LIFE IN BIG RED: STRUGGLES AND ACCOMMODATIONS IN A CHICAGO POLYETHNIC TENEMENT

Dwight Conquer Good

I have lived long enough amidst you to know something about your circumstances; I have devoted to their knowledge my most serious attention. I have studied the various official and non-official documents as far as I was able to get hold of them— I have not been satisfied with this. I wanted more than a mere abstract knowledge of my subject. I wanted to see you in your own homes, to observe you in your everyday life, to chat with you in your condition and grievances, to witness your struggles against the social and political power of your oppressors.

Friedrich Engels
The Condition of the Working Class in England (1845)

At 10:00 a.m. on August 16, 1988, Bao Xiong, a Uighur woman from Xinjiang, stepped out the back door of her top-floor Big Red apartment and the roosting porch collapsed beneath her feet. All summer long I had swept away slivers of wood that had fallen from the Xiong's decrepit porch onto mine, one floor below. Six households were intimately affected by Bao Xiong's calamity, because we shared the same front entrance and stairwell, and our respective back porches were structurally interlocked within a shaky wooden framework of open handings and sagging staircases that creaked precariously in the red-brick exterior of the Chicago tenement. The six households included two Uighurs, one Mexican, one Puerto Rican, one Mexican-Puerto Rican, and myself, a white male ethnographer from Northwestern University. Ethnically our wing represented much of the rest of Big Red, where other first-generation Uighurs, Mexican, and Puerto Rican families were joined by refugees and migrants from Cambodia, Iraq, Lebanon, and Poland, as well as an elderly Jew and Appalachian and African Americans who had been displaced from gentrifying neighborhoods of the city, such as Uptown. Big Red mirrored the global forces of displacement and migration that had grouped such ethnically diverse working-class residents in one dilapidated building.

Although separated by language, ethnicity, and cultural background, the polyglot residents shared the commonplaces of daily struggle embodied in Big Red. By sharing the same crowded living space, they were forced to interact across ethnic lines and cultural traditions. The distinct smells of several ethnic
Life in Big Red

Cuisines wafting from kitchens pungently accented the sounds of many voices and languages in the corridors and public spaces, collectively creating a richly sensuous experience of overlapping difference for anyone climbing up and down the back staircases. After reaching your landing, more often than not. you parted your way through damp clothing hanging from the clotheslines that crisscrossed back porches and extended the laundry of one household onto the threshold of another, your progress punctuated by the robust greetings, cries, and laughter of children.

Within minutes of arriving home on the day that the Xiong's porch collapsed, I heard versions of the story from most of the neighbors whose back landings were structurally connected with Bao Xiong's. A Puerto Rican grandmother was relieved that her neighbor had come to no serious harm but worried about the future safety of the children, particularly her grandchildren. A young Mexican mother anxiously pointed out the loose and missing rail on her porch, and how her wash had been ruined by all the dust and falling debris. Then Bao Xiong joined us, uninjured but still shaken. She kept repeating to the small circle of neighbors: "Oh-h-h, very, very scared. Only me. Happen only to me. Why me? Oh-h-h, very scared." For her, the physical mishap was fraught with metaphysical meaning. She was not interested so much in why or how the porch collapsed. It is in the nature of things that they decay and fall. She sought explanation for the meaningful conjunction between the fall of the porch, and her stepping outside the back door. In her worldview, the precise timing of those two events was no mere coincidence, and she credited the divination powers of a Hmong shaman who lived in another wing of Big Red.

Providing substandard housing to a mix of people from all over the world, Big Red became a highly contested site of convergence and friction between the forces of global resettlement and local redevelopment. More than an inhabited physical space, Big Red itself inhabited discursive space, became a site of cultural production and political struggle.

"Inhabited space—and above all the house," argues Pierre Bourdieu, "is the principal locus for those socially constituted motivating principles that generate and coordinate cultural practices (1977:89). Bourdieu investigates the "practices"—both physical and figurative—on which people dwell and practice everyday life. His study of Kabylia housing demonstrates how the house is a threshold of exchange for both the incorporation and the objectification of a cultural ethos, those dispositions that enable and constrain practice (1990:271–83). He uses the terms "habitus" and "class habitus" to name these "durable inculcated" dispositions and tastes that are a consequence of one's position within socioeconomic space (see also Bourdieu 1984:169–225, 1990:271–83).

