

MAPPING A COURSE FROM SITE TO SIGHT

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Not only is all mapping “cognitive” in the broadest sense, inescapably bound within discursive frameworks that are historically and culturally specific, but all mapping involves sets of choices, omissions, uncertainties and intentions—authorship—at once critical to, yet obscured within, its final product, the map itself.

—Denis Cosgrove, *Mappings*

The measure of mapping is not restricted to the mathematical; it may equally be spiritual, political or moral. By the same token the mapping’s record is not confined to the archival; it includes the remembered, the imagined, the contemplated. The world figured through mapping may thus be material or immaterial, actual or desired, whole or part, in various ways experienced, remembered or projected.

—Denis Cosgrove, *Mappings*

Reproduced to the point of cliché, Niagara Falls does not seem a promising subject for a fledgling artist, yet among the earliest of Zoe Leonard’s works are three black-and-white photographs with this motif.¹ Their significance within her oeuvre is indicated by their placement at the forefront of the first substantial monograph, published in 2007, to accompany a survey of twenty years of her practice.² All three are aerial views, shot from high above Horseshoe Falls. Spray, rising like a misty cloud from the basin at the bottom of the cataract, obliterates the roiling water below, making it difficult to gauge scale and volume. Other features familiar from canonical renderings, such as the torrent’s overwhelming force and grandeur, are also downplayed. Suggesting a reluctance on the part of the artist to reveal the subject of the photographs, the high-contrast printing flattens and abstracts the space, further contributing to the illegibility of this extraordinary topography. Like a navel in an orange, a tiny boat (one of the *Maid of the Mist* fleet, which has plied sightseers to the base of the falls for more than a century) anchors the composition of *Niagara Falls no. 4* (1986/1991), the most vertiginous of the images.

Their subjects framed in terms that spell out their distance from conventional representational modes, these images proved emblematic of Leonard’s burgeoning practice. Far from providing objective information in a notionally transparent record, each work declares itself, first and foremost, a visual artifact.³ In rejecting the purported factuality of a documentary representation, Leonard seeks a personal sense of truth.⁴ As the disarmingly understated Niagara trio attests, for her, subjective truth often entails a reading against the grain: a subversion of given formulations.

Some forty-eight aerial views make up the first section of plates in the 2007 publication that marked Leonard’s first full-scale retrospective. All, with two exceptions, were realized between 1986 and 1990. Many feature urban vistas, of Paris, Washington, D.C., and elsewhere. Others show more generic terrain crossed by railways or road systems; several show uninterrupted expanses of

Zoe Leonard,
NIAGARA
FALLS NO. 4,
1986/1991.
Gelatin silver
print, 37 3/4 x
25 3/4 inches.



water. Images of clouds outside a plane's window constitute another group. Another is made up of photographs of maps—of Kraków, Japan, Paris, as well as a vast three-dimensional model of New York City (now in the Queens Museum of Art)—and a terrestrial globe: obviously worn, they are probably outdated. Certainly, the ways in which these subjects have been shot—in an obfuscating somber light, from awkward angles that crop their edges, with creased and folded surfaces left to buckle—serves to undermine the functionality of the representations. From its earliest years, photography has

been deployed to map and to survey. This seminal group of works records its predecessors: sundry forms of cartography that, in defining and structuring the natural world, reflected contemporary understandings of it.⁵

Unlike many of her generation, Leonard was not formally trained at art schools: she was drawn to photography through an early love of its utilitarian functions as well as its place within the lexicon of fine arts. Attentive to a miscellany of its genres—including aerial reconnaissance, scientific and forensic documentation, and simple snapshots—she has also long treasured the ubiquitous postcard. Mechanically fabricated from images shot by anonymous journeymen, postcards embody an artisanal aesthetics that is fundamental to Leonard's vision. Even as she came to revere certain of the medium's masters—initially street photographers like Robert Frank, Weegee, Bill Brandt, and Lisette Model, then later, Eugène Atget and Walker Evans—Leonard has maintained her keen appreciation for lesser-known or unrecognized commercial practitioners.⁶ Seeking out their work in mundane instructional guides and pedagogical manuals, she frequents used-book stores, flea markets, and other out-of-the-way channels where obsolete photographically based publications now circulate.

For a variety of reasons, not least her lack of interest in the well-rehearsed and renowned, the likelihood that the motif of Niagara Falls would recur in Leonard's oeuvre seems slight. Nonetheless, in 2008 it became the subject, or at least the ostensible subject, of an environmentally scaled work comprising some four thousand postcards, each of which depicts a view of the celebrated site: *You see I am here after all*. While photography is once again her medium, it now takes the form of found material.⁷ As banal, vernacular images replaced the singular renderings that she had made two decades earlier, she once again sought to prize apart the motif's thematic conventions rather than simply adopting them tout court.

