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Spencer, Amy

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ARTISTS' BOOKS: AN EXPLORATION AND A CREATION

By

Amy Elizabeth Spencer

A capstone project submitted for  
Graduation with University Honors

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University Honors  
University of California, Riverside

APPROVED

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Dr, Elizabeth Kotz  
Department of Art

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Dr. Richard Cardullo  
Howard H Hays Jr. Chair and Faculty Director, University Honors

## **Abstract**

Artists' books are self-contained objects created as works of art, rather than merely vehicles to chronicle information or catalog works of art housed elsewhere, with the term "book" used flexibly to cover anything from traditional codex books to moveable objects that have text and/or images. Artists' books may be made using the tools of bookbinding, typography, hand-lettering, printmaking, letterpress, illustration, and even sculpture. A startling array of concepts, techniques and materials are put to use in their creation. This capstone project seeks to define artists' books and explore historic examples, specifically works whose goals were, in part, to be democratic multiples. A second component of this Honors capstone project is a series of five artists books created to commemorate, reflect on and refer to both the history of artists' books and the experience of attending University of California, Riverside as a non-traditional student. This project was conceived to both explore the definition and history of artists' books and to make that exploration tangible and tactile with a creative element.

## **Acknowledgements**

Many, many thanks to Dr. Elizabeth Kotz who patiently and empathetically mentored, encouraged and advised me, to Dr. Richard Cardullo for believing in me and admitting me into the UCR Honors program, to Cherry Williams for advice, encouragement and a place to present my project in UCR's Rivera Library's Special Collections, to Marcia Reed for allowing me to look at the Getty's Flux-kit, to all the wonderful artists who contributed to the Flux-kit—Melissa Schnaible, Lee-Anne Penner, Uwi Moore, Cathryn Miller, Casey Gardner and Pam Delucchi—to my fabulous kids for upping their cooking game to give me more study time, and to my darling husband Stan. Deep gratitude is also due to my God who gives me courage.



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## **“More Advanced as a Concept”<sup>1</sup>: Artists’ Books as Democratic Multiples**

Everyone knows what a book is. They are ubiquitous. Most of us interact with them from the time we are infants being read to out of board books, to when we practice our new skills with early readers in first grade, to reading novels and chemistry textbooks. Books record thoughts and ideas, religions and philosophies, histories and revolutions. They are familiar, efficient, compact, understandable vessels to carry and communicate vast quantities and varieties of information. Books can be used as weapons, as comforts, to inspire, to teach, to document and to destroy. They can also be art.

A book created to be a work of art is an artist’s book. Artists’ books are of a different nature than the books most of us are familiar with. They are self-contained objects created as art works, rather than to merely chronicle information or catalog works of art housed elsewhere, with the term “book” used flexibly to cover anything from traditional codex books to moveable objects that have text and/or images. Artists’ books may be made using the tools of bookbinding, typography, hand-lettering, printmaking, letterpress, illustration, and even sculpture. A startling array of concepts, techniques and materials are put to use in their creation. Stephen Bury defines artists’ books succinctly, “Artists’ books are books or book-like objects over the final appearance of which an artist has had a high degree of control; where the book is intended as a work of art in itself. They are not books of reproductions of an artist’s work, about an artist, or with just a text or illustrations by an artist.”<sup>2</sup> Bury defines what artists’ books are as well as what they are not. A brief look at the history of the art form and how it developed is helpful in understanding what makes a book and what makes an artist’s book, what characteristics they share and how they differ.

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<sup>1</sup> Ruscha, “The Painted Whirred,” 41.

<sup>2</sup> Bury, *Artists Books*, 1.

Joanna Drucker, considered to be a preeminent scholar in the study of artists' books, has declared that "the artist's book is **the** quintessential 20<sup>th</sup>-century artform".<sup>3</sup> The book created solely as a work of art really came into its own in the 20<sup>th</sup>-century, but as Drucker chronicles in her book, *The Century of Artists' Books*, there are a wide variety of interesting precedents that explored the idea of beautifully designed and crafted books. Even before printing was invented around the world, scrolls, papyrus and codices were created with great care, expertise and inventiveness. As the 20<sup>th</sup>-century approached, some noteworthy creators of antecedent artists' books were William Blake, "an engraver by profession who made numerous books of his own writing and artworks,"<sup>4</sup> William Morris, designer, author and proponent of the Arts and Crafts movement who founded the Kelmscott Press in order to produce luxurious books that reflected his aesthetic ideals, and Gelett Burgess, "a character by all accounts, and a multi-talented artist, writer and wit"<sup>5</sup> who self-published the satirical *Le Petit Journal des Refusées*. In looking back over the history of book production and how it led to the development of artists' books, Drucker reminds us:

Every book is a metaphor, an object of associations and history, cultural meanings and production values, spiritual possibilities and poetic spaces, and all of these are a part of the field from which the artist's book derives its identity, its shared connections and distinguishing features as a book whose realized forms and thematic intentions are only the most evident aspects of its totality as an idea."<sup>6</sup>

What separates these earlier books from 20<sup>th</sup>-century artists' books that fit the description of being a works of art in and of themselves is the intention of their creators. They approach artists'

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<sup>3</sup> Drucker, *Century of Artists' Books*, 1.

<sup>4</sup> Drucker, 22.

<sup>5</sup> Drucker, 30.

<sup>6</sup> Drucker, 42.

books, but do not quite reach them. They were created as books rather than as works of art, were made with an artist's sensibility and used the form of a book as their medium.

In the early 1900's, the innovation of creating works of art in the form of a book appeared in Russia. "The movement of Russian Futurism . . . served as an arena in which the 20<sup>th</sup>-century art of the book emerged."<sup>7</sup> The Russian Futurists were interested in upending conventions.

Many of the earliest Futurist activities . . . were founded upon the principle of aesthetic disobedience – a method of using attacks against established norms of taste and beauty as a form of (or surrogate for) civil disobedience – which offered a rare avenue for expressing opposition in a context where officials sought to control, marginalise and eliminate any such thing. From the very start, Futurism redefined art as an active agent of social change.<sup>8</sup>

One facet of the Futurist movement was their use of small, ephemeral, pamphlet-type books to express and spread their ideas. They were produced using a miscellany of methods and "they demonstrated that the book could be rethought to serve new ends."<sup>9</sup> The Russian Futurists were truly avant-garde in that they took the object of the book and made it into art.

Early 20<sup>th</sup>-century avant-garde art movements embraced artists' books as a newly appreciated form of artistic expression. Some of their books were even made in small editions, but they did not have the explicit goal of creating democratic multiples, or inexpensive books produced in large numbers with the specific intention of being available and accessible to the masses. "The democratization of art is premised upon the idea that the more types of people engage with art . . . is, in and of itself, a good thing"<sup>10</sup> and "the idea of the book as a democratic

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<sup>7</sup> Drucker, 46.

<sup>8</sup> Glisic.

<sup>9</sup> Drucker, 49.

