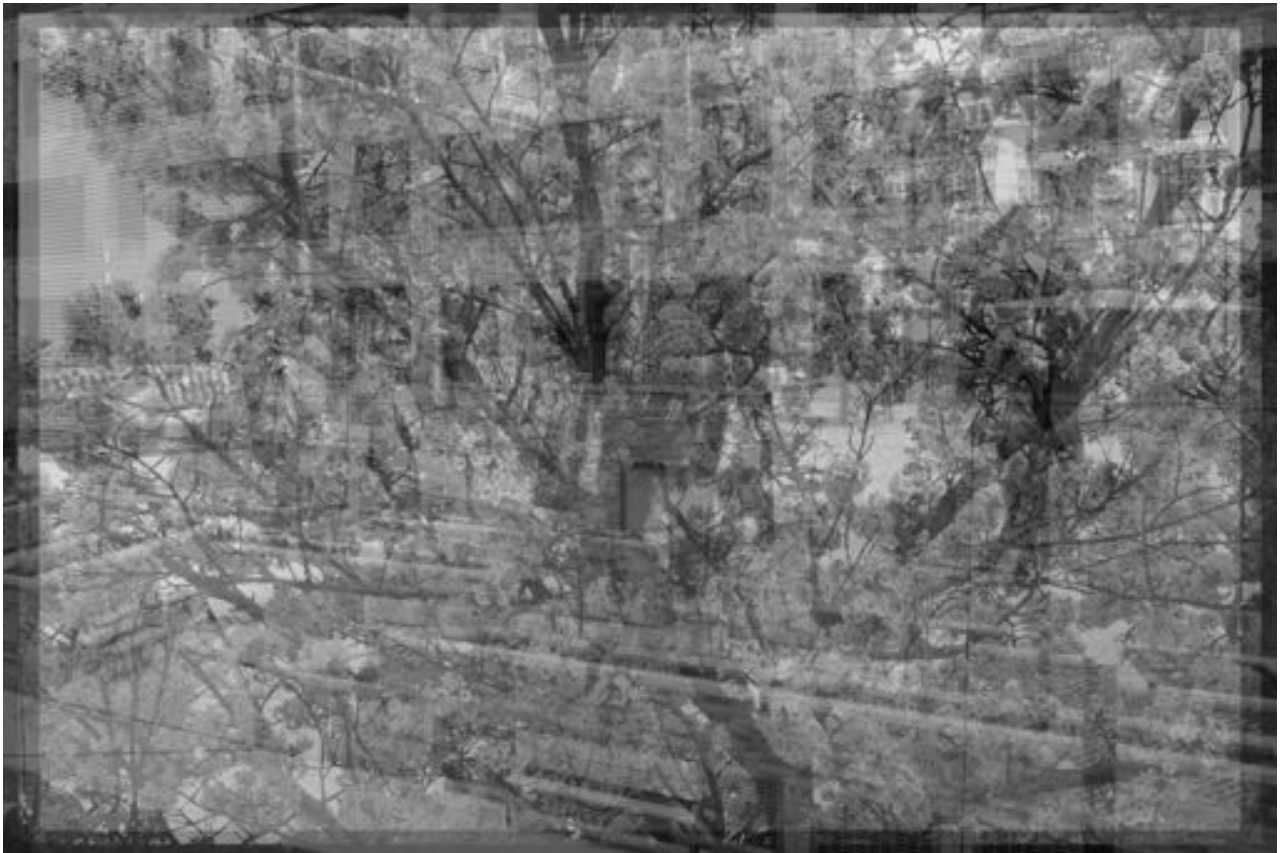


# Critical Review of Practice (PHO702)

Andrew Brown



*Figure 1. Andrew Brown, 2019, displace #1*

## Introduction

In this review, I position and evaluate the work presented in my portfolio by engaging critically with contemporary and historical photographic discourse and practice, and by analysing the social, cultural and professional context in which it has developed. I will show how my visual strategy and method has evolved, assess the outcomes and consider how I will engage with an audience and develop the work. CRJ links are given as endnotes.

