



Re/Locations, detail

RE/LOCATING CONTINUITY

along a wall
a long walk

A distance – rounding a corner and the long straightaway vista. This is how Chicago works, how walking in this city rewards the north-south, the east-west. The assurance of its grid, how it dares us to get lost.

What allows us to construct a continuity of that which is not? What is won by submitting to a daily practice?

Reaching down for what has been discarded. No parking, bk556, snake skin torn, picked up again later, echoed as something else. Working to make a run. Using felt (that fabric made of a thousand small directions at once) as the underpinning, scaffolding. Grabbed and grabbing.

... turning to the thing in hand according to its nature, thus letting that nature become manifest by the handling.ⁱ

This is the hide of what animal?

This is the hide of a long animal, the hide of an animal who has pressed himself along streets and corners, who has let the world stick to him. Not just any world, but the world of gutters and half-torn gum wrappers. This is an animal who degrades. Who grades himself back. Who kneels in streets, in fine clothes, to lift and rock that which function has abandoned. Trident. Lifesavers.

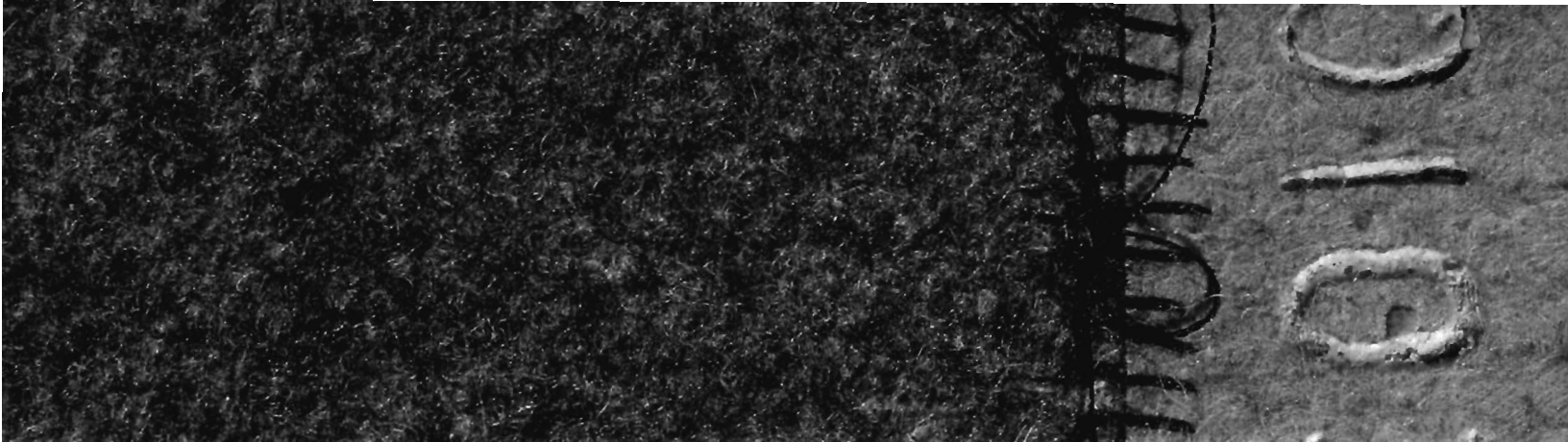
Look to the horizon. A color visits, visits again, and a last time down the line. Now an order, a sorting, a gathering. All of a kind. The odd interruption of elegance.

Candy. Gum. Condom wrappers. Shiny, hit by light, splayed open. A Marlboro box unfolded, undone.

The philosopher Simone Weill draws a distinction between decreation and destruction. It is decreation that interests her, "to make something created pass into the uncreated." Destruction, "to make something created pass into nothingness," is to her a "blame-worthy substitute."ⁱⁱ

Re/Locations





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What would it mean to be uncreated? It suggests a kind of waiting space – one is no longer one thing, and one anticipates becoming, but is not yet, another. Suggests a state bound to, derived from, yet different than the created. At some distance to the created.

Or is it more physical than metaphysical? Is it the difference between tossing the crumpled cigarette box to the ground and picking that box up to unfold it, to open it back out into the flat form it knew in the short time between being printed and being made into container? Does it suggest return?

