

Joe Milutis:

I just heard a bird sound. Did you hear that?

Micah Silke:

Yeah, I did—a trill.

Joe Milutis:

I don't know where that's coming from. Well, let's go downstairs!
There are a couple of interesting videos down there.

[They descend a set of stairs]

Micah Silke:

What book do you have there?

Joe Milutis:

Oh, this is *Les Miserables*. I've been reading it for a couple of years and I'm almost finished with it. I put it down for a while and got disinterested in it. Then I picked it up in the middle and resumed. There was this really great nonfiction section on old convents and I got immediately pulled in that way. Then I realized that what [Victor] Hugo is doing by interspersing long non-fiction sections into the fiction was really interesting.

[Joe flips through the novel]

After a very long, famous section about the history of the Paris sewers, for example, the first sentence when you get back into fiction is, "Jean Valjean was in the Paris sewer." So, just those words—"he was in the Paris sewer"—now have this completely dense reality that you wouldn't have been able to get by way of, let's say, a typical fictional description. So as soon as Hugo says "he was in the Paris sewer" the whole weight of what that means and the complexity of it and the layers and just the gothic tangle of it all is immediately that much more palpable to you.

[A projector streams [a video](#) by artist Pipilotti Rist onto a hardwood floor below. The clip cuts between images of outer space and brightly dressed humans, some of whom open their mouths wide as they look into the camera. The piece is accompanied by ambient music. Joe and Micah walk over the floor]

Joe Milutis:

This is another instance where it's not clear how you are supposed to interact with the piece. It's not necessarily a video in a monitor on a wall, and it almost seems like we are doing something bad by stepping on it. But you actually notice that there is an interesting disorientation—the light is a little bit weird right now. It seems like it should be a little bit darker, but I kind of like the fact that if you stand here and look for a while it sort of throws you off balance. And umm...

[Pause. Ten seconds pass in silence]

Micah Silke:

It's weird *[laughs]*.

Joe Milutis:

There is an interesting sense of movement to it. Every once in a while you'll see these *[Joe points down to the image of a person with their mouth wide open]*. And actually if you let yourself move around with it and just follow the shape and the movement and take it in, it's interesting in itself. The one part about this that you will see in a second—well maybe you won't—but it's more interesting when the figures sort of come up at you. In fact, this is actually a bit more abstract right now. But see, this is how it goes *[The image of the person with their mouth open begins to expand the breadth of the picture plane]*, and all of the sudden you're through their mouth.

Micah Silke:

The movement really does cause you to lose your equilibrium.

Joe Milutis:

It's a whole different experience if you were standing on the upper floor, watching it from a distance. I think that's what's interesting about having a video in space and installed rather than seeing it on a monitor or a computer. You are performing the piece as much as you are watching the piece in some sense because the way in which your body is part of the piece is important.

Micah Silke:

So does it circle back to the beginning?

Joe Milutis:

It's definitely a loop. I always brag to people that I am the one person who goes to museums and actually waits for the loop to finish [*laughs*]. Because the way in which you're supposed to experience a museum—and I think the way in which most people do—is just to pass through it and whatever is on happens to be on.

Micah Silke:

Do you do media art yourself? I saw the video of "[Paint it Black](#)" on YouTube. And I saw the [BitTorrent](#) thing.

Joe Milutis:

Yeah, that's sort of a mix. In *The Torrent* project there was a performance element that had video. It was actually a video piece before it was a creative writing piece, because it was dealing with distressed, glitched images from a BitTorrent video that were then used as jumping-off points for an elaborate fiction project. And then later on I went back to those videos to do some performance, some live VJ work with it. So it's a mix. The remix stuff that I'm doing will sometimes have literary elements, sometimes it will not.

[They approach an exhibit featuring a twenty-foot arrangement of over six hundred pages of poetry tacked to the wall in the shape of a moon. The piece is "Paper Moon (I Create as I Speak)" by Paul Ramirez Jonas. One page is noticeably missing from the moon; that page sits on a stand accompanied by a microphone and a five-watt amp]

But this is interesting. Let's... they have a microphone. I don't know if they have performers that come and do this. Or...

