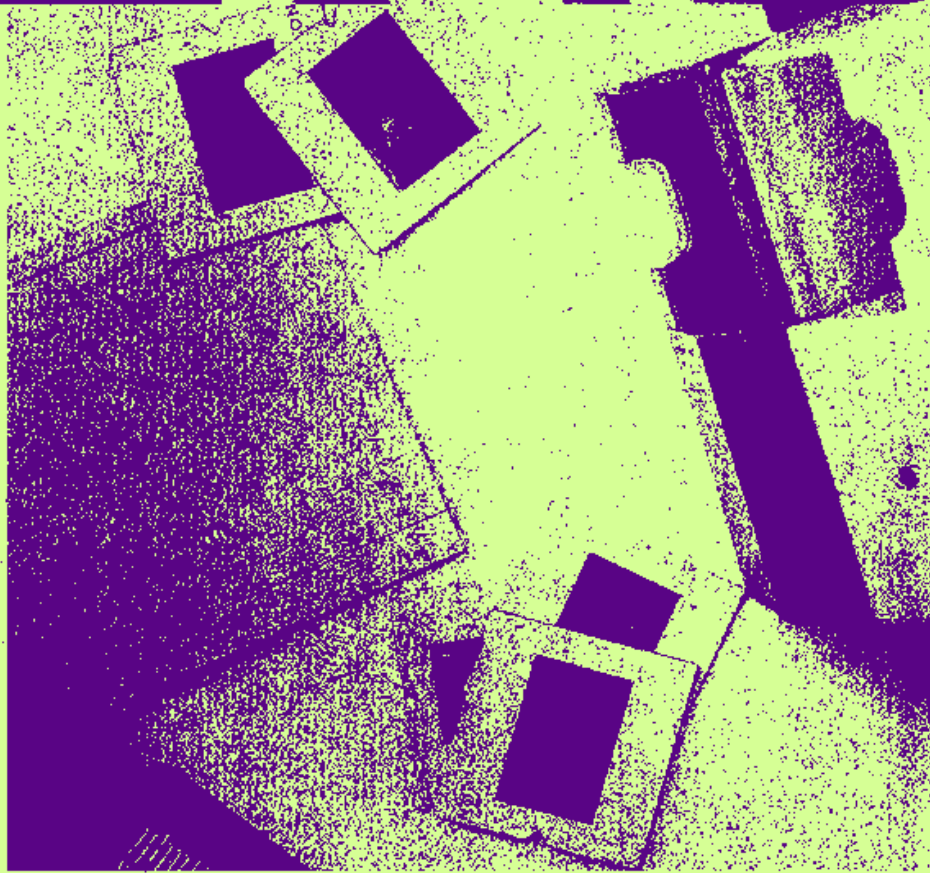# THE
FEMINIST
INSTITUTE

MEMORY LAB

TFI TEACHES:
CONSIDERING ETHICAL DIGITIZATION PRACTICES

WHAT IS THE FEMINIST INSTITUTE?

The Feminist Institute (TFI) documents and celebrates feminist contributions to culture by preserving and digitizing archival materials for public access. TFI promotes information activism and gender equity by infilling the cultural record to reflect fuller truths.

Through our partnership program, our staff works closely with institutions, feminist creators, and organizations on archival projects with both physical and digital records. Our partnership with supersisters, a 1970s feminist trading card collection, is a perfect example of this.

In August 2022, TFI staff traveled to Indianapolis, IN and worked closely with the mother-daughter duo, Lois and Melissa Rich, to organize and digitize their collection of ephemera, press, mock-ups and more.

WHY ZINES?

Zines are emblematic of DIY feminist practices that have preserved and recorded marginalized histories when large institutions excluded their narratives from the larger cultural record. Here at TFI, we always want to pay homage to the DIY roots that have given us so much feminist history to work with. Also—we love zines!

We envision a future where gender-marginalized individuals and organizations' equal contributions to culture are known and recognized, and their rights are protected. As part of this vision, TFI aims to provide free educational programming and resources to individuals and collectives looking to create their own archival collections—which is why we've created this zine series.

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WHY DIGITIZE?

Digitization can increase the accessibility of materials, aid in preservation (with proper digital upkeep), and help infill the cultural record. Digitized archival materials are frequently used in cultural memory projects or remixed into new creative and educational projects. Though digitization has many benefits, it's also an expensive practice often inaccessible to many smaller archives and, in some cases, even large institutions. It requires considerable archival labor, from the actual scanning, creating metadata, cataloging, and digital upkeep.