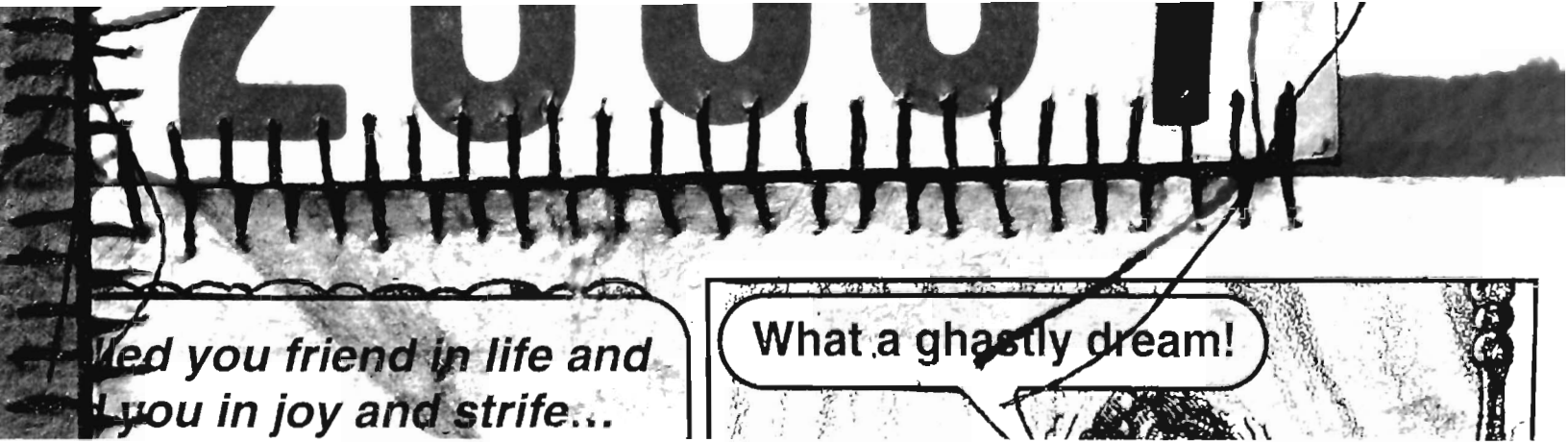
Weill frames her definition precisely, as “to make” this thing happen, not “to allow,” not “to encourage” it to happen. But “to make” has this doubleness in it, indicating both to form, as in “make me a cake” and to force, as in “make me.” If we assume she meant to indicate both, then we are left with a directive to ever apply ourselves to the labor of dismantling, the work of undoing. What would it look like to treat our making as continuous; as a series of makings and unmakings? To give equal attention to both? Equal weight?

Where is re/locating?

Are there several *Re/Locations* or is there one? Is it the same work even when differently installed? How far would it have to be recreated for us to no longer recognize it as itself? Here is a work made of studio remnants and trash, slipping into galleries and claiming for itself the prerogative of changing shape every time, of bringing only what it wants, of fitting each space precisely and claiming it *fully*, then of slipping off again to become something else to someone else. A cyclical beast. Every installation a pause between being made and again being unmade. Neither a conclusion nor a statement, simply a rest. Remnants caught, suspended, barely still.

We are flat and we contain. There is no reason to believe we will remain contained. We are spliced and splayed. (A bag was this before it was a bag, a box requires slots and tabs.) Bring the edges together. Make us capable of containing. Capable of continuity.

I keep thinking about embryological development, about the tremendous migrations and rearrangements taking place when the embryo still consists of a countable number of cells.



I led you friend in life and
I you in joy and strife...

What a ghastly dream!

At the stage at which it is called *blastula*, this ball of cells has already divided into three distinct regions, one of which – the ectoderm – will go on to become both skin and nervous system. And shortly thereafter, a section of that ectoderm will fold over on itself, forming a tube that will in turn become brain and spinal cord. Edge coming to meet edge, forming a channel for the passage of information.

Who of us exploring ideas by working with our hands isn't susceptible to such stories? The embryological sameness of skin and nervous tissue. Of touching and thinking. That folding made it possible for us to think, to move, to sense.

The psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion:

Thinking is bearable because of its sensuous component. The experience which has not yet reached a conclusion is whether the human animal will survive a mind grafted on to its existing equipment.ⁱⁱⁱ

There are round containers and there are flat containers. There is folding and unfolding. *Re/Locations* is decidedly flat, and in being flat

must contend with time in a way that a round container need not. It starts and it ends. It has a middle. As a viewer, I must travel in order to read it. What happens as I do so?