<sup>10</sup> Booth

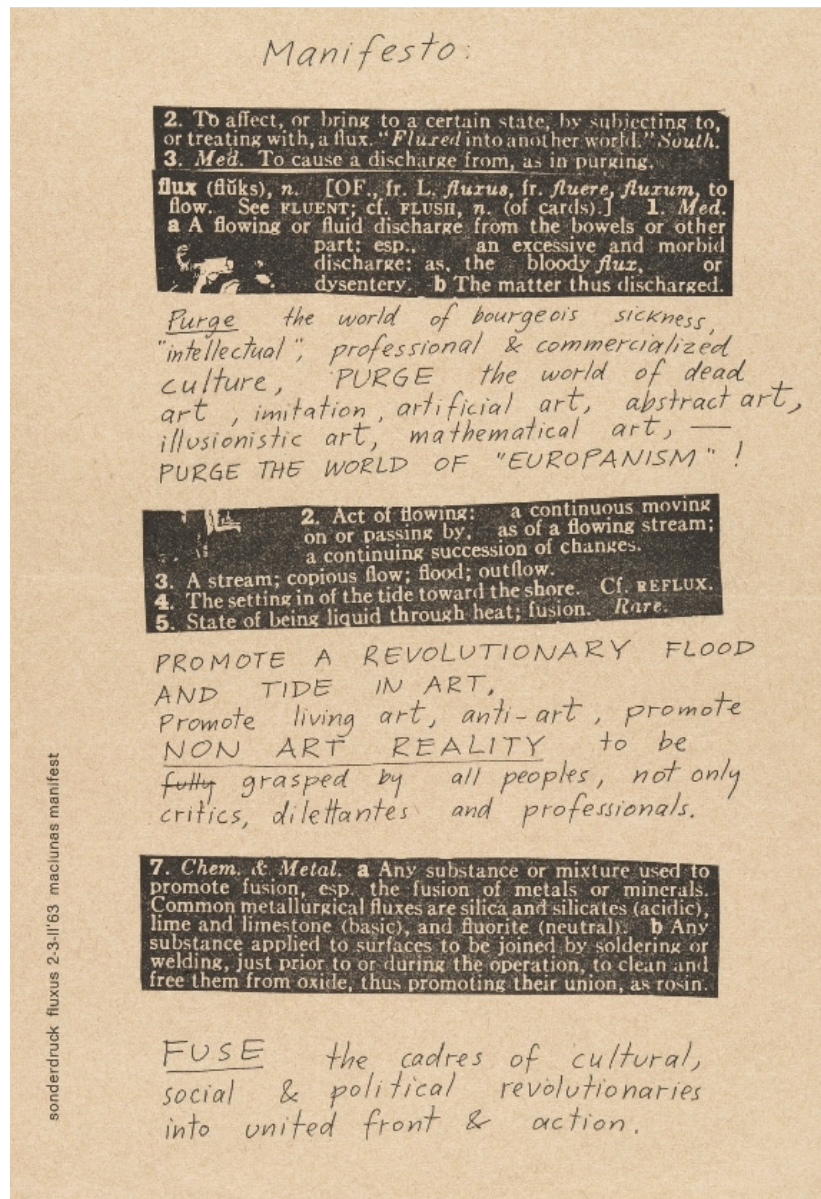
multiple . . . comes into its own in the post-1945 era.”<sup>11</sup> The concept of the artist’s book as a democratic multiple was expressed differently by different artists. Fluxus, an interdisciplinary, international group of artists, addressed the idea of the democratic multiple by seeking to change the focus from individual artists by producing group works, among many other endeavors. Fluxus rejected the art galleries’ system of distribution and commerce and their focus on elite clientele. Their take on the multiple was both in having multiple creators as well as in producing their publications as multiples. Ed Ruscha was another artist who addressed the idea of the democratic multiple with artists’ books, but differently than Fluxus did. Ruscha’s focus was on having as much control over every aspect of design and production as feasible, while still producing his books on a large scale. Each book was designed as a work of art, but one that was not unique, or even a limited and numbered edition, making it art that was available to the masses. Ruscha published an array of artists’ books throughout the 1960s and 70s that were small paperbacks, relatively inexpensive to purchase and produced in large numbers as democratic multiples. Because books are so familiar, they are approachable. Because of their size, compared to, for example, a bronze statue, they are both less expensive to create en masse and much easier to disseminate. Both Ruscha and Fluxus, as they sought to democratize art, used the artist’s book as their medium, in all its inexpensive, potential-to-circulate glory in innovative, interesting and imaginative ways.

While Fluxus was a changing, shifting group of artists, George Maciunas was “the architect, designer and principal organizer of the many cooperative Fluxus activities” and was the one who coined the name, Fluxus. It was a play on the word flux and Maciunas even pasted what appears to be an inverted white-on-black photocopy of the dictionary entry on an early

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<sup>11</sup> Drucker, 69.

manifesto: "Act of flowing: a continuous moving on or passing by, as of a flowing stream; a continuing succession of changes."<sup>12</sup>



### *Fluxus Manifesto*<sup>13</sup>

Fluxus consisted of a variety of artistic efforts that can all be put under the umbrella of performing or publishing art works. It was also a way of thinking about the world and an

<sup>12</sup> Maciunas.

<sup>13</sup> Maciunas.

“alternate attitude toward art making, culture and life.”<sup>14</sup> Maciunas was also the “designer and producer of almost all the Fluxus published materials, although at various times he was assisted . . . by others.”<sup>15</sup> While performance was a large part of Fluxus, it “was conceived as a publishing venture and publishing is at its very heart”<sup>16</sup> and both the publications and the production of multiples are where the movement intersects with artists’ books. As Anderson describes, “[t]he range of material ‘published’ under the aegis of Fluxus is extraordinarily broad”<sup>17</sup> and included sales catalogs, performance posters and programs, flyers, pamphlets, scrolls, radio shows, tablecloths, aprons, money, stamps, scores, brochures, announcements, records, newspapers, magazines, kits, books, games, puzzles, filmstrips and boxes housing smaller containers holding food, seeds, bunion shavings, cards, soap, instructions, toys, and more. The *Flux-kit* was one of these boxes, actually a vinyl briefcase, and is described on MoMA’s website:

First announced during June 1964 in the fourth Fluxus newspaper, *Fluxus cc fiVe ThReE*,

the *Flux-kit* encapsulates a collection of multiples and printed items . . . The retrofitted attaché case, initially advertised for the price of \$100, was among the most elaborate of the Fluxus Editions produced, packed with small objects to be held in the hand, read and manipulated. The contents vary between each kit; however generally, Fluxus newspapers and announcements sit strapped inside the lid and the central compartment houses a . . . [variety of] works . . . in latched plastic cases.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Smith, *Fluxus*, 24.

<sup>15</sup> Smith, 37.

<sup>16</sup> Anderson, “Fluxus Publicus,” 40.

<sup>17</sup> Anderson, 40.

<sup>18</sup> MoMA, *Fluxus Editions*.



*Flux-kit, 1965*<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> This is not the *Flux-kit* I saw at the Getty, but has some of the same components. The contents of the *Flux-kits* varied. Various Artists with Eric Andersen, Ay-O, George Brecht, Dick Higgins, Joe Jones, Alison Knowles, Takehisa Kosugi, George Maciunas, Nam June Paik, Benjamin Patterson, Mieko Shiomi, Ben Vautier, Robert Watts, *Flux-kit* 1965. <http://www.moma.org>.



The *Flux-kit* exemplifies the democratic multiple in its longevity—it was produced on a rolling basis, with the contents varying depending on what Maciunas had available at the time, between 1964 and 1969<sup>20</sup>—and in its contributors, who varied, but often included more than a dozen artists for each *Flux-kit*. Not only was the kit available as a whole, but individual components could also be purchased, making the art available to even more people. It was sold, not in art galleries, but “through alternative distribution systems” such as mail order and in shops run by the collective.”<sup>21</sup>

The *Flux-kit* I saw at the Getty Research Institute<sup>22</sup> was a gift of Jean Brown to the Getty. Ms. Brown was an art collector, a friend of George Maciunas and received her *Flux-kit* directly from him.<sup>23</sup> It was in beautiful condition. It was larger than I had expected from photographs. The attaché case was thick and hefty. The words “FLUX-KIT” were painted, seemingly with a stencil, on the outside in large, white sans-serif letters. The bold and contrasting title inspired my first question. Was this an object of gravitas as indicated by the serious-looking attaché case or something completely different? It was something completely different.

I was able to examine and discuss the *Flux-kit* with the Getty Research Institute’s chief curator, Marcia Reed. I smiled the whole time we were looking at. We took it apart together, opening and examining the various components. The first thing I noticed when we opened it, like a suitcase on a hotel bed with the handle towards us, was the strap with a belt buckle in the middle holding some Fluxus newspapers in the lid. Looking down into the deeper half of the case, there were sections containing a variety of shapes and boxes which all fit together like a

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<sup>20</sup> Hendricks, *Fluxus Codex*, 72-76.

<sup>21</sup> Smith, “Developing a Fluxable Forum,” 18.

