



Dwelling-in-eviction: Improvised practices of inhabiting Dublin's private rental sector

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Abstract

Anushka Dasgupta is a PhD researcher at Utrecht University. She conducted scholar-activist ethnographic fieldwork as a member of Community Action Tenants Union (CATU), Ireland in Dublin and studies improvised, community responses to housing insecurity manifesting in the urban through dispossession, decay and neglect.

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In Ireland's housing crisis, evictions are the violent manifestation of large processes of welfare ruination such as austerity, neoliberalism and the accompanying financialization of housing. In Dublin, Ireland, private rental sector (PRS) tenants are perpetually engaging with eviction. In this article, by combining theoretical interventions in the study of the ruination of western European welfare states, improvisation and rehearsal from scholarship in urban studies and radical theory on inhabitation and eviction – I firstly, explore the practical dimensions of the experience of evictions in Dublin's PRS. Evictions are woven into the workings of the PRS and tenants are made familiar with dispossession even before the concrete threat of eviction arises. This familiarity produces the basis for improvisation of security in conditions of extreme housing precarity.

Secondly, and more centrally through scholar-activist ethnographic involvement with Community Action Tenant's Union (CATU), Ireland, I identify and study three improvised practices (of homelessness, delay and overhold) of tenants who effectively extend the process of their eviction to retain shelter for longer. Tenants try and stretch the process of eviction to their benefit by drawing into repertoires of those without shelter, by using (quasi)legal tactics and combining them with direct action and finally by overholding i.e. not leaving the site of eviction thereby altering the landlord-tenant relationship and questioning the bases of entitlement to private property through practice. These practices comprise what I call the concept of dwelling-in-eviction, the main contribution of this paper.

Keywords

Eviction, welfare states, improvisation, temporality, overholding

Introduction

Ireland is experiencing an acute housing crisis where the private rental sector (PRS) is characterized heavily by evictions. The country has been in a state of housing emergency for decades now because of the privatization of public housing, financialization of the housing market (Aalbers, 2017; Tubridy, 2024; Lima Holanda, 2018), a decline in homeownership (Byrne, 2019) and a strong trend of buy-to-let strategies in housing provision patterns (Lima, 2020). Ireland is home to precarious renters forced to rely on the PRS to meet basic housing needs. In its capital city, Dublin, the PRS is where landlords regularly hand out Notices of Termination of Tenancy (NOTs) with the intention of evicting.

There were attempts to curtail the ill-effects of evictions in the past through two eviction bans. As part of the first Covid-19 eviction ban, landlords were no longer allowed to issue notices of eviction during the effective period of this ban, tenants serving out notice periods had their notice periods put on hold subject to resumption only at the end of the ban, and rent increases were not permissible at this time. This was supposed to be a temporary measure, yet in October 2022, another eviction ban was put into place, only this time, the rent freeze didn't apply, and eviction notices could be issued under certain sets of circumstances (such as unfulfillment of rental obligations by the tenant). The lifting of this eviction ban led to thousands of renters being at risk of eviction overnight in April 2023 (Bowers, 2023) making evictions more visible and pertinent. In any case, temporary eviction bans are not useful in tackling the structural problem of evictions and dispossession (see Fowle & Fyall, 2024; Brown et. al., 2023).

Consequentially, homelessness in Ireland was at record numbers soon after the removal of the moratorium on evictions (Bowers, 2023). Between January 2015 and August 2024 alone, the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) has issued 4525 eviction orders (CATU, 2025). These are just from the cases that are brought to the RTB by landlords or tenants and are not representative of the full reality (CATU, 2025). These cases normally pertain to the validity of NoTs and determining the (il)legality of evictions. In a housing landscape characterized by unaffordable rents, high insecurity driving high rates of homelessness (Lima, 2020), evictions are a central issue in the lives of urban dwellers in Dublin and elsewhere on the island. *How* tenants continue inhabiting the city under such circumstances is not addressed in detail in scholarship.

In the Irish context, the further lack of adequate and systematic documentation of housing and community struggles has been noted by Irish scholars such as Fiadh Tubridy (2024) and Rory Hearne et al. (2018). There is a rich history of tenant organising in Ireland (Byrne, 2018; Hearne et al. 2018) and a pressing need remains for research *with* communities that are rendered the most precarious by the regimes of accumulation at play in the Irish PRS. Further, Ireland is a crucial example in understanding how the rapid financialisation of housing and unchecked post-austerity (neo) liberalization plays out in urban western Europe. Evictions have long been a social and political issue in Ireland and the Irish PRS is dotted with financial actors with global connections (Lima, 2020) who are responsible for a large chunk of (il)legal evictions (CATU, 2025) in Ireland. These factors make it a context worth learning from.

In this article, through scholar-activist research by way of activist involvement as a member of the island-wide tenant's union- Community Action Tenants Union (CATU), I ask the following questions: i) What is eviction in practice in the lives of Dublin's PRS tenants? and ii) How do these tenants improvise in eviction? In answering these questions, I center the agency, knowledge, organizing strategies and capacities of precarious PRS tenants living under the perpetual threat of eviction.

This paper makes two contributions: First, by building on what we already know about evictions in Dublin's financialized housing market I illustrate how evictions are built into the system of housing provision and are something tenants are deeply familiar with. Thus, in answering the first question, I show that evictions are not just isolated events but are a structural and characteristic phenomenon of Dublin's PRS. Therefore, the insecurity of dispossession far precedes actual dispossession or its threat, thereby making evictions more a feature of the PRS than an aberration from its operation.