The work is part of a larger project exploring community engagement with urban regeneration in east London, the objective of which is to use photography to explore how regeneration impacts on communities and how communities can influence these developments to ensure greatest benefit to residents [1]. Whilst I have continued to work on all aspects of this project, I have taken the opportunities offered by Informing Contexts to explore new forms of image making and its

relationship to contemporary theory in the arts, humanities and natural and social sciences (for instance, posthumanism and changing notions of time). The resulting work, presented in my portfolio and discussed in this review, is a radical departure from my previous photography [2].

### **Work-in-progress: compress, displace, erase**

The portfolio presents three series of images, each of which focuses on a particular setting and explores the relationship between human activity, the built environment and the natural (non-human) world in the process of urban regeneration [3]. My intent is to convey a sense of the complexity of this relationship. I have sought to produce images that bring these three aspects together into the same space and explore the way in which, across time, the balance between intertwined elements can alter, creating a sense of interdependence, precariousness, instability and potential fragmentation. In addition to the images, each series includes an animation exploring transitions.

The work is motivated by an emotional, as well as an intellectual, response to the tensions created between the built and natural environment and the way in which communities are disempowered in the regeneration process. Intensive development condenses and *compresses* urban areas, *displaces* communities and *erases* or diminishes neighbourhoods. Alongside this, urban development threatens, and is threatened by, the natural world, which precedes, and will exceed, human presence.

The regeneration projects I explore are driven by demand for new housing. They deploy a variety of strategies, including demolition of existing estates and replacement with new private developments, refurbishment of housing stock with displacement of existing residents, new developments on greenfield and brownfield (polluted) land, intensification of housing on existing estates through high-rise developments and conversion of commercial and industrial sites to housing. This is a socially, culturally, politically and economically complex field (Florida, 2017, and Klinenberg, 2018, explore the impact of this process on communities; Rosler, 1991, examines how the arts, including photography, can play a part in housing activism; Demos, 2017, provides a critical consideration of the arts in environmental activism).



Figure 2. Andrew Brown, 2019, *erase #1*

Posthumanist [4] theorists (like Braidotti, 2013; Haraway 1991; Hayles, 1999) recognize that as we struggle to find appropriate language and concepts to make sense of the world in ways that eschew human exceptionalism whilst maintaining an active concern for equitable and sustainable human well-being, artistic exploration becomes a key component in interdisciplinary enquiry. Photography, video and virtual environments provide a means to conduct thought-experiments (once confined to philosophy) exploring possible futures (De Mette, 2010), human and posthuman, as does Sugimoto's [5] exhibition *Aujourd'hui le monde est mort [Lost Human Genetic Archive]* (Figure 3).

Before this module, my practice fell firmly on the 'hunter' side of Jeff Wall's hunter/farmer distinction. The hunter, as Cotton (2014) observes, pursues and captures images, whereas the farmer cultivates and constructs. Ethical concerns about the potentially intrusive nature of street and other covert photography, led me towards collaborative approaches which draw on the practices of both hunter and farmer. Like Wall (2012), I now see my practice as hybrid, involving both finding and making (which Wall sees as an essential part of the creative process). My

portfolio work is constructed in the sense that 'A constructed photograph is one that is formed by bringing together discrete elements to create a final picture' (Smith and Lefley, 2015: 113).



*Figure 3. Hiroshi Sugimoto, 2014, Aujourd'hui, le monde est mort [Lost Human Genetic Archive], Palais de Tokyo, Paris*

### Critical contextualisation

Photographers exploring regeneration have largely focused on two aspects: the lived experience of residents and the physical transformation of the built environment. Dana Lixenberg's Imperial Courts project (1993-2015), for instance, explores life on a housing project in Los Angeles. In the UK, Nicola Muirhead photographed residents of Trellick Tower in west London, and, subsequently, people affected by the Grenfell Tower tragedy. These and other projects are discussed in my Sustainable Prospects presentation [6].



