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Preservation decision-making for the James Ivory Collection at the Morgan Library & Museum

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Abstract
The James Ivory collection, given to the Morgan Library & Museum, comprises screenplays, scripts and notebooks of Merchant Ivory Productions films from 1963 to 2018. The collection's housing and conservation needs were assessed for storage and exhibition. Objects largely consist of single sheets loosely held together or bound, and notebooks. These items contain extensive notations and materials inserted by Ivory, who directed or wrote many of the films. A major challenge of preserving the collection stemmed from the inserted materials, which could be removed to avoid damage or for display purposes. However, material preservation and exhibition display are not the only considerations. The collection's condition and order retains information about Ivory's working process, which could be lost or altered by overly invasive actions. The preservation of the physical materials must be balanced with the preservation of contextual information. This project explores whether to preserve these materials as found or whether (and how) to intervene.

Keywords
James Ivory; archives; order; screenplay; script; exhibition

Introduction

The James Ivory Collection is an archival collection comprising modern materials. The first 55 objects were given to the Morgan Library & Museum in 2017, with further donations made by James Ivory the following year. Mixed in together with the paper and books is a varied assortment of inserted items ranging from news clippings to dried plants, photographs, and much more in between. My project was to assess and resolve the new acquisition's preservation needs, and to prepare selected materials for exhibition within a limited timeframe. First, I will describe the collection materials generally. Then, I will cover some of the factors deciding the course of preservation and will end with a discussion of leaving or separating parts within objects.

Collection overview

James Ivory assembled the collection over the period from 1961 to 2017, between the founding of Merchant Ivory Productions by Ivory and his partner Ismail Merchant, and the release of the film *Call Me By Your Name*, for which Ivory won an Academy Award for Best Adapted Screenplay. As the director of several Merchant Ivory films, these materials provide valuable insight into the filmmaking process. Not only does the collection have his personal copies of screenplays and notes, it also contains material used or added by others, such as notes, sketches, and other loosely inserted items. So, although there may be other copies of a particular draft in existence, the individual copies may have unique features. Also, these materials will not be found together in quite the same order anywhere else.

Most of the collection items fall into one of three categories: screenplays, small scripts, and editing notebooks. These categories share characteristics of materials, construction, and use. Let us examine these categories starting with screenplays.

Screenplays are scripts that are written specifically for screen productions—that is, television or film. The collection contains different types of screenplays such as drafts at various stages of revision and shooting scripts (shooting scripts are more detailed and contain the director's shooting instructions). Typically, screenplays take the form of loose sheets inside a cover or other enclosure, although Ivory also employed the services of bookbinders to bind the screenplays of some of the earlier films into books. Screenplays for several other films were produced through Studio Duplicating Services, a business in New York City specializing in script duplication and binding. These have a distinct appearance, described thus on the business's website:

> Copies were done onto white for originals, or coloured paper indicating to which version of the re-write it belonged. The pages were collated by hand, holes punched, then held together with brass brads threaded through the holes. The script was then bound in one of several coloured covers with the title, author and Studio stamp embossed in gold ink.[1]

1 Studio Duplicating Service, Inc., 'Our History', http://studioduplicatingservice.com/OurHistory.aspx (accessed 10 Feb, 2019).

However, all but one of the brass brads are missing from the Studio Duplicating scripts. A comment by James Ivory during a visit to the Morgan Library & Museum provides an explanation. While looking through one of his screenplays, he remarked on the page fasteners, saying that he usually worked with the sheets loose. With this in mind, it makes sense that only a single brad from Studio Duplicating Services remains in the entire collection. The rest likely were removed by Ivory to facilitate his use of the screenplay.

The paper in the screenplays varies widely, encompassing, among others, thin typewriter paper and carbon copies, regular copy papers in white and assorted colours, and sheets of thermal paper and electrofax. Although most are printed (or are copies from printed sheets), there are extensive handwritten annotations and sometimes sketches or storyboards. Vertical lines through the text were drawn by Ivory to indicate that a scene had been shot already.

