LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

Capturing Eviction in America: Forced Dislocation and the Iconography of the Housing Crisis

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Abstract:

Since the subprime mortgage crisis caused the inflated housing bubble to burst in the United States in 2007, increased housing insecurity and the prospect of eviction are no longer experiences associated with the urban poor. The 2007-2008 housing crisis in fact demonstrates how residential homes have transformed from asset to liability for the middle class as well. Subsequently, the downward mobility middle class evictees undergo poses the question of how a supposedly stable concept of the middle class becomes mobilized and shifts its meaning. This essay explores how the increasingly pervasive genre of 'eviction photography' deals with such mobilizations in the current class structure. Informed by narrative theory as well as cultural geography, it shows how images of forced dislocation both locate the housing crisis in concrete spaces and chart its affective implications. Theories on spatial inequality and the political imagination of art by Ariella Azoulay, Walter Benn Michaels, and Jacques Rancière, amongst others, provide the framework for my inquiries. I draw on selected photographs that attest to the aftermath of foreclosure as a foil to John Moore's World Press Photo award-winning series *Evicted*, which stands out for the distinct attention it pays to the human subjects involved in the process of eviction. In the imaginary nexus between photographer, photographed, and spectator, Moore's images are read as visual and spatial interventions that construct intimate yet shared knowledge about contemporary social and economic inequalities.

Keywords: photography; American; housing crisis; eviction; foreclosure; forced dislocation; middle class; inequality; downward mobility.

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Introduction: Eviction and Post-Housing Crisis Photography

'Eviction is one of the least studied processes affecting the lives of poor families,' writes urban sociologist and MacArthur Fellowship winner Matthew Desmond, who published one of the most lauded works of non-fiction in 2016, *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City* (Desmond 2016: 296). When it comes to housing discrimination, Desmond states, there is more focus on '*getting in*' than on '*getting (put) out*' (Desmond 2012: 121). Similarly, Paul Reyes, author of a widely discussed essay on the iconography of the 2007-2008 housing crisis in the United States, remarks that 'recent recessions have been largely invisible,' among them the Great Recession (Reyes 2010). One aspect of the Great Recession, however, is highly visible, and that is the great number of urban and suburban residential homes that have been and continue to be foreclosed after the inflated housing bubble that lasted from the late 1990s to 2007 burst. In fact, photographic interventions into ever increasing spatial inequality, and in particular photographs of forced dislocations with a documentary impulse, have made this growing visibility the very subject of their work. Eviction photography not only draws our attention to how supposedly stable geographies of residential homes and their inhabitants undergo significant changes, but also points to the laws and policies that underpin the execution of removal orders. They thereby mirror the new kind of social order these policies engender, namely one in which class belonging can no longer be regarded as stable. From 2007 to 2011 alone, there were 'more than 4 million completed foreclosures and 8.2 million foreclosure starts' (McClanahan 2016: 100). This resulted in a veritable photographic 'spectacle of eviction and foreclosure,' which rendered 'the private domestic economies of debt public' and the experience of eviction 'newly commonplace' (McClanahan 2016: 100, 114).

Post-housing crisis photography constitutes a ubiquitous and pervasive genre in the history of photography on social marginalization today, as indicated by the photojournalistic output addressing the housing crisis, as well as the considerable number of exhibitions at both large cultural institutions and smaller galleries across the United States. This includes *The Great Depression: Foreclosure USA* at the MOMA in San Francisco in 2010, *Foreclosed: Rehousing the American Dream* at New York's MoMA in 2012, and *Foreclosed: Documents from the American Housing Crisis*, also shown in New York in 2012, at the Alice Austen House Museum in Staten Island. Capturing the changing geographies of the Great Recession in visual-narrative terms, 'foreclosure photography has already helped define an era that will mark American society for decades to come' (Reyes 2010). As photographs of foreclosure demonstrate, eviction nowadays no longer is an experience associated exclusively with the urban poor. The latest housing crisis in fact demonstrates how foreclosures contribute to increasing inequality affecting the middle class as well, an inequality that is spatialized insofar as the meaning of home is transformed from a financial asset to a liability. The iconography of forced dislocation vividly captures 'what has been lost and what is to be gained in the navigation of class'—that is the belonging to a specific and supposedly stable class (Lang 2006: 12).

In what follows, theories on spatial inequality and the political imagination art can engender, put forward by Ariella Azoulay, Walter Benn Michaels, and Jacques Rancière, amongst others, provide the framework for my inquiries. As for my primary material, I

focus on John Moore's World Press Photo award-winning series *Evicted*[1], which stands out for the distinct attention it pays to the human subjects involved in the process of foreclosure. In order to provide a foil to Moore's approach, I draw on selected photographs that attest to the aftermath of foreclosure. To be sure, the photographs under consideration here elide issues of race, as they view downward mobility and the spiraling towards poverty through the lens of whiteness. That people of color are mostly absent from the frame forms a stark contrast to the fact that those hit hardest by eviction are black, and black women first and foremost. Indeed, eviction could be regarded, as Desmond does, as a twinned counterpart to incarceration: 'black men are *locked up* while black women are *locked out*' (Desmond 2012: 121). The kinds of photographs discussed here should therefore be read as part of a troubling trend that takes poverty into view increasingly once it affects not only poor African Americans, but also white people who previously thought of themselves as part of a stable middle class. As such, the essay exposes the ironies of a neoliberal society that pays attention to social ills when increasing inequality threatens to change its own place in life.

