

“entre tu e eu” / “between you and I”: showcasing the potential of fanzines as an artifact of expression and authorship within the theme of feminine sexuality and self-discovery



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Abstract

This paper explores and showcases the level of experimentation that fanzines provide to authors through the fanzine collection “entre tu e eu” (“between you and I”) and how fanzines can be transformed into the author’s voice to convey messages in a way no other method can. With a D.I.Y (do it yourself) approach, fanzines are objects that enable authors to explore them as they wish, without rules or constraints these artifacts provide a medium where limits, themes, graphics, and storytelling, can be tested at their full potential without the approval of a second party. As such, “entre tu e eu” is a collection of three fanzines, each working as a way for the author to confide in and to prove the flexibility that fanzines provide within the theme of feminine sexuality and self-discovery given that each fanzine offers a different sub-theme, format, graphism, and color palette. While being very different from each other, the collection conveys that each fanzine is part of the same collection, seizing the opportunity to experiment with the printing method of risograph as one of the key elements between them.

Keywords

Illustration, fanzine,
expression, sexuality, self-
discovery, feminine.

01. Introduction

Rules are not to be applied to fanzines. They do not come with a booklet of written or unspoken instructions. Fanzines are objects dependable to their author, working almost like a boundless blank canvas by offering a place without limitations where authors can explore as much as they desire. As such, although fanzines by the same author may share similarities, they will usually have different aspects as well, being a mirror of the authors changing tastes or skills.

This paper views to explore the potential of this experimentation with the fanzine collection “entre tu e eu” (“between you and I”), created as

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the final project from the master's degree of the Illustration and Animation course on IPCA (Polytechnic Institute of Cávado and Ave. This collection within the theme of feminine sexuality and self-discovery, a theme of interest to the author, has three fanzines in total, each one with their own sub-theme: "OLHOS" ("EYES"), indirect homophobia; "o jardim púdico" ("the prude garden"), body hair; and "à distância" ("long-distance"), mental health and masturbation. Although they share key elements that help them to perceive as part of the same collection (sharing one color, the printing method of the risograph and the three being comics) they are inevitably different while being part of the same collection. To understand the best option in function of their own theme, each fanzine was deeply explored resulting in a variety of different types of illustration, formats, sizes, secondary color, and types of narratives.

This paper will start with a brief introduction of fanzines and some examples of authors fanzines to demonstrate the diversity of fanzines under their belt. However, the focus will be the showcase of the collection, its choices explanation and the author's process to contemplate the usage of this artifact as a way of exploration.

02. Fanzines and their flexibility

Fanzines come in all formats and sizes; they are independent [1] hand-crafted [2] objects made by one or a group of authors [2], which means they do not have to follow exterior rules since it's the job of its author to take care of all the steps of the process (production, publication, and distribution) of its creation [3]. The artifact itself was born inside the science fiction community during the 30s [4] but its popularization took place in the 70s in the United States of America and the United Kingdom thanks to the punk scene [5]. All those fanzines were created by fans of those phenomena to other fans, encouraging them to produce fanzines too, and, since this is an object with easy accessibility, they enable anyone to make one.

During that process, the author decides everything, format, colors, theme, the approach they wish to take, and how the final product will be. Considering formats, fanzines can be either physical, like booklets, leaflets, and magazines (the most popular) [6] or digital (for instances, a blog) [7] objects; And as for forms of expression one may use illustration, photography, comic, papercuts, poetry, or prose, or mixing everything and create something new. The possibilities are nevertheless endless, and it depends entirely on the author to choose how to create the fanzine.

If we consider the fanzines work of Gabriella Masson (also known as love6) and Joana Estrela we can see that, besides having preferences with their fanzines, their objects still have different approaches in some aspect or another.

With Gabriella Masson's fanzines, for instance, in both volumes of "A Ética do Têsão na Pós-Modernidade" Masson utilizes a monochromatic color palette of black and white, while "Garota Siririca" and "Sheiloca" prefers the usage of color, although limited. All three fanzines are comics, a preference of the author [8], but the structure varies from each other: "A Ética do Têsão na Pós-Modernidade" does it approach with vertical comics

along with loose illustrations and short sentences; “Garota Siririca” uses comics occasionally in a more structural way and others attempts to explore other ways to create the page; “Sheiloca”, at last, takes away the structural aspect, there are no lines dividing the scenes as if each page was just one illustration. As for their format, each has a physical version in the format of magazine (although “Garota Siririca” and “Sheiloca” started digital) and share feminist themes along with self-discovery, sexuality, and LGBT+.