[Joe speaks inaudibly into the microphone.]

I think we were meant to do something with this.

Micah Silke:

You have to try to read it. [*Micah reads off the page*] "Speak..."

Joe Milutis:

The guard isn't stopping us, so...

[Joe tests the mic, mumbling into it with a series of soft booms, then begins to read off the page]

“Speak. I create as I speak. Chk, chk, k, k, k, k, k. Eff. Oh. Eek. I create as I speak, k, k, k. As I speak. I create as I speak.”

[Joe steps back from the microphone]

Micah Silke:

I’m noticing this one doesn't have any rolled R's in it.

Joe Milutis:

[Laughs] That might be a hard one to do.

Micah Silke:

You have a personal vendetta against the rolled R, isn't that right?

Joe Milutis:

Umm... [laughs] I guess so. Maybe it's just jealousy that I've never been able to do it. At one point I did a piece about the rolled R based on the fact that I was finding that a lot of people who did what's called sound poetry, basically if they could throw in some rolled R's it automatically seemed to make it sound poetry, right? There are many different ways you can think of what sound poetry is. I thought that maybe it was getting to the point where it was too connected to verbal vocal pyrotechnics and less connected to whatever, whatever...

I think that in general I am allergic to certain things that become, how can I say this, almost like you cannot do this art unless you are doing X, Y and Z. Or, you're not identified with this type of practice unless you are *these things*. And I find that certain things get identified or defined in very weird, strange ways. Even something like the digital humanities—which I'm very connected to—recently has been narrowly defined and it's kind of disconcerting. All of a sudden people are saying, “Oh, you're obviously not doing digital humanities unless you're doing *this*.” So I'm all for diversity and multiple ways of thinking and doing different arts and different practices.

Micah Silke:

And, your book [*Ether*](#) is a big...

[TWO WOMEN *enter*]

Joe Milutis:

It's a... Umm, I'm... I would hate to be...

[*Joe flees toward another exhibit, laughing. Micah catches up*]

Micah Silke:

Oh, interrupting?

Joe Milutis:

Interrupting them. But also, like, overheard seemingly self-aggrandizing in an art gallery. "Oh yes, let me talk about *my* art!"

[*They enter a room of bare drywall. A single strand of elastic stretches around the perimeter. It is [an exhibit](#) by the artist Ján Mančuška*]

Micah Silke:

Well what is this? Is this art?

Joe Milutis:

Yes.

Micah Silke:

I think it's cool.

Joe Milutis:

Let's see.

Micah Silke:

It smells like a rubber band in here.

Joe Milutis

It is a rubber band. Umm. It's interesting. I almost feel like this room was made specifically for this piece. Is it a rubber band or is it a shoelace?

Micah Silke:

It's a shoelace. It's a, umm... It's a spandex!

Joe Milutis:

Huh.

Micah Silke:

So it's a mixture of lace and rubber bands.

Joe Milutis:

Interesting hybrid. Umm...

[*Micah reads off the band*]

Micah Silke:

"Red artificial leather standing by the side next to the table across from another multi-colored metal chair with wicker seat with broken backrest on which I sit only when I have some... quest?"

Some *quests*?

Joe Milutis:

Quests?

Micah Silke:

I think *quests*, yeah? "...And when I reach the point where another small table stands at the other wall I will turn again... [*mumbling under breath*] toward the black leather arm chair, which I already passed..." It's basically a run-on sentence.

Joe Milutis:

[*Laughing*] Bad grammar in one context is art in another.

This show definitely has its center in conceptual art, but it seems like there's a concrete poetry component as well. And I think some of this stuff tends to be what's most difficult to get people to recognize as art.

I mean, we're looking at plastic spoons stuck to the wall with various shadows. And there is a certain point when you've been around the block a little bit, you can say whether or not it really floats your boat or not rather than... well you can also discount everything in this room if you want to, or you can have a qualitative judgment.

I think this is interesting to me because of all the different colors of white and the different ways in which you can appreciate the shadows, almost like a little bit of a sundial. But it's not terribly groundbreaking for me personally. One of the things about appreciating this kind of art is being free to say that rather than being terrorized by an artistic blackmail. "Well, if you don't understand or you don't like it you must be some rube."