In the summer of 2007, Leonard was invited to participate in an ongoing series of projects commissioned by Dia Art Foundation for its museum in upstate New York. Over the preceding months, she had begun to explore ways of working with vintage postcards depicting waterfalls from places around the

world. As she considered the designated site at Dia:Beacon, the museum's collection and institutional history and its geographic and cultural location, she narrowed her focus to Niagara's cataracts. Various factors influenced this decision. The gallery at Dia:Beacon in which this series of commissions is presented offers specific challenges. Unlike the adjacent spacious day-lit galleries, it is a comparatively narrow, somber space that is interrupted by a succession of doorways. As such, it is best suited to the display of small-scale two-dimensional works such as drawings or photographs. On only one surface can artworks be installed. From the outset, Leonard determined that she would not treat this long wall as a backdrop on which to hang a number of prints (as her predecessors in the series had done); she would integrate the gallery by means of an environmentally scaled piece that straddled the principal wall's four segments.

In tandem with the Hudson River Valley, Niagara Falls became a founding motif of early American painting, a key element in the expression of national identity. If the former provided the quintessential embodiment of the picturesque in landscape representations, the latter was emblematic of the sublime. Today, Niagara Falls is commonly viewed as a degraded, manipulated, and thoroughly artificial rendition of wilderness. Even so, it remains the most reproduced and perhaps the most immediately identifiable of all natural wonders. As Leonard mulled the problematic demands of Dia's multilayered site, she came to the conclusion that her project demanded both a monumental work and a monumental subject. Among the myriad cascades that she had been looking at for months, Niagara proved the likeliest candidate. Since its extensive topography unfolds in discrete parts, it was well suited to address the divided 147-foot-long wall. Its ubiquity as one of the most popular images ever found on postcards ensured that she could readily acquire its printed image in bulk, from sources on the Internet as well as in flea markets and secondhand stores, and so accommodate the piece's substantial span. Thematically it referenced the broader historical and cultural context in which the work would be shown. And, as Leonard discovered when working on site in the gallery, only the Niagara motifs were able to formally "hold the space"; that is, when cards with identical subjects were grouped and set as larger units in grids across the extensive wall, only the Niagara images proved strong enough to command that challenging architectural environment.⁸ Once this had become evident, all the other reasons that made Niagara Falls a better choice seemed undeniable.

As Leonard surveyed her ever-expanding trove, she quickly realized that publishers preferred a restricted range of views—Table Rock, Goat Island, Terapin Point, and Bridal Veil Falls were particular favorites. She then classified these vistas more rigorously, culling the anomalous few that depicted awestruck tourists and the occasional aerial view. She also eliminated any that seemed too anecdotal, including examples from the 1950s in which visitors wearing bright yellow sou'westers dominate the foreground. Careful scrutiny revealed that

often a single shot of a certain view had been deployed for decades with only the barest of modifications: foliage, for example, might have been altered to reflect seasonal variations or a few distant buildings removed or the time of day adapted for dramatic effect. Technical developments accounted for differences among identical views: faults in color registration, idiosyncratic hand tinting and over-painting, and saturated chromatic scales.

After sorting the cards according to the dominant scenes, Leonard then began to place them in grids based on shared perspectives.⁹ But only when she decided to sequence the scenes according to geographic location around the falls' perimeter and to introduce a horizon line as a structuring device did she find the means by which she could order and compose the project. Two factors determine the precise position of each group of cards along the axis that runs the work's length: the vantage point (that is, the scene's location along the cataract's brink) and the sight line (the distance and angle from which the image was shot).

Assembling the cards in grids disclosed not only minute variations in perspective and slight changes in technique but also random accidents of history. Notable in this regard were the abraded surfaces, worn edges, and faded tones found on cards that had circulated courtesy of the postal service.¹⁰ Nonetheless, either because they were unused or because they had been purchased as part of a collection for display in an album, most are in mint condition. Leonard's decision to present them face forward largely concealed their individual histories (revealed through the postmark indicating the date of mailing and the place from which each was sent and the handwritten personal messages).¹¹ In lieu of anecdotic provenances, a history of the various reproductive technologies and representational techniques deployed over a period of some seven decades would be revealed. In spite of this panoramic scope, the work neither represents comprehensively the ways in which this subject has been depicted nor provides a faithful depiction of it at a specific historical moment.¹² The repetition of distinctive shapes within any particular group of cards, like the serendipitous chromatic patterning, draws attention to the generic identity of the cards. Paradoxically, the fact that their visual forms were shaped primarily by mundane functional needs, rather than by explicitly aesthetic factors, heightens their subtle beauty when seen en masse.

