Huebler's oeuvre is itself a pipe dream. Flusser, for his part, stresses the anti-historical – and therefore, apolitical – nature of photographs, which 'replace events by states of things and translate them into scenes'. In Flusser's sweeping historical overview, the linearity of writing gave rise to historical consciousness, which the photograph then eroded, reinstantiating a kind of magical thought that confuses cause and effect (making it irrelevant whether, for example, the cock crows because the sun rises or the sun rises because the cock crows). Likewise, in his 1969 declaration, Huebler says he wants only 'to state the existence of things in terms of time and place'. Yet just as we may recall that Sekula insists that the unity of an archive – which is what *Variable Piece #70* purports to be – derives from ownership, so Bill Gates' monopolization of the Bettmann and United Press International archives (currently estimated at 27 million pictures) comes to mind. His company, Corbis Corporation, even went so far as to sequester these underground.

In dialectical opposition to the ever-expanding reach of monopoly capital, Negri and Hardt foresee that, through the process of post-industrialization, 'Private property, despite its juridical powers, cannot help becoming an ever more abstract and transcendental concept and thus ever more detached from reality.' Nonetheless, photography remains intimately bound up with the juridical powers that allow private property to persist as an operative reality, rather than an abstract and transcendent concept – especially through surveillance, an empiricist undercurrent running through *Variable Piece #70*. It is exactly these juridical regimes, moreover, that turn an otherwise abstract and transcendent concept into an operative reality. And yet, because this work also posits itself as a public archive, a commons – 'the incarnation, the production, and the liberation of the multitude', as Hardt and Negri would have it – it also militates against juridical power.

John Miller, 'Double or Nothing: On the Art of Douglas Huebler', *Artforum*, vol. 44, no. 8 (April 2006) 220-27.

Marcia Tucker
John Baldessari: Pursuing the Unpredictable//1981

[...] The most common method used by John Baldessari to keep himself and us 'off balance' is to incorporate accident and chance as source material for his work, in the tradition of John Cage. As early as 1966, he wanted to make work out of things that nobody else would think of making art of.[1] This impulse generated the first aluminium fragment pieces he made. Later, accident became a means of ensuring that the outcome of a piece would remain unknown until it was finished. A chance word or overheard phrase could trigger an entire body of work; in the case of *Floating: Color* (1972), the word 'defenestration' suggested the possibility of throwing something that was *not* an object out of the window. In his notes, Baldessari comments that

> using colour gave rise to a simple ordering system based on the colour wheel, which was useful here and in later pieces because it was sequential yet brief in number. I wanted a form that was static but not limitless. Also, the form provided a way to avoid relational colour choices, that is, colour combinations based on intuitive process.[2]

Baldessari's use of chance to avoid composition or aesthetic decisions had its prototype in an informal exhibition entitled 'Pier 18', held at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1971. The projects were photography-oriented, and each participating artist was asked to meet two photographers at a deserted pier at a specific time and to present them with a project. Baldessari simply asked them to try to photograph a ball, which he repeatedly bounced on the pier, so that it would appear in the centre of the finished photograph. Consequently there was no opportunity to 'compose' or to try to make a handsome picture. Many other works grew out of this strategy, such as *Trying to Roll a Hoop in a Perfect Circle*; *Throwing 4 Balls in the Air to Get a Straight Line ...* ; and *Throwing 3 Balls in the Air to Get an Equilateral Triangle ...* (all from 1972–73). The hoop piece consists of 'the best sequence of 216 frames', while the throwing-balls pieces are 'the best of 36 tries' because there are 36 shots in a roll of 35-mm film. A later work, *Strobe Series/Futurist: Trying to Get a Straight Line with a Finger* (1975), is based on the same principle, wherein chance is an integral part of the activity itself. The results are thus limited by the arbitrary rules of the game, in other words, the number of tries will be limited to the number of available shots on a single roll of film. In some of the later works, particularly the

Blasted Allegories series, the images themselves have been obtained haphazardly by taking pictures of a television screen with an intervalometer. Such strategies were evolved, says Baldessari, because