<sup>22</sup> I am grateful to the Getty Research Institute and, in particular, to their chief curator, Marcia Reed for the opportunity to examine the Flux-kit in person.

<sup>23</sup> Reed

puzzle. The conservators had added strategically placed foam sheets and paper wrappers, but they were easy to remove and did a good job of protecting without interfering with the function and interactability of the *Flux-kit*. In the middle, towards the left and on a small varnished wood platform to raise it to the height of the other components, was a doorbell button.<sup>24</sup> There were other wood pieces built into the attaché case, the rest of them being dividers rather than platforms. My first impression was one of curiosity. I wanted to take each part out and look at it individually. There was an element of play and of fun to the work as a whole—the adventure of disassembling the creation, experiencing each piece, and then the challenge of putting it all back just the way it belonged.

On the right, at the back were two little, green glass bottles with droppers. The smaller one was labelled *Chieko Shiomi: Water Music* and the larger one, *Ben Vautier brand of Dirty Water*. Next to the bottles, moving towards the left, was Alison Knowles' *Bean Rolls*, which is a square tin can with a resealable top filled with beans and scrolls about beans. My favorite part of the Getty's *Flux-kit* was in the middle of the back row of the case: Chieko Shiomi's *Endless Box*. It is a set of thirty-four white, folded paper boxes, nested together and twisted into an origami whirlpool. The repeating lines draw you in and are surprisingly beautiful, even in their simplicity. While the sides of the boxes remain square, because of the slight twist given the boxes once they are assembled, the corners form curved lines leading to the center. Between the *Endless Box* and an *Ay-O's Finger Box* were various odds and ends, including a set of instructions or scores by Giuseppe Chiari in a tiny manila envelope and a long scroll with a concrete alphabet poem. At the far left of the back row, was the *Finger Box*, which was about three and a half inches square, closed on all sides, with a three quarter inch hole in the center top.

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<sup>24</sup> Ms. Reed told me it would ring if they kept batteries in their Flux-kit.

Inside were thin sheets of foam rubber covering unidentifiable bumps. The idea is to put your finger in the box without knowing what you will feel. Different boxes held different “tactile elements ranging from nails to sponges, beads to cotton balls, and bristle brushes to hair.”<sup>25</sup>

There is both an element of danger and a piquing of curiosity that comes from not knowing what you will find in a particular *Finger Box*.

Starting at the left of the front row of artworks, there are ten hinged plastic clamshell boxes in a row, with the hinges down and the clasps up, containing different works from different contributors. They include *Water Yam* by George Brecht which is a collection of event scores, *Zen for Film* by Nam June Paik which includes a length of unexposed film, *E.S.P. fluxkit* by James Riddle with colored papers and instructions for how to determine the colors with your eyes closed, *Invocations of Canyons and Boulders* by Dick Higgins containing an exposed filmstrip, *Fluxuskw Rocks Marked by Weight* by Robert Watts which is rocks . . . with their weights notated on stuck-on, white ovals of paper, *Instruction No. 2 (Please Wash Your Face)* by Ben Patterson which contains a soap shaped like a flower and a towel, *Fresh Goods From the East!* by George Maciunas with little, snap-closed vinyl cases,<sup>26</sup> *Events* by Takehisa Kosugi holding a single event score, *Holes* by Ben Vautier housing a variety of black and white photographs of various holes, and *Games and Puzzles* by George Brecht which includes two metal balls and instructions for how to arrange them. Finally, in the front right corner is another hinged plastic box, *Printed Matter* by Robert Watts, this one with the hinges and clasps perpendicular to the ten boxes previously listed and filled with various and sundry printed matter.

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<sup>25</sup> Higgins, *Fluxus Experience*, 40.

<sup>26</sup> We did not open them.

The different elements, contributed by diverse artists, are wildly divergent, but there was also a cohesiveness. The unity was achieved by various means. Ten of the parts of the *Flux-kit* were housed in the matching plastic boxes and the labels for the various items were created by Maciunas, whose creative stamp harmonized the design. Additionally, there was a synthesis forged from the overall tone of playfulness, surprise and challenge to convention.

The delight of the *Flux-kit* for me is the sense of wonder and curiosity I experience as I interact with it. That wonder is sustained because of the multitude of components supplied by distinct and diverse artists. The *Endless Box* by Shiomi constructed with plain white paper is remarkably different from the text-based works such as the newspapers by Maciunas and the scores by Chiari. There are the pieces of the *Flux-kit* that are made from or including objects such as the *Finger Box* by Ay-O and *Games and Puzzles* by Brecht. There are, by contrast, works consisting mainly of images, such as *Holes* by Vautier. There is so much to look at, play with, and think about. Its complexity lends itself well to the objective of surprise and turning convention on its head.

Fluxus was a collaborative collective of contributors and the varied ideas and creativity of each person meant that the works produced were widely variable in their purpose and aesthetic, even while Maciunas' influence and the goal of disrupting convention lent some cohesion to the output. In contrast, the artists' books by Ed Ruscha reflect one artist's vision.

Expressing his particular idea and aesthetic and the complete control (within the bounds of the technology at his disposal, of course) he could have over every aspect of the photography, graphic design and printing of the books was what attracted Ruscha to producing artists' books. "I merely wanted a cohesive thing" Ruscha told John Coplans in a 1965 interview, and as the sole artist he could achieve that cohesiveness. Unity in execution of an artist's book can be more

complex and challenging than with other kinds of artwork because there are so many components to a book, from the binding to the materials used, from the printing to the illustrations and typography, and Ruscha met that challenge and made it a part of his artwork. He did not see the book as a container for information, as it had been viewed since its invention in its various forms. Rather, he saw it as an object that could be made into a work of art. He explained to Coplans, “. . . you don’t necessarily learn anything from my books . . . I have eliminated all text . . . I want absolutely neutral material.”<sup>27</sup>

Ruscha’s goal was to create a book that was a work of art in and of itself, with his particular, cohesive aesthetic—a true artist’s book—and to do it in multiples, relatively inexpensively. To clarify relatively inexpensively, his books were printed very well, with the best paper and binding techniques, for what they were—pocket-sized paperbacks. In a 2007 interview with Robert Enright, Ruscha stated, “As I recall, they were four dollars.”<sup>28</sup> Their relative cheapness was in that they were not precious, hand-printed fine press livres d’artiste, for example, but that they took the form of the every-day object, albeit a nicely produced one. “[W]hat I am after is a kind of polish . . . a clear-cut machine finish . . . [and] a mass-produced product of high order.”<sup>29</sup> The mass-produced aspect of his work is where Ruscha engages with the idea of the democratic multiple. Clive Phillpot describes the democratic multiple as it relates to Ruscha’s work in this way: “Infinitely replicable books by artists need no longer be imprisoned under glass or in vaults in libraries and museums, and suffer from restricted access; they can be bought for a song, and be so ubiquitous that single copies can be worn out with pleasurable use and then replaced with another copy.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ruscha, *Concerning ‘Various Small Fires’*, 25.

<sup>28</sup> Ruscha, “The Painted Whirred,” 41.

<sup>29</sup> Ruscha, *Concerning ‘Various Small Fires’*, 25.

<sup>30</sup> Phillpot, Clive, “Twenty-six Gasoline Stations”, 149.

The first of Ed Ruscha's artists' books, *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, has a publication date of 1962, but was initially printed and copyrighted in 1963 in a numbered edition of 400, republished in 1967 in an unnumbered edition of 500 and then published a third time in 1969 in an edition of 3000.<sup>31</sup> It is a small paperback, approximately seven inches tall by five and a half inches wide and a quarter inch thick. Its covers are made of thick, glossy, white cardstock wrapped around the sewn pages which are also glued at the spine. The title is printed on the front cover in a red, blocky font with thick serifs: "In my original books, I focused on this one typeface called Stymie. I don't know if they even have it anymore. I came to it through setting type at a printer's."<sup>32</sup> The book is wrapped in a see-through glassine dust jacket. The pages are glossy as well and the paper is particularly well suited for printing photographs.