Second, and more centrally, I focus directly on the activities of renters that inhabit the PRS who then improvise within their own evictions as a response to such insecurity which comprise the concept of dwelling-in-eviction. Therefore, in answering the second question, I identify three improvised practices vital to how dwellers come to grapple with the realities of dispossession through eviction. These practices are: a. practicing "homelessness" by, for example, resorting to living in a homeless shelter while inhabiting a site of eviction, or by making oneself mobile i.e. ready to move; b. practicing "delay" by resorting to various legal/quasi-legal strategic tactics that delay the final moment of removal from the property and; c. practicing overhold, that is staying on beyond the final date of removal from the property. These everyday practices constitute parts of an improvisation that maneuvers the specific circumstances of eviction to inhabit it for longer. This improvisation of temporary security is what I call dwelling-in-eviction, this concept comprises the main theoretical contribution of this paper.

In the following sections, I first contextualize the Irish PRS and connected literature. Further, I position myself theoretically, placing my ethnographic work in conversation with theoretical interventions around European welfare states, improvisation in the urban, and the temporalities of anti-eviction organizing. In the following empirical sections by answering the guiding questions of this paper, I show how eviction stretches beyond a single moment of dispossession and develop the concept of dwelling-in-eviction which is comprised of improvised practices of precarious PRS tenants.

Theoretical Framework

Ruination, Improvisation and Dwelling

Financialisation and austerity measures are undoubtedly the largest contributors to this extreme form of precarisation of vulnerable tenants in Dublin's PRS. Previously, in literature around European welfare states this has been seen as "retrenchment" or the shrinking of what has already existed as a form of protection to citizens (Van den Berg, 2025). However, following from Van den Berg's (2025) work on welfare ruination building on the work of

Stoler (2008), I see the extreme precarity of tenants subject to arbitrary dispossession at the behest of landlords as something that comprises an ongoing process of welfare ruination. Financialisation of housing and austerity are processes of that ruination (Van den Berg, 2025). Van den Berg writes: "Ruination can ruin lives, social relations, social policies and public infrastructures and it is often specific: certain (racialised, gendered) populations are targeted" (Van den Berg, 2025, p.84).

Processes of ruination are fundamentally violent, however the responses of people who are subject to it can be full of care, possibility and ingenuity. Van den Berg (2025) thus invites scholarship to turn towards focusing on improvised, make-shift, informal practices of what people do in the face of welfare ruination. Following from Stoler (2008) on the idea that there is indeed 'debris' that remains from ruined welfare, Van den Berg (2025) argues that this debris, as we will come to see in the following sections, is ingeniously used by urban dwellers through improvisation in Dublin as elsewhere in ways that make subsistence possible. I choose this concept of welfare ruination over singularly addressing austerity, or welfare 'retrenchment' or financialisation because it allows me to shift the focus from the state and its shortcomings onto how citizens provisionally organise (Van den Berg, 2025). This concept fits the focus of my ethnographic material best – that is, the everyday practices of people directly engaging with their precarity. It allows us to see citizens, in this case specifically tenants, as active agents in improvising their own security despite minimal state protection and pervasive forms of violence (such as evictions, in this case) being enacted upon them. Therefore, this paper focuses on the improvisation of practices that comprise dwelling-in-eviction. Improvisation is crucial here to understand the temporary solidarities and quick fixes of tenants that I have focused on. I draw primarily from the work of AbdouMalik Simone in how I view improvisation. Simone (2019) - drawing from cities of the urban south and using dynamics of improvisation from jazz music and ensemble playing - develops a notion of improvisation that captures the total ongoingness and provisionality of life that takes place for the now, with resources available in the now. Improvisation is essentially knowing the intricacies of "making the most of a hinge – knowing how to move and think through various angles" (Simone, 2019, p.08). Eviction is one such hinge where what the tenants do is dependent on the specificities and uncertainties of a very particular situation of eviction which is a result of larger processes of welfare ruination. In my fieldwork, I focused on these specificities of decision-making and the practices that emerge therein.

In that, dwelling-in-eviction is totally improvised. Simone writes: "The question of holding is important. No matter how improvised, lives need to be held, supported" (Simone, 2019, p.04). Uncertainty is a crucial part of this improvisation as things constantly change, relationships evolve and change too, allowing for improvised formations that enable dwelling-in-eviction. Improvisation is how people try out what is possible to do with what is accessible in the moment to culminate in circumstances that are fleeting, temporary, but immediately beneficial. It is the holding together of things more than the enactment of a vision of a future. Theoretically, the concepts of welfare ruination and improvisation that stems from therein allows me to respond to Van den Berg's (2025) proposed research agenda

of " looking at... how certain moments and opportunities may be used... without necessarily expecting them to grow or to be there in the future" (Van den Berg, 2025, p.89).

Addressing the element of necessity or urgency for tenants involves a perspective on housing scholarship that moves away from assessing forms of challenging dispossession in the pursuit of housing justice with the dominant vocabulary of the western-left (Lancione, 2023). There is a dominant framing of what counts as political and what does not in housing scholarship – this framing tends to exclude the desperation of those inhabiting precarious housing frameworks from the ambit of being taken seriously as valuable political practice. Lancione (2023) positions himself as taking desperation as fundamentally political and calls for greater attention in housing scholarship to those that inhabit precarity – he considers all forms of inhabitation to be political. Adopting Lancione’s (2023) orientation to direct action and displacement in the urban as processes through which actors make and re-make varied “modes of being in the city” allowed me to move closer to the “micropolitical life” of housing precarity in Dublin’s PRS.

Here, dwelling is an important borrowed term to unpack. Lancione (2023) uses dwelling interchangeably with inhabiting and his preference for this term is because it conveys the fullness of all ways of agentically, through practice, reaching for life – i.e. the experiences through which stability and change in inhabiting the earth is registered and made possible. This, according to him, makes housing only a “part of the process of dwelling.” (p.179) This effectively implies that housing is not tied to the materiality of inhabitation or “shelter”, but it is also what people do to live. There are also forms of dwelling which are not specifically tied to a house, per se. I use dwelling as a key theoretical verb here to focus directly on tenants attempts to make life amid insecurity. This is the basis for studying their improvisations.