Joana Estrela’s themes focus on LGBT+ themes as well and take into account the narrative itself to the fanzine’s choices: “Os vestidos do Tiago” (“Jame’s dresses”) pretends to look like a children’s book and because of that, the color palette is limited and utilizes primary colors, its format is also the magazine; “Propaganda” on the other hand is a diary, the graphite drawings along with the manual writing help to emphasize the feeling of something personal along with the magazine format too; At last, “Como Dizer...” is a tutorial on how to confess to another girl, the leaflet format helps understanding the needed steps with each unfold.

Each author chooses how to make their fanzines, and with that, they can create new objects and discover more options while exploring new methods.

Fig. 1 Pages of “A Ética do Teseo na Pós-Modernidade vol.2”, lovelove6, 2013.

Fig. 2 Page of “Garota Siririca”, lovelove6, 2013.

Fig. 3 Page of “Sheiloca”, lovelove6, 2018.



Fig. 4 Pages of “Os Vestidos do Tiago”, Joana Estrela, 2013.

Fig. 5 Page of “Propaganda”, Joana Estrela, 2014.

Fig. 6 Half-folded fanzine “Como Dizer...”, Joana Estrela, 2018.

03. The fanzine collection “entre tu e tu”

A fanzine is a flexible object that enables the search of the author’s expression, to attest this, the collection presented here has three different fanzines, each one with its specific theme within the global theme of the project (feminine sexuality and self-discovery), and like so they dabble different narratives, formats, and technics, each working as a topic the

author wants to vent about (henceforth the title “entre tu e eu” (“between you and I” as if the sharing of secrets between author and reader).

However, it was necessary that these objects would be created taking in mind that they are part of the same collection, and for that, it was imperial to search and study how this could be done (Fig.7). Collections as such: “The Puffin in Bloom Collections” and “A Place Called Perfect”, with shared key elements between each cover; the books of Chinua Acheche with illustrated covers by Edel Rodriguez, share the same color palette and art style; the collections of Juniper Books, such as “Fables”, where each book together organized create an illustration on the spine; helped understand how each object could be connected. But it was with “Building Stories” by Chris Ware (Fig.8) that the author found a hint on how to approach the “entre tu e eu” collection.

“Building Stories” is a box with various artifacts inside it and each tells a story from a resident of the same building. These artifacts are all different, each catering to one story and one resident and this is specially seen with the diversity of formats, varying between leaflets, magazine, posters, or back covers, but also by changing color pallets and page organization from one another. Although they are different, since all these stories happen on the same building, they end up end up connecting with each other in one way or another. This difference yet union can also be seen on the cover of the box, since they are from the same building complex they are on the same box, which also shows, for instances, different typography while writing its title.

This aspect of “Building Stories” was truly inspiring, since “entre tu e eu” wanted to also have different narratives and doing so with various formats and graphic styles but while the narratives of “Building Stories” ended up intertwining, which does not happen with “entre tu e eu”. This connection could be made utilizing graphic elements that each of the fanzines would have in common, like sharing a color, as seen with the books by Chinua Acheche with illustrated covers by Edel Rodriguez.

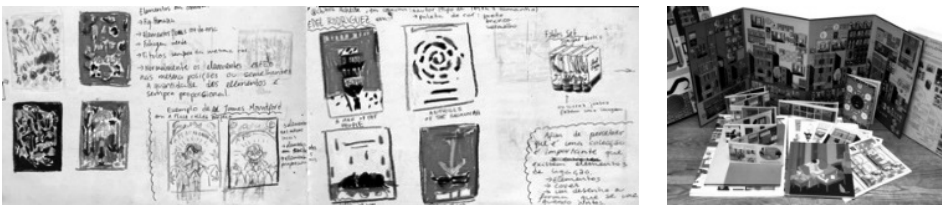


Fig. 7 Visual studies of “The Puffin in Bloom Collections”, “A Place Called Perfect”, Edel Rodriguez cover illustrations and “Fables”.

Fig. 8 “Building Stories”, Chris Ware, 2012.

