

This is (not) a paper bag: on the uncanny nature of objects and the property room as archive

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(1st annual? 🦷) Archival Kismet Symposium

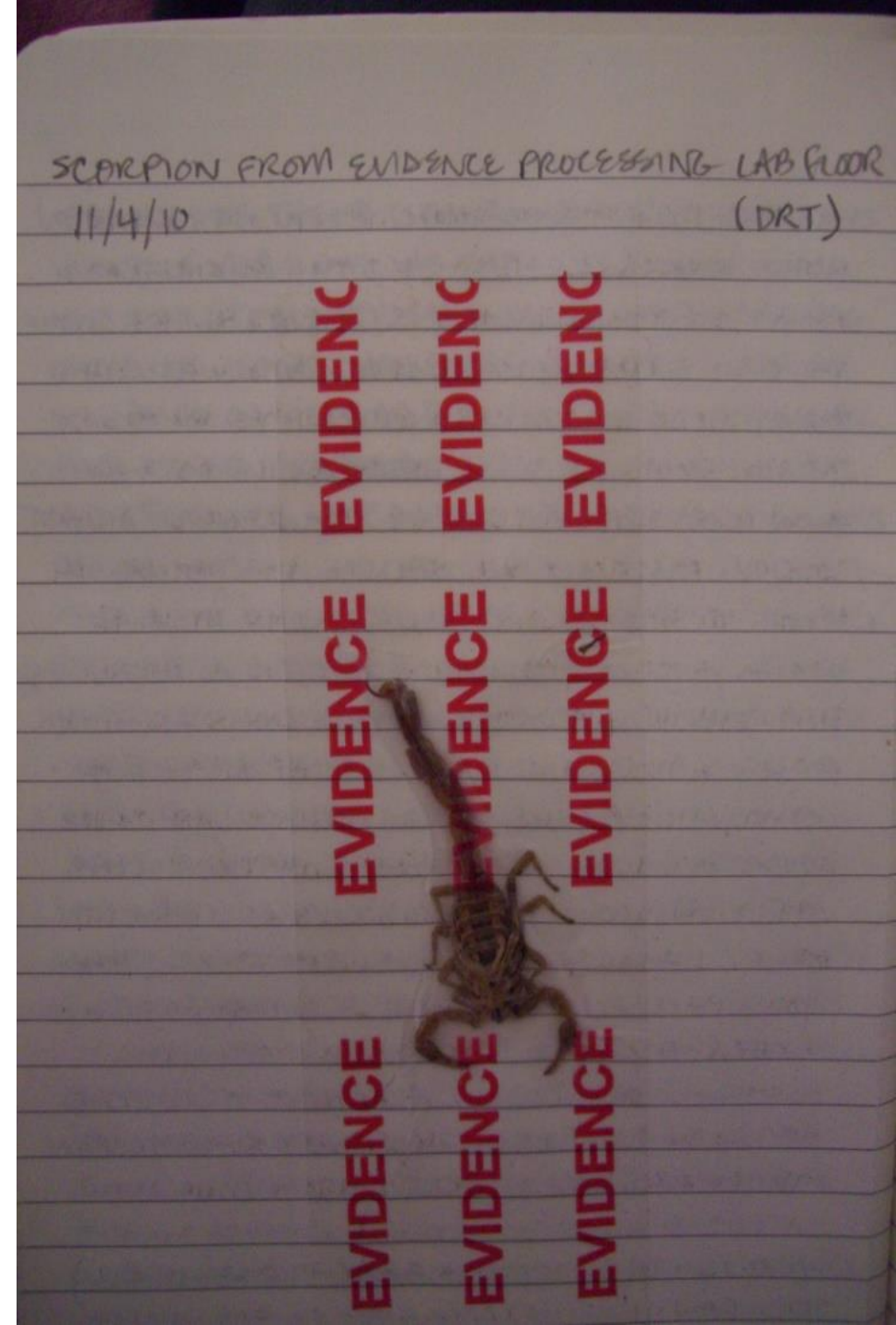
April 11, 2021

“The CSI Effect”

- There is more than one of these!
- Other useful tropes:
 - “Toto, I don’t think we’re in Kansas anymore”
 - “Orpheus Descending”
 - “Alice in Wonderland”
- Material objects as visual and emotional triggers

Kidding/not kidding

The property room staff weren't keen on paperwork; years worth of log sheets for disposed-of evidence had thus accumulated into a huge pile. Among the first tasks I was given was to impose order on that haystack of forms. I asked whether there was "anything I should keep in mind" as I worked through the pile. Speaking as a librarian, I meant, "were there categories or parameters I should be organizing under besides strict case number order?" In response to this question, R., the property room supervisor, scratched his beard thoughtfully and eventually responded, "Well...we do get scorpions in here. So watch out for those."



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* I am PRETTY sure about this! I used a calculator and everything.

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Drew Dernavich
The New Yorker – 7/29/13
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Kidding/not kidding

Badeaux, Danielle. 2009. "DNA's Over There...Right Next to the Jelly: The Problems with the Preservation of Evidence in Texas." *Texas Tech Administrative Law Journal* 11: 333.

The Evidence Log: “I’ve got something...”

The list of **weird stuff** that ends up in property rooms is very long

not least because

Everything that ends up in the property room **becomes weird**

Kidding/not kidding

Asif, Manan Ahmed. 2014. “Idols in the Archive.” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 73 (01): 9–16. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021911813001678>.

Levitt, Laura S. 2012. “Evidence: Doing Justice.” *Bulletin for the Study of Religion* 41 (4): 11–15. <https://doi.org/10.1558/bsor.v41i4.11>.

Asif:

*“Here was a history of policing, **a repository of all the sins in a small corner of the world.** Every family's internal was external here...*

...I was not supposed to tell the[se stories] to strangers. This archive made me silent for ethical reasons--it did not belong to me. I had no right to tell their secrets, as they were not my secrets. The scar was not on my body.”

Leavitt:

I found myself relating not so much to Maggie Nelson, the writer, but to her aunt Jane Mixner, the victim [of a 40-year-old murder, which was resolved on the basis of DNA evidence]. I thought about her property held in police storage for all those many years. And I thought about what it meant for me to have been a victim of a violent crime and to have objects of my own held in one of these facilities at least for a time. More than this, I could not help but think about all of the other evidence of so many crimes preserved in police storage and I wanted to know how all of these collections related to those other objects I was more familiar with, the objects held in Holocaust collections.

*“Whenever you touch something,
it touches you back.”*

- Maria-Cristina Jimenez