Micah Silke:

Not an artist.

Joe Milutis:

Yeah. But at the same time you have to be open to some of the difficult gambits that some of this art is laying out. [*Joe points to an exhibit with big metallic drips hanging from the ceiling by the artist Ranjani Shettar.*] This is something that's much more typically craft-based. Someone will look at this and say, "That's obviously sculpture because someone crafted these shapes that are hanging in the air." But to me that's what makes this piece kind of uninteresting. I'm not quite sure. Maybe if we look at the text we can see what the conceptual basis of this is. It might be the way in which these shapes were generated is based on some sort of principle or transcoding from one register of media into another. I'm not sure. But let's see.

[*Joe walks around, searching for a title card*]

Which one is this? *Fire in the Belly*? No.

Micah Silke:

Is it wood on paint?

Joe Milutis:

I'm also trying to figure out how it fits with everything else.

Joe approaches an ATTENDANT.

Is there a card for this piece?

Attendant:

Yes. *Fire in the Belly*?

Joe Milutis:

Oh, so it is made of wood?

Micah Silke:

Yeah.

Joe Milutis:

So is that the conceptual element that it sort of looks like...

Attendant:

It looks like a paint splatter, flying through the air.

Joe Milutis:

Oh, okay.

Micah Silke:

Wait, did you say brain splatter?

Attendant:

Paint splatter. But that, too.

All three laugh.

But you don't want to walk underneath it because we have plaster ceilings and we don't want it to fall on anyone.

Joe Milutis:

Well, there you go. Wood that looks like metal that is supposed to be paint.

Micah Silke:

Right. In motion. But you wouldn't know that you shouldn't stand underneath it.

Joe Milutis:

These are all the weird rules. And that's why people like her are hired to say to people, "Wait, you shouldn't be doing that." That's why I knew that talking into the mic earlier was allowed, because there was a guard standing right behind us. You just test the waters.

It's interesting because a lot of artists get perturbed when you aren't participating in a robust way and not exploring. But there is this issue with cultural ideas about what you should be doing with art

and what you shouldn't be doing, where the line is between appreciation and participation.

[They approach an intricate pencil drawing of a circle, six feet wide in diameter, inside of which are many smaller circles that are connected to one another with arrows. Inside the smaller circles are the names of powerful individuals and organizations, and next to the arrows connecting them are amounts of money, prison sentences, political favors, et cetera. The piece tracks the potential involvement and collusion of these actors in major world events]

This is a Mark Lombardi piece where he maps out these conspiracies. He has a whole map of the power structures around things like the Cuban Missile Crisis or the mafia. He had a very mysterious death and people wonder whether or not he was actually onto something when he was mapping these out, or whether it was a fairly typical suicide.

Micah Silke:

So he tracks conspiracy theories?

Joe Milutis:

Well, it's not that he tracks conspiracy theories, but that he maps out these relationships between different organizations and the way in which money flows between those organizations. By mapping it this way it resembles a conspiracy theory. But it's also an innovation in information design. He's coming up with this mode of visualizing the conspiracy.

In some ways it's just like the economy. People say that the notion of the economy came into being as soon as we were able to visualize it. As soon as we had bar graphs, pie charts, numeric tables—that's when the notion of the economy starts, because without that visualization we can't conceive of what an economy is.

So it's the same thing here. He came up with this design, this map, which is obviously not artistic in the way we would think of artistic—like someone who is drawing a picture. He's obviously just using some kind of straight edge that is connecting circles. He's made all these shorthands for different types of relations, for

example the dotted line versus the solid lines, versus the red lines. And you can see there are some cash transfers.

Micah Silke:

Bank fraud here. Drug smuggling. Money laundering. Eight years in jail. Bank fraud. There are a lot of interesting criminal connections.

Joe Milutis:

Yeah, and then if you spend time looking at these maps you'll see that there is only a few degrees of separation between people like presidents and heads of corporations and institutions. I think some of the best ones are the ones that deal with the mafia and the Vatican and things like that.

