

Photobook Proforma

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Knowledge and Understanding Skills: 20%

Guidance specific to task (from the brief):

Your evaluation should show clear understanding of the history, function, practical development and production of the photobook through a range of critically understood examples. The analysis of these will highlight the functions and strategies employed by the photographer and your interpretation of their communication of meaning through the publication.

Using examples (3 max), explore your understanding of the history, function and practical development of the photobook. Your analysis should highlight the strategies used by the artist/photographer to communicate their message. Include visuals (500 – 1000 words)

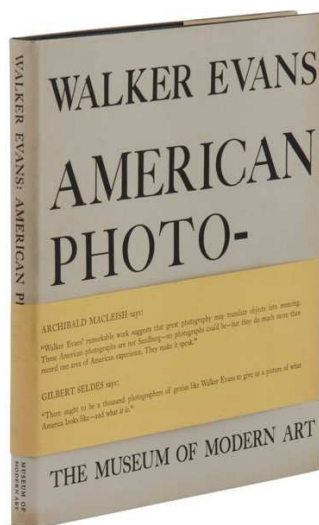
Walker Evans' *American Photographs* (1938) is widely regarded as the first photobook of the modern era, establishing many of the conventions that continue to shape the form. Through careful sequencing, typographic restraint, and a topographic sensibility, Evans' book functions to explore American life during the Great Depression. His images are presented with a deliberate neutrality, frontal compositions, consistent image sizes and generous white borders encourage the viewer to interpret the work without overt authorial direction. The book is divided into two sections, separated by an essay, demonstrating Evans' early understanding of the photobook as a narrative vehicle rather than a simple catalogue of images. Shopfronts, signage, portraits, and architectural details accumulate to form a portrait of a nation shaped by capitalism, poverty, and aspiration. My own book, called *Common Land* resonates with this approach, presenting images as evidence rather than as dramatic events.

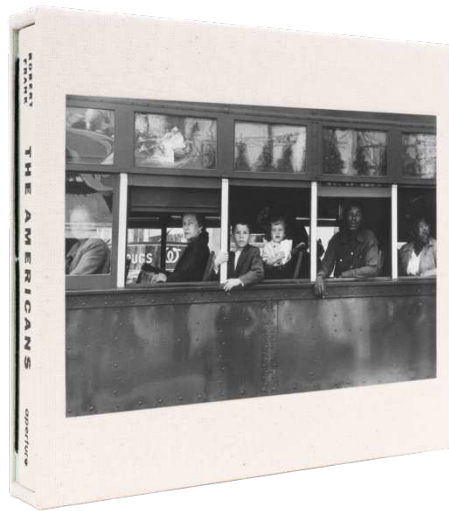
The first photobook I encountered, other than a book about photography, was Robert Frank's *The Americans* (1958/59). This work marked a dramatic shift in both style and intention. Where Evans employed clarity and order, Frank embraced ambiguity, fragmentation, and emotional resonance. His sequencing strategy is often described as cinematic. Images flow into one another through recurring motifs such as flags, cars, faces and gestures. The book functions to create a sense of movement across the American landscape. Frank's willingness to use grain, motion blur, and off-kilter framing challenged the conventions of documentary photography at the time. These aesthetic decisions communicate a sense of unease, reflecting the contradictions of post-war America. The images are printed with white borders and presented without captions, compelling the viewer to navigate the work intuitively. This strategy has influenced *Common*

Land, where meaning emerges through the accumulation of small details rather than through explicit commentary.

The photobook that has influenced this project more than any other is Stephen Shore's *Uncommon Places* (1982). Shore's work represents a further evolution in photobook design and in the photographic treatment of the everyday landscape. Using a large-format camera and colour film, Shore captures exceptional detail, presenting the American built environment with clarity and neutrality. Influenced by the New Topographics movement, his meticulous compositions allow viewers to draw their own conclusions about the spaces depicted. The layout of *Uncommon Places* reinforces this observational stance. Images are printed large, often nearly filling the page, on glossy paper that emphasises detail and colour fidelity. Captions are limited to time and place, and the sequencing is slow and deliberate, inviting a contemplative reading. Shore's book functions to reveal the complexity of ordinary spaces through attention to detail, colour, and spatial relationships. Similarly, *Common Land* presents urban spaces without spectacle, focusing on quiet transformations and the layered histories embedded in the built environment. The use of consistent image size, restrained design, and neutral observation in my book is directly influenced by Shore's approach, allowing meaning to emerge through careful looking rather than through overt narrative.