Evictions

Evictions have been theorized multitudinously in scholarship, lacking a clear definition: as events with specific local histories (Vasudevan, 2017), scholars have addressed its processes (Baker, 2020), its temporalities (Harms, 2013) and more recently have called attention to its resistance through vivid, important and timely ethnographic interventions (Casellas & Sala, 2017; Lancione, 2017; among others) that allow for evictions to be understood as the site of the larger struggle for housing justice. There is an inherent ambiguity around exactly what an eviction might officially be. The UN defines forced evictions as:

The permanent or temporary removal against their will of individuals, families and/or communities from the homes and/or land which they occupy, without the provision of, and access to, appropriate forms of legal or other protection (Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, general comment No. 7 (1997) on the right to adequate housing: forced evictions)” (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2014).

Under a housing crisis where alternative accommodation is unavailable, and eviction is the leading cause of rampant homelessness (Lima, 2020) it is unlikely that any eviction is anything but forced. In the absence of adequate social housing (Lima Holanda, 2018), the role of the PRS was to ensure housing was delivered to largely low-income households who could not afford to own accommodation (Galligan, 2007). This did not change much post 2008 (Kitchin et. al., 2015). In the aftermath of austerity measures and growing inflation, rent increases placed a difficult burden on income insecure families that reside in the PRS (Kitchin et. al. 2015) and this coupled with insecurity of tenure, a lack of awareness of tenant rights and practically no social housing available for recourse led to growing homelessness in the years succeeding austerity measures in Ireland.

In the Irish context, the most significant form of power in the hands of the landlord is the power to evict a tenant or terminate a tenancy (Byrne & McArdle, 2020). This power can be wielded informally as well, in the sense that landlords may use other channels than legal notice to remove a tenant such as changing the locks on the doors of the house when tenants are away (Byrne & McArdle, 2020). Landlords also resort to what is called retaliatory conduct (Byrne & McArdle, 2020) wherein they use everyday strategies of penalizing tenants for challenging the authority of the landlord. This is also seen to affect the agency of the tenants to negotiate tactfully with their landlords as the fear of eviction through such informal channels looms large thereby discouraging tenants from seeking help from third-party actors such as NGOs or turning to the state for recourse (Byrne & McArdle, 2020). In this sense, eviction is larger than removal. Seeing it as such shapes how I answer the first research question around how eviction practically manifests.

Seeing eviction as larger than just removal necessitates engagement with its unique temporalities. Previously, eviction temporality has been explored in scholarship. For example, in the work of Baker (2021, p.805) eviction is seen as something that “compresses, stretches, appropriates and produces time.” It has been theorized more concretely through the notion of Eviction Time in the work of Erik Harms (2013) in Saigon, wherein urban dwellers live in the rubble of half-demolished dwellings amid eviction. Harms notes that eviction involves a “complex assortment of temporalities that arise when people are displaced from their lands and homes” (Harms, 2013, p.346). Harm notes that eviction sparks almost bodily engagements with time – characterized by uncertainty and ambiguity, which are also characteristics necessary for improvisation to take place in the urban (Simone, 2019). I draw from Harms’ work, especially the notion of “forever temporary”, the feeling that the temporariness somehow draws out with no end in sight to characterize the temporal backdrop of dwelling-in-eviction. Knowing that an end to an eviction process is more often physical dispossession than a right to remain in place in Dublin’s PRS (CATU, 2025) the permanent nature of temporariness is an important feature of dwelling-in-eviction, one which is felt and mobilized in the three practices I eventually address.

Methodology

I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Dublin for almost 8 months in 2024. The data collection process comprised of gathering fieldnotes while being a member of CATU participating in anti-eviction organising in some Dublin branches & organising doorknocks to mobilise support for tenants in eviction. I also conducted interviews with CATU members across Dublin who were in various stages of being evicted and with CATU activists and organisers who have organised against evicting landlords.

The arguments made in this article draw from ethnographic fieldnotes and the 17 interviews conducted. For the purposes of this article, all names are pseudonyms. All data (in the form of audio recordings, fieldnotes, transcriptions) is securely stored on university protected storage. I analysed this data thematically, first identifying different strategies of dealing with evictions that are mentioned and then by grouping these strategies under broader themes from which the three practices emerge. My approach was informed by Willis and Trondman's (2000) *TIME*, *Theoretically Informed Methodology for Ethnography* which means that I primed myself to look out for specific practices given my theoretical considerations but at the same time be open for elements of novelty and surprise emerging from the field which also became central to my analysis. My close ethnographic look at eviction's processes respond to the call of Baker (2021) to look at evictions as not focusing on just the event of removal from property (Baker, 2021) but tracing the processes, counter-movements, flows within eviction.

As a member of CATU, evictions seemed to be everywhere in the union's day to day activities and I decided to follow them closely alongside members facing them. I started out by following the Dublin organizer for the union in their meetings with activists and tenants resisting evictions and soon became an active member in the branches of Dublin 03 and Ballymun-Finglas learning from other organizers and assisting with eviction resistance specific to individual union members. I met with new members who were served with NoTs, went to meetings where anti-eviction strategies were discussed and strategized with tenants who were dwelling-in-eviction in these months. Descriptions of these engagements comprise my fieldnotes.