The vertical lines and colourful papers feature in the next category of collection objects as well: the small scripts. Technically, small scripts are also screenplays, but portable in form, measuring roughly 16 cm by 12 cm. In contrast to the screenplays, they are all bound in some way, with the pages oriented either vertically or horizontally. James Ivory used these scripts for quick reference. He also decorated some of them; one in particular stands out because of the continuity-checking images that he collected and adhered inside, which normally would have been discarded after use.

His tendency to collect things also shows itself in the third category of objects: the editing notebooks. These are blank stationery notebooks used by Ivory for his notes, storyboards, calendars, journal entries, and so on, with each book corresponding to a different film. They often contain an assortment of loosely inserted materials, such as news clippings, postcards, dried plants, papers, photographs, and other miscellaneous items. The first and last leaves of the notebooks are the most heavily used, indicating that Ivory often started from the ends and worked inward, frequently using the insides of covers as a folder for loose material or a place to collect information for easy reference; while the interiors sometimes have stretches of blank pages interspersed with inserts. This shows that he didn't necessarily work from one page to the next from front to back. Other notebooks are page after page of printed sheets, attached to the blank leaves with tape or staples.

Outside of the three main categories of objects, one other feature of the collection stands out: the sticky notes and flags. These are numerous and found on all object types. Most of them take the typical Post-It Note form, a small piece of coloured paper with a self-adhesive strip on the back; but some are plastic with a red or blue rectangle at one end. James Ivory used them to add information and to mark pages, and also to label much of the collection.

From these descriptions of collection objects, one may notice that the materials are very familiar. Although some of it clearly reflects technology more common in previous decades—for example, the typewriter—most of it would not be out of place in an office today. This familiarity can be a significant challenge in working with the collection, as nearly everyone has personal experience with these kinds of paper and stationery in an everyday context, where they are less valuable and more disposable. As a result, it can be difficult to see these as important objects with real preservation needs. I will delve more into some of the difficulties caused by this mindset shortly.

Approach to preservation

The project began with the collection review, as the exhibition objects had not yet been selected. Examination revealed that much of the collection was in good condition, but that there were a few condition issues that were common either across each object category or the collection as a whole. For example, the screenplays had numerous small tears and creases in the papers, and the editing notebooks frequently exhibited damage to the joints and hinges. Self-adhesive tapes were also used extensively in some objects, and the older tape adhesives were yellowed and brittle. Because there were so many objects, and because the main object categories shared many similarities in their structure and condition, I attempted to approach preservation in a way that reflected this division. To that end, I proposed guidelines for storage, rehousing and treatment for each object category or condition issue.

The full document described broadly what action to take when encountering various materials and situations. For example, all photographs were to be sleeved and all bulky inserts documented and removed to reduce stress on bindings. These guidelines were meant to streamline the process of treatment decision-making and simplify dealing with the volume of materials as a group. They were also intended to serve as a record of what was done and

why, and would apply to any objects that may be added to the collection in the future. Here is a brief selection from the guidelines:

For minor tears or creases, do not mend or flatten.
For books with damaged joints and hinges, provide an enclosure.
For bulky inserts, document and remove them.
For sticky notes and self-adhesive tape, leave in place.
For thermal papers, copy to preserve text.
For photographs and film, store in a sleeve.

With some things, this approach worked well. It was successful for preservation measures whose main influencing factor was inherent vice that would lead to eventual loss of information, such as the thermal papers found in several objects. These papers have a heat-activated dye that is known to fade in a relatively short period; documents are not expected to last more than a few years. The papers in the Ivory collection were already partially faded. Because of their short useable life, copying these sheets to preserve the information was a high priority and was done consistently regardless of other factors. I tested a few copying methods and chose photography, as it produced the best results in terms of colour reproduction, legibility, and cropping, and the files could be easily manipulated to make more text readable. With the number of sheets needing photography and the extent of fading, the extra time spent on a simple photo set up was worthwhile for the increase in image quality.

