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Douglas Huebler and the Photographic Document

Christian Berger

This article discusses the concepts of document and documentation in Douglas Huebler's (1924–1997) work of the late 1960s in order to assess the role of referentiality and subject matter within conceptualism more broadly. It examines the complex form and function of documents in his *Location Pieces* and establishes documentation as the zone of encounter between an artistic concept, proposal, or system, and the outside world. Focusing on the essential role of photographic images in his pieces affords new analysis of Huebler's practice. Central to that practice was the tension between the photograph as an allegedly neutral document – an idea deeply rooted in the history of photographic discourse – and its critical as well as aesthetic potential.

Keywords: Conceptualism; Documentation; Photography; Douglas Huebler (1924–1997)

In his *Location*, *Duration*, and *Variable Pieces*, which Douglas Huebler (1924–1997) began making in the late 1960s, the artist combined short written statements with other materials, most often maps and photographs. The statements usually contained a description of a structure or system devised by Huebler, which would be communicated through markings on maps and photographs the artist had taken. Huebler presented this type of work for the first time in *Douglas Huebler: November 1968*, a booklet on which he worked with the exhibition organizer Seth Siegelaub (1941–2013) and that functioned as a “one-man exhibition” of his art in printed form.¹ This publication marked Huebler's departure from his minimalist sculptural work of the mid-1960s and defined a new direction in his art; it also marked his emergence as one of the founding figures of Conceptual Art in the United States. In a statement placed at the beginning of the book, Huebler referred to his work as “sculpture”: “The existence of each sculpture is documented by its documentation. The documentation takes the form of photographs, maps, drawings and descriptive language.”² Sculpture as a medium then stood at the center of contemporary debates about an expanded notion of artistic work.³ Yet it would be hard to conceive of most pieces in *November 1968* as sculpture in any traditional sense. Huebler's trajectory from sculpture to systems and “so-called ‘conceptual’ works” becomes apparent in his statement for the catalog of *January 5–31, 1969*, a landmark Conceptual Art exhibition in which Siegelaub presented Huebler's works together with those by Robert Barry (b. 1936), Joseph Kosuth (b. 1945), and Lawrence Weiner (b. 1942).⁴ Huebler concluded:

Because the work is beyond direct perceptual experience, awareness of the work depends on a system of documentation. The documentation takes the form of photographs, maps, drawings and descriptive language.⁵

The artist repeated this last sentence verbatim from *November 1968*. This demonstrates that Huebler's concept of documentation remained essentially the same during the formative period between 1968 and 1969, when his conceptualist practice took full shape. In both statements, he defined it as a collection of individual documents in various media, but only in the later version did he refer to it as a "system." The significance of this concept within his practice will be addressed below.

Throughout *November 1968*, the term "documentation" is highly significant: all illustrations of his sculptures are labeled as such within captions. The same applies for the catalog of *January 5–31, 1969*, to which every artist contributed four pages: one page with a list of works followed by two illustrated pages then followed by a statement.⁶ Huebler is the only artist whose illustrations are listed as "documentation." This underlines the importance the concept held for him. His use, however, is not as straightforward as one might expect, compared to common notions of it in relation to the art of the 1960s and 1970s in general and to Conceptualism in particular. There, documentation is commonly understood, in the words of British curator and critic Lawrence Alloway (1926–1990), as what "distributes and makes consultable the work of art that is inaccessible ... or ephemeral."⁷ During this period, artistic practices departed from the notion of the self-sufficient, stable, and finished art object presented on the walls of a gallery space. Instead, artists preferred to employ performative, process-based, and/or "conceptual" strategies. Documentation, often by means of photographs, was considered to be "crucial to the exposure (if not to the making) of practically every manifestation" of such art.⁸ Photographic documentation could serve the "expedient recordmaking [*sic*] purposes"⁹ of these art forms and "establish [their] past existence."¹⁰

Huebler was probably the Conceptual artist for whom documentation was the most essential. It was very important not only as an artistic strategy, but as a term he actively employed to characterize his practice. He repeatedly came back to it in his interviews and statements from 1969 and after. Even if some literature has acknowledged this importance, the subject has not been studied comprehensively.¹¹ This article aims to fill this gap and seeks to analyze the complex form and function of "documentation" as both a strategy and a category, and of "documents" as individual components of that documentation within Huebler's work of the late 1960s. As the role of photography seems crucial in that context, it will specifically focus on the photograph as document through an analysis of three individual photo-text works discussed by the artist in terms of "document" and "documentation."

Within conceptualism, documentation cannot always be distinguished clearly from the work of art itself. Apart from this "crux of documentation," this article also discusses the potential of documentation as a strategy for Huebler. By pointing to the world outside, his maps and photographs let aspects of everyday life and the recipient's experience of it into the work – a possibility he openly embraced. Looking at how he used documentation will therefore allow for a more nuanced understanding of

North American Conceptual art, which is too often understood only in terms of its rigorously analytic and reductionist tendency. The way he referred to photographs as documents will be interpreted in light of earlier precedents and identified as a strategy to overcome their fetishization as aesthetic objects – a strategy that nevertheless did not reject the medium’s artistic and critical potential as such. His involvement with the theory and history of the photographic medium complicates the question of how Conceptualist practices took their departure from Modernist models.

The Crux of Documentation

Four of the 15 works listed in *November 1968* are referred to as “proposals.” In his statement, Huebler wrote: “The proposed pieces do not differ from the other pieces as idea, but do differ to the extent of their material substance.”¹² In these cases, documentation therefore cannot be understood as a recording of something that has already taken place. Yet a similar openness regarding the concept of documentation is already intrinsic to the way Huebler set up several of the other works in *November 1968*, which he referred to as “site sculpture projects” in the annotated drawings in the booklet. Essential for the majority of them are maps onto which Huebler drew geometric shapes that indicate locations at which markers could be placed or small amounts of material manipulated. In some cases, these maps are combined with photographs. *Boston – New York Exchange Shape* (Figure 1), perhaps the best-known piece within the booklet, is a good example. For this work, Huebler drew a hexagonal shape on maps

