

In the Event of Not Having an Answer

Elisabeth Workman

IN THE EVENT OF NOT HAVING AN ANSWER

Elisabeth Workman

Dusie Kollektiv 2015 www.dusie.org



In the Event of Not Having an Answer © 2016 Elisabeth Workman All rights reserved. A Dusie Kollektiv Chapbook

In the Event of Not Having an Answer FIRST EDITION

/150

Cover art by Beatrix & Erik Brandt

Special thanks to Susana Gardner. For the Dusie Kollektivs past, present, future.

IN THE EVENT OF NOT HAVING AN ANSWER:

A) LOOK FOR ITS TRACE

In the park called Powderhorn one block north of where I live there is a lake and on the west side of the lake there is a bald trail, where it seems the grasses have been rubbed away by heavy foot traffic, even though you never see anyone walking there. When B at three asked about this path, what/how is it, and I didn't know/asked back, and she didn't know/asked back, we somehow arrived at the theory that probably this trail was made by the night horses, that it was their trace.

B) PIXELATE

Powderhorn is a couple miles southeast of downtown Minneapolis, whose tiny, shiny, fucked-up crown of capital—even when you can't see the physical skyline—glows starcancelations into the night sky for miles and miles. In this part of the country it's easy to give detailed directions and situate destinations according to the compass. Without mountains, the protest of forests, or even hills, the city grids here so frequently remain faithful to a literal north-south/east-west perpendicularity. The pixel effect of flyover country. Pixels and their rips, the water bodies, running or still like ruptures suggesting everything waiting to surface is wet ("choice is in the water"-Fred Moten¹) is flood. The lakes here, I've heard, are all glacier puddles, and the terrain really an old sea floor we traverse, cursing dead city planners in commutes to/from our tentacled gardens as we head straight into the explicit sun, this far north a naked, blazing severity.

¹ Fred Moten, *The Feel Trio* (Tucson: Letter Machine Editions, 2014).

² Jason Coyne, Facebook status update, March 30, 2015, 10:42 pm

C) CLIFF DWELL

In the event of not having an answer, there were the night horses in the way that a mouth can be a fissure in the surface of the seen through which the unseen might slip their sound. We had never discussed the night horses and did not know from whence they came or where they were headed. Does the answer matter?

I'm looking for a way to think about them, against which precedent of the not-actuallyvisible. The night horses vs. debt? vs. doubt? The night horses vs. the Dow Jones? vs. 21st century slavery the American penal system the nets of Foxconn the invisible strings of the other Fox con the 24-7 networks of spectacle insisting bifurcation redundant demarcation the gold standard the gilded cage????? The night horses vs the gilded age ("Good thing that the hand of the market is invisible or some kind soul would have smashed it by now."—Jason Coyne²). The very contest, the very reflex that reaches for binary formulations, their dependency on the rigidity of either cliff, a failure of my thinking.

² Jason Coyne, Facebook status update, March 30, 2015, 10:42 pm

D) TWO ROADS DIVERGE IN A PATRIARCHY

"Even in the way we talk about how radicalization or change happens, we begin by bifurcating: does change happen this way or that way—even in our desire to participate in that radicalizing process we can't begin to actually figure out the complexity of it; immediately we come to this either-or proposition."—Myung Mi Kim³

³ Myung Mi Kim, "Generosity as Method: An Interview With Myung Mi Kim," interview by Yedda Morrison, San Francisco, December 1997. *Electronic Poetry Center*. http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/kim/generosity.html Last accessed June 17, 2015

E) COUNT TO FIVE

What am I doing is an underrated question. I am writing you something, Dusie. You/you.

This is my fifth time here, as a part of the Kollektiv (which I don't think I spelled correctly until last year... *meine schuld*).... I get hung up on this number. If the major points of a compass and the number of seasons are four, then five must be an excess of the so-called whole. What is the fifth element? Dusie? Ether? The death of either/or? Is ether another word for the Sea of Feelings? Is it when you come to know another in a way that crowns your death because the velocity of intimacy invites a dissolution of separateness?