This brings us to the next influencing factor: time. Time is important when working with a high volume of material, as time-intensive actions with low returns are often not possible or desirable to carry out. Therefore, it was easy to set guidelines such as not mending minor tears, not flattening creases, and leaving self-adhesive tape in place when the risk of further damage or loss was low. In fact, because of the time and additional treatment steps required, tape was not removed even when it was actively staining adjacent materials. The few exceptions to these guidelines arose from treatment for exhibition display (and therefore only applied to selected objects).

The guideline for sticky notes was where things started to get more complicated. As with tape, the notes had physical considerations such as whether they would stay stuck or fall off, leaving adhesive residue and becoming lost. Unlike the tape, the notes also carried text information. Because the sticky notes were so numerous and the vast majority of them were integral to the objects, removal or other interventions such as re-attaching them with wheat starch paste were never seriously contemplated for them all; the guideline was to leave them in place. However, for a small proportion of sticky notes that were not integral to the objects, but were added later by James Ivory as part of his organization system, removal (and retention) was considered.

Original order

Another major issue that arose in making preservation decisions for the collection was deciding whether or not to separate or move materials from their location, either temporarily or for the long term. There were many factors at play here. One of them was maintaining the order of materials in the objects, which is extremely important in preserving contextual information. To a researcher using the collection, encountering an assortment of papers together might be just as significant as the text on the paper itself. This valuable context may be lost if the order were disturbed. Also, 'original order' is a fundamental principle in archives that refers to the order established by the creator of the collection.[2] This means that James Ivory's organizational sticky notes and labels, the same ones for which removal was contemplated, were important for archival reasons. It was preferable to leave them in place as well.

Removal of parts

Besides original order, there were other reasons to avoid separating or changing the order of materials, even temporarily. For one, it was difficult to track and reunite parts after separation. The collection being newly acquired and not yet having records contributed to this difficulty. Furthermore, documenting the location of parts was challenging. If anything were to be taken from a screenplay or notebook, there may be few or no clues as to its origin. Even when page numbers were present, they were often unhelpful for recording or finding the origin later. There might be multiple instances of 'page 51' in a single object, each from a different draft.

2Note that 'original order' is different from 'order as received.' See 'original order' in the glossary of archival terminology, Society of American Archivists, 'Original Order', https://www2.archivists.org/glossary/terms/o/original-order (accessed 10 February 2019).

Fig. 1 A pair of small scripts with yellow sticky notes. The note has been removed from the front cover of the script at left (with red tape) and stuck on the object folder instead, while the note on the script at right remains in place.

When parts had to be separated, I took documentation photographs that showed the part in context. But this method had limits. First, in cases of momentary or accidental separation, no documentation existed as the need to reunite parts was not anticipated. Second, many of the materials were commonplace in any office environment, making them hard to distinguish from non-collection material. For example, a business card might have been left by a visitor or it might have fallen out of a collection object. Finally, in many cases the parts of objects lacked individual identifying marks. Even a photograph can only do so much to identify a specific bit of blank paper or binder clip among many possible candidates. This problem relates back to the familiar, everyday nature of the objects. It also introduces an element of stress for the conservator, who may see office supplies everywhere and not know if they belong to an object.

So, once removed, the parts were hard to put back and very easy to lose. Returning to the sticky note example, any notes that were removed from an object or folder also had a high chance of being mistaken for regular scrap paper or office supplies (Fig. 1). The sticky note on the right is clearly part of the object. But the one on the left, which was removed from the object, looks ambiguous. Even though it is placed beside the object on its folder, and despite being the same colour and size as the note next to it, its identity is already in question. Somehow, the note needed to signal that it was an important piece of the object.

Documentation

This signal of importance took the form of a polyester sleeve and official-looking documentation (Fig. 2). The first attempt consisted of simply sleeving the note with a label and location information handwritten on the outside. However, at a glance it looked like a sticky note in a sleeve. It didn't matter that an accession number was written on it; the arrangement just did not grab attention. The humble sticky note required something more to distinguish it from other notes in the environment. So the documentation expanded to include a colour photograph showing the sticky note in context in its original location in or on the object, with relevant information printed on a full-size sheet of paper, all assembled inside the sleeve to make it appear larger and more important. Depending on where the sticky note came from, a similar sheet or half sheet was placed in the original location to signal that something that belonged there was removed.

