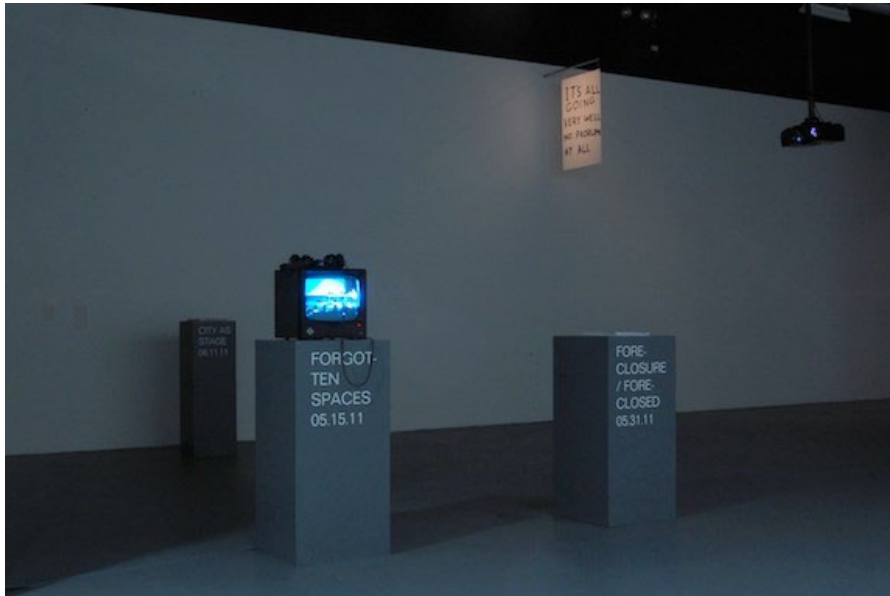


BETA



[Photograph from the exhibition "Foreclosed: Between Crisis and Possibility." Photo by Sadia Shirazi.]

Reimagining Foreclosure as a World-Making Project

Barrak Alzaid

Foreclosed: Between Crisis and Possibility. Curated by Jennifer Burris, Sofia Olascoaga, Sadia Shirazi,

and Gaia Tedone, Helena Rubinstein Curatorial Fellows of the Whitney Independent Study Program, 2010-2011.

May 20 - June 11, 2011

The Kitchen, 512 West 19th Street, New York, NY

One sticky summer afternoon, I walked into The Kitchen and encountered a distinctly alienating experience. A red rotary phone—sans rotary dial—rested on a reception desk and was set against a static backdrop of repetitious black numbers that evoked stock exchange tickers. I placed the phone's receiver against my ear and the dial tone rang several times before an audible click and a *Hello?* The voice at the end of the line belonged to Tania Bruguera, a Cuban artist currently based in Queens, who happened to be standing at the other end of the gallery. Her installation in *Foreclosed: Between Crisis and Possibility* was comprised of this small, nearly inconspicuous red rotary phone, a part of a larger work entitled *Immigrant Movement International (IMI)* that interrogates the notion of citizenship through public forums and actions. In this iteration of *IMI*, the artist attaches herself prosthetically to Claude Closky's *Untitled (NASDAQ)*, a series of randomly generated stock tickers wallpapered to the interior walls of the

reception area. Bruguera's bright red telephone rests on the reception desk and grounds the relentless, often impenetrable capitalist processes implicated in the foreclosure mentioned by the title. Bruguera's action beautifully enacted the porous boundary between the gallery and the world beyond, and encouraged audiences to toggle between the analytic and the affective resonances of the works presented throughout the exhibition.



[Tania Bruguera, *Immigrant Movement International (IMI)*. Photo by Latoya Ruby Frazier.]

Produced by The Whitney Museum of American Art's Independent Study Program (ISP) at The Kitchen by a cohort of promising curatorial fellows—Jennifer Burris, Sofia Olascoaga, Sadia Shirazi and Gaia Tedone—this exhibition endeavored to mark the interstitial space between crisis—a state of fraught psychic and systemic rupture—and possibility. Here, possibility is imagined as a world-making project. Rather than simply presenting alternatives to the psychic and subjective experience of foreclosure, or trying to explain foreclosure as an aspect of the failure of capitalism, the works in the exhibition offered a constellation of radical investigations of the term.

This world-making project began with the layout of work in the exhibition space, displaying progression from social and systemic engagements with foreclosure, reaching its apogee at the center of the exhibition space, an installation of three plinths with monitors that offered

recordings of public platforms re-presented in the gallery as sites of discursive contact.

Facing these plinths was the silent projection of Yto Barrada's video work, *The Smuggler* (2006), a portrait of a Moroccan woman who, over the course of thirty years, has made regular trips to the enclave of Ceuta to smuggle fabric, clothing, and goods back to shop owners in Tangier. The video explores this woman's entanglement with questions of disclosure and concealment that arise in attempts to navigate national borders which become sites of piracy.

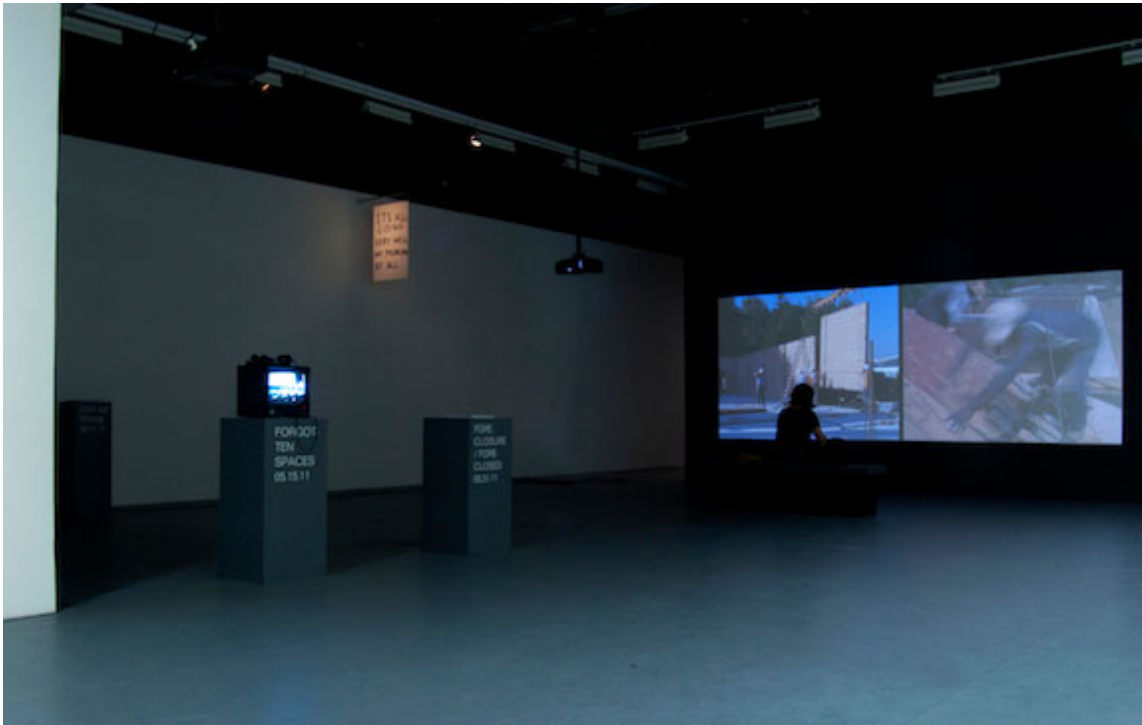


[Yto Barrada, *The Smuggler*. Photo by Latoya Ruby Frazier.]

The physical work enacted by the woman in the video reverberates with labor echoed in Harun Farocki's work *Comparison via a Third* (2007). In this two-channel film installation, the filmmaker depicts technologies of brick production at various sites in geographic locations including Africa, India, and Europe. Farocki's work contends with scale and the economies of labor in a much different way than Barrada's personal portrait; it connects the viewer to a multitude of precise engagements with brick-making material and assembly. In Burkina Faso, laying the bricks becomes a festive community gathering that contrasts starkly with the mechanized process in Germany. Farocki's rhythmic and intermittent cuts across landscapes and stages of brick-making offers an alternate temporality to dominant and linear narratives that set North and South on opposing poles of pre- and post-industrialization. Instead, his shots linger on the choreography and gesture of each process, whether it be the mechanized twist

and turns of a machine or hands laying mud onto bricks.

