

Conference Theme: Gender-Technology-Environment

Title: Technologies of Surveillance: The Cold War, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and the Archiving of Women's History

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Abstract: James Bond, the world's most popular fictional Cold War spy, conducts espionage with a range of specially designed cars, guns and gadgets. Most real-life espionage occurs in far less spectacular technological fashion. This paper deals with a set of documents declassified under Canada's Access to Information Act. These documents reveal that during the Cold War, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) deliberately targeted individuals, groups and events associated with second wave feminism from the 1960s-1980s. The documents can be divided into two sets: i) cross-referenced surveillance reports, including information from informers and stakeouts; and ii) material appended to these reports. Unlike these reports, this material is rarely censored via Access to Information protocols and is a rich supplement to the former. Consisting largely of open sources, it includes articles appearing in newspapers and magazines, pamphlets, newsletters, position papers, announcements and minutes of meetings from mainstream sources, women's groups and left-wing organizations. I suggest that these two sets of documents can be treated as an archive in order to write not only about RCMP surveillance but also about Canadian women's history. However, there are several ethical issues that emerge when researchers use such material as an archive. This paper emerges out of an ongoing study with co-author Steve Hewitt, University of Birmingham, UK.