The house is a privileged site for Bourdieu because it is an enclosure with thresholds and openings, and thus epitomizes the "dialectic of the internalization of externality and the externalization of internality" (1977:72). Recently there has been a resurgence of interest among anthropologists in this inside-
outside dialectic, in the interpenetrations between global forces and local particularities. George Marcus and Michael Fischer pose the challenge of “how to represent the embedding of richly described local cultural worlds in larger impersonal systems of political economy” and argue that these broader outside forces “are as much inside as outside the local context” (1986:77–78). Leith Murfings has called similarly for an anthropology of the city that comprehensively represents demographic, political, and economic pressures on urban lifeways (1987:9; see also Sariyek 1990).

Urban housing is just such an intersection between macro-forces and micro-realities. Housing encompases intimate and collective as well as public space, and is situated between the deeply personal and the highly political. Housing is a physical structure and an ideological construction. It structures propriety, shapes interactions, and provides a compelling issue around which people mobilize.

Big Red, a dilapidated tenement where I lived for twenty months in northwest Chicago’s Albany Park neighborhood, intersects a distinctively local life-world with larger political-economic forces. In Albany Park, with its deteriorating housing stock—67 percent built before 1939—and a high density of thousands of large multiunit buildings, the issue of housing looms large (Royer 1984:37). This analysis begins by situating Big Red within the larger context of Chicago’s Albany Park neighborhood, a port-of-entry for many new immigrants and refugees. It then explores the struggles of accommodation and tactics of resistance within Big Red, and concludes with the documentation of domination and displacement accomplished by agents of civil society through the rhetoric of transgression and redevelopment.

Big Red and the Transformation of Albany Park

Since the 1960s all new we’ve had everything moving in or moving out and I can’t tell one “who,” because there was no “who.” The big buildings were deserted. There’s a big building down there called Big Red. It’s horrible. It was turned into a slum.

RUTH, LONGTIME RESIDENT OF ALBANY PARK

Most urban sociologists note that Chicago is “America’s most segregated city” (Squires et al. 1987:94; Frennon 1988:124) and journalists echo this theme (Mc-


Clary 1991:161. The South Side and the West Side of Chicago are primarily African American. Albany Park is located on the Northwest Side of Chicago, an area that historically has been predominantly white (see fig. 3.1). During the 1970s and particularly the 1980s the ethnic composition of Albany Park shifted, not from white to black but from white to an emergent third category in the racial and ethnic geography of Chicago, “immigrant” or “diverse.” The extraordinary ethnic diversity of Albany Park parallels that of many Chicago North Side neighborhoods that have received substantial numbers of new immigrants and refugees from hemispheres of the South and the East. In the aftermath of the 1990s census, Albany Park is now a site of redistricting efforts to create a new ethnic ward for Asians or Latinos as a result of population growth through immigration (see Edlin 1991:1; Quintanin 1991).

Housing has played a key role in the ethnic recomposition of neighborhoods like Albany Park. On March 25, 1964, Anthony Downs delivered a speech before the Chicago Real Estate Board titled “What Will Chicago’s Residential Areas Be Like in 1975?” He forecast “many changes” in Chicago’s residential neighborhoods, using three structural factors as causal predictors: the impact of rising real incomes, combined with the aging of the housing stock; the impact of ethnic changes. “In older areas of the city,” Downs explained, “older and less-well-maintained housing will become increasingly difficult to market to rising-income families. As a result, the housing in many of these so-called ‘gray areas’ will gradually shift to the market for either complete redevelopment or occupancy by lower-income groups, particularly nonwhites” (Downs 1964:4). His general predictions about neighborhoods with aging housing stock have come to pass, even though he did not foresee how the category “nonwhites” would expand significantly as a result of the 1965 Immigration Act and the 1980 Refugee Act.