Common Land draws strongly from this lineage, presenting the urban environment as a constantly evolving space shaped by cultural shifts, economic pressures and the routines of daily life. The photobook format invites the viewer to engage with the work reflectively, allowing themes to unfold gradually through sequencing and material choices. Through a combination of careful editing, restrained design, and attention to the subtleties of the built environment, the book positions itself within a tradition of photobooks that use the urban landscape as evidence of quiet transformation.





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Cognitive and Intellectual Skills: 30%

Guidance specific to task (from the brief):

Your research report should critically analyse the theories and concepts explored in your photobook, as well as the techniques it employs. Focus on developing a reasoned and informed debate rather than simply describing the work. Your analysis should lead to clear, valid conclusions, considering the form of the book, the reading experience it creates.

Avoiding description, critically analyse the theme/ context you explore within your photobook. Your critical analysis should demonstrate your cognitive and intellectual skills in how you have understood the subject and made work as a response to it. Consider how the form of your book communicates meaning in relation to the subject of exploration. (500 -1000 words)

The body of work produced for this book is informed by the visual and conceptual strategies of artists such as Stephen Shore and Robert Adams. Like these practitioners, the project examines human intervention within the landscape and the politics of space. The photographs trace the continual reconfiguration of buildings and urban environments, revealing how shifts in use reflect broader patterns of social and economic change. The repurposing of domestic properties into offices near town centres, and the more recent conversion of retail units into residential spaces as high-street commerce declines, illustrate how capitalist systems consume, reassign, and ultimately abandon space. These transformations offer insight into the cultural and human consequences of such processes.

Changes in the built environment function as markers of shifting cultural values. A former pub converted into a convenience store, for example, signals a move away from communal gathering spaces towards forms of consumption that prioritise convenience, extended opening hours and individualised patterns of use. Architectural alterations, structural adaptations and the remnants of earlier signage operate as material traces of these transitions. They accumulate like layers of wallpaper in an old house; each layer revealing a different historical moment, aesthetic preference or economic condition.

Whilst Robert Adams often addresses human impact on the natural environment with a clear political inflection, this work adopts a more observational stance. It does not present a direct political argument; instead, it offers an objective framework through which viewers may draw their own conclusions. In this respect, the project aligns more closely with Stephen Shore's *Uncommon Places*, where the ordinary landscape is presented without overt commentary, allowing meaning to emerge through attentive looking.

The book, titled *Common Land*, presents the urban landscape as it is encountered, unarranged, uncorrected and shaped by the quiet forces of daily life. The photographs attend to places at the moment of encounter, revealing how weather, movement, habit and chance continually remake the city. Human presence appears only as one element within a wider spatial field, integrated into the environment rather than positioned at its centre.

Urban space emerges as a set of overlapping layers, industrial remnants, post-war planning, commercial zones, and domestic streets compressed into shared geographies. These layers coexist without resolution. Older structures persist beside new interventions, signs of decline intersect with adaptation, traces of continuity remain embedded within ongoing change. The photographs observe these juxtapositions closely, showing how some buildings are maintained and valued while others are left to deteriorate, decisions shaped less by community need than by economic pressure.

The work avoids spectacle and nostalgia, favouring instead the ordinary moments in which the city reveals its underlying rhythms. Streets paused between uses, buildings marked by labour, habitation and brief interruptions of activity within otherwise still scenes. Where people appear, they do so as part of the spatial fabric, underscoring how urban environments are shaped as much by routine movement as by long-term planning or policy.