My involvement was two-fold: at once I was a scholar, but also an activist. This positioning allowed me to conduct research in the spirit of engaged scholarship and accountable activism (see Gilmore, 2022; Tubridy, 2024). As a non-European, migrant woman of colour based at a university in the Netherlands and conducting fieldwork in Dublin, Ireland – I was new to the cultural and political context as well as housing organising in many ways. While that positionality cannot be unpacked in this paper due to the paucity of space, I was not new to organising in general. With my previous involvement in student activism in my country of origin and my commitment to organising against interconnected systems of oppression, I was interested in contributing to and learning from CATU in my time in Dublin. I contributed my time and labour – not just towards activities to gather data but also in my capacities as a union member to do “activism with, not for” (Chatterjee, et al., 2019) tenants. I recognised the extractive nature of academic research and while I cannot completely remove this quality, my awareness of it informed every choice I made in my

fieldwork. I reflected on the nature of my fieldwork and checked in with organisers, activists and other scholars within the union during the fieldwork process to reflect on the extractiveness of my own fieldwork and learn how to usefully contribute as well.

In learning about the practices of dwelling-in-eviction, I was able to contribute to dwelling-in-eviction as well by organising with tenants. Through this, I was able to identify the following practices as crucial to this concept of dwelling-in-eviction. This experience of being rendered insecure by the condition of housing precarity is fertile for entanglements that necessarily move towards a “terrain of resistance” and are grounds for “autonomous ways of thinking and doing home” (Lancione, 2023, p.10). Therefore, I prioritized looking at what are the practices of provisioning and holding together that come from a deeply painful experience of housing precarity such as in this moment in Dublin. This article does not intend to romanticise the experience of precarious PRS tenants but intends to establish them as legitimate knowers and practitioners of housing justice within such insecurity. This article is an encouragement for scholarship to (continue to) engage with the lived experience of tenants as fundamental sources of knowledge about precarious housing, evictions, and housing movement building.

In the following empirical sections, I answer the guiding questions of this paper: around how evictions are practically experienced by precarious PRS tenants and then I elaborate on the three practices of dwelling-in-eviction that emerge from my data.

Rethinking Eviction as Everyday

The idea of eviction that emerges from my fieldwork is that it is a phenomenon which is inflicted upon tenants for longer durations than just the moment of receipt of a NoT or the actual date of the eviction or the act of removal/departure from the rental property itself. Eviction is a constitutive component of housing provision through private landlords in Ireland, and therefore it is already present and observable in the everyday lives of tenants even without any sight or sign of termination or removal. The basis for community organizing around an ongoing eviction is in the fact that eviction is a possibility for all renters in the PRS, therefore, (the possibility of) dispossession is always near. This sparks empathy and a deep familiarity with dispossession. We read about this in Byrne and Sassi’s (2023) work on practices of homemaking in Ireland’s PRS, where they document a reluctance towards feeling permanence in a rental property. This reluctance becomes pronounced in the form of not decorating living spaces, or always preparing to move. In the work of Byrne and Sassi (2023) tenants in Dublin’s PRS are seen to practice displacement as a consciously deployed strategy to inhabit insecurity.

Building on this, practically, eviction manifests in how tenants dwell in their rentals every day. They are hesitant to assert their rights as a tenant and ask for repairs and maintenance from their landlords for fear of attracting attention or having their rent raised. Tenants often undertake structural maintenance of their rental housing themselves. This involves financial costs and a feeling of having taken a risk. A tenant said to me that they

once put it this way to their landlord: “We can fix everything. But then by tomorrow you kick us out. So, we just want to be sure that that's not your intention.”

Her landlord had responded saying that this was indeed not his intention and given her the go-ahead to improve the house structurally at great personal expense. Two years later, he issued an NoT asking her to vacate. Tenants must thus actively estimate the possibility of physical dispossession while grappling with its odds in the day to day, making decisions based on its probability. Thus, eviction is felt everywhere, at every point a decision is made with regards to how tenants inhabit their rental homes. Whether they buy things to decorate it or carry out structural repairs to keep it habitable – all decisions depend on evaluating what the odds of staying in a specific house are. Eviction is a specific temporal and spatial site where everyday life is made possible by tenants through their practices within ever-present conditions of dispossession.

This perpetual presence of evictions in the lives of renters provokes a further engagement with the question: what is an eviction practically? Evictions are ambiguously defined by public institutions. For example, in the considerations of Irish official bodies such as the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB). The RTB is “an independent, public body” whose role is to “...operate a dispute resolution service”¹ between tenants and landlords among other responsibilities. It does not apply a uniform definition to what constitutes illegal eviction (CATU, 2025). It has no procedure to verify if legal evictions (only possible on account of sale, major renovation or owner/kin of owner urgently moving in) take place legitimately allowing for gaping loopholes that landlords can exploit (CATU, 2025).

The origins of the word “eviction” lie in the Latin word *evictus* which means to “vanquish, to win a point” (Merriam Webster, n.d.a). It comes from the word *evince*, which means to “display clearly” (Merriam Webster, n.d.b). During my research, tenants in any stage of eviction reported feeling as if they had been shown their place as tenants through the process of eviction. Nisha, a young woman who had been issued with a valid order to vacate her dwelling unit, a studio flat in a Georgian house turned into several single-person units in a posh Dublin neighbourhood, shared with me how her landlord once said to her face: “you are only a tenant!” Nisha has turned homeless due to this eviction after a long legal battle with her landlords. She now lives between her fathers’ house and the sofas of her friends.

Tenants in Dublin’s precarious PRS already know their place of course; many of the tenants I interviewed claimed to empathise with the rationale of the evicting landlord. The tenants “understand” that the landlord has the ultimate say in what happens with their property. This indicates the primacy of private property rights – not just in the Irish constitution or in the very existence of the category of “legal” evictions but also in the lived realities of tenants’ lives. Interviewees felt that, in the end, they were tenants who were not entitled to live in the property the same way their landlords were entitled to sell it. Eviction then is practically about the re-articulation of the right to private property on part of those who own and about showing those who lack property their “place.” Removal is only one

¹ [Home | Residential Tenancies Board](#)

aspect of tenants being shown their place at the whim of a landlord, at the bend of financialized motives. In Dublin's PRS, eviction is that medium through which the pecking-order of financialized housing is made evident. Thus, eviction is an articulation of those violent processes of welfare ruination (Van den Berg, 2025) such as austerity and rapid financialization. Much like how Van den Berg (2025) characterizes austerity, eviction too is a form of "slow violence" (Nixon, 2011).