Whether approached from the left or the right, *You see I am here after all* unfolds erratically along a horizontal axis. On entering the gallery, viewers reorient themselves, both metaphorically and literally, as they assume a course. Because the variously sized grids of cards are separated by blank areas of wall space, audiences soon gain the impression that they are navigating from one fixed position, or vantage, to another. Given the gallery's physical limitations, at no point can they step back to scan the whole: an omniscient overview is never possible. To experience Leonard's work in situ is thus to undertake an episodic journey, with stops en route along Niagara's perimeter (in effect, at the precise

places from which the photographers took their shots) to scrutinize its most admired sites. In short, a map has been overlaid on to or, better, constructed out of pictorial matter; in devising this diagrammatic tool directly from mimetic material, Leonard has conflated cartography with pictorial illusionism.

As seen in the first group of black-and-white images that she shot in the late 1980s, map making plays a key role in Leonard's conceptual and formal arsenal. When asked in the mid-1990s about her early photographs of maps, she responded: "I was questioning what these different maps were and what information they contained. I am still doing this work," she noted, adding, "Different subjects, same terrain."¹³ Among the subjects this fertile terrain would soon offer her were storefronts on the Lower East Side, where she had maintained a studio for more than twenty years. In 1997, using an old Rolleiflex camera that she had recently purchased, she began taking pictures of her neighborhood, as it began

to show signs of what—with the influx of J. Crew, Old Navy, Gap, Starbucks, and other chains—would soon become unchecked gentrification. As she documented the panoply of individually owned premises that were fast disappearing from this landscape—clothing retailers, tailors and fabric sellers, pawnbrokers, jewelers, and butchers—Leonard became particularly fascinated by the textile recyclers, whose buildings were filled with huge bundles of secondhand goods ready for shipment abroad. Perceiving in the rag trade a microcosm from which she could explore the intimate network of relations between goods and services that structured her daily life, she started to trace the dispersal of these humble products from her local milieu to foreign markets in developing countries.

More instinctively than programmatically, Leonard explored, over the next ten years as her travels permitted, trade routes and global networks that regulate the flow of material and foodstuffs in and out of her immediate environment. The result was an epic work, which she called *Analogue*, in reference both to the imminently obsolete photographic means that she had employed to create it and to the way in which the piece functioned as an elegiac meditation on historical changes occurring simultaneously in communities throughout the world. Like *You see I am here after all*, *Analogue* was generated by an archival impulse, but it too takes cartography as its governing trope: as viewers navigate the piece, they reprise journeys of discovery and analysis undertaken by the artist.¹⁴

In Leonard's aesthetic and practice, the camera instantiates the eye of the artist; it manifests an act of viewing the world at a specific moment in time as she stands on a particular spot, holding the camera against her body at a particular height, and looks through the viewfinder. The experience of confronting

Zoe Leonard, detail
from *ANALOGUE*,
1998–2009.
412 gelatin silver
and c-type
prints, 11 x 11
inches each.



Analogue in its guise as an installation divided into twenty-five chapters spread across a single gallery space is, inevitably, a corporeal one.¹⁵ Surveying the gridded images, which are arranged conceptually (as opposed to, say, typologically or chronologically), involves positing connections in multiple directions—horizontally, vertically, and diagonally—as motifs recur, repeat, and mutate within a single chapter or from one chapter to its neighbors. Political, social, economic, and cultural relations are disclosed via association, sequencing, and structure, as well as in narrative terms: they emerge out of viewers' individual meanderings and meditations rather than according to any predetermined analytical script.

In the months prior to the moment that she was offered the Dia:Beacon commission, Leonard was involved in presenting *Analogue* at a series of public venues, including the Wexner Center for the Arts in Columbus, Ohio, where it debuted in May 2007, and Documenta 12 (June 16–September 23, 2007) in Kassel, Germany, where it was widely acclaimed, a highlight of an exhibition designed to “explore the terms ‘art work’ and ‘public’ in stark juxtaposition.”¹⁶