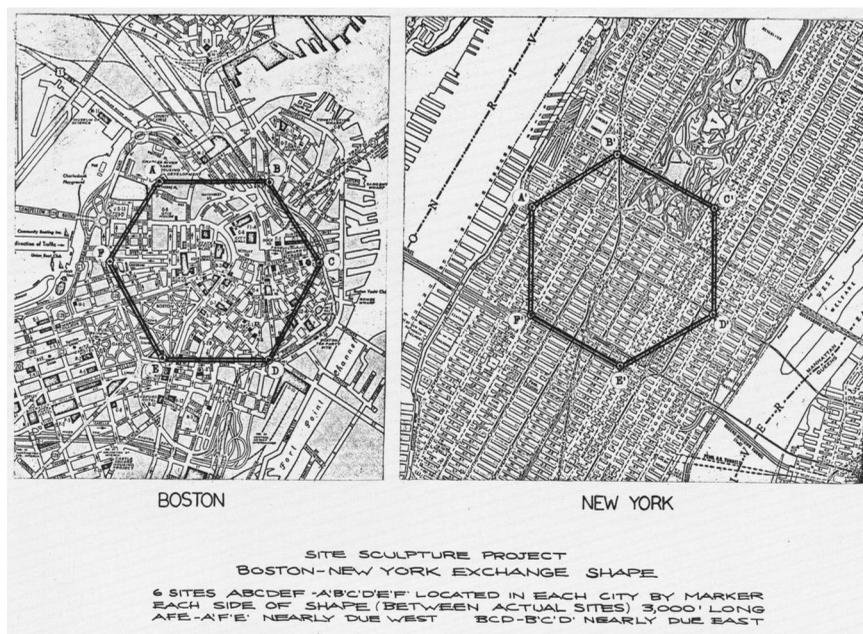


Figure 1. Douglas Huebler, *Boston – New York Exchange Shape*, from *November 1968* (New York: Seth Siegel, 1968). © 2016 Estate of Douglas Huebler / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.

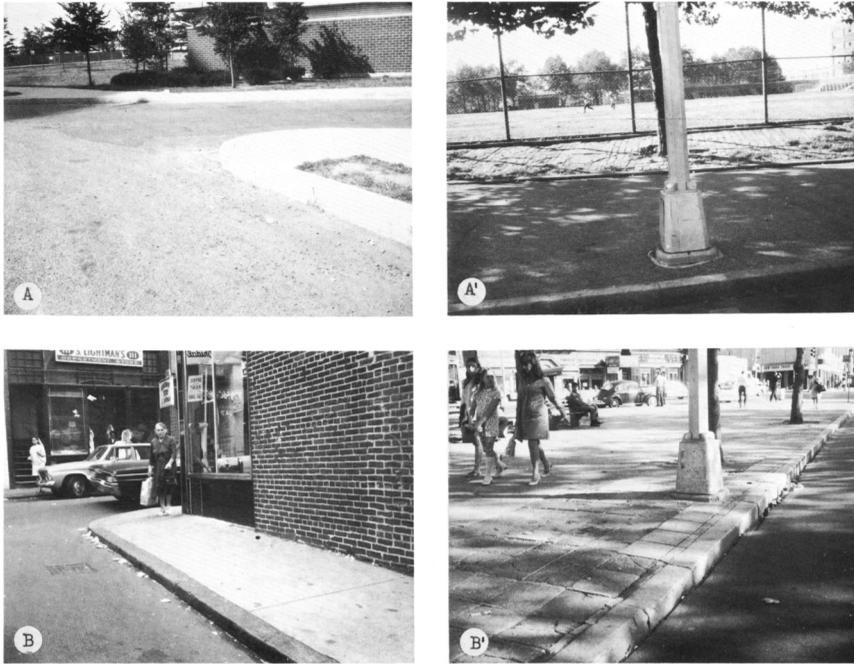


Figure 1. Continued

of downtown Boston and midtown Manhattan. In *November 1968*, reproductions of the marked and annotated maps on one page are followed by a double-page spread at the centerfold of the booklet with four photographs on the left and a reproduced standard letter page with typewritten text on the right. This text lists the 12 places located at the vertices of the two hexagons on the maps and explains that:

A 1" diameter self-sticking paper was placed at each site as a "Marker." Each site was photographed at the time the marker was placed with no attempt made for a more or less interesting or picturesque representation of the location.¹³

Of the 12 photographs, only four are reproduced, each with a letter indicating the site where they were taken.¹⁴ The drawings on the map perform a dual function: not only do they serve as means of presentation for the recipient, but also, as curator and art historian Anne Rorimer noted, they represent a "method for the creation of form."¹⁵ This shows a complexity of documentation in Huebler's work that exceeds his specific case and is characteristic of many conceptualist practices.

Art historian Alexander Alberro has pointed to the connections between documentation, presentation, historical validation, and the "boundaries of a Conceptual artwork" as well as to Conceptual artists' awareness of these issues.¹⁶ And indeed, thinking about documentation seems almost inevitable in the context of a "dematerialized" art practice that questioned the status of the art object in its traditional sense.¹⁷ Parallel to "The Crux of Minimalism" that art historian Hal Foster discussed in *The*

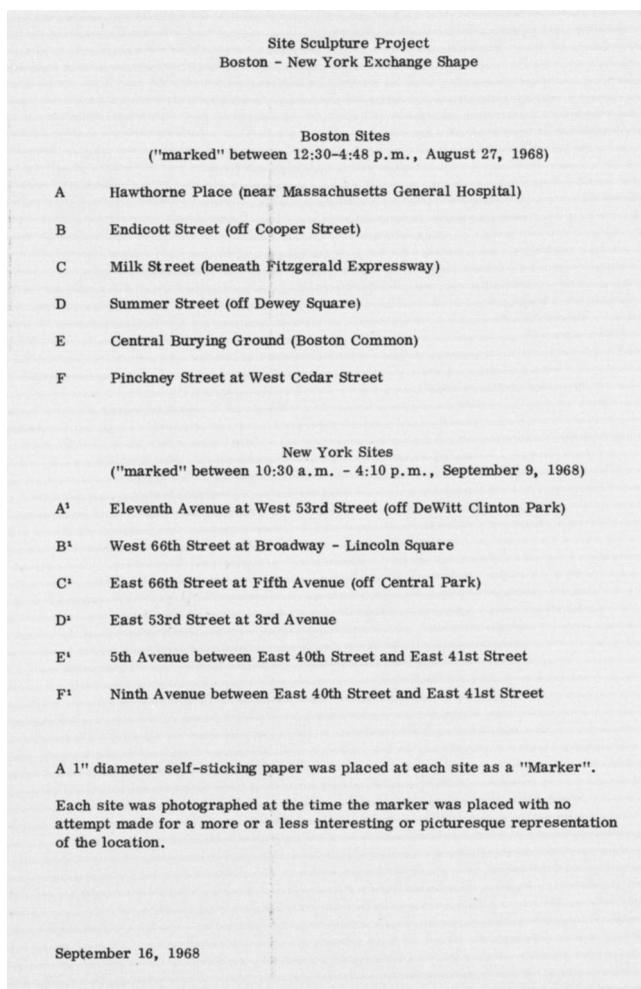


Figure 1. Continued

Return of the Real, artist and visual theorist Johanna Drucker has identified “The Crux of Conceptualism” in its “subtracting [of] all production values from the work of art” as both a continuation of and a break with Modernist art.¹⁸ While the questioning of the privileged status of the art object and its aesthetic contemplation challenged Modernist models and values, the reductionist tendency that could be linked with such an approach continued the Modernist quest for purity and self-referentiality.¹⁹ For Drucker, the “separation of idea and material as the central premise and strategy of conceptualism calls the nature of ‘idea’ into question. It inquires into where the idea resides in a work of art.”²⁰ In Huebler’s and other cases, this separation of material and idea is maintained through the categorization of all kinds of plans, texts, photographs, and other material entities as documentation that is set apart from the work of art. To speak of a “crux of documentation” in that sense means that on the one hand, documentation as a category could serve as a means to maintain the purity of

the idea, but on the other hand, these documents – images, plans, texts, or diagrams – almost inevitably introduced aspects to the work that underscored that purity. Huebler’s art consciously acted upon these notions.

