Not Me (My Hunted Poem Exercise)

This exercise is a combination of a couple of impulses I’ve always associated with poet Eileen Myles, whom I interviewed at the Auburn SPLAB in April 2002. It involves going out and hunting a poem. The memory of it come up in a workshop I facilitated in February 2021 and thought I might have written it up as a one-page, but alas, no, so off to the archives as no online search combination was striking poetry gold.

At the end of her 1991 Semiotexte book Not Me Eileen has an essay entitled “How I Wrote Certain of my Poems.” (It was evocative of George Bowerings’s how i wrote certain of my books (Mansfield Press, 2001) but Eileen beat him by a score and I wouldn’t put it past Big Daddy to lift something tasty from a far-away poet, but ask him, eh?)

In the Myles essay there is this wonderful passage:

The process of the poem, the performance of it I mentioned, is central to the impression I have that life is a rehearsal for the poem, or the final moment of revelation. I literally stepped out of my house that night, feeling a poem coming on. Incidentally, it hadn’t started raining yet, so I wasn’t alone in being ready to burst. I was universally pent up. I had done my research, pretty unconsciously, celebrating the mood I was in. Taking the ferry, watching the angels, then the explosion of rain and light made it absolutely necessary to go in the deli on 6th street and buy a notebook and pen. I went over to Yaffa and wrote it looking out the window. I haven’t changed a thing... I’ve had this feeling before — of going out to get a poem, like hunting. The night that comes to mind is the night where I wrote the earlier poem. I felt “…erotic, oddly / magnetic...” like photographic paper. As I walked I was recording the details. I was the details. I was the poem...

For some reason I had it in my mind that Myles got it from John Ashbery, which makes sense, as they are both New York poets, but nothing in Not Me says that. But, looking through bankers boxes of old SPLAB stuff in my closet, about 8 feet from where I sleep every night was the gold mine of a poet’s handout from a SPLAB Anne Waldman workshop, wherein it is written:
A John Ashbery Method: Create a title for a poem, then take a walk and come back and write.  

Shortcut: carry a pocket journal with you, more satisfying than a cellphone, but that works in a pinch.  

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