Handling and transport

Careful handling and transport provided a further reason to set guidelines that favoured leaving object parts in place rather than removing them. Because of the limited time available to complete the project and prepare for exhibition, the objects were in high demand and being moved frequently. Being simultaneously in demand by conservation, curatorial, imaging, and communications departments, and with exhibition deadlines looming, it was not possible to

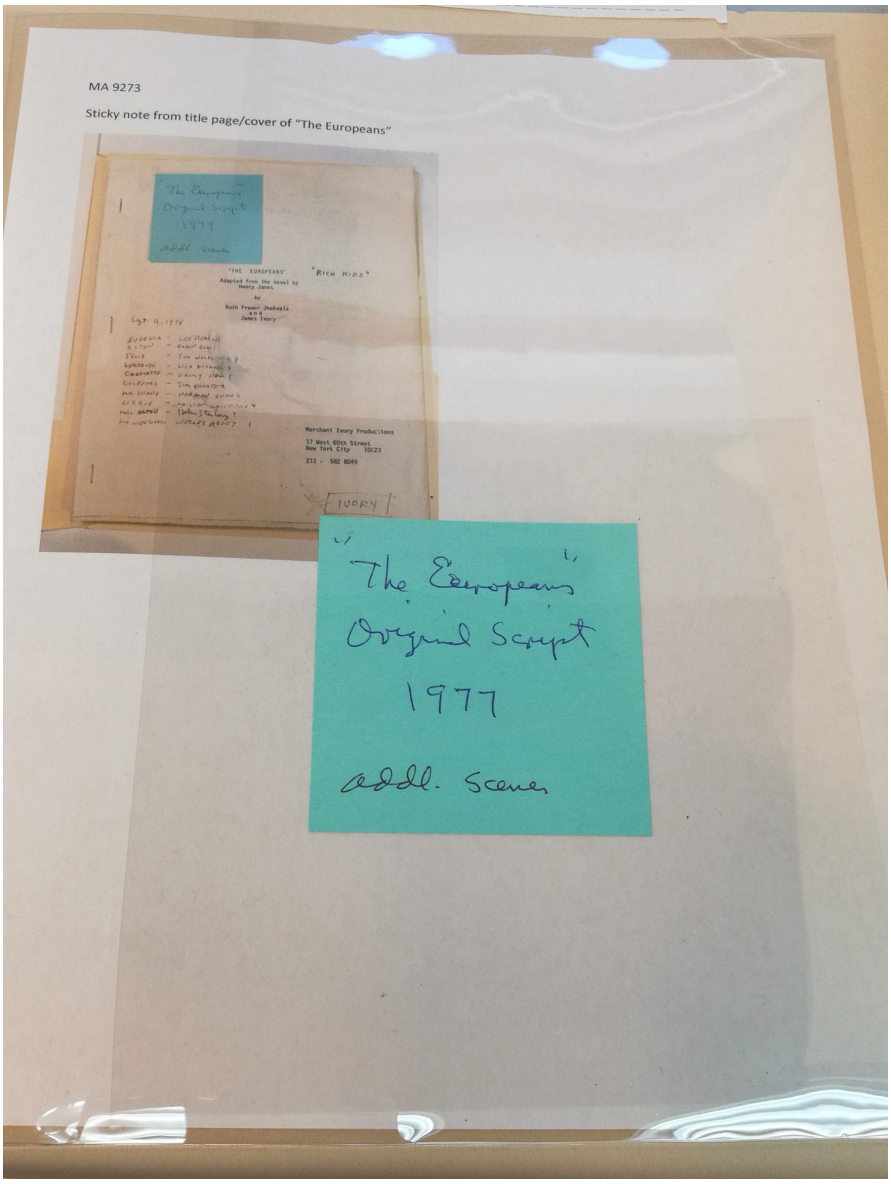

Fig. 2 Documentation of a sticky note removed from the title page of MA 9273, 'The Europeans'. The note is sleeved together with a context photograph and information printed on a full-size sheet of paper.

restrict collection movement. Separating objects into even more parts that might be further disordered and lost or damaged in transport increases the risk.

