PROPERTY GUARDIANSHIP

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Contemporary cities as sites of intensified insecurity (Vasudevan, 2015);

The concept of precarity as an analytical tool to theorise work and life insecurity towards a ‘critical geography of precarity’ (Waite, 2009; see also Lewis et al. 2015);

‘Spatialising precarity’: on the relationship between precarity and urbanisation, particularly around housing inequalities (Ferreri et al. 2017);

Critical approaches to temporary urbanism and the emergence of intermediaries for on-demand connectivity (Ferreri, 2015; Harris, 2015; Madanipour, 2017);

Property Guardianship as a case study: conditions, tensions, possibilities;

On-going research collaboration with G. Dawson and Dr A. Vasudevan.
Overview

- Property Guardianship: an emerging sector between housing and security
- The live-in security sector and the centrality of London
- Experiencing Property Guardianship
- Normalising housing precarity in the temporary city
PROPERTY GUARDIANSHIP
AN EMERGING SECTOR BETWEEN HOUSING AND SECURITY
ORIGINS: KRAAKWATCH OR ANTI-KRAAK

- Origins in the Netherlands in the 1980s.
- Changes in housing and squatting legislation in response to the widespread squatting movement of the 1970s.
- Property owners started offering short-term leases to students and artists in vacant spaces to deter squatters, a practice called kraakwatch (squat watch) but often referred to by squatters as anti-kraak (anti-squat).

Netherlands (since the 1990s)

- 50 PG companies (Bond Precaire Woonvoermen 2014);
- At least 20,000 Dutch individuals living as guardians (Priemus, 2011).
THE PERCEIVED THREAT OF SQUATTING AND VANDALISM

- PG companies were founded in response to the threat of squatting and vandalism rather than to squatting per se.
- “the anti-squatters far outnumber the squatters at any time in their history” (Priemus, 2011).
- The provision of kraakwatch (or anti-kraak) as a response to an imagined threat of unlawful occupation.

‘Anti-kraak’ sign in a window, Rotterdam (2013)
A ‘GROWING NICHE’

- In the UK since 2001, a ‘growing niche’ in the security sector.
- Used by public and third sector organisations as much as by private property owners, incl. local authorities, housing associations, health trusts.
- Over 30 companies, some with several offices in England, Scotland and Wales (ex. AdHoc).
- Difficult to estimate numbers, but 4,000+ guardians.
Dex Property Management (UK and Netherlands), screenshot from website 2015 [http://dexpropertymanagement.com/]
“Insurance companies love the fact the property is at a reduced risk by being occupied by Guardians who care about the property because it's their own temporary living space.”

Camelot Property Management Ltd – FAQ
Adapted from Camelot Property Management Ltd (2014)
Adventures of Scamelot (2011) squattastic.blogspot.co.uk

THE ECONOMICS OF PROPERTY GUARDIANSHIP
The term ‘Property Guardian’ is not a legal term of art: it has no statutory definition. The name derives from a particular business model, under which a Guardian Company provides on-site security to a property owner (whether a freeholder or leaseholder) for a property which is temporarily vacant by granting rights to people (‘Guardians’) to live in it.”

THE LIVE-IN SECURITY SECTOR
THE CENTRALITY OF LONDON
1. Mainly Property Guardian Company e.g. Camelot, AdHoc

2. Social enterprises e.g. Acorn Guardians

3. Large Security Company e.g. SitexOrbis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Type</th>
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<th>No. of offices</th>
<th>Office locations</th>
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<td>*Ad Hoc UK</td>
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<td>Art Guard</td>
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SOME UK ESTIMATES

- In the UK since 2001, 31 companies (2016).
- At least 21 out of 31 companies were established after 2009.
- Around two-thirds of UK-only companies have only a single office in London, and 36% appear to be exclusively operating in the capital.
- 2014: industry estimate of 4,000 guardians (Orbis, 2014).
EXPERIENCING PROPERTY GUARDIANSHIP

FLEXIBILITY – ON-DEMAND AVAILABILITY - DISPOSABILITY
“Does adventurous living in a former school, monastery, office block or factory appeal to you? […] You have chosen to live adventurously in someone else’s property.”