A friend tells me the number five in Tarot is often associated with struggle. Five as the dynamic *between* elements, the unseen unifying/dissonant factor, the burgeoning effort. The fifth daughter in Eleanor Arnason's "The Grammarian's Five Daughters" gifts the Canton of Chaos (where they live "topsy-turvy and pell-mell, with no hope of anything better") with prepositions ("it must have been magic") and re-names the newly organized land Relation.⁴

All of which leads me to the thought that the power of the Kollektiv / the collective is relation, its space of intimacy the space *between* bodies.

⁴ Eleanor Arnason, "The Grammarian's Five Daughters," in *Sisters of the Revolution: A Feminist Speculative Fiction Anthology*, ed. Ann and Jeff Vandermeer. (Oakland: PM Press, 2015).

F) WITH-NESS

Because the here/the with-ness/witness of the collective is a constellated where in flux, a force comprised of simultaneous, disparate energies, I want to think about our superfluous season (because the not-center has a climate, too), because I want to poke my head out of the curtains (though I am more often of the Emily D sentiment "must have more veil") to write about the intimacy wherein/when this collective seems to reside, even if we don't know each other.

G) INTIMATE DISTANCE

In "Intimate Distance" Jabès hears Joseph Guglielmi: "An EMPTINESS takes shape and appears an emptiness takes shape and appears to explode with its name."⁵

⁵ Edmond Jabès, *The Book of Margins* trans. Rosmarie Waldrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 23.

H) REPEAT THE FEELING

The night horses must emerge after sundown like see-through explosions through vespertine curtains. I don't want to be a human anymore, B says one afternoon in the car, I want to be a cat, no, a horse, I want to be a horse. Something in your heart repeats the feeling, like a human microphone. You may feel the night horses from afar, but who will ever see them. The distance is an ache, a mistake far away, an egg ripe with chance. Do the night horses come from the lake? Do they rise from it every night like crazy boats? Are there holes at the bottom of the lake that are thresholds to their world?

I) AFFILIATE

Even if we've never met. Or met briefly in the fluorescent-lit vortex of an over/underwhelming, over/overpriced conference. Or met crying in the bathroom at an off-site reading. Maybe we once met in Outerspace where you sat on the floor, one leg extended to the side / one curled in, dancer-style, your sneakers spelled FLARF. We almost met when I was passing through your town, but you weren't home, so I put the chap in your mailbox, and pictured your roommate, per their public proclamations of doing so with so many books, flinging it across the room after trying to read it. We once started a poem together in a comment stream on Facebook, the poem became poems, the poems became a book, we even got paid by one magazine--\$100 for one poem! Please find your half enclosed; *very* sorry for the delay. We met in the process of mutual labor across geographies. We met in the folds and repetitions of our excessive urgencies (somewhat delayed, more on that later, I am really trying to get something to you soon, at least before the baby is born—are parentheses little wombs?). We met in the absence of a center, of a scene, in the margins and like Maria Damon says, "The margin is not a habitat but an event, a state of becoming and devolving in constant flux."⁶

⁶ Maria Damon, *The Dark End of the Street: Margins in American Vanguard Poetry*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

J) SECRET CENTAURS

The night horses ripple in the mutations of our own unknowability. Or we do in theirs. The universe's contractions secrete their luminous amniotic loam. Some kids know how they froth, they feel it with their whole body as a kind of lack, secret centaurs with a phantom half. The night horses bloom plight. They skirt the perimeter of erotic struggle and flee, their plumes the very ornament of our injury.

K) GRAMMARFRUIT

Describe a scar. Plight & grammarfruit.

Suck the seeds, then bury them. Collapse frivolously, then rise like hives. Was it night horse or aught whores? Or nil tours? This love of the nothing between us, this hole-y holiday, as contingent upon disappearing as becoming.

L) GET OUT

The something I started to you I lost. The something I lost was my second start at something for you. The first was called "Powderhorn," it was a long poem in couplets. I had in mind a leaky, wayward ghazal, Frankensteining together what I wanted to think about as a baroque of the everyday, but because my only source materials were my last two journals, and because I couldn't find a way to not become re-entangled in the emotional subtext, I got tired of myself, and left at the line: *If the struggle isn't in you, get out.*⁷

More than several pages into my second attempt, which looked vaguely like this, my computer froze and when I restarted it, *because I hadn't ever saved it*, the document was nowhere to be found. It took me approximately 38 hours to acknowledge that it was lost, to give up on finding it. And really, at this point, I'd prefer not to.

Right next to the Dead Letter Office must be the Office of Lost Documents, an unmarked door that never opens with nothing/everything behind it.

⁷ which is also an invitation to return.

M) GAPEFRUIT

but there was still music in my cave in the muck light with my gapefruit

The tarot card I drew in the last hour at the point of what-should-I-do—the FIVE OF STONES⁸ [elsewhere: Pentacles or Coins] —depicts five spectral figures in a cave, hovering above a fire. The most prominent of them features a lavender triangle with tendrils in a golden shell that seems to scream vulva. Loss is essential. The story of holes and vanishment (as in: They were vanished from the kingdom. They were vanished from history).

of invisible bodies the birds sing they say and say

⁸ Rachel Pollack, The Shining Tribe Tarot

N) BLEED A MANE

What is the trace of the loss? This memory of the theory of the night horses? Months after we theorized their existence and never really discussed them again, in the first days of Thaw (the season *between* winter and spring in Minnesota), we passed a park caretaker picking up with extendable metal claws the trash the snow concealed and B immediately conjectured that the guy was picking up "night horse poop."

Just last week in my final push to finally finish this chapbook a friend tells me about the Djuna Barnes story "A Night Among the Horses," which I immediately recognize as the essential reading for this chapbook that I had until this point never heard of, despite my love for *Nightwood*.

Per its title the story centers on an equine night encounter in which the he of the story runs, albeit very briefly, with the horses he has come to know. While the story concludes with a very precise kind of loss, I am interested in his failure preceding it, his failure to keep up with the herd becoming his merger with the animal which climaxes in this moment: "Something delirious, hysterical, came over him and he fell. Blood trickled into his eyes down from his forehead. It had a fine feeling for a moment, like a mane, like that roan mare's mane that had passed him—red and long and splendid."⁹

⁹ Djuna Barnes. "A Night Among the Horses," *The Little Review*, <u>http://nmi.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/1535.pdf</u> [later published in the 1923 collection *A Book*, which was reprinted as *A Night Among the Horses* in 1929, then *Spillway* in 1962]

O) MUTATE

The climax of Joe Brainard's *Bolinas Journal* is a story about the loss of his baroque pearl broach on the beach: "There is one place on the beach where you either have to jump down or push yourself up, depending on which direction you're going. (Me, up) But I slipped, and slid down, crushing my pearl against the rock. Which fell off as the tide came in and swept away."¹⁰

It's tempting to read the baroque broach as proxy for pop culture because something about Brainard's naked porosity in pop culture has me thinking the night horses might be the analog/modernist term for what we should *really* refer to as "moon ponies." Bronies would agree. At the effervescent threshold of moon boots and Twilight Sparkle, the pastel/petrol grotesquerade of the moon ponies might make them the more accurate emissaries of death and loss in our time, stuplime memento moris trundling along the periphery, puffs of death issuing from their cotton candy pink nostrils to remind us that a margin is magic, too. Today, the same friend who shared with me a pdf of *Bolinas Journal* concludes a post on Tumblr: "Carrie just said to Jared on the phone, 'I'm glad you're okay. I'm glad you're okay.' Later we're going to eat a watermelon we took from a dumpster last night. Our grave is going to say THE PONIES WERE JUST HERE."

¹⁰ Joe Brainard, *Bolinas Journal* (Bolinas: Big Sky Books, 1971)

P) DISAPPEAR

"Funny tho," Brainard writes of his pearl broach snatched (back) by the ocean, "instead of reacting to the loss, I somehow got outside of myself [in the margins of the self], waiting and watching to see how I would react. Which I didn't."

Loss is essential. Blood the trace: "At any rate," Brainard leaves the beach "wearing an empty chain and a bloody spot where the pearl had been. // (Secretly realizing all the way that I couldn't have asked for a more dramatic ending to this journal)."

The journal goes on for a few more pages, after an oval lapis consolation gift from Gordon, after "Maybe I don't <u>really</u> realize it's gone yet. (The story of my life) I mean—," after two rejected flyers and the one that was used (a very proto-*Sonnets* cover) for a reading by Ted Berrigan and Robert Creeley, in the end, it's Joe B who disappears:

"My idea of how to leave a place gracefully is to 'disappear."

Q) DISPERSE INTENSIVENESS

It's interesting to think of the collective as a community¹¹ enacting its own impossibility, its own immanent loss, as a party of the unseen, that its vectors are contingent upon our remove from each other, and the wider the remove the more necessary the web (in both senses) when we send each other our traces. For all we know Dusie could prove the possibility of time travel. Mina "TIME is the dispersion of intensiveness" Loy¹² would approve. "Of many by many for many," says Susana. In "Welcoming Space: Susana Gardner and Dusie Books" Frances Kruk points to the www as an alternative to the "tyranny of profit-driven publishing" and suggests that the Dusie "tentacles reach across space and time to entangle work."¹³ I like this formulation—the messiness inherent in entanglement, its kudzu-ness chimera-fied with more non-human agency in a sentient distance evocative of a kraken, great moon pony of the sea.

¹¹ What does that word even/ever mean? I hang from it to remember to come back to it and fail at unpacking it. Is Facebook a community or the demonstration of normal grass? I see Paul Thek's "Meat Piece" (the Brillo box with the slab of meat inside); I read in Leonora Carrington's "My Flannel Knickers" this—*Here I might explain the process that actually takes place in this sort of jungle. Each face is provided with greater or smaller mouths, armed with different kinds of natural teeth.... These teeth bar the way to a gaping throat, which disgorges whatever it swallows back into the foetid atmosphere.*—and think "Facebook." How is poetry a Facebook? How is poetry a community? How is it a mob? What would the community think? Is community the weak word? The university? The use of community that seeks to exclude, whitewash, homogenize, sanitize, sterilize, dehumanize and/or patronize while reinforcing white supremacist power structures/sentences?

¹² per Kruk's "Welcoming Space": "*Dusie* (Mina Loy's nickname as a student in Germany) 'means many things,' Gardner explains, 'but was particularly resonant for me living in Europe, learning German, screwing up pronouns *du / sie*:

meaning, *you* (informal), and *she/he/it/they/you* (formal)...thus [defining] this aggregate space of many for many by many.""

¹³ Frances Kruk, "Welcoming Space: Susana Gardner & Dusie Books," *How2* Volume 3 Number 1. Accessed April 19, 2016.

https://www.asu.edu/pipercwcenter/how2journal/vol_3_no_1/smallpress/welcoming_s pace.html

R) GET ENTANGLED



A flock of dreams / browse on Necropolis

S) LAMENT

The same friend who confesses (and I love her for it) in an email re: Joe Brainard: "god bless him, but *I Remember* is like kind of a pain in the ass in some ways, isn't it?" in another email recommends Henri Lefebvre's *The Missing Pieces*, while I am working on whatever this is wandering in the trace of the night horses, the moon ponies, the kraken wake of loss. Semiotext(e) classifies the book as "an incantatory text, a catalog of what has been lost over time and what in some cases never existed." While *The Missing Pieces* gestures towards comprehensiveness (as catalogs do), what is perhaps most haunting about it is the thought of what is missing from *The Missing Pieces* and this thought feels oceanic, just as the abyss-shaped totality that lies in the brevity of this fragment: "The indigenous art of all epochs destroyed by missionaries." A great deal of the entries are complete sentences (in the grammatical *and* cosmic juridical sense), e.g.: "The Tate Britain is deprived of the Tracey Emin 2002 Christmas tree: Emin offered it, instead, to AIDS patients in the West End of London." Another:

In 1921, in a film by Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray is asked to shave off the pubic hair of the very eccentric Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven; the film is destroyed in the course of being developed.

And another: "In 1918, Arthur Cravan marries Mina Loy and is lost at sea."

T) UPSET ALL RECOLLECTION

Jabès: "Borne along by a 'demented memory' that upsets all recollection, the word remembers only its intrepid forays into the unknown and its inevitable failures of a weak word¹⁴, always at the mercy of its painful muteness. For it must, at all cost, leave the silence that oppresses and risks stifling it."¹⁵

¹⁴ What is the weak word? The entirely transparent one? The one used so often in the same way that it has lost its material capacity to disrupt, delight, stun, or surprise? The word so legible it is dead?

¹⁵ Jabès, *The Book of Margins*, 194.

U) PENINSULA

I was living overseas for the first Dusie Kollektiv, on a peninsula—jutting out like a hard nipple or mutant fin from Saudi Arabia-in the Persian Gulf. After living in the Dakotas and then a small town in the center of Pennsylvania, remoteness was becoming a kind of thing for me, an unself-conscious melancholy I was drawn to. And what did I know? Poetry scenes glowed on the faraway horizon like 24-7 cafeterias, while I kept writing under the simple motivation that I felt crazy if I didn't. I hadn't heard of Doha till one day I saw a job ad for a writing teacher at its American school and when I got home that night I learned that E had been offered a job at an art school in, of all places on this planet, Doha.¹⁶ Beyond Qatar, my students came from Iraq, Egypt, Lebanon, Indonesia, Pakistan, India, America, Canada, Brazil, Switzerland, Germany, the Netherlands, Romania, the Faroe Islands, Russia, Turkey, South Africa, Australia. Though incredibly insulated, they were also very open-minded, embodied antidotes to the Islamaphobia coursing through the West.¹⁷ Susana's invitation, coming from Switzerland, to participate in the first Kollektiv felt antidotal too—a dedication of energy outside of the dominant American master narrative—and somewhat mysterious (I didn't really know anyone involved or what to expect), but as the chapbooks began to arrive and the physical evidence accumulated there was illumined a network of poets like a bioluminescent web on a map¹⁸ that only appears in the poetry night.

¹⁶ Qatar hadn't yet acquired the U.S. State Department tag of "slave state" though one could not live there without coming to know that the comfort (and in many cases grotesque lavishness) with which some lived was at the expense of others, their extreme poverty and, as we would later learn, slavery and abuse, but let us not kid ourselves, U.S.(tenure-track Marxists included), that we are not complicit in the terror of the global economy and in the (c)rimes of our own demented memory, that we have ever been clean or free.

¹⁷ It was the second George W term and we felt done with America.

¹⁸ "You start with a map that's meaningful, and feel your way into the present. Then it opens up. The maps keep moving. You have to keep renovating your brain." –Stephanie Young, *Ursula or University*

V) LIKE THE SILVER LUCIFERS WE ARE

Tonight is the strawberry moon in Sagittarius. Are your lips half-animal with June, too? I decide to re-read tonight Mary Ruefle's "Poetry and the Moon"—"I even remember an image I was especially fond of in one of [my early] poems--," Ruefle writes, "there was some woman wandering around a field carrying a *strawberry wand*!" [emphasis hers]. At this point in my pregnancy I look like a moon thief and move through my to-do lists like a deep-sea somnambulist, each entry here like a souvenir between dreams, a coming-up-for-air.¹⁹

I find following the end of the essay—"When Buzz Aldrin joined Armstrong on the surface of the moon, his first words were: 'Beautiful, beautiful. Magnificent desolation."—an annotation barely legible (as my handwriting can often be), clearly scrawled with a dying pen: "We saw three wild horses. Punishment. / the only feeling was desolation / the sky sank to meet us / and we were beautiful too / Beautiful, magnificent desolation." ?? And it returns to me that I had been reading online fascimiles of semiliterate journals from the so-called American frontier and feeling on that edge of language that it was so close, in its near illegibility, to being something else, something not propelled by the colonial sickness of manifest destiny, but, I don't know, maybe something more reverential, uncertain, nonhierarchical. These mutabilities are the violence of language; they are the violets of language. One frontier (space) collapses with another (Oregon Trail), but what I'm more interested in is the frontier of feeling which is not really a frontier at all (i.e. the intensity of feeling is that it is always already there); I'm interested in what's happening there with that desire for beauty, a bestial kind, its oblivion an animal excess.

A collective is to mount our moon ponies in disparate unison. A collective is to go centaur and ride into the swelling shadows and pierce strawberries with long forks like the silver Lucifers we are and with our *strawberry wands* we shrink the city and we shrink its hoary sprawl and we shrink the emperors of civilization in a delirious clothes-snatching stampede and lower the stars like the silver Lucifers we are we are or something to that effect.

¹⁹ Is silence when you are drowning in the alphabet?

W) TRANSFORM THE MATERIAL

Elizabeth Grosz: "...art is not simply the expression, recognition or celebration of an animal past, a pre-historical allegiance with the forces that make one; it is not memorialization, the confirmation of a shared past, but above all the transformation of the materials from the past into resources for the future, the sensations not available now but to be unleashed in the future on a people now ready to perceive and be affected by them."²⁰

²⁰ Elizabeth Grosz, "Art and the Animal" *Theory*. Last accessed April 19, 2016. https://visrfreeschool.files.wordpress.com/2013/09/grosz-art-and-the-animal.pdf

X) GET ROMANTIC

It's easy to get romantic about a collective when you haven't actually met in-the-flesh so many of its members, and maybe that's the point.* I've been reading Stephanie Young's *Ursula or University* and feeling nauseous, grateful (not to be a part of), jealous not to be a part of the intensities of the Bay Area poetics scene. Winters in the upper Midwest foreclose the possibility of a continuous, dynamic, anarchic scene; or, this is my SAD experience—that the poets I feel most charged by are also hermits for at least half the year or how would I know the most true thing to say here is that I am a hermit. And we don't need Facebook to know (though it certainly helps hammer the point) that we shouldn't confuse poetry spaces with safe spaces or poets with allies, though simultaneously: by virtue of friendships with other poets, I've come to know a complex, vital, mutant intimacy and I continue to learn from and be fed by the dynamics of such relationships and feel that feeding them is also a way of feeding poetry. Still, I can feel so sick about the social parts of the larger culture that some days I'd rather live in a cliff with my wolf-children and be done with this business stat.

*that the meeting happens in our co-labor and the myriad encounters with the resulting physical objects, and this is so very analog it strikes me as part of its romance, and really, not knowing each other in the normative, scene-y way is also romantic because the emphasis is on the books (what happens between bodies) and not the people.²¹

²¹ Taking this thought even further, Elena Ferrante, in a letter to her publisher, wrote, "I believe that books, once they are written, have no need of their authors. If they have something to say, they will sooner or later find readers; if not, they won't. . . . I very much love those mysterious volumes, both ancient and modern, that have no definite author but have had and continue to have an intense life of their own. They seem to me a sort of nighttime miracle, like the gifts of the Befana, which I waited for as a child. . . . True miracles are the ones whose makers will never be known. . . ."

Y) REPEAT AS A MEANS OF RELATIONSHIP, CHANCE AS A MEANS OF DIVINE



The midwife and herbalist Susun Weed's cult classic *Wise Woman Herbal for the Childbirthing Year* is like a green apothecary for the span of time from conception through the postnatal 4th trimester. I keep it by my bedside and keep it in mind on the edge of labor.²² Much less useful, these entries are artifacts of the same duration in which my body becomes alien to me, in which I become a lake conveyance, an increasing archive, an oceanic lack. I increase the text as a remedial act, because soon as I verge on certainty it morphs and slips away. Here, then, is both an event, and a deviation from event. "The place of the book is a place forever lost." This is a field report from an irretrievable space I submit to you & now draw this card,²³ apparently, as an act of punctuation.

²² She is the queen of nettles, raspberry leaves, clover, and practicality—some of her many aids to labor include a shot of whiskey and cannabis.

 $^{^{23}}$ "She flings up the lid. / She plucks all the flowers. / She swims in the evening. / She rests in the sunshine."

Z) Np[=-=-"} }}[]] -"""" p09' >?c u/;;;;;/////;²⁴

The Book of Margins begins:

"Can it be that, in the book, dying means becoming invisible to all others, but decipherable to yourself?"

(Aely)

"Could it be that, in the book, writing means becoming legible to all others, but undecipherable to yourself?"

"... for dying is a manner of seeing the invisible"

Maurice Blanchot ("Discours sur la patience," Le Nouveau Commerce, Spring 1975)

.NONE OF THE ABOVE & ALL OF THE ABOVE //

/.'/. unseen

²⁴ first writing by Baby C, who went rogue when her mother left the room