Removing bulky inserts

Having established a strong preference for leaving materials in place, guidelines specifying removal of materials were re-examined. Initially, all bulky inserts were supposed to be removed from the editing notebooks. This is because the thickness of the inserted material was damaging to the bindings, resulting in loose or broken hinges and detached covers. Removing the inserts was intended to relieve stress, preserving the books' structures for longer. But when it came to it, how much bulk was too much? What if the book had adapted to the added thickness and no further damage would occur if inserts were left in place? For some books, considering the number and distribution of inserts, not to mention the time required to document their locations in a book without pagination, it might not be worth removing them. In the end, the notebooks were evaluated on a case-by-case basis rather than following the guideline as it was originally written.

Although there were reasons for the initial inclusion of these guidelines, first-hand observation of the risks of separation encouraged greater caution than a blanket rule allowed. In addition, preparing objects for exhibition required working with them on an individual level that was not well accommodated when the guidelines were drawn up. However, sometimes removing and separating parts was necessary. In those situations, as much as possible, materials were kept close together and in the same folder. Actions that were anticipated to alter the placement of materials were discussed with and approved by Carolyn Vega, the curator in charge of the collection, before carrying them out, and all changes were documented.

Exhibition requirements

Separation was also carried out due to exhibition display. These changes were intended to be temporary, lasting only for the duration of exhibition preparation and the display period. As most of the materials would return to their places after the show ended, original order was less of a concern for these objects. And although other risks of separation still applied, the changes were necessary for display. For instance, a few sheets of a screenplay might be pulled from a stack of papers to show side-by-side, while the rest of the papers remained in their folder.

Although it would have been possible to display more sheets as part of a whole object, with the stack of papers opened in the middle, in this circumstance it was actually less risky to separate them and mount them individually. This is because objects were displayed hanging almost vertically off of the back of the case, with mounts attached to a high density polyethylene foam panel. The foam was backed with aluminum honeycomb, but we did not get permission to drill into it. With this setup, there was the possibility that the stacks of paper in their acrylic mounts would prove too heavy for the centimeter-thick foam to support. In contrast, individual sheets were mounted simply on mat board held up with pins, which was much lighter and safer. Fortunately only one thick screenplay was displayed in its entirety, and the foam panel supported the weight for three months without incident.

Accidents happen

Accidental separation of materials is also a possibility. This occurred during exhibit installation, when some sheets of paper fell out of an editing notebook while hanging the mount. Without knowing their order or exactly where they had come from, they were stored in the object folder with a note rather than risk returning them to the book in the wrong place.

Conclusion

The guidelines set out for the preservation of the collection were useful, but only up to a point. Once factors such as maintaining order and exhibition preparation came into play, it was necessary to evaluate objects more individually. It would have been more helpful to approach the exhibition objects as a separate matter from the collection review and have the guidelines clearly reflect the differences in use.

It was also obvious that undisturbed collection materials were at much less risk of damage and loss than those selected for exhibition, which naturally underwent much more handling, treatment, and separation. Even so, under exhibition conditions, more aggressive removal of object parts would have been warranted. As the separation was temporary and the context of each part would be documented well, removed materials had a higher chance of returning to their proper place after the exhibition and the risk of accidental dissociation would have been reduced. Documentation was of critical importance: not only did it provide a necessary record of object condition and the relationship of separated materials, but it was also helpful in signaling the value of seemingly familiar objects.

Finally, although it was sometimes necessary to remove parts of objects to prevent damage or facilitate display, for this project and in these circumstances it was usually best to leave the James Ivory collection objects just as they were.

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Biography
Abigail Merritt earned an M.A. and Certificate of Advanced Study in Book Conservation at Buffalo State College in 2016. Until recently, she was the Sherman Fairchild Fellow in the Thaw Conservation Center at the Morgan Library & Museum in New York. She previously interned at the New York Botanical Garden, the Weissman Preservation Center at Harvard University, the British Library, and the University of Iowa.

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