We’re on public property ladder
The Sun, 22 March 2009

Here today, gone tomorrow
The Guardian, 12 March 2011
FLEXIBLE LIVING

Welcome

Are you a young professional looking for an affordable space to live?

Are you responsible?
And... are you flexible?

“..the key to being a property guardian, you've got to be so flexible in every respect.”

INTERVIEW WITH MARK, 2014
“I’ve got a three-day a week job… I can’t work more than 3 days and keep the theatre going. So I needed a place to live so I could work part-time… until theatre stuff becomes permanent, this is my only way of keeping a base in London. I could definitely easily afford a place [where I am from] but for some reason I feel like it might be beneficial to have a place here for London theatre work if it comes up.”

INTERVIEW WITH GEORGE, 2014

The insecure work-home nexus: the uncertainty and insecurity of entrance into the world of work becomes intimately related to housing that has the same attributes.
On-demand availability

“It was getting quite close to late August and I hadn’t heard anything. I was getting worried because it would be really difficult for me to pay rent at a normal London price.... And in September I got an email saying ‘Can you come to a viewing tonight?’ and it was here. I came down, I had a look... probably no longer than a week after, we came to get the key, and then it was all ‘go!’”

INTERVIEW WITH LUCY, 2014
“I have basically lived with Camelot since I have been in London, pretty much, and that’s four years. I have been in four properties and then in several locations in between while waiting for another property. […] every year that I get moved on it gets harder. The stress between when they tell me to move out and when I find somewhere else and move in, that stress of not having a home, not having a base, not knowing where you are going to go, it’s getting bigger. And so two years down the line I probably may not be sounding so... Okay about it. But I think [PG companies] bank on people having a certain amount of tolerance. And then they drop off, and then they just get new people in, who are fresh. The turnaround in terms of guardians must be huge. But it’s not a problem, because they’ve always got more [people applying]”

**Interview with Emma, 2011**

**Stress**

**Precarity as a ‘heightened sense of expendability’ (Butler, 2011)**
NORMALISING HOUSING PRECARITY IN THE TEMPORARY CITY
LOCAL AUTHORITIES – THE WIDER CONTEXT – ALTERNATIVES?
LOCAL AUTHORITIES

- Survey of property guardian use in the public sector in London (2016);
- 18 out of 32 borough councils used property guardianship in their properties, for a total of over 1,000 property guardians (Berry, 2016);
- different financial agreements depending on the council;
- health and safety, legal definitions, governance and responsibility;

The case of Bristol City Council (2017)

The Law on Property Guardianship white paper (2017), by 7 companies

- Health and safety requirements apply to all buildings, whether they are commercial, residential or other types.
- Fire safety, gas safety and any potential on-site hazards fall under the same regulations as tenants, and are enforceable by the same authorities.
- Licenses not tenancies; key differences include non-exclusive occupation of the premises and shorter notices to leave. In return, guardians live in low-cost accommodation.

Giles Peaker, Partner, Anthony Gold Solicitors;
Andrew Arlott, QC, Andrew Dymond, Barrister, Arlott Chambers

Published by seven UK property guardian providers

- Ad-Hoc  www.adhoctproperty.co.uk
- DEX  www.dexpropertymanagement.co.uk
- Dot Dot Dot  www.dotdotdotproperty.com
- Guardians of London  www.guardiansoflondon.com
- Live-in Guardians  www.liveinguardians.com
- Lowe Guardians  www.lowedguardians.com
- VPS Guardians  www.vpsguardians.co.uk

November 2017

Available on the Empty Homes Network website
“Of all the renting experiences I’ve had in London, yes Camelot was stressful because you never knew when they were going to turn on you but, actually, out of the places I’ve lived in London, that’s the place I stayed at longest, and in terms of location and value for money, it was probably the best!”