But, again, all of these pieces are thought pieces. They are not engaging or immersive in the way we would imagine, say, a landscape painting, but they are engaging and immersive as intellectual objects, design objects, objects that ask for a relationship to the audience that is less in the spirit of a spectator genuflecting an artist but more in a kind of dialogue or conversation. It's almost asking you to figure out why these connections are important, to do your history and map out connections in the same way.

At the same time it's very despairing, because when you see these connections laid out like this, it's kind of like, what *can* you do? It almost is the same type of emotion that you would have in front of a religious painting where you just feel like, "I am just a small human being. I mean nothing. I can't change the way things are." Because seeing all these connections, even if you knew the history behind this, it probably would lead to suicide just like it led the artist to suicide, because you realize how screwed things are.

That's why his work is really great because even though on the surface it looks like informatic art or a design exercise, it really has deep connections to religious art and absolute art and the kind of art that is about the sublime, even though it's just made of pencil and paper.

Micah Silke:

Because of the scope of the project?

Joe Milutis:

Yeah well, because of the scope of the project, but just the awesomeness of what he is mapping out. This is something that *couldn't* be represented with traditional art. You *couldn't* represent this with a painting. But yet, it is something that needs to be represented. And it is something that is only possible in the times we live in. Not only is it uniquely possible to have these kinds of networks of transfer and collusion, but also our ability to perceive them and map them out and study them is a novel historical possibility. Even if these connections were present in the Middle Ages, there would be no way for one person to be able to have data and information enough to be able to manufacture this.

So in a way, again, it is very much like a religious painting in that the way in which people understood their world in the Middle Ages was to create similar texts and diagrams, but with angels and heaven and layers of reality between God and the earthworms; they had that all mapped out so that one could understand one's place in the world. It's the same thing here, except here it's with multinational corporations and gangsters and politicians.

Micah Silke:

Uh-huh, that's really cool. Cool connection.

[They make their way into a room where Frank Capra's [State of the Union](#) is playing continuously on a wall and sit down]

Micah Silke:

You have the a book coming out in January, [Failure, A Writer's Life](#). What is it about the process of failure that compelled you to write the book?

Joe Milutis:

That's always a hard question, to go back and think of the reasons that you did something like that. There are many different impulses, but an obvious one is that working as a writer and an artist and realizing how your work is valued or not valued as you move through your career, and feeling that there must be something to value from the failed experiments and finding a way to justify them.

But I didn't want to do something that would just be autobiographical or whiney. I wanted to think in a really deep way about the value of the unpublished, especially since now that so much can now be published on the internet—even if it's self-published or published by machines, like the way that spam proliferates or how different bots and algorithms create texts. There is this vast ocean of unpublished texts that assails us every time we interact with the Internet, and we have to choose how to navigate it.

I started to think that this archive of the unpublished is probably more like what we would call the “virtual” than, say, if you were putting on a headset and engaging with some sort of immersive space. In some deep way the unpublished *is* the virtual, in that whenever we choose to read one thing as opposed to another, or choose to write one thing as opposed to another, what happens to that other thing? What happens to the thing that is no longer in consciousness? What happens to that thing that is set aside or forgotten or failed?

For example, somebody like Henri Bergson said that *this* was the virtual—the things that we can't act upon, the things that slip back into time and that are no longer accessible to us. And so I try to think about the different connections between an unpublished work, or even an unwritten work, and all those things that don't make it into a written artifact and don't make it into our consciousness. What is the relationship between those things that we can read and we can act upon and are in our thought space, and those things that are inaccessible?

And so in some ways that connects *Failure, A Writer's Life* back to my other book, *Ether*. They both deal with the idea of an inaccessible substance or a substance that is mysterious, seemingly beyond human device. But yet I am interested in the various ways in which humans have tried to conceive it, frame it, or imagine it. What is the value of these intangible substances to creative work?

Micah Silke:

In *Failure, A Writer's Life* you have a chapter, or essay titled “Hemingway.” What is that section about?

