

Beyond the Codex: Strategies of Collective Bookmaking

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70733/ixj5esbv87h4>

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Abstract

This essay is a conversation among three Polish artists—Dominika Łabędź, Małgorzata Markiewicz and Katarzyna Zimna—discussing their projects performed through workshops at “The Lost-and-Found” symposium, which took place in Lisbon, Warsaw and Riga between December 2023 and June 2024. The practices of the three artists employ the methodology of collective “bookmaking”, treating books as symbolic sources of knowledge. In their projects they all engaged in a play with a “book as codex” figure, both formally and conceptually, addressing relational aspects of knowledge production and the creative power of bodily or material experience, collective storytelling and experiments. Within this process, the dynamics of collective making have gone beyond authorial intentions and control and helped to rework the “book” into a more fluid and inclusive form—envisaged not only as an object, but also as documentation of a process or as an experience as such.

Introduction

In this essay, we present three collaborative bookmaking projects developed during “The Lost-and-Found” symposium, which took place in Lisbon (December 2023), Warsaw (March 2024) and Riga (June 2024). Drawing from our previous experiences and artistic practices in collective ways of working and bookmaking, in this text we focus on the processual expansion of our individual projects during “The Lost-and-Found” events towards a collective practice. This was achieved by each of us introducing new artistic methods that were tested in each context. While practised individually, this methodological exploration was anchored in shared foci: examining the relationships between materiality, narrative and collective experience, and interfacing play, collective creativity and improvisation. In our activities, we each approached the “book” as an open-ended entity, without beginning or end, multivocal, inconsistent, playful, while exploring spaces, possibilities and gestures beyond the usual, the routine or the “proper”.

The titular “codex” traditionally acts as a figure of the “proper book”, in terms of material form and content: a sequence of pages fixed in place, with a cover, a beginning and end, conforming with certain conventions, an outcome of authorial control, editorial guidelines and also being a source of “knowledge”. Breaking this code

within artistic practices occurs as part of the process of collective bookmaking, where the final “book” is not fixed in any way, but, instead, open for negotiations, and mainly offers a pretext to initiate a shared experience and a relation between the participants. For us, this has become a starting point to create three individual books, and while all books are an outcome of “The Lost-and-Found” events, each is a record of collective experiences between those participating in the bookmaking. It is in this context that the medium of the book has for us become a platform to practice a feminist approach to collaborative writing and storytelling non-hierarchical and based on collective input and creativity. Our three books attest to processes of collective knowledge creation in which diverse voices and experiences are valued equally. The multiplicity of perspectives shared by the participants challenges arbitrary viewpoints and decentres what is generally understood to be knowledge. This enables the practice of an ethics of care, with mutual respect, attentive listening, collaborative decision-making and shared responsibility, in which the process of creation is as important as the outcome.

In crafting this essay, we drew closely on Donna Haraway’s ideas, in which the world is not a space of closed, self-contained systems, but a dynamic network of collaborations, where beings coexist and co-create in a nonlinear way. Instead of providing a single, closed narrative, Haraway describes a network of mutually influencing, co-creating and constantly transforming stories. Such an approach is foundational to our individual projects, guided by our shared need for interactions with the world and active participation. We also attempt to practise this approach through visual means embedded within this essay; a collage of collaborative instances of our individual more-or-less formal writing, authorial descriptions of our projects, intentions and expectations (marked in italics), common references and photo-documentation of our projects. Through similarities and differences, our stories and projects resonate and influence one another, symbolically opening a space “in-between” that we have intentionally left open to be filled by the readers. Although we propose some conclusions, we invite readers to freely explore the intertwined and entangled threads of our practices. Therefore, this essay has a multivocal structure, which we tried to make accessible by merging some threads and topics. In the first section, we present some theoretical background, framing our shared ideas and briefly attend to our three individual projects that were developed during “The Lost-and Found” symposium: Małgorzata Markiewicz’s *Gloves-stories* (workshop in Lisbon), Katarzyna Zimna’s *Pulp and Love* (workshop in Warsaw), and Dominika Łabędź’s *Exercise Scores* (durational workshop in Lisbon, Warsaw and Riga). Subsequently, we refer to our previous experiences and practices to shed light on our projects’ foundations. Finally, we try to summarise the experiences from the workshops and analyse potentials for collaborative bookmaking in the context of *Practices of Co-Existence*.

“Becoming-with”

In our independently conceived frameworks, all three projects developed within the context of the symposium refer to collaborative and embodied practices, not only drawing inspiration from Haraway, as previously mentioned, but also Bruno Latour and Silvia Federici. The embodied practice of “becoming-with” proposed by Haraway in *Staying with the Trouble* (2016), emphasises the coexistence of species as a source of new subjectivity. Haraway argues that no individual human, animal or any other being exists in isolation.^[1] All “become” through their coexistence and interaction with others. In this sense, “becoming-with” means that identities, meanings and futures are jointly created by various entities through relational processes. Our bodies and senses are active participants in our relationships with the surrounding world, and this relationship is not merely about survival but also about co-creating a better future. Haraway calls for the practice of care, solidarity and engagement in coexistence that transcends species, social and technological boundaries.