As such, after studies on how to create a collection, it was chosen for them to have a place where they could be reunited: an envelope that reminiscences menstrual pads. For that, after some mock-ups (Fig.9) on how to emulate this idea, some characteristics had to be considerate: the laterals of the packaging had to be visibly closed, a longer brim to cover the front that closes with a long and thin white sticker and a pattern (all characteristics of a menstrual pad (Fig.10), created with elements from each fanzine.

This envelope (Fig.11) has just one color, pink, the color chosen to be the shared key point between all fanzines, and the laterals are sewn

to allude to the visibly closed laterals of the menstrual pads but specially to oblige the reader to tear the envelope to read the secrets within it (Fig.12)

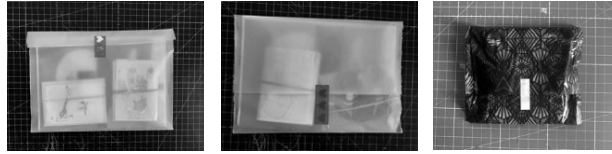


Fig. 9 “entre tu e eu” collection package mock-up.



Fig. 10 Menstrual pad.

Fig. 11 “entre tu e eu” collection.

Fig. 12 “entre tu e eu” collection opened.

04. “OLHOS”

The first fanzine created was “OLHOS” (“EYES”), a poem in a comic that describes the feelings of a girl going to her girlfriend’s house. The objective of this poem is to show the uneasiness that the couple feels when they sense other people are staring and probably judging them, contrasted with the carefree attitude they have when they are alone.

For that, the narrative is divided into three parts: outside, where the couple has no fear of expressing how they feel, however, when they sense the look from other people on them, the couple gets apart from each other; inside the house, when there’s an emotional and physical distance from the couple from the fear of the girlfriend’s father discovering them; and inside the blankets, when they are clinging into one another, happy and free, away from the looks and judgment from other people where they can express themselves away from the world.

It was important to establish how the antagonist of the narrative, the looks of other people, would be presented. Studies of literal and metaphorical representations were made, like figures of eyes or symbols of stars or peacocks (Fig. 13). However, it was decided that would be interesting to show this antagonist with the way the couple reacts to it, like this, the antagonist would be present but invisible simultaneously (Fig. 14).

The format of this fanzine also viewed to impose this narrative and, after studies of a magazine format in the size A4 to make visible what wanted to be hidden, it showed to be a more interesting approach one that combined the idea of being hidden and to be visible. Considering this thought, the format chosen is a leaflet that when folded can be read like a magazine,

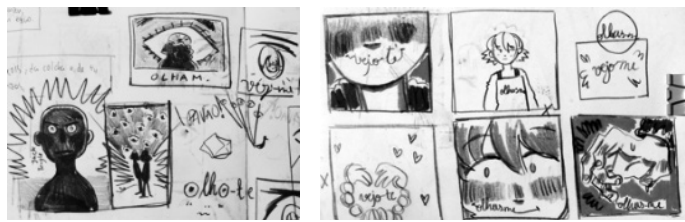


Fig. 13 Early studies for “OLHOS”

Fig. 14 Early studies exploring the couple’s reaction.

having the dimension of A7, a size capable of being hidden. This part shows the couple repressing their feelings, but, when reaching the last page, it is necessary for the reader to entirely unfold the fanzine, showing a poster with the dimension of A3, where the couple is happy, hugging each other as if the object of the fanzine is the blanked where the couple hides themselves.

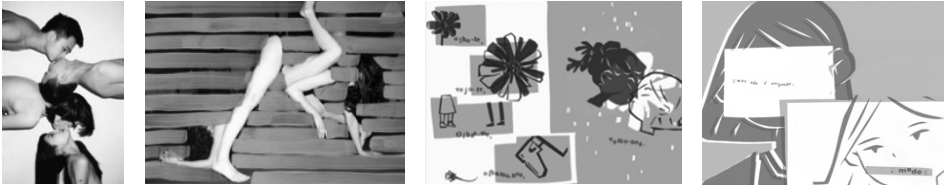
This concept of hiding one's feelings, both emotional and physical, served as inspiration: an untitled photograph by Ren Hang (Fig.15) where a group of people is kissing but since their faces are emotionless, it helps with the idea of them not showing their true self, that there is something keeping them away from that moment; and the photograph "Luxaflex, Of Mud and Lotus" by Vivianne Sassen (Fig.16) showing what seems to be bodies intertwined but with paint covering parts of the photograph making it impossible to understand what is actually happening.