Joe Milutis:

This book is structured with vignettes, small portraits of literary failures, or ideas around failure; then there are larger—what I’m calling—“convolutes,” which is a term that Walter Benjamin used. Convolutes are omnibuses that have a lot of different material. So there are no chapters, but there are these small vignettes, and then there are these large convolutes.

The Hemingway section is a vignette section. Hemingway had some very interesting experiences in his life relating to how I’m thinking about failure. For one, he lost all of his work at a certain point. That section is about ambulance drivers, actually. There are a lot of famous people in literary history who at one point chose to be ambulance drivers. I noticed that it’s usually the same impulse—to leave writing and to do something that seems like manly, useful activity, as opposed to the writerly, disconnected-with-life sort of thing. So I talk about whether that is a misapprehension.

When Nietzsche decided to go to work as an ambulance driver during The Franco Prussian War, Cosima Wagner told him that a gift of 100 cigars would have been better than the presence of a dilettante. So the idea of Nietzsche going to war, from what we know of Nietzsche, is kind of laughable. He was always sickly; he was just going to be in the way. But yet, Nietzsche is the philosopher who tried to break out of philosophy into something that is more connected to life.

Micah Silke:

So are the writers usually going to a war to become ambulance drivers, or did they just end up being them?

Joe Milutis:

I think in most cases, yeah. Hemingway, Nietzsche. Whitman was not necessarily an ambulance driver, but he went to work in hospitals during The Civil War, which was also important to the way in which he thought about the relationship between work and life, what can be written and what can’t. During WWI, [John] Dos Passos was an ambulance driver. I think Dashiell Hammett was an ambulance driver. There’s a long list of people, mostly from WWI, that was a big time for literary EMS.

But these are just little vignettes, little thoughts. I haven't done a history of literary ambulance drivers, although that would be interesting. Hemingway was a node for these ideas to come together about the relationship between literary action and this notion of inaction, which is connected to the virtual idea of the choice one makes between writing and not writing, or the choice one makes between reading and not reading. How do we value that moment of inaction, that reflection, those things that aren't easily quantified?

That's an issue that plagues the university, and especially the humanities, a lot. How do we value this work when it is not obviously connected to action? I think all those writers were reacting to that by—in a very anxious way—becoming ambulance drivers, because that idea of inaction seemed intolerable to them.

Hemingway's style, even when he was writing, was much more athletic, sparse, minimalist. It's an interesting dynamic. If you wanted to do a little graph...

Joe grabs Micah's pen and begins making a list.

Within the realm of failure: the virtual, inaction, the unpublished, the unread...

Micah Silke:

What about the deleted?

Joe Milutis:

The deleted, yeah—anything having to do with reflection. And within the realm of success we have: the actual, action, the published. But as you can see, these binaries start to break down. Obviously in order to be a writer you need this element of reflection, so we couldn't actually say, "This is the failure column and this is the success column." Because to actually be a literary success you need failure.

I always tell my students that in order to write three good pages you probably need about fifty. You need the unpublished to get to the published. You need to work through the black sea of your own scribbles and your own thoughts to get to something that's worth reading. So, I play around with these different binaries throughout.

They are what Bergson calls “jets of thought,” based on the fact that your thought is constantly dividing. Each moment is double. Each moment is the moment as it is happening, but it is also the memory that’s being created of that moment.

Bergson puts memory over in the virtual category, but recollection in the column of action. There is true memory, and then there is recollection, which we can say is like a snapshot. We can say “Ah, I remember getting a tricycle when I was four years old.” We have a mental snapshot of that. But can you give me the moment-by-moment experience from that time? You can’t, but somehow for Bergson it still exists. Somehow that duration of true memory and our experience of it is what makes us truly creative.

Again, it’s something not easily accessible, but this virtual realm of the past makes its way up into the world of action of right now. Everything I’m doing right now is somehow underwritten by all these things that are not here in this space with us. This, by the way, is also the uncanny. I teach a course about the supernatural and the uncanny. The virtual tends to impel things that are repressed that come back, that seem like they are ghosts.

