After the Photographic Archive (online, 19-20 Apr 27)

Online, Apr 19–20, 2027
Deadline: Nov 27, 2026

Prof Gil Pasternak

As archives are continually challenged and photography's evidentiary status has collapsed, how can we engage with and understand the past through visualisation and imagery? Archives have always been problematic, deeply shaped by systems of power that frame what is, and will be, known about the past, what is possible to reconstruct, and what will be ultimately remembered or forgotten. They reflect the needs and intentions of record creators, as well as the broader legal, social, cultural and technical contexts in which those records were produced, received and archived. Archivists further mediate these records through processes of selection, description, classification, preservation, and access, which are inevitably coupled with the exclusion, marginalisation, and reinforcement of established hierarchies. Yet, despite these limitations, archives remain the primary foundation for historical inquiry.

Photography revolutionised archival practice in the mid-19th century with its distinctive nature from the written record, as photography itself has never carried meaning on its own. A photograph acquires meaning only when it enters a system that assigns it a role and interprets it through a selected framework. Archives, in this case, configure photographic meaning by determining which images are preserved, how they are classified and catalogued, and the contexts in which they are encountered and accessed. Every act of selection, description, and omission frames the photograph's significance, turning it from a mere visual trace into information, cultural memory, or a historical document.

Over recent decades, the archival authority, photography's place within it, and its credibility have continued to be profoundly challenged by emerging ethical questions about visibility, access, decolonisation, the rise of digital technologies, synthetic media, online ephemerality, metadata instability, social media, and the growing visibility of private, community, and counter-archives, all of which have epistemic consequences for the production of historical knowledge. All these challenges raise urgent questions: What role do photographic archives play today? As traditional archival structures and photography's position within them come under question, how do we read their value for historical research now? Is it now more necessary than before to ground historical inquiry beyond the archive?

Organised and hosted by the Photographic History Research Centre at De Montfort University (UK) in collaboration with Masaryk University (Czech Republic), this online conference calls for a radical rethinking of the core principles of photography's role as historical evidence within established archival practices, by taking into account the current technological transformations, ethical

questions, and shifting visibilities, and their impact on the production of historical knowledge, cultural memory and heritage. In light of these changes, this conference seeks to reevaluate core ideas such as credibility, how we access history, whether it is possible to capture historical complexity, and whether photographic archives in a traditional sense remain essential or have become obstacles to more plural, unstable, and ethically accountable forms of the past.

We invite 15-minute contributions that, in the spirit of the call, interrogate the theoretical, methodological and conceptual insights into topics such as:
- Politics of Survival; Selection, Preservation, Protection Refusal, Opacity and Destruction
- Reparative Interventions, Ethics, and Accountability
- Technical Transformations and the Reshaping of Historical Imagination
- Social Platforms and the Ephemerality of Digital Memory
- Synthetic Pasts and the Generated Image
- Materiality, Metadata and (De)Contextualization
- Community, Family and Personal Photographic Archives
- Counter-Archives and Competing Evidences
- Alternative Sources and Historical Complexity
- Beyond the Western Archival Paradigm
- Post-Archival Futures

Please, submit a proposal of 250-300 words (in .doc or .pdf format) by 27 November 2026 to the following e-mail address: afterthephotoarchive@gmail.com

- Your proposal should include your name, contact details, institutional affiliation (if applicable), a publishable biographical note of 80-120 words, and up to five keywords.

- Kindly name the file with your full name (e.g. Smith_Jane_APA27.pdf; Smith_John_APA2027.-doc).

The conference will be a two-day online event held via Microsoft Teams on 19-20 April 2027. Conference presentations and discussions will be delivered in English.

As organisers, we envision this event not only as a forum for scholarly exchange but also as the beginning of a collaborative conversation that may develop into a future academic publication. We are thus considering the possibility of publishing contributions presented at the conference, and expressions of interest will be understood as an indication of potential participation in the subsequent editorial and peer review process.

For news and additional information, please visit the conference webpage: https://sites.google.com/view/after-the-photo-archive

Organisers
Valéria Bláha | PhD Candidate in Art History, Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic
Gil Pasternak | Professor of Photographic Cultures and Heritage, De Montfort University, United Kingdom

Reference:

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2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/54362>.