shocking. I quickly realized I was in an environment filled with dogmas and hero worship. People seemed strangely certain about everything—what design is, what it can do, how it can improve lives, and the role of a designer. While the rhetoric was often inspiring, in practice, it only deepened my sense of inadequacy. It felt as though modernism had to be wholeheartedly embraced; otherwise, nothing would ever be considered good enough.

The library became my survival strategy in that environment. I thought, "Well, let's find out what these people think." Most of the graphic design books at the library were written in English or Spanish, filled with illustrations and small captions. Later, someone joked to me that "designers don't like to read; they prefer picture books." But what about those images? What did they depict? Designs for airplanes, computer companies' logos, and the visuals for The Olympic Games. The scale of those projects felt completely detached from my own reality.

In the end, I gave up journalism school to fully dedicate myself to design. I was captivated by the books I read—it felt as though design had become the main subject of a reportage.

Books inform my practice. My bookshelf is where I find allies. My bookshelf is the result of years of pilgrimages—and a series of privileges: being able to travel, having the means to buy those books, and having the ability to understand what is written.

In an essay *Unpacking My Library*, the German philosopher Walter Benjamin reflects on his relationship with his book collection, suggesting that books act as companions and guides in one's intellectual journey. I couldn't agree more—books play a supportive and influential role in shaping thoughts and experiences. I read books to encounter people who have already grappled with the ideas I'm wrestling with. My bookshelf is also where I organize my anger, channeling it into a space of reflection and strategy. Many of my actions are simply survival strategies to navigate conflict, and all my design conflicts are off the grid.

Design books vary widely in form, appearance, and content. Their primary purpose is to teach—or perhaps more accurately, to propagate—a discipline deeply embedded in the heart of capitalism. They can be large and glossy, elevating individuals into “design heroes.” They can also serve as authoritative guides to the professional Olympus, offering rules designed to shield us from the specter of amateurism. These books establish methods, share examples, and, with some goodwill, may even suggest ways to break the rules they promote. And depending on the geographical coordinates you occupy on this planet—you must have felt the impact that books had on your understanding of what design is.

When Technology, History, and Feminism Meet

In 2019, I had the opportunity to watch the documentary **Graphic Means**, directed by designer Briar Levit. It felt like a revelation—finally, someone had managed to connect technological evolution, design history, and feminism all at once. Yet again, language determines who can or cannot access that information.

At the time, I was teaching in a design specialization course and thought it would be a great opportunity to share it with the class. I've always had this conviction: if I discover something that makes my eyes light up, I feel a responsibility to share it with others. I watched the movie one night and decided the very next day to translate the captions into Portuguese. From this episode, a relationship of friendship and admiration was born with the film's director, Briar Levit.

A few months later, Briar reached out to invite me to contribute a story for a book she was working on, **Baseline Shift: Untold Stories of Women in Graphic Design History**. I suggested writing about the Brazilian designer Bea Feitler. Throughout her career, Feitler made significant contributions to editorial and book design. In 1961, she was hired to work at *Harper's Bazaar*, where she became co-art director with Ruth Ansel. Together, they redefined the magazine's design, blending tradition with the vibrancy of the 1960s. Later she played pivotal roles in launching *Ms.* magazine, the first commercial magazine in the United States that became an icon of the women's movement itself in the early seventies.

The story of Bea Feitler and her career as a graphic designer and art director for magazines has gained increasing recognition and celebration in recent years. She was not entirely undiscovered at the time, but her contributions are now being more widely appreciated. While I was already aware of Feitler's impact on editorial design, visiting her personal archive at Parsons offered me a deeper understanding of her career. It is hard to believe that Feitler's career only lasted for about 20 years. “When I started I thought I would have done well as a freelancer but it felt like I had to have a *job*. I was not psychologically ready, doubly so because I was a woman”, she said in an interview about looking for jobs. Reading through several interviews where Feitler discussed her work, it was disheartening to realize that, despite a four-decade gap, I could still relate to many of her professional struggles: the challenges of negotiating salary

increases, the fight for graphic design authorship, and the ongoing underrepresentation of women in leadership roles within the creative industry.

In another interview, Feitler touches on an aspect of professional practice that has always intrigued me as both a designer and a woman: the need to socialize to secure better positions. This is a common dilemma in the LinkedIn era, but it was already present in the 1970s. “I don’t just sit around going to parties or pushing my name by kissing people over lunch at La Grenouille. It would help, but I don’t have the time. What sells me is my work,” Feitler once remarked about her career.

As we work to fill the gaps in graphic design history, as a female designer, it often feels like running a relay race without knowing what baton is being passed from the previous runner. Efforts to balance the representation of women in reference books often fail to capture the nuances and singularity of their voices. It remains challenging to accurately measure the struggles and achievements these women faced in the past.

All these lessons from the experiences of other women and our roles within the division of labor might give the impression that feminism is an item on my list of interests. But I believe feminism is not a subject; it is a lens through which I observe reality. I am particularly interested in noticing those *who are not there*.

How a Virtual Book Club Became a Publishing House

The year was 2020, and everyone knows what happened that year. In Brazil, despair was further exacerbated by political turmoil under the destructive administration of Jair Bolsonaro. Amid chaos, I started receiving frequent messages asking for book recommendations—probably because I often shared books online. This sparked an idea: what if we gathered a

small group of people to read and discuss books together? Expecting around 30 participants, we were astonished when 300 people signed up.

The group quickly became more than just a book club—it was a space where students, teachers, artists, experienced designers, and even non-designers came together to share perspectives. People from diverse backgrounds and locations engaged in meaningful discussions, transforming those meetings into a supportive community where trust and understanding flourished.

With a large number of participants, we were able to expand our activities in meaningful ways. We commissioned monthly articles featuring book reviews, driven by the belief that building critical design requires building an economy—paying people for their writing as the professional work it is. Additionally, we offered full scholarships and purchased books for students or individuals who couldn’t afford them, ensuring greater accessibility and inclusivity within the community. It became clear that publishing is more than creating content—it’s about fostering networks, growing communities, and sparking new ideas.

After a year and a half, the community’s enthusiasm revealed a deeper need: to tackle the scarcity of design books translated into Portuguese, particularly those relevant to Brazilian and Latin American contexts. This realization led to the transformation of Clube do Livro do Design into a publishing house. Together with participants, we launched our first crowdfunding campaign to translate *Natural Enemies of Books*, edited by the feminist graphic design collective MMS (Maryam Fanni, Matilda Flodmark, and Sara Kaaman).

Initially, I naively thought we’d publish one book a year through crowdfunding and leave it at that. The plan seemed simple: publish the book, then return to my studio and focus on my

commercial work. However, I quickly realized that publishing without proper distribution was meaningless. Circulating these books became an essential—and equally demanding—part of the process. There was no point in undertaking the intense work of publishing if the books didn't reach readers. Distribution, therefore, became an important part of my role at Clube do Livro do Design.

Some have described these publishing initiatives as a form of activism. I'm not sure I agree—I believe activism is a serious word. Instead, I prefer to call this "shared enthusiasm." Books are relational objects. Books make friends. Friendships have the power to keep you moving forward. That's what truly drives these efforts: the joy and passion for discovering, creating, and sharing ideas. Shared enthusiasm is contagious; it fosters connections and sparks meaningful conversations. At its core, publishing is exactly that—a powerful act of shared enthusiasm that spreads from person to person, shaping communities and broadening horizons.