Ethical questions also need to be reckoned with, including what kinds of rights are required to post materials on the internet, who should be able to see what, and the safety of the individuals featured. There's also the question of remediation, which refers to the process of mediating media into new forms and the new meanings the material takes on in that process. While it does have world-making potential, the remediation process should be embedded in feminist + queer praxis and community-level decision-making (Groeneveld, 2018).

WHAT IS DIGITIZATION?

Digitization refers to the process of transferring analog media files into digital ones. This can include VHS tapes, audiocassettes, paper materials, photos, slides, negatives, and more. This zine will primarily focus on the process of materials mentioned above, but also things like t-shirts, buttons, and other ephemera via photography.

WHAT TOOLS DO I NEED?

Digitization requires specialized equipment depending on the material. As mentioned, things like t-shirts, buttons, and other ephemera can be photographed and uploaded as a digitization method. Suppose you're working with a low budget. In that case, you can always go the more DIY route of photographing and uploading as a permanent or temporary stand-in for more involved digitization processes.

Below is an easy-to-use chart to determine what kinds of equipment you may need:

ANALOG	PHOTO/PAPER	AUDIOCASSETTE	VHS TAPE
Equipment	Flatbed Scanner	USB Cassette Converter	VCR, Video-to-Digital Converter
Preferred File Formats	TIFF (.tiff) JPEG2000 (.jp2) JPEG (.jpg) PDF (.pdf)	WAVE (.wav) FLAC (.flac) MP3 (.mp3)	FFV1 v. 3 codec; .mkv wrapper H.264 codec; MPEG-4 AVC wrapper

How do I use these tools?

You can find digitization tips at thefeministinstitute.org/blog or by scanning this QR code:

THE FEMINIST INSTITUTE

WHAT IS REMEDIATION AND WHAT ARE ITS IMPLICATIONS?

Remediation refers to transferring media to another form and, more specifically, how analog materials are transferred to digital ones. Remediation is a topic within cultural digital archiving, as cultural archives are primarily created through *acts of transfer*. Most of these archives are creating counter-memories and histories and, as such, are inputting omitted materials back into the cultural record. As this transfer happens, the materials we're digitizing, preserving, and re-presenting are being "socially, medially, and culturally produced" (Chidgey, 2012).

So, when digitizing materials and representing them, it's essential to ensure they're in conversation with their whole history. Materials can quickly become decontextualized when they're singled out from the larger collection. We can also take remediation as an opportunity for world-making. As Groeneveld states:

> Remediation is a crucial aspect of social justice work because of its world-making potential; feminist/queer approaches to remediating social movement documents ought to be shaped by the principles developed within their own movements, particularly principles of consent and community-level consultation. (78)
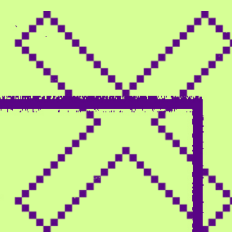
Considering Ethical Digitization Practices

WHAT ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS DO I NEED TO MAKE?

Digitization is exciting, and so are the sharing possibilities of the internet! It's important not to let that excitement take away from the ethical considerations needed when re-presenting once analog materials online for the world to see. Of course, if you're digitizing more of a family history, mostly just for your family to see, you can ask the people featured if they're okay with you putting it online. However, the ethics and release processes can be more complex when digitizing larger cultural works. Below are some suggestions to review for an ethical digitization practice:

1

Have conversations with the people featured.

Speak with the people who are in the materials you're digitizing. Ask how comfortable they are with them being put online and if there are any specific objects they may only want available in certain contexts.

2

Include take-down policies.

On your web page, have a clear and findable take-down policy with an active email address where people can reach you if they have comments, concerns, or questions about the materials online.

3

Explore for who and why you're putting these materials online.

Explore why you're putting these materials online. This step isn't meant to discourage digitization projects but to make them more meaningful. While the internet can be an endless pool of sharing, you also want to be aware that there are bad actors online and what this could mean for you and yours.

CONCLUSION

When digitizing more significant cultural works, there is a more involved release process as these cultural memory projects exist in an affective landscape that often brings up memories and emotions. To navigate the personal nature of cultural memory projects, TFI shapes our partnership model within feminist ethics of care (Caswell and Cifor, 2016). This means that we put relationship building at the center of our work, prioritize collaboration with the record-holders, and honor their wishes in how the collection is presented once analog materials are digitized. Put simply, we focus more on our archival process than our product.

Sources

Caswell, M., & Cilor, M. (2016). From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics: Radical Empathy in the Archives. *Archivaria*, 81, 23–43

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Groeneveld. (2018). Remediating pornography: the On Our Backs digitization debate. Continuum (Mount Lawley, W.A.), 32(1), 73–83. https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2018.1404677