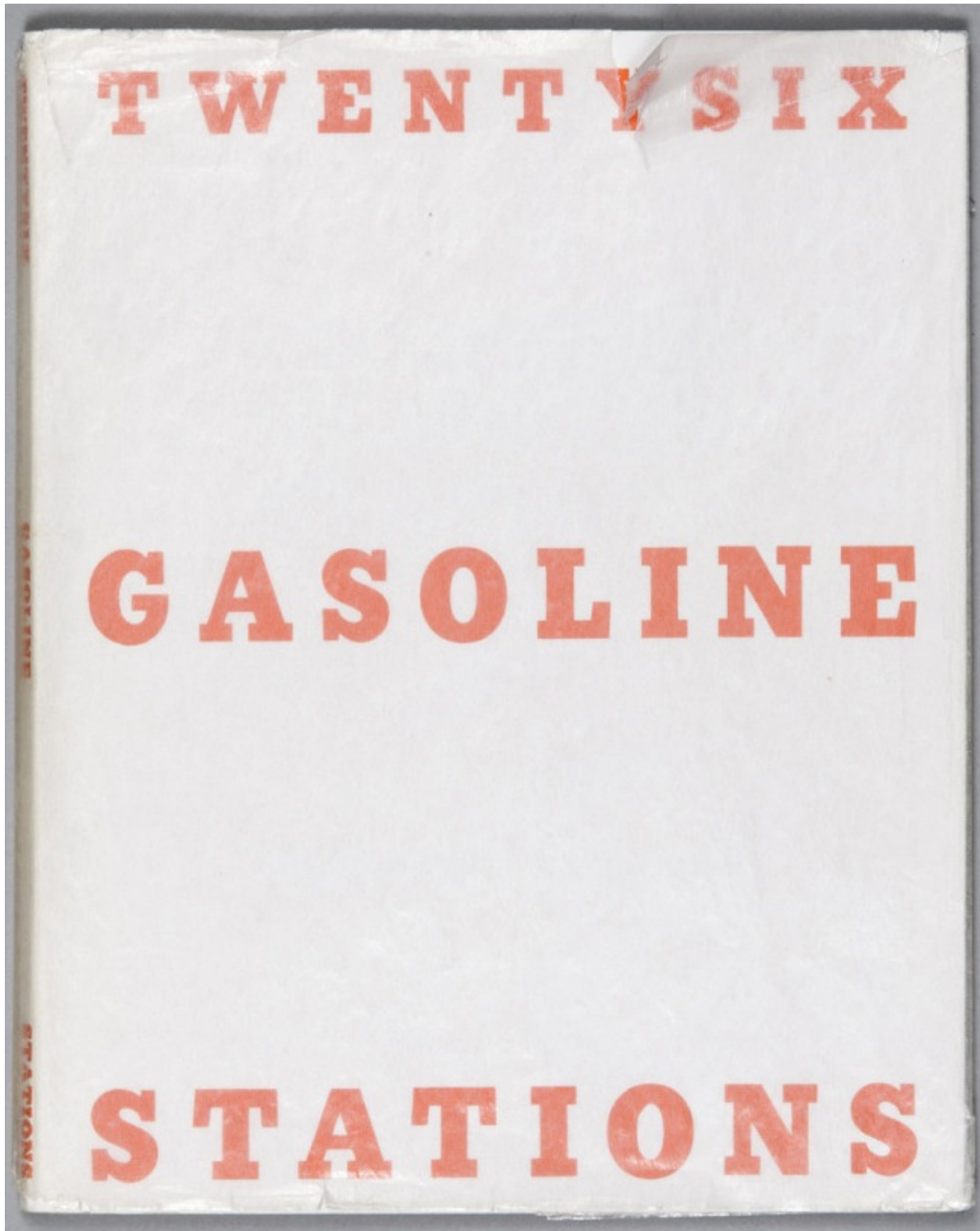
While the dust jacket elevates it a bit, overall, *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* is a very unassuming object. It is small, thin and the layout is simple almost to the point of not seeming to have a designer. The most striking aspect is the title printed in boxy, thickset, red utilitarian letters that are spaced and kerned to reach from side to side on the very top edge, the very bottom edge and right through the middle of the front cover. The inside pages are plain. They include no interpretation, just black and white photos of gasoline stations. Most seem to be taken from across the street and there are very few cars or people in the images. The focus is on the built environment, rather than on what might occupy it. The photographs never fill the whole page. Many of them take up the top two thirds of a page (with small white borders at the top, side and towards the gutter) with a few covering only the top half of the page. In only one instance, there are two photos of gas stations stacked on top of each other on one page. Most of the images are

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<sup>31</sup> Ruscha, *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*.

<sup>32</sup> Ruscha, "The Painted Whirred," 37.

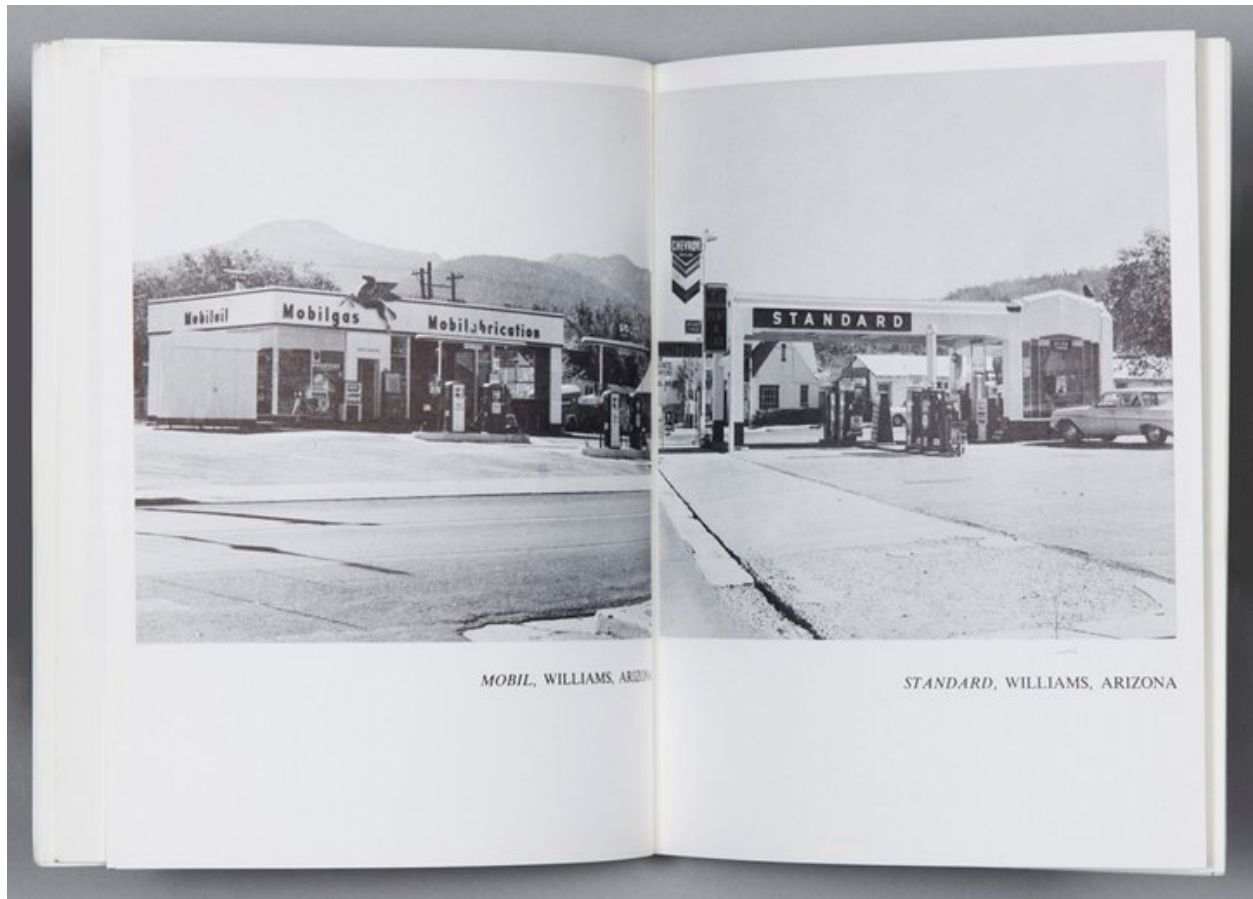
only the width of a single page, minus the small borders, but five of the twenty-six extend over a two page spread.