By using actual maps for *Boston – New York Exchange Shape* and other pieces, Huebler based his work on abstractions of the world around him and his viewers. And even while these maps do not provide a “field of perceptual and textual detail” like the photographs do, they point to different topographical characteristics of the two cities and the experience of a person navigating them.²¹ The superimposed geometrical shapes stress the abstract two-dimensionality of the maps. While the hexagon partly corresponds with the grid structure of Manhattan, it appears to be a completely alien element when superimposed over downtown Boston’s irregular street system. The choice of the two places furthermore connects New York, the center of the contemporary art world where Huebler’s work was presented, with the capital of Massachusetts, the state in which he lived while he was teaching at Bradford Junior College until the mid-1970s – a juxtaposition that has been discussed as a relation between center and periphery.²² The two maps therefore demonstrate the potential of documentation to introduce aspects of reality, everyday life, and the socio-political into the work. This becomes even clearer in the photographs that depict street corners and sidewalks in both cities. Huebler described their role as follows:

The photographs were not really meant to be good photographs of an interesting place. They just happened to be where the place was that I’d already located on a map before I went in the first place. ... And there’s no proof that when you get there you’re pointing your camera or putting that marker on the exact spot, which is of course part of the point too. ... So what it finally comes back to is the idea of these locations, the idea of the system, and that demands language.²³

With this explanation, the artist plays down the photographs’ importance. He stresses their determination by the sketch on the map, the system, and the idea – the latter two being conceived in, and articulated through, language. Characterizing his use of systems, he further explains:

I set up a system, and the system can catch a part of what is happening – what’s going on in the world – an appearance in the world, and suspend that appearance itself at any given instant from being important, you know, being what the work is about. The work is about the system. The system is not proof of anything either, except that you can set up almost any series, you see, and reach into anything that’s going on.²⁴

According to Huebler’s characterization of his practice, the systems he set up acted as devices to collect external events or appearances – but those appearances are then denied any importance, the work being “about the system.” However, these systems in themselves mattered to him just as little, except as a way to prove the possibility of such a strategy. This concept of a system that is established to set things in motion resembles the claim of Sol LeWitt (1928–2007), one of Huebler’s

contemporaries, from his seminal “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art” (1967), in which he also stressed the irrational dimension of conceptual work.²⁵ In his later “Sentences on Conceptual Art” (1969), LeWitt linked this intuitive or irrational aspect of Conceptual work to experience.²⁶ This connection between the generation of a seemingly pointless system and the possibility of producing an experience is another parallel between LeWitt and Huebler, who wanted his art to exemplify a way of looking at the world and of “conceptualiz[ing] our experience” of it.²⁷ Reasoning about what his art was or could be, Huebler argued in 1969:

If you can call art anything, you can call it a way whereby you can try to figure out what things are all about. ... And I guess I will call that art, you know ... to try to figure out how to be significantly alive in the world.²⁸

This phenomenological – rather than purely intellectual or thought-based – approach is key to the understanding of Huebler’s art and distinguishes it from the preoccupation with analytic philosophy that was fundamental for other early Conceptual artists such as Kosuth or the members of the group Art & Language.²⁹ By allowing “referenc[e] to worldly matters ... back into art,” Huebler exemplifies a broader, more open, and heterogeneous model of Conceptualism right at the core of North American Conceptual Art.³⁰

The Tradition of the Photographic Document

In several statements that were published after *January 5–31, 1969*, Huebler focused on the photographs and their role as documents in his work. This emphasis corresponds with a parallel shift in his practice, where the combination of text and photographic images became the dominant structure of his work far into his career.³¹ In these statements, Huebler rejected any notion of aesthetic quality or authorial subjectivity for his photographs. In an interview for the catalog of *Prospect 69*, an early Conceptual Art exhibition that took place in September–October 1969 at Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, Germany, he explained:

I use the camera as a “dumb” copying device that only serves to document whatever phenomena appear before it through the conditions set by a system. No “aesthetic” choices are possible. Other people often make the photographs. It makes no difference.³²

He thereby drew a clear distinction between his art and the “conceptual cul-de-sac” that art historian Abigail Solomon-Godeau diagnosed in contemporaneous art photography, with its insistence on originality and subjectivity.³³ Moreover, Huebler distanced himself from the formalism privileged by Modernist art criticism, following the lead of influential American art critic Clement Greenberg (1909–1994), and developed an alternative to “eyesight alone.”³⁴ Huebler’s statements distinguished between actual visual experience (in the world) and isolated, formalist contemplation of an artwork.³⁵ His practice did not result in a general “elimination of visibility” or “suppression of the beholder” – two often cited notions that art historian Benjamin Buchloh and Charles Harrison, long-time editor of the journal *Art-Language*, used

to characterize Conceptual Art as a whole.³⁶ Yet labeling the photographs in his pieces as “documents” served Huebler as a key strategy to underline the secondary importance of a visual dimension within his art. Another statement, also from 1969, demonstrates this succinctly: “The photographs in this case are absolute documents because they don’t show anything pictorially interesting.”³⁷

This understanding of photographs as “absolute documents” resonates surprisingly closely with the prevalent understanding of photography in the first decades of the medium’s existence in the nineteenth century, when “all photography was [regarded as] documentation.”³⁸ Towards the end of that century, however, this understanding began to be challenged. Around the same time, the term “documentary photography” was introduced to characterize this particular approach to the medium.³⁹ In 1888, Albert Londe (1858–1917), most famous for his work as a medical photographer in the Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris, included a chapter on “Documentary Photography” in his book *La photographie moderne*. He defined it as “all the applications where photography is nothing more than a faithful copyist, absolutely exact.”⁴⁰ For him, this was not just an aspect or a specific form of photography, but stood at the core of the medium in general. In his introduction, Londe praised photography’s crucial value to the natural sciences, as “the indispensable auxiliary in all the sciences where documentary precision is necessary.”⁴¹

