

Library Collections Conservation Discussion Group 2002: Mutilation: Damage, Despair, and Repair

The Library Collections Conservation Discussion Group (LCCDG) met at the 30th Annual Meeting of the American Institute for Conservation in Miami, June 2002, to discuss the problem of malicious destruction of library materials and treatment options for those damaged materials. Discussion group attendees participated in a general discussion, heard two prepared presentations, and watched one demonstration.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Although malicious damage was the title topic, attendees quickly broadened the discussion to cover damage to collections from a variety of activities and situations. Discussion topics included:

- Damage by well-meaning and/or uninformed staff and patrons that unwittingly use destructive materials or techniques in processing or “repairing” collection materials. Other examples cited were the use of pressure-sensitive tapes, stiff-gummed cloth or paper tapes, bar code labels, call number labels, property stamping, and lamination with various plastic films
- Damage resulting from housekeeping techniques and products, such as careless washing and waxing of floors that result in damage to materials on lower shelves, use of cleaning products with caustic fumes, etc.
- Damage resulting from careless handling, improper photocopying techniques, and poor shipping procedures.

This open discussion took place on June 10, 2002, during the AIC 30th Annual Meeting, June 6–11, 2002, Miami, Florida. The moderators organized and led the discussion and recorded notes. Readers are reminded that the moderators do not necessarily endorse all the comments recorded and that although every effort was made to record proceedings accurately, further evaluation or research is advised before putting treatment observations into practice.

Suggested solutions to these problems focused on developing collegial, cooperative, and consultative relationships with library staff involved in processing, shelf prep, interlibrary loan, shelving, stacks maintenance, and facilities maintenance.

Participants also reported damage to collection materials involving body fluids—animal and human. Small quantities of body fluids that are *dry* are not considered biohazards and can be disposed of in a routine manner. Suggestions for dealing with materials damaged in this manner are removal of covers and rebinding; photocopying damaged pages for replacement; obtaining replacement pages through interlibrary loan; and, when necessary, discarding the item.

Mold damage, not usually described as mutilation, is of concern to all collection conservators. Vacuuming infected items using a HEPA (high efficiency particulate air) filter appears to be universally accepted as the first step in mold eradication. Wiping down mold-infested stacks with commercially available disposable dry wipes, accompanied by massive housecleaning, fans to lessen the likelihood of pockets of stagnant air, and dehumidification were other procedures discussed. Cobalt-impregnated tapes that may be hung from the ceiling were recommended as a simple tool for monitoring of humidity levels in stack areas.

Our ability to “kill” mold was debated. Vendors of conservation supplies sell “mold wipes” which they claim will kill mold, but the consensus among discussion group participants was that this treatment would not destroy spores in the dormant phase, nor would it ameliorate the dangers of toxins that remain in paper fibers after wiping or vacuuming.

Opinions about whether alcohol would kill mold seemed to be divided by national boundaries, with most conservators in the United States saying “no,” and most Canadians saying “yes.” One participant recommended alcohol-impregnated paper towels to eliminate mold growth. Ethanol as a fungicide appears to have lost popularity due to an understanding that it sets the stage for rapid

re-infestation in a warm, humid environment. It was pointed out that Lysol no longer contains orthophenyl phenol and does not kill mold. Isopropyl alcohol (70%) has growing support as an effective fungicide.

Mold in libraries is a multi-faceted problem that extends beyond the initial clean up. Some institutions post warning signs to alert patrons to the fact that the area has been contaminated by mold. In some institutions, individual items are flagged to warn patrons that they have been treated for mold contamination. Items treated for mold contamination are separated from the general collection and used only in a controlled environment. In some institutions, text blocks with moldy edges are trimmed and rebound, and in some institutions it is routine to withdraw moldy items. In many cases, unfortunately, treated items must be returned to the same problematic environment, because there is no other option.