*Twentysix Gasoline Stations*<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> <https://www.tate.org.uk/about-us/projects/transforming-artist-books/summaries/edward-ruscha-twentysix-gasoline-stations-1963>



*Twentysix Gasoline Stations*<sup>34</sup>

The only information provided are the locations—city and state—of the filling stations and their italicized (as if they were book titles) names in all caps of another simple, but thinner and black, font. Just as the unassuming physical aspects—including small size, familiarity of form and simplicity of design—reinforce the accessibility of Ruscha’s book; so does the content. Gasoline stations and city/state location appellations are both recognizable and mundane. Gas stations are places that almost everyone has experience with and likely takes for granted, unless of course, they are about to run out of gas. This familiarity and accessibility emphasizes, along

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<sup>34</sup> <https://www.tate.org.uk/about-us/projects/transforming-artist-books/summaries/edward-ruscha-twentysix-gasoline-stations-1963>



with the reproduction numbers and relative cheapness, that this is a democratic work of art, available to all. Ruscha was not necessarily looking for a particular, well-informed, connoisseur audience. When asked by Coplans what type of people liked his books, if it were modern art enthusiasts, he replied, “No, not at all. Many people buy the books because they are curiosities. For example, one girl bought three copies, one for each of her boyfriends. She said it would be a great gift for them, since they had everything already.”<sup>35</sup> And when asked a similar question by Enright, Ruscha recalled, “The memory I have about it is that if I were to show it to a person who was an intellectual, that person would view it with skepticism. But if I showed it to somebody who sold gas in a gas station, they’d say, “Hey, look at that, that’s fine.”<sup>36</sup>

Ed Ruscha produced “16 books . . . between 1963 and 1978”<sup>37</sup> including *Thirtyfour Parking Lots in Los Angeles*, which was published in 1967. It is similar to *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, in that it was published with the same type of binding, cover and page materials, with the same functional, red, blocky font on the cover and black and white photos within. It has the same glassine cover, but one noteworthy difference is the overall size of the book. *Thirtyfour Parking Lots* is a full eight inches by ten inches, rather than the five and a half by seven of *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*. The interior font differs slightly in that there is no italicization and the letters are not all capitals. There are the same narrow borders around each photo, but the images, for the most part, take up closer to three fourths of each page rather than two thirds. In this book, the photographs are of parking lots rather than gas stations, but they both reference the car culture and built environments of Southern California and its environs as well as the utilitarian structures we usually take for granted, except of course, when we can’t find a parking

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<sup>35</sup> Ruscha, *Concerning ‘Various Small Fires’*, 25.

<sup>36</sup> Ruscha, “The Painted Whirred,” 41.

<sup>37</sup> Harry Ransom Center, “Ed Ruscha.”

spot. Ruscha did not take the photos for *Thirtyfour Parking Lots* like he did for *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*. They were taken by a photographer named Art Alanis, who was credited on the copyright page.<sup>38</sup> “He hired a helicopter one Sunday morning for five hundred bucks. Five hundred bucks that included the photographer. He got the negatives along with it.”<sup>39</sup>

*Thirtyfour Parking Lots in Los Angeles* is a fascinating book to look through, one that captured my imagination in a different way than *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*. With *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, I am entranced by the big picture, the idea of the road trip and the path covered more than I am by the individual filling stations. In *Thirtyfour Parking Lots*, I am fascinated by the details. My first impulse is to translate the images into the familiar and to try and figure out how they would look from the ground, rather than to appreciate the geometries revealed by the unusual perspective from above. But, then, I start to notice the new information afforded me by this unorthodox view and it is hard to resist the temptation to assign meaning to the unfamiliar data. For example, I smile at the appropriateness of the multitude of directional arrows in the parking lot labeled “Church of Christ, 14655 Sherman Way, Van Nuys.” I notice the oil stains<sup>40</sup> and wonder what is indicated by darkest stains in the book<sup>41</sup> being at the “State Dept. of Employment, 14400 Sherman Way, Van Nuys.”<sup>42</sup>

Did the parking lots with the darkest stains get the most visitors, or did more of their visitors have older, leakier cars? Or was it just a difference in age or composition of the lots themselves?

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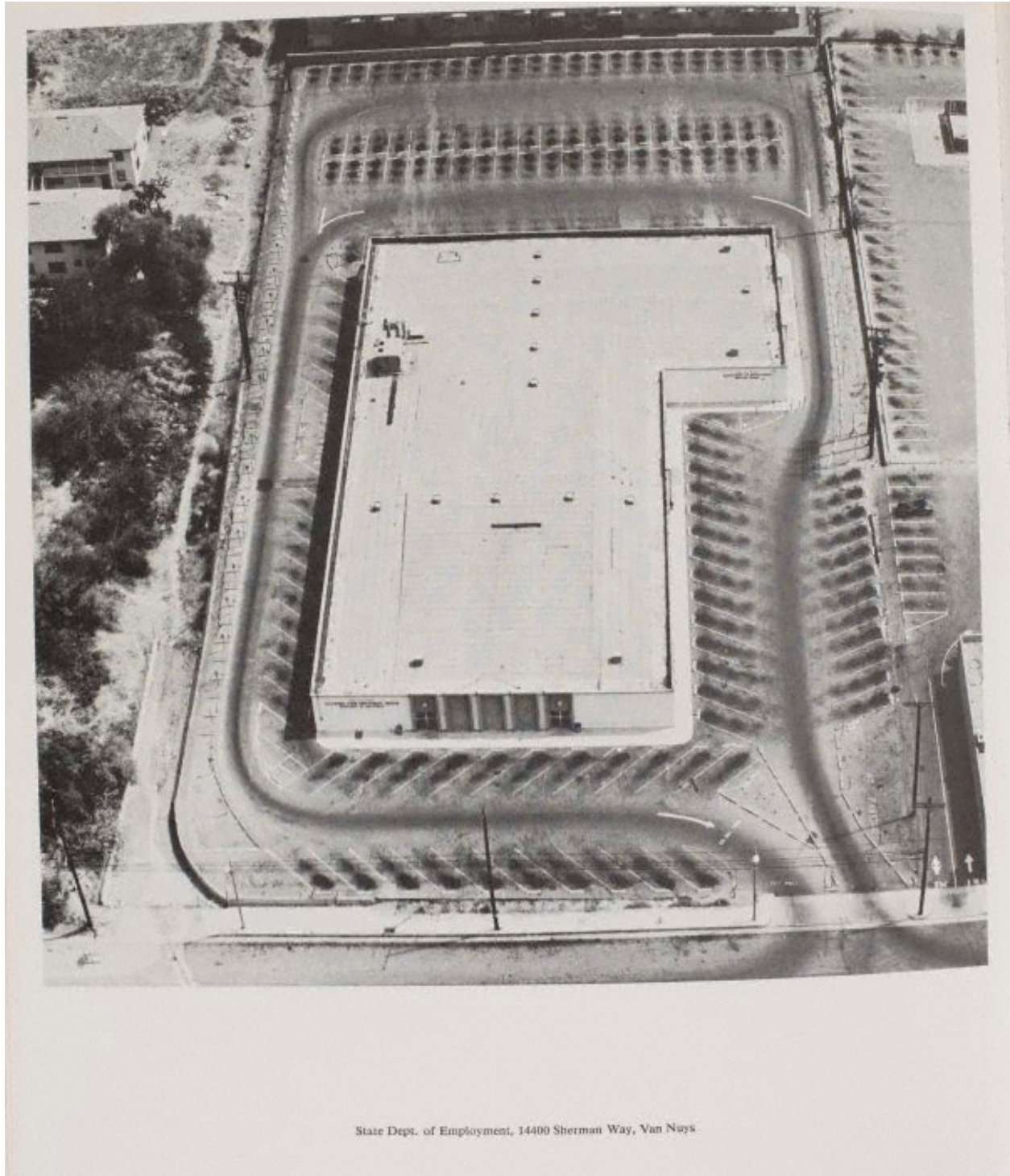
<sup>38</sup> Ruscha, *Thirtyfour Parking Lots in Los Angeles*.