Not long after Leonard began to formulate her response to Dia:Beacon, I invited her to take on a second commission: to present *Analogue* in the context of a series of projects Dia hosted at the Hispanic Society of America in Manhattan. Though preoccupied with the as-yet-untitled postcard project, Leonard agreed to the additional request, since it offered an unusual opportunity to contextualize *Analogue* within the society's famed historical collection and, not least, to bring the work back to its point of origin, New York City. Rejecting the option of using its collection of documentary photography, she gravitated toward the rare cartographic material that is a hallmark of its holdings and began to familiarize herself with maps, charts, and related objects that date from the fifteenth through the eighteenth century. Soon she honed her focus to two areas: working charts, such as rutters and *derroteros* used by mariners as they sailed in unfamiliar waters, and the sumptuous portolani, which—by means of their cartouches, compass roses, and symbolic emblems—transform essential data into ceremonial artifice.¹⁷ The humble anonymous guides and the obviously beautiful and better-known treasures each held a different kind of fascination. In the utilitarian books and charts, notation based on direct observation was allied with diagrammatic and textual additions; by synthesizing diverse kinds of information—plying, as it were, the space between experience and knowledge—mariners sought to orient themselves as they approached landfall. Juxtaposing *Analogue* with these two distinct bodies of historical works enabled Leonard not only to frame it in a larger temporal context but also to underscore its fundamental role as a navigational tool, a way of exploring political, social, economic, and cultural conditions endemic to our historical moment.

Conceived in tandem, “Derrotero” (as the project at the Hispanic Society was finally titled) and *You see I am here after all* illuminate each other in significant ways; above all, their dialogue underlines how consistently Leonard frames

Folio from Juan
Bautista Pines de
Pacia's derrotero,
1700. Courtesy
Ecuador. Collection
Hispanic Society of
America, New York.



her projects, literally and figuratively, in exploratory terms.¹⁸ Comparison serves, in addition, to suggest how they might connect with earlier works by a generation of artists from whom Leonard frequently takes her bearings. In its monumental scale and gridded format, *Analogue* clearly invites comparison to several epic pieces made by artists who matured in the late 1960s, namely, Sol LeWitt, Gerhard Richter, and Hanne Darboven. As she struggled with an initial corpus of some ten thousand images, which she would eventually pare down to over four hundred spread over

twenty-five variously sized chapters, Leonard scrutinized the ways in which Richter had orchestrated and sequenced the body of multifarious source materials from which he created *Atlas* (1962–2006). Also relevant were the terms in which LeWitt deployed his geometric forms in *Drawing Series—Composite, Parts I–IV, #1–24, A+B* (1969) so that it could hold within a monumental space while offering an immersive experience. Central to the modernist impulse on account of its nonnarrative, nonhierarchical mode of structuring, the grid was crucial. Each invites a mode of parsing that is incremental and cumulative and that allows for a certain degree of randomness within a systematic way of looking.

When conceptualizing her project for Dia:Beacon, Leonard attended closely to the more immediate institutional framework offered by the institution's collection. The “subjective truth” that she had sought from the beginning of her practice is embodied in the various modalities of mapping that inform both of her recent projects: “There is ... a misconception that a map is an objective tool for learning or navigating. But, actually the way you choose to map something will determine how you navigate,” she stated in an interview in 1997.¹⁹ Her attitude recalls notions of mapping deployed during the 1970s by a number of artists who sought uncharted terrain as their preferred sites for environmentally scaled sculpture. Among the highlights of Dia's collection are key works of Land art: Walter De Maria's *Lightning Field* (1977) and Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970). They and others, including Michael Heizer's *City* (1972–present) and Richard Serra's *Shift* (1970–72), are located in remote and fairly inaccessible sites—off the grid, so to speak. Questions of access became paramount as—sometimes reluctantly, occasionally avidly—these artists came to acknowledge that reproductive imagery would provide the vehicle through which these works would be known and even experienced, albeit vicariously. Leonard's ways of thinking about the roles and forms of mapping offer an unexpected lens through which to reconsider methodologies devised by Serra and Smithson in particular: for them, as for her, notions of mapping prove critical to both the realization of their works and their reception.

In the late 1960s, Serra shifted his aesthetic and practice from a focus on object-based sculptures to what he termed “peripatetic vision”: “the discrete object dissolved into the sculptural field which is experienced in time.”²⁰ Central to his reconception was a transformative experience that he had in Japan. As he visited the country’s historic gardens, he realized that they were organized in terms entirely different from the protocols and precepts governing Western spatial systems and, consequently, Western landscape traditions. Rather than imposing control and order from a single static vantage point, Japanese gardens orchestrate a viewer’s movement in time through a series of carefully prescribed vistas. As Serra redefined his notion of experiencing sculpture as a mode of walking and thinking that revealed “the structure and content and character of a space and a place by [means of] the elements that I use,”²¹ he began to seek sites outside the museum context, in places he characterized as “anti-environments.”²² These leftover spaces, the antithesis of conventional sculpture gardens or parks, were working spaces, active farmland rather than landscape per se. It was in such remote environments in the early 1970s that he created several works, notably *Shift*, that first embodied his peripatetic vision. *Shift* comprises a number of planar forms made from concrete that serve as “barometers”—measuring devices and linear vectors—to engage the site’s irregular topography: they enable a meandering spectator to gauge the elevation and hence the shifting contours of the field from multiple vantage points. Embedded literally in the terrain, Serra’s cartographic tools are mapped directly on to their site.²³