The Erosion of the Middle Class and the Spatial Politics of Eviction Photography

As Walter Benn Michaels contends, the concept of the middle class has been stretched so considerably that many who consider themselves a part of it, do not in fact belong to it—or, more importantly to my discussion here, no longer belong to it, in both economic and social terms: 'As survey after survey has shown, Americans are very reluctant to identify themselves as belonging to the lower class and even more reluctant to identify themselves as belonging to the upper class. The class we like is the middle class' (Michaels 2006: 6). The photographic texts that powerfully negotiate spatial inequality in the form of real estate insecurity across classes attest to this erosion of a stable concept of the middle class. As Doreen Massey reminds us, the various classes are 'not structured as blocks which exist as discrete entities in society, but are precisely constituted *in relation to* each other' (Massey 1994: 86). Yet the notion of the middle class today is not simply relational, but also relativized. As indicated above, 'middle class' has become a term that people across various classes tend to apply to themselves, even if their actual experience is marked by considerable mobility up and down the economic scale—and hence a changing sense of social belonging as well. Processes of eviction frequently force former inhabitants into a spiral of downward mobility. 'Poverty' has thus become a concept that is increasingly applied to the living conditions of the (once) comparatively well off. It can capture the precarious living situations of those who once belonged to a more narrowly defined middle class, but now face the costs of increasing inequality: '[T]he fact that we all like to think of ourselves as belonging to the same class doesn't, of course, mean that we actually do belong to the same class. In reality, we obviously and increasingly don't' (Michaels 2006: 6).

Whether neoliberal society, or the middle class itself (or what is left of it), would rather turn a blind eye to the erosion of a stable concept of the middle class, is a question up for debate. Despite increased attention in journalism and the arts (as in the eviction photographs under consideration here), the visibility of the housing crisis tends to get brushed over in the public consciousness as of yet, just as much as its subjects who are

under an increasing threat of falling away from middle class status tend to get obscured—an experience that their poor black counterparts have endured for even longer. One decided political aim of eviction photography is to counter the blind eye the public might still turn to downward mobility. It does so by preferably (if not unproblematically) zooming in on residential middle-class spaces that become contested during forced removals, and rendering them more visible to the public eye. The growing visibility of downwardly mobile residential space and its inhabitants that ensues can, in turn, give rise to a politics that works towards various forms of resistance. In geographer Doreen Massey's view, the destabilization of space is in fact a 'prerequisite for history to open and thus a prerequisite, too, for the possibility of politics' (Massey 2005: 59). Art historian Rosalyn Deutsche, too, points to the importance of recognition which art can garner for a democratic politics to come into being—recognition by the public, as well as by the photographer and her or his subjects. With the recognition that 'social space is produced and structured by conflicts' in the first place, Deutsche writes, 'a democratic spatial politics begins' (Deutsche 1996: xxiv).

Eviction photography pinpoints the housing insecurity that a destabilized middle class now faces as well. It does so, for instance, via a multitude of juxtapositions, navigating between various concepts of classes, as well as the realities of class belongings. What is more, it troubles binaries—first and foremost between the rich and the poor. Finally, it exposes incongruities, both of domestic scenes of eviction and of the uneasy role of the photographer witnessing such scenes. Ultimately, photographs of forced removals partake in urging their spectators—including the photographer who witnesses evictions and the viewers who study her or his photographs—to look behind the surface of eviction processes and the downward mobility they engender, including their economic causes and effects. Studying them can help to know and hold accountable those who wield power over residential spaces, as well as the capitalist practices that render these spaces increasingly unequal. How space is configured, how it is made accessible, and how it locates its subjects, philosopher Jacques Rancière insists, is a question of politics after all:

> In the end, everything in politics turns on the distribution of spaces. What are these places? How do they function? Why are they there? Who can occupy them? For me, political action always acts upon the social as the litigious distribution of places and roles. It is always a matter of knowing who is qualified to say what a particular place is and what is done in it. (Rancière 2003: 201)

Rancière also reminds us, however, to keep in mind that there is a difference between the political and ethical communities such thinking about space can generate. As he explains it, 'a community is political when it authorises forms of subjectivation for the uncounted, for those unaccounted for. [...] Inequality first takes effect as a miscounting or misaccounting, an inequality of the community to itself' (Rancière 2003: 198). Yet a community only becomes ethical when a visible category 'identifies itself as "the excluded" and [...] wants to identify the community with itself' (198). In this essay, I therefore propose that it is the photographer who creates a sense of such a political community while taking pictures of the processes of foreclosures—while it is her or his subjects whose (self-) representations hold us accountable for recognizing the community as ethical—a

community that comes into being between photographer and photographed in the act of taking photographs, and between the photographed subjects and their spectators, in the act of viewing those photographs.

