Archivo Research Seminar: Critical Perspectives (online, 1 Jan-30 Jul 27)

online, Jan 1–Jul 30, 2027
Deadline: Oct 31, 2026

Ana Catarina Pinho

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES
PHOTOGRAPHY, ARCHIVES, AND POLITICAL IMAGINATION

ARCHIVO ADVANCED RESEARCH SEMINAR 2027

GUEST MENTORS:
Professor Gil Pasternak, De Montfort University Leicester, United Kingdom
Dr. Vindhya Buthpitiya, University of St Andrews, United Kindom
Dr. Özge Çelikaslan, Media Scholar, Artist, Archivist, Germany / Turkey

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Photography has never simply reflected the social and political worlds in which it operates. Its histories are deeply entangled with systems of classification, surveillance, colonial administration, and institutional authority, but also with practices of witnessing, activism, artistic intervention, and resistance. These different histories point to a fundamental tension: photography makes people, events, and experiences visible, while also participating in the structures that determine how they are seen, interpreted, and remembered.

"Critical Perspectives: Photography, Archives, and Political Imagination" takes this tension as its starting point. The seminar considers photography and archival practices not simply as records of political and historical realities, but as part of the processes through which those realities acquire meaning. Attention is therefore directed beyond what photographs represent towards the institutions, technologies, cultural frameworks, and forms of circulation that shape their production and interpretation.

Questions of visibility are central to this discussion. Photography has long been associated with transparency and evidentiary truth, yet making something visible is never a politically neutral act. The same medium that has enabled testimony and brought injustice into public view has also served systems of identification, classification, surveillance, and governance. Who is represented, who remains absent, who controls the image, and who has the authority to interpret it are consequently as important as what the photograph itself appears to show.

The archive makes these questions particularly tangible. It is shaped by decisions about what is collected and preserved, made accessible, or left out. These processes influence what can subsequently be known about the past and whose experiences become part of historical memory. Pho-

tographic archives can therefore be understood as spaces where knowledge and authority are produced, but also where they may be questioned and renegotiated.

This has become particularly evident in artistic, activist, and community-based engagements with archival material. Counter-archival practices, gestures of restitution, reenactment, repair, and speculative reconstruction have all offered ways of returning to inherited images and asking different questions of them. Such practices can expose omissions and exclusions within established historical narratives, while also raising difficult questions around authorship, ownership, responsibility, and the ethics of working with images shaped by unequal relations of power. Yet critical engagement with images and archives need not be limited to exposing or contesting existing structures. Visual practices can also participate in imagining other possibilities. Images have played an important role in protest, dissent, political mobilisation, and collective memory, but they can equally provide spaces for thinking through different forms of belonging, recognition, and collective life. Political imagination, in this sense, concerns the possibility of looking beyond established ways of organising the visible and asking what other histories, relations, and futures might become conceivable.

Such questions have acquired renewed significance within contemporary digital environments. Social media, networked circulation, computational vision, algorithmic classification, artificial intelligence, and expanding systems of surveillance are transforming how images are produced, encountered, interpreted, and preserved. Greater access and circulation coexist with new forms of extraction, opacity, exclusion, and control. Many of the questions that have accompanied photography throughout its history therefore persist, even as the technological conditions through which they operate continue to change. Critical Perspectives explores these contradictions as a productive field of inquiry. Photography can document and administer, reveal and obscure, preserve and erase, reinforce existing structures and provide ways of challenging them. To understand these tensions requires looking beyond individual images to the wider systems through which they are produced, circulated, classified, displayed, archived, and reactivated. Across the programme, these questions provide a shared framework for examining how photography and archives participate in the construction of historical and political knowledge, while considering how critical, artistic, and research practices might open other ways of seeing, interpreting, and imagining the social world.

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PROGRAMME
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MODULE 01 [28 Jan - 25 Feb]
Critical Perspectives: Photography, Archives, and Political Imagination
— Introductory Module

MODULE 02 [04 Mar - 01 Apr]
Photography and Political Imagination: Democracy, Populism and the Limits of Possibility

MODULE 03 [08 Apr - 06 May]
Liberation by Camera: Photographies of State and Resistance

MODULE 04 [13 May - 10 Jun]

Entangled Memories: Reimagining Archival Ecologies

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RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT

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Throughout the programme, participants will be encouraged to develop their individual projects through sustained engagement with theoretical and methodological questions raised by the seminar. Research development may take the form of an academic article, thesis or dissertation chapter, artistic or practice-led research project, curatorial proposal, archival investigation, or another research-oriented outcome appropriate to the participant's field.

The programme therefore approaches the seminar as a collective site of critical inquiry, where established assumptions about photography, archives, and political representation can be questioned and where alternative ways of seeing, interpreting, and producing historical and political knowledge can emerge.

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SUBMISSION OF APPLICATIONS

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Applications should be submitted as a single PDF file named [Surname_AARS26], containing the following materials:

— Application form
— Project abstract (max. 500 words)
— Indicative bibliography (optional)
— Writing sample (max. 1,500 words)
— Biographical note (max. 150 words)
— Short CV highlighting relevant academic and professional experience from the last five years (max. two pages)

The application form can be downloaded at https://www.archivoplatform.com/seminar

Early Bird Registration: deadline 15 Oct 2026

Standard Registration: deadline 31 Oct 2026

Upon notification of acceptance, selected participants will be invited to confirm their participation by completing the registration process and paying the applicable programme fee.

Participants whose tuition fees are funded by a university, research institution, or other organisation may request an invoice issued directly to the funding institution. Payment instructions will be provided together with the acceptance notification.

Unless otherwise agreed in advance, late payments will incur a 10% monthly administrative charge on the outstanding balance.

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FEES & REGISTRATION

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Early Bird € 1,200
Standard Registration € 1,500

Registration is personal and may not be transferred to another participant without the prior written approval of ARCHIVO. Successful applicants will be invited to confirm their participation by completing the registration process and paying the applicable programme fee by the deadline indicated in their acceptance letter.

Participants whose fees are funded by a university, research institution, or another organisation may request an invoice issued directly to the funding body. Payment instructions and invoicing details will be provided upon acceptance.

Unless otherwise agreed in writing, late payments will incur a 10% monthly administrative charge on the outstanding balance.

What the Programme Includes:
Participation in all scheduled online seminar sessions.
Access to the programme's digital learning materials and assigned readings.
Individual and peer feedback throughout the programme.
A Certificate of Participation, subject to fulfilling the attendance and participation requirements.

Withdrawal and Refund Policy
Cancellation by ARCHIVO
ARCHIVO reserves the right to cancel the programme if the minimum enrolment of 10 participants is not reached.
In the event of cancellation by ARCHIVO, all registered participants will receive a full refund of any programme fees paid. Participants will be notified no later than three weeks before the scheduled start of the programme.

Withdrawal by Participants
Requests to withdraw from the programme must be submitted in writing.
Participants who withdraw after the programme has commenced, or who fail to attend without prior notice, remain liable for the full programme fee. No refunds will be issued once the programme has started.

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INQUIRIES

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For more information, please contact the seminar chair, Dr. Ana Catarina Pinho, at seminar@archivoplatform.com

Reference:

ANN: Archivo Research Seminar: Critical Perspectives (online, 1 Jan-30 Jul 27). In: ArtHist.net, Sep 16, 2026 (accessed Nov 24, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/54268>.