<sup>39</sup> Helfand, minute 4:18.

<sup>40</sup> Did cars leak more oil fifty years ago?!

<sup>41</sup> Followed closely in darkness of staining by “May Company, 6067 Wilshire Blvd.” or possibly “Santa Monica Blvd. from Roxbury to Wilshire Blvd.”

<sup>42</sup> Ruscha, *Thirtyfour Parking Lots in Los Angeles*.

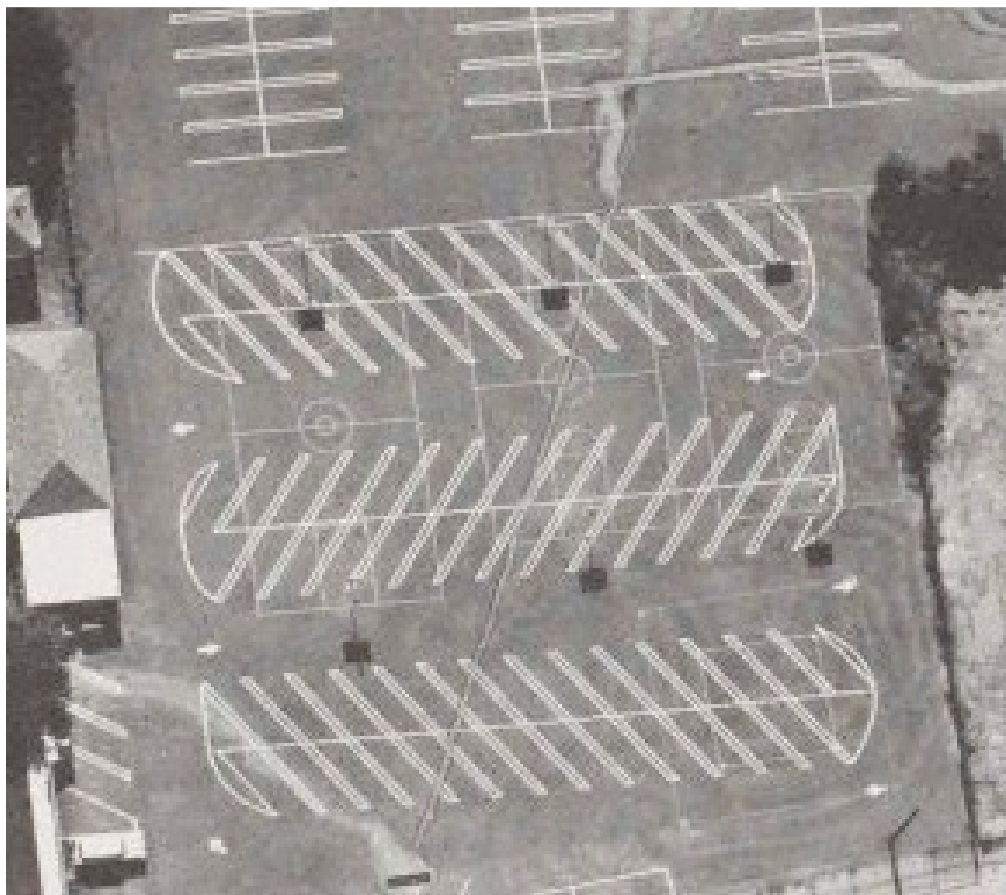


Ruscha, "State Dept. of Employment," *Thirtyfour Parking Lots in Los Angeles*<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> <https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/430.2008.a-ii>

I am enthralled by how empty the lots are during daylight hours and find myself wondering if there would be any way to take these photographs in Los Angeles today. I imagine more things were closed on Sundays fifty years ago than are today and find it strange that even the church parking lot was empty on the Sunday morning that Ruscha hired the helicopter with its accompanying photographer. Maybe church was in the afternoon. My favorite details in all the parking lots pictured are the overlapping basketball courts and parking spaces in the “Unidentified Lot, Reseda.”



Ruscha, “Unidentified Lot.” *Thirtyfour Parking Lots in Los Angeles*<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> <https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/430.2008.a-ii>

As I continue to look at the photographs, however, I move beyond the details. The more their structure becomes disassociated with their purpose, the more I see them as abstractions. I begin to appreciate the strange beauty in their mathematical and spatial repetition. “Dodger Stadium, 1000 Elysian Park Ave.” becomes a huge, beautiful organic blossom rather than what seems like acres of asphalt. I see loops and lines rather than layouts, and because of the aerial view and aforementioned emptiness, I notice things I never would have otherwise. For example, the intriguing ombré formed by both the oil stains in the various parking lots and by humanity’s desire to park as close to an entrance as possible.<sup>45</sup>

Besides making Ruscha’s books more approachable, the everyday places or objects he selects as his subjects give the viewer the opportunity to see the world around them in a new light, from a different perspective, or perhaps with a new sense of appreciation—not necessarily a new appreciation for their purpose (although it is always nice to find a gas station or parking spot when you really need one) but for their visual potential to be interesting or even beautiful. “I’m not just trying to take the important things in the world and make art out of them. I’m sometimes taking the foolish and the insignificant, things and trying to see some value in them.”<sup>46</sup>

Both the group of artists who called themselves Fluxus and the artist Ed Ruscha made distinct and extraordinary art. They also had different ways of addressing the concept of the democratic multiple, and both were noteworthy. Ruscha took the quotidian object of the book and, while keeping its pattern commonplace, elevated it to an avant-garde work of art. In looking back, he said: “I felt when I got going on the books that it was really the red meat of my work. It was the choice bit. Although I was painting pictures at that time, I felt that the books were *more*

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<sup>45</sup> Ruscha, *Thirtyfour Parking Lots in Los Angeles*.

<sup>46</sup> Ruscha, “The Painted Whirred,” 47.

*advanced as a concept* than the individual paintings I had been doing. As they progressed, I could see that I was telling some bigger story . . .”<sup>47</sup> Ruscha’s books were more focused on concept than form, using a simple, familiar form in a new way. Fluxus not only took the focus away from the individual artist, but also took the concept of the book and played with it. In contrast to Ruscha, they did not have the same restraint when considering form, but just the opposite. Working collaboratively, they created a new kind of art, using familiar modes of production in new ways. Fluxus publications, while in some ways having an affinity with the everyday book, took a wide variety of shapes, and were freed from museums and galleries to be made directly available to the masses.

Artists’ books are different from other kinds of books because of the intention of their creators. Their primary purpose is to be a work of art. They are also different from other types of art. As Ruscha pointed out, they are “more advanced as a concept”<sup>48</sup> and as Drucker asserted, they are **the** quintessential 20<sup>th</sup>-century artform.”<sup>49</sup>

While Ruscha’s books invite the viewer to look at the world anew, and the *Flux-kit* invites the person encountering it to experience the world anew, artists’ books in general invite us to participate with art anew, differently than we confront more traditional forms of art such as painting, prints or even sculpture. A sculpture can be walked around and a painting or print can be examined while it is hanging on a wall. We can understand these works just by looking at their surfaces, but an artist’s book needs to be interacted with to fully see all of its aspects and how they work together. The pages need to be turned and the structure needs to move to be appreciated. In an interview with Willoughby Sharp, Ed Ruscha recounted, “I realized that for

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<sup>47</sup> Ruscha, 41, emphasis added.

<sup>48</sup> Ruscha, “The Painted Whirred,” 41.