By contrast, Serra’s close friend Robert Smithson evolved a theory of the Nonsite to address the issue of his work’s conveyance and its reception. Whether gallery based or devised for alternative networks such as magazines and film festivals, Smithson’s Nonsites took as their materials diverse forms of information. As a work like *Nonsite (Oberhausen, Germany)* (1968)—composed of descriptive materials, maps, and geological specimens—acquired its identity from the confluence of its documentary material, its site, or locus, was obviated as a destination. When he began to construct environmentally scaled works at remote sites, Smithson once again turned to the Nonsite as his principal means to engage with a broader audience, most of whom he



Robert Smithson,
NONSITE
(OBERHAUSEN,
GERMANY), 1968.
Five steel bins,
slag, and five maps
with black-and-
white photographs,
dimensions variable.

thought would never make the journey to the actual location: thus his film *Spiral Jetty* is not a document of the eponymous sculpture, on the edge of the Great Salt Lake in Utah, but a companion piece, an artwork that parses the Land artwork for gallery, cinema, and museum audiences. Conversely, *Map of Broken Glass (Atlantis)* (1969), a three-dimensional map of a mythical place that either never existed or is now lost, was first executed outdoors and later absorbed into the museum circuit.



Richard Serra,
CONSEQUENCE,
2003. Paint stick on
linen. Two parts,
6 feet 11 ¼ inches
x 55 feet each.
Collection of the
artist.

centuries, geography was deemed unquestionably superior to chorography—that is, intellectual and mathematical knowledge was favored over its pictorial and sensual counterpart. While such distinctions are increasingly difficult to maintain given current directions and modes of map making, Leonard’s cartographic mode might be said to have reversed standard priorities. Or, better, given that it is at once abstract and representational, her charting of Niagara from vernacular found material could be deemed a kind of “third option”: “a diagrammatic language to notate place.”²⁴ Alternatively, it might be deemed a Nonsite, in concert with Smithson’s fluid concept; for it similarly attempts a formulation that is located within the cultural imaginary rather than within the disciplinary protocols of geography, mensuration, and geology. Though it echoes, albeit more distantly, Serra’s inscription of his navigational tools directly on to the terrain, a more circumstantial reference point is his wall drawing *Consequence* (2003), which occupies a gallery next to *You see I am here after all*. For Serra’s drawing similarly employs a horizon line as its principal structuring device, as a means of orientation and of setting into motion a corporeally based form of looking. More relevant, at least from Leonard’s perspective, was Richter’s *Six Gray Mirrors* (2003). Composed of monumental sheets of glass, each cantilevered off the wall at a slight angle, it too had been commissioned specifically for its site at Dia:Beacon. Once Leonard began working in situ, she found herself engaging with Richter’s multipartite installation nearby, which she described in a recent interview as “about looking, about how one looks at oneself looking.”²⁵ Such were the very terms that she had earlier used to characterize her own intervention at Dia:Beacon, when she remarked: “We are not really looking at Niagara Falls, we are looking at representations of Niagara Falls.” From that assertion, it was a short step to her next, more radical claim: “We’re looking at how we look, how we are taught to look . . . and how freighted that is and how rich that is, both in terms of a personal experience and in terms of a larger cultural experience, a social experience.”²⁶ *You see I am here after all* reveals how freighted looking may be and how most cultural icons, whether the increasingly derided Niagara Falls or works in Dia’s storied collection, are sedimented with posthumous cultural accretions

If, for Leonard, “the camera stands in for the eye, for me,” then we the viewers stand in her stead as we look at the images she takes, or makes. In *You see I*

am here after all, she invites us to exchange roles in an open-ended exploration in which the questions of who sees whom, and what, and how, are constantly brought up by capitalizing on the ways that “I,” “you,” and “here” all become shifting referents.²⁷ *You see I am here after all* consequently establishes a very different relationship to its context from the often ironically detached, critical one that she had engaged in prior years, when she took numerous photographs within institutional settings: *Mirror no. 1* (Metropolitan Museum) (1990), *Preserved Head of a Bearded Woman* (Musée Orfila) (1991), *Beauty Calibrator no. 2* (Museum of Beauty, Hollywood) (1993), *Carnivores* (1992/1997), plus a series of trophies shot in natural-history museums, and an untitled intervention in the Neue Galerie in

Kassel for Documenta 9 (1992). In these instances, issues of museal framing, display, and collecting were her primary concerns.²⁸ Many are imbued with a deconstructivist aesthetic; others have been discussed in relation to institutional critique. Some, though not the commission for Kassel, were made surreptitiously—that is, without prior permission to work on site—and were never intended to be shown in those venues. Not only is *You see I am here after all* subtly calibrated for its site—above all, through its dialogue with works in Dia’s collection—but that relation is underscored by its title (derived from an exultant

note, written in a female hand along the border of a card depicting the brink of the American Falls, which was posted from Niagara on September 20, 1906).²⁹ Leonard hesitated long before she finally appropriated the message as her title, not least because she feared that its triumphal overtones could be taken to represent her feelings about presenting her own work in the midst of Dia’s collection. Also far from irrelevant to the question of whether *You see I am here after all* rings out in these terms is its clearly gendered message.

