

YOU SEE I AM HERE AFTER ALL

ZOE LEONARD

Dia Art Foundation, New York

Distributed by Yale University Press,
New Haven and London

2010

CURVING INTO A STRAIGHT LINE

Ann Reynolds

The roar of Niagara is in my ears.

The horizon line is a simple visual fiction. It traces a limit or edge of perception rather than the actual physical terms of what is seen, which is the curving away of the earth's surface. As a two-dimensional representational convention, this line divides the space of representation to indicate a separation between spatial realms, land and sky or sky and water, and to physically and perceptually orient the viewer in relation to this space—what constitutes its top, its bottom, and, by default, its left and right—and, by extension, correlatively, the space in the real world that it represents. In cartography, lines describe the borders between states, counties, countries, and continents and between land and bodies of water in relation to the curved longitudinal and latitudinal lines generated by the four cardinal points—north, south, east, and west—and their axial relationships across the globe. Because most flat maps are oriented so that left equals west, right equals east, top equals north, and bottom equals south, and because the curve of longitudinal and latitudinal lines becomes negligible in such maps at most scales, these two sets of lines constitute a grid of straight horizontal and vertical lines in most cartographic contexts. Like the horizon line, they inform and orient perception and thus bodies in space. But, unlike the horizon line, they play little to no role in a viewer's perception of the earth, since, being abstract constructs to begin with, they exist only on the surface of maps and globes.

Photography and film can produce their own, quite simple illusions of a curved reality straightened into a fictional line, and panoramic photography and movie-camera tracking shots, in particular, can produce still and moving versions of the same type of lines. Robert Smithson, for example, used a movie camera to steadily trace the curve of a sandy embankment surrounding a body of water at the site of his 1971 earthwork *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill*, while keeping the camera's lens parallel to and at a consistent distance from this curved embankment. The resulting image, when projected, is of an embankment that appears to have no curve at all.¹ In orchestrating his camera's movements in relation to the bank's own physical terms, Smithson reiterates one of the fundamental terms—and contradictions—of film: that it consists of a thin celluloid strip of individual still images that vertically unspools off a circular reel and then behind the lens of a camera or a projector to produce a flat, often still, yet continuously moving horizontal image, only to respool back onto a circular reel once again. This thin strip measures out space and time, bit by bit, second by second, frame by frame, each discrete image identical or almost identical to the previous one, yet none of these distinctions are perceptible except when an editor's splice abruptly terminates one sequence and conjoins it to another. When projected, this moving image can appear to be seamlessly continuous and complete, or conversely it can suggest fragmentation or incompleteness by calling attention to the abstract

limits of its framing edge and to a reality that might exist just beyond this edge. These conditions and the experiences that they promote are built into the making and viewing of most films. They are commonplace conventions, just like the horizon line or cartographic longitudinal or latitudinal lines.

The rotation and translation of curves into straight lines is a central formal element of Zoe Leonard's *You see I am here after all* (2008). To map the roughly southwest to northeast coordinates of the cartographic axis from the American Falls to the Horseshoe Falls at Niagara on to a long exhibition wall at Dia:Beacon, Leonard rotated this axis approximately 135 degrees so that it would line up with the east-west axis of this wall. She then centered this rotated axis line on the wall, approximately halfway between the floor and the ceiling. Conceiving the waterline of the falls' topography as superimposed on this axis line, Leonard arranged groupings of vintage photographic-postcard views of specific sites that are geographically situated along the panoramic arc from the American Falls to the Horseshoe Falls. In the process, she transformed the irregular, curving waterline of the actual topography at the site into a relatively straight line running left to right along the center of the museum wall.² Based on their horizontal or vertical formats, the images in the postcards set on this line share roughly the same ratio of sky to landscape or waterscape, even as the physical location from which each image was photographed shifts slightly to the north and east from one group of images to the next. Leonard grouped other sets of images below, above, or detached from, yet arranged parallel to, this line. These postcards share points of view that are for the most part somewhat higher or lower than the one represented in the images arranged along the first or primary line, even if their subject is the same. Thus two of the fundamental yet loosely organizing spatial principles that guided Leonard's postcard arrangement were the position of the image's referent along a continuous horizon or waterline at the site and the point of view embodied by each image along this line in relation to a second set of vertical axes of sight lines above, at eye level with, or from below the same location along the falls. Together these two sets of axes and the arrangements of the fairly uniform rectangular cards that they dictate constitute a grid that fills significant sections of the exhibition wall.

All of the procedures and many of the organizing principles that Leonard used come into play when transforming any physical site into a coherent two-dimensional picture, map, or filmstrip, no matter how limited or expansive, but here, because she has used ready-made photographic images to map out her picture, her actions reiterate the procedures used to make these images in the first place: rotating, dividing, flattening, fragmenting, and temporally fixing the referent. And because Leonard included multiple postcard images to represent most of the sections and points of view along the waterlines and sight lines of her chosen subject, her resulting picture does not possess the spatial, visual, or temporal coherence of any one of the individual images that it contains. As it is

a picture constituted by numerous preexisting pictures, it is overdetermined and, as a result, a bit disorienting for the viewer.

Leonard's work makes more sense as a potential archive of the pictorial conventions and photographic technologies used to represent Niagara over time as well as the relative, and historically fluctuating, popularity of particular locations and points of view. The fact that her waterline and sight lines become thick at numerous places with hundreds of identical or relatively similar postcards depicting the same location and point of view stacked up above the center line, or arranged in numerous, equally neat horizontal rows below it, indicates such popularity. Within some of these groupings, Leonard also includes images that, although taken from the same point of view, were not taken at the same point in time or using the same photographic and printing technologies. For example, some images possess the glossy, oversaturated hues of midcentury color photography, and others are black-and-white and hand colored. Leonard mixes these different types of images together within her groupings of shared points of view to create a rich visual staccato of colors and textures. Such variety contrasts with other sections in which she offers a more limited range of images, in some cases one type, suggesting that this particular point of view was produced or popular during a more limited period of time.

At other points along the exhibition wall, Leonard's line thins out to two or three horizontal rows of four or five cards each, suggesting that some locations have been much less frequently represented in postcards. And without postcards to depict them, some segments of the waterline or horizon line are not represented pictorially at all. Leonard marks their absence as images, yet presence as part of the spatial continuum of the panoramic arc or the archival grid of possible categories, with passages of blank white wall, maintaining the conceit of the work as both a picture and an archive.

Both as a picture and as an archive, Leonard's work is necessarily incomplete. It does not provide a comprehensive image of the entire waterline or horizon line that one might see in an aerial photograph, a film, or a map, or that one might experience, but that few ever do, walking the entire length of the site, along the river's edge opposite the falls. Nor does it offer examples of every type of postcard image of Niagara Falls ever made. But the image that results from her combination of these two systems—pictorial and archival—underscores the fact that we see Niagara in part and in pieces and at a variety of different densities and paces at Dia:Beacon, not just because Leonard may want us to in this particular situation but because we have always been encouraged to see it this way. As mass-produced found objects, her postcards already document some of the preferred ways in which Niagara Falls has been transformed into a set of images and points of view over time. In her effort to incorporate so many different preexisting images of the falls into a grand picture, a map, and an extensive archive of close to four thousand postcards, the differences among these

postcards, and the contradictions and falsifications inherent to the conventional representational procedures used to produce them, also become more readily apparent.⁷ As a result, the massive "picture archive" that we see at Dia appears to be both more true, complete, and recognizable, as a collection of indexical images of the site, *and* more of an incomplete fiction, as a collection of the strange fragments and abstract conventions that produce a set of iconic images, than any of the individual postcards contained in this "picture archive." And it is redundantly so—a reiteration of a number of different spatial and temporal realities and fictions, indexes and icons, reorientations and disorientations, totalities and fragments, excesses and absences, all at once. It seems that to picture or to archive something is to make it strange and yet, paradoxically, strangely familiar at the same time.

In fact, that Leonard's organizing procedures produce strange and unfamiliar visual effects also depends on the fact that the imagery in the individual postcards is immediately recognizable and familiar, if not in its specificity as a set of iconic images of "Niagara Falls," then simply as a generic group of landscape images. Through repetition and, in some instances, because of their placement high on the wall and thus at a greater distance from the viewer, individual images of sheets of falling water, clouds, and other natural formations tend to anthropomorphize into body parts or begin to suggest man-made objects such as massive billowing curtains or thick slabs of luminous pastel icing. Variations in the hand coloring of the same photographic image in multiple cards enhance such readings; cumulus clouds, for instance, come to resemble monstrous gloved hands hovering over the landscape. Small, previously unremarkable elements—such as broken branches, umbrellas, or piles of rocks—become points of focus or seem oddly significant. Slightly anomalous images within a large grouping read as mistakes, underscoring the conventionality of their surrounding images. Again, Leonard asks us to consider the nature of the relationship between the particular and the general and, ultimately, between the indexical and the merely conventionally familiar. Through the experience of making these comparisons and witnessing these transformations, some occurring within the groupings of the same or similar images, some occurring because of the repetition and location of the cards, we are reminded of how Niagara Falls' status as an image and an icon has shaped the way that it has been perceived: it is recognized but often not truly seen. Embedded in this recognition is a tendency toward pathetic fallacy, rich with emotional attachments, associations, and expectations.

The presence of mass-produced multiples and the individual differences among them also acts as a reminder that most of Leonard's cards functioned or at least were intended to function as objects of social exchange, to be purchased by individuals and sent to other individuals as personal mementos or souvenirs. This function and its material evidence—the idiosyncratic or handmade qualities of some of the hand-painted images, a few of them sprinkled with glitter or

altered in other ways by their senders; postmarks and messages handwritten on top of the postcard images; and even the creases, stains, tears, and other unique marks on the postcards' surfaces—underscore the fact that, in addition to being collected and stored over time under varying conditions, many of these cards have also circulated through the mail at widely different points in time, connecting individuals with images and messages through a largely unknowable network of locations and temporalities. When referred to in the postcard messages, these locations and temporalities can be somewhat disorienting or incongruous in relation to the locations depicted in the postcard images. On top of an image of Horseshoe Falls, someone writes: "Dear Cousin Elizabeth, I am at Coney Island today. With love..." On another, slightly different image of the same location, signed C. W., the message reads: "Hello Mildred,—can't write you today. Will sometime the last of the week. Have been up to Jen's all day. Been eating most of the time, as usual." Such messages call attention to the fact that many of their authors have put these postcards to uses that were not predicated on the images on them or even on the locations where the cards were originally purchased. They simply functioned as relatively inexpensive and efficient forms of personal communication.

As mass-produced objects, Leonard's postcards are the products of a repeated set of conventional processes whose methods and social and economic intentions are directly confessed through the way that they are constituted as objects and as images. Her production of yet another pictorial image and archive out of these individual image-objects underscores, even if on the abstract level of procedural conventions, all of these conditions. But, in choosing to work with these objects, many of which have already been put to personal use by others, she has also had to embrace the lingering effects of these earlier uses that are not uniformly conventional and that call attention to other histories, locations, and sets of social relations and their lingering emotional affects. So her archive does not just track the ways in which Niagara has been depicted and the relative popularity of these depictions; it is an archive of personal use of and response to these depictions, some familiar and others unexpected, including Leonard's own.

Leonard's use began with her decisions about which postcards to include and how to display them at Dia:Beacon. Although her use of established cartographic and pictorial conventions and ready-made image types guided her translation of one site into another and her creation of her picture archive, the representation of Niagara that she produces, as already noted, is anything but straightforward. Even if one appreciates how Leonard has rotated and translated the cartographic and topographic terms of her subject, a clear sense of the specifics of these transformations requires an unlikely familiarity with these cartographic terms and the subtly changing details of the actual topography of the falls from the late nineteenth through the late twentieth century, the period when the postcards included in the installation were produced. While Leonard drew from a variety

of documentary and historical sources and has visited the site, her use of the postcards directs comparisons away from the "reality" or specificity of the site as a physical location along the Niagara River and toward comparisons between individual images or image types, since the terms of her articulation of the falls' waterlines and sight lines were set by the cards that she already owned or could collect. Because Leonard also needed to adapt the site's cartographic and topographical terms and the pictorial conventions that she used to the specific spatial terms of the exhibition space, these latter terms, as opposed to the site's, become the primary points of reference. And finally there are Leonard's choices of how many cards should constitute a group, where to place individual cards within that group, and which cards possessing handwritten messages to include. These choices are the ones that create most of the strange and beautiful visual effects and that remind spectators of the fact that the cards can, and already have been, put to use in many different ways. Now Leonard uses them once again, collecting, selecting, and arranging them to produce an individual response from within—or perhaps, more accurately, in spite of—the regularizing conventions of cartography, picture making, archiving, and mass production.

Leonard conveys her message on three registers: through the abstract grid consisting of the horizontal and vertical lines of geometric yet individual cards that her archive of Niagara produces; through the visual fluctuation between icon and index produced by the multiplicity and arrangements of these individual postcard images that her picture of Niagara produces; and through the numerous spatial, temporal, social, and emotional relationships generated by countless others who purchased, inscribed, sent, or collected these cards. Each of these registers, from the generically abstract to the idiosyncratically personal, describes a relationship between form and content, regardless of whether or not this relationship is made clear in each case. In combining and shaping these descriptions for her own use, Leonard directly acknowledges and exploits the actively signifying relationship between the grid of horizontal and vertical lines and the specific materials that they orient, fragment, repeat, contain, or fail to contain.

In its incorporation of representational images of an iconic North American site that possess evidence of individual use and personal exchange, *You see I am here after all* also invites a deeper exploration of how the grid can function as an explicit or implicit template for understanding the articulation of content through landscape. In cinema, for example, the grid functions implicitly as an orienting device through which the content of the image, whether iconic or mundane, is animated. In the 1953 Hollywood film *Niagara*, Marilyn Monroe is identified with the falls in a number of different ways that echo contemporaneous approaches to the representation of women and that now resonate with Leonard's use of rotation and horizontality. In his film *Marilyn Times Five* (1968–73), made from footage shot in the late 1940s, Bruce Conner also uses the

rotation, fragmentation, and horizontality of a woman's body to underscore her status as an object of desire that is both present and absent, abstract and real. In considering this broader set of visual references, all linked to Leonard's installation through their iconic subjects and the techniques used to represent them, the legacy, scope, ambition, and sexual politics of Leonard's "picture archive" and the unique terms of her message can be more fully appreciated. "Curving into a straight line" then is at once a description of and a metaphor for the process of translating perceptions or conceptions of reality into abstractions or fictions, be they individual or generic.

WHEN A WOMAN ROLLS OVER

Does this remind you of the past?

In a short article titled "Men Rate Beauty," which appeared in *Look* magazine on January 30, 1950, the association of beauty with women and an evaluation process focused on discrete body parts generate a diagrammatic grid of dotted red lines superimposed over a black-and-white photograph of a woman. This woman, an unidentified model in a chic dark cocktail dress, rotates her torso toward the camera but directs her gaze over her left shoulder; her right knee rests on the seat of a chair while her left leg stretches out for balance. This somewhat awkward position results in a two-dimensional, three-quarter-view image that fills the left-hand page of the two-page spread of the article. The dotted grid consists of a system of parallel and perpendicular lines and text labels, which identify several specific body parts: hair, eyes, mouth, hands, and feet.

On the facing page, five men respond to a slightly different type of question—"What do you notice first about a woman?"—from that implied by the article's title by holding up two-dimensional cutout fragments of the photographic image, which roughly correspond to body parts delineated by sections of the grid. One respondent, grasping a cutout



"Men Rate Beauty: Five Men Look at Women in Five Different Ways," published in Look, January 30, 1950.

of the image's torso, calls attention to the absence of labels for significant portions of the image's body—breasts, waist, hips, and legs—by announcing, "I'm strictly a chest man myself... and consider myself an expert in that department," thus revealing the need for euphemisms because of the unavoidable association between the fragmentation of the female body and sexually charged fetishization. The accompanying text underscores the conventionality of substituting fetishized parts for wholes and its significance for the presumably female readers

of the article: "Five men look at women in five different ways . . . it could happen to you. . . . Women are made of a certain amount of flesh. . . . But when each one [of the five men] casts a connoisseur's critical eye upon a woman, it usually comes to rest on his own favorite focal point."

Although "Men Rate Beauty" is not strictly an advertisement, it possesses most of the qualities that Marshall McLuhan attributes to contemporaneous advertisements for products that are intended to enhance a woman's personal appearance. Advertising, according to McLuhan, is based on "content-producing" forms, which depend on a tendency to look for content or understand form as content rather than appreciating form on its own terms or as something that shapes content. In his classic 1951 text *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man*, McLuhan notes that the straight line or grid, when drawn across images of individual women or used to organize several women into a row, "form[s] a pattern which recurs in our world with regularity." He offers two advertisements, one for Nature's Rival girdles and the other for Ivory Flakes laundry soap, as examples of this ubiquitous pattern. One shapes the content of the advertisement copy, "Four figures—all different, but with one common factor. . . the waist line!" with a gauzy geometric frame that highlights the mechanized similarities between four female torsos while minimizing attention to their heads and lower legs and feet. Because of a similarly flattened, generalized, X-ray view of the left side of the female figure in the Ivory Flakes advertisement, McLuhan responds to the question posed by its copy, "What makes a gal a good number?" with the rejoinder "[by] simply 'looking like a number of other gals.'" McLuhan attributes the streamlined mechanization of the female body, viewed as an assembly of almost identical, replaceable parts, in both of these advertisements to a larger social condition and set of shared desires: "Just as success and personality know-how consist of recipes and formulas for reducing everybody to the same pattern, we seem to demand, in harmony with this principle, that love goddesses be all alike. Perhaps the impulse behind this self-defeating process is the craving for a power thrill that comes from identity with a huge, anonymous crowd. The craving for intense individuality and attention merges with the opposite extreme of security through uniformity."⁴ Such a balancing act between the uniquely individual and the generically uniform generates anxiety and a certain amount of instability but also some significant elisions or displacements. Ready-made forms threaten to subsume individual iterations, and as a result, to quote another 1950s advertisement for undergarments, "Your most important line is never spoken."⁵ What is left unsaid, the unique curve of each female body from the waist to the midthigh, is presumably communicated—and uniformly shaped—by standardized girdle lines. No words are necessary.

In the film *Niagara*, the first sequence of shots of Marilyn Monroe establishes a purely formal association between her character, Rose, and the falls, since she never speaks. In the first shot, we see Monroe lying on her back in

bed smoking; on hearing her husband's key in the door to their cabin, she puts her cigarette out, quickly rolls over onto her side with her back to the camera—and to the door of the cabin—and pretends to be asleep. This sequence is immediately followed by a wider reverse shot of Monroe, now facing the camera, eyes closed, her body extending almost the full width of the lower portion of frame. The white bedsheets wrap and fall around her apparently naked body, accentuating her curvaceous horizontality. At the end of this scene, once she has confirmed that her husband, George, played by Joseph Cotten, is asleep on his bed, she quickly rolls over again, and a tight framing shot of her upper body, the back of her head a tumult of platinum-blond curls, slowly fades to a wide, bird's-eye-view, stationary-camera shot of the American Falls and the Horseshoe Falls, establishing a direct visual analogy between her body and the landscape of Niagara.

The camera then slowly pans from right to left, remaining parallel to the distant horizon line beyond the waterline of the falls until it reaches a bell tower on the Canadian side of the Niagara River.⁶ A similar shot of the falls follows the final, also horizontal, image of Monroe in the film. This time she lies on her back, since her character, Rose, has been strangled to death by George. Unlike the initial panning shot of the falls, which is filled with moving cars and pedestrians on the street and walkway bordering the river's edge opposite the falls, this second shot is almost completely devoid of movement. A single, barely perceptible moving figure eventually appears at the periphery of the frame: a man on a bicycle, coming to unlock the building in which George has been accidentally trapped overnight after the murder. The contrast between movement and relative stillness in these two, otherwise similar shots underscores the initial identification between the falls and a horizontal Rose but also supports a significant if subtle distinction. No longer a "sleeping" landscape, she is literally a still life.

Vertical and horizontal orientations or image formats are traditionally associated with specific types of subjects to such a degree that these subjects are often assumed to be equivalent to a particular orientational format. Portraiture, for example, usually assumes verticality, and landscape or still life assumes horizontality. Therefore, a physical shift from one orientation to another, say vertical to horizontal, could be understood as a transformation of not only physical positioning but also subject matter. Descriptive phrases such as "woman as landscape" or "woman as still life"—*la grande horizontale* is relevant here as well—can be and have been used to acknowledge the subsuming of one subject matter by another that occurs in such rotated images, but these phrases and the images to which they refer also connote an inevitable transformation of content. For example, the model in the "Men Rate Beauty" article and Monroe in *Niagara* rotate their bodies to physically accommodate visual analogies or systems of meaning that subsume their individual identities within more abstract values or generalized ideas. The trailer for *Niagara* states quite graphically and explicitly the central analogies

Poster advertising
the film *NIAGARA*,
directed by Henry
Hathaway, 1953.



that the film hopes to draw between the falls and Monroe through its copy: "Niagara and Marilyn Monroe: the two most electrifying sights in the world!" and a poster for the film concretizes this association

by representing Monroe's reclining body as a horizontal supplement to the lip of the falls, its curves simultaneously sheathed and shaped by the rushing water that folds over and around them, mimicking the way in which the sheets wrap around her body in the film.⁷ Orientation and rotation, then, are not just conventional representational formats or procedures; they are also conventional modes of signification. They are often, to use McLuhan's phrase, "content-producing."

But it is at the very edge of perception that individual women such as Monroe or even the anonymous model in the "Men Rate Beauty" essay come to occupy, both physically and conceptually, such generalized or even spectacular "landscape" or "still life" positions; either the usually awkward transformation process is visually occluded, or, if captured in a moving image, it occurs so rapidly that it is not easily perceived or even meant to be consciously grasped. As already stated, to map the waterline of the falls on to the long exhibition wall at Dia:Beacon, Leonard needed to rotate it approximately 135 degrees and translate it, in spite of the vertical stacking of numerous cards at many points along this line, into a predominantly horizontal image. Because of the visual logic of such a conventional landscape orientation, however, the specifics of this cartographic adjustment are not immediately obvious. In addition, although her chosen postcards consist of roughly equivalent numbers of horizontal and vertical formats, depending on the point of view or site that they reflect, the overarching horizontality of the exhibition wall and of the grid Leonard creates with the cards and the suggested horizontal continuity of the waterline render the constant rotations from vertical to horizontal that occur throughout the work almost imperceptible, or at least secondary to the organizational unity of the overall work. A spectator must consciously choose to consider or focus on these two instances of rotation: from site to exhibition and from vertical to horizontal images. The work itself does not immediately draw attention to them or to their potentially shifting signifying effects. Like those of Monroe in *Niagara*, Leonard's rotations produce conventional if not spectacular fictions, even if the overt dependence of these significations on the more banal physical mechanics that produced them remains tenuous at best. Yet evidence of such transformations is there, even if it is embodied in seemingly unrelated, strange visual effects. Discovering and isolating these effects is one way to grasp how these fictions are produced and how they signify.

She rapidly and repeatedly rolls over onto her back, over and over and over again, from what appears to have been a more vertical, possibly seated position on the floor. This action, captured in one shot by a stationary camera, provided a fluid transition from one classic pinup pose to another in the original film. Here, however, it becomes the very point of the sequence of cinematic images: an awkward and almost indecipherable series of ambiguous forms and gestures that takes on a life of its own and, after seven repetitions, finally resolves into a still image of the reclining female nude, eyes closed, head tipped slightly back, and arms stretched out and crossed above and behind her. This sequence is part of the second section of Conner's *Marilyn Times Five*. The film consists of found footage of a 1948 black-and-white soft-core porn film titled *The Apple-Knockers and the Coke*, starring Arline Hunter, a popular Marilyn Monroe look-alike from the time, which Conner edited into five sections, approximately equivalent in length. The length of each of these sections is roughly determined by the duration of the accompanying soundtrack: Monroe singing "I'm Through with Love" from the 1959 film *Some Like It Hot*.⁸

Each of the five sections contains at least one set of multiple repetitions of a brief sequence from the original film footage, and each of these repetitions produces slightly different effects by drawing out these sequences so that the camera or the model's originally less perceptible transformative actions or gestures are revealed, attenuated, or emphasized. By catching and repeating the awkward turn of Hunter's body in section 2, Conner renders visible images and forms that were previously unnoticeable, unseen, or suppressed by the smooth, rapid forward movement of this footage when it was part of the original film. The strange, beautiful, and equally unsightly forms that, as with some of the images in Leonard's postcards, take on a life of their own in this sequence provide a sense of what it takes to turn something—or someone—into a conventionalized image and temporarily fix that image, by extending and endlessly duplicating the processes that originally produced it. Conner, like Leonard, temporarily transforms his found images of an icon—or in Conner's case, a proxy for an icon—into an awkward, unfamiliar series of repeated, abstract, yet still indexical shapes, an anonymous and unfamiliar landscape of forms and mechanical gestures, only to temporarily reconstitute it as icon in order to begin the unraveling process once again.⁹

In her essay "The Horizontal Walk: Marilyn Monroe, CinemaScope, and Sexuality," which includes a brief discussion of Conner's *Marilyn Times Five*, Lisa Cohen points out how the critical rhetoric surrounding the emphatically horizontal, wide-screen technology of CinemaScope described a similar, seemingly paradoxical relationship between realism and spectacle and an analogous spectatorial experience of closeness to and distance from the images that this technology produced.¹⁰ Monroe, more than any other star, was identified with CinemaScope. She, along with Lauren Bacall and Betty Grable, starred in *How*

Film still from
Bruce Conner's
MARILYN TIMES
FIVE, 1968-73.



to *Marry a Millionaire*, the first movie made entirely with this technology, and the "Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend" number from *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* was an early test of its potential.¹¹ Cohen notes that both Twentieth Century Fox and trade-paper writers promoted CinemaScope as a process that could offer an intimacy and realism that

the cinema had never possessed before and, at the same time, asserted that it provided something bigger, better, and more fabulous than life itself.¹² Such claims were perfectly in sync with what Cohen describes as Monroe's own embeddedness both in "a discourse of realism, which renders her familiar and attainable ... and in a discourse of glamour, which positions her as spectacular and remote." And these qualities directly shaped the terms of Monroe's fans' experience of her: "the fan exists on an equally shifting ground, the instability of which defines the problem of knowledge about a (this) star: we want to get close and know everything; we want to stay distant and remain in awe."¹³

Leonard may be more subtle than Conner in her deconstruction of an equally iconic subject and the conventions that produce it, but she does offer Niagara both as a set of relatively realistic photographic images and as a spectacle, and she encourages at least two somewhat contradictory experiences: a desire to stand back and take in the overall grandeur of the spectacle and a desire to move in extremely close to discover the intimate details of the work. This set of paradoxical experiences can, at moments, coalesce somewhere in between the two; when perceived from a middle distance, the images on the postcards can lose their representational coherence and melt into abstract or even anthropomorphized images. Perhaps the perceptual instability that surfaces here is in part a result of the largely imperceptible rotations of the image(s) or, at the very least, an inability on the part of the viewer to reconcile two presumably different signifying structures: horizontal and vertical, iconic and indexical, fictional and real, landscape and figure.¹⁴

PRESUMED ABSENCE

You see I am here after all.

Leonard's title, *You see I am here after all*, asserts presence where absence is presumed. She adopts this phrase from a handwritten and signed message on the front of a black-and-white postcard image of the brink of the American Falls. The author of this message, "Lulu," is the presumably absent person. Nothing else can be known about this author, at least in this context, but the message

and its accompanying date provide a set of the simple, inevitable contradictions inherent to most postcard messages: I insist on my presence through a postcard message that speaks in my absence; I am still speaking of my presence when the date on which I am stating that I am doing so, September 20, 1906, is now more than one hundred years in the past.¹⁵ In *About Looking*, John Berger observes: "The present tense of the verb *to be* refers only to the present; but nevertheless, with the first person singular in front of it, it absorbs the past which is inseparable from the pronoun. *I am* includes all that has made me so. It is more than a statement of immediate fact: it is already an explanation, a justification, a demand—it is already autobiographical."¹⁶ Similarly, "I am here after all" here could be understood to comprise all that came before and to insist on an immediate and ongoing presence in the face of bodily absence, a presence with a past and a presence now in the past but maintaining a continuity between all these states through the material presence of text and image. Such an enunciative statement—and the speaking subject, the place from which she speaks, as well as the location depicted in the postcard image, even if the speaker's "here" did



Film still from
Bruce Conner's
MARILYN TIMES
FIVE, 1968–73.

not originally refer to the brink of the American Falls—cannot be configured in terms of a simple set of spatial axes or temporal lines, since all three elements of this statement are simultaneously present and absent and existed and continue to exist in different locations or points in time. These patterns of presence and absence and of contrasting temporalities and locations shape the emotional content of

Leonard's work and, perhaps indirectly, her own autobiographical presence or intent. She is here after all, when perhaps her presence is unexpected. The terms and workings of this shaping of affect through shifting and multiple relationships between space and time can best be understood through analogies to different spectatorial experiences of film.

The second section of Conner's *Marilyn Times Five* begins with the disembodied voice of Monroe singing "I'm Through with Love." The screen is black, yet the soundtrack prompts the expectation of an image, which soon materializes in the footage of Hunter.¹⁷ Although suggested through Hunter's striking resemblance to the star, Monroe herself continues to be visually absent, and her absence is continuously underscored by the nondiegetic sound of her voice and the regular reappearance of sections of black leader or extradiegetic shots of seemingly empty, white spaces or backdrops above, behind, or to either side of Hunter's body. These two visual interruptions—one dark, the other light—suggest two types of absences, a blacking out or voiding of Hunter's image and a turning away from it. In both cases, however, Hunter's body and, by extension, the body of the absent subject, Monroe, remain proximate. And because the

duration of the soundtrack remains constant in each of the five sequences, even though it sometimes precedes or follows the initial appearance of the footage of Hunter in each section and the ratio of black leader or empty shots to shots containing images of Hunter varies in each sequence, the absences, both visual and auditory, become increasingly defined in relation to each presence, building up a pattern of anticipation and momentary gratification of that anticipation that is never fully resolved.

Such a structuring pattern of absence and presence, when accompanied by a concomitant emotional arc of pathos and action or loss and return, is endemic to what Linda Williams calls the melodramatic mode of American "moving pictures." Williams claims that what is often lost and then recovered in such pictures is a "space of innocence," which is often represented by rural landscapes or homes. However, she notes, "Even if this space is not literally represented, . . . the most enduring forms of the mode are often suffused with nostalgia for a virtuous place that we like to think we once possessed, whether in childhood or the distant past of the nation."¹⁸ The rhythmic dialectic of pathos and action in melodramatic films creates the structures of feeling that, according to Williams, "animate the form" by mixing a fear of loss with the suspense of action, through a consistent dialectic tension between "too late" and "in the nick of time."¹⁹ This effect is often created through the parallel montage of a rapid succession of repeated shots of the victim's dangerous plight and the rescuer's efforts to reach her or him. Although the action within each shot feels quick, the duration of the event is drawn out through the repetition and montage, resulting in what Williams calls melodrama's "teasing delay of the forward-moving march of time." This pacing, when "linked with melodrama's larger impulse to reverse time, to return to the time of origins and the space of innocence that can musically be felt in terms of patterns of anticipation and return," overrides any apparent, more conventional, linear narrative action in the film.²⁰

The lyrics of "I'm Through with Love" rehearse a similar emotional structure of initial innocence and irreparable loss: "Why did you lead me to think you could care? You didn't need me, for you had your share of slaves around you to hound you and swear with deep emotion and devotion to you. Good-bye to spring and all it meant to me. It can never bring the thing that used to be. For I must have you or no one, and so I'm through with love." In its original cinematic context in *Some Like It Hot*, Tony Curtis's character, Joe, dressed in drag as Josephine, overhears this song being sung by Monroe's character, Sugar. Her disembodied voice draws him into the ballroom where she sings, accompanied by an orchestra, to a room filled with dancing couples. When she finishes singing, Josephine rushes onstage and embraces and kisses her. The result is a potentially incongruous or "unfamiliar" image of two women passionately kissing, even though the audience knows that one of the women is, in fact, a man. Sugar expresses astonishment and asks, "Josephine?" Josephine wipes the tears

from her face and says: "None of that, Sugar. No guy's worth it." Sugar then repeats the name Josephine again and smiles, suggesting, perhaps, that she has recognized who Josephine really is. Almost simultaneously, another character in the room identifies Josephine as "no dame" as she/he tries to escape, but what is also implied through Sugar's gestures, facial expression, intonation, and lyrics is the fact that what she presumed was lost was not necessarily a man but a particular emotion, love, which the return of Josephine/Joe embodies.

This brief sequence from *Some Like It Hot* interrupts or ultimately contributes to the conventional narrative pattern of Hollywood romantic comedies, which traditionally culminate in the promised or actual union of the heterosexual couple, depending on how this sequence is read and, more important, how it is viewed. Through her conception of "delaying cinema," Laura Mulvey describes how the slowing down of the forward movement of narrative in a film instigates a "displacement of emotion from character to cinematic language."²¹ Melodramatic films, in particular, signal such displacements through what Mulvey calls "privileged moments" or "tableaux" within the *mise-en-scène* that may be difficult to observe consciously when watching them in a theater. But on VHS or DVD, she notes, "A segment extracted from the flow of narrative bears witness to the pull towards tableaux that has always been there in cinema.... It is easier to perceive the lack of smoothness that has always been an aspect of film narrative, its resistance to that forward movement to which it has always been tied by the movement of celluloid through projector."²² In representing emotion as a return, not just of a character but also of the diegetic unity between sound and image, the reunion of Josephine and Sugar and their pose as lovers temporarily locked in an embrace function as an opportunity for such a privileged moment, one that a viewer can enhance by slowing it down or temporarily extracting it from the forward flow of the narrative and freezing it or endlessly repeating it. Such activities can, according to Mulvey, feminize the aesthetic of a film and the spectator's gaze by reconfiguring the power relations among spectator, camera, and screen, as well as the presumably fixed relations between male and female in classical Hollywood film.

These activities are adaptations that—like the handwritten messages on or changes made to Leonard's postcard images by their senders—reconfigure a mass-produced object in terms of a variety of different individual purposes or desires. Conversely, through the actions of the sender, each postcard became—and continues to be—a privileged moment, in the sense that is analogous to the individual freezing on and investing in cinematic tableaux as described by Mulvey.

In Conner's hands, *The Apple-Knockers and the Coke* becomes nothing but a series of privileged moments, in which desire is carried by the cinematic structure of the film and by the synchronization and desynchronization of sound and image. Through his selection and repetition of specific shots and, in some cases, his attenuation of individual shots by including slightly more footage with

each repetition, Conner draws out isolated gestures and the feelings of sexual longing or desire that they promise to fulfill. These actions and the spectatorial experiences that they produce emphasize the presence of the celluloid strip of individual still images that make up the footage of the original film and, in doing so, also remind the viewer of the potential malleability of the emotional time of the camera and the dependence of this emotional time on diachronic relationships between movement and relative stillness and the synchronization—or lack of synchronization—of images and sound.

As a picture and as an archive, Leonard's assembly of postcards is necessarily incomplete. Her archive does not include postcard images based on drawings, prints, or famous paintings of the falls, and there are photographic images taken from points of view that were not established in relation to the primary horizon line or waterline that Leonard chooses to reconstitute on the wall at Dia. Such images may suggest numerous other possible organizing systems, different graphic technologies or different constitutions of horizon lines, but their absence here serves only to emphasize what is present and to provide a specific sense of Leonard's chosen system—its structure, points of reference, and intrinsic limit terms, as well as its directly acknowledged absences. Like Conner, Leonard calls attention to the absence of images within her chosen system through two types of visual interruption, leaving significant portions of the long exhibition wall blank and allowing several large doorways to cut through the work. Whenever possible, Leonard mounted her postcards right up to and along the edges of these doorways, creating quite abrupt, darker, and spatially deeper interruptions or cuts within groups of images or between them. When one enters the space that contains her work, the general abstract patterns of the geometric blocks of postcards initially dominate, and the blank white wall and the doorways appear as nothing more than neutral supports, if one even considers them at all. But once one is drawn into the space, moves along the wall, and is caught up in the visual richness and variety of the groupings of the individual cards—and in figuring out the terms of their arrangement—these blank spaces start to play a more active role in one's experience of the work. They begin to feel more like willful interruptions or gaps in a continuum, and thus intrinsic parts of the work itself. They could even be loosely described as extradiegetic because they call attention to the assumed boundaries or terms of the spatial reality articulated by the individual postcard images and by the overall work itself and because they also threaten to dissolve them.

Leonard's direct engagement with the space of exhibition is completely appropriate, given *You see I am here after all's* larger exhibition context at Dia:Beacon. Many of the works that surround Leonard's installation were produced with a particular type of institutional exhibition space in mind, what Brian O'Doherty first referred to in 1975 as the "white cube." According to O'Doherty, this choreographed encounter ultimately produced an experience in

which "we see not the art but the *space* first."²¹ Through scale; a use of reflective materials, such as glass, mirrored glass, or stainless steel; a reiteration or incorporation of the standard formal or material elements of the exhibition space; and the use of materials associated with quite different types of spaces—rural, marginal, or industrial, to name just a few—the artists who made these works called attention to the material, conceptual, and, at times, ideological limits of the white cube. As a result, this type of space and all that it implied became part of these works, even if they were never actually installed in such a space. Dia:Beacon brought these works into its space in the former Nabisco box-printing factory at another moment in history, after they and most of the artists who made them had become established in the art history of the post-World War II period. Dia's vast and flexible exhibition spaces are able to easily accommodate these predominantly large-scale works, even if the particular, intended spatial dynamics between the works and their initial exhibition venues were lost in the process. At the same time, these new exhibition circumstances have altered the experience and significance of these works and increased the potential for them—some more than others—to become silent relics of a past moment, discrete objects or images identified primarily in terms of the individuals who made them.

As an artist of her generation, born in 1961, Leonard is undoubtedly aware of the history of the art that surrounds her own in the Dia exhibition space; to some extent this history is a part of her own history as an artist. As someone who has grown up in the United States, she is also aware of Niagara Falls' role as one of a limited number of icons that have come to represent the wonder of the North American natural landscape. Such personal and shared connections are evident in the thoughtful way that she draws on these histories, but it is through her engagement with the grid and its pictorial corollary, the horizon line, that her work revivifies and complicates these histories in significant ways. In the end, the abstract geometric image that her installation offers—the grid that constitutes the work—does not simply acknowledge the formal vocabulary that Leonard's work shares with that of some of the other artists whose work is included in Dia's permanent collection, Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, and Agnes Martin, for example; it also provokes a consideration of the possible relationships between her installation and the long-term installations that surround it. It is more than a form; it is a process of adaptation, translation, and ultimately transformation, a supremely "content-producing" form. Through combinations of both explicit and more subtle expressions of the grid's signifying potential, and by incidentally providing—through reiteration, or analogy, or archive—a longer, more pragmatic history of the grid and its corollaries in photography, film, cartography, and picture making in general as processes that are always negotiating a relationship among material terms, conventions, and individual use, Leonard reminds us of many of the presumed and actual absences throughout the museum, absences

that both her work and her presence set about to correct. Although in some respects her work constitutes a return to fundamental aspects of the abstract grid and to a subject that might be considered cliché—a too-often-revisited articulation of an American icon—*You see I am here after all* supersedes nostalgia, or a desire to return to a former space of innocence: whether the moment of nascent institutional critique or the spirit of the American sublime. In essence, it is not a return after all, since the grid and Niagara have been here all along.

NOTES

All epigraphs to individual sections of this essay are taken from messages on postcards included in Zoe Leonard's *You see I am here after all* (2008).

1. Smithson intended to use this unedited footage in a film about *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill*, which he never completed.
2. In some instances, the physical top edge of the cards provides the organizing principle instead of the waterline illustrated within the cards, but even in these cases these edges and lines are parallel to and equidistant from one another.
3. The presence of minute differences within and across image groupings also reveals that over time (as a result of erosion, damming of the Niagara River at various locations, and other types of alterations made to the topography) many of the historically most popular sites—American Falls from Prospect Point, from Luna Island, from Goat Island, from the *Maid of the Mist*, and from Inspiration Point, and Horseshoe Falls from Goat Island, from Terrapin Rock, from Terrapin Point, from Prospect Point, and from *Maid of the Mist*—have remained the same in name only.
4. Marshall McLuhan, *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man* (1951; repr., Boston: Beacon, 1967), p. 96.
5. Advertisement copy for Warner's corselettes, *Harper's Bazaar*, August 1956, p. 100.
6. In a number of subsequent scenes, this line of the falls becomes a flat, distant, yet immediately recognizable backdrop that can always be glimpsed as a series of fragments through the framing architectural elements of the Rainbow Cabins motel, where all the main characters are staying.
7. In one version of the poster, the acrid yellow color of the ink used for the name of the actress and the title of the film suggests that both Monroe and the falls are artificial creations, linked together via pathetic fallacy. As a result, both names stand out against a black background and in contrast to the aquamarine and white of the rushing water and the body of the actress immediately below. Monroe's bright, equally artificial blond hair serves to tie these two parts of the image together formally, just as her hair serves as the site for the fade to the shot of the falls in the film. The poster's supplementary copy, which continues below the names of the film and its star—"a raging torrent of emotion that even nature can't control"—linguistically unbinds Monroe and Niagara again into "emotion" and "nature" but concedes through the modifier "a raging torrent" that the falls and Monroe also share qualities in common, if only to a greater or lesser degree. Alongside this text, Monroe appears again in a black-and-white still from the film but now upright, in the grip of her costar, Cotten. At the bottom of the poster another still depicts her again with Cotten and horizontal, this time on her back and dead.

8. The song was written in 1931. Sandra Warner, the actress who plays Emily in the Sweet Sues (the all-girl band in the film), was Monroe's body double for all the still publicity shots for *Some Like It Hot* because Monroe was visibly pregnant at the time. So Arline Hunter is one of many body doubles for the actress. The five repetitions in Conner's film might also refer to the number of images of Monroe contained in the famous shot of her looking at herself in a full-length restroom mirror in *How to Marry a Millionaire*: four reflections plus the actress herself looking at her reflection.

9. Laura Mulvey describes something similar in terms of both operations and effects in an experimental film by Martin Arnold: "Subjected to repetition to the point of absurdity, they lose their protective fictional worlds. Furthermore, the repeated frames that elongate each movement and gesture assert the presence of filmstrip, the individual frame in sequence that stretches towards infinity.... As Arnold combines stretched time with the manipulation of human gesture, he combines reference to the strip of celluloid with the presence of the cinema machine, the uncanny of the inorganic and the automaton." (Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* [London: Reaktion, 2006], p. 172.)

10. Lisa Cohen, "The Horizontal Walk: Marilyn Monroe, CinemaScope, and Sexuality," *Yale Journal of Criticism* 11, no. 1 (1998), pp. 259-88.

11. CinemaScope's wide image is produced with an anamorphic lens that horizontally compresses the width of the image while maintaining its height. When the film is projected, another lens is attached to the projector to restore the original width of the image. For a more detailed description of this process, see John Belton, *Widescreen Cinema* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992). *How to Marry a Millionaire* and *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* were released in 1953, the same year as *Niagara*, but despite its horizontal emphasis, the latter film was not shot in CinemaScope. Examples of what critics described at the time as Monroe's "horizontal walk," however, occur throughout the film. In one scene early on in the film, she emerges from her motel cabin, dressed in a tight-fitting, low-cut powder-blue suit. Her color and verticality visually link her to a sliver of the falls in the background that is visible through the architectural elements that frame her as well. The camera first captures her in a long shot, as she turns and walks toward this still camera and the other female lead, played by Jean Peters, smiling at Peters as she passes; at which point the camera starts to track her around the corner of the motel office and up the driveway. Her movements throughout this shot are awkward and unstable, possibly owing to the uneven surface that she is walking across in high heels and her purposeful, quite rapid gait, but the accompanying soundtrack translates this awkwardness into a sexually suggestive wobble or sway through the muted whining of horns. This acoustically directed reading is then underscored by a reverse-angle shot of Peters crossing the space of the motel courtyard to meet her husband, played by Max Showalter, who is watching Monroe's departure, followed by a cut to Monroe exiting the frame, and then a final cut to the husband moving forward to get a better look and Peters gesturing for him to stop staring, turn around, and accompany her to their cabin, at which point the background music fades.

12. Cohen, "Horizontal Walk," pp. 275-76, 279.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 278.

14. Since Leonard used only photographic postcards of Niagara, one popular image tradition, based on drawings and paintings, that directly connects women to the falls is absent from her installation: illustrations of the "legend of the white canoe." This legend, which was fabricated by white settlers, describes the Native American Ongiara tribe's practice of offering the fairest of their maidens as a sacrifice to the great spirit of the waters by sending her over the falls in a canoe laden with fruits, vegetables, and game, in the hope that this

great spirit would then favor the tribe in war and peace. Postcard images of this legend depict the maiden standing in a canoe at the very precipice of the falls. This vertical image could be viewed as a counterpoint to the consistently horizontal images of Monroe and the falls, and the differences are telling in terms of the media used and historical traditions that these two images are part of.

15. Coincidentally, the postcard is dated September 20, 1906, and the opening for this work at Dia:Beacon was September 21, 2008.

16. John Berger, *About Looking* (New York: Vintage, 1991), pp. 50–51.

17. This anticipation is set up in the first section in which images of Hunter appear but also specifically through its opening sequence, in which Hunter's image initially appears without sound. A pan of her reclining body from upper thigh to her head is repeated three times; the soundtrack of Monroe singing "I'm Through with Love" initiates the fourth repetition and continues for the rest of the section, which consists of a total of five repetitions of this initial pan.

18. Linda Williams, *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O. J. Simpson* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 28.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 35–38.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

21. Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second*, p. 147.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 150. Within her argument, Mulvey describes her use of her own digital reedit of a thirty-second sequence of "Two Little Girls from Little Rock" from *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* to analyze the precision of Monroe's dance movements in this scene. Mulvey's fragment captures Monroe's gesture of pulling up the shoulder strap of her dress, an action that appears to be quite sluttish and disorderly in comparison with her otherwise tightly choreographed movements within the original sequence. But once this gesture is isolated, frozen, and then repeated, Mulvey discovers that, like Monroe's other gestures, "[it also] unfolds until it finds a point of pose, just as the delayed cinema finds such moments through repetition and return" (pp. 172–73). In answer to the question of "how to marry Marilyn Monroe," Lisa Cohen produces her own privileged moment from the scene near the end of this film of the double wedding of Monroe and Jane Russell to their respective fiancés. Cohen illustrates this moment through a still of Monroe and Russell wearing matching wedding dresses and exchanging knowing glances, while the camera momentarily excludes from the frame the grooms that flank them. She describes this moment as "a brief but radiant vision of how a girl might marry Marilyn" (p. 282).

23. Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Santa Monica, CA: Lapis, 1976), p. 14. O'Doherty presented a preliminary version of this argument in a lecture titled "Inside the White Cube, 1855–1974," given at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in January 1975, and he subsequently published an expanded version as a series of articles in *Artforum* in 1976.

