

**Feminists and their Archives (1968-2018).**  
**Advocacy, Memory and Research**

**International symposium**

**University of Angers, Monday 26, Tuesday 27 and Wednesday 28 March 2018**

**Call for papers**

The fiftieth anniversary of May and June 1968 will be the occasion for numerous commemorations of the event, but also more generally on the "1968 years", bounded, according to Philippe Artières and Michelle Zancarini-Fournel by the two dates of 1962 and 1981. During that period, feminist movements in France and other occidental countries experienced a renewal through activism, intense cultural production and high visibility in the public sphere and the media. To write the history of such feminist mobilizations and to question their posterity, one needs to engage with the issue of archives, written and oral, private as well as institutional, collective as well as individual, preserved or destroyed. This symposium aims to initiate a wide-ranging reflection on the constitution, conservation and use of feminist archives and to promote an interdisciplinary and international dialogue. Proposals will focus in particular on the following four areas:

**1. Political and material conditions for the preservation of archives**

Very early on, feminists pointing out the absence of women from national narratives and academic history decided to make up for what Natalie Zemon Davis called "the patriarchal silences of the past". Convinced that the marginalization of women in history directly contributed to women's marginalization in the present, feminists elaborated other narratives of the past, turning the writing of history into a political issue and an important dimension of their struggle. Their aim was to offer representations of the past that were not only alternative but also competing with those commonly conveyed in society in order to act against the occultation of women and feminists. To do so, they shed a new light on existing sources and discovered many documents that had been ignored, while they also became aware of the need to constitute their own archives.

Thus, from the emergence of organized feminist movements during the second half of the 19th century, feminists began to seek out, collect and make available unpublished sources. They constituted Archival collections and some donated them to public institutions for the purpose of conservation and promotion. This is the case of Marguerite Durand who donated her collection, during her lifetime, to the City of Paris in 1931. The donation resulted in the creation of the library of women's history and feminism (Marguerite Durand Library), which is at risk today<sup>1</sup>. It is true that not all feminists have the same resources to develop and maintain archival material. Many groups disappear from history because of a lack of preserved traces, and the existing funds are often vulnerable to changes of context. Dependency on institutions can also lead to the risk of being dispossessed of their archives. For example, it is the likelihood that Cécile Brunshvicg's archives would not be deposited in a specialized structure, due to a lack of space at the Marguerite Durand Library, that prompted the creation of the Association Archives of feminism and of the Center for Feminist Archives (CAF) in the University of Angers in 2000 and 2001. Recent works have also highlighted the importance of local archives allowing new perspectives on feminist movements.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://sauvonslabmd.fr/>

A first axis of the symposium will focus on the material and political conditions for the creation of archives. What are the reasons for the creation of a feminist fund? What political and organizational opportunities favor such initiatives? What is the profile of the actors creating and animating structures for the preservation of documents? What negotiations exist between activism and institutionalization?

## **2. Transformation of archives since 1968**

The symposium examines in particular the period from 1968 to the present day. Indeed, the relationship to archives seems to have been transformed during the "1968 years". The use of anonymity, the insistence on the collective, the refusal of institutions, the ephemeral nature of groups, or the continuity of political activity until today seem to have been obstacles to the creation of archival collections of feminist activity.

Moreover, from the 1970s on, drawing from a more general movement of reflexivity in the epistemology of history and from a new interest in the "voiceless", the collection of memories emerged as a necessity for writing women's history, as for other socially dominated categories. The question therefore arises of the conservation and promotion of oral archives.

Finally, from the 1990s onwards, the advent of the digital age has renewed the question of the preservation of traces. The Internet is a formidable tool for disseminating knowledge on the history of feminism, but highlights the complexity and difficulty of preserving digital archives.

The second axis of the colloquium will thus consider the historical transformations of the relationship between feminists and their archives since 1968 and will raise the question of the evolution of the forms of archives themselves.

## **3. Archives and memories**

Keeping tracks of past collective or individual actions is one of the conditions for the passage to posterity. Initiatives for the preservation and promotion of archives help shape feminist memories, offering the necessary grounds to build memory. Thus, depending on the resources available to individuals and collectives to preserve their archives and make them known, they do not have the same place in the narratives of the past.

This question is all the more topical today that feminists of the 1970s are coming to the end of their militant career and are led to interrogate, more than ever before, the material or immaterial traces they wish to transmit to future generations. In addition, archives also provide the new generations with the material from which they can sort out the "feminist heritage" they want to endorse.

The political nature of the constitution of the archival collections is therefore obvious. For example, in Paris, the Lesbian Archives Research Cultures (ARCL), which, since 1983, has been conserving and promoting the archives of lesbians, has reserved their consultation for women only. In doing so, they define a specific perimeter of memory.

The third axis of the colloquium will examine the relations between archives and memories. Are conservation projects, as the first step in the process of re-examining the past, abstract gestures or forged by rivalries and cooperative relationships between feminist movements? How do the ideologies and resources of collective groups and individuals shape the relationship with archives and thus feminist memories?

In addition, other uses of the archives can be evoked, especially in the domain of the arts (plastic arts, literature, theater, performances ...) or the media. Cinema, video and radio make use of archives, as well as exhibitions, not without sorting and selecting according to criteria that deserve reflection. What can we say, also of the highly sought-after feminist audiovisual and iconographic resources? How can we analyse the commodification of feminist archives?

#### **4. Research issues**

Archives are at the heart of the scientific knowledge of the past. In France, the creation of the Center for Feminist Archives in the University of Angers owed a lot to the development of the academic history of women and feminism, and favored it in return. The work on archives therefore raises a number of epistemological questions. For example, how can we apprehend certain events or groups that have not left immediate traces? By encouraging the preservation or production of archives, do researchers contribute to create a bias in the way history is written? How to deal with political conflicts modeling collections and possibly restricting access to archives? And what about the threat of self-censorship preventing from the donation of personal archives?

A final axis will therefore focus on the specificity of the archives relating to the history of feminism, in line with reflections on the specificity of the archives for the writing of women's history.

The international dimension of the colloquium will not only allow new comparisons, but also the study of feminist actions and networks in the field of libraries, archives and the collection of testimonies (published, recorded, filmed).

#### **SUBMISSION OF PROPOSALS**

You are invited to submit your proposal by December 1st 2017 in the following format (in French or English)

Title of intervention

Name, first name, status and institutional affiliation

E-mail address

Summary of 3000 signs max. presenting the main ideas and materials of the intervention.

#### **Organizing Committee**

- Christine Bard, Université d'Angers
- Claire Blandin, Université Paris 13
- Pauline Boivineau, Université d'Angers
- Marion Charpenel, CSI Mines-ParisTech
- Hélène Fleckinger, Université Paris 8
- Alban Jacquemart, Université Paris-Dauphine
- Audrey Lasserre, Université Catholique de Louvain / Actions Marie Curie
- Sandrine Lévêque, Université Lyon 2
- Bibia Pavard, Université Paris 2