Equally significant in this context is Latour’s perspective. In *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime* (2018), he highlights that in the face of ecological crisis and breakdown of “common social life”, solely

relying on “facts” is not enough.^[2] We must create a common world a space where facts gain meaning through institutions fostering dialogue, trust and collaboration. Similarly to Haraway, for Latour, every act of knowledge and decision-making is situated in specific, physical and contextual conditions. Without them, “facts” lack stability or meaning, they are “sustained” by networks of relationships that we must co-create. In other words, for people to believe in facts, they must feel that these facts directly concern them and exist within the world they inhabit alongside others. This means that simply repeating or teaching scientific truths is not enough. We need to build a social and institutional world in which these truths hold significance and are embraced as part of a shared experience.

This conceptual framework guiding us is expanded by Federici’s vision of communal relations explored in the book *Re-enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons* (2009).^[3] Federici proposes that community is an embodied practice that integrates care, solidarity and cooperation through everyday activities and the creation of alternative social institutions. While Federici does not reject the role of the state, she emphasises the need to develop grassroots community initiatives that are more responsive and closer to people’s daily lives than centralised power structures. Such a vision of community not only counters alienation and exploitation, but also transforms our subjectivity, teaching us to see ourselves as part of a larger, interdependent and co-responsible network of beings.

Each of these perspectives frame our three projects of collective knowledge production and bookmaking in varying degrees while also interlacing. Our working process, rooted in the experience of the body and collective action, becomes, in this context, not only an artistic practice, but also a political and social one a form of communal activity that redefines participants’ subjectivity and opens new pathways for building relationships and generating knowledge.

Lisbon workshop and *Gloves-stories*

In her *Gloves-stories*, developed in Lisbon in December 2023, Małgorzata Markiewicz approaches a glove as a second skin, as protection from germs and against the cold, something that in one moment might be extremely close to our warm palm, in intimate contact, but when lost may mean nothing like it to a passer-by who encounters it. The glove’s close relation with its previous owner can even be repulsive to a potential new owner, a collector. In Lisbon’s workshop, Markiewicz invited participants to share and imagine stories with her. Those stories were based on the lost gloves she keeps finding in different urban spaces, either in her hometown, Kraków (Poland), or while travelling. Following the workshop, photos of gloves selected by the participants, accompanied by texts they wrote, as well as drawings and embroideries were collected into a book.



Figs 1-2. Małgorzata Markiewicz, *Gloves-stories*

It was the winter of 2006 in Helsinki when I started noticing gloves on the streets. I was there for a two-month residency at the Helsinki International Artist Programme. I felt sorry for those gloves, as they were lost, forgotten, useless. So I started to collect them, to give them new life in my artistic practice. I saw them as personalities, disposals which needed to be taken care of by giving them agency and subjectivity. I was looking for their new pair, a new partner for the future. They become valuable again. Since then, I have collected gloves and brought them into new relationships. The gloves-stories idea emerged for “The Lost-and-Found” symposium. The aim was to engage others, ask how they read those residues of our lives. We can’t deny that everything is related to something, we live within the entanglement with other species and materiality. It is good to be aware of this.

Warsaw workshop and *Pulp and Love*

In her *Pulp and Love* project developed in Warsaw in March 2024, Katarzyna Zimna addresses the idea of recycling memories and experiences into a new form in order to deal with ghosts from the past and gender stereotypes. The project employs the collaborative activity of bookmaking to work through emotions, share insights and deal with intimate private stories as well as clichés. For the workshop in Warsaw, she hand-made plain sheets of paper recycled from the pages of old *Harlequin* romance books found in 2023 in the attic of her husband’s family house. Participants of “The Lost-and-Found” symposium were invited to contribute to these pages with their own expressions of broadly understood “love”, using creative means of their choice (painting, embroidery, collage, sewing, mark-making, writing).