When a CATU member or a resident in a specific neighbourhood contacts the union in relation to the receipt of a NoT, CATU's local branches, depending upon strength and capacity, swing into action. CATU's strategies, from my fieldwork, are primarily geared towards buying the tenant more time in situ, while negotiating permanent stay in that position if the situation permits and trying to garner community support for dwellers at risk of homelessness. The union cannot necessarily stop an eviction, but they can stretch out the process for long. This is the strategy of choice for much informal anti-eviction organizing (Roy, 2017). The lengthening of the process of eviction requires, however, relationships and practices that facilitate this.

Dwelling-in-Eviction: Practicing Homelessness, Delay and Overholding

Tenants who organize within or by using CATU are actors that invent and reinvent highly situationally adaptable practices that allow for the lengthening of eviction. These practices are the way tenants can dwell-in-eviction and go towards answering the second guiding question of this paper: How do tenants improvise in eviction? In the following sections, I address this process of resisting an eviction through staying in place for longer. Dwelling-in-eviction requires the intentional stretching of the painful process of eviction. Tenants who practically experience eviction in perpetuity in Dublin's PRS already know how to work with the conditions of insecurity they inhabit every day. This knowledge comes from the highly stressful, harmful and endangering positions PRS tenants occupy in not just housing but also employment, class position, minority status, being racialized or having insecure visa or residency conditions. They improvise within housing insecurity to develop distinct practices.

Practicing homelessness

The first set of practices are associated with homelessness. These practices are varied and can i) involve the use of public infrastructure for the officially homeless while actively resisting removal as a tenant in a rental unit; ii) getting rid of belongings and avoiding purchasing more due to an inability to imagine an emplaced future; and iii) by visualizing, enacting and planning for life in the absence of shelter. Taking Lancione's (2023) definition of the concept of dwelling as a starting point, practices of dwelling indeed include the repertoires of those who are without shelter i.e. colloquially known as homeless. Lancione (2023) refutes the notion of homelessness as a state of exception and sees homelessness as woven into everyday practices of inhabitation. And indeed, these repertoires of homelessness, taken from multitudes who can and do do dwelling without a physical

structure to call “home”, are something tenants in eviction turn to and employ to inhabit their evictions.

While following tenants dwelling-in-eviction, a common thread running across the minds of all was the inevitable possibility of having to be physically removed from the dwelling units that had become sites of eviction. In fact, the more likely way the limbo of waiting in “Eviction Time” (Harms, 2013) comes to an end is (violent) physical dispossession or tenants leaving out of intimidation or moving into further precarious and unsuitable housing (CATU, 2025). Tenants therefore had to prepare for this outcome.

Repertoires of homelessness are used by tenants dwelling-in-eviction. Tenants often creatively utilize parts of this repertoire as rehearsal, as practice for the very probable future of having to live in the city without shelter. Rehearsal is a key feature of improvisation, to practice certain skills in a given situation so that they can later be transposed to another likelihood is common in improvised practices (Dasgupta & Van den Berg, 2024).

In many of the houses that were sites of ongoing evictions, a rehearsal for the probability of physical dispossession had begun. The signs of this were visible: as things strewn around the house - cartons, boxes, dismantled furniture, all signifiers of a potential move. Interviewees reported having identified storage units where they could place their things in the event they would have to dwell on the streets or sleep in different locations such as with friends or with family until they were able to find something suitable. Most tenants dwelling-in-eviction found it hard to visualize a place to put all their belongings in. Therefore, they simply stopped purchasing new things or replacing broken items. Many interviewed tenants no longer felt an attachment to the state of presentability of their shelter. A sense of being “houseproud” was lost when dwelling-in-eviction. Tenants would refrain from painting walls, carrying out any repairs, or even stop day-to-day cleaning. At the same time, the relationship of rent would continue uninterrupted – tenants dwelling-in-eviction continue to pay rent to their landlords even while in the process of eviction.

Some tenants described having prepared for the inevitability of moving out of their house by actively becoming officially homeless. One such tenant, soon after the receipt of the NoT was offered a space in a women and children’s shelter in Dublin’s North City. With no guarantee of whether she would be able to retain her home, she, in concurrence with her partner, thought it was best to have a spot in the homeless shelter as a backup. Rejecting a spot in Dublin’s overcrowded and insufficient homeless accommodation would not be wise as finding a spot in the first place is very difficult. Therefore, she began the tedious routine of being a homeless person living in a homeless shelter. This practically meant she slept at the other end of the city in a room with her children surrounded by strangers, all at various stages of losing and/or having lost their shelter. In the day they would simply return to their rental home under eviction, do their daily routines there such as cooking, eating, going to school, etc. In the early evenings, they would return to the homeless shelter. Failure to report there on time would count as a forfeiture of this much coveted publicly funded spot. Therefore, she continued with her feet firmly planted in both possibilities – of being with and without shelter. This is another way of practicing homelessness while dwelling in eviction – which is by becoming officially homeless, sleeping in a homeless shelter and becoming a

number in the official homeless statistic while very much organising with CATU and fighting to retain one's rental. In this sense, the tenant improvised with the "debris" (Van den Berg, 2025) that remained from her relationship with her landlord as well as from her relationship with the welfare state – the physical structures that she conducts life out of and sleeps in are both afforded to her by these relationships. Improvisation involves working with what is available in a specific moment to garner better odds for an unpredictable future and that is what tenants like this one do.