Londe also asserted photography’s value as “a mine of documents for artists.”⁴² This seems irritating at first, but can be explained by looking at the practice of Eugène Atget (1857–1926), another important early practitioner of the medium. Seen as a founding figure of Modernist photography soon after his death, Atget sold his systematically assembled photographs of buildings, landscapes, animals, or flowers during his lifetime also as “documents for artists.”⁴³ Art historian Molly Nesbit’s further analysis of that notion leads to the concise observation: “A document was a picture that had a job to perform.”⁴⁴ It did not necessarily have to be a photograph, but an easily readable image and rich in detail; aesthetic considerations were of secondary importance.⁴⁵ Similarly, when Huebler referred to the photographic document in his statements, he argued for its subordination under a function (“the camera... only serves to document whatever phenomena appear for it through the conditions set by a system”). Therefore, “no ‘aesthetic’ choices are possible” and the photographs are “not really meant to be good photographs of an interesting place.”⁴⁶

Huebler further elaborated on these issues in *Location Piece #2, New York City – Seattle, Washington* (1969, [Figure 2](#)), which was published as a multiple in 1970 as part of *Artists and Photographs*, a box set of artists’ editions produced by Multiples, Inc., a project launched by art dealer Marian Goodman before she opened her gallery. As Lawrence Alloway made clear in his accompanying essay, the project’s aim was to explore the relevance of photography in conceptualist, performative, and process-oriented artistic practices.⁴⁷ This context makes the piece and Huebler’s accompanying statements especially relevant for a discussion of the photographic document in his art. *Location Piece #2* consists of a square envelope containing 19 printed cards. The signed and dated artist’s statement for the piece is printed directly on the



Figure 2. Douglas Huebler, *Location Piece #2, New York City – Seattle, Washington*, 1969, from *Artists and Photographs* (New York: Multiples, Inc. and Colorcraft, 1970). © 2016 Estate of Douglas Huebler / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.

envelope, while one of the cards carries another typewritten statement with Huebler's signature. In this second statement, the artist considered the role that "appearance" or visual experience played in his art in general. The middle paragraph reads:

My work is concerned with determining the form of art when the role traditionally played by visual experience is mitigated or eliminated. In a number of works I have done so by first bringing “appearance” into the foreground of the piece and then suspending the visual experience of it by having it actually function as a document that exists to serve as a structural part of a conceptual system. The systems used are random or logical sets of numbers, aspects of time, or propositions in language and the “documents” of appearance are photographs that have been made with the camera used as a duplicating device whose operator makes no “aesthetic” decisions.⁴⁸

In that statement, Huebler’s pursuit of an art that would not have appearance, visual experience, or aesthetic decisions at its core is again linked with the notion of a system on which the visual elements would depend. The term he chose to express this subordinate character of the visual elements, i.e. the photographs, is again “document.” However, in stark contrast to the earlier understanding of the photograph as a document with actual use value, an objective image of reality that is able to deliver fact, in Huebler’s case the documents seem to depict only meaningless appearances. But, as a closer look at *Location Piece #2* and other works demonstrates, Huebler performed in his pieces a highly sophisticated investigation into photographic meaning. The statement on the envelope reads:

In New York and Seattle an area was arbitrarily selected within which a person in each city photographed places that he, or she, felt could be characterized as being (1) “frightening” (2) “erotic” (3) “transcendent” (4) “passive” (5) “fevered” and (6) “muffled.” Within each area each person made two entirely different sets of six photographs after which all four sets were sent to a third person (the artist) with no information that would make it possible to key any one of the photographs with any of the words originally specified. The four sets (24 photographs) were then scrambled altogether and 12 of these arbitrarily selected for this piece; to those were added 4 photographs that had not been made to characterize any kind of place. 16 photographs, a Xerox map of New York and another of Seattle join with this statement to constitute the form of this piece.

Similar to *Boston – New York Exchange Shape*, two cards show excerpts of city maps from the two cities, in this case New York and Seattle. On each of them, an area has been marked with a circle. On the New York map, one easily recognizes the lower part of Manhattan below 49th Street, surrounded by the Hudson and the East River, with the very tip of the peninsula being cropped and some of the adjacent boroughs of New York and cities in New Jersey being visible at the margins. The circle encompasses a section from 25th Street to Franklin Street, with Washington Square Park at its center. For Seattle, an area between Lake Union to the West and Lake Washington to the East has been chosen, with the mark encompassing Mont Lake, Capitol Hill, parts of the Madrona neighborhood, and the 230-acre Washington Park Arboretum. The 16 other cards each carry a black and white photograph.

In his characteristic way, Huebler has created a complex system involving multiple agents and media. However, he immediately subverts this system through the introduction of various chance operations. In effect, the viewer or recipient is confronted with a set of 16 photographs without any additional clues concerning their creators, the depicted locations, or the attributes that, according to the statement, would have motivated some of their creation. Without any keys, the images seem at first to “collate an aleatory collection of signifiers.”⁴⁹

Still, a person familiar with both cities might be able to identify a few of the given locations. The person Huebler asked for the photographs of Seattle must have taken a significant number of them walking through the parks. The round brick tower on one image (Figure 2, third row, second from right) is recognizable as the Volunteer Park Water Tower. In another picture (second row, first from left), one can see the Japanese Garden at the south end of the Washington Park Arboretum. The small bridge built out of bricks (fourth row, first from left) is the Arboretum Bridge a bit further north in the same park. And the motorway bridges next to a meadow (second row, second from left) are very likely the ramps connected to State Route 520 that were part of a controversial plan to build an expressway that would cut through Washington Park. On May 4, 1969, several thousand citizens marched through the park in protest against the plan.⁵⁰ Therefore, the ramps – and by extension also the park – were not just recognizable locations, but were also sites of contemporary political controversy. As for the other pictures, it is doubtful whether a quiet street, like the one with the tall tree on the left (second row, first from right), or the white wooden house (fourth row, second from left) would be imaginable in Manhattan. But this does not mean that this photograph depicts a place in Seattle, as the statement mentions four photographs that were added by the artist without indication of their respective sites. Actually, the first of these photographs was taken across the street from Huebler’s house in Bradford, and the second could also very well be from New England.⁵¹ Other pictures, especially the ones with close-range views, are less easily identifiable. But those that show scenes in a park might well belong to the Seattle set – and one can also make guesses about which of the street scenes look as if they might have been taken in New York.