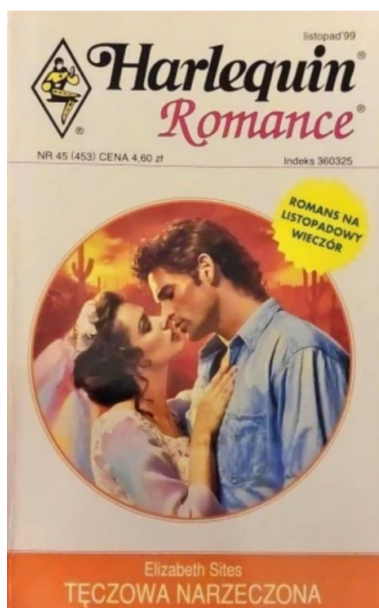


Fig 3. Sample Harlequin book cover. Fig 4. Katarzyna Zimna's *Pulp and Love* project; page by Anna Markowska

In summer 2023 I spent some time in my late father-in-law's house dealing with the layers and piles of objects, documents and memories of a few generations that passed away. Among other things, in the attic there was this large collection of Harlequin (romance) series of books: smelling old, with yellowish pages wavy from moisture. I could have thrown them away, as no one would want to read them anymore, but I thought they might be used to make hand-made paper at the printmaking classes with my students. I started working with these old pages, tearing them, blending, smelling and reading sentences bursting with emotions, broken hearts and sudden love epiphanies. When these stories began to break down into basic elements phrases, words and, finally, paper pulp with single letters, looking like scattered seeds I started to feel emotional, responding to the universal language connecting harlequins and masterpieces and their readers. Love, relations bonding, belonging, passing... Making new pages from these books in the end was the moment of grief and contemplation of transience and circularity of human life and love stories.

I kept making paper from these old lost and found Harlequin books with the intention to give them a new life. The idea was to bring new stories to these "blank" sheets of paper, that already carried their (whose?) stories. Participants of "The Lost-and-Found" symposium in Warsaw were asked to add something to these pages a word, sentence, image, sign their own expression of widely understood "love". These personal interventions were made through writing, drawing, stitching, printing and collaging with the intention to create a new collaborative "Columbina book". This new title refers to the figure of Columbina, often Harlequin's mistress a female servant stock character in the commedia dell'arte, appearing/dancing on the stage in-between main scenes performed only by male characters, as women were not allowed to be part of the main plot. Columbina becomes here a metaphor of female agency and voice, as Harlequin books represent stereotypical, patriarchal values and viewpoints.

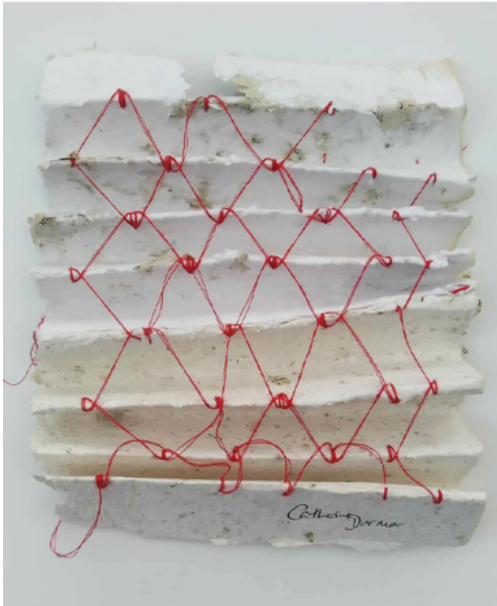


Fig 5. Left: Katarzyna Zimna, *Pulp and Love*; page by Catherine Dormor; Fig 6. Right: Katarzyna Zimna, *Pulp and Love*; page by Yaraslava Ananka

Lisbon, Warsaw and Riga durational workshop and *Exercise Scores*

In her *Exercise Scores* developed throughout “The Lost-and-Found” symposium in Lisbon, Warsaw and Riga, Dominika Łabędź offered a series, including *Exercises in Moving Over*, *Exercises in Making Ways* and *Exercises in Making Matters*. These exercises, which fall within the framework of creative workshops, research and artistic practices, are based on active participation and engagement. Drawing from collective and activist strategies, and translating them into the field of art, Łabędź approaches art as a shared experience, where knowledge production takes place beyond books, in space, time and context. Łabędź believes that simple tools of improvisation and performance can encourage working through and with individual experiences and affects and negotiates these to develop speculative narratives aimed at alliance-building and commitment to the commons.



Fig 7. Dominika Łabędź, *Exercise in Moving Over*, Museu Nacional de Arte Contemporânea, Lisbon, Portugal, 2023



Fig 8. Dominika Łabędź, *Exercise in Making Ways*, Zachęta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw, Poland, 2024



Fig 9. Dominika Łabędź *Exercise in Making Matters*, Dubulti Beach, Riga, Latvia, 2024

The Exercises in Moving Over that I conducted in Lisbon were based on collective language games, auditory exercises and collective performative storytelling. These exercises created a space for various expressions and needs, leaving room for the voices of others, opening up to dialogue, negotiations and improvisation.

In the exercise First Language in Lisbon in December 2023, for example, each participant spoke in their mother tongue. Unable to understand each other, we searched for points of reference. Intuitively looking for etymological links, we began to create connections between words that formed a shared narrative.