Together, the images form a quiet record of lived space, neither romanticised nor dramatised, attentive to how history, economy and everyday life remain carved into the built environment. The urban landscape is presented not as backdrop but as evidence, a material archive of social change, infrastructural decisions and the accumulated patterns of daily life.

Practical Skills: 40%

Guidance specific to task (from the brief):

Present your book professionally, carefully considering how you deploy methods, technical processes. Your methods should synthesize the form of your book and the context/meaning of your subject. Your book should demonstrate proficiency, selection in editing and flair. The decisions you make should be as product of significant research into book production and design. Within your evaluation, ensure to provide examples of book dummies to show the developments in your practical

processes. These decisions should be as product of significant book design planning including alternative idea generation.

Evaluate the methods and technical processes you have employed in the making of this body of practice. Explain your process for making your book, consider how editing/ design/ typography and format speak to the subject matter you have explored. Provide examples of the book dummies you have created over the past semester to show developments in your practical processes. (800 – 1500 words)

At the outset of the book project, I assumed I would continue developing a photobook called *Twentyeight Red Phone Boxes*, which I had already been working on independently. I had produced a sixth iteration of the dummy, and many of the creative decisions were already in place. However, it became clear that the project had reached a point where further development would be limited, and I wanted to challenge myself more fully within the context of the module. I will return to that earlier work in the future, but with the benefit of the knowledge and critical understanding gained through this process.

My practice has increasingly centred on the exploration of social change, and this concern underpins all of my recent projects. For this module, I set out to create a photobook that offers insight into daily life within the built environment whilst also revealing how urban spaces evolve, are repurposed and reflect broader cultural and economic pressures. The work addresses the shrinking of public space as areas once accessible to communities are acquired, privatised, or redeveloped. Pubs, for example, once central to communal life, have been converted into private dwellings or retail units, whilst others remain boarded up and inaccessible. Similarly, gardens, green spaces and common land have been replaced by concrete, car parks and commercial infrastructure. These transformations speak to the ongoing influence of capitalism upon the organisation of and use of space.

The process of making the work began with choosing a starting point within an area and walking its surrounding streets to gain a sense of its character. As I moved through these spaces, I photographed in response to what I encountered, focusing on details and structures that reflected the themes of the project. I wanted to capture as much detail as possible, but unlike artists such as Stephen Shore or Joel Sternfeld, I do not have access to, nor could I justify the cost of, an 8x10 large-format camera. Instead, the work was produced using a combination of medium-format and high-resolution full-frame digital cameras. I chose to work in colour because much of the cultural significance of the images lies in the colours of surfaces, materials and signage.

Once I had assembled a substantial body of work, I began the layout process. At this stage the book was still untitled. Before designing anything, I spent several hours studying a range of photobooks, analysing the creative decisions made by different artists. This included a visit to the library to examine books I did not own. I discussed layout strategies with lecturers, technical demonstrators, and fellow

students to better understand how meaning and flow are constructed within the photobook form.

I began designing the book using InDesign. One of the early decisions, informed by my research, was to keep the majority of images the same size to give them equal visual weight. I also realised that the book would function more effectively with a large number of images, allowing meaning to emerge through accumulation. I initially divided the book into thematic sections, each introduced by a full-bleed image on the right-hand page, with a blank page on the left. These sections were not labelled, allowing viewers to discover the themes themselves.

I produced another dummy using this methodology, but I became increasingly uncomfortable with the direction the book was taking. I found myself selecting images to fit predetermined themes, which created two problems, repetition, and the exclusion of stronger images that did not fit neatly into those categories. I completed the dummy to evaluate it fully, and my concerns were confirmed.

I decided to start again. I determined that the book needed approximately 140 images, so I selected what I considered the strongest 148 and excluded the rest before beginning the layout. Each section would contain five images, one full-bleed opening image and four bordered images that nearly filled the page. With fewer images per section, I allowed the thematic groupings to be more flexible, giving the viewer a more contemplative experience. The groupings were loosely based on common themes, for example, tower blocks, residential spaces. And transport infrastructure. I produced another dummy to ensure the structure and pacing aligned with my intentions.

