

ACTIVATE Project – Questions after secondment

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Centre audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir (Paris, France)

1-30 May 2025, Work package 4

La Contemporaine (Nanterre, France)

31 May-26 June 2025, Work package 4

1. Can you tell us more about your research work in your home institution?

My research focuses on the 20th and 21st century non-fiction, non-commercial, experimental film and amateur photography in Central and Eastern Europe. I explore how film and photography contribute to creating or challenging historical narratives as well as how they construct visual formulae for portraying various national and social groups.

I have recently completed a collaborative monograph *In Visible Presence: Soviet Afterlives in Family Photos* (with Olga Shevchenko, MIT Press, 2023), which focuses on private images' semantic mobility and shape-shifting. In the book, we explored how everyday images change functions and meanings, traverse public and private milieux, and allow their owners to articulate and control their biographic narratives.

At OSA, I presently focus on the emergence and transformation of archival infrastructures of the Private Photo and Film Archive (PFFA, [HU OSA 320](#)) and the audio-visual media monitoring collections of the RFE/RL ([HU OSA 300-81-9](#)). I would like this research to contribute to our understanding of image production and circulation in the transnational framework, as well as their longitudinal perception, preservation strategies, and impact.

2. How did the secondments take place inside your broader work/research practice? Do you think the secondments helped you reflect on it?

The secondments at Centre Audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir (CASdB) and at La Contemporaine (part of Paris Nanterre University) allowed me to get a deeper knowledge on the pioneering, feminist audiovisual archives and the distribution strategies of audiovisual materials in France, especially in the activist networks. It provided me with access to a rich film collection of the CASdB and gave an opportunity to learn about both institutions archival and outreach work. Staying at CASdB and La Contemporaine allowed me to meet many colleagues working on collection development, processing, and exhibitions, and discover collections similar and partly complementary to those of Blinken OSA Archivum.

3. Did the secondments help your research in a surprising way?

During the secondments I went beyond the scope of my individual research and learned about collections I was not aware of previously – such as French activist feminist films or amateur photographic collection at La Contemporaine, to give just a few examples. Other interesting insights emerged in conversations with archivists and curators at both institutions, which highlighted for me that some of the institutional agendas, dynamics, and even challenges are surprisingly common in our field.

The academic and archival network created thanks to the secondment will be helpful in both pursuing the planned cooperation within the project as well as initiating new collaborations. I have also acquired knowledge of other academic institutions in France and established connections with scholars at Nanterre University, CERCEC, CNRS, and

participated in a conference on photography at INHA. These encounters helped me to productively think about new directions of research on visual culture and activism.

4. How did your secondments take place inside your workpackage and inside the broader ACTIVATE project, especially as co-leader of WP4 “Alternative media”?

During my secondments, I have co-organized the first WP4 seminar “Comparative Archival Ecologies: Mapping Alternative Audiovisual Media Collections” which took place on June 2-3 at La Contemporaine and online. The seminar focused on the questions of audiovisual archives’ role in the politics of preservation and presentation of countercultural, alternative media. It brought together media and audiovisual heritage archivists and scholars in the fields of sociology, filmmaking, visual studies, cultural history, and archival studies to explore how archives preserve and present audiovisual collections of alternative media and political dissent. We have reached out to a range of institutions within and beyond the consortium, and developed an exciting program which introduced novel research on both historical and evolving activist archives.

I believe that studying the heritage and archival practices in France as well as introducing OSA Archivum activities during the exchanges with colleagues in Paris will contribute towards the project deliverables, especially in terms of planning the future seminars, publications, and a summer school. We have found several productive thematic synergies and I would like to further expand my research on audiovisual archives and commemorative practices within the framework of WP4.

5. Did the secondments help you create a stronger link with your host institution? Can you share how?

Getting to know archivists, researchers, and public program curators in partner institutions is certainly beneficial for my current and future activities. Familiarity with the holdings and engagement with the institution during the secondment opens up new avenues for future cooperation within the Activate project and also enriches my curatorial knowledge. I have learned about many projects (both archival, as well as exhibitions and publications) relevant for the Activate deliverables, including a final exhibition on transnational feminism. While the cooperation on this project is ongoing, it helped us address strategic questions and identify members of the working group for the final project.

Spending a month at each partner institutions offered invaluable insights into the institutions’ collections and activities, something that cannot be achieved in the format of a short-term visit. In this sense, the Activate timeframe is really beneficial for building stronger connections with host institutions.

6. Can you describe how the work you performed during your secondments will contribute to the elaboration of the final exhibition on feminism?

During the first secondments, I have concentrated on familiarizing myself with the collections of feminist audiovisual works, such as film collection at the CASdB or multiple research and exhibition initiatives at La Contemporaine. The films and other audio-visual materials, including La Contemporaine’s rich poster collection, could greatly enrich the final exhibition. Furthermore, it was important to learn about several already completed projects and their outputs, including but not limited to DISSINVENT. Dissidents and Exiles from Socialist Eastern Europe and the USSR: History, Archives and Memories (1945-1991), completed in 2022, or research on the 1970-80s posters in the framework of the See Red Women’s Workshop (SRWW) published in the latest thematic issue *La Féminisme par l’Affiche* (Matériaux pour l’histoire de notre temps n° 155, 2025).

I believe that researching both institutions' collections as well as learning about their prior and ongoing initiatives is going to be helpful in designing the conceptual framework of the final exhibition, finding additional international partners for it, and identifying relevant exhibition materials.

29 August 2025