*Figure 4. Dana Lixenberg, 1993-2015, Imperial Courts*



*Figure 5. Nicola Muirhead, 2017, Grenfell Tower*

The impact of regeneration and gentrification on the east London built environment has been documented by Chris Dorley-Brown. Figure 6 presents the juxtaposition of a site before and after re-development, composed to emphasise the impact of development in an otherwise seemingly static environment.



*Figure 6. Chris Dorley-Brown, 2014, Middleton Pub*

In *Metropole* Lewis Bush (2018) takes an explicitly political approach to corporate property development in central London. His stark monochrome images accentuate the impact of developments on the urban landscape. He uses multiple exposure to amplify the visual impact of this hyper-modernist architecture (Figure 7) and juxtaposes this with developers' corporate imagery by inserting loose images into the pages of the book (Figure 8). Bush also includes text with details of the cost, ownership and vision of the developers, to underline the economic, rather than social, impetus behind the developments.



*Figure 7. Lewis Bush, 2018. Untitled, Metropole*





Figure 8. Lewis Bush, 2018. *Untitled, Metropole*

In both these examples, a form of juxtaposition has been used as a visual strategy to explore change, introducing temporal and relational dimensions into the still image.

Moholy-Nagy (1947: 68) states, artistic engagement entails:

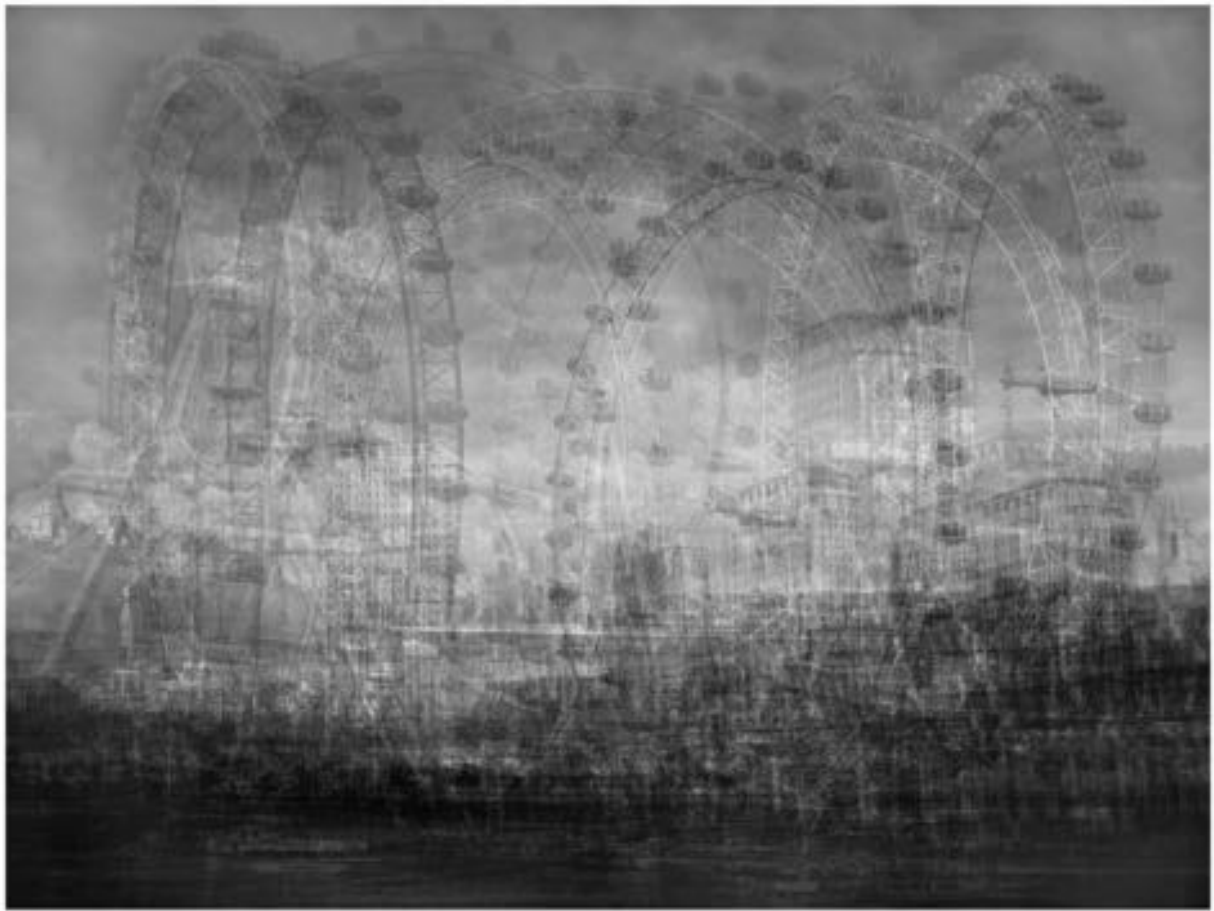
flashlike acts of connecting elements not obviously belonging together. Their constructive relationships, unnoticed before, produce the new result. If the same methodology were used generally in all fields we would have *the* key to our age - seeing everything in **relationship**.

