

Artist-In-Residence

 centerforartandthought.org/work/project/artist-in-residence_sort_contributor_page_2

working blog

Established in 2013 with the launch of the Center for Art and Thought (CA+T), the Artist-in-Residence Virtual Residency is a one of a kind program that moves from the delimited physical spaces of a center or institution to the virtual spaces of the Internet. This de-centering of the physical allows the resident to work from anywhere in the world, provided that s/he has a connection to the Internet.

Over the course of their residency, the artist has the opportunity to work towards the completion of a project, such as a manuscript, a collection of stories, or scholarly article. The fundamental goal of the residency program is to facilitate the artist's critical engagement with the public through their contributions on a virtual platform. This platform is a space for the artist to garner inspiration from an engaged audience and to work through ideas, both visually and textually.

At the end of the residency, the artist will present his or her work online. For example, they might present a digitally recorded podcast, a live online streamed talk, or curated online exhibition. For more information about the Artist-in-Residence Virtual Residency, please e-mail your inquiry to residency@centerforartandthought.org.

- **Asylum history: recovering lost property and persons**

Sep 15, 2013

Part six in an ongoing series on a poetics of historiography.

To return to ethical questions of reading, investigating and representing: what choices might we make in regard to the modernist romance and normative moralism of representing suspension and statelessness?

Let's turn to archival recovery of lost property and personhood in two related museum exhibitions: a digital exhibit, *The Lives They Left Behind: Suitcases from a State Hospital Attic*, and the San Francisco Exploratorium exhibit, *The Changing Face of Normal*. (A third exhibit at the New York State Museum was *Lost Cases, Recovered Lives*. The [website](#) has a striking picture of the suitcases on display.) Both shows partnered with the New York Historical Museum to display the personal belongings that patients were not allowed to access while institutionalized.

Most patients at the Willard Psychiatric Hospital, a New York state hospital, were immigrants without family ties who came into conflict with someone, such as a landlord or a restaurant owner, during the Great Depression. About half of the patients spent their entire lives in the institution and were buried in unmarked graves.

Most did not have access to the things they brought with them. Hospital staff members labeled patients' belongings and stored them in alphabetical order, organized by sex. Over four hundred suitcases were found in the hospital attic when the institution closed down in 1995.

As a contributor to the *Changing Face of Normal* exhibit at the Exploratorium, photographer Jon Crispin [documented the suitcases](#), how they were stored, and their contents in detail.

Here's a weird story: When I do the shooting, my digital photographs are labeled with what's called IPTC information. It's all the camera metadata stored with each photo, and you can add whatever you want. I typically add my copyright information, and also the names of the Willard patients for my own records. But when I upload photos to [my blog](#), I strip that out.

For one person's suitcase, I forgot to delete their name. Two days later, I got a call from someone who's desperate, saying, "Do you have the objects of —?" and she gave the name of the person. And she said, "That is my grandmother. We didn't know anything about her." She had Googled her grandmother's name and came across the Willard suitcases on my site. But even in this situation, the woman had to prove to the state that she was not only the granddaughter of this person, but that she was legally the

recipient of her estate. So, in other words, if the grandmother had willed her estate to the other side of the family, this woman would not have been able to get access to her things.

One of the ten suitcases chosen by *The Lives They Left Behind* exhibit belonged to Rodrigo Laguda, Patient #15902. (Laguda's suitcase is absent from the Exploratorium exhibit and Crispin's photography project. His story is included in a 2009 devised theater production, *Echoes of Willard*, mounted in London.) The website frames Laguda as a "student activist" and Filipino nationalist.

Laguda's belongings included correspondence with uncles and cousins in the Philippines; a handwritten autobiography about his American schooling; a Illinois Naval Reserve wardroom boy's cap; a color postcard from Mackinac Island, Michigan; a handwritten novella; and a photograph of a Filipino student gathering under a festooned portrait of the Filipino nationalist, José Rizal.

Laguda's trunk contents. Photograph by Lisa Rinzler

Objects get historiographical value as sources (artifacts or relics) by being possessions, lost or found. Possessions do hard work to represent lives. The narrative frame is a suitcase; narrative is two or more objects in juxtaposition.

Laguda was born in Capiz, Philippines at the turn of the twentieth-century to a politically prominent family. He came to the U.S. in 1907 as a child and came under the care of a Protestant organization for relocated children in Salt Lake City. He performed a reading at the First Methodist Church Children's Day program on June 19, 1910.

After attending secondary schools in Salt Lake City and Chicago, Laguda did menial labor for an Illinois Naval Reserve ship patrolling the Great Lakes. Without finishing high school, Laguda moved to Buffalo where he worked as a house servant for a prominent doctor. After a romance with a young woman fell apart, he reportedly started to hear voices calling him a sinner and fell into a depression. The employer subsequently committed Laguda in 1917. The doctors at the Willard asylum diagnosed him with syphilis. Laguda spent the rest of his life at the hospital until his death in 1981. He is buried in an unmarked grave in a nearby cemetery.

On possessions and self-possession in the context of the Vietnam War:

Given these epistemological and ontological coordinates, the refugee figure is patently bereft of property — possessing neither interior faculties for the rational and moral calculation of interest and consequence, nor external properties for their 'right' exercise in intercourse with others, including legitimate citizenship, proprietary rights, or simply

things ('Clothing, a lot of these people didn't have clothing. Some of them didn't have shoes.'). Profoundly dispossessed, from this perspective the refugee has lost every *thing*.

— Mimi Thi Nguyen, building on Lowe and Hegel*, in *The Gift of Freedom* (Duke, 2013), p. 59.

The Willard suitcase exhibitions, maybe in the way of all civic and popular memory, seek to recover what we understand as our common humanity. Our humanness in common.

Next: The life lost

*Addendum on Hegel via Butler: "Hegel is already in the thrall of personification, writing about what Life does, for instance, as if Life were a person, showing how abstractions sometimes require the sacrifice of what is material and finite, but also underscoring the power of property to rob persons of what is most living in them, including or especially the owners.."

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- **Dear you**

Oct 20, 2013

we are between genre in the ether world of over-ambition we author no books win no grants get cast in no roles adjudicate no awards receive no fellowships finish no degrees start no theater companies teach no classes make no touring dates speak at no panels read at no readings get no jobs speak for no one not even ourselves we want it queer we want an instigation we want out we want in to be maximal so until then we wait

fighting tooth and nail for down time allotted for rehearsals and unpaid overtime and re-allocated for exhaustion writing and moderate ambition = no genre of body of work rather our body is ephemera keepsakes valued as junk worth more as ash so until then we wait allergic attaching mostly through grievance abusing trademarked phrases apt to composting on contact doing each other wrong just because we want it queer we want an instigation we want out we want in to be maximal so until then we wait

it's been a somewhat lonely road not really personally lonely but in the realm of writing aesthetics thinking together spaces for sharing of humility humor and abiding people respected for what they already know already live with how they make do and even thrive among moments of wreck we want in to be maximal so until then we wait

none of the API queer poets are Pinay all Pinay poetics are heteronormative but some of us are brave truth? only for the page and not the mic? queer Pinay aesthetics resonance? bodies? illness? sense of place? embrace of being counterfeit? sense of precarity? audience conversants collaborators? readers in common? platforms and projects? will it always be the anthology? we want an instigation we want out we want in to be maximal so until then we wait

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