Historical Processes and Demographic Changes

Back in 1907, the completion of the Ravenswood Elevated public transportation line that terminated at the Lawrence and Kimball intersection at the corner of Albany Park stimulated a building boom, and the population grew at a stunning rate (see table 3.1). Population growth and housing construction continued into the “roaring twenties.” The building boom was over by 1930 and the Great Depression of that decade: “By 1924 Albany Park reached residential maturity. Since 1930 there has been little residential development, and, in fact, after a slight increase in population during the 1930s, the community has lost population” (Albany Park Community Area 1982:17).

Throughout much of the twentieth century, Albany Park could be characterized, in the words of one resident as “a step-up-and-then-out” community. After 1932 Russian Jewish immigrants augmented the original population of Swedes, Germans, and Irish. By 1930 Russian Jews were the majority among
foreign-born whites. In 1934, when the population of 55,822 had almost reached its zenith (see table 3.1), it was almost 100 percent white. There were 43 listed under “Negro” and 43 listed under “Other.” It was a community predominantly of first- and second-generation immigrants: 27.4 percent foreign-born white, and 43.8 percent native white of mixed or foreign-born parents, according to “Population and Family Numbers.”

An uncataloged archival paper in the Albany Park Branch of the Chicago Public Library dating from the 1960s, “Changes in Population in Albany Park Area,” interpretively summarizes the history of Albany Park’s transitional population:

Presently Alb Pk. [sic] is in the midst of the second population change since the war and its third in the last 40 years. Original settlement was Scandinavian, German and English. In the 1920′s and 1930′s a middle class Jewish population came in and was succeeded by a lower income Jewish population. Now a non-Jewish population is moving in and the Jewish population is moving away. Population is now mostly either middle aged or older. Few young families come into the area. . . . Between the years 1950 and 1960 Albany Park lost 30% of its child-bearing population. Community now has a larger number in proportion of older women. Young people are of high school and college age and will be marrying and moving away during the next few years. This makes an unstable community.

From 1940 to 1980 the population of Albany Park declined 18.7 percent, but during the 1980s it grew 7.4 percent (see table 3.1).

Moreover, the ethnic diversity of the neighborhood increased dramatically.

2. Uncataloged archival material, Chicago Public Library, Albany Park Branch. Scattered throughout the Albany Park Branch Library in the cabinets and desk drawers are minutes of committee meetings, North Side Commission memoranda, old newspaper clippings and photographs, flyers and leaflets, and unpublished reports from key neighborhood institutions and groups. I am grateful to the librarians who helped me locate these materials.
Table 3.3. Ethnic Composition of Albany Park by Census Tract, 1970–90

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census Tract</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Latino</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Other</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1401</td>
<td>1970</td>
<td>3,762</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>4,096</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>34.9%</td>
<td>42.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>3,987</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>34.9%</td>
<td>35.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1402</td>
<td>1970</td>
<td>5,570</td>
<td>88.9%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>5,294</td>
<td>44.5%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>34.2%</td>
<td>35.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>5,873</td>
<td>32.3%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
<td>35.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>1403</td>
<td>1970</td>
<td>5,217</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
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<td>1980</td>
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<td>66%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>6,944</td>
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<td>1.0%</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>1404</td>
<td>1970</td>
<td>6,423</td>
<td>98.4%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>91.7%</td>
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<td>7.0%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>5,479</td>
<td>76.2%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
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<td>1405</td>
<td>1970</td>
<td>2,106</td>
<td>84.9%</td>
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<td>7%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>13%</td>
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<td>1980</td>
<td>3,064</td>
<td>71.5%</td>
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<td>16.7%</td>
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<td>1406</td>
<td>1970</td>
<td>7,328</td>
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<td>0%</td>
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<td>2.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>9,040</td>
<td>59.4%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
<td>22.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>8,011</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>33.4%</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1407</td>
<td>1970</td>
<td>7,724</td>
<td>91.7%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>7,600</td>
<td>87.5%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
<td>30.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>8,782</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>47.3%</td>
<td>22.8%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1408</td>
<td>1970</td>
<td>7,272</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>7,174</td>
<td>65.4%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>22.9%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>7,381</td>
<td>39.1%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>40.4%</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 3.4. Chicago's Population by Race and Ethnicity, 1950–90

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Latino</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>All Races</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>3,978,110</td>
<td>492,285</td>
<td>33,415</td>
<td>17,172</td>
<td>3,620,922</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>2,602,748</td>
<td>812,575</td>
<td>110,000</td>
<td>25,019</td>
<td>3,530,456</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>1,977,280</td>
<td>1,102,620</td>
<td>247,343</td>
<td>42,116</td>
<td>3,169,359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>1,381,359</td>
<td>1,117,908</td>
<td>422,063</td>
<td>33,743</td>
<td>3,008,072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>1,036,048</td>
<td>1,067,711</td>
<td>565,852</td>
<td>104,118</td>
<td>2,784,776</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census
Note: The total for all races is not necessarily the total for the other four categories since airm individuals may be counted in two columns.