For Lulu, the author of that provocative addition, neither the photographic depiction of the site on the postcard nor the postmark that officially recorded both where and when the card was mailed appear to have offered adequate proof of her achievement. A supplementary signature had to be affixed to the image—as if only the gesture of manually signing the indexical record could provide proof.³⁰ Interplay between handcrafted and reproductive technologies is also integral to Leonard’s practice: here, as elsewhere in her oeuvre, the spectator is made aware of how the camera stands in for the “eye”—and so becomes a conduit for the “I.”

Like several of her peers, notably Matthew Buckingham and Tacita Dean, Leonard is acutely conscious of the fact that she functions on the cusp of a crucial moment of historical change. Imbued with a retrospective tenor, the works of all three artists often employ technologies that verge on the obsolete.³¹ While Dia’s

invitation offered Leonard opportunities for dialogue with her artistic mentors at least partially on their own ground, the result of the commission bears witness to the unbridgeable distance that distinguishes the two generations. *Analogue* counterpoints transformative appropriation, recycling, and certain modes of adaptation fomented by global networks with the uniformity, banalization, and homogenization that are among its most heinous effects.

If there is a note of bravado in Leonard’s title, it is undercut by a bittersweet recognition of the chasm that separates her generations from those earlier moments. Far from impudent or irreverent, *You see I am here after all* contains a poignant recognition of the belatedness of its intervention in this charged context, in which her voice clearly takes on a feminist valence.³³ No more than she, can we, in turn, remain indifferent to the effects of her authorial gendering of this work, or of her exposure of the personal within the public statement.

With its contingent, shifting references, her title depends as much on being spoken as on being read and hence on being heard as much as on being voiced. Infused with this performative aspect, *You see I am here after all* exceeds its direct referent—the falls—to reengage the discursive space of its more immediate context. If the larger cultural context provided the occasion for the choice of Niagara as the work’s ostensible subject, it was not the whole cause for that choice: the more pressing factor was the immediate aesthetic context, what might be called the “laboratory” of its aesthetic formation. If the collection shaped and formed Leonard’s response to the site, the installation that she conceived there is retrospective, in that it throws light both on certain icons of art history and on the underlying premises that governed the formation of the museum’s holdings. While paying due tribute to its historicizing context, *You see I am here after all* is nonetheless fueled by an impulse different from those informing its historical predecessors. Just as the politics of seeing cannot be ignored in her work, so in her voice lurks a substrate of the formerly inadmissible. In recent years, a disciplinary critique has provided the yardstick that legitimated the entry of additional works into Dia’s founding collection.³⁴ What or, better, who might confirm Leonard’s self-inscription within this polyphonic but circumscribed legacy? An alternative discourse? Her audience? ...

NOTES

The epigraphs to this essay were taken from “Introduction: Mapping Meaning,” in *Mappings* (London: Reaktion, 1999), pp. 7, 2.

1. Each photograph bears a double date; 1986/1990 in the case of *Niagara Falls no. 1* and *no. 2*; and 1986/1991 for *no. 4*. The first date indicates the year in which the image was shot, the second the year in which it was printed. Such a time lag is not uncharacteristic of Leonard’s practice. She often dwells for long periods on a contact proof before she finds the image’s

Zoe Leonard,
MIRROR NO. 1
(METROPOLITAN
MUSEUM), 1990.
Gelatin silver print,
41 1/2 x 28 1/4 inches.



appropriate form—what she calls its “subjective truth.” (Zoe Leonard, interview by Anna Blume, in *Zoe Leonard* [Vienna: Secession, 1997], p. 12.) Commenting on this notion of “subjective truth,” Leonard added, “but also to engage with the viewer in the act of looking.... To assert my point of view is also to hint that yours exists too.” That is, the work became increasingly based in observation (with all the complexity that that concept entails for her) rather than in the depiction of individual motifs. (Leonard, conversation with the author, September 12, 2010.)

2. They are placed at the head of the first section of plates in *Zoe Leonard—Photographs*, ed. Urs Stahl (Göttingen, Germany: Steidl, in association with Fotomuseum, Winterthur, 2007), pp. 19, 20, 21.