Exercises in Making Ways, conducted in Warsaw in March 2024, were focused on narrative and interpretative sources. Reference points were selected images from the Zachęta National Gallery of Art collection. We started the exercises with a practical centre activity that helped us become

grounded in our bodies. I asked the participants to reinterpret the works they had chosen, using drawing and text. The questions I asked were helpful in the process. Participants could adopt any perspective personal, artistic, social, political, environmental, intuitive all were equally valid.

Exercises in Making Matters, conducted on Jurmala Beach in Latvia in June 2024, focused on the dual meaning of producing physical matter and creating meaning. This refers to the double exposure, where matter and meaning are linked in thinking about a common world. The exercises were designed to make us aware of the world's hybridity.

In our three “bookmaking” projects, the collective production of knowledge is process-based and interactive. While sharing similarities, our approaches are specific and therefore differ. Markiewicz refers to material objects as narrative vehicles, exploring their narrative and emotional potential. Zimna works with memories, using recycling and the transformation of material objects (books) to create new emotional experiences. Łabądz focuses on non-material experiences, performativity and the speech act, in which knowledge is produced in action through negotiation. Emphasising the importance of collaboration and collective action, we each employ a different approach to communal encounters enabled by processes of transforming objects (Markiewicz), emotions (Zimna) and experiences (Łabądz) to catalyse novel ways of understanding our common world and alternative knowledge-building practices.

Previous “Book” Practices and Co-creations

Approached through feminist politics, artists' books can serve as documentation of everyday lived experiences that are often neglected in history and culture. Within such framing, an artist's book becomes not only an aesthetic medium but has the potential to challenge dominant discourses and hierarchies of knowledge and foreground experiences that are marginalised, including those being considered “private” or “irrelevant”, often concerning women or other “peripheral” subjects. We use books to give space to those agencies and their effects that have been invisible in mainstream discourses. And while this is the focus in our individual “The Lost-and-Found” projects, this approach is rooted in our earlier practices that are sensitive to collaborative experiences. The potential of the artist's book as an open, non-hierarchical medium as well as the use of “things” elements taken from our material surroundings to be used as props carrying emotional weight, or as catalysts of meaning had already been explored in some of our previous individual artistic activities. Those former experiences generated the strategies and methods we employed for “The Lost-and-Found” workshops.

During her PhD research (2011-15), which was partly developed at Konstfack, Stockholm, Markiewicz explored the “non-codexical book” through the interface between theory and practice.^[4]

Since my topic was “House, Home and Domesticity” and each of us has a different definition of what “home” means, I started to collect “home recipes” with which I created The Cookbook with Home Metaphors (2014). This book has an open structure, can continue to grow and invites readers to add their own instructions. The book collects stories that demonstrate various aspects of home and domesticity. My intention was to bring out the intimate, personal essence of what is imposed on us as a home in the form of social standards. The compositional principle of both the theoretical presentation and the corresponding artworks first delivered within the framework of my doctoral thesis is natural

growth. I position myself at the centre of this growth and, by posing questions, open up its successive rooms, cells and hideaways, with chapters presenting different but equivalent problems related to the concept of home. These problems are elaborated on through text as well as visual material. Writing affects the material and vice versa. My approach in the book is grounded in openness to the Other. Therefore, the book assumed an open form approach that can lead to a continuous inclusion of other points of view and other works. My work emphasises the relationship of artistic practice to theory. The structure of *The Cookbook with Home Metaphors* can be described as follows: introduction or the ingredients of the story; development, or the recipes stories; and the final, summarising, part, or eating telling and listening to stories as a conclusion. An important inspiration for my book came from Richard Sennet. In *The Craftsman* Sennet compares gastronomy to the act of writing. Below, I provide the pertinent, extensive fragment from the chapter “Instruction through Metaphors”:

Madame Benshaw's Recipe for Poulet à la d'Albufera

A third way of writing expressive instructions was furnished me by Madame Benshaw, who taught me to cook *Poulet à la d'Albufera*. Madame Benshaw had come to Boston, a refugee from Iran, in 1970 [...] Here's the unadulterated text: 'Your dead child. Prepare him for new life. Fill him with the earth. Be careful! He should not over-eat. Put on his golden coat. You bathe him. Warm him but be careful! A child dies from too much sun. Put on his jewels. This is my recipe.' To make sense of it, I've inserted my own crude references: 'Your dead child. (the chicken) Prepare him for life. (bone) Fill him with the earth. (stuff) Be careful! He should not over-eat. (stuff lightly) Put on his golden coat. (brown before baking) You bathe him. (prepare the poaching liquor) Warm him but be careful! A child dies from too much sun. (cooking temperature: 130 Celsius) Put on his jewels. (once cooked, pour the sweet-pepper sauce) This is my recipe.'^[5]

The story drew my attention to the possibilities of language and human imagination. How to speak about something that is difficult to put into words, since it is actually somewhere in-between? Madame Benshaw's recipe consists of several, very short sentences, which gives enormous room for interpretation, just like poetry.