Generally speaking, the pictures in *Location Piece #2* are therefore not just “empty images ... that could have been taken in no matter what city,” as other authors have described them.⁵² A greater uncertainty arises when one tries to link the six rather evocative terms from the beginning of the statement to the set of photographs: could the garden be called “transcendent”? And what would be “muffled”? The reading of the piece here becomes a playful exercise that nonetheless invites more general questions about how meaning is invoked or derived from images and how powerful captions can be to the understanding and interpretation of photographs.⁵³ In his statement for the catalogue of *Sonsbeek '71*, an international exhibition of mainly site-specific and audio-visual works that took place in the Dutch city of Arnhem in 1971, Huebler himself declared “the fabrication of meaning” rather than the “‘product’ of art” as the main issue of his work.⁵⁴ Such inquiries into the production or attribution of meaning were essential for conceptualist practices.⁵⁵ At the same time, this line of thought builds on a rich tradition in the theory of photography. In the years between the two World Wars, writers such as German playwright Bertolt Brecht

(1898–1956) insisted that “the simple ‘reproduction of reality’ says less than ever about that reality.”⁵⁶ Referring to Brecht’s remark, which is rooted within a Marxist perspective, philosopher Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) argued that “[a]t this point the caption must step in.”⁵⁷ A more contemporary reference would be the interest in sign systems within structuralist thought, as exemplified by Roland Barthes’ (1915–1980) essay “The Photographic Message” (1961), in which the French philosopher and semiologist analyzed the processes of signification involved in the reading of photographs as well as in the relationship between image and text.⁵⁸

Location Piece #2 makes explicit the “arbitrarily constructed relationships between language and appearances,” in words that Huebler later used to characterize concerns he believed were essential to all his work.⁵⁹ His strategy was perhaps most aptly described by artist Mike Kelley (1954–2012), his former student at the California Institute of Arts in Valencia, where Huebler taught and served as Dean between 1976 and 1988:

There is an image, quite typically a quite mundane and recognizable one, accompanied by text which one would expect would elaborate on, or explain, the image. It does not do so. Instead, in Huebler’s terms, the text “collides” or “dances” with the image.⁶⁰

While the relationship between text (or system) and image (or documentation) in *Boston – New York Exchange Shape* is deconstructed mainly in terms of localization, *Location Piece #2* raises the question of meaning in relation to text and photographs. Employing photography and language as “co-dependent representational systems,” Huebler demonstrates, in Rorimer’s words, “how language tends to dominate phenomena and foster stereotypical thought.”⁶¹

By exposing the limitations of linking verbal attributes to photographs, *Location Piece #2* advances a critique of the role of text or commentary more than of the photographic image. The artist actively performs a playful and complex investigation into photographic meaning, or the attribution thereof, as well as the relationship between text and image—two aspects that have a rich tradition in the history of photographic discourse.

Huebler’s Photographic Strategies

In February 1969, Huebler created his *Location Piece #5, Massachusetts – New Hampshire* (Figure 3). The statement explains:

On February 7, ten photographs were made of snow lying 12 feet from the edge of Interstate Highway 495 in both Massachusetts and New Hampshire. Each photograph was made at an interval of every 5 miles; or every 5 yards; or of every 5 feet; or of a variable combination of all those intervals. Ten photographs and this statement constitute the form of this piece.

As the intervals can be random, the last part of the description takes the whole system to the absurd. It is revealing to read how Huebler linked his strategy for the piece to the way he shot the photographs:

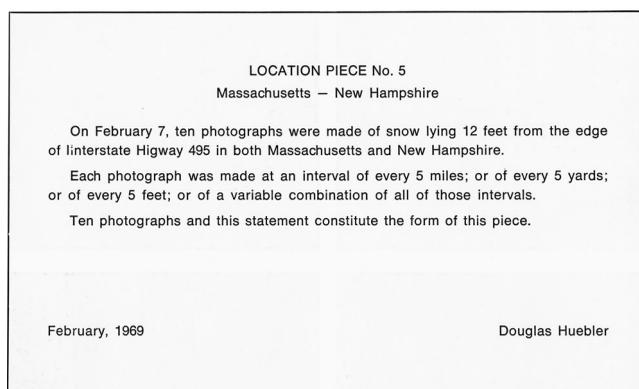


Figure 3. Douglas Huebler, *Location Piece #5, Massachusetts – New Hampshire*, 1969, from Klaus Honnef, *Douglas Huebler*, exhibition catalog (Münster: Westfälischer Kunstverein, 1972). © 2016 Estate of Douglas Huebler / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.

I set up a system that was to shoot the snow on the side of the highway – this was up in Massachusetts and New Hampshire in the middle of the winter, February – to shoot straight down at the snow, so there’s no pictorial aspect. Shooting straight down at the snow, every five miles, as registered on the car. Actually, it was a forty-five degree angle to the snow, but essentially not pictorial. And it could have been, and maybe it was, every five yards, or maybe it was every five feet, or maybe it was every five miles, you see.⁶²

Huebler’s main point was that he wanted his photographs to be “not pictorial.” In order to achieve that aim, he employed a specific compositional strategy by pointing the camera at a certain angle towards the ground. As a result, the black and white photographs show nothing except different arrays of snow that are unevenly spread beside the road, perhaps pushed aside and piled by a snowplow. While the snowscapes do not conform to established modes of landscape depiction, they are not unpleasant to look at, as the uneven arrangements allow for a subtle play of light and shade to emerge on the surfaces. Because comparative motifs are excluded, it is difficult to grasp the dimensions of the details, not to speak of their respective locations. The piles of snow are “essentially not composed” and “come to us as unanalyzable wholes” that create “an extraordinary sense of disorientation,” as the artist has “banished any indication of the ... horizon, from within the compass of the image.”⁶³

In fact, these descriptions were not originally written with regard to Huebler’s work but are taken from art historian and critic Rosalind Krauss’s essay on Alfred Stieglitz’s (1864–1946) *Equivalents*, a series of cloudscapes that the photographer produced from 1923 to 1931 by photographing vertically the night sky. For Krauss, Stieglitz’s pictures point to cropping as an act that is “crucial to the definition of photography.”⁶⁴ As counter-intuitive as it may seem at first to apply Krauss’s formalist analysis to Huebler’s photographs, this transposition demonstrates the degree to which *Location Piece #5* operates with regard to properties specific to photography – cropping, camera viewpoint, and the modulation of light and shade dependent on the angle and the light source –

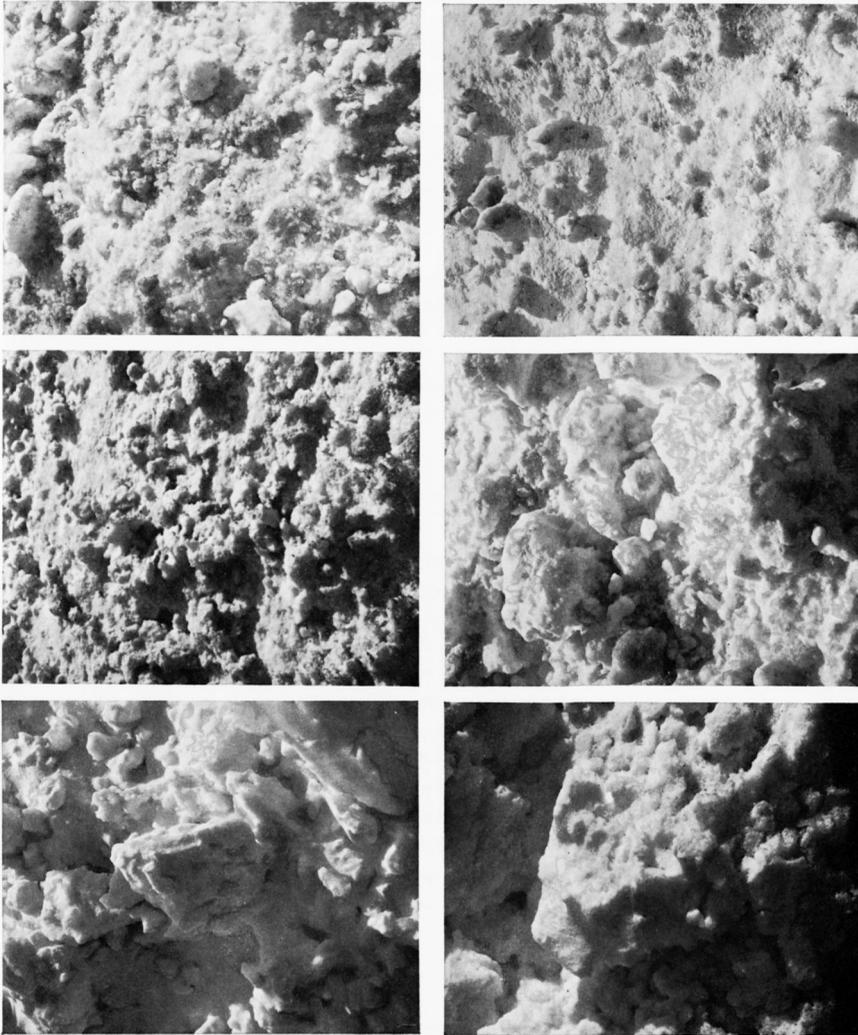


Figure 3. Continued

without any aspiration for the pictures on their own to be regarded as art.⁶⁵ While Huebler rejected the Modernist privileging of visibility and art photography's valorization of the individual print, his practice shows a sustained interest in the medium of photography and its history.

In Huebler's work, photographic documentation was never simply a record of an action that had taken place. On the one hand, some of his statements regarding the transparent character of photographs and the camera as "a 'dumb' copying device" seem to indicate that he did not appreciate photography as a medium. But on the other hand, photographs are intrinsic to the conception of many of his works. The aesthetic strategies he employed and his way of generating works based on certain properties of photography represent a very conscious and sophisticated use of the medium. His art performs a playful and complex investigation into photographic meaning as

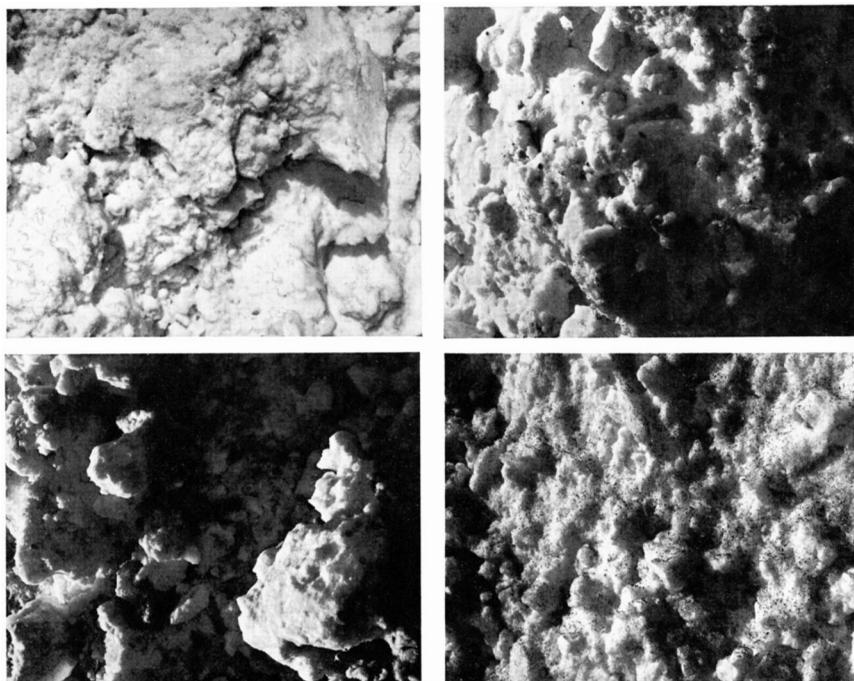


Figure 3. Continued

well as the relationship between text and image. Huebler's labeling of photographs as documents can be seen as a logical rhetorical move against formalist criticism and Modernist photography. The use of these documents, however, allowed for the introduction of reference to the outside world, or "worldly matters," into his art.

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- 1 Liz Kotz, "Huebler in Transition, 1968" (unpublished draft, 2015). I am grateful to Liz Kotz for sharing that text, which has been very inspirational for my research. For *November 1968*, see also Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 72–80.
- 2 Douglas Huebler, *November 1968* (New York: Seth Siegelau, 1968), n.p. In addition to these "sculptures," four drawings were listed as a separate category.
- 3 Stephen Melville, "Aspects," in *Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965–1975*, ed. Ann Goldstein and Anne Rorimer, exhibition catalog (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1995), 241. See also Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Michael Asher and the Conclusion of Modernist Sculpture," *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 10 (1983): 276–95; Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," *October* 8 (Spring 1979): 30–44.
- 4 Douglas Huebler and Frédéric Paul, "Truro, Massachusetts, October 11–14, 1992," in *Douglas Huebler, "Variable", etc.*, ed. Frédéric Paul, exhibition catalog (Limoges: FRAC Limousin, 1992), 130.
- 5 Seth Siegelau, ed., *January 5–31, 1969*, exhibition catalog (New York: Seth Siegelau, 1969), n.p.
- 6 In Barry's case, the page reserved for the statement is left blank.
- 7 Lawrence Alloway, "Artists and Photographs [1970]," in his *Topics in American Art since 1945* (New York: Norton, 1975), 202.
- 8 Nancy Foote, "The Anti-Photographers," *Artforum* 15, no. 1 (September 1976): 46.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 48.
- 10 Alexander Alberro, "At the Treshold of Art as Information," in *Recording Conceptual Art: Early Interviews with Barry, Huebler, Kaltenbach, LeWitt, Morris, Oppenheim, Siegelau, Smithson, Weiner*, ed. Alexander Alberro and Patricia Norvell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 2.
- 11 I would like to point here to the work of Alexander Alberro, Heather Diack, Liz Kotz, Robert Morgan, and Anne Rorimer, which will be referred to throughout this article. See other endnotes for individual citations.
- 12 Huebler, *November 1968*, n.p.
- 13 Huebler, *November 1968*, n.p. Within the booklet, the piece is constantly referred to as "New York-Boston Exchange Shape," i.e. with the names of the two cities inverted.
- 14 *Boston – New York Exchange Shape* is part of the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Here, a road map of Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island (with New York City at its very margin) was added to locate the two cities. The photographs are slightly different from the ones published in *November 1968*: <http://www.moma.org/collection/works/137399> (accessed June 30, 2016). See Lucy R. Lippard, "Douglas Huebler: Everything about Everything," *Art News* 71 (December 1972): 29, on the co-existence of different versions of some pieces. Andrew P. Cappetta has discussed the museological consequences of such issues in his conference paper: "Reconstructing Douglas Huebler" (College Art Association 103rd Annual

- Conference, Panel: Preserving the Artistic Legacies of the 1960s and 1970s, New York, February 2015).
- 15 Anne Rorimer, *New Art in the 60s and 70s: Redefining Reality* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2001), 136.
 - 16 Alberro, "At the Treshold of Art as Information," 6. See also Anne Moeglin-Delcroix, "Documentation as Art in Artists' Books and Other Artists' Publications: Art versus Documentation? Terms of a Paradox," in *Artists' Publications. Ein Genre und seine Erschließung*, ed. Sigrid Schade and Anne Thurmman-Jajes (Cologne: Salon-Verlag, 2009), 40–42; Tom Holert, "Land Art's Multiple Sites," in *Ends of the Earth: Land Art to 1974*, organized by Philipp Kaiser and Miwon Kwon, exhibition catalog (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art; Munich: Prestel, 2012), 96–117.
 - 17 Lucy R. Lippard and John Chandler, "The Dematerialization of Art," *Art International* 12, no. 2 (February 1968): 31–36. Petra Lange-Berndt has rightly pointed out that Lippard's and Chandler's aim in introducing the term in 1968 "was not ... to dispense with materials but instead to redefine and update the category." Petra Lange-Berndt, "Introduction: How to Be Complicit with Materials," in *Materiality*, ed. Petra Lange-Berndt, Documents of Contemporary Art Series (London: Whitechapel Gallery; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015), 19.
 - 18 Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996); Johanna Drucker, "The Crux of Conceptualism: Conceptual Art, the Idea of Idea, and the Information Paradigm," in *Conceptual Art: Theory, Myth, and Practice*, ed. Michael Corris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 253.
 - 19 See Frances Colpitt, "The Formalist Connection and Originary Myths of Conceptual Art," in Corris, *Conceptual Art*, 28–49.
 - 20 Drucker, "The Crux of Conceptualism," 267, n. 4.
 - 21 Lucy Soutter, "The Visual Idea. Photography in Conceptual Art" (PhD diss., Yale University, 2001), 123.
 - 22 Sophie Cras, "Global Conceptualism? Cartographies of Conceptual Art in Pursuit of Decentering," in *Circulations in the Global History of Art*, ed. Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann et al. (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 172–3; 178.
 - 23 Norvell, "Douglas Huebler, July 25, 1969," in Alberro and Norvell, *Recording Conceptual Art*, 139.
 - 24 *Ibid.*, 146.
 - 25 "When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes the machine that makes the art. ... Conceptual art is not necessarily logical. The logic of a piece or series of pieces is a device that is used at times only to be ruined. ... Ideas are discovered by intuition." Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (Summer 1967): 80. For the irrational dimension in LeWitt's art and the importance of intuition as method, see Sabeth Buchmann, *Denken Gegen das Denken: Produktion, Technologie, Subjektivität bei Sol LeWitt, Yvonne Rainer und Hélio Oiticica* (Berlin: b_books, 2007), 48–54; see also Rosalind Krauss, "LeWitt in Progress," *October* 6 (Fall 1978): 46–60.
 - 26 "Conceptual artists are mystics rather than rationalists. ... Irrational judgements lead to new experience." Sol LeWitt, "Sentences on Conceptual Art," *Art-Language* 1, no. 1 (May 1969): 11.

- 27 Norvell, "Douglas Huebler, July 25, 1969," 139: "I began to get into the whole notion of language, the convention of language as a way by which we read ... or conceptualize our experience."
- 28 Norvell, "Douglas Huebler, July 25, 1969," 146. The second ellipses are from the original quote.
- 29 Liz Kotz, *Words To Be Looked At: Language in 1960s Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 232; Melville, "Aspects," 231–6; Robert C. Morgan, "Huebler's Phenomenology," in Paul, *Douglas Huebler, "Variable", etc.*, 188–94. For positions that argue how the larger project of (North American) Conceptual art must still be understood in terms of the social and political protests of the time, see Lucy R. Lippard, "Escape Attempts," in Goldstein and Rorimer, *Reconsidering the Object of Art*, 16–39; Seth Siegelau's reply to Benjamin Buchloh in *October* 57 (Summer 1991): 155–57, as part of Joseph Kosuth and Seth Siegelau, "Replies to Benjamin Buchloh on Conceptual Art"; Blake Stimson, "The Promise of Conceptual Art," in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), xxxviii–lii.
- 30 Douglas Huebler, "Sabotage or Trophy? Advance or Retreat?" *Artforum* 20, no. 9 (May 1982): 76.
- 31 Rorimer, *New Art in the 60s and 70s*, 137.
- 32 *Prospect 69: Katalog-Zeitung zur internationalen Vorschau auf die Kunst in der Galerie der Avantgarde*, exhibition catalog (Düsseldorf: Städtische Kunsthalle, 1969), 26.
- 33 Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Winning the Game When the Rules Have Been Changed: Art Photography and Postmodernism," in *The Photography Reader*, ed. Liz Wells (London: Routledge, 2003), 155. See also Foote, "The Anti-Photographers," for that relation.
- 34 Caroline A. Jones, *Eyesight Alone: Clement Greenberg's Modernism and the Bureaucratization of the Senses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). See also Thomas Crow, "Unwritten Histories of Conceptual Art: Against Visual Culture," in *Modern Art in the Common Culture* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1996), 213; Robert C. Morgan, *Conceptual Art: An American Perspective* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1984), 105.
- 35 Norvell, "Douglas Huebler, July 25, 1969," 142: "If there's anything that I really can say is part of my work, at least, it's to take the notion that appearance itself carries aesthetic value, or art value, I should say ... I'm not talking about real experience – I mean real visual experience, where I might choose to look at one kind of thing over another kind of thing in the world just because my responses are that way. I'm talking about art using appearance – using certain color structures, certain notions of composition and so forth. ... But I am certain that art is not limited to being something that's located at the end of your eyeballs, you know."
- 36 Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October* 55 (Winter 1990): 107; Charles Harrison, *Essays on Art & Language* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 29.
- 37 Norvell, "Douglas Huebler, July 25, 1969," 140. This statement refers to *Location Piece* #5, which will be discussed below.
- 38 Alan Fern, "Documentation, Art, and the Nineteenth-Century Photograph," in *The Documentary Photograph as a Work of Art: American Photographs, 1860–1876*, ed. Joel Snyder and Doug Munson, exhibition catalog (Chicago: Smart Gallery, 1976), 11.
- 39 Timm Starl, "Dokumentarische Fotografie," in *Begriffslexikon zur zeitgenössischen Kunst*, ed. Hubertus Butin (Cologne: Snoeck, 2014), 73; William R. Alschuler,

- “Leon Vidal,” in *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century Photography*, ed. John Hannavy, vol. 2 (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2008), 1448–9.
- 40 Albert Londe, *La photographie moderne* (Paris: Masson, 1888), 157: “Par photographie documentaire, nous entendons toutes les applications où la photographie n’est qu’une copiste fidèle, rigoureusement exacte.” This and all following translations are by the author.
- 41 Londe, *La photographie moderne*, 1: “elle est devenue l’auxiliaire indispensable de toutes les sciences où la précision documentaire est nécessaire.”
- 42 Londe, *La photographie moderne*, 2: “pour les artistes, une mine des documents.”
- 43 Molly Nesbit, “Eugène Atget,” in *A New History of Photography*, ed. Michel Frizot (Cologne: Könemann, 1999), 400. See also Rosalind Krauss, “Photography’s Discursive Spaces: Landscape/View,” *Art Journal* 42, no. 4 (Winter 1982): 317–18; Sophie Berrebi, *The Shape of Evidence: Contemporary Art and the Document* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2014), 17. See Erin Silver’s review in this volume.
- 44 Nesbit, “Eugène Atget,” 401.
- 45 Molly Nesbit, *Atget’s Seven Albums* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 15.
- 46 All these quotes are taken from the statements cited above.
- 47 Alloway, “Artists and Photographs.”
- 48 Douglas Huebler, *Location Piece #2* (New York: Multiples, Inc., 1970).
- 49 Melanie Mariño, “Dumb Documents. Uses of Photography in American Conceptual Art, 1959–1969” (PhD diss., Cornell University, 2002), 245 (here with regard to one of the pieces in *January 5–31, 1969*).
- 50 Walt Crowley, *Rites of Passage: A Memoir of the Sixties in Seattle* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995), 269; Jeff Stevens, “May 4, 1969: Hit the Highway, Freeway,” *Seattle Star*, May 4, 2016, <http://www.seattlestar.net/2016/05/may-4-1969-hit-the-highway-freeway>. In 1971, the plan was finally dropped. The “ramps to nowhere” (or “ghost ramps”) are currently being removed.
- 51 I am grateful to Darcy Huebler for this information.
- 52 Anne Moeglin-Delcroix, *Esthétique du livre d’artiste 1960–1980: Une introduction à l’art contemporain*, rev. ed. (Marseille: Le Mot et le Reste, 2011), 153: “images vides, sans intérêt, et qui auraient pu être faites dans n’importe quelle ville.”
- 53 Robert C. Morgan, *Art into Ideas: Essays on Conceptual Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 166; 169: “Huebler ... has made an important comment about the limitations of photography in manufacturing an accurate view of reality when left without a textual counterpart to fill the visual threshold between representation and deceit.”
- 54 “The ‘product’ of art is not its issue: the fabrication of meaning is the issue and may be read back from the observation statements that form the product.” *Sonsbeek ’71: Sonsbeek Buiten de Perken*, ed. Gert van Beijeren, exhibition catalog (Deventer: De IJssel, 1971), 141 (original emphasis).
- 55 See Phyllis Plous, “Speaking to Contemporary Culture: Notes and Excavations,” in Phyllis Plous and Frances Colpitt, *Knowledge: Aspects of Conceptual Art*, exhibition catalog (Santa Barbara: University Art Museum; Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1992), 62, for Conceptualism’s “emphasis on systems for the production of cultural rather than personal meanings.”
- 56 *Brecht on Film and Radio*, ed. and trans. Marc Silberman (London: Methuen, 2000), 164.
- 57 Walter Benjamin, “A Short History of Photography [1931],” trans. Stanley Mitchell, *Screen* 13, no. 1 (March 1, 1972): 25. Sections of Benjamin’s essay are also devoted

to Atget's photographs, which he compared "with those of a scene of action" in the section directly following my quote.

- 58 Roland Barthes, "The Photographic Message," in *Image, Music, Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 15–31. See also Kotz, *Words To Be Looked At*, 218.
- 59 Douglas Huebler, in *Origin and Destination. Alighiero e Boetti, Douglas Huebler*, ed. Marianne van Leeuw and Anne Pontégnie, exhibition catalog (Brussels: Société des Expositions du Palais des Beaux-Arts de Bruxelles, 1997), 134.
- 60 Mike Kelley, "Shall We Kill Daddy?" in Van Leeuw and Pontégnie, *Origin and Destination*, 156. For the biographical information, see Kenneth Reich, "Obituary: Douglas Huebler; Artist Helped Start Conceptualism," *Los Angeles Times*, July 15, 1997.
- 61 Rorimer, *New Art in the 60s and 70s*, 139.
- 62 Norvell, "Douglas Huebler, July 25, 1969," 139–40.
- 63 Rosalind Krauss, "Stieglitz/Equivalents," *October* 11 (Winter 1979): 134–5.
- 64 *Ibid.*, 133.
- 65 Heather Diack, "The Benefit of the Doubt. Regarding the Photographic Conditions of Conceptual Art, 1966-73" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2010), 128; Joshua Shannon, "Uninteresting Pictures: Photography and Fact at the End of the 1960s," in *Light Years: Conceptual Art and the Photograph, 1967–1977*, ed. Matthew S. Witkovsky, exhibition catalog (Chicago: Art Institute, 2012), 91. Both Diack and Shannon have pointed to the relation between Stieglitz's *Equivalents* and a different work by Huebler, *Location Piece #1, New York – Los Angeles* (1969), where photographs of the cloudy sky down from the plane window were taken on a flight between the two cities. For Diack (128), "[i]n recalling Stieglitz's interest in 'Equivalents,' ... Huebler is demonstrating his acute awareness of photographic history."