

From Collective Practice to Cultural Heritage: The Lives and Archival Afterlives of Independent Film Collectives

ACTIVATE WP4 Conference

Penthaz/Lausanne, 18-19 March 2027

Cinémathèque suisse and Université de Lausanne

The forthcoming workshop of the "[Alternative Media and Digital Activism](#)" work package of the [ACTIVATE](#) project will examine independent film collectives and their intersections with collective filmmaking practices, archival work, and cultural heritage in a transnational European perspective across the 20th and 21st centuries.

Although militant film collectives can be traced back to the 1910s in France and other European countries, it was from the 1930s onward that collective filmmaking practices became more widely structured and politically organised. Their “golden age” arguably emerged in the late 1960s and continued into the early 1980s, when numerous collectives across Europe operated outside or at the margins of the commercial film industry. Often linked to trade unions, workers’ movements, feminist and anti-colonial struggles, or alternative distribution networks, these groups developed collaborative modes of production and circulation that challenged dominant cinematic, economic and institutional structures.

Yet the history of film collectives is neither linear nor homogeneous. Their emergence, transformation, and decline are closely tied to specific political, economic, and technological contexts. From the interwar period to post-1968 activism, from analogue film culture to today’s digital environments, collective practices have continually adapted their forms and priorities. In recent years, for instance, some collectives have explicitly focused on preserving, circulating and reactivating the materiality of analogue and photochemical supports as both an aesthetic and political gesture. Understanding the historical evolution of collectives thus also means analysing the conditions that favour their emergence, the infrastructures they rely on, and the shifting focus of their activities.

From the mid-1980s onward, many collectives were gradually transformed into more conventional legal entities (production companies, NGOs, independent author-driven structures), marking a shift from collectively authored militant documentary practices to more individualised forms of filmmaking. This transformation raises important questions about the parallel process of *patrimonialisation*: how has the institutional recognition of these films accompanied, reframed or even reshaped their political and collective origins? Did the passage from militant documentary to “author cinema” coincide with processes of institutionalisation and canonisation?

Today, some of these films — along with their related documentation — are preserved, restored, catalogued, and exhibited by national film archives and heritage institutions. Yet films alone rarely capture the full scope of collective practices. Non-film materials — posters, pamphlets, scripts, correspondence, production files, distribution catalogues, photographs, technical notes,

and digital traces — are often essential to reconstructing the political, social, and aesthetic frameworks in which these collectives operated. How can archives preserve and contextualise these heterogeneous materials? What role do they play in resisting the de-politicisation or simplification of collective histories?

At the same time, collective filmmaking has not disappeared. Contemporary artists continue to experiment with collaborative authorship, shared infrastructures, and alternative economies of production and distribution. This conference therefore also seeks to foster dialogue between historians, archivists, and contemporary practitioners working collectively today. Contributions from artists, filmmakers, and members of collectives — reflecting critically on their own practices in relation to historical precedents and archival futures — are particularly welcome.

We welcome proposals addressing (but not limited to):

Histories and Evolutions of Film Collectives in Europe

- Emergence of early militant collectives (1910s–1930s)
- The “golden age” (late 1960s–early 1980s)
- Transformation into institutional or author-driven structures
- Political, economic and technological conditions shaping collective practices
- Shifts in focus: activism, education, alternative distribution, analogue materiality
- Contemporary collectives and new collaborative models

Production, Circulation and Transnational Networks

- Production, distribution and exhibition models
- Links to trade unions, political movements, feminist, queer or migrant struggles
- Alternative circuits and transnational solidarities
- Informal or underground networks of circulation
- Cross-border collaborations and European infrastructures

Archival Challenges

- Acquisition of collectively authored works
- Copyright and collective authorship
- Cataloguing collective practices
- Fragmented archives and incomplete collections
- Preservation of non-standard formats and low-budget materials
- The role of non-film materials in reconstructing collective activity
- Archival strategies for contextualisation and reactivation

Institutionalisation and De-politicisation

- From activist cinema to cultural heritage
- The tension between institutional recognition and radical politics
- Canon formation and the marginalisation of collective authorship
- The shift from collective documentary to author cinema
- The role of festivals, retrospectives and museum exhibitions

Reactivating Collective Histories

- Restoring transnational networks of solidarity
- Curatorial practices foregrounding collective authorship
- Digital humanities approaches and network analysis
- Participatory archiving and community-based preservation
- Artistic reappropriations and contemporary reactivations

Institutional and Practice-Based Perspectives

- Concrete archival workflows
- Preservation and digitisation strategies
- Policy frameworks and funding structures
- Ethical considerations in handling politically sensitive materials
- Collaborative research between archives and universities
- Practice-based research by contemporary collectives
- Contemporary collectives and their relationship to heritage institutions

To apply : Please submit your proposal (max. 300 words), along with a brief CV, by **29 May 2026** to achilleas.papakonstantis@cinematheque.ch, francois.vallotton@unil.ch and archivum@ceu.edu (subject “ACTIVATE Conference WP4 March 2027”).

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