She is not alone in this practicing of homelessness. Although her act of literally sleeping in a homeless shelter is more extreme than other actions- such as putting items into storage or slowly emptying the house of its furniture and plants as many tenants dwelling-in-eviction do - practicing homelessness is common. This is because tenants dwelling-in-eviction cannot visualize a future with secure shelter in it. One interviewee, characterized this feeling of futureless-ness in the following words: "How can we survive at the moment? So, there are things (for the house) that we would love to buy and change, but we can't because we are limited. We don't know what our future is from now on."

Thus, practicing homelessness is not simply improvising in the face of the lack of a roof or the fact that one sleeps in a homeless shelter. It is a specific temporal orientation, where the present situation of eviction stretches out into the future where there is no end or relief in sight. Tenants are forced to live in this uncertainty and therefore practice not having a home while still paying rent, while still sleeping somewhere, while still knowing where their belongings are.

Other tenants simply started preparing for having to live on the streets. One such tenant practiced homelessness by actively scouting for locations where he could pitch a tent in the summer. He looked up suitable tents, camping gear and other necessities and had made a list of things he would need when the moment of removal would finally arrive. He felt that he had developed an eye for scouting suitable locations to "go homeless" in the upcoming months. This was another way of rehearsing, preparing for and improvising homelessness while in eviction.

Regardless of whether there is physical removal or not, dwelling-in-eviction for many in Dublin's PRS necessitates a corresponding relationship with everyday life- one that prepares to transition anytime from being a tenant with shelter to being effectively without shelter while living at the site of eviction. This furthers my argument that eviction is not simply the moment in time that dispossession is physically thrust upon a tenant, but it is a phenomenon, location and process that dwellers actively learn to inhabit.

Practicing delay

Dwelling-in-eviction therefore not just entails practices of preparation for an uncertain future of being without shelter but also involves coming to terms and working with "eviction time" (Harms, 2013) or the feeling of futureless-ness that I describe above. Eviction time is concretely described by tenants dwelling-in-eviction as a sort of timelessness where urgency and boredom are felt simultaneously.

For the tenant, the urgency of arranging things that allow them to stay on is a dominant feeling. This urgency informs how staying on is strategised. There are many ways in which tenants stretch out the eviction process, such as: i) gaining and combining information from the state, NGOs, housing movement organisers, and neighbours to develop further steps; ii) using this information to then pursue (quasi) legal tactics of delay such as starting a known-to-be lengthy dispute process with the RTB; and iii) direct action. Tenants dwelling-in-eviction know that they are responsible for how they combine different resources in their specific circumstances.

Firstly, tenants must gain information from different sources and use them to their benefit. Nisha, a young woman trying to hold on to her studio which she was being evicted from because of scheduled renovations described her position to me in these words:

My case is proving very labour intensive for me... It's actually holding me in good stead to go through the official channels of RTB, the official channels of Threshold. It's like the system. It's actually like if you were playing a game, you actually do need those cards in your pocket, of those officials... you're linked in with these official people. Because I actually think I would be treated worse if I was not linked in with the RTB, with the EHS, the HAP, Threshold...I have to care because I have to call on these different things.

Nisha names a variety of NGOs and government agencies in the above quote that she has been in contact with. Tenants combine a large variety of resources to stay in place: they “call on” different moving parts of life in Dublin, formal and informal—information from state agencies (such as Citizen’s Information Desk, the Dublin City Council’s Department of Housing in the case of HAP tenancies), CATU, the services of various NGOs such as Threshold (who offer legal representation and verification of NoTs) or support groups, and contact with local elected representatives and their networks. These agencies and networks are the residual traces of the welfare state in the lives of the tenants. The care of the welfare state for many was never truly there (Van den Berg, 2025) however, even within the lack of care, there are certain bodies such as the RTB or the odd local elected representative that can be used for the benefit of tenants by themselves. Tenants gather different advice from different bodies and officials while dwelling-in-eviction. The tenant needs to stay on top of all this information in order to delay their eviction. The tenant needs to organize different sources of information in ways that are beneficial to her situation, this involves a highly expert, flexible and provisional practice of deploying said information to cause delay. The tenant effectively works the situation (Simone, 2021) through improvising with available information.

Secondly, tenants often rely on (quasi)legal procedures to delay their eviction. A first step for a tenant who has received a NoT is to reach out to Threshold, an advisory organization that offers the free service of verifying whether the eviction notice in question fulfils the criteria set for its validity. This is to check if the eviction notice’s inconsistencies can be used in favour of buying more time for the tenant. Tenants that had an NoT also began communication with their landlord through CATU. They drafted letters with local organisers asking landlords to consider the specificities of the tenant's situation, the severity

of the housing crisis and the acute possibility of homelessness as reasons to allow the tenant to remain in place. CATU members' experience with dealing with bad landlords in the past is often used in determining the tone of and demands in these letters. This past experience also informs how negotiation with landlords is escalated.

Another way to practice delay was to begin proceedings with the RTB. Tenants with an eviction notice would often file cases against the landlord questioning the "validity of notice of termination" or on grounds of "unlawful termination of tenancy." This is a more formal delay strategy, as even if the notice is valid or the eviction is legal, starting a process with the RTB means that during the proceedings, no removal can take place. The time that this buys can be up to 2 or 3 months which is the time it takes for a preliminary hearing. This often looks like a mediation process between the landlord and the tenant and leads to some non-binding general agreements. This process drags out for a lot longer depending upon appeals to the decisions. Here, the slowness of bureaucracy, the toothlessness of the RTB (as its advice is not legally binding) and the persistence of tenants in terms of doing the paperwork and showing up to the hearings are all used to buy more time. Even if the tribunal rules the eviction to be legal and valid, legally, the tenants do not have to go anywhere, as this decision can always be appealed in a court of law. Court proceedings normally drag on for long periods of time and this causes further delay. While starting court proceedings can be advantageous for tenants who continue to stay on in their houses during this process, these proceedings themselves are great sources of distress and uncertainty for tenants who have to now navigate a legal system. Some tenants may choose not to confront landlords in the legal system based on factors including but not limited to visa status, documentation, unfamiliarity with the country's legal system as a non-native as some of my interviewees mentioned.