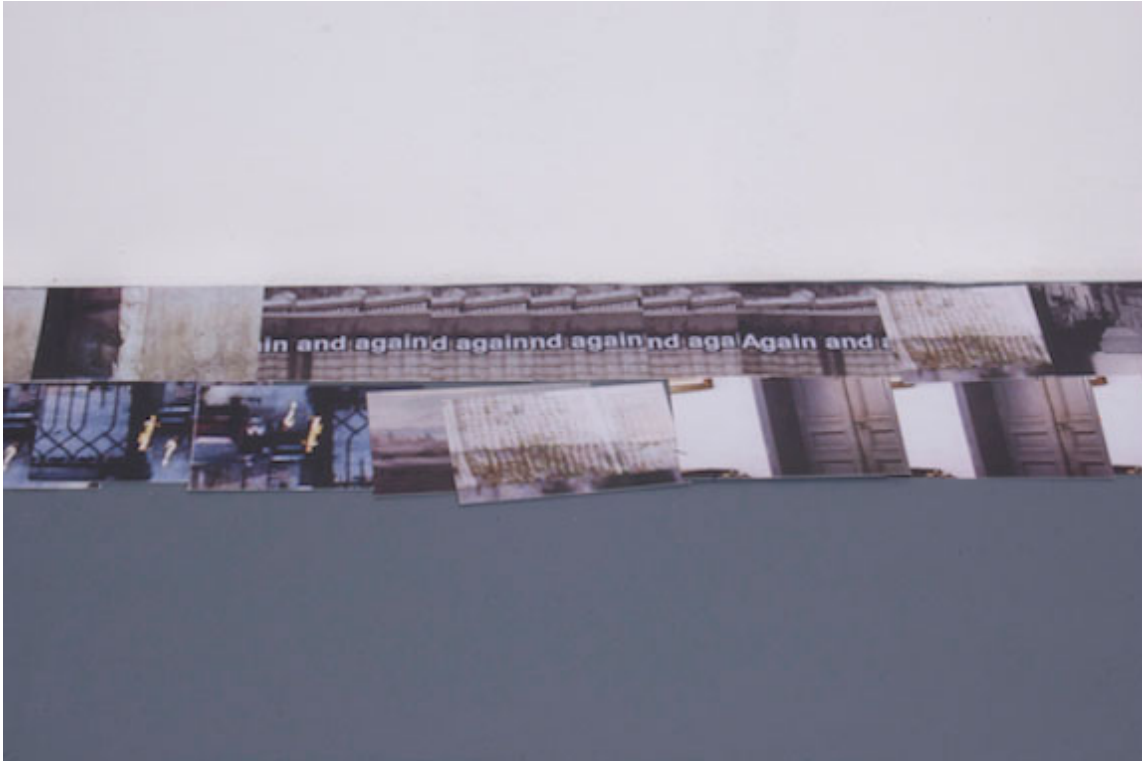
This dual channel video documents how the scale of a building process can become deeply imbricated with a community's formation and subsequent transformation of social relations. The critical approach taken by the curators in the exhibition text sets up the dual channel video to actively initiate the viewer into a capitalist process without being reductive or heavy handed.



[Harun Farocki, *Comparison via a Third*. Photo by Sadia Shirazi.]

Turning the corner brought the viewer in full view of Kamal Al Jafari's introspective photo installation, *In Praise of Bystanders* (2011-), which serves as an entrée to a screening of Al Jafari's film *Port of Memory* (2009). In the first room, an enlarged photograph depicted a young schoolboy, backpack in hand, standing in the shadow cast by the stone arch of a passageway, gazing out into the room. The figure seemed to casually observe the meticulously tiled series of photographs that surrounded the perimeter of the room. The work interrogates the foreclosure of the Palestinian residents of Jaffa by creating an alternative archive. The filmmaker projects films and videos shot in Jaffa so that he can re-photograph moments in which residents of the city were unintentionally captured on screen in Israeli and Hollywood films. Aljafari unhinges these subjects from their peripheral role, and casts them as the focus of his work. These tile-like traces of history are not precious; the viewer is invited to take a piece, and in doing so, reshapes the normative trope that consumption merely destroys images and histories. Although

viewers are implicated in the capitalist processes that appropriate and re-signify historical narratives, the photographs, as consumable art, re-stage the work metonymically outside the gallery walls. Subtraction becomes a generative, productive piece of the work, and the images do not simply reenact events, but rather invite visitors to participate directly in the historical narrative and bear witness in a way that is both startling and beautiful.



[Kamal Al Jafari, *In Praise of Bystanders*. Photo by Latoya Ruby Frazier.]

Three public platforms took place in a variety of public domains, as integral parts of the exhibition. A curatorial installation/intervention comprised of three plinths in the center of the gallery space functioned as a rhetorical hinge that wove together the dichotomous poles of the exhibition: the psychic and the systemic aspects of foreclosure. Each plinth corresponded to a distinct platform, and featured a recording of that event once it had occurred. Such an intervention encouraged viewers to remain engaged in the dialogue long after the live event had retreated from people's memories. The platforms culminated with *City as Stage*, which featured Tania Bruguera, Peter Marcuse, Damon Rich, and Radhika Subramaniam.

On the final day of the exhibition, the talk extended beyond the time set for the event, fulfilling the exhibition's promise to occupy the public domain. Reflections on individual and institutional responsibilities in ethical housing and gentrification projects within New York, queer youth

homelessness, and a critique of art's role and responsibility offered audience members a rich context to imagine ourselves within the terms of foreclosure in the very city where we live. In these platforms, possibility became expressed through the realm of the social and collapsed the space between public space and gallery, producing the exhibition as a dynamic site of self-reflection and meaning making.



[The public program "City as Stage." Photo by Maria Rapticavoli.]

The exhibition maintained a close tension between the psychic and systemic qualities of the term "foreclosed." The works and public platforms toggled between possibility as both ideal and undesirable outcomes, while the rupture endemic to crisis operated as a creative and generative force even while it is implicated in foreclosure. By incorporating these deeply affecting elements as organic and interactive aspects of the exhibition itself, the collection offered the promise of a not-yet-here articulated through the presence and immediacy of art.

The exhibition's title belied the layered and nuanced articulation of the terms foreclosure/foreclosed throughout each of the works. Rather than simply pose a fixed answer for what lies between crisis and possibility, *Foreclosed: Between Crisis and Possibility* opened up the field.