<sup>49</sup> Drucker, 1.

the first time this book had an inexplicable thing I was looking for, and that was a kind of a ‘Huh?’” and that “it’s a surprise to people.”<sup>50</sup>The very strengths of artists’ books—their complexities and multiple opportunities to express ideas through form, function, image, text, materials and the way all those factors all unite—make them harder to truly appreciate and comprehend when they are behind glass. When they are inside a vitrine, it is harder to have that “Huh?” experience. Ironically, many early artists’ books like the *Flux-kit* and Ruscha’s books no longer fill the role of democratic multiples. They have become precious because of their place in history and are now kept behind barriers or under glass. While these first artists’ books themselves are not as accessible as their creators intended them to be, they have contributed to and solidified a legacy that continues today of valuing the insignificant, of experimentation, of multiples, of bringing art to the everyday, of surprise, delight, humor, and of artworks that astonish.

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<sup>50</sup> Ruscha, “A Kind of a Huh,” 65.

## Artists' Books Created for the Project

### *My Life is a Little Too Fluxus*<sup>51</sup>

This book project is a tribute to the *Flux-kits* created by George Maciunas and the group of artists calling themselves Fluxus. I reached out to book artists I admire on Instagram and asked if they would be interested in contributing to the project. I wanted this part of my creative project to be collaborative, in the spirit of Fluxus. Five of the artists said yes and I also purchased a component for the kit from another artist. I gave them the theme—being busy and overwhelmed—and indicated the space constraints of the boxes I bought to house the kits, but beyond that, they had free reign to contribute artwork in their medium of choice and to interpret the theme any way they would like. In order to reflect some of the material choices of the *Flux-kit* I saw at the Getty Research Institute, I looked for a box or case with toggle latches and a handle to hold the kit, a bell to ring, a glass bottle and clear plastic clamshell boxes that clipped shut. Once I received all the parts for my *Flux-kits*, I made pieces to fill the kits as well as to add my own voice and aesthetic to the work. I retrofitted the inside of the cases to organize the separate pieces of the kits, similarly to the way the *Flux-kit* was modified, with polyurethaned wood pieces. This is the most complex of the book objects I created.



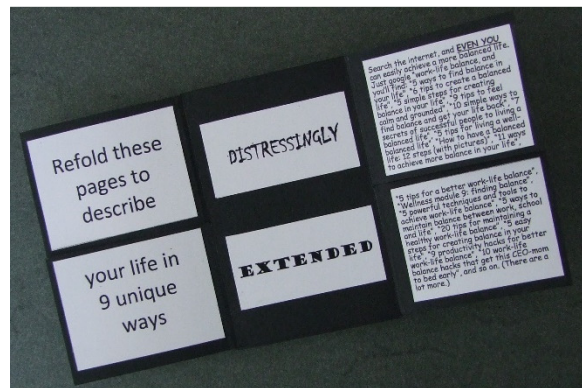
<sup>51</sup> A copy of this collaborative work is in Special Collections & University Archives of University of California, Riverside's Tomas Rivera Library.

<sup>52</sup> Amy Spencer





53



54

53 Melissa Schnaible

54 Lee-Anne Penner





55



56



57



58

- 55 Pam Delucchi
- 56 Cathryn Miller
- 57 Casey Gardner, top and Uwi Moore, bottom
- 58 Amy Spencer

*Discrimination at UCR is*<sup>59</sup>

This book references the artist's book *Rape is* by Suzanne Lacy. The genesis for this book came from a comment a professor made to me during an Honors engagement hour. It was unnerving and completely atypical of my experiences here at UCR. A fellow student in a class I was taking that quarter asked to interview me for a sociology class project about racism and during the course of that interview, we ended up sharing our less-than-ideal interactions at UCR. I thought a collection of these experiences would be a valuable contribution to my capstone project and set out to gather others' stories. I made announcements in all of my classes from spring and fall of 2019 quarters, wrote a request on the white board in the Honors suite and posted flyers in various student unions. All of the stories come from either my own experience, or were shared by other students. To UCR's credit, I did not get much of a response. The vast majority of my experience, and I hope it is the same for everyone, has been one of a diverse, accepting, supportive campus community. Besides being part of my capstone project and paraphrasing *Rape is*, my goal in making this book was to foster empathy and increase kindness.



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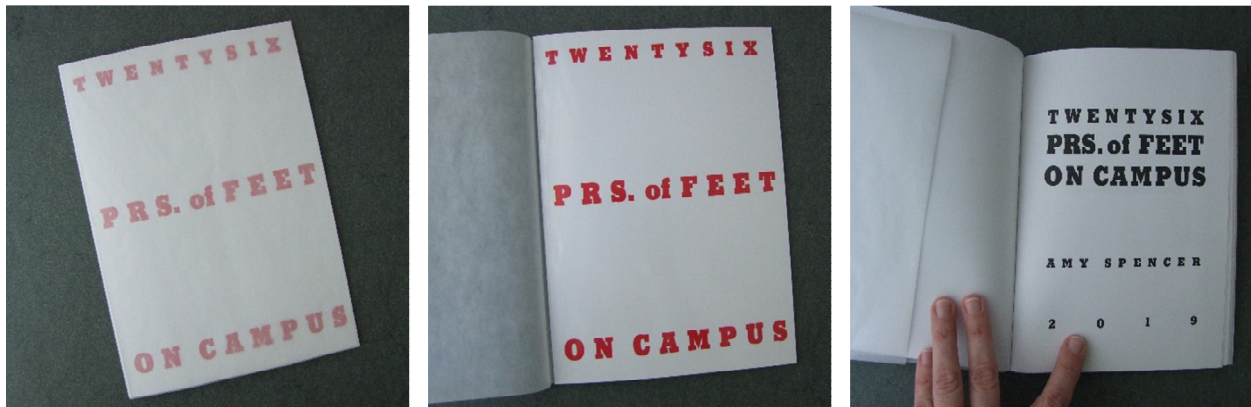
<sup>59</sup> A copy of this book is in Special Collections & University Archives of University of California, Riverside's Tomas Rivera Library.





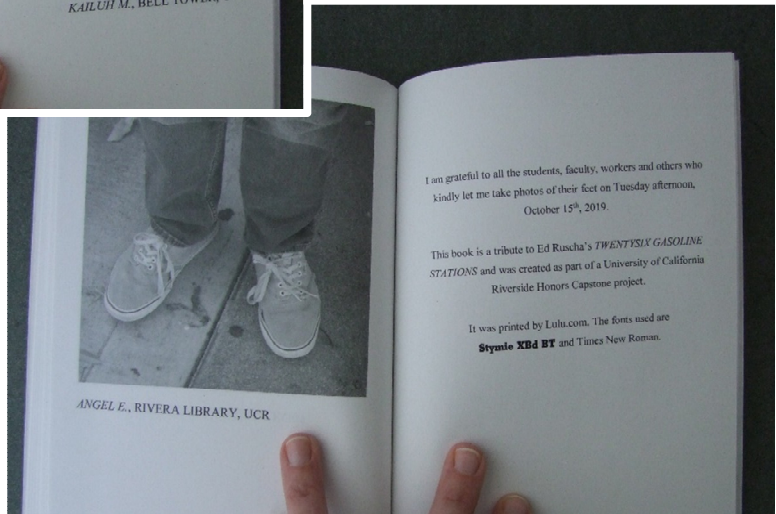
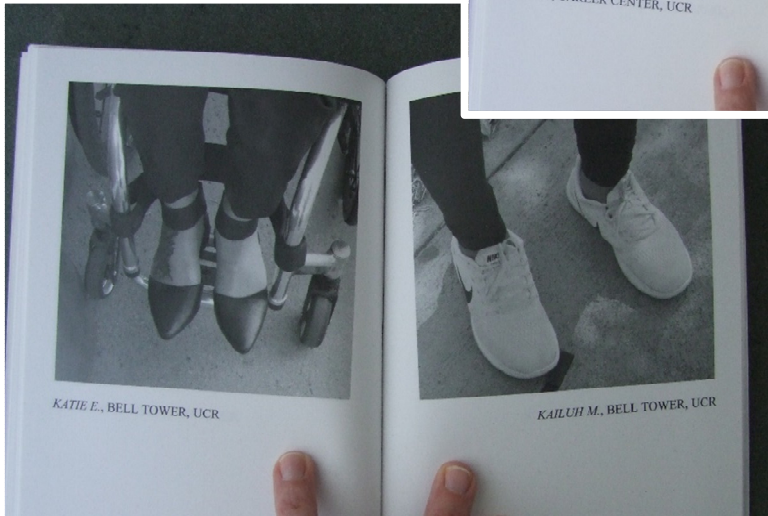
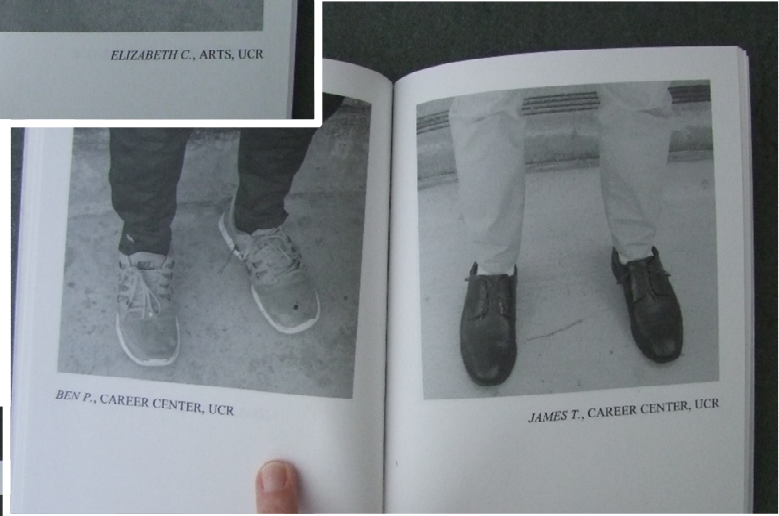
*Twentysix Pairs of Feet on Campus*<sup>60</sup>