INTERVIEW WITH ANNE, 2012

- Since the Housing Act 1988, and then the Housing Act 1996, standard Assured Shorthold Tenancy Agreement (6-12 months) have become the most common legal tenancy in England and Wales;
- 28% of household in London are in private rented accommodation (GLA, 2017)
- 2014-2015, 4.1% average yearly increase in rental costs (Gov.uk and VOA, 2016).
DECLINE IN GENUINELY AFFORDABLE HOUSING

1978: 31% of residential properties in Greater London was publicly owned and managed (council housing); reached nearly 50% in inner London boroughs.

2014: 12% (Mayor of London Office, 2014) (7% nationally)

PG in social housing demolition or privatisation (borough councils and housing associations).

Balfron Tower, Tower Hamlets. Source: Wikimedia Commons
Normalisation of property guardianship as ‘an alternative to renting’ and as ‘affordable housing’.
‘LICENSED’ SQUATTING

- As in the Netherlands, in the UK the rise of Property Guardianship occurs at the time of changes in legislation around unlawful occupations (squatting), Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012
- ‘Yesterday’s squatter is today’s anti-squatter’ (Priemus, 2011)

“You know, they keep squatters out but they essentially want you to be able to cope like a resourceful squatter....if you’ve had experience of being in a squat... it prepares you for these guardian places.”

INTERVIEW WITH ELLIOT, 2013
SHORT-LIFE COOPERATIVE HOUSING: MANAGING MUNICIPALLY-OWNED EMPTY PROPERTIES, MOSTLY (BUT NOT SOLELY) IN LONDON.

NEGOTIATION BETWEEN ORGANISED SQUATTERS (ESTIMATED AT 25,000 INDIVIDUALS IN THE MID 1970S), LOCAL BOROUGH COUNCILS AND THE GREATER LONDON COUNCIL.

AROUND 15,000 RESIDENTS LIVED IN SHORT-LIFE HOUSING COOPERATIVES IN LONDON IN 1986; STILL 10,000 IN 2000 (BOWMAN, 2004, P.262).

ONGOING EXAMPLES OF AFFORDABLE CO-OPERATIVE HOUSING IN LONDON DERIVED FROM THIS MODEL: TEMPORARY (EX. PHOENIX HOUSING CO-OP) AND PERMANENT (EG. ABEONA HOUSING CO-OPERATIVE).

FRASER, R (1986) FILLING THE EMPTIES: SHORT-LIFE HOUSING AND HOW TO DO IT. SHELTER.
IMAGINING ALTERNATIVES?

- Normalisation of the precarious urban habitus concerns as much conditions as imaginaries.
- Propositive spatial imaginaries of home and the city, beyond temporariness.
- Guardians’ positive experiences: making homes in unusual non-residential spaces, communal living, DIY dwellers’ control, co-operative ways of working and living.
- Relationship with the neighbouring communities and involvement in longer-term local plans.

- E.g.: a collective of property guardians living in a publicly-owned school building in South London decided to clean and re-open the school’s botanical and wildlife garden as a ‘precarious public space’. Over a 3-year period they held a range of community-oriented activities and became involved in a campaign to save the garden and transform the planned redevelopment of the site for greater affordable housing provision.

http://oldtidemillgarden.wixsite.com/deptford
When the temporary use of space is analysed in the context of a larger process of spatial production, and from different perspectives, however, it becomes clear that temporariness finds different meanings and implications for different parties. For some, it is a brief moment of opportunity in a general situation of insecurity and vulnerability, while for others it accelerates the change of image, mediates the market conditions and legitimates substantive gains.

FURTHER READINGS


- Ferreri, M. and Dawson G. 2017. Self-precarization and the spatial imaginaries of property guardianship, *Cultural Geographies* (First Published online 22 August).

- Property Guardian Research Group propertyguardianresearch.wordpress.com

Thank you.