Many tenants are unaware that they can indeed stay in place for so long. Practicing delay is brought to them from repertoires of housing organisers and activists who have been involved in the struggle for housing justice in Dublin over longer periods of time. Therefore, relationality is a key feature of these highly technical improvisations in the legal domain. Effectively, the knowledge required is around how to make the eviction itself last longer, to delay displacement and housing organising is what makes this knowledge available to those tenants with no organising experience.

Third and finally, direct action is also used as a mode of practicing delay. This draws from the repertoire of housing activists and organisers. Some landlords use intimidation tactics that are violent: such as showing up with a chainsaw, showing up with paid thugs or family members, or changing the locks when they notice the tenants are away (CATU, 2025). Here, the repertoire of community organisers is important as well as the recruitment of neighbours into the individual struggle against eviction. This helps CATU mobilise for housing justice while hinging on to an individual eviction case. Direct action can often look like organising a 'march-on-the-boss' which is showing up at an unresponsive antagonistic landlord's house to show solidarity with the tenant, protests and demonstrations, showing up in large numbers to prevent physical removal of tenants being evicted, organising gatherings such as coffee mornings or barbecues on slated eviction dates.

CATU's approach to evictions differs from branch to branch, depending upon capacity, but there does seem to be a relationship between delaying for the sake of the tenant to stay in place and delaying removal to build community and build a movement. Housing organising considers the histories of activism, locally specific cycles of financialisation and changing landlord composition and behaviour while tenants trying to dwell-in-eviction may have signed onto the union in a time of desperation. Thereby, tenants were often using the union as an effective delaying strategy with the goal of being individually housed on a personal level. This is an enactment of two different visions of what is political. In practicing delay, activist organising for housing justice is connected to feelings of desperation and urgency coming from the individual experience of the tenant. This relational orientation of one to the other is integral to practicing delay. Tenant organising on part of CATU takes the individual tenant experience and transforms it in some ways to building resistance and strengthening the housing movement. Thus, delay is also a political practice that takes desperation seriously, as is the call of Lancione (2023). Repertoires of tenants and tenant-organisers and activists interested in a broader sense of housing justice interact with each other in improvising delay.

Overholding: From 'private residence' to 'social space'

Practicing delay is a lengthy process. This means that tenants can and do often stay beyond their first eviction date and their proposed date of eviction by the RTB in case of a pending case and this effectively translates into what is called overhold. The word itself exists in RTB official records and landlords often bring tenants to the RTB on account of 'overholding' which denotes that the tenant has stayed on beyond the date that they were required to have vacated the property. When it comes to overholding, the timing of a slated eviction becomes irrelevant. Overholding is broadly the active practice of staying on in such a site of eviction. This practice is useful to focus on for both scholarship on evictions and for movement building as overholding holds potential for rearticulating property rights beyond the landlord-tenant relationship as I will argue in this section. A Dublin PRS tenant who overheld in his house for more than a year put it this way: "... your eviction date isn't the day that you leave, it's the day that your landlord wants you to leave."

Overholding as a practice comes out of knowing this. However, this knowledge that tenants can continue to dwell beyond the official eviction date in a property under eviction comes from contact with tenants or activists who are already organized within Dublin's housing movement. Interviewees under eviction stated that they realized they could stay on, that overholding was a possible strategy only after having spoken to their local CATU branch.

Overholding essentially looks like dwellers living out day to day life in a property that was already inhabited by them before the receipt of an NoT. However, there are two major changes that take place in this time that set apart overholding as a part of dwelling-in-eviction from renting before the receipt of an NoT. These are: i) the transformation of the dwelling space from domestic to something more porous and full of political potential and ii) the

transformation of the relationship of tenants to the space itself, as transcending the pre-existing landlord tenant relationship.

Firstly, overholding itself comes from desperation i.e. there is simply no other alternative suitable accommodation leading to a situation in which the tenant must overhold. This, however, does not mean that it is a form of dwelling that lacks the political potential for movement building geared towards stopping evictions altogether. Tenants that are dwelling-in-eviction are indeed inhabiting a sense of temporariness with no end in sight that they begin to then improvise with. Tenants thus learnt to improvise with eviction time (Harms, 2013). The relationships that tenants build with activists within the housing movement and the element of temporariness are two key ingredients to improvising the overhold. The fact that every day spent in overhold does not guarantee another one i.e. that there is an inherent risk of violent, physical dispossession present in the everyday is something I identified as reorienting the tenant's relationship to domestic space. Apartments that were sites of evictions were before NoT's sites for domestic life, but through the receipt of the NoT, tenants are directly brought to violent engagement with forces of welfare ruination (Van den Berg, 2025). Here, I notice tenants then opened their private living space to host forms of relationality other than that of co-habitation as family or as friends or simply roommates. Many tenants would host large, public gatherings on their official eviction dates, inviting neighbours, friends, family and strangers from the activist world into their dwelling for coffee, or a barbecue, or sometimes even a sit-down meal. This was not always an easy or desirable transition for overholding tenants. A housing activist who supported a group of tenants in their overhold recollected this discomfort on part of tenants:

...some of the tenants were like 'I'm going to go stay with my partner, actually.' I don't think they meant it in any bad way at all. They were actually, like, they would like some peace, their house is insane right now. They can't relax in their own home. It's not their private residence anymore. It's some kind of social thing or like, political experiments or whatever.