This book was made to replicate Ed Ruscha's *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*. I loved learning about Ed Ruscha's artist's books and knew I wanted to remake one. I liked the idea of shrinking the figurative scale of the book down from the drive between Oklahoma and Southern California to UCR's campus and thought feet would be appropriate, as we mostly use them to get where we need to go, once we arrive at the campus. It was difficult for an introvert like myself to ask twenty-six people if I could take pictures of their feet, but most people were bemusedly agreeable. I tried to make the book as similar to the original as possible and was particularly thrilled when I read Ruscha mentioning the font he used for the cover of *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* in an interview, which I was able to find online and download. One intentional difference was the placement of the pictures I took. Ruscha varied the sizes and positions on the page of his photographs, but I kept mine all the same, so as to not give more importance to any one pair of feet over another. Just as in Ruscha's book, the feet are mostly arranged in order geographically, in the section of campus that I regularly visit. I did not take pictures over the entire campus because once I got to the edge of the areas I usually frequent, I had enough photos. I gave my subjects the option to request to see the finished book and did not want anyone to be left out. Also, I was spent from asking strangers if I could photograph their feet!



<sup>60</sup> A copy of this book is in Special Collections & University Archives of University of California, Riverside's Tomas Rivera Library.





I am grateful to all the students, faculty, workers and others who kindly let me take photos of their feet on Tuesday afternoon, October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019.

This book is a tribute to Ed Ruscha's *TWENTYSIX GASOLINE STATIONS* and was created as part of a University of California Riverside Honors Capstone project.

It was printed by Lulu.com. The fonts used are **Stymie Xb4 BT** and Times New Roman.

*(semi) Chaos (bordering on banality) or the First Two Weeks of the Quarter*

The idea for this book was sparked by *Le Grande Desordre* by Isidore Isou. I collected all the papers anyone handed to me during the first two weeks of fall quarter of this year and stapled them together by days. The kraft paper cover was not handed to me during those weeks, but was given to me by the oral surgeon who removed my daughter's wisdom teeth. The only materials I contributed were the staples and the ink for the title. I do not think any of the papers are more than mildly interesting on their own, but I do think the cumulative picture of how I spent those two weeks is a little more interesting together. This book makes me feel both weirdly exposed and slightly vulnerable.





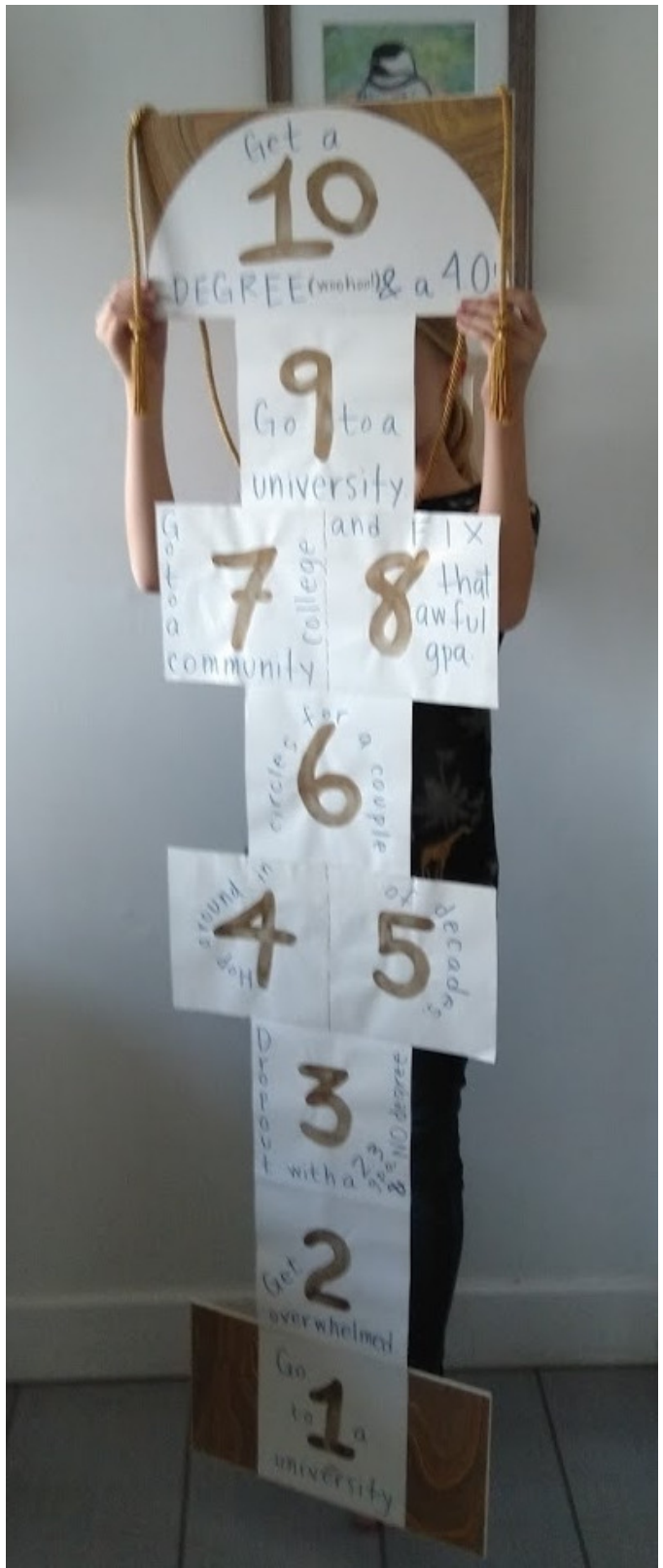
### *Hopscotch Your Way to a Degree*

This final book of the five was inspired by *La Marelle or Pie in the Sky* by Laurence Weiner which “takes the moves of a hopscotch game and reads them as a cosmic metaphor.”<sup>61</sup> To round out my collection of artists’ books commenting on my experience at UCR, I thought it would be appropriate to mention some of the struggles I had to get to this point, attending university in my middle-age. My early college career was mostly a one step forward, two steps back experience, for various reasons. After reading about Weiner’s use of a hopscotch, I decided to make a life-size hopscotch of my own laying out the “hops” I took to get here, including many years of doing other important things, but not progressing on my formal education. I am grateful for the opportunity to be a part of the UCR Honors program and to make this capstone illustrating my experiences. I felt an honors cord was an apt closure for the last book created for my project.



<sup>61</sup> Drucker, 318





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