I encounter seams, regularly.

Why seams? Was a whole torn and in need of repair? Or, did two separate things want joining?

What conditions permit a seam to exist? Or, what conditions does a seam permit to exist?

I encounter textures, in rapid succession.

In the introduction to her book *Touching Feeling*, Eve Sedgwick discusses an essay by Renu Bora in which:

He develops the observation that to perceive texture is always, immediately, and de facto to be immersed in a field of active narrative hypothesizing, testing, and re-understanding of how physical properties act and are acted upon over time. To perceive texture is never only to ask or know What is it like? nor even just How does *it* impinge on *me*? Textural perception always explores two other questions as well: How did it get that way? and What could I do with it?



I haven't perceived a texture until I've instantaneously hypothesized whether the object I'm perceiving was sedimented, extruded, laminated, granulated, polished, distressed, felted, or fluffed up. Similarly, to perceive texture is to know or hypothesize whether a thing will be easy or hard, safe or dangerous to grasp, to stack, to fold, to shred, to climb on, to stretch, to slide, to soak. Even more immediately than other perceptual systems, it seems, the sense of touch makes nonsense out of any dualistic understanding of agency and passivity; to touch is always already to reach out, to fondle, to heft, to tap, or to enfold, and always also to understand other people or natural forces as having effectually done so before oneself, if only in the making of the textured object.^{iv}

If this is the case, then what happens to the viewer walking the length of *Re/Locations*? Every few inches a new texture, another mental branching – backwards and forwards. Add to that the memory of seeing this shiny foil three steps back and also at the very start, and that now there are twenty of a kind expanding up to ceiling and down to floor.

Branching and connecting. Transposing. Grafting the real to the imagined, to the remembered.

If *Re/Locations* is a timeline of any sort, it's not the kind we use to place dinosaurs in relation to King George. Maybe it's better to say that in its structure – from its roots in daily walking, to its facture through hand stitching, to the way in which a viewer encountering it makes sense of its textures by imagining backwards and forwards – it makes palpable something of the human experience of time. Not in the sense of nostalgia or memory, but in the sense of measurement, of the units we use to track ourselves in time, of the way we experience time as both discrete and continuous. As seamed. As sliding here and sticking there.

Time can only be addressed indirectly. Obliquely. We may invent devices – practices, procedures – by which it can be brought to attention. These devices need not be as somber as a single note repeated for hours to be a serious interrogation of time. They may derive from the ordinary acts of caring for those in our home – family, animals – or the labor that forms a studio practice. At a minimum they must contend with duration and repetition.



On the effects of repetition, the poet

Lyn Hejinian:

The initial reading is adjusted; meaning is set in motion, emended and extended, and the rewriting that repetition becomes postpones completion of the thought indefinitely.^v

The regularity of the stitch – the precision of it – the expectation of regularity – meter – the steady beat – the Vedic allusion to meter as protective cloak – to not being burned so long as one has meter – this is the repeat – the practice – the step in walking or the stitch in binding – it allows the travel elsewhere – it contains the experience – not as we imagine a volume would, but in time – it contains the experience in time because it creates a kind of footfall – a ladder – a place to not get lost from.

Here Gertrude Stein, writing of the objects in *Tender Buttons*:

Instead of giving what I was realizing at any and every moment of them and of me until I was empty of them I made them contained within the thing I wrote that was them. The thing in itself folding itself up inside itself like you

might fold a thing up to be another thing which is that thing... If you think how you fold things or make a boat or anything else out of paper or getting anything to be inside anything, the hole in the doughnut or the apple in the dumpling perhaps you will see what I mean.^{vi}

along a wall

a long walk

A distance –

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Judith Leemann is an artist, writer, and educator based in Boston, Massachusetts.

ⁱMartin Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, trans. J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1968), p. 195.

ⁱⁱSimone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, trans. Arthur Wills (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), p. 78.

ⁱⁱⁱWilfred R. Bion, *A Memoir of the Future* (New York: Karnak Books, 1991), p. 160.

^{iv}Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 13.

^vLyn Hejinian, *The Language of Inquiry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 44.

^{vi}Gertrude Stein as cited by Lyn Hejinian in *The Language of Inquiry*, p. 104.