Photography and visual culture theorist Ariella Azoulay discusses the role of precisely this tripartite constellation in the creation of a political imagination. Through a communal effort, photographer, photographed, and spectators can partake in acts of 'political imagination,' and thereby contribute to the visual politics of eviction photography (Azoulay 2015: 5). While Azoulay addresses an entirely different cultural and political context of housing crisis photography (the deterritorializations taking place in the West Bank), she uses the art of photography with a documentary impulse to locate household economies within the sphere of politics. This makes her discussions useful in the context of eviction photography as well. As if to imbue Rancière's idea of a political and ethical community with the forces of the imagination, Azoulay defines the political imagination as a 'form of imagination that exceeds the grasp of the individual mind—it is a form of imagination that transcends the single individual alone and exists *between* individuals and is shared by them' (5). In eviction photography, this idea of a "political imagination" takes place in the interplay between photographer and photographed, and extends itself to a spectator who might feel equally threatened by downward mobility. Crucially, Azoulay considers photography as 'a privileged site for the generation of a civil discourse,' and photographs of 'house destruction' as a particularly apt 'source for the generation of a new form of knowledge,' namely 'civil knowledge' (9-10). Behind the notion of civil knowledge, in this case knowledge about contemporary social and economic inequalities, stands, of course, a social idea of photography. This social idea is what motivates the political meaning of eviction photographs as we can find it in Moore's work.

Walter Benn Michaels, on his part, locates the social idea of contemporary photography—as well as his conception of the middle class—in the very 'relation between aesthetic autonomy and political economy today' (Michaels 2016: xiii). He considers this relation of particular importance for artists who are 'making art in an economy defined by an almost unprecedented rise in economic inequality'—that is art that emerges in a 'context of structural conflict' (xii). In fact, as Michaels states, contemporary questions of structural conflicts and changing understandings of class structures are in need of 'useful' art: precisely for 'understanding a society organized and increasingly stratified by class' (xiii). As he himself contends, however, this

> [t]his usefulness is, inevitably, a restricted one. If what you want is a change in policy, you're not likely to get it from art […] But if what you want is a vision of the structures that produce both the policies we've got and the desire for alternatives to them, art is almost the only place to find it. (Michaels 2016: xiii)

Notably, Michaels proceeds to locate this usefulness in the very autonomy of art: 'it's the beauty of the photograph […] that is the mark of politics' (Michaels 2016: 40). This beauty (by way of abstraction or other forms of artistic representation that supersede a mere recording of the world) would not generate empathy in the spectator, but expose structures of inequality, such as the form insecure housing takes when eviction occurs. Art would

thus focus on 'the system itself [… as] capitalism [is] itself the problem,' rather than the plight of its victims (41-2). Consequently, art as an intervention engages in political work by laying open the structures of capitalism and class: 'art's ability to make the idea of class visible (and hence its reality imaginable) has its political meanings' (177). While forced removals are interventions into private home space, eviction photographs can be viewed as visual interventions into the politics that have previously invaded this space. Both kinds of interventions should be considered political. Insofar as we regard photography as a powerful tool of storytelling through visual means, eviction photography coins our imagination and narratives (in the form of individual as well as structural stories) of increasing inequality, housing insecurity, and downward mobility. In fact, I would contend that the most interesting and effective stories eviction photography can tell us afford us a look behind the scenes of foreclosure and lay bare its structural inequalities, while creating the kind of intimacy that falls short in Michael's argumentation but allows the spectators to more fully engage with the political ramifications of these very inequalities.

In what follows, I will investigate the spatial and political interventions via the triangulation of photographer, photographed and spectator in some major examples of eviction photography that document the forced removals of middle class residents no longer able to afford rent or mortgage payments. The main focus of my inquiry will be the 2011 World Press Photo award-winning photographic series *Evicted* by journalist John Moore. *Evicted* is of particular interest here because it aims to know its subjects, whose livelihoods are in the process of becoming precarious, so intimately. To this end, it locates them in a very specific place, namely on the very inside or just outside their homes; residential spaces 'formed out of the particular set of social relations which interact at a particular location' (Massey 1994: 168). In order to pinpoint the importance of this intimacy for creating the kind of "political imagination" Azoulay envisions and eviction photography can engage in, I contrast Moore's work with foreclosure photography that tends to be more interested in showing the aftermath, that is the remainders of foreclosures in the form of already abandoned and often outright empty homes. I do so in order to show how Moore, one of the most prominent representatives of eviction photography, stands out for the ways in which he captures the evictees' plight as well as the (re-) negotiations of the boundaries between the private and the public that come to the fore in the process of forced removals. As foils to the distinct attention Moore pays to his human subjects, I look (to start with, but more briefly) at photographic works by Brian Shumway, Bruce Gilden, and Lauren Greenfield, who also make the housing crisis a central subject of their work, yet frequently opt for cutting out the evictees of their photographs. To a degree, their approach might better satisfy the kind of political photography Michaels argues for. Where they fall short, however, is their inability to generate the kind of affective engagement that Moore makes a central subject in his photographic analysis of housing insecurity—and that, as I argue, has a greater impact on politicizing the spectator who wishes to tackle the challenge of ever increasing housing inequality.

