



*Who's to say I can't talk about medicine unless I'm a doctor, if I talk about it like a dog? What's to stop me from talking about drugs without being an addict, if I talk about them like a little bird? And why shouldn't I invent some way, however fantastic and contrived, of talking about something, without having to ask whether I'm qualified to talk like that?*

Gilles Deleuze, "Letter to a Harsh Critic"

*This is a showtune, but the show hasn't been written for it yet.*

Nina Simone, "Mississippi Goddam"; Live in New York, 1964

A transverse line, in geometry, is a line that passes through two lines in the same plane at two distinct points. Transversals play a role in establishing whether two other lines in the Euclidian plane are parallel.

Last year's curators, Patrick Durgin and Devin King, put it this way:

Poets theater is a genre of porous borders, one that emerges about the same time, and involving many of the same artists, as performance art, performance poetry ("spoken word"), conceptual and "intermedia" art. But poets have long been playwrights, either primarily (Sophocles, Shakespeare) or as a platform for postmodern literary experimentation (the operas and page plays of Gertrude Stein, for example).

The artists in the Fourth Annual Festival of Poets Theater do not, for the most part, identify as poets or playwrights. They perform, but they are not theater makers. Their use of language in performance flies in parallel to the "porous border" of Poets Theater. This line-of-flight traces the genre of Poets Theater, sometimes scraping its surface, illuminating something raw and essential and impermanent; grounded in dramatic form. Other times these works fly high above Poets Theater, on a different plane, giving us a birds-eye-view of how meaning is made when the words fly high above the page, as the sound of speech or the jazz of improvised dialogue.

These artists draw a transverse line through poetry and theater, not to strike them out, but to determine parallels. They do so without tethering their identities or roles to any one given history, genre or form. Some performances in the festival could be considered as transversing the larger body of work or practice of the artists themselves. When a performance artist reads from their novel, when we hear the director perform their writing, or when we are presented a poem as a video: these transversalities open up new spaces, new lines-of-flight that lend strange new perspective to otherwise assumed roles and identity.

This is, to my mind, one of the things that Poets Theater does, and does well. Its irreverence to any one form, genre or history (or maybe the reverence of a museum thief) rewrites what it means to fail, and in doing so allows for something new.

Josh Hoglund, Curator of *The Fourth Annual Poets Theater Festival: Transversals*