3. In her search for the suitable form for each image, which can at times prove protracted, Leonard may try out several different types of paper while varying a print’s overall dimensions and margins. During her editing process, she never crops out the black line around the image that is integral to the printing process, and she often also retains accidents and blemishes that for other photographers are the bane of darkroom procedures. The unframed print is then installed behind glass, directly on the gallery wall. The cumulative intent of this nexus of unconventional procedures is to heighten viewers’ visceral and physical engagement with her works, to sharpen their awareness of the act of looking and the constructed character of what is being scrutinized.

4. Leonard, interview by Blume, p. 12. See note 1, above.

5. In early summer 2008, Leonard was asked to select an image for the verso of Dia’s fall 2008 calendar: the recto was to contain, *inter alia*, information about her forthcoming exhibition at Dia:Beacon, *You see I am here after all*. Leonard proposed a black-and-white postcard of Niagara Falls shot from the air, produced in roughly the 1920s. (See the frontispiece to this book.) Folded into a standard format and size required to meet the post office’s regulations for self-mailing material, Dia’s calendar is sent to several thousand of the museum’s members and supporters. Its grid of folds and creases notwithstanding, when opened, the calendar functions as an exhibition poster. The artist also imagined that it might serve as a visual guide or map for those in her audience at Dia:Beacon who wanted additional help in locating specific postcard views, such as Terrapin Point or Goat Island, in relation to Niagara’s larger topography. Indeed, during the installation, the artist would herself have recourse to the calendar for the same reason. Spread on a tabletop or pinned to a wall, it uncannily resembles those creased vintage maps Leonard found so alluring twenty years ago.

6. Apropos of the artists she admires, Leonard quoted the “perfect comment” made by her friend and fellow photographer Moyra Davey: “It’s a question of what I like to look at versus what I like to make, or what I have to make, or what I *can* make,” and then added: “I have a *love* of street photography.” (Leonard, conversation with the author, September 12, 2010.)

7. Leonard had worked with postcards on a previous occasion when she manufactured her own from photographs she had taken of objects in the collection of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA). Stacks of thirty-two different cards were placed on a display rack for sale in the gallery of the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, North Adams, where the piece, titled *For Which It Stands* (2003), had its debut in the exhibition “Yankee Remix: Artists Take On New England,” in 2003–2004.

8. Leonard, conversation with the author, September 10, 2010.

9. The vast majority of picture cards suppressed the expansion of Niagara’s built environment, favoring instead (often doctored) representations of states of “natural wilderness.” Not only Horseshoe Falls’ eroded profile but also most man-made incursions—whether the

consequence of hydroelectric regulation or modifications to the landscape in the interest of public safety—are occluded in the standard depictions. To function well as a souvenir, a card needed to preserve the cascade’s iconic identity as little altered; even so, a measure of variety within this now-regularized repertoire was required to avoid cliché.

10. About half of the cards in Leonard’s ensemble bear postmarks: the remainder are presumably either from unsold stock or were owned by collectors.

11. In this aspect, Leonard’s use of postcards runs counter to that of On Kawara (whose works are installed in galleries near *You see I am here after all* at Dia:Beacon): for his extended project *I Got Up* (1968–79), Kawara consistently selected a postcard from the city in which he slept the previous night, stamped on it the time at which he arose in the morning, and mailed it to a friend or professional associate. With the cards arranged in grids and displayed with both rectos and versos visible, this project, like many others in his oeuvre, betrays an existential approach. The precise place and time in which he first engaged the world on a specific day are recorded by means of three features integral to the postcard in its role as witness: the banal, often stereotypical, image that identifies the city in which he spent the night; the postmark recording the date; and personal news delivered in the form of a handwritten message.

12. Leonard did not see herself as a collector in the vein of, say, Walker Evans, for whom aesthetic and connoisseurial questions were paramount. (Parts of Evans’s vast postcard collection were exhibited in “Walker Evans and the Picture Postcard,” on view from February 3 to May 25, 2009, in the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Howard Gilman Gallery.) Far from a collection *per se*, Leonard’s trove of cards is simply the raw material out of which her project was constructed, as may be gauged from her likening the process of acquiring them to “going to Pearl Paint and getting a tube of paint.” (Zoe Leonard, Conversation with Lynne Cooke, Dia:Beacon, New York, February 22, 2009.)

13. Leonard, interview by Blume, p. 12.

14. The notion of an archive not only connotes physical sites, like libraries and museums, but also encompasses cultural legacies and discursive formations within which collected material is framed. Even as it reevaluates the mundane, an archive is a repository in the realm of high culture, a theoretical construct that involves historical consciousness and comparative studies of and ongoing debates about material artifacts.