Figs 10-11 . Małgorzata Markiewicz, *Cookbook with Home Metaphors*

In a similar way, in *Gloves-stories* the material artefacts generated stories and provided ingredients to create “new recipes”. Comparing Markiewicz's PhD practice with the workshop in Lisbon reveals her negotiations of the

role of the artist, who becomes a catalyst for a collective experience inviting participants to contribute to the process of collaborative “cooking”, as was the case in her doctoral project, or “bookmaking” in “The Lost-and-Found” workshop.

In her previous projects, Zimna expanded the traditional form of the “codex”, in terms of the material and visual form, making an accordion or puzzle books. The inclusive, open (and difficult to define) form, characteristic for the medium of the artist’s book, has a very important function in her view; it helps document experiences, people, places or gestures that are often marginalised and difficult to capture in any other medium. As a member of a book art community, she recalls an earlier participation in a collaborative book-making project:

I would like to mention here the group artist’s book project that I participated in during the Covid pandemic, that referred to the aspects of togetherness and community building. It was initiated and curated by Jadwiga Tryzno from the Book Art Museum in Lodz. Artists who work with the artist’s book medium were asked to share their projects created during the pandemic that also included texts and photo documentations of their creative spaces: temporary studios, kitchens, living rooms, wherever they were able to keep working during the time of isolation. All these inputs were gathered on the internet platform that became a sort of an open-ended online book itself with many individual “pages”, but contributing to the collective experience and knowledge generated during this particular time. It is still available at <https://pandemiabookart.pl/>.

However, her interest in art as a shared experience and co-creation has roots elsewhere. Primarily a printmaker, she tries to push the boundaries of the book as a very traditional (“codexical”) medium, to play with its rules and procedures, as well as with the well-established role of the artist as a “master”. In some of her projects, Zimna used a traditional print as an open form that could be further modified and enriched by audiences, through colouring or embroidering, for example. The traditional edition of identical copies of a print, signed by the artist, becomes then a collection of variations co-authored by the participants.

Another example can be her *Seedlings* project, from 2019, which comprised a series of miniature linocut prints acting as a metaphor of the beginning and unlimited possibilities.^[6] Sharing, collaboration and community were the main ideas behind this project. For the *Paradox Forum* in Riga, which took place in the same year, the artist printed a large tablecloth with multiplied images of “seedlings”. Participants were asked to contribute to the tablecloth by filling the white shapes of particular seedlings either by embroidering or otherwise modifying the fabric.

While working on this series, I had this idea that a print, as an empty, cut-out form, acts like a seedling reaching its final appearance (and identity) depending on whose hands it hits, the type of “fill”, the way it is displayed. In the case of this work, the possibility of multiplication, inherent to the medium of print, was used to literally share art, like gardeners share excess seedlings among each other. This work had also another aspect the barter exchange. After their contributions, participants could take home a copy of one seedling printed on paper.



Figs 12 13. Katarzyna Zimna, *Seedlings*, interactive installation, Riga Art Academy, Latvia, Paradox Forum 2019

As described earlier, a similar strategy was used in her *Pulp and Love* project for “The Lost-and-Found” symposium. For this instance, she produced “blank” pages from recycled *Harlequin* books and asked participants to add their own content. In that context, Zimna renounced the “authorial” gesture, leaving space for individual contributions.

Since 2018, Łabądź, together with Joanna Synowiec, has co-run the self-publishing house Dzikie Przyjemności (Wild Pleasures). They operate outside the commercial circuit, with a bottom-up approach to the entire production process, in line with the principle of DIT (do it together) rather than DIY (do it yourself).

Most of our publications are collective works, representing modes of collective action and knowledge production that challenge the traditional artistic notion of individualism. I enjoy collaborating with others in various fields, which is why I also invite people who are involved in a field that interests me to publish together. These are often friends, but not always.

What I’m trying to do is sort of archive my own and collective art projects but also create a space for community creativity, work and reception. In this way it is easier to maintain the ephemeral nature of the work in progress, that is often based on relationships. The aim is not only to document projects, but also to continue thoughts, intuitions, observations and connections, broadening perspectives.



Fig 14 . Left: Dominika Łabądź *Happy Ending Story*, Tajne Komplety, Wrocław, Poland, 2020; Fig 15. Right: Performative reading of Dominika Łabądź, *Happy Ending Story* Studio BWA, Wrocław, Poland, 2020

There is one collective book project I realised during the pandemic I would like to describe here. In response to the experience of isolation, I wanted to create a space for dialogue and to give voice to “all” where expression was free. Over the following months, the book came together, collecting works from 70 contributors. The invited and self-applying participants had complete freedom regarding the form and content of their submissions. I collected all the illustrations, texts, poetry, recipes, manifestos, etc., and published it in 2021, as a single book entitled Happy Ending Story.^[7] The book took on a polyphonic character, which, in its anarchistic specificity, constituted a form of order.^[8]

Currently, we are working on expanding the scope of the publishing house by moving towards its collectivisation. Our goal is to share production resources, enabling others to independently create their own publications and offer more space for alternative narrative forms and the blending of structures through poetry, essays, diaries, the integration of visual art, conversations, interviews, recipes and more.