This sensibility is exemplified by two 1931 photobooks by Moshe Raviv-Vorobeichic, *Wilna* and *Paris*. The *Paris* photomontages present a dynamic exploration of relationships, and contradictions, of the 20th Century city, bringing the human, industrial and natural together in the same frame (Nelson, 2010).



*Figure 9. Moshe Raviv-Vorobeichic, 1931, Images from Paris*

Digital manipulation opens up further possibilities for photomontage and the layering of images. Corinne Vionnet, Jason Salavon and Idris Khan (Figure 10) digitally overlay multiple images, to explore place, time and vantage point.



*Figure 10. Idris Khan, 2015, London Eye*

Missing from photographic work dealing with regeneration is an environmental dimension, addressing both the impact of development on the environment, and inclusion of public 'green' space in new developments. This is explored by Japanese photographers, such as Naoya Hatakeyama [7]. In Japanese culture, there is a close relationship between self and the environment (Nakamori, 2018), and awareness of the need to intertwine human and natural in urban settings (now prominent in Western neuroscientific research on well-being in cities, for example, Fitzgerald et al., 2018). Hatakeyama explores the relationship between extraction of materials in rural areas for creation of ever-growing urban areas, which in turn encroach on the rural; increasingly an issue in London with the use of urban greenspaces and 'greenbelt' countryside for intensive housing developments. Most recently, Hatakeyama has explored the relationship between urban development and the environment through a photographic project



on the rebuilding of his own community following an earthquake. The images reinforce the manner in which the environment can 'push back' against development.



*Figure 11. Naoya Hatakeyama, 2011, Takatachō-Morinomae, Rikuzentakata series*

### **Visual strategy, method and critique**

Exploring the work of James Welling, featured in Squiers' *What is a Photograph?* exhibition, inspired me to experiment with composite images. In a commission to celebrate 80 years of the MoMA Sculpture Garden (Reed et al., 2018), Welling employed a process of channel mixing to combine archival with contemporary images of the garden (below).



*Figure 12. James Welling, 2014, Ferrer*



*Figure 13. James Welling, 2014, David Smith 2*

His work draws inspiration from Warhol's screen-printed images, Rauchenberg's montages (Figure 14) and photographic work such as Richard Avedon's portraits of the Beatles (Figure 15).



*Figure 14. Robert Rauschenberg, 1997, Rotary Drive, Ground Rules series*



*Figure 15. Richard Avedon, 1967, Beatles Posters*

Welling (2017) states that he starts with three monochrome images, which he feeds respectively into red, blue and green channels in image processing software, producing a composite colour image. An image from a series placing contemporary dancers in modernist buildings, together with the three original monochrome images illustrates this process.