During the decades of the 1980s. From an immigrant but overwhelmingly white neighborhood. Albany Park has changed to a neighborhood with a minority of nonwhites during the 1980s. At the same time that the total population of the neighborhood bound 7.4 percent, the number of whites declined 40 percent. blacks increased 58 percent, Latinos increased 73.4 percent, and Asians increased 83.6 percent. According to the 1990 census figures, African Americans now make up 3.4 percent, Latinos 31.8 percent, and Asians 24.1 percent of the population of Albany Park (see Hinz 1991a). With twice as many Asians as in Chinatown on the near South Side, Albany Park is now the city's biggest Asian neighborhood (Quilan 1991).

The total population of Chicago declined 7.4 percent. The number of whites declined 20.1 percent. blacks declined 8.4 percent, Latinos increased 29.3 percent, and Asians increased 41.2 percent. Although in 1980 Chicago already had a majority of minorities, by 1990 whites had slipped from being the predominant group for the first time since the city was founded (see table 3.4).

Demographic data from the neighborhood schools vividly reflect the out-migration of the Jewish population in the 1960s and early 1970s and the arrival of new immigrants and refugees. In 1959 Roosevelt High School had been 70 percent Jewish; in 1965 it was still 60 percent Jewish ("Schools," n.d., uncataloged archive, Albany Park Branch Library). By 1988, however, Roosevelt High School was 39.17 percent Latino, 24.01 percent white, 22.29 percent Asian, and 14.2 percent black. This pattern intensifies at the level of a feeder elementary school. In 1959 Hubbard Elementary School had been 95 percent Jewish, and in 1965 it was 80 percent Jewish ("Schools," n.d., uncataloged archive, Albany Park Branch Library). Although I do not have precise 1988 data for Hubbard, its students are overwhelmingly new immigrants, with more than fifty languages and dialects spoken.

The middle-class Jewish population has been replaced not only by immigrants and refugees from all over the world but also by a large number of Appalachian and working-class whites (Royer 1984:37). Public Aid statistics

3 The "Asian" category includes Middle Easterners.
Table 3.8 Ethnic Composition of Chicago, Albany Park, and Census Tract 1401,1 1970-90

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White (%)</th>
<th>Black (%)</th>
<th>Latino (%)</th>
<th>Asian (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chicago</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albany Park</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>91.5</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>24.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Census Tract 1401</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>42.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>33.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census; Local Community Fact Book, Chicago Metropolitan Area 1990.

'Little Beirut' area where Big Red is located.

show that whites living in census tracts dominated by nonwhites receive public assistance in disproportionate numbers to their percentage of the population. These tracts illustrate this pattern: in Census Tract 1401, whites represent 20 percent of the population and 31 percent of Public Aid recipients; in 1403, whites represent 38 percent of the population and 57 percent of Public Aid recipients; and in 1407 whites represent 27 percent of the population and 42 percent of Public Aid recipients. Whites in Albany Park have a fertility rate of 70, compared to the citywide fertility rate of 52 for whites. Albany Park ranks ninth among Chicago's seventy-seven neighborhoods in the fertility rate of white women, and demographers connect high fertility rate among white women with low level of education (Bousfield 1989:16-18).

