

This is a pre-copyedited, author-produced manuscript of a chapter accepted for publication in the book Anäel Lejeune, Alexander Streitberger and Christophe Viart (eds), *L'Art de Douglas Huebler* (Rennes: University of Rennes, 2018). The definitive version is Dominic Rahtz, 'Reference and Self-Reference in the Work of Douglas Huebler', in Anäel Lejeune, Alexander Streitberger and Christophe Viart (eds), *L'Art de Douglas Huebler* (Rennes: University of Rennes, 2018), pp. 101-112.

REFERENCE AND SELF-REFERENCE IN THE WORK OF DOUGLAS HUEBLER

The use of language in American Conceptual Art of the late 1960s is usually explained in terms of a negation of the phenomenality of the work of art as an image or an object, and as the vehicle for a move into the immaterial realm of ideas. In the 'purer' versions of Conceptual Art, the condition of art itself was seen as conceptual, and therefore, according to a certain philosophical context, subject to the workings of language, regardless of its referent. For the Conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth, in his 1969 essay 'Art After Philosophy', this condition meant that works of art "provide no information whatsoever about any matter of fact".¹ Kosuth defined the work of art, in another text from 1969, as "a kind of proposition presented within the context of art as a comment on art", before going on to claim that "Works of art that try to tell us something about the world are bound to fail... The absence of reality in art is exactly art's reality".² Kosuth's 1968 series of photostats of dictionary definitions of words such as 'meaning', 'nothing', and so on, were described

¹ Joseph Kosuth, 'Art After Philosophy' [part 1], *Studio International*, vol. 178, no. 915 (October 1969), p. 136. The characterization of this version of Conceptual Art as 'pure' is derived from Kosuth.

² Joseph Kosuth, *The Sixth Investigation 1969 Proposition 14* (Cologne: Gerd de Vries, 1971), n.p., cited in Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, 'Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions', *October*, no. 55 (Winter 1990), pp. 127-8.

by him as “abstractions of abstractions”,³ and, in his terms, were concerned with the abstract as the proper domain of art. For Kosuth, the use of language allowed the work to separate itself from the world and to refer only to itself.

In what Kosuth regarded as the less ‘pure’ versions of Conceptual Art, language tended to be used as a means of referring to a wider reality, a reality that could be documented or represented in language. The work of Douglas Huebler falls into this category. Huebler used language in combination with photography and other means of representation in the form of ‘information’ to refer directly to a state of things, a reality, that existed in the world. His short text in the exhibition catalogue *January 5-31, 1969* can be read in these terms: “I prefer, simply, to state the existence of things in terms of time and place”.⁴ Language was here used in the mode of the statement, referring from a position of separateness to a reality that existed elsewhere. Whereas in the ‘purer’ versions of Conceptual Art, such as Kosuth’s, language provided the means for a self-reference separated from the world, the less ‘pure’ versions, such as Huebler’s, used language as a means of reference, pointing beyond itself to a world outside of language.

The referential status of Huebler’s work was determined by a presupposition concerning the separate and indifferent existence of the world. In an interview from 1969, Huebler stated, “I am pointing... at the world by saying that how we deal with the world, how each individual does, how each person chooses... whatever structure, whatever system he sets up, can make the world more or less interesting. But the world itself does not change. The world itself is always there”.⁵ What appears to be merely a matter of common sense was arrived at in Huebler’s work through an

³ ‘Four Interviews with Barry, Huebler, Kosuth, Weiner’, *Arts Magazine*, vol. 43, no. 4 (February 1969), p. 22.

⁴ *January 5-31, 1969* (New York: Seth Siegelau, 1969), n.p.

⁵ Alexander Alberro and Patricia Norvell (eds), *Recording Conceptual Art: Early Interviews with Barry, Huebler, Kaltenbach, LeWitt, Morris, Oppenheim, Siegelau, Smithson, and Weiner by Patricia Norvell* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), pp. 141-2.

apparent indifference when it came to the particular ways in which the 'thereness' of the world was referred to. The work was intended to capture "an appearance in the world, and suspend that appearance itself from being important".⁶ Huebler thus established a relationship between the indifference of the world, which was "always there", and the reference in the work to one appearance of that world, an appearance which was similarly indifferent, in the sense that it had no importance in itself. One of Huebler's early Location works, *Site Sculpture Project, Boston-New York Exchange Shape* (1968), for example, referred to its reality by establishing a series of points forming a hexagon on two maps—one of Boston, the other of New York—that were then "marked" with a small one-inch paper sticker in the actual street location. Huebler photographed each site as he "marked" it, with, as he put it in the statement that formed part of the piece, "no attempt made for a more or a less interesting or picturesque representation of the location".⁷ Of works such as this, Huebler wrote that "When I go to the site to document it—to "mark it"—I think "here it is" and that's all".⁸ The indifference of the photographic documentation combined with the particularity of its referent in each case may be read in the phrase "here it is". On the other side, the particularity of the elements that comprised the piece itself were described in similar terms. "Both the sites selected and the shape that they describe are "neutral" and only function to form "that" work".⁹

It is noticeable that on such occasions, when articulating the indifference that characterizes the relationship between his work and the aspect of the world it is referring to, Huebler often has recourse to such deictic terms as "here", "that", "there", and so on, which refer to the particularity of a location in which he happened to place a one-inch paper sticker, or to the particularity of the work itself as holding together a number of real locations according to the shape they form on a map. The deictic terms 'here' and 'that' were used to refer to this or that particular realization of the work, but

⁶ Alberro and Norvell, *Recording Conceptual Art*, p. 147.

⁷ *Douglas Huebler: 'Variable', Etc.* (Limousin: FRAC, 1993), n.p.

⁸ 'Four interviews', p. 22.

⁹ 'Four interviews', p. 22.

the words themselves also refer to the indifference of each act of reference.

The capacity of language to refer to the world, to “point... at the world”, has often been seen as dependent, explicitly or implicitly, on the linguistic category of deixis, and it is deixis that can be seen to exemplify in language the referential indifference invoked by Huebner. Unlike more interiorized formal attributes of language, such as grammar, deictics are those words, such as ‘here’ and ‘there’, ‘now’ and ‘then’, ‘I’ and ‘you’, that relate an instance of language to a particular reality. As such, they allow for reference, for the apprehension of the world in language, to take place. However, in linguistic terms, the referential status of deixis is ambiguous, because a word such as ‘there’ does not in itself refer to anything at all, but can only refer to a particular ‘there’ according to the position of the person uttering it. In the terms of Émile Benveniste, who (with Roman Jakobson¹⁰) largely established the parameters of the problem in linguistics, deixis effects the shift from language as structure to language as discourse. On one hand the function of such deictic terms as ‘there’ or ‘here’, ‘you’ or ‘I’, and so on, is to relate an instance of discourse to a particular reality, which corresponds to the long-established meaning of the word ‘deixis’ as linked etymologically to indicating or pointing. It is in this sense, of pointing at a particular reality, that deictic terms are able to produce reference in language. On the other hand, a word such as ‘there’ does not by itself refer to anything at all, but can only refer to a particular ‘there’ according to the instance of discourse. For Benveniste, deictic terms such as ‘here’ or ‘there’ constituted what he called ““empty” forms”,¹¹ given in language, according to which the subject of an utterance was positioned. The character of these ““empty” forms” of language was such that, in themselves, they had no relationship to reality. There

¹⁰ See Roman Jakobson, ‘Shifters, Verbal Categories, and the Russian Verb’, in Jakobson, *Selected Writings II: Word and Language* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), pp. 130-47.

¹¹ Émile Benveniste, ‘Subjectivity in Language’ (1958), *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek (Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami Press, 1971), p. 227. This discussion of deixis has also been informed by Wlad Godzich, ‘Foreword: The Tiger on the Paper Mat’, in Paul de Man, *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), pp. xv-xvii.

was no particular 'there' in the world to which the word 'there' would necessarily correspond, and there was no general concept of 'there' that would encompass all possible designations of 'there'.

Huebler's characteristic way of working was to produce a "system" or "conceptual structure", articulated in language, that would, in his words, "catch a part of what [was] happening... in the world".¹² For example, the "conceptual structure" of Huebler's *Duration Piece #5* (1969) is stated as follows:

During a ten minute period of time on March 17, 1969 ten photographs were made, each documenting the location in Central Park where an individually distinguishable bird call was heard. Each photograph was made with the camera pointed in the direction of the sound. That direction was then walked toward by the auditor until the instant that the next call was heard, at which time the next photograph was made and the next direction taken.

The ten photographs join with this statement to constitute the form of this piece.¹³

The statement refers to a definite reality, a particular place on a particular day—Central Park in New York on 17th March 1969. The structure of the work is such that the views of this reality depicted by the photographs can only, within the general parameters set by the location, be arbitrary, since as Huebler determined things, they were taken of the direction of a sound, a bird call. The photographs, of course, cannot capture this sound, nor do they show the cause of the sound, the birds. Since it is not possible to determine any reasons for what the photographs depict from the photographs themselves, they can only refer to what happened to be captured photographically at the moment

¹² Alberro and Norvell, *Recording Conceptual Art*, p. 147.

¹³ Douglas Huebler: *'Variable', Etc.*, n.p.

concerned according to the system developed by the artist. According to Huebler, he “use[d] the camera as a ‘dumb’ copying device that only serves to document whatever phenomena appears before it through the conditions set by a system. No ‘esthetic’ choices are possible. Other people often make the photographs. It makes no difference. What may be documented that has appearance in the world actually is returned to itself as only that and as nothing that has to do with the piece”.¹⁴ Photography, for Huebler, was merely a “metaphor for appearance”,¹⁵ appearance as such.

There are two aspects of Huebler’s use of photography that bear on the question of the referential status of his work. First, a particular photograph may be considered as necessarily true with respect to what it shows, a capability that can be attributed to the mechanical and indexical character of photography (that is, straight analogue photography). In this sense, the photographic image can be seen as referentially reliable since there is a definite causal or existential relationship in its capturing of the appearance of what the camera is pointed at. In his remarks concerning the mode of existence of the photographic image in *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes claimed that “The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent”.¹⁶ This gives the photograph a particular condition, which distinguishes it from other forms of representation. In fact, a photograph can be distinguished from other forms of representation to the degree that it is not a representation, to the degree that the photographic image has a kind of automatic relationship to what it is of, like a reflection in a mirror. At this level of its existence, the photograph is not subject to the language or conventions of representation and can be seen, as Barthes put it, as “an image without a code”, as

¹⁴ Douglas Huebler, statement in *Prospect '69* (Düsseldorf: Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, 1969), p. 26; cited in Jack Burnham, ‘Alice’s Head: Reflections on Conceptual Art’, *Artforum*, vol. 8, no. 6 (February 1970), p. 41.

¹⁵ Michael Auping, ‘Talking with Douglas Huebler’, *LAICA Journal*, no. 15 (July-August 1977), p. 38; cited in Liz Kotz, *Words to Be Looked At: Language in 1960s Art* (Cambridge, Mass. MIT, 2007), p. 242.

¹⁶ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Fontana, 1984), p. 80.

conveying a “literal reality”.¹⁷ (Where a photograph does constitute a representation, it is necessarily figured through the language or conventions that define a culture.) Barthes, attempting to characterize the particularity of this relationship between the photograph and its referent, stated that: “the Photograph is never anything but an antiphon of “Look”, “See”, “Here it is”; it points a finger at certain *vis-à-vis*, and cannot escape this pure deictic language”.¹⁸ The photograph can be seen as the equivalent of a deictic term such as ‘here’ or ‘there’. Like the word ‘there’, photography can be used to point to a particular appearance of the world, and, like the word ‘there’, in its constitutive indifference as a linguistic ““empty” form”, photography may equally well refer to innumerable other appearances, innumerable other ‘theres’.

Thus, secondly, photography can be characterized according to its indifference with respect to what it shows. In *Duration Piece #5* each photograph could have shown any other view of Central Park, depending on what bird call happened to be heard at a particular moment, a possibility suggested by the ten different photographs that comprise the work. Huebler tended to be dismissive of the role of photographs in his work, stating that “they are not interesting in themselves”; rather, in their indifference to what they show, they “refer out to everything else”.¹⁹ This indifference can be seen as the corollary of the necessary reality of the relationship between the photographic image and its referent, which according to Barthes, “involves Photography in the vast disorder of objects—of all the objects in the world: why choose (why photograph) this object, this moment, rather than some other?”²⁰ These two aspects contribute to a sense of photography as a mere mechanical apprehension of the world, both true and indifferent with respect to its referent. Although each photograph may be seen as referentially reliable in any particular instance, its constitutive indifference meant that the

¹⁷ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 88; Roland Barthes, ‘The Photographic Message’, in Barthes, *Image, Music, Text* (London: Fontana, 1977), p. 19.

¹⁸ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 5.

¹⁹ Peggy Gale (ed.), *Artists Talk: 1969-1977* (Halifax: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 2004), p. 235.

²⁰ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 6.

referent itself could only be the most general one possible—the world and all of its possible appearances.

As Huebler himself has pointed out, however, as well as many subsequent commentators on his work,²¹ the referential reliability of his work was frequently undermined by introducing incongruity, coincidence and changes in sequence into each “conceptual structure”, and hence unreliability into its relationship with the reality it sought to capture. This systematic undoing of correspondence produced a sense of doubt in the relationship between the work and its referent. In many of his early Duration pieces, for example, Huebler made a point of stating, as part of the text, that the order of the photographs did not correspond with the times that they were taken. For example, in *Duration Piece #3* (1968), according to the accompanying statement, he took twelve photographs of an escalator in the New York Port Authority Building, the first eight at one minute intervals, with the subsequent intervals extending to an hour, a day, with the last being taken exactly a month after the first one. The statement that comprises one part of the work thus describes a particular temporal structure. As part of the statement, however, Huebler also signalled that “None of the photographs is keyed with the time it was made”,²² which negated any possible correspondence between the photographs and the list of times they were taken. Furthermore, the photographs look very similar, suggesting that whether the interval was one minute or one month made no difference to the appearance of what was shown.

Many other works contain the same undermining of possible correspondence between the photographs and the actual times or sequence in which they were taken. The statement that forms part of Huebler’s 1968 work *Duration Piece #4* declares that the nine photographs of children skipping,

²¹ See, for example, Gordon Hughes, ‘Exit Ghost: Douglas Huebler’s Face Value’, *Art History*, vol. 32, no. 5 (December 2009), pp. 894-909.

²² *Douglas Huebler* (Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum, 1979), n.p.

at ten second, twenty second, and thirty second intervals, “have been scrambled out of sequence”.²³ Similarly, the photographs in a 1969 work *Location Piece #1*, which show a sequence of views from an aeroplane window that corresponded to the states flown over on a journey between New York and Los Angeles, were, in their presentation, deliberately not “keyed” to these states.²⁴ Such works involve two different kinds of statements concerning reality that are not necessarily compatible—the photographic, which necessarily corresponds to a particular appearance in time, and another, different, organization of time, such as a series of standardized intervals counted in seconds, minutes, hours and days, or a journey by plane.

In a panel discussion in New York on the theme of ‘Time’, in which he took part in early 1969, Huebler stated:

I am interested in being able to take some very small piece of life, of the world, and doing something with it in terms of time, that is, by demonstrating how objects or the position of things change. I’ve done that by having elements, events, or materials actually change as they would in sequential time, documenting the changes photographically, and then scrambling the photographs so that there’s no priority of the linear.²⁵

The changes in sequence that resulted produced a relationship of indifference between the statement and the photographs, so that although each photograph necessarily corresponded to a particular moment of time, and in photographic terms may be seen as referentially reliable, this moment was

²³ Douglas Huebler, n.p.

²⁴ Douglas Huebler: ‘Variable’, Etc., n.p.

²⁵ ‘Time: A Panel Discussion’ (New York, 17th March 1969), in Lucy R. Lippard (ed.), *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1997; first published 1973), p. 83. This panel took place on the same day, 17th March 1969, as the photographs in *Duration Piece #5* were taken.

arbitrarily detached from its stated time in the text. In Huebler's work, the "conceptual structure" of the work thus systematically undoes any correspondence between appearances and the ordering of appearances. (Similar strategies may be seen in the designation of the Location and Duration pieces as such more generally. Sometimes a Location piece seems more concerned with duration than location, as in the case of *Location Piece #7 (Snow Sculpture Project)* (1968), or vice versa.)

This unreliability was acknowledged by Huebler in a self-interview published as part of 'Four Interviews with Barry, Huebler, Kosuth, Weiner' in *Arts Magazine* in early 1969, where he wrote that "The documents prove nothing. They make the piece exist and I am interested in having that existence occur in as simple a way as possible".²⁶ In Huebler's work, the arbitrariness of any initial apprehension of the world, or an aspect of it such as Central Park or the New York Port Authority Building, was subjected to different means of giving shape to this apprehension, through a sequence of appearances or through language, which turn out to be incompatible, or at least arbitrary, in their relationship to one another, and therefore throw into doubt the relationship between any apprehension of the world and the world itself. The condition of Huebler's works are thus suspended between reliability and unreliability, between the claim to referential reliability of particular instances of capturing appearances such as the photographs, and the systematic undoing of this reliability by the arbitrariness of the "conceptual structure" that was invented to hold such instances of reference together. This unreliability of reference is in fact the corollary of the arbitrariness of the structure and its linguistic character, which in the end can only reliably refer to itself as another event happening in the world. The capacity of Huebler's works to refer, for example, to a particular 'there' in his Location pieces, was subject to the deictic ambiguity between the singularity of this 'there' and the possibility (also contained in the word 'there') of having innumerable other referents.

²⁶ 'Four Interviews', p 22.

Although deictic terms such as 'here' or 'there' consist in ""empty" forms" that have no referent themselves, such terms are necessary for language to function as a means of apprehending the world. According to Benveniste, deictic terms such as 'there' can only be meaningful from the position of the subject of the utterance concerned. In particular, it was the linguistic category of person, especially the fundamental relationship between the words 'I' and 'you', around which all discourse arranged itself. 'I' and 'you' share the same ambiguity as other deictic terms such as 'here' and 'there', since each word in itself does not refer to anything at all, but only refers to a particular instance of self or other according to the person uttering it. For Benveniste, in his 1958 essay 'Subjectivity in Language', all deictic terms such as 'here' and 'there', 'now' and 'then', and so on, were really only extensions of the more fundamental relationship between 'I' and 'you'. In his words, such terms "organize the spatial and temporal relationships around the "subject" taken as referent",²⁷ as "an internal point of reference", as he put it in another essay.²⁸ This instance of self was only produced in the instance of discourse, however, and did not have any existence prior to or outside of it.²⁹ Deictics, by themselves, as ""empty" forms", can only refer to the instance of discourse itself, to the fact of language taking place in the first place, and in this sense they are self-referential.

Since such reference necessarily occurs in the act of speaking, it may be defined as a speech act. For Benveniste, in a later essay on the speech act theory of J. L. Austin, the act of speaking has the condition of referring to itself, of "referring to a reality that it itself constitutes by the fact that it is actually uttered in conditions that make it an act. As a result of this it is both a linguistic

²⁷ Benveniste, 'Subjectivity in Language' (1958), in *Problems in General Linguistics*, p. 226.

²⁸ Émile Benveniste, 'L'appareil formel de l'énonciation', *Langages*, no. 17, (1970) p. 14. The original French reads "La présence du locuteur à son énonciation fait que chaque instance de discours constitue un centre de référence interne".

²⁹ On this point, see Roland Barthes, 'Why I Love Benveniste' (1966, 1974), in Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), p. 165.

manifestation, since it must be spoken, and a real fact, insofar as it is the performing of an act".³⁰ Although deictic words can be seen as self-referential, and consist in ""empty" forms", they are nevertheless real, and constitute in each case a "real fact", that of language taking place in the world.

Initially, it appears that the specifically deictic character of Huebler's work is located in the photographs, which are causally and existentially inseparable from the position and act of pointing the camera and taking the photograph, but in fact it is the "system" or "conceptual structure", articulated in language, that causes each photograph to become detached from this act of reference, and to take on the generalized condition of an ""empty" form". The emptiness of this form was arrived at in Huebler's work through an act of linguistic negation. The referential unreliability produced in each "conceptual structure" tended to be negatively directed at habitual ways of making sense of the world, or what Huebler referred to as "myths" (following Barthes' meaning of the term in *Mythologies* as those instances of naturalized ideology that conceal their own status as second-order semiological meaning). The indifferent ""empty" form" of the photographic image, as appearance as such, was thus arrived at through the negation of habitual forms of recognition articulated in language.

In Huebler's *Location Piece #2* from 1969, two people were assigned to take twelve photographs each of places in the cities of New York and Seattle that they felt corresponded to the words 'frightening', 'erotic', 'transcendent', 'passive', 'fevered' and 'muffled'. These words functioned as subjective descriptions of the particular places that were photographed. Although the work may at first seem to be concerned with the subjectivity of how things appear, this was only an initial determination that functioned as the starting point of its own displacement. The photographs were sent to Huebler, without any indication of which images corresponded to which words. He then selected twelve images at random, and the final work comprised these together with four other

³⁰ Émile Benveniste, 'Analytical Philosophy and Language' (1963), in Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics*, p. 236.

unrelated photographs of places, maps of the cities concerned, and the statement that described the form of the piece. The deictic character of the photographs themselves were complicated by the associations drawn with the words 'frightening', 'erotic', and so on, by the people who took them, which referred to their own subjectivity at the moment each photograph was taken as well as the actual locations. The work effectively consists of a series of utterances or speech acts—'this is frightening', 'this is erotic', and so on—which refer to the subjects of those utterances as much as to the various views of the cities involved. Whereas each photograph can be defined as deictic due to its causal or existential relationship to its referent, deictic terms in language are determined by no such relationship in themselves. The arbitrariness of the sign means that deictic words such as 'this' can only refer to the world by way of a reference to the situation in which such words take place, in other words by reference to the causal or existential relationship between an utterance and the person uttering it. By introducing arbitrariness into the system, Huebler produced a separation between each image and the particular subjective position that had originally determined it. In doing so, one might think that Huebler thereby shifted the burden of meaning onto the viewer, but his stated intention with such works was to force the viewer to reflect on the "myths" or "cultural ready-mades"³¹ that produced meaning in the first place, and to produce an uncertainty with respect to any construction of "a new myth in order to occupy the emptiness that 'appearance' seems to leave behind when it has been released from its expected role".³²

However, it was the further development of *Location Piece #2*, in a work titled *Location Piece #2A*, that reveals the emptiness that constitutes appearance as such most clearly. In this work, Huebler introduced a further stage in the separation between photography and subjectivity, adding the following text to the first statement:

³¹ Douglas Huebler *10+* (Evanston, Ill.: Dittmar Memorial Gallery, Northwestern University, 1980); cited in *Douglas Huebler: 'Variable', Etc.*, p. 176.

³² Douglas Huebler: *'Variable', Etc.*, p. 176.

The cultural terms associated with the images in *Location Piece #2* have been given an added vitality through the process that accounts for their selection; to the contrary, the 12 photographs eliminated by 'chance' were, thereby, stripped of all cultural associations except that of 'meaninglessness', and now join with this statement to constitute the form of this piece.³³

In this second work, the photographs have been definitively separated from the subjective positions that originally determined them, resulting in images characterized by "meaninglessness". The reasons for what the photographs depict have been completely extinguished, and the photographs themselves are reduced to mere intentionless acts of pointing. As such, they have the same condition as deictic terms defined as linguistic ""empty" forms", as actions in language that in themselves can only refer to the indifferent fact of their taking place. Although such forms provide the condition for the constitution of subjectivity in language, they have no subject themselves, since as ""empty" forms" they are suspended from their usual subjective appropriation in the instance of discourse.

Just as a deictic term such as 'here' or 'there' by itself can only refer to the instance of discourse itself, and in this sense is self-referential, the photograph, in itself and to the extent that is completely indifferent to what it shows, is similarly self-referential. It posits its own reality as an act, the act of mere pointing. This self-referentiality, however, is a long way from the self-referentiality of Joseph Kosuth's work, whose "abstractions of abstractions" putatively exist in a quasi-logical realm separated from the world. In Huebler's case, self-reference is rather that of the reality of the instance of discourse in the fact of its utterance as the necessary first moment of reference, a reality that is necessarily part of the world, even though it also provides the condition for its own separation from it. Huebler once stated that his intention was to "empty the work of what appears to be the

³³ Douglas Huebler, n.p.

content... to empty it, to empty it of history, to empty it of mythology, to empty it of literature and to allow it to speak by being empty".³⁴ Huebler's intention in his work was thus to produce an "empty" form", a self-referential and indifferent form that would nevertheless correspond to an apprehension of the world as if for the first time.

³⁴ Michael Auping, 'Talking with Douglas Huebler', *LAICA Journal*, vol. 15 (July-August, 1977); cited in Liz Kotz, 'Image + Text: Reconsidering Photography in Contemporary Art', in Amelia Jones (ed.), *A Companion to Contemporary Art since 1945* (Malden, Mass. and Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), p. 531, n. 39.