Łabądź's project *We Want the Right to Think* (2022) was a starting point for the workshops carried out as part of “The Lost-and-Found” symposium. For that project she collaborated with friends activists, educators, sociologists and poets through a series of workshops at BWA art gallery in Zielona Góra. Afterwards, these workshops became part of her exhibition “Exercises in Moving Over” at BWA Zielona Góra in 2023.

In response to mounting crises on the Polish-Belarusian border, polarisation, the climate crisis and others both projects focused on subverting language and questioning the constructs embedded within it. The aim was to raise awareness of our privileges and reveal the multiplicity of worlds we live in, where decoding is the first step towards change.

The project concluded with workshops around identifying and gathering wild edible plants. They operated under the assumption that sharing food meets the need to be among people, acting as a catalyst for community and freedom.

At the end, we published a collective book, with the motto, “We practice moving. We dismantle established constructs and actively participate in a future that starts today. We design possibilities; we do not wait with folded arms. We take responsibility.”^[9]



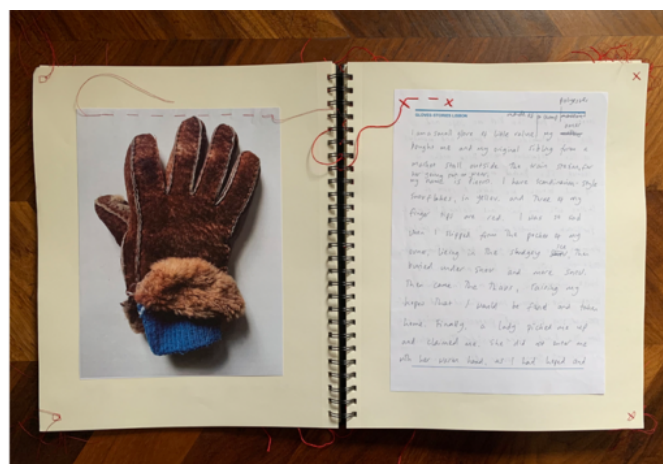
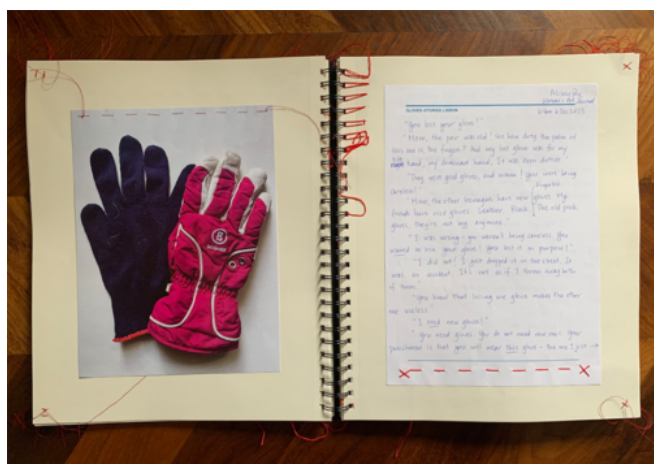
Fig 16. Left: Dominika Łabądź *Walking Through the Forest for Food*, BWA art gallery Zielona Góra, Poland, 2023; Fig 17. Right: Double-page spread Dominika Łabądź *Ćwiczenia z przesuwania się/Exercises in Moving Over*, published by Dzikie Przyjemności and BWA

Driven by the urgency of alliances and looking for ways to conceptualise the world together, not to be reduced to an individual arising from a lack of institutions and shared language, I went further by creating performative exercises that I conducted during the three editions of “The Lost-and-Found” symposium. In each edition, I proposed a different set of exercises that I invited participants to take part in. Later, I published them in a book, titled Exercises Scores. These simple improvisational tools aimed to disrupt our sense of certainty, encouraging negotiation with questions such as: what do we want? What are we capable of? Who are we willing to co-exist with? Can we achieve equality, and if so, how?^[10]

Practising Co-existence

Addressing and recapturing micro-his/her/it-stories can serve as a tool to uncover experiences often remaining invisible in mainstream narratives. In the workshops we developed for “The Lost-and-Found” symposium we wanted to collaborate with others, inviting them to write and tell stories *together*. Through the process, we each encouraged spaces that are not universal while attending to individual experiences and affects and recognising agencies of those involved. While different, our artistic gestures shared the desire to resist simplistic divisions ignoring diversity and to make space for particularity, complexity, rootedness and proximity to the world. For the functioning of a community, practices of care and attentiveness are essential, as argued by Federici.^[11]

Similarly, Haraway’s concept of *becoming-with* presents an alternative to individualistic thinking and the autonomy of the subject in favour of interconnectedness with other entities humans, animals, plants and more broadly, entire ecosystems.^[12] Haraway emphasises a form of communal being in which our lives and fates are interwoven with those of other sentient beings. Attentive practices are not just about observing but also engaging in action in response to what is noticed. This idea of noticing as a moment for pausing, paying attention and caring was a catalyst for Markiewicz’s *Gloves-stories* project.