The northeast corner of Albany Park, Census Tract 1401 (known on the streets as "Little Beirut") has been the vanguard of Albany Park's demographic change (see map and tables 3.3, 3.5, 3.6). Little Beirut has the greatest population, density, and residential deterioration in Albany Park. With high concentration of large, multistory apartment buildings owned by absentee landlords, it is the gateway for new immigrants into Albany Park. In 1970, Little Beirut was 36.1 percent foreign-born, compared to 22.2 percent for Albany Park as a whole. In 1980, 54 percent of the Little Beirut population was foreign-born, compared to 36.3 percent for Albany Park (Royer 1984:356). The Latino population of Albany Park—now quickly closing the gap with whites (table 3.8)—settled first in Little Beirut. Even though Census Tract 1407, the

most populous in Albany Park, now has the highest percentage of Latinos, 47.1 percent, in 1970 it had only 6.4 percent, compared to 14 percent Latinos in Little Beirut. In 1970, when Albany Park was only 8.5 percent nonwhite, Little Beirut was 18 percent nonwhite. Viewed in light of Albany Park changes over time, Little Beirut has been a bellwether more than an anomaly. Perhaps that is why it commands such interest from established residents; more than just a dramatic contrast, it functions as an augury of things to come.

Viewed within the "ethnographic present," however, Little Beirut appears in be the extreme case, even within a demographically interesting neighborhood like Albany Park. Whereas census figures for Albany Park reflect a fall in white population, from 91.5 percent in 1970 to 80.7 percent in 1990, whites in 1990 are still the largest group overall. In Little Beirut, however, whites, at 23 percent, are ranked third—behind Asians, who are the largest group with 35.4 percent, followed closely by Latinos with 34.9 percent of the 1990 population. Little Beirut has the largest concentration of African Americans, 57.7 percent of the population. Compared to 3.4 percent for Albany Park as a whole (see table 3.5), Little Beirut had a higher percentage of Asians than any other census tract in the city, except two in Chinatown (Flores, Bousfield, and Chin 1990:19).

According to 1990 census figures, however, Census Tract 1402, immediately east of Little Beirut, now has a higher percentage of Asians (see table 3.3).

Table 3.6. Census Tract 1401* Births by Ethnicity, 1970-87

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Latino</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Av. # in</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>33</td>
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<td>106</td>
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Sources: City of Chicago, Department of Planning. I am grateful to Marie V. Bousfield, City Demographer, for releasing these unpublished data.

*The "Little Beirut" area where Big Red is located.
Little Beirat has the highest percentage of Public Aid recipients among Albany Park's eight census tracts; 13.19 percent, compared to 7.89 percent for Albany Park (see table 1.7). In 1980, only 15.9 percent of its housing units were owner occupied, compared to 31.8 percent for Albany Park. The rate of overcrowding (more than one person per room) — perhaps the statistic most revealing of poverty — is 20.1 percent in Little Beirat, compared to 9 percent for Albany Park as a whole.

Middle-class white residents define Little Beirat as the alien, threatening "Other" of Albany Park. Here is the interpretive assessment of a young Jewish real estate agent, the grandson of longtime residents of Albany Park, who now works there:

That's a war zone. That's the nastiest area in Albany Park. You don't even want to be there at night. Shit — that's the worst. All those big rental units — no one has a commitment to the property. I almost sold a two-unit on Ainslie. We were ready to close, a Vietnamese woman. But she had a brother who lived in the area. She said she just wanted to check with him before she closed on the deal. Oh man! He told her, "Don't even consider it. Don't even think about it. You don't want to even think about being there at night."

A municipal report describes Little Beirat this: "Housing conditions . . . are poor, and this area has physically declined. Deferred maintenance, disinvestment and the deterioration of Kedzie Avenue have created the perception that this is not a good place to live. Gang-related incidents and graffiti reinforce this image." (Albany Park Community Area 1982:40). A white policeman confided: "Let me put it to you this way: I'm carrying a gun, and I wouldn't come into this area after dark if I didn't have to." His partner described Little Beirat as "the underbelly of the district."

Established residents cast their positive images of Albany Park against the negative Other of Little Beirat and, by extension, Big Red. Through synecdochic extensions, Little Beirat absorbs and intensifies most of the tensions reverberating around the historic transformations of Albany Park. Little Beirat is on the edge of Albany Park, literally and figuratively, and the edges, margins, and borders of a culture are always intensely contested zones charged with power and danger (Douglas 1966; Bakhtin 1984). People need concrete symbols through which they can grasp elusive meanings and discharge deep and contradictory feelings. Big Red is a particularly powerful symbol for the middle class, because it naturalizes property and people. The disturbing signifying powers of Big Red contradict other signs of neighborhood revitalization.