Fig. 15 untitled, Ren Hang, 2011.

Fig. 16 untitled, Ren Hang, 2011.

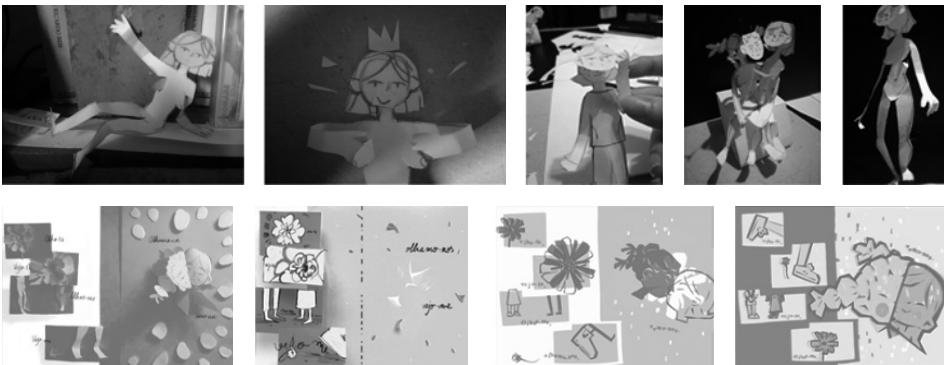
Fig. 17 & 18 Digital mock-ups of the risograph printing method.

The idea of hiding but present explored in these photographs was desired to be explored with the illustrations of "OLHOS". As such, taking in mind the overlay technique of the risograph, elements of the pink layer are on top of the yellow layer, creating orange because the pigment of these colors are not opaque (Fig. 17 and 18). Other technique used to achieve the hiding concept was the erasing of certain parts of the characters bodies (example: face or mouth (Fig.18)).



Visually it was certain that the material to use was paper, firstly, paper dolls (Fig.19) were created and tested, but because of the A7 size being too small, their reading wasn't viable, so instead of this tridimensional approach, a bidimensional paper cuts technique was created (Fig.20) inspired by paper cut dressing dolls.

Fig. 19 Some paper dolls studies.



Here all elements of each page were cut in a lighter color paper on top of a darker one while letting a slight margin of the darker paper to be shown. This technique made it possible to change between lines and filling zone on a digital montage (Fig.21).

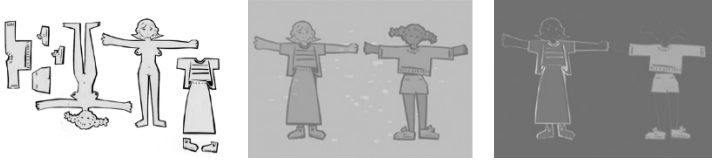


Fig. 20 Page studies from the A4 dimension with paper doll to the exploration of the bidimensional papercuts.

The typography was also created with papercuts, this time using the lettering from magazines, with this technique some words are made with bigger or bolder typography to change the rhythm of the poem's reading. The space left on the magazine was then transferred to a blank paper sheet, creating a pattern utilized on the fanzine (Fig.22).

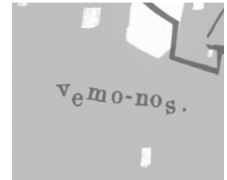
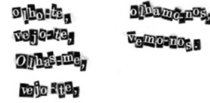


Fig. 21 Technique study for "OLHOS".

At last, the color chosen to go together with the pink was yellow (Fig. 23) to make use of the overlay technique, but using these colors in its purest and play it together with the white of the pages they would be printed on, to allow the composition to breath not feel too chaotic.

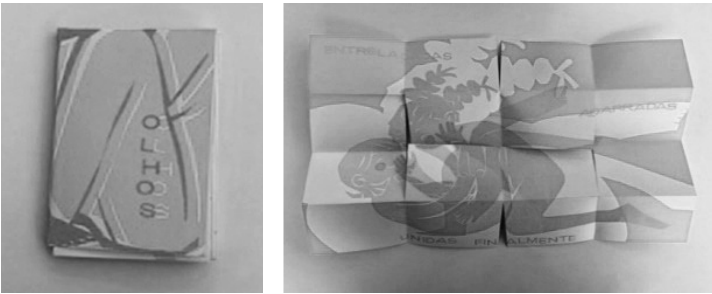


Fig. 22 Typographic technique for "OLHOS" and pattern created by the typography's missing space.

Fig. 23 Fanzine "OLHOS"

05. "o jardim púdico"

Next was "o jardim púdico" ("the prude garden", a play of words with "prude" and "prune"), a silent comic around the concept of body hair as a garden. The narrative is about the notion that when a person is born it's given them a garden to take care of, however, how the regard it depends on the biological sex they were born with. This narrative is also divided into three parts: the first shows a girl that has to take care of the garden as people her to, clean and beautiful, but when she sees the garden of her neighbor, a boy, she's amazed at how wild and free it is; the second is the girls trying to have a garden as free and wild as her neighbors but people are always talking down on her, telling her that it should be that way, and even though at first the girl pays no mind to them, eventually the comments take the best of her and she gives up, letting her garden die; the last

and third shows the neighbor helping the girl to have courage again and let her garden grow once again. At first, it was thought that this fanzine would have heavy text, however, with studies this text would be gradually shortened until it was non-existent (Fig.24).



Fig. 24
Visual and narrative studies for “o jardim público”

The format of this fanzine was also a leaflet and after studies (Fig. 25) to understand the best direction to take the full potential of the narrative it was the vertical way of the paper that seemed to be the best, as such the three parts of the narrative are physically explicit.



Fig. 25
Format mock-ups of “o jardim público” evolution.

Like this, the first page is divided into two columns, the right one is directed to the first part of the history where the girl discovers her neighbor’s garden, and the left one is dedicated to the fight she has with society, one she eventually loses, this step back in the reading (if taking in mind the western direction of reading, from left to right), from going to the right and then to the left works as a step back on her decision of having a wild and free garden as well.

The second page, and last one, works as a full page, at the top shows the neighbor trying to convince the girl to go back on her decision and to try to have a garden again, the rest of the page is dedicated to them happily watering a big and wild garden.

For the garden’s metaphor served as inspiration: a work from “Fuck-ing Freedom” by CACHETE JACK (Fig.26), where a woman is cutting her pubic hair that looks like a bush, with the sentence “WILD FOREST” in the background, appearing that the women’s body hair is a forest, this work also inspired the first color palette from this fanzine during some studies, yellow and green along with a darker color; and the book “O Prazer” (“Pleasure”) by Maria Hesse (Fig.27) where the pleasure is represented as a garden with an abundance of flowers and other plants, almost correlating with the amount of pleasure that it’s trying to be conveyed on that moment. The works helped to understand how to play with this metaphor, how to present the garden on the exterior but also on the character. When the character wants to fight on this garden is big, when she gives up, it’s dead, although when changing her mind and finally being sure of her answer and choice

she is happier than ever before, establishing a connection with her mind state and the garden she's growing. The character also hides her body hair, for being ashamed, only at the end the reader is finally able to see it.

To help with this idea of the garden the color chosen together with pink was decided to be green to go along with the theme of garden and nature.

Visually, the illustrations for the comic wanted to take advantage of textures, various studies (Fig.28)

were done in this direction, but seemed too chaotic, at last, the following was decided: each group of elements has a different texture created with drawing materials, washi tape and tape (for the hose and water) were also used as well as stamps (lettering, hair, and nature). For the watering can be used paper cuts from magazines of the real object, but since there weren't enough, teapots were chosen instead, this choice led to a more delicate representation yet comical, because of its dimension in comparison with the other elements created.

For the antagonist of this narrative, contrary to "OLHOS", in "o jardim púdico" it was decided that its power should be visually represented, for that reason, paper cuts of open hands were used, where they would be modeled as if point the finger. Their supposition together with the shadows they created made them have a strong presence (Fig. 29), shows the antagonist in contrast with the other elements).



Fig. 26
Illustration for "Fuck-
ing Freedom", CA-
CHETEJACK, 2017.

Fig. 27
"Pleasure", Maria
Hesse, 2019.



Fig. 28
Evolution of
studies for "o jardim
púdico".

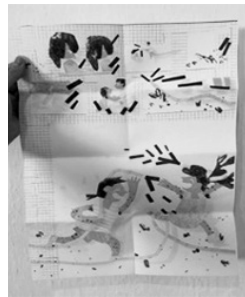


Fig. 29
Reading sequence of
"o jardim púdico".