Figs 18–19. Małgorzata Markiewicz, *Gloves-stories*

Her workshop was a direct reference to Haraway’s writing, where “storying cannot any longer be put into the box of human exceptionalism.”^[13] Markiewicz sees her collaborative work as an alternative way of creating, shifting

his-storical framings towards *it*-stories or rather *gloves*-stories.

Working on a book in a collaborative way is setting the stage, creating a frame within which others can be included. In my case there were objects found on the street, and open “pages” that can be read by others. Such an approach catalyses an unlimited number of perspectives and stories. It makes us more attentive and careful towards the materiality we are surrounded and entangled with.

As for Zimna, in *Pulp and Love* she also positions herself as the initiator of the process:

I hand-made the pages, told the participants the story behind them, and prepared the necessary materials. Before the session started, I had the idea how it would all go in my head, how the final “book” would look like, but, obviously, it all turned out unexpectedly. The participants filled these pages in their own unique, creative and playful ways.

During the final discussion I realised that the form of a book, like the whole process of its making, cannot be hierarchical, fixed codex-like. Therefore, we discussed some ideas of the potential presentation of the “book”, so it would keep its subversive, feminist character, based on sharing and equality. My role in this project was not as an artist-author, but rather as an initiator, a game-master or a hostess, taking care of participants and their process. The outcome, apart from the collection of pages made of “pulp and love” was mainly the experience of togetherness, of exchange of perspectives and inspirations. Giving up the authorial control was enriching and liberating.

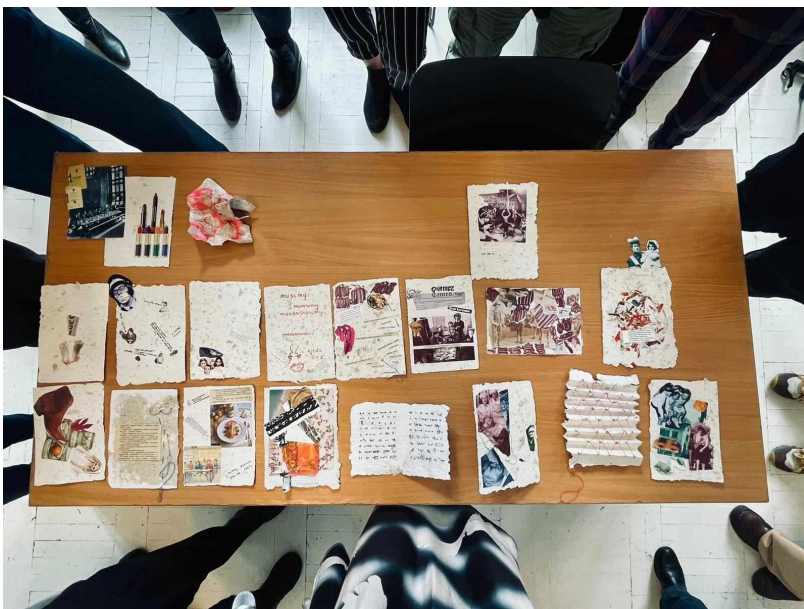


Fig 20. Katarzyna Zimna, final presentation of *Pulp and Love*; photo: B. Sliwinska

Finally, Łabędź's book *Exercises Scores* is not a collective work itself. The possible exercise scenarios were developed prior to each edition of the symposium, reacting to and responding to the previous ones. Thus, rather than generating collective knowledge, the book stimulates it, while at the same time serving as a tool offering guidelines that can be used in various combinations, transformed and adapted.



Figs 21-24. Dominika Łabądz, *Exercise Scores* published by Dzikie Przyjemności, Wrocław, Poland, 2024

The exercises I proposed did not focus on cognitive reliability, but on how to live in the same world, share the same culture, face common challenges and explore a landscape together. It is not about deficits in knowledge production but, as Bruno Latour writes, about deficits in shared practices. Redefining these practices, through imbalance, balance, double layers, and an open-ended approach, can help in registering, maintaining and cherishing the maximum number of alternative ways of belonging to the world.^[14]