Once satisfied with the layout, I wrote an introductory text and began considering the title and cover. The task of choosing a title for the book proved particularly challenging. I wanted something concise and understated, a title that would not overly determine the reading of the work yet would still offer a subtle point of entry. I began by compiling a list of possibilities drawn from a range of sources, including other photobooks, song lyrics and fragments of text encountered in daily life. I analysed each option in relation to the themes of the project, testing whether the language carried the right tone and conceptual relevance.

My initial inclination was to use the idea of “layers,” drawing on the analogy of wallpaper stripped back to reveal different historical moments. Early possibilities included Layers of Life and Everyday Layers. However, the latter carried unintended associations, particularly with poultry farming, which risked distracting from the work’s focus on the built environment. During a tutorial discussion, Ryan suggested a different approach, to revisit all of the images and look closely for pieces of text within the photographs themselves, allowing a title to “jump out” organically from the material.

While reviewing the full body of work, I came across an image, ultimately not included in the book, that featured a sign reading “Common Land / Tir Comin.” The phrase resonated with me and encapsulated the themes of the project, and I therefore chose it as the title. This shift in method aligned more closely with the

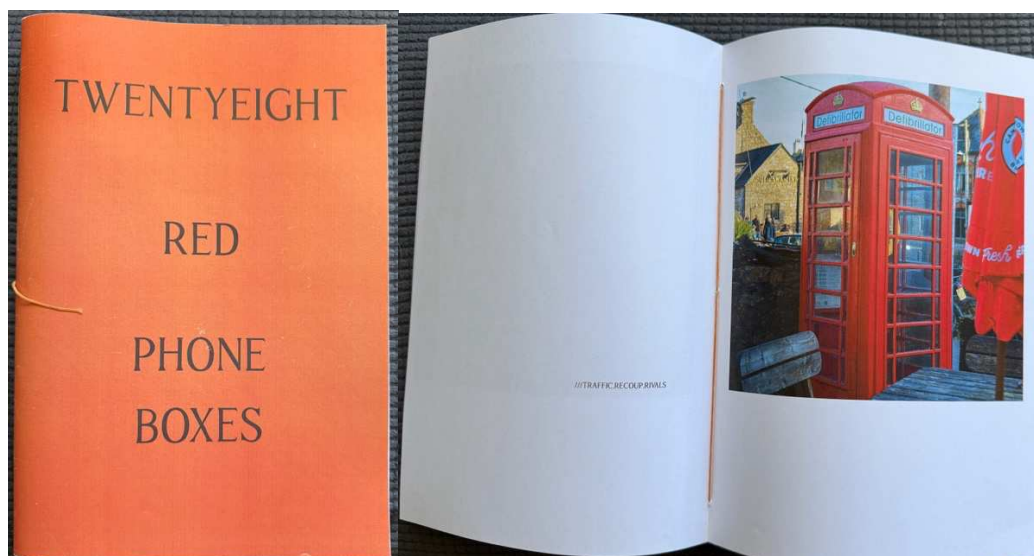
ethos of the project. Rather than imposing a title from outside, the aim was to let the work speak for itself and to identify language already embedded in the landscape I had photographed.

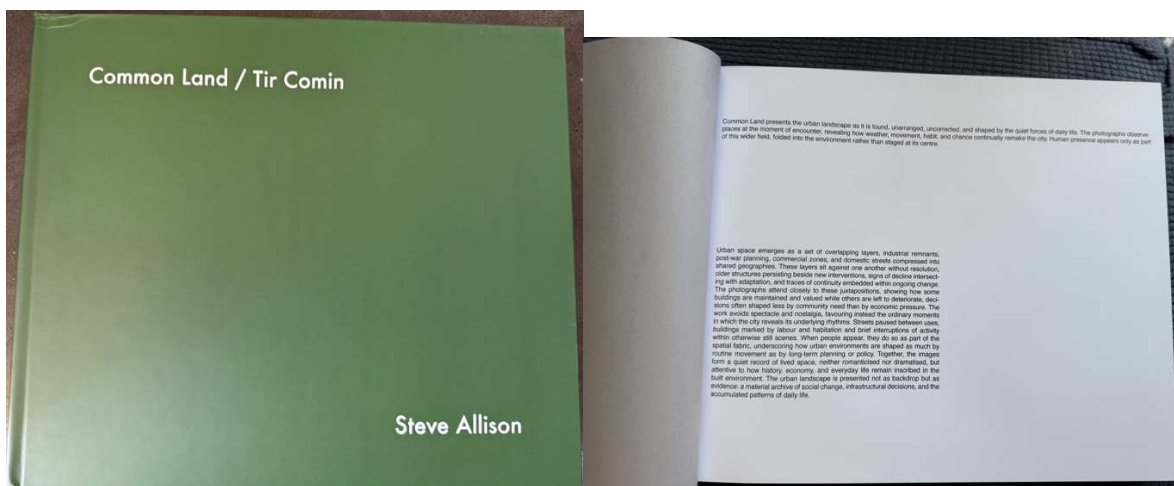
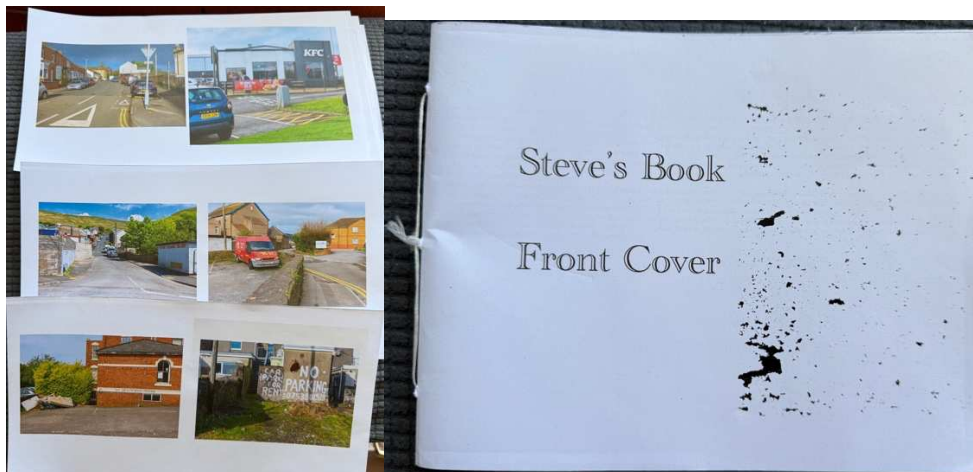
Initially, I considered using the image containing the sign as a full-bleed wraparound cover, but after discussions with Ryan and Lucy, I opted for a more understated design. After experimenting with several options, I settled on a dark green cover with the title in white at the top and my name at the bottom. The dark green reflects the landscape and creates a tension with the built environment contained in the book.

Once the design was finalised, I turned to production. I decided the book should be professionally printed, as there was no creative rationale for a handmade approach and the work benefits from a polished, professional finish. Choosing a printing service proved more challenging than expected. Many services cater to casual users and require the use of proprietary software, limiting creative control. Only a small number accept InDesign files or PDFs. After considering paper options, cover materials and cost, I selected Blurb, which allows full creative freedom through an InDesign plugin. I rebuilt the book using Blurb's specifications and produced another dummy to ensure consistency before submitting the final version for printing.

I discovered that the linen cover option was only available in grey, not the colour I wanted. I decided to use the imagewrap option and use an image of just the solid colour I wanted. I placed the text and sent it for printing.

The final product arrived and I was relieved to find it had been produced the way I had imagined. One thing I would have changed though was the placement of the text. It is quite close to the spine and probably would be better further into the page.





Transferable Skills for Life and Professional Practice 10%

Guidance specific to task (from the brief):

Your photobook should meet industry standards in design, development, and production. Plan your workflow according to your chosen publication method to ensure timely completion. Active participation in sessions is essential for sharing your work, engaging in discussions, and demonstrating both employability skills and a strong grasp of the module content. Your evaluation should reflect on your learning throughout the process and highlight the transferable skills you have developed.

Evaluate what you have learnt throughout the process of making your photobook. Pay particular attention to the transferable skills you have developed. (500-1000 words)

The book project has been a most rewarding module, not only because the photobook is the natural endpoint for my practice, but because it has forced me to think critically about the mechanics of how photographic work is encountered. Producing a book is not simply a matter of sequencing images; it is an extended process of decision-making in which every element, from paper stock to binding becomes part of the meaning-making apparatus. Over the past few months, through close analysis of a wide range of photobooks, I have developed a far deeper understanding of how these decisions shape the viewer's experience.

One of the most significant realisations has been the extent to which layout influences interpretation. Varying image sizes can introduce rhythm and movement, creating a dynamic flow through the book. Conversely, using images of identical size gives each photograph equal weight, encouraging a more democratic reading of the sequence. The choice between full-bleed images and those with white borders is equally consequential. A full-bleed image immerses the viewer, while a bordered image creates a sense of distance, as though the viewer is observing from outside the frame. Even the presence of a blank facing page can shift the emphasis, isolating an image and giving it greater resonance. These are subtle decisions, but they accumulate to form the visual and emotional architecture of the book.

Binding, too, has emerged as a creative tool rather than a purely functional one. Lindokuhle Sobekwa's *I Carry Her Photo With Me* uses a spring binder to evoke the feeling of a personal notebook, a place where fragments, memories, and photographs are gathered. This approach demonstrates how binding can carry conceptual weight, reinforcing the narrative or emotional tone of the work. At the same time, binding has practical implications. A book that lies flat allows images that cross the gutter to be read without interruption, which can be crucial for certain sequences.

The cover, often dismissed in the cliché that one should never judge a book by it, is in fact a critical threshold. It is the viewer's first point of contact and sets the tone for the encounter that follows. A single colour with simple text can create a sense of restraint and anticipation, inviting the viewer into the work without revealing too much. A small image on the cover offers a hint of the content while maintaining ambiguity. A full-bleed wraparound image can function like a cinematic trailer, enticing but only effective if the chosen image carries enough visual and conceptual weight. The cover is not merely packaging; it is part of the narrative strategy.

The question of softcover versus hardcover has also become more nuanced. My initial assumption was that a hardcover offered durability and a sense of permanence. However, after discussing this with Estefani, I began to appreciate the tactile and experiential qualities of softcovers. They are easier to hold, more relaxed, and encourage repeated engagement. A hardcover can sometimes feel too formal, turning the act of looking into an event rather than an everyday encounter. This conversation shifted my thinking about how material choices influence not only the longevity of the book but the frequency and manner in which it is handled.

Other decisions operate more subtly but still contribute to the overall meaning. The use of recycled paper in a book addressing environmental concerns, for example, may not be immediately obvious to the viewer, but it reinforces the conceptual framework. The physical size of the book also shapes perception, a large book signals importance and invites slower, more deliberate viewing, while a smaller book can create a sense of intimacy and personal connection.

Having completed the module, I now have a far more comprehensive understanding of the creative decisions involved in bookmaking and how these decisions shape the viewer's encounter with the work. This knowledge will directly inform my future projects, allowing me to approach the photobook not simply as a container for images but as a fully integrated form, one in which every material choice contributes to the meaning of the work.

Having completed the module, I feel I have developed a range of transferable skills that will continue to inform my practice. These include visual editing and sequencing, a stronger sense of design literacy, material awareness and a more rigorous approach to critical analysis and research. I have also gained practical skills in project management and workflow planning, alongside greater technical competence in layout and production tools. Just as importantly, the process has strengthened my reflective and conceptual thinking, sharpened my awareness of how audiences encounter work, and improved my ability to communicate and engage in collaborative dialogue. Together, these skills form a foundation that will support both future book projects and the wider trajectory of my practice.