Commercial and Economic Development

Established residents formed the North River Commission (NRC) in 1962 out of three powerful community institutions — Swedish Covenant Hospital, North Park College and Seminary (the Swedish Covenant Church), and Albany Park Bank — to forestall neighborhood decline and decay that was already evident. In the late 1970s, Albany Park hit bottom. In 1977 there was a 29 percent vacancy rate on the commercial strip, which included seven adult bookstores, three massage parlors, an X-rated movie theater, and a predominance of used-furniture and secondhand thrift stores. The number of home sales plunged from 1,122 in 1979 to 580 in 1980. In 1977, however, the Lawrence Avenue Development Corporation (LADCOR), an arm of NRC, invented the Streetscape Program and persuaded the city of Chicago to fund it. In 1978 Lawrence Avenue became the first commercial area in Chicago under this program to receive new trees, street and pedestrian lights, and benches without advertisements at a cost of more than $7 million to the city (Cornell 1990:15).

In 1981 LADCOR spurred the city to launch the Facade Rebatl Program. The plan provides a 30 percent cash rebate for property owners or tenants who renovate storefronts in accordance with guidelines set by LADCOR and the city. In Albany Park, 192 of 750 storefronts have been renovated through this program, representing $2.5 million in storefront improvements. No other neighborhood in the city even comes close to matching Albany Park's participation in the Streetscape and Facade Rebatl Programs. Other commercial strips such as Howard Street and Devon Avenue to the north have renovated ten to twenty storefronts through this program ("Looking Good Getting Tougher," News Star, 29 August 1989, p. 1).

Strategically planned large-scale commercial developments followed the success of the Streetscape and Facade Rebatl programs. The Albany Park

Table 1.7. Percent of Albany Park Population on Public Assistance* by Census Tract, 1988

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<td>Albany Park</td>
<td>7.89%</td>
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*Total Public Aid Cases.

Source: I am grateful to Marie V. Bouchard, City Demographer for Chicago, for releasing the unpublished data on Public Aid Cases by census tract for 1988. The population estimates for 1988 were taken from Area at Risk: Chicago's Potential Undercount in the 1990 Census, City of Chicago, Department of Planning, March 1990.

Shopping Center at the sun-down intersection of Lawrence and Kedzie avenues opened in February 1987, creating more than eighty jobs. In September 1988, two blocks west at the corner of Lawrence and Kimball avenues, Kimball Plaza opened with another eighty jobs. In February 1989 Dominick's Finer Foods opened at the corner of Lawrence Avenue and Pulaski Road (an area previously described as an eyesore), creating more than 150 jobs. In May 1990, Albany Plaza Shopping Center opened on the 4900 block of Kedzie, the block immediately north of Albany Park Shopping Center, bringing another eighty jobs (Carson 1990:16).

The revitalization of the Lawrence Avenue commercial strip has been a remarkable success. By 1988 the Albany Park community area was generating $8.3 million annually in federal income taxes, more than $800,000 in state income and sales taxes, and more than $180,000 in local taxes (Carson 1990:16). In 1987 there were $14 bank loans totaling $41 million. This level of bank lending compares favorably with those of three other ethnically diverse North Side neighborhoods: Rogers Park, 456 loans totaling $41.3 million; Uptown, 458 loans totaling $45.5 million; Lincoln Square, 457 loans totaling $36.3 million. There is a big difference, however, when one compares Albany Park to an affluent neighborhood like Lincoln Park: 1,655 loans totaling $229.8 million (Kersen 1990:88).

The dramatic turnaround of Albany Park’s shopping district during the 1980s coincided with a startling climb in the number of jobs in the larger Chicago area. As reported in the Chicago Tribune on April 22, 1990, “Between 1986 and 1989, the city area grew by 12.8 percent in jobs, the region’s largest and largest sustained uptick in employment in more than two decades” (Gonzalez 1990:1). The number of jobs in the six-county Chicago area reached just under 3 million in March 1989, an increase of 340,000 jobs since March 1986. The biggest gains were in the suburban counties, but Chicago added more than 50,000 jobs to bring city employment to 1.18 million, the highest level since 1981. This increase reflects a growth rate of 5 percent (Gonzalez 1990:1). Nearly half of all new jobs are concentrated in what is called the Super Loop, the downtown area and the areas immediately north along the river and Michigan Avenue (Gonzalez 1990:1).

Community leaders link the health of a neighborhood’s commercial strip to the condition of its housing stock. The executive director of the powerful NRC explains the theory behind the redevelopment of Albany Park:

Twelve years ago, the officers and volunteers of the North River Commission advanced a premise, then unknown and immediately ridiculed. That premise was that older, lower income, predominantly multi-family areas that suffer from slum and blighted conditions, do so beginning with the commercial strip or main street of the area. Up until then, the accepted wisdom was that decay began with deferred maintenance and ultimately abandonment of large multi-family buildings. Our conclusion was that if you successfully change the look of the main street from decay to prosperity, and if you provide hundreds and even thousands of employment opportunities, then the housing market can be stimulated into rehabilitation. (Cicero 1988:8)

The NRC “praying” was what a poststructuralist would call a social semantic approach, which stimulates housing within a web of interactive signsifying practices arising from and feeding back into a matrix of political-economic power. Altering the signifiers in one venue has consequences for another domain. Changing “the look of the main street from decay to prosperity” stimulates the “rehabilitation” of “slum and blighted conditions” along the residential side streets. “Every text, being itself the intertext of another text,” Barthes affirms, “belongs to the intertextual” (1973:77; see also Hodge and Kress 1988).

Just one-half block north of the renovated facades of the commercially revitalized Lawrence Avenue, and only two streets west of affluent Ravenswood Manor, stands Big Red. Located on Albany Street, and officially named “Albany Apartments,” the sprawling red-brick building overspills the official image of Albany Park. It belies the shopkeeping prosperity of Lawrence Avenue and threatens the “suburb within the city” tranquility of Ravenswood Manor. Weighed down with history, Big Red is a drag on the development programs that attempt to disconnect or erase the past and to propel Albany Park toward a bullion future. Behind the incompletely and ambivalently achieved “streetscape” program, Big Red stubbornly presents other signs, other meanings about Albany Park. Big Red disrupts the discourse of success and revitalization. It challenges the ideology of progress and development. Its deteriorated structure overflows with a mix of poor Third World refugees and migrants alongside the working class African Americans and Appalachians. It stands as a document of the geopolitical and political-economic structures—of violence and oppression—that caused such a heterogeneous group of people to ricochet from their multiple respective homelands and re-collect themselves in a dispossessed tenement side by side with this country’s socioeconomically displaced and marginalized people. “Within an ever more integrated world,” Eric Wolf observes, “we witness the growth of ever more diverse proletarian diasporas” (Wolf 1982:383).
Dwelling within Big Red

Everyday life invents itself by poking in countless ways on the property of others.


I moved into Big Red in December 1987 in order to begin research for the Changing Relations Ford Foundation project. At the time I moved in to the A27 apartment, previously occupied by an Assyrian family, I was the second white resident. An elderly Jewish man lived in C21. The ethnic breakdown for the other 35 units was 11 Hmong, 10 Mexican, 10 Assyrian, 2 Sino-Cambodian, 1 Puerto Rican, and 1 Puerto Rican-Mexican mixed (see figure 3.2). During the twenty months I lived in Big Red, the ethnic mix was enriched by African Americans, Appalachian whites, more Puerto Ricans, and new immigrant Poles (see figure 3.3). I lived in Big Red until the end of August 1989, when along with all my A stairwell neighbors I was displaced and that wing of Big Red was boarded up. I rented an apartment just one block north of Big Red and continue to live in Little Beirut and interact with my Big Red networks at the time of this writing.8

Initial inquiries about renting an apartment pulled me immediately into interactions with other tenants. Beyond the “Apartment for Rent” sign, there was no formal assistance for prospective tenants: no rental office, telephone number, or agency address. Yet every vestibule and stairwell was unlocked, open, and filled with friendly people. All the business of renting the apartment was conducted informally, through face-to-face interactions with other residents. In twenty months, I never signed or saw a lease. It was a few months before I actually saw the absentee owner. The word-of-mