The Poet Who Once Ran for President
A Conversation with Eileen Myles

Interview by Jen Benka and Carol Mirakove

We caught up with the only poet we know who has run for president—Eileen Myles—to discuss electoral matters. Eileen is the author of more than 20 volumes of poetry as well as fiction, articles, plays, and librettos. Her most recent book, Sorry, Tree, was published last year by Wave Books.

Boog City: You ran for President in 1992 as an “openly female” write-in candidate. What did you think the value was at that time, and looking back, what was the value?

Eileen Myles: I was actually shocked that this massive American ritual, the presidential campaign, was about to begin and that there was no female candidate, and that there was no acknowledgement in any way that other kinds of Americans’ needs should be represented. In fact George H.W. Bush was making it clear that women and “minorities” and queers and activists existed. It’s like knitting class. Someone constructing pot-holders of resistance and saying look. It’s a waste of time.

BC: In a campaign letter you distributed in 1992 you wrote: “When you step in the booth on election day, do write in a vote.... You’ll be alone in that booth and it’s so dirty looking man and there’s a groundswell of hope around him, and I think that’s pretty fucking empty.

EM: I think you are both a myth. It’s like the many boring panels we are invited to be on in which we are asked if poetry is political rather than how we’re experiencing or activating it as a political force lately. I think the idea of the resistance is the resistance. I don’t believe it exists. It’s like knitting class. Someone constructing pot-holders of resistance and saying look. It’s a waste of time.

BC: A political organizer friend of ours has asserted that the culture has to change before social change can happen. In your leaving NYC and living in San Diego, we wonder if we might benefit from your broadened perspective: what do you see being especially available to people in NYC towards making culture change?

EM: I think there are more of us here. I don’t live in San Diego anymore, by the way, and I moved back to N.Y. the day before yesterday. I think we have the joy of congress here. We fight and squawk, and cheer and laugh and retrieve and lunge back out. It’s such a human environment. In S.D. I found myself endlessly encountering malls, and a lot of vegetation and quiet. I’ve been living in L.A. too for the past year and there there’s a distant teeming. People love their cars, and it’s for New York and that includes upstate N.Y., and I think she is the strong candidate. I think she as the strong candidate and that the culture has to change before social change can happen. I’m sorry, I think the Obama campaign is a lot of spin. He’s a charming, good looking man and there’s a groundswell of hope around him, and I think that’s pretty fucking empty.

If I Snag a Fracture
by Eileen Myles

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Wait’s Over for Beckett Selected
Illustrated Material Evidence

Sex plays an important role in Beckett’s work. Unlike many avant-garde poets, he involves his own flesh, or, to put it another way, the words are sexual bodies and as the writer he is actively involved in them, not explaining from a distance.

A dan and Eva had an apple. Wittgenstein put an apple in a drawer. Tom Beckett eats them both. His Unprotected Texts is a Wittgensteinian examination of language that sucks language dry while letting it drip. His writing, collected here for the first time, is gorgeously plain.

Beckett is associated with the language poets, to whom he dedicated many pages in his influential critical journal, The Difficulties (1980-1990). Like those writers, Beckett wants readers to see what writing is and wants us to become newly familiar with what we are reading—this is a word, this is a sentence.

In the two most linguistically complex works in this book, “Books” and “The Picture Window,” reconstructions of words, repositioning of sentences and thoughts in relation to one another, and repetition of simple sentences and phrases call forth new meanings at the same time they confuse us. As ordinary as the words are, we ask what we are reading. Language becomes the center of a writing that seems to speak nothing out of the ordinary. What’s ordinary is simply confusing. Is language simple and confusing? Confusing language is simple. We are reading reading.

Sex plays an important role in Beckett’s work. Unlike many avant-garde poets, he involves his own flesh, or, to put it another way, the words are sexual bodies and as the writer he is actively involved in them, not explaining from a distance. What makes this writing all the more personal is that when he was young, epilepsy, as Beckett has put it, “subtracted me in many ways from the enjoyment of my body.” So here it is, sex and language, equal and related pleasures.

Related to this is gender, another of Beckett’s preoccupations. In his writing, gender, words, and sex become one, sliding all over the place, but contained by a writing of rigorous subtraction, and made personal by a man who since childhood has been acutely aware (sometime painfully so) of his body, of body, of bod

ies. “What is nobody’s gender,” he writes. “What leads to his examination of self in writing “Vanishing Points of Resemblance,” which combines elements of fiction, autobiography, poetry, and prose. Beckett has said he tried to take the quotation marks off “self.” He writes “I used to want to be a woman. But that was too much work. Now I try to write. Which is almost as bad.” So what does he want and why did he write it? And how does one who writes “I’m one of those people who look like a million other people and am often mistaken for someone else” feel in the world?

Beckett is a writer of subtraction, as a craftsman and as a poet/person. He’s not telling us everything about himself, or anything. At the end of the interview that closes the book, interviewer Craig hill asks Beckett what he hopes readers will walk away with after reading these poems. He answers, “Questions.”


The interaction of Javier’s quotidian text and Concepcion’s fantastic imagery make for a satisfying and nuanced foray into the dangerously familiar terrain of lost love.

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330 W. 28th St., Suite 6H
N.Y., N.Y. 10001-4754
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letters to the editor
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editor/publisher
David A. Kirschenbaum
editor@boogcity.com

copy editor
Joe Bates

art editor
Brenda Lijima

music editor
Jonathan Berger
juanbarguesa@gmail.com

poetry editor
Rodrigo Toscano
boogcity_poetry@yahoo.com

politics editors
Jen Benka, Carol Mirakove
boogpolitics@gmail.com

printed matter editor
Mark Lamoureux
mark_lamoureux@yahoo.com

counsel
Ian S. Wilder

www.welkometoboogcity.com

Printed Matter
By Jonathan Berger

Off This Planet

Brian Speaker

Brian Speaker needs a job. Well, he’s got a job, but he’s ready to get out. It’s a shame because it’s the work he was born to do. Brian Speaker—he was born with the name, though his German forebears were once Sprichers—works as a voiceover artist. When the singer/songwriter/multi-instrumentalist/producer arrived in New York City, he practically fell into comedy. “I started in television,” he explains, “but the first radio job interview I had, I got. I got it relatively easily in the recording studio. I had a lot of characters I could go into. Over the first few years here, I was doing a lot more on-camera, but once I entered the voice world...”

His voice work has gotten him on MTV, Nickelodeon, and VH1. “I only work like one or two days a year,” he laughs. “It sounds like a good gig, but like most singer/songwriter/multi-instrumentalist/producers he’s looking to get away from the day-to-day grind of recording non-musically and being heard worldwide. Despite being the voice on Clearasil and Capri Sun campaigns, Speaker wants to be a rock star. ‘I express myself best with my guitar,’ he explains. ‘It’s like having your heart in your hands and getting to pound on it.”

Of course Speaker does more than play guitar. His second solo album, the fulllength Off This Planet, speaks to many strengths. Recorded at Speakersonic Studio (Brian’s East Village home and workspace), most of it was performed by Speaker. The album features a variety of his pop styles: from the loping, joyful “Waverly Place” to the movingly soulful “April Dawn” and the rocking, harmonic “Push Back.” He’s an eclectic songwriter, though his material is accessible some of it memorable. And his ability to orchestrate great sounds surpasses most.

A central concern of the songs on Planet seems to be separation anxiety. From the album’s title to songs like “Aliens” and “Into the Unknown,” Speaker seems entranced with approaching new environments, much like his experimental approach to tackling varied songstyes. “The Ghost,” a brooding track, tells of the last soul haunting his former ground before a Brian army sings and giant drums echo. These sounds, plus an eerily tin- ting piano, all clearly complement the unsettling atmosphere built by the lyrics. His album-closing “Ya’ll Come Back” speaks of the hometown that he ambivalently misses. This Speaker is all about isolation.

Of course, that’s nothing like the perfectly affable and Indiana-friendly Brian Speaker. He’s a social animal who has a smile and a handshake for everyone (a fairly disturbing phenom for the native New Yorkers he approaches). Maybe that’s what his desired career shift is about. Perhaps he wants to get out of the claustrophobic recording room and into the control room (where he can talk to artists) or on the stage (where it’s all about interaction). Perhaps Speaker wants to rock out not because of dreams of adulation or fortune, but because he doesn’t want to be alone anymore. Maybe Brian just wants to make friends.

That’s not so far off, he says, “I mean, I still love my isolation.” Supporting this supposition is the way Speaker is expanding the scope of his work. Speakersonic Studio is fast becoming the second home of a variety of up-and-coming New York songwriters. Samer Bingham, Adam Bricks and M.LaMar have been recording with Speaker, who has proven that he can record, produce, and add whatever flavor or instrumentation might be required to create the correct sound. No one complains about his results. In fact, Recording Magazine has sung the praises of his ability to orchestrate great sounds. Finally, his results. In fact, Recording Magazine has sung the praises of his ability to orchestrate great sounds. Sounds Can Be Deceiving

By Brook Pridemore

My Little Monkey Got Caught

Sounds of Greg D

The “further reading material” in the press kit for Sounds of Greg D, the monklike of New Jersey-born, bred and based songwriter Greg Di Gesu, is a perfect example of the dangers of talking too much. The back cover of their debut, My Little Monkey Got Caught, broadcasts that the music was “performed live in the studio.” The band’s bio makes note that bassist Dave Dreiwitz is also a sometime member of rock gods Ween. “That’s not so far off,” he says, “I mean, I still love my isolation.”

It’s these skills that have served him well as soundman on the Sidewalk Cafe, handling mixing for recordings of the Fools, Ben Godwin, and Dube Dalton, among hundreds of others. He’s had the skills and experience since picking up the guitar in his early teens. “I had always been a sound tech nerd,” says Speaker. “We had a travel- ling large capacity P.A. system. We basically built it from the ground up.”

It’s also allowed his songs to be experienced on cable shows, and his voice to be included as backup on the soundtrack of Across the Universe. You won’t notice Speaker in the midst of all those Beatles’ songs, as ever, he fits seamlessly in the mix.

For more info visit www.brianspeaker.com. Jonathan Berger was once a lot more important than he is today. Don’t ask him about it, it’s not a pleasant story, and he may be tempted to tell it.

The bass player from Ween is in your band? That’s really cool, but call it what it is: a bass guitarist. Dreiwitz’ bass is mixed pretty far back for the vast majority of the disc, leaving room for some excellent lead guitar from Jack Pezzutti (especially the swampy slide guitar on “Love on the Go”) and B3/other keys by Anne Wendt. You record- ed John Mayer? Okay, that’s a re- sume builder, but the music herein has nothing to do with snarky, album-oriented rock.

And there’s never a word anywhere about, pardon me, the SOUND of Sounds of Greg D. My Little Monkey Got Caught is a very tight, barroom country and Creedence Clearwater Revival-sounding collection of songs that occasionally dips into the weirdness of White Pepper-era Ween (“My Little Monkey Got Caught”). Of course, the album more frequently dips into the grown-up bachelor pad stylings of early Luna (although the latter is probably more attributable to Di Gesu’s deep, resonant baritone).

My Little Monkey Got Caught was not made by a rock-god supergroup, which the bio led me to believe. It is, however, a very brisk, unassuming, and well-made album by artists doing good work. Sounds of Greg D kind of sounds like a group you might be pleasantly surprised to hear on a Sunday night at plac- es like Sidewalk Cafe (where Sounds of Greg D occasionally have been known to play). For more information visit www.gregsdounds.com. Brook Pridemore writes good traveling music, played 201 shows in 2007, and leads Brook Pridemore and the Valley Cubs into dens of iniquity across the land.

Greg Fuchs

East 7th street (abandoned area), New York City, 2008

Lucibel Crater

“The Family Album evokes family values the way they ought to be–emotionally rich, amicable, and sad.”

Local flavor: Lucibel Crater sings about his Upper East Side neighbors in his latest release, East 7th Street, which chronicles the abandoned building that’s now the site of a new club. Lucibel Crater

JOHN BERGER

BOOG CITY 3
Arnold J. Kemp

About the Artist
Arnold J. Kemp has had solo shows at Debs & Co. in New York, and San Francisco’s The Luggage Store Gallery and Stephen Wirtz Gallery. In 2000 his work was included in The Studio Museum in Harlem’s groundbreaking “Freestyle” exhibition. His work has been collected by The Metropolitan Museum of Art and The Studio Museum in Harlem. He completed a large site specific project in 2007 for The Portland Institute of Contemporary Art’s Time-Based-Arts Festival, and he performed INARMS, a commissioned experimental play, for The San Francisco Poets Theater. His work is currently on view at Sister in Los Angeles and envoy in New York.
This is BOOG CITY’s 50th issue, all of which have featured an advertisement from the Bowery Poetry Club.

We’d like to thank Bob Holman for his unwavering support.

Please visit www.bowerypoetry.com
POETRY

Mark Wallace
Carlsbad, Calif.
From Party In My Body

Living this way, there’s no place for anyone, so we maneuver ceaselessly. These wet cold streets like a secret told in a language no one knows. Goodnight, folks. Where you live is not your address. Coming up short on passionate worship, I lose myself in local food shops, celebrate the dispersal of hands. Buildings project emotions on people. I’m tired of seeking distractions on weekends. There’s no time to get lost in reflection. Arriving at events after they start! How many people can be stuffed into phone production companies?

* There are always new corners to be backed into, so let’s go to the cafeteria. An angry debate among medical scholars interrupted my afternoon daydreams. O how the mighty have fallen asleep. Should we focus on solving domestic squabbles? Crash the party for diplomats? I’ve always wanted to live in museums and once in awhile visit houses. Psychologically suggestive behavior! Overpopulation by deer and people is leading to late night cultural clashes. I love to read and write and talk but have to earn a living. Back in the ground it goes. Open my notebooks and show them to who?

* Why not revel in being between, instead of being obsessed with arrival? Why try to justify hands? Maybe we can get together during a break in financial burdens. Uninformed cliches about modern art? Email me take care bye. A certain portion of the population will always be lost emotionally. Note that in my daydreams, even my faults are romantic. Let’s abandon ourselves to creation in the pages of a professional journal. Darkness is a great excuse for fiddling days away. Watch closely as I fail to function.

Lawrence Giffin
Bushwick, Brooklyn
Universal Soldier
Equip Axe. Equip Axe regardless of job.
Equip Amor. Equip Amor regardless of job.
Equip Sword. Equip Sword regardless of job.
Equip Crossbow. Equip Crossbow regardless of job.
Equip Spear. Equip Spear regardless of job.
Equip Gun. Equip Gun regardless of job.
Equip Knife. Equip Knife regardless of job.

About the Poets

Lawrence Giffin is series editor of The Physical Poets (www.physicalpoets.com) and coauthor, with Steve Zultanski, of a collaged political treatise, Comment Is Free. Uche Nduka (cover) was born in Nigeria. He is the author of seven volumes of poems, including eel on reef. Mark Wallace is the author, most recently, of the book of poems Felonies of Illusions and the collection of short stories, Walking Dreams.

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So here you go, seventy-six women poets who’ve all read at the Bowery Poetry Club in New York City. One poet, one poem, one photo, that’s the recipe for this book. Poets were asked to send their Greatest Hit. We look on this book as an introduction—a go-to starting point for the women who helped open the gates to the Academy of the Future of 21st Century Poetry. So who’s your fave? Just remember to look for her by first name—


Bowery Women gratefully acknowledges funding from New York State Council on the Arts.

Bowery Women is the third book in the Bowery Books series following Taylor Mead’s A Simple Country Girl and The Bowery Bartenders Big Book of Poems. Available at bookstores, and through all online booksellers. and the Bowery Books webpage, below.