This is why, for example, in the 19th century many stories about ghosts and spirits were really about things like sexuality and class and race. They were all these things that couldn’t make it into the current historical moment, and people couldn’t talk about them. Yet they were present, and they were impinging on the surfaces of reality. So these things that can’t be talked about somehow return and somehow affect our reality, and so in the 19th century that was represented as the ghostly.

Micah Silke:

When I was growing up, one of the clichéd words to say was “virtually.” Like, “This is *virtually* killing me,” or whatever. So would it almost be apt to say that a ghost story or a vampire story is virtually a story about sexuality or repression?

Joe Milutis:

Yeah, yeah. That’s a good play on words and that is a good point because when you say that something is virtual you’re saying that it is not quite, but just as well. Like: “Hillary Clinton is *virtually* the

president of the United States.” She’s not really, but she might as well be—and I don’t even know if that is true, but let’s just say that it is. So it’s this idea of going back to the uncanny, the idea of double-ness. The double is not just a replication it is sort of an uneasy duplication. A good example is the robot in [E. T. A.] Hoffmann’s “The Sandman.” She seems like a woman but she’s not really a woman; there is that uncanny difference.

So yes, the virtual is the “not quite but just as well,” the almost similarity. Just think of the fact that we are both “humans,” and that our whole existence is based around assuming similarities between people and things. That’s how we have knowledge. But the catastrophe of knowledge is that system of similarities will always break down. Within the realm of apparent similarity there are always going to be these unsettling differences. I can think that you are understanding everything I say, and then I can read the interview and be like, “Oh, my God! He totally did not get a...What...I don’t even know if he was using an iPhone to record this or... I didn’t say any of this!”

[Micah laughs hysterically]

That’s the uncanny gambit of communication. You could think that you are making sense and then you could realize that no, you’re not making sense at all, you’re speaking some weird personal language that nobody but you understands.

Those are the kind of problems that I’m interested in philosophically. Going back to my artwork, you could say that all the different mediums have this virtuality precisely because of the fact that I force the question of, what is the identity of the medium?—maybe sometimes expanding it in ways that are odd or unrecognizable.

You could say that my failure is that I am virtually a poet, or virtually a video artist, or virtually a philosopher, or whatever you want to say. Because I am not really, but just as well.

I’m engaging with poetry and video and theory and the variety of the things that I deal with, but yet I’m constantly resisting the idea of *being* a poet or *being* an artist or *being*. . . even the role of professor is something that I play with the boundaries of what it can

be. And for all of these categories, if they are treated as identities and treated as forms that you pretend to know what they mean then you close down what they could actually be. The virtual is not about *being* but *becoming*. The adventure of life or the adventure of form or being is something that is radically open. So let's use the idea of a poet as a placeholder. As a job title or as an identity, it can close down possibilities of what poetry could be.

Micah Silke:

So if you say, "I'm a poet," you essentially compartmentalize yourself within a set of rules? Is that the nature of it?

Joe Milutis:

Yeah, and then you realize that in order to be recognized as a poet you need to engage in a certain system of recognition-creating. It's like a machine for recreating recognition. Sometimes that recognition is the problem. In order to innovate, you always have to be doing something that is not really recognizable to people. Just as to be a successful writer you have to be a failure first.

Let's say you decide, "I'm going to write the great 900-page novel," like *Les Miserables*. Well, you're spending 900 pages wondering, "What the hell am I doing? What is this thing that I am creating?" There is no way that you are going to know throughout the 900 pages, or even after it is done, whether it was actually worthwhile as literature, or worthwhile as something to read. So you always have to be willing to deal with that uncertainty.

Micah Silke:

So Henry Darger wrote I guess what would be the largest epic, ever. [*Darger was a reclusive custodian famous for penning a 15,000-page manuscript that was discovered after his death.*]

Joe Milutis:

And died never knowing that it was going to be world famous.

Micah Silke:

And never even attempted to ask anybody to look at it. It's never been published still.

Joe Milutis:

And he could have possibly been a serial killer.

[They both laugh]

Micah Silke:

Is that true? I knew he was weird, but...

Joe Milutis:

Well, we don't know, but he definitely was a strange bird and hints of his biography, what we know of it ...he might have... I won't say, but nevertheless, what were you going to say about Henry Darger?