06. “à distância”

“à distância” (“long-distance”, play words with “long-distance relationship”) was the third and last fanzine of this collection, also in comic focuses on isolation and personal intimacy. The narrative for this fanzine was the hardest to come by it was always known that it should portray the sequence of events that leads the main character to masturbate, but how this should be made was unknown (Fig.30).

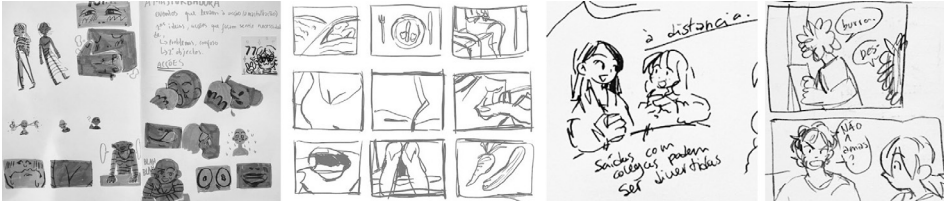


Fig. 30 Studies evolution for “à distância”.

Fig. 31 Initial study for the leaflet format for “à distância”.

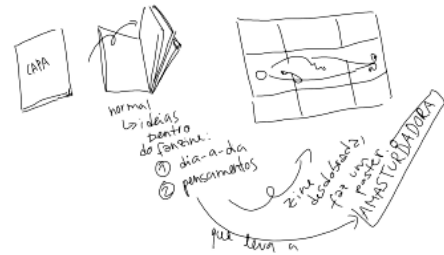
Fig. 32 Graphic game with the pose from the cover and back-cover of “à distância”.

Like so, it was decided to take advantage of the feelings of isolation the author felt during the master’s attendance weighted with the COVID-19 pandemic, creating a narrative about it. “à distância” tells the story (Fig.31) of a character that is in a long-distance relationship and feels isolated from everything, to distract herself from this focus she tries to have sex with her girlfriend, however, thanks to the awful internet connection this is not possible. With this the character has a new goal: to get a better internet connection; but when she finally gets what she wants the solitude and isolation she tried to hide but always felt finally catching her. Only after the character vents with her housemate and talks with her girlfriend, she reconnects with herself and see at last her girlfriend’s breasts.

For this fanzine, at first, when the narrative wasn’t chosen yet, it was thought to use the leaflet format (Fig.32), however, since the narrative turned longer than expected the chosen format was the magazine for a fluid reading.

With dimensions, at first “à distância” was going to be A4, the illustrations were even done in this size, however it was later decided for the fanzine to be in A5 for being of easy transportation and going together with the concept of being in a long-distance relationship and always on the move. There is even a cover and back-cover game (Fig.33), where they are on the first and last page respectively, here the position of the couple hugging on the first page reminds the couple’s feet position on the last page, creating an almost cyclic reading and staying true to the long-distance relationship concept with farewells and meeting once again.

The illustration of the comic was done with stylized drawing using a pen with a fine tip, using it to create meshes in a large amount to sug-



gest the emotional conflict the character is experimenting with. On the contrary, the absence of this mesh may represent the character's apathy or relief and acceptance.

Other stylistic choices used to evoke this emotional conflict are scribbles on top of the character's faces (Fig. 33), transforming them into background characters, when frequently, that is not the case, like how it happens with the character's roommate, or even the character herself.



Fig. 33 Scribbles on top of the characters heads of “à distância”.

For these visual choices to represent this emotional conflict served as inspiration the mangas: “Boy Meets Matia” by Peyo (Fig. 34), where after a traumatic event one of the main characters sometimes sees everything distorted and in an almost childish representation with the drawings along with stressed mesh lines on the background; and “My Lesbian Experience with Loneliness” by Kabi Nagata (Fig. 35), where not only does she use only two colors, pink and black (originally the colors chosen for “à distância”), but also the abundance of mesh that helps to represent the Nagata's uneasiness.



Fig. 34 “Boy Meets Peyo”, PEYO, 2018.

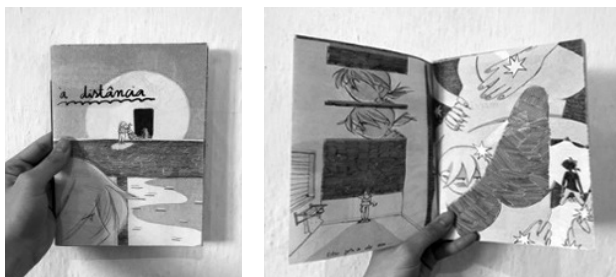
Fig. 35 “My Lesbian Experience with Loneliness”, Kabi Nagata, 2016.