While Moore's photographs are more human-centered, and Shumway's, Gilden's, and Greenfield's more object-centered, both types of photographs depict starkly contrasting worlds in terms of income bracket. As such, they are timely inquiries into the nature of precarious livelihoods and the spatial cost of capitalism, in the form of increasing

housing insecurity and downward mobility. I compare and contrast them as critiques of an (often corporatized and commodified) American dream of belonging. In their search for a renewed sense of home, social justice as well as injustice become visible in the spaces they photograph. By focusing on inequalities that are brought about by spatial relationships, and hence linking social justice and space, these foreclosure photographs can be considered as attempts at locating spatial justice—which calls for a participatory culture that is capable of exerting greater control over how spaces are produced, politically as well as visually.[2] The foregrounding of human subjects in Moore's photographs elicits an emotional response on the part of the spectator that is capable of encouraging political change based on an understanding of secure, affordable housing for all people both as a social benefit and a human right. Focusing on evictees still located in or just outside their soon-to-be-former homes allows Moore to explore the ways in which politics emplaces them within society, but also to investigate how these emplacements are experienced and managed by various agents, including the evictees, those carrying out eviction orders, and the photographer. But let me begin by looking at selected photographic works depicting the aftermath of foreclosures, as a foil to Moore's series *Evicted*.

Photographing the Empty Home: The Aftermath of Eviction in Brian Shumway, Bruce Gilden, and Lauren Greenfield

In a sub-genre of eviction photography, we encounter what is left in the aftermath of evictions. It hones in on residential sites of dwelling after the process of eviction has taken place—rather than the human subjects undergoing the process of eviction. This includes Brian Shumway's stylized images of empty home interiors, Bruce Gilden's Californian middle-class subdivisions in arrested development, and Lauren Greenfield's architectural juxtapositions of the American Dream and its nightmares.[3] All three photographers aim their viewfinder at the afterlives of homes emptied out, of material possessions as well as their inhabitants. Like Moore's images, their work was exhibited in the New York City show *Foreclosed: Documents from the American Housing Crisis* in 2012. In contrast to Moore, however, the three photographers locate themselves in a space devoid of human subjects. Even if they zoom in on evictees, they do so not within their homes-to-be-foreclosed, but after the evictees have already been forced to leave their homes. In Shumway's "Foreclosed Home Interior. Pittsburgh [Area], Atlanta, GA" from 2009, for instance, the black-and-white void is too stylized to give the spectator much of a sense of a human, let alone a citizen's presence. Void of actual inhabitants, as well as any traces these former residents might have left, the image is rather dominated by the beauty of natural light and the aesthetics of its geometrical arrangement. Its focal point, the two sections of a glass door leading to an outdoor terrace, are neatly mirrored by the twinned light rhombi shining through them onto the squared tile floor. The visual language of the photograph thus favors the aesthetics of objects over the stories of the people who were forced to leave their homes. These homes look empty, rather than emptied out. Reyes is right in asking (and answering) whether images such as this one 'resonate the same way without knowing beforehand that [the onlookers] were looking at a foreclosed home? Probably not' (Reyes 2010). But even if Shumway's image does not point to the social injustice eviction

frequently constitutes, it could be regarded as a philosophical comment on the afterlife of the commodity culture of capitalism, in the form of incessant accumulation of property and the transience of human presence.

This nod at transience can also be found in Bruce Gilden's "Untitled" (2010), a photograph of a forlorn outdoor swimming pool outside a middle-class home near Fresno, California. The composition of this photograph, which puts the languidness of the organically shaped pool and the contrasting squareness of a diving board at its center, comes across as similarly stylized as Shumway's photograph of a foreclosed home interior. In contrast to Shumway's image, however, a lonely towel left on a deck chair seems to speak of a resident who might have just recently left the site. What we are confronted with in Gilden, then, is not only a human trace, but also an (aestheticized) sense of crime, insofar as the image of the pool, next to a foreclosed home, is reminiscent of a crime scene in a black and white film noir. Think, for instance, of the somber opening scene of Billy Wilder's film *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), in which a homicide squad rushes to the scene of murder in 'one of those great, big houses in the 10,000 block' to find the shot body of its protagonist, a young screenwriter, floating in a faded silent-film star's decaying pool—famously captured by a photographic reflection of the body, surrounded by policemen, through a mirror installed at the bottom of the pool. Talking from his grave, the protagonist-narrator remarks on how the pool, a symbol of desired wealth, has turned into his very site of death: 'The poor dope. He always wanted a pool. Well, in the end, he got himself a pool—only the price turned out to be a little high' (Wilder 2019). Desmond for one, in his book *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*, decries eviction as the very crime that Gilden's Fresno image alludes to: the crime of exploitation through extractive markets in the form of landlords who are in many ways supported by government regulations and support. Scholars of sociology, psychology, public policy, and law agree that eviction is a crime because its fallout is so tremendous:

> Losing your home and possessions and often your job; being stamped with an eviction record and denied government housing assistance; relocating to degrading housing in poor and dangerous neighborhoods; and suffering from increased material hardship, homelessness, depression and illness—this is eviction's fallout. Eviction does not simply drop poor families into a dark valley, a trying yet relatively brief detour on life's journey. It fundamentally redirects their way, casting them onto a different, and much more difficult, path. (Desmond 2016: 298-99)

Seen in this light, eviction must, as Desmond insists, be considered 'a cause, not just a condition, of poverty' (Desmond 2016: 298-99). Against the backdrop of the rapidly shrinking supply of affordable housing in the U.S., many foreclosure photographs visually comment on how landlords, civil courts, sheriff deputies, removal companies, and homeless shelters profit from evictions, at times within the frame of a photograph, at times outside of it. As Desmond puts it, 'We have overlooked a fact that landlords never have: there is a lot of money to be made off the poor' (306). The sarcasm of an oversized FREE sign on a storage truck loading up the remains of one family's residential life in one of John

Moore's photographs, which will be discussed shortly, is a case in point. It perfectly exemplifies how photography hones in on sites exhibiting the kind of corporate culture in which the business of eviction has become highly lucrative for property owners and national (re)moval companies such as (the actually existing) *Kick 'em Out Quick* alike.

As Barbara Ehrenreich has laid out in *This Land is Their Land: Reports from a Divided Nation* and various journal articles related to it, being poor is expensive (Ehrenreich 2008; 2014). Eviction, too, comes with high costs, monetary and other. Photographer and filmmaker Lauren Greenfield's photographs of the so-called Foreclosure Alley in California's Inland Empire show particularly effectively that eviction today causes severe downfalls along the ladders of income and prestige across classes. Capturing a vast area of exurb communities stretching from Los Angeles to San Diego, an area that has been greatly affected by economic distress brought about by refinancialization, bad mortgages, and falling property values, Greenfield's images were taken at a time when the reality of foreclosure that cuts across class boundaries had not yet caught up with the public imagination. Notably, Greenfield's "Foreclosed Home, Inland Empire, CA" from 2008 does not show a foreclosed home of the urban poor, but of the suburban middle class. In fact, the photograph depicts two homes next to each other, one against the backdrop of a groomed lawn and greenery on the left, the other with lawn turned brown and dried up palm trees on the right. This two-sided photograph suggests that foreclosure and eviction can happen to your middle-class neighbor, or to you, turning the green yard surrounding your home sapped and impoverished in no time.

John Moore's Series *Evicted*: The Process of Foreclosure, the Presence of the Photographer, and Human Subjects vs. Objects

In contrast to the photographic work just discussed, John Moore's series *Evicted* (2011) hones in on both the process of foreclosure and the human subjects involved in it. The series is part of a long-term project on the housing crisis for the Getty, and is set in and around the Denver metropolitan area (Moore 2012). The photos were taken in places like Milliken, 50 miles north of Denver, a town of 5610 inhabitants in 2010. A farming community through the Depression and World Wars, Milliken experienced a housing boom in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In the 2000s, more than 12% of its population lived under the poverty line. Milliken is everywhere in the United States. Moore's images were taken during the fraught moments of foreclosure of a small number of suburban Colorado families, and show the clearing of their houses and possessions onto public sidewalks. Moore focuses on the destabilization of space in the very act of dispossession, highlighting the spatial and social injustices evictees are subjected to. While the photographers discussed above portray foreclosures after the fact, Moore's photographs are more processual. They convey both a sense of its aftermath and a state 'before.' In one of Moore's images, for instance, two small children still playfully frolic on the floor, as they supposedly used to in their earlier everyday lives—hinting at their past—while an eviction crew empties out the living room. The children will continue to play, albeit somewhere else—pointing to their future. The photographs capture a moment in time, namely the moment of the carrying out of an actual eviction order, but this moment is implicitly

embedded into a timeline. Thus, an image such as this one is capable of drawing attention to the various stages of eviction, making us wonder about the pre- and the post-histories of a particular forced removal, and ultimately question its causes as well as its effects. The medium of photography, in its suspended stillness that alludes to the past, present, and future in one specific scene, is ideally suited to capture the processual nature of forced dislocation.

Besides putting the temporal boundaries of the depicted space into question, each photograph begs the question of the photographer's stance. This is true of photography in general of course, but in eviction photographs the presence of the photographer can become especially fraught. He or she enters a home in the very moment its residents are being forcibly dislocated; a moment that residents may experience as the highpoint of anger, shame, or despair. All these expressions are visible in the faces and bodies of Moore's subjects, such as in one distressed female resident wiping away tears from her torn face. Moore gained access to homes about to be foreclosed by accompanying the eviction teams that carry out court orders in the state and are supervised by the county's sheriffs. When one angered resident, who had been asked to remove his family's possessions within the customary 24 hours (so as to not have to pay exorbitant fees to store them) asked Moore what he was doing on the site, the photographer answered: 'I said I was very sorry this was happening and that I was taking some pictures to show what people all around the country were going through. And he let me stay' (Moore cited in Backman 2012). The implication here is that Moore felt welcomed into the homes about to be foreclosed by the residents. Consequently, his photographic alternations between residential interiors and exteriors allow us an inside perspective on the processual nature of eviction, as well as an intimacy with the life stories and fates of the evictees we would not have access to otherwise.

The photographer creates this sense of intimacy by portraying only a small number of particular families and individuals. Most of Moore's images adhere to the conventions of portrait photography: he either takes images of the evictees' faces and bodies from up close or, if he decides on a camera angle from a medium distance, puts his subjects at the very center of the possessions strewn around them. The intimacy he relies on as one of his main stylistic means effects the universal appeal of these pictures. As the images bring eviction close to home in the viewer's minds, they show local concerns to be global ones— and, what is more, global ones that were not new. As American culture studies scholar Annie McClanahan points out, 'post-crisis foreclosure photography folds together the longer history of late twentieth-century capitalism and the more immediate, punctual event of the twenty-first-century financial crisis' (McClanahan 2016: 105). In fact, the traces of late twentieth-century capitalism can be discovered in the sheer amount of objects that populate the front lawns in many of Moore's photographs. Of course it is not only objects but people, too, who see themselves evicted as 'the secondhand, the residual that has been remaindered by capitalist modernization'—even if the secondhand of an 'incessant accumulation of debris in the midst of the continual demand for the new' (Manzanas and Benito 2014: 40). In that sense, Moore's photograph can be read not only as a comment on the inhuman and often shameful nature of eviction, but also as a critique of the single home as commodified and fetishized property.

More importantly for the purposes of this essay, however, Moore shows how the process of eviction transforms belongings, furniture, clothes, memories as well as people into debris, if not outright waste. One of his photographs, tellingly, is marked by the prominent placement of an array of garbage bags. In a display of pride and belief in the nation, the flag may be flying high in some images, but, in another image, it is rolled up. Environmental historian John Scanlan speaks to the denigration of individuals that comes with forced removal:

> At a human level a violent stripping away of (positive) characteristics consigns its victims to an indistinguishable mass, a state that ensures their treatment as mere rubbish—social outcasts, foreigners, *others*—and like representations of the damned in religious iconographies simply *stuff* that can be pushed around, co-mingled with its similarly valueless and indistinguishable like, a pile of rubble to be moved from one place to another. (Scanlan 2005: 14)

Sociologist and philosopher Zygmunt Bauman, too, points to the long history of turning humans into waste: 'The production of "human waste," or more correctly wasted humans (the "excessive" and "redundant," that is the population of those who either could not or were not wished to be recognized or allowed to stay), is an inevitable outcome of modernization, and an inseparable accompaniment of modernity' (Bauman 2004: 5).

Moore, however, does not satisfy himself with showing humans who are turned into objects to be done away with. Rather, he creates a sense of an 'elsewhere,' as filmmaker and postcolonial thinker Trinh T. Minh-ha puts it so aptly—the supposed, if often unknown destination of those being evicted—but an 'elsewhere [that is] within here'—as eviction takes places in and just outside of one's home (Minh-ha 2011: 2). What is more, Moore's photographs can be regarded as a response to the phenomenon of 'ruin porn' that has come to be associated mainly with photographs of derelict Detroit architectural monuments and residential homes. These images tend to exploit the photogeneity of post-apocalyptic landscapes, and may lead viewers to revel in the pornographic sensationalism of urban wastelands, without necessarily questioning the origins or causes of this decline (for more on this see, for instance, Binelli (2012); Lyons (2018)). Moore's images, by contrast, invite their spectators to view those who are involved in the process of eviction as human beings worthy of dignity. This includes, tellingly, both the evicted and the sheriff, as one can see in one of Moore's images of an eviction in Centennial, Colorado, the angle of which is as lopsided as the lives that are about to be turned upside down. To a degree, this lopsidedness could be read as troubling some of the binaries ingrained in the representation of real estate crisis, such as victim and perpetrator, winner and loser, even rich and poor—putting the meanings of these terms, as indicated above, into motion. The social ruination that cultural historians Ana Maria Manzanas and Jesús Benito write about in relation to the violence that is exerted upon the home would then pertain to both parties involved during the process of eviction: 'These spheres represent different faces and stages of ruins; not the conventional ruins of the great edifices of history, but rather different stages of physical and social collapse as the characters move between social and physical death' (Manzanas and Benito 2014: 40-1). The inclusion of those who carry out eviction

orders, such as the sheriff and her or his deputees, in fact sets into motion the political meaning of foreclosure photography. Fittingly, Azoulay speaks of the effects housing ruination imposes on both the 'destroyer' (the evictor in the form of the sheriff) and the 'destroyee' (the evictee):

> [N]o single party to destruction can impose ruin while successfully shaping the traces of this selfsame ruination to fit only its desired narrative. The process of destruction is strung out between those who destroy and those who suffer destruction, between destroyer and destroyee, as it were. To reconsider destruction in this light is to perceive that destruction ruins […] the very configuration of life allegedly free of destruction, its agents or victims. Ruination and its concealment are akin to the betrayal of the pact, partnership, and promise that constitute life among and with others. (Azoulay 2015: 132).

Moore of course does not show his subjects as devoid of affect; on the contrary. Their life in upheaval, they may sit still, disappointment written all over their faces, or wring their hands above their heads. The photographs highlight the emotions of the victims of eviction, as well as those who carry out eviction orders, and thereby appeal to the viewer's own emotions as well. They result in 'the kinds of affect produced in us by photographs of people we know and care about as opposed to the kinds of affect produced by photos of people we don't know or care about' (Michaels 2016: 18-9). While most spectators of Moore's photographs will not know the photographed in person, they may know them in an affective twist of the imagination: as mirror images of potential future selves they may experience as equally precarious. To see her- or himself as potentially implicated in a scenario of eviction seems crucial for generating the kind of intimate knowledge that is capable of engendering empathy on the part of the spectator. And to showcase not only the emotions of the evictees, but also how the act of eviction affects the evictors, reveals the ethical conundrums faced by those who are put in the position of enforcing legalized acts of residential removal. What is more, we may take the display of such emotions as hints that agents who carry out government-sanctioned orders—and thereby state power—can never be called entirely sovereign.

The Role of Affect, Intergenerational Representation, and the Role of the Sovereign

To further elicit the kind of emotional response discussed above, Moore includes various generations in his images, including couples, family members, and small children. It might be difficult 'to illustrate the size and enormity of the problem' in one single image, as another photographer of foreclosure, Anthony Suau, remarks. But Moore tackles this challenge by spotlighting its youngest and most innocent members (Suau quoted in Reyes 2010). Taking the innocence of toddlers and babies into view, Moore foregrounds the incongruities of the often inhumane process of eviction and human life with its basic right for shelter. For instance, nothing in one image depicting the Milliken home of Brandie Barbiere, who had lost half of her childcare business and stopped making mortgage payments seems right, or, to be more precise, in the right place: neither the presence of the

one-year-old boy, Chase Milam, watching his room from his crib being emptied out right above his head (as if he was being left-over, or forgotten, an object to be removed as well), nor the outlandish outfits of the officers (including mosquito hat and a gun), nor the movie playing on the TV set, *Finding Nemo*. The inclusion of a children's movie within the photographic frame works as an incongruity as well, insofar as Moore foregrounds the emotional impact on both the subjects and the viewer by juxtaposing the devastating scene of eviction with the idyll a movie for children seemingly represents—which, upon closer inspection, turns out to be not very idyllic after all. This computer-animated adventure movie from 2003, in an ironic reversal of intermediality, begins with the fish parents, Marlin and his wife, moving into a new 'neighborhood' of the ocean. As if the movie was prefiguring the housing crisis from 2007-2008, the little ladyfish instantly wonders about their new home: 'Isn't it too big for us?' (*Finding Nemo*). Of course, the fish family's neighborhood happens to be filled with a whole array of predators, the worst of which are divers who literally act from above, by jumping from a boat and capturing their son Nemo, removing him far away from home. Just like the eviction photograph in which it features, the film turns out to be about the devastating impact of forced dislocation. What is more, it pitches proper and improper uses of residential space against each other. Via their focus on children, Moore's photos emphasize 'the impropriety of turning the home inside out and the improper treatment of property once removed from its "proper" place' (McClanahan 2016: 116). By including toddler subjects within its frame, the 'proper' place of their upbringing is (literally as well as metaphorically) called into question, as the kids' cribs and toys will populate front lawns and streets soon enough.

The uneasy role (and space) the photographer occupies during evictions, as hinted above, can also be framed in terms of incongruity and liminality. While the photographer might successfully imagine a world turned upside down, he or she is caught in 'a world inside out: the home's inhabitants and all the furniture are out-of-doors while the photographer […] stands inside the door'—a fact that points to the problematic invasion of private space, and the blurring of boundaries between the private and the public (McClanahan 2016: 116). On the one hand, the act of photographing might itself be seen as another kind of invasion, as the distressed reaction of the female resident mentioned above shows. On the other hand, the genre of eviction photography may help us confront the very question of uneasy positioning. Moore, for one, addresses the conundrum of presence (including his own) by not eliding the presence of those who are—as of yet—inhabiting the space. For almost none of Moore's photographs are void of human presence. Rather, they are half empty, creating an 'atmosphere of eclipse' in which 'the sense of citizen [or citizen-to-be] presence is actually increased,' to borrow the words of an earlier visual chronicler of housing crisis photography, Great Depression photographer Walker Evans (Evans quoted in Reyes 2010).