Micah Silke:

Was everything that he ever wrote, is all of it virtual literature? Is that where you would put it?

Joe Milutis:

Yeah, I think so. For me the idea of virtual literature is not just the unpublished, but also the way in which something can be pulled from the vast archive of the unpublished to become something that is respected worldwide. We're always shaping information; we're always presenting things to be read or reread. And enlarging our filters for what is read or readable, what's considered art and what's not considered art, is part of how we can strategize and frame how to understand virtual literature.

So yeah, I think that is a good example, especially because some of his collage novels are 10,000 pages long or something like that. One of his books is just a transcription of weather reports. How does this exist as literature? How does this even get read? And I think that to me, the idea of a completely unreadable text is interesting because of the fact that it got made by somebody. For somebody this was somehow potentiating. There was something about creating this writing—creating this habit of writing a 10,000-page novel about the weather—that was important for this lonely janitor. Just as a human artifact it's important to pay attention to.

Sometimes it's more important, and actually more inspiring, to pay attention to something someone like Darger wrote than, let's say, a novel written by someone who is very privileged and who has all of these scintillating episodes that you wish you could experience

yourself. As a reader, you come to that novel knowing the lifestyle that produces it and you know what its pleasures are. But with Darger you have somebody who is basically at the lowest rungs of society, who is still finding a way to be creative, who is inventing his own system of writing. That is fascinating to me. To me it is a good place to look if you yourself are trying to innovate, or really save yourself as a writer, by looking at texts that you're not quite sure what to do with, texts that you're not quite sure how they should be read or why they were written.

That's part of the impulse of my book *Failure*—thinking about monstrous literature and the idea that there is some work out there that is so unreadable and so monstrous-seeming to our sensibilities. But yet, within that monstrosity there seems to be, for me, a kind of hope, or some kind of energy that is really inspiring, precisely because it shows the way of somebody who's gotten out of a dead end. It may be a failed text, but here's someone who somehow created what [Gilles] Deleuze calls "a line of flight." For Deleuze, the quality of the art doesn't matter as much as the ability for that work to create an existential movement that creates a becoming, a new form of being, a new existence.

Micah Silke:

In the artist or in the viewer?

Joe Milutis:

It could be both. But I think he's thinking about specific artists, like outsider artists who create combinations or writing machines. Or they imagine combinations that may seem schizophrenic, for example, but yet create a form of freedom for a writer.

Micah Silke:

Like the difference between a sonnet and something William Carlos Williams wrote?

Joe Milutis:

Yeah, and I think William Carlos Williams was somebody who was constantly trying to create a new form, or an anti-form, and didn't know, for example with his book *Paterson*, where that was going, and he died not really finishing it. It was frustrating to him, and yet he knew he was going in the right direction, and that allowed him to

experience the city around him in interesting ways. I think that's a good example of somebody who's considered one of the great American poets but one of his most important works was this book that was working outside form in some radical ways—dealing with documentary materials, unpublished letters from friends and enemies, and just throwing it into poetry because it was part of his life and he was working through this material. It was process-oriented.

The idea of a text that doesn't have a beginning or an end but is all middle, that's a kind of virtual literature because that privileges the action, and the quality of the action and the quality of the process rather than the nicety of a completed object.

Micah Silke:

Okay, well, we seem to have run out of time. But I can ask you questions that I've prepared about background, about college, about growing up. Or you can say, "Hey, I'm kinda busy," or, "I don't think those questions sound very fun."

Joe Milutis:

You know, I can't think of anything else that I really would like to talk about. At this point, given what we've talked about before, it might fit sort of awkwardly. Maybe what you can say is that I'm very uninterested in interviews that try to humanize the subject too much, because in some ways I am interested in the inhuman. That's one thing that's really important for my whole work. So the ideology of interviewing somebody to get their personality is just that, it's an ideology. But I actually think that everything we talked about today is so much about the inhuman, and so much of what I'm working with is about the inhuman, that it almost feels like I would be compromising it to say, "When I was a wee boy..."

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