To go together with the pink was first thought of using black, however, the illustrations ended up being too cold and harsh; the solution was the color “midnight blue”, evoking a dreamy and nostalgic feel together with pink (Fig. 36).

Fig. 36 Fanzine “à distância”.

07. Final thoughts

Fanzines can be spaces for authors to discover themselves. Joana Estrela and Gabriella Masson create fanzines with some elements always different, making the fanzines almost evolve with themselves.



For instance, while creating “entre tu e eu” the author didn’t plan on all of them being comics, the fact that every fanzine was a comic showed her it was her preferred way of expression. While working on this project, various ways of creating illustrations were tested, and this enabled the author to see which one she liked the best, and what aspects to keep a next time. The short “No Fim.” (Fig.37), gifted with an honorable mention, for the national contest on Amadora BD 2022, used a similar texture technique with papercuts to “o jardim púdico”, and more works following the creation of the collection followed this same example as well as a digital technique imitating the riso technique (a multiply layer on top of another with a different color) and this could only be possible after the experimentations done during the development of these fanzines.



Fig. 37 Page from the short “No Fim.”, 2022, and “Cuidando”, 2023.

However, “entre tu e eu” did not come to life without its own problems during production, to be able to adapt was essential. For starters, the collection was started during the COVID-19 pandemic which degraded the author’s mental health; the pandemic also made it more difficult to contact risograph printing shops and when one was chosen, orders were forgotten, and the machine that printed green stopped working during production, which delayed everything. Besides these problems, the risograph printing method also turned up to be very peculiar. It was always known that the results wouldn’t be perfect, and this was embraced specially on “à distância” where the layers do not meet one another perfectly, however, files that did not have any problems at naked eye would sometimes show errors during its printing, for that the file would have to be edited again. Although sometimes challenging this printing method did in fact provide beautiful and intense colors, and a noticeable texture that no other printing method would allow.

This fanzine collection wasn’t merely to be made and not shared, that is not a fanzine, fanzines must be spread, like so a presentation of “entre tu e eu” was done on “Tinta nos Nervos” in Lisbon, here was possible to see what worked and what not, which fears people shared or what they started to consider but also to share ideas between author and public. “OLHOS” was the most popular, although there were people afraid of opening it to its fullest, “à distância” was the easiest to read, thanks to the magazine format, and “o jardim púdico” the most difficult, because of the reading method and for being silent. It was also possible to see that the people who got the collection feared tearing apart the package since they knew that once they opened it there was no way back to how it was in the beginning. There are no more collections available, but the individual fanzines can be bought on “Tinta nos Nervos” in Lisbon, “Ó!galeria” in Oporto, and on the author’s Instagram “peugamorta”.

The creation of fanzines initiates an underground way of communication, everyone can make one, that’s the charm of it, and it allows the growth of authors or artists.

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Fig. 1 Issuu, <https://issuu.com/katzenminze/docs/eticadotesao2>

Fig. 2 Revista Samba, <http://revistasamba.blogspot.com/search/label/'gabi%20lv6>

Fig. 3 lovelove6, <https://lovelove6.com/portfolio/quadrinhos/sheiloca/>

Fig. 4 Joana Estrela, <https://joanaestrela.com/product/vestidos-do-tiago>

Fig. 5 Joana Estrela, <https://joanaestrela.com/product/propaganda>

Fig. 6-7 Author's image.

Fig. 8. The New Yorker, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cover-story/cover-story-chriswares-big-box-of-melancholy>

Fig. 9-12 Author's image.

Fig. 13 The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/05/arts/design/ren-han-garis.html>

Fig. 14 Vivian Sassen, <https://www.vivianesassen.com/works/of-mud-andlotus/carousel/#not-on-stevenson-2>

Fig. 15-23 Author's image.

Fig. 24 CACHETEJACK, <https://cachetejack.com/Fucking-freedom>

Fig. 25. WOOK, <https://www.wook.pt/livro/o-prazer-maria-hesse/23820785>

Fig. 26-33 Author's image.

Fig. 34 Tumblr, <https://heavensickness.tumblr.com/post/190774974098/mylesbian-experience-with-loneliness-kabi-nagata>

Fig. 25-36. Author's image.