Through a lot of figuring out and despite a lot of tension, sites of eviction during the overhold would be transformed into a space for new social ties and relationships to be formed. This openness to other actors to improvise with and for new relationships to mobilize and fall back on in such a precarious time of being vulnerable to violent dispossession is a key feature of the overhold. Some tenants dwelling-in-eviction mentioned times when their front door keys were handed out to neighbours and local activists so that people could use the dwelling. Often, friends and activists would take turns to sleep in the houses of tenants at the risk of being violently removed by particularly belligerent landlords. This would transform a previously more private and closed housing unit into a space for lively, chaotic, communal living. This would produce a sense of comfort and security for those dwelling-in-eviction.

Secondly, interviewed tenants in overhold said that they were unable to gauge how entitled they were to the space that they were overholding in. This uncertainty stems from how tenants perceive their relationship to their rented space and landlord. Most tenants do not overhold because they want to, they do it because they have to – the other alternative is

often dwelling in the street. However, while overholding, all the tenants I met were cautious about their relationship to the landlord: they no longer viewed themselves as tenants and no longer viewed themselves as dwelling legitimately in the same houses for which they continued paying rent even during the overhold. This says something about the residential-rent-relationship (Byrne, 2019). It is not only a relationship of landlord and tenant based on rent or the creation of value, but it rests far more on a philosophy of and belief in private property and one's right to the same. The transformation of the tenant dwelling-in-eviction to another type of dweller under the overhold is demonstrative of an altered subjectivity of dwellers within Dublin's PRS. Dwelling-in-eviction by overholding is also an increasingly common way of dwelling in a precarious PRS wherein tenants are either forced into overhold or forced into the streets.

This creates an even more precarious landlord–tenant relationship characterized by fear, anxiety and the threat of violence. However, simultaneously, the fact that it is possible to overhold decisively challenges the authority of the owner as the only factor in determining what is to be done with their privately owned asset. Overholding thus shows the tremendous agency and capacity of precarious PRS tenants to articulate another right to inhabit what is an asset for someone else – a right that draws its basis from something other than the legitimacy of private property and grows strength from relational and improvised organizing against evictions altogether. Thus, the relational and transformative nature of dwelling-in-eviction by overholding holds potential as a lens of looking at anti-eviction inhabitation, by taking desperation and desperate improvisation seriously.

Conclusion

Tenants in Dublin's PRS are not new to having to improvise in the face of insecurity. PRS tenants already know what they must do to survive the intense insecurity of the housing market; they are already familiar with the mechanics of evictions and the treachery of landlords. In answering the first guiding question of this paper, I show that eviction is more than physical dispossession or removal of a tenant from their rented dwelling. It is a phenomenon that far precedes the threat of removal and is woven into renting in the PRS. This echoes Baker's (2021) view on evictions being a set of practices that "sustain displacement." But while Baker's (2021) focus is primarily on the practices of evicting, I flip the focus on to those who are evicted time and time again and their activities.

Tenants improvise their own security for varying lengths of time. They do this by developing repertoires of practices of homelessness, by engaging with the murky temporalities of evictions by delaying their own removal and finally by expanding their dwelling units from domestic to public by exercising their right to dwell in their rental properties by overholding. These practices comprise what I call dwelling-in-eviction, a certain type of improvised and organized response to the violence of eviction. The use of the word dwelling draws from Lancione (2023) as denoting ways of inhabitation not necessarily tied to shelter. Thus, focusing on practices of dwelling allows for us to see dwelling-in-eviction as much as a form of inhabitation as it is a form of dispossession. Taking

necessity and desperation seriously as forces and affects at play in the processes of dwelling also means taking the urgency that they employ seriously – I do this by addressing the temporalities of eviction and engaging with the temporary nature of the improvisations that emerge therein.

In this sense, eviction is the “hinge” (Simone, 2019, p.8) that tenants attempt to make the most of through these practices. If austerity and financialization of the housing market – the effects of which are felt through eviction – are processes of welfare ruination as Van den Berg (2025) puts it then certainly, the practices that emerge from my ethnographic engagement with Dublin’s PRS are the concrete and ingenuous responses of those that are on the receiving end of the blows that these processes violently deal. Evictions too then, are a part of this process of ruination – bearing direct consequences on the lives of primarily low-income, precariously employed tenants who do not, however, accept these processes without exercising their own agencies and imaginations to work with(in) these ruins. Tenants exercise their individual agency in relation to collective agency found in their engagement with housing organising and the broader housing movement in the city.

Within evictions, painful and necessary improvisations take place out of necessity that also end up contributing to building anti-eviction movements. Expanding the definition of eviction to include tenants’ acute awareness of it and centering tenants’ practices both allow scholarship to prioritise the agency of tenants, learn from repertoires of improvised practices that already exist and shift the focus from institutions and profit-making entities to the activities of people who make life happen under incredibly insecure circumstances. These are activities of “holding together” (Simone, 2019) and at the same time comprise the vibrant “micropolitical life” (Lancione, 2023) of Dublin’s PRS. Dwelling-in-eviction specifically means to hold or stay on-hold within the process of eviction so that the lives of tenants are held and supported. These activities are full of potential for building movements for housing justice as we see in the final practice of overholding – that tenant’s practices even within eviction can lead to an undermining of the primacy of domestic space as private and housing as an asset that landlords are free to do anything they want with.

Thus, dwelling-in-eviction is concretely and primarily, a set of improvised practices that enables scholarship and the housing movement to understand eviction as more than the effect of landlordism, as something processual and having a mechanics of its own that needs to be understood to see it as structuring the lives of PRS tenants. Dwelling-in-eviction demonstrates “continuity in the violence of ruination” (Van den Berg, 2025, p.80). And, finally, it is a way of inhabitation and serious political engagement with the struggle for just housing that draws from the expertise and experience of precarious tenants who, by dwelling-in-eviction, also generate new possibilities and spaces for organising against landlords towards just housing. Taking the breadth of eviction as a process seriously and taking into consideration the practices of those fighting dispossession at the front lines opens other spheres of life under landlordism for investigation as potential sources of organising power and strategy.

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