What is equally increased is the sense of what Azoulay (2015) calls 'the intervention of sovereign power in space,' carried out by sheriffs such as those mentioned above, who function as the executors of state power. Carrying out eviction orders issued by courts, they may act lawfully; yet the justification of their work stems from the idea that the victims 'are presented as law-breakers who leave the sovereign no other paths of action' (128-29). So while the government may indeed be legally justified to evict those who have defaulted

on their mortgage or monthly rent payments, the presence of both sheriff and photographer also points to Rancière's notion of political and ethical community that can evolve in the visual sphere of Azoulay's "political imagination." Their presence throws into question the power of the sovereign and her or his state-sanctioned forms of forced dislocations. One might even argue that it creates a shared space that favors the coming together of a community:

> The disasters inflicted are justified in a manner that allows the sovereign to be absolved of responsibility towards victims who are dispossessed and rendered homeless overnight. The sovereign's refusal to accept responsibility for clearing wreckage, rehabilitating space and providing financial reparation leaves enduring scars on the social fabric […] Paradoxically, this also provides an opportunity to revive a space of coming-together. (Azoulay 2015: 152)

One core notion of social photography, both during the Great Depression and the Great Recession, indeed lies in the idea of shared responses, of affect taking place in the same shared space. This includes the geographical space of the foreclosed home that comprises a communal space inhabited by photographer, evictor, and evictees, as well as the emotional space that is created between the subjects who are photographed and the subjects who look at and recognize themselves in it. Spatial interventions could thus provide openings for alternatives in spatial distribution driven by the intimate yet 'civil knowledge' (Azoulay 2015: 10) that is based on shared human values and interests in human rights for all:

> The sovereign's attempt to control the meaning attached to space and the uses to which it is put cannot change the very ontology of the political, however, as that which is constituted *between people* […]. Even where spatial interventions lethally harm the agency of individuals and violate their shared horizons, their shared response to the disaster imposed on them as well as the forms of congregation that arise from the measures imposed to restrict their movement create zones (in shared space) that are not completely subject to the sovereign's intentions, goals and plans. (Azoulay 2015: 151-52)

Suggestions for solving the affordable housing crisis are manifold, and understanding affordable housing as 'human-capital investment' would be a first step (Desmond 2016: 310). This understanding, however, depends on the recognition of housing as a basic human right, as it is inscribed into Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as a number of other national and international conventions.[4] Along these lines, political theorist and feminist Iris Marion Young makes a plea for reclaiming the 'values of home' in a democratic manner. Safety and security, as well as the kind of privacy that may, according to Young, act as a (re)source of political action and resistance, should be accessible to every human being, beyond any confines of race, class, or gender. Young hereby positions herself against other feminists who, in the face of increasing inequality often accompanied by the loss of a stable home, call for a dismissal of said values: 'To the

extent that having a home is currently a privilege [...] the values of home should be democratized rather than rejected' (Young 2005: 146). In other words, Young sees the 'appropriate response to this fact of privilege' not in rejecting the values of home, but instead in 'extend[ing] its positive values to everyone' (151, 149). Ultimately, we might not be able to 'build our way out of the crisis' but, as Desmond puts it so astutely: 'If poverty persists in America, it is not for lack of resources' (Desmond 2016: 312). To continue to render visible the geographical omnipresence and temporal persistence of downward mobility to the public eye is the task the photographers discussed in this essay have set themselves. Moore's images of forced dislocation in particular can be regarded as the kind of critical spatial intervention into conceived but unraveling notions of class belongings that, given the increasing ubiquity of downward mobility, need to be seriously reconsidered.

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Notes

[1] All of Moore's images discussed in this essay can be found here: https://www.worldpressphoto.org/collection/photo/2012/people-news/john-moore.
[2] For a useful theoretical base for extended discussions on spatial justice see, for instance, David Harvey, *Social Justice and the City* (1973), Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990), and Edward Soja, *Seeking Spatial Justice* (2010).
[3] http://www.instituteartist.com/filter/isis/feature-Foreclosure-Alley-Lauren-Greenfield.
[4] The National Economic & Social Rights Initiative (NESRI) gives a good overview of the human right to housing here: https://www.nesri.org/programs/what-is-the-human-right-to-housing. As NESRI states on this website, 'Everyone has a fundamental human right to housing, which ensures access to a safe, secure, habitable, and affordable home with freedom from forced eviction. It is the government's obligation to guarantee that everyone can exercise this right to live in security, peace, and dignity. This right must be provided to all persons irrespective of income or access to economic resources.'

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