In all three projects developed within the scope of “The Lost-and-Found” symposium, the dynamics of collective making/being went beyond authorial intentions and control and generated unexpected results. This required flexibility, attention and acceptance from all participants, as well as a level of playfulness and the ability to adapt the original assumptions to the ideas and interpretations that emerged during the process. Such an approach incorporated a feminist perspective, attending to alternative and marginalised histories mindful of minority experiences. Within this framework, collective “writing” becomes a form of reclaiming space, striving to present alternative narratives a world of intimacy filled with emotions, affects, values and respect for “others” particularities. Marginalised histories are not merely an addition, but a crucial element in reshaping the way we understand the book, narrative and creative process. The inclusion of these histories, and stories, transforms the book not only into a medium for storytelling, but also a space generative of feminist politics grounded in micro-histories, affects and materialities. Artistic projects oscillating on the boundaries of authorship nurture and celebrate feminist politics by creating spaces for dialogue, solidarity and forms of resistance. They establish a place for collective experiences and defy the capitalist and neoliberal foregrounding of individualism and singular needs. Our workshops imagined ways of reconstructing community ties destroyed by processes of colonialism, primary accumulation or privatisation of resources. The collaborative processes underpinning them have the potential to offer an alternative, prioritising cooperation and care. Collective action and the sharing of resources and responsibilities allow individuals to find new ways of existing in the world, based on collaboration instead of competition. This is a practice of co-existence.

Conclusion

It seems that the collective production of knowledge may shift symbolic boundaries and stimulate our ability to imagine and learn new ways of living and being with one another, and to create an ecology in which everyone and everything is deeply interconnected. As Haraway wrote, “It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories.”^[16]

What our “The Lost-and-Found” projects have in common is the starting point the particular, personal experiences, observations, questions. However, all three of us refrain from giving our own authorial and “codexical” answers; rather we prefer to open the discussion, provide space, time or blank pages for others to fill with their answers or further questions. The “books” document fleeting moments of togetherness, spontaneous acts and decisions, inspire storytelling and chatting, describe the here and now and reinforce bonds between their makers. Using workshops as a collaborative method in which the participants’ individual experiences become part of a larger artistic process and social reflection, all projects redefine the possibilities of transforming the everyday into new forms of meaning and narrative. The proposed instructions and interactions, being open to interpretation, convey a potentially limitless variety of perspectives and outcomes. Although they do not directly refer to random operations, their course is determined by a mode of action whose outcomes cannot be fully predicted. Conducting these operations within social and artistic practices, gives them stability and meaning, setting them in the context of common experiences and values. It seems crucial that the creation or questioning of these practices is rooted in a concern for the common good, which becomes the reference point and foundation for further action.

Our projects propose to adopt a feminist horizontal perspective, in which art is understood as a shared experience. Horizontal thinking aligns with the idea of equal opportunities, however, it is not synonymous with inclusivity; it does not accept diversity as a given status quo, but rather strives to create diversity by recognising particularities, localities and agencies, micro-stories and materialities to generate new narratives. When we look at ourselves, at each other, at the world with care and attention, we can deepen our “optical awareness” the ability to perceive what is around us with insight and empathy and to understand our interdependence. It creates conditions of possibility and fosters change, although it does not pre-condition it. It proposes a radical reformulation of our place in the world and the way we treat diverse forms of existence with love and care. We leave readers of this essay with a blank page to fill with your own story of affects and experiences in communal relations.

Footnotes

1. Haraway, Donna J. *Staying with The Trouble: Making Kind in the Chthulucene*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. 2016.

2. Latour, Bruno. *Down to Earth, Politics in the New Climatic Regime*. Cambridge: Polity Press. 2018.
3. Federici, Sylvia. *Re-enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons*. Oakland: PM Press. 2019.
4. Titled *HOUSE. HOME. DOMESTICATION. HOUSE OPENING*.
5. Sennet, Richard. *The Craftsman*. New Haven: Yale University Press. 2019. p. 189.
6. Zimna, Katarzyna. *Seedlings*, interactive installation, Riga Art Academy, Latvia, Paradox Forum 2019; online solo show, accompanying the keynote paper at the conference "Kant, aesthetics and contemporary art", Cardiff Metropolitan University, Cardiff University, University of Exeter, UK, 2020.
7. *Happy Ending Story*. Wrocław: Przyjemności, Dzikie. 2021.
8. The entire process and project have also been documented and published on the Research Catalogue, where it is accessible at: <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1078636/1078789> (accessed 2025-02-09).
9. Konrad Góra, Ewa Jupowiecka, Marzen Lizurej, Dominika Łabądz, Joanna Synowiec, Przemek Witkowski, *Ćwiczenia z przesuwania się*. Wrocław: BWA Zielona Góra and Dzikie Przyjemności, 2023, p.11
10. *Ibid.*
11. Federici, *Re-enchanting the World*.
12. Haraway, *Staying with The Trouble*.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
14. Latour, *Down to Earth*.
15. Haraway, *Staying with The Trouble*, p. 12.