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72 Hours

Shadowy forms flicker through the windows of an abandoned home. In one window, a family gathers around the dinner table. In another, a woman opens her mail. Through the attic, a group of small children play games. The home has been empty for six months—its residents long since moved out—but over the course of an evening, it is lit up from within by shadow projections. From the street, passersby witness a series of unfolding events that reveal the daily experiences of the building's former residents. Suddenly, sinister events start to occur. A constable arrives, delivering a 72-hour eviction notice. Someone hurls a pile of bank statements into the air. A woman watches as a moving crew forcibly evicts her from her home.

Shadows point toward their own history. They mark the deferred presence of events—not mirrors or doubles but fleeting imprints, memory-traces. Rising up and fading out, warping and dissolving with the passage of time, they reflect back on the things from which they arose with detachment. As if to say: what has happened has happened. But the world might look differently. It might obey a different logic, be cut from a different piece of cloth. Old hierarchies might be dissolved, old forms might transform into new ones. Everything might black out or else be altered in the blurred, flickering, and shape-shifting dance of shadowy forms.

72 Hours is an intervention project that uses shadow projections to trace the calamities of

the foreclosure crisis. Working with a tenants' rights group, City Life/Vida Urbana, weekly experimental workshops have been held in the Brewery Complex in Jamaica Plain. During these jam sessions, people affected by foreclosure are invited to retell their stories in unfamiliar ways—by acting them out in shadow-play format. A single mother with three kids is told that she'll have to move into a two-bedroom apartment. A man undergoing foreclosure watches as building inspectors survey his property. A family of four packs up boxes in preparation for move-out.

Using the traces left behind by their bodies to retell their own stories, participants in the workshop become actors and collaborators in a series of interventions whose aim is to reshape our understanding of the housing crisis. Inventing new narrative devices to shake up received narratives about foreclosure, *72 Hours* foregrounds individual stories of eviction, struggle, and resistance. The workshop's results are recorded and projected back in a range of settings: through the windows of foreclosed homes during an eviction blockade, or through the windows of empty, bank-owned homes in Roxbury, Jamaica Plain, Mattapan, Ashmont, and Dorchester—the neighborhoods in Boston that have suffered the most during the financial crisis.

Each image projected represents a memory from the life of someone affected by foreclosure. Played on a loop, the shadows may be reminders of recently lived traumatic pasts or premonitions of other, possible futures. At





times the houses may appear to be haunted by evicted residents. At others, they may seem occupied by dissidents refusing to leave. The projections serve as injunctions, insertions into contested areas. Transforming private neighborhoods into public arenas for debate, the projections may create spaces in which new solutions can be reached. They aim to open up dialogue between local residents, banks, and public officials. They seek to put pressure on the banks by making human absences visible and felt. As a virtual occupation campaign, the videos may succeed in forcing these vacant units back into the hands of the families who need them most.

Participant Story: Ken Tilton

December 7th was my foreclosure sale date. I was ready (so I thought). A lawyer from City Life had told me what to expect—one or two people from the bank showed up, looked at the house and left. A "no big deal routine." The night

Previous: Velasquez family vigil, organized by City Life, in Dedham, MA



before I put up the signs City Life had given me: "WE WILL NOT BE MOVED" in my windows. I was prepared. At 9AM the first guy showed up with a big red auction banner—a sinking feeling came over me—then about six people in total—clipboards in hand—giving my home an inspection—a panic feeling came over me. This was really happening. This is my home. Reality. One guy, hands cupped at his eyes, peered through my window—I waved—no acknowledgment. I wasn't even there to him. What I did was call City Life with an insane, rambling message. They called back and talked me down. By the time I hung up all the people outside were gone. The fight begins!

Participant Story: Francis Louis

I lost my house in 2007. I held off the banks for one year after foreclosure and organized four blockades, but I didn't get a lawyer until my 48—hours notice. In November, 2008, they moved us out — me, my parents and three kids. We

Above and Left: Still of a shadow projection of a participant having her belongings removed from her foreclosed home, courtesy of John Hulsey



moved from a 4-bedroom apartment to a 2-bedroom apartment. In August, 2009, City Life decided to organize the occupation of a vacant foreclosed unit in Roxbury and I volunteered to occupy it. If I couldn't get it for my family, at least it would have helped another family. In September, we officially occupied the building and had an occupation warming party. Now we are staying there and we are so happy that we have a place where we can breathe!

Participant Story: Theresa

The banks gave everybody false hopes. Nobody can keep up with these mortgages today, not even rich people. Our parents, after 30 years, would have mortgage-burning ceremonies, but the way these mortgages are written, no one will ever own their own home. I'm currently in modification on my first loan, and in bankruptcy on my second loan. The banks need to see what they are taking away from people. That's why we're doing the shadows. The project shows

Above and Right: Still of a shadow projection of a participant having her belongings removed from her foreclosed home, courtesy of John Hulsey



families' lives throughout America. We're having a party or cooking. Children are doing their homework. It's about our lives. The way the banks are dealing with us is affecting everyone, including the children. They are uprooting families, breaking apart communities. Whatever happens, I plan to keep on fighting. Those who have gotten their houses back are our beacons. They keep giving hope to others, inspiring us to stand up against the banks.

John Hulsey | www.jhulsey.net

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