> I'm concerned with the formal and aesthetic qualities to the point where I try to set up situations where I can't make any aesthetic decisions about it and that's very hard. I realize that as you go on you get better and better at making things look good, and you have to set up stumbling blocks so that you can escape your own good taste, and even that creeps in a lot.[3]

Far from being simply an aleatory artist, Baldessari further keeps us off balance by making an equal number of works based on concepts of choice and comparison, a diametrically opposed system to that of chance and accident. In the *Choosing* series (1971), for example, participants were asked to select, much in the manner of a game show, any three items (green beans, rhubarb, carrots, onions, beets, radishes, etc.) from a similar group. Baldessari would then choose one of the three by pointing to it, and a photograph would be taken. This single chosen item was then carried over to the next group, consisting of the selected item plus two new ones, and the entire process was repeated.

Many of Baldessari's videotapes are also based on the idea of making comparisons (and therefore, even unconsciously, choices), some of them minute and unlikely, as in *Examining 8d Nails* (from *The Way We Do Art Now* ...). In this video segment, painstaking attention is paid to which nail has more rust, or which appears 'cooler, more distant, less important' than the other two. The tape is funny because we tend not to compare common nails at all. On the other hand, *How Various People Spit Out Beans* forces comparison of an activity that has no reason for taking place at all *other than* for comparison, and it is the inappropriateness of the activity in relation to its function that makes it amusing. Both tapes highlight Baldessari's use of choosing and comparing, both on the part of the artist and the viewer, as strategies basic to both making art and to life in general.

An hour-long film called *Script* (1973–77) is Baldessari's most complex use of this strategy of choice. Ten very short, simple scripts for ten scenes are shown in printed form first. Seven couples, none of them professional actors, are given each of the scenes to act out in any way they wish. First, we see all ten scenes played consecutively by each of the seven couples, followed by each scene played, in turn, by all seven couples. Thus far, two sets of comparisons have been set up, the first consisting of choosing the favourite couple's version of each scene. Finally, when it seems that all possibilities for choice and comparison have been exhausted by repetition, Baldessari provides us with 'the top ten shots' ranked from one to ten. His choices are clearly not the ones the viewer might have made, further emphasizing the intensely personal nature of selection and judgement-making.

Another Baldessari strategy is to set up rules for making work which defy those in existence and considered basic to making art. For instance, he has stated that he became interested in doing sequential work because he never believed that 'any one thing was the final word. If one thing is happening here, what's happening there?' He says that he used to go around for days 'trying to look between things instead of at things', an idea which resulted indirectly in such pieces as *Car Color Series: all Cars Parked on the West Side of Main Street* ... (1976), where Baldessari photographed the centre of the door of a parked car, presenting the photographs, like a colour sample chart, in the same order in which all the cars were parked. Where a car wasn't parked, a blank space appears on the wall. 'It's a matter of focus', he says. 'If you believe your world is formed by what you look at, and you just don't look at the usual things, then your world will change.'[4] [...]

1 [footnote 35 in source] Marilyn Hagberg, 'Neglected, Under-Rated, Intellectual Baldessari', *San Diego Magazine* (January 1966) 66–8; 101.

2 [36] From the artist's notes for forthcoming catalogue [Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, 1981].

3 [37] Patricia Failing, 'John Baldessari: Taking Visual Notes', *The Oregonian (Northwest Magazine)* (5 February 1978) 11.

4 [38] Daniel McMullin, 'An Interview with John Baldessari', *Artists' News* (Topanga, Canada, October–November 1980) 9.

Marcia Tucker, extract from 'John Baldessari: Pursuing the Unpredictable' in *John Baldessari* (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1981) 18–21.

John Baldessari
Interview with Nancy Drew//1981

Nancy Drew Have you ever considered just being a writer?

John Baldessari All the time. I think sometimes that I'm somehow on this convolution of a journey ... The thing that seems to keep me from just being a writer is that I still need the non-verbal image.