PRESENTATIONS

Malicious vandalism and theft are perhaps the most troubling damage that collections conservators must deal with. Beth Doyle, Collections Conservator for the Duke University Libraries, described the aftermath of a large-scale, organized mutilation and theft of materials in the Harvard College Library (HCL). Beth described a three-year effort by the Harvard College Library to work with more than fifteen hundred items, including plates, maps, and entire books which had been removed from the HCL by a single individual. When the materials were recovered and returned to Harvard in 1996, Conservation Services was faced with the task of organizing and matching materials with bibliographic records and then with their original bindings. Much of the work of matching plates and maps with volumes was based on patterns of foxing, acid burn marks, staining, cockling, or trimming. Once the stolen items were re-integrated into the collection and appropriate conservation treatment completed, they were sent to off-site storage at the Harvard Depository. Patrons may request the volumes and use them in a supervised reading room.

The presentation initiated a discussion of security issues and included suggestions and concerns about how we protect vulnerable materials. It was observed that oversize maps in books present problems because they can be damaged when they are opened, unfolded, and refolded. They are also attractive, often valuable, and therefore vulnerable to theft. An original map might be transferred to a map department where it can be properly stored, and a copy placed in the original volume, even though this would change the nature of the book. An item might be stored off-site, with use restricted to a supervised reading room, although that would prevent patrons using it in conjunction with other maps. An item might be transferred to a

discrete collection and people sent there to use it, or a facsimile of the entire volume could be produced to serve as a use copy.

Douglas Hasty, Head of Access Services, Florida International University, gave a second talk. Mr. Hasty was invited to speak to LCCDG because of the significant role that interlibrary loan (ILL) plays in collections conservation. Interlibrary loans greatly increase collection use and pose particular problems as library materials are shipped to other institutions for use by their patrons. Many collections conservators are concerned about the use of pressure-sensitive adhesives used to label ILL items, about packing and shipping procedures, and about the care and handling standards at borrowing institutions. ARIEL, the ILL system for the digital capture and transfer of printed materials, creates concern about care and handling during image capture.

On the other hand, interlibrary loan departments provide support to collections conservation units by obtaining duplicate volumes or photocopies of pages needed for replacing damaged or missing pages. In addition, ILL staff identify materials that are too vulnerable to be loaned or copied and can bring damaged items to the attention of collections conservation staff instead of, before, and/or after loaning it to another institution.

Creating replacement pages was a topic briefly mentioned and worthy of a session of its own. Some institutions are scanning pages to produce registered, double-sided replacement pages. An article in *Library Resources and Technical Services* (46(1) January 2002) by Sue Kellerman, Head of the Preservation Department at Pennsylvania State University, provides a good description of the process used in a production setting. Another institution is using a low-tech photocopy procedure that is labor-intensive, but requires less sophisticated labor to produce the same product.

DEMONSTRATION

Following the discussion, Ethel Hellman demonstrated the following quick and easy method of hinging loose leaves onto a textblock.

Materials needed:

- Strips of Japanese paper (1/2 in. recommended width)
- Wheat-starch paste or methyl cellulose, brush
- Strips of Reemay (1 in. x 12 in. recommended)

Procedure:

1. Tear or cut the strip of Japanese paper to a length 1 mm shorter than the height of the textblock. The goal is to avoid having to trim the ends of the strip after it has been adhered to the text block.
2. Apply paste to the shoulder of the textblock.

3. Place the hinge along the pasted-out shoulder of the text block, with half its width on the shoulder and half off the shoulder. Tap the hinge into place gently.
4. Place a strip of Reemay on top of the hinge and apply pressure to insure adhesion. Leave the Reemay strip in place on the textblock, with its edge even with the edge of the shoulder. This is *important*. If the Reemay is not even with the edge of the shoulder, the loose item will adhere to the textblock and the hinge function will be lost.
5. Position the spine edge of the loose item on the edge of the shoulder on top of the Reemay strip. If the loose item is a page from the textblock, it will usually be square at the fore edge of the text block. Hold firmly in place with the fingers of one hand.
6. Maintaining the position of the loose item, apply paste to the free edge of the hinge, and to the spine edge of the loose item. Tap the hinge into place onto the loose item.
7. Cover the hinge with another strip of Reemay and apply pressure to adhere well. Leave both strips of Reemay in position and, protecting the shoulder, weight the hinged area until dry.

The LCCDG session in 2003 will focus on security issues in library collections.

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