15. Altogether there are three different realizations of this work: the installation comprising 412 C-prints in twenty-five chapters, in an edition of three; the book including eighty plates; and the series of forty dye-transfer prints, in an edition of six, selected from the larger corpus of images.

16. Roger M. Buergel and Ruth Noack, “Documenta 12: 100 Days of Art in Kassel,” accessed September 2, 2010, <http://documenta.de/ausstellung.html?&L=1>.

17. Broadly speaking, maps may be divided into two kinds: those that impart information in instrumental terms and those that are exegetical and visionary. This distinction is embodied, for example, in the difference between the various forms of seafaring charts, including rutters, coastal pilots, and *derroteros* (guides to navigate coastal waters), and terrestrial globes and portolani, which form the basis of Leonard’s presentation at the Hispanic Society. Rather than tools for discovering new territories, rutters and *derroteros* contain images of landmarks, which sailors used to figure out where they were positioned.

18. “Derrotero” occupied three galleries at the Hispanic Society. *Analogue* was placed in the largest space, and the historical material from the society’s collection was installed in rooms adjacent to each other.

19. Leonard, interview by Blume, p. 12.

20. Richard Serra, "Rigging," in *Writings/Interviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 98.

21. Richard Serra, interview by Liza Bear, in *ibid.*, p. 36.

22. Serra, "Rigging," p. 100.

23. Since direct engagement is a prerequisite of all Serra's sculpture, he not surprisingly deems all forms of reproductive media inadequate means to experience his works. The photographs that he publishes, straightforward black-and-white renderings, are no more than rudimentary documents; sometimes, as with these works, they are taken from the air, then overdrawn so as to underline the positions of the forms. For him, this secondary material is confined to catalogues and publications: it has no place in the circuit of museum and gallery display.

24. "Since it's not made from a recognizable vantage point, it is abstract (that is, a series of lines). But since it was made to be read—to be applied to the world—it is representational," she argues. (Leonard, conversation with the author, September 12, 2010.)

25. Leonard, Conversation with Lynne Cooke, February 22, 2009. Leonard did not fully preconceive her work before installing it at Dia:Beacon. In large part, it took on its form in situ, as she studied each intervention in relation to its impact on the gallery space as well as its architecture.

26. *Ibid.* Summing up how the context had affected her thinking, she concluded, "What I really appreciate in the collection expanded." Among the "discoveries" that she made while working on site, she singled out not only *Six Gray Mirrors* and *Consequence* but also On Kawara's Today series, in which history and biography, the public and personal, are seamlessly interwoven, and Andy Warhol's *Shadows* (1978–79), which were made through a process of screenprinting a photographically based image onto fields of monochrome color applied to the canvas by hand.

27. Leonard, interview by Blume, p. 12.

28. From "aerials" Leonard turned directly to museums as sources for her images. If the aerials foregrounded points of view—that is, questions of observation in the broadest sense—then it was, for her, an easy segue to question how things are ordered and classified: "how in the past we have looked at, organized, and tried to understand the world." (Leonard, conversation with the author, September 12, 2010.)

29. The vintage cards in *You see I am here after all* were likely produced before the 1980s, and most were manufactured much earlier in the century. Thus, the period of their production ends about the time that much of the production of the art in Dia's collection was completed.

30. Today, a visitor to Niagara who wanted to attest to her presence would more likely send an image that she had taken on her iPhone of her silhouette against the raging cascades.

Within seconds it could reach her recipient, whom she could then call in a further gesture of confirmation. Almost redundant in this self-servicing multimedia age, postcards have all but disappeared from tourist stores at Niagara.

31. For the older generation of artists discussed here (Andy Warhol, too), who emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, a combination of manual and mechanical technologies was often fundamental to a work's realization: industrial fabrication was generally in service of the customized.

32. For a history of Niagara's decline from a transcendent high-cultural referent to a vulgarized mass-market icon, see Ginger Strand, *Inventing Niagara: Beauty, Power, and Lies* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008). "Here's what I learned," the jaundiced author concludes, "Niagara Falls as a natural wonder does not exist anymore" (p. 5).

33. If I term this "feminist," it is not in a polemical sense (as perhaps could be said in relation to, for example, the work Leonard exhibited in Documenta 9 in 1992, in which she interspersed female crotch shots among the eighteenth-century paintings). I instead refer to issues first trenchantly explored in feminist (and later queer) studies relating to the seer and the seen. At a fundamental level, the politics of seeing remain informed by feminist discourse.

34. See Lynne Cooke, "Never No More No Literature?" in *Dia:Beacon*, ed. Lynne Cooke and Michael Govan (New York: Dia Art Foundation, 2003), pp. 46–73.