Figure 16. James Welling, 2015, *Choreograph Series, 9472*



Figure 17. James Welling, 2015, *Choreograph Series, 9472, initial images*

The resonance in achieving the objectives of my work, is that the process produces *interaction* between images rather than just laying images alongside or on top of each other, which enables the exploration of the relationship between elements. Using my site-specific photographs, I produced a number of composite images that combine, and create interactions between, photographs of the local environment, housing estates and images of construction (Figure 18).



Figure 18. Andrew Brown, 2019. *Colour and Monochrome Composites*

In achieving my intent, I felt that the colour images were too decorative and distracting, even with reduced saturation, and the 'pop-art' connotations lacked the desired emotional and aesthetic depth (a criticism that could also be aimed at Welling's work). This led me to experiment with production of monochrome images using the channel mixing approach. Figure 19 shows an image from the *compress* series, followed by the three images from Canary Wharf from which all images in that series were created.





*Figure 19. Andrew Brown, 2019, compress #1*



*Figure 20. Andrew Brown, 2019, compress Series Initial Images*

Using a black and white adjustment layer, I manipulate filters to vary the interaction between the photographs, and thus produce sequences of very different images from the same initial images, shifting emphasis and highlighting their interdependence.

Nothing is added or subtracted from the images, nor is their position changed: all that varies is filtering. Figures 19 and 21 are from the same sequence.



Figure 21. Andrew Brown, 2019, compress #4

I constructed a short animation for each series from the images in these sequences, akin to Muybridge's (1878) *Horse in Motion* animation, to explore how these images relate to each other and illustrate the production process [8]. I have subsequently re-edited the animations to stand as works in their own right.

Constructing sequences that achieve my visual and conceptual objectives has required firm editing. I have, for instance, removed some images that I felt were either too graphic (see Figure 21) or too descriptive.



*Figure 22. Andrew Brown, 2019, displace #6*

The complexity of the images raises the issue of how they are displayed and disseminated to engage viewers. As they are constructed from high resolution photographs, large prints can be produced. Alternatively, they could be projected or mounted on acrylic or lightboxes. As with other complex, monochrome images, like Khan's image (Figure 10) and Sohei Nashino's city maps (Figure 23), there is no immediate point of focus for the viewer, who has to visually hunt around the image, taking cues from familiar elements.



*Figure 23: Sohei Nashino, 2010, Diorama Map London*

Khan (2012) states that in selecting fragments of photographs to include in his composites 'I would try to choose something that really stands out in the photograph. Roland Barthes called it the punctum', a somewhat peculiar reading of Barthes, for whom the punctum was much more than a property of the image. It also seems to misrecognise the visual appeal of Khan's own work, including his *Every Page of Roland Barthes's Book Camera Lucida* (2004), which would seem to be designed to actively resist the kind of reading presented by Barthes (1981).



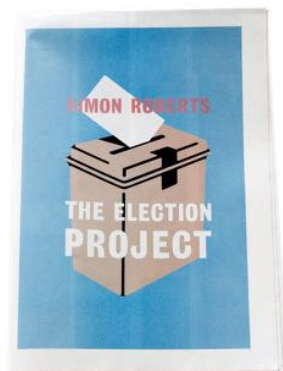
Figure 23. Idris Khan, 2004, *Every Page of Roland Barthes's Book Camera Lucida*

One of my objectives in producing this work was to explore the extent to which it could reflect notions of time emerging from contemporary theoretical physics, for instance the collapse of the distinction between time and space, and the idea of time as a block (where past, present and future co-exist). As physicist Fay Dowker (2019) notes, in Grace Weir's *Time Tries All Things* installation, notions of time in physics have departed from our human experience [9]. To address this, I have attempted to avoid any sense of unfolding narrative in the sequences and animations,

though clearly there is temporal directionality in my experience and in viewers' readings of the images. I have attempted to produce, in Eco's (1984) terms, an open text, which, acknowledging Barthes' (1967) and Foucault's (1977) reflections on the status of the author, is polysemic and encourages a diversity of readings. Baetens et al (2010) observe 'Time and space are the yin and yang of photography ... The more you press on space, the more the notion of time will return with a vengeance-and vice versa' (2010: vii).

### Engaging audiences

The portfolio images and animations are part of a larger and diverse body of work, which takes different forms and potentially engages different audiences. Simon Roberts, in his work as Election Artist in 2010, chose to keep the strands of his work separate. A website was created for citizen photographs, and a newspaper for physical distribution of election-related images. Roberts also produced prints that were exhibited in the Houses of Parliament and sold through the gallery system.



*Figure 24. Simon Roberts, 2010, The Election Project Newspaper*

In contrast to this differentiated output, Susan Meiselas and Laia Abril (2019 Deutsche Borse shortlisted) have produced multi-modal exhibitions, with artefacts, videos and documents displayed alongside photographs [10].





*Figure 25. Laia Abril, 2019, Photographers' Gallery, London*



*Figure 26. Susan Meiselas, 2019, Photographers' Gallery, London*

My output is already differentiated, with images feeding into community image banks and used in presentations and print for advocacy. I have distributed prints to participants and exhibited work in a community centre, in addition to using social media. For the work in my portfolio to reach an audience would require the kind of multimodal exhibition created by Abril and Meiselas. Whilst the gallery is clearly a privileged space, more aligned to the cultural capital seeking middle

classes (Bourdieu & Darbel, 1991), strong links can be made with other modes and sites of engagement, creating new possibilities for dialogue, a key driver for the multiple forms of photographic practice in my project. Rosler's 'If You Lived Here ...' series of exhibitions and events (Wallis, 1991) exemplifies artistic involvement in campaigning around urban development. Lixenberg's use of web archives for community images and videos, Emma Blau's, Julian Jermain's and Wendy Ewald's use of hoardings and buildings to display photographs, and the use of newspapers by Jermain and Roberts suggest other forms of public engagement.

## **Development**

I am starting to make my source monochrome images on large-format film, for both practical and conceptual reasons. Practically, I want to be able to make large images, and thus must have the best possible source. For the mixing process to work effectively, I have to plan the composition of the initial images and the tonal distribution carefully. Working with a large format camera helps concentrate on this.

The images ultimately become digital files in the mixing process. Conceptually, this mirrors the process by which the (embodied and analogue) lived experience of residents, interwoven with the natural and built environment, is transformed into (digital) data which informs the planning and regeneration process (the areas in which I am working are pioneering data driven policy making, which marginalises the narratives of residents, and invites the accusation of 'social cleansing' through housing policy). The consequences of this process are material and embodied. Making my photographic work material and portable, in the form of prints, artefacts, books, performances or installations brings these critical issues back into material entanglement with the lived experience of residents and other stakeholders in the regeneration process.

The challenge now is to build on this experimental image-making and integrate it productively into my project; and, following Manovich (2007), consider 'what comes after the remix?'.

*2496 words*

## Endnotes with CRJ links

1. To achieve the objectives of the wider project, I am: (i) working with residents to explore their experiences and understanding of and aspirations for development of the areas in which they live through their own image making; (ii) working collaboratively with community groups to produce photographic images to be used in campaigning and advocacy; (iii) developing my own photographic work to explore the relationship between community and environment in the light of regeneration and gentrification of areas of east London. These are discrete, but inter-twined, bodies of work that inform each other. This review and the WIP portfolio focus on the third aspect of the project. A summary of the objectives of my project, with a link to the full project proposal is here:  
<https://atomised.co.uk/make-this-place-ours-project-aims-and-objectives>  
Regular updates are provided on the development of the project in my CRJ, for instance:  
<https://atomised.co.uk/march-2019-project-update>
2. Examples of my earlier work can be seen in my CRJ Galleries section and in my previous WIP portfolios. Positions and practice WIP portfolio:  
<https://atomised.co.uk/archived-positions-and-practice-work-in-progress-portfolio>  
Sustainable Prospects WIP portfolio:  
<https://atomised.co.uk/sustainable-prospects-wip-portfolio>
3. The first series of images (*compress*) focuses on Canary Wharf, where development becomes ever-more intensive, effectively compressing the area. The second series (*displace*) focuses on Barking Gascoigne Estate, where residents have been displaced to allow blocks to be demolished and replaced by private housing development. The third series (*erase*) focuses on Barking Creekmouth, an estate that was built in the nineteenth century to house workers at a local chemical plant and demolished in 1953 following a flood (this series includes archival photographs as source material alongside my own contemporary images). The WIP Portfolio is here:  
<https://andrewbrown.portfoliobox.net/>
4. Keeling and Lehman (2018) state that 'Whereas a humanist perspective frequently assumes the human is autonomous, conscious, intentional, and exceptional in acts of change, a posthumanist perspective assumes agency is distributed through dynamic forces of which the human participates but does not completely intend or control.

Posthumanist philosophy constitutes the human as: (a) physically, chemically, and biologically enmeshed and dependent on the environment; (b) moved to action through interactions that generate affects, habits, and reason; and (c) possessing no attribute that is uniquely human but is instead made up of a larger evolving ecosystem. There is little consensus in posthumanist scholarship about the degree to which a conscious human subject can actively create change, but the human does participate in change' (online: no page).

5. CRJ post on the work of Hiroshi Sugimoto:  
<https://atomised.co.uk/looking-back-into-the-future-to-the-end-of-time-post-humanism-and-the-photography-of-hitoshi-sugimoto>
6. This includes consideration of the work Bill Stephenson, Roger Mayne, Dana Lixenberg, Nicola Muirhead, Richard Ansett, Wendy Ewald, Emma Blau, Kaylynn Deveney, Julian Germain, Simon Roberts, Valentin Jeck, Graham Smith, Edmund Clarke and the Photovoice approach. Sustainable Prospects presentation is here:  
<https://atomised.co.uk/final-sustainable-prospects-presentation>
7. CRJ post about the work of Naoya Hatakeyama here:  
<https://atomised.co.uk/naoya-hatakeyama-constructing-extracting-the-future>
8. Like Muybridge's animation, my animations are created from a series of still images. In my animations, however, the images fade one into another, creating a 'morphing' effect. A CRJ post on experiments with this process is here:  
<https://atomised.co.uk/channel-mixing-process>
9. Dowker (2019), in the exhibition catalogue, states that: 'On the subject of "time", however, there is not consensus on whether our perceptions can be coordinated with our current best scientific world view. We perceive time passing and make sense of our lives within the context of a fixed past that has happened and an open future that hasn't happened yet. But the dominant view amongst theoretical physicists is that the Universe is a Block in which the future already exists and time doesn't pass.' [no page]. She adds that to seek alternative ways of thinking about spacetime 'requires new thinking along lines we probably can't foresee. How do we break out of old ways of thinking and create new knowledge that yet remains disciplined by and true to all that we already know? We need to understand our current best theories, General Relativity and quantum theory, as well as we can ... We can also look to art, music and literature to inspire and to challenge.'

[no page]. The departure from human perception of time acts to de-centre the human subject in much the same way as posthumanist theory (and, in a more extreme form, object-oriented ontology or speculative realism). CRJ discussion of space and time, and Grace Weir installation, here:

<https://atomised.co.uk/spacetime-and-photography>

Discussion of photography as a time-based medium, including work by Catherine Yass, here:

<https://atomised.co.uk/imaging-time-understanding-photography-as-time-based-media>

10. CRJ post on Deutsche Borse exhibition at the Photographers' Gallery, London:

<https://atomised.co.uk/deutsche-borse-photography-foundation-prize-2019-shortlist-exhibition>

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Figure 24. Idris Khan, 2004, Every Page of Roland Barthes's Book *Camera Lucida*

Figure 25. Simon Roberts, 2010, The Election Project Newspaper

Figure 26. Laia Abril, 2019, The Photographers' Gallery, London

Figure 27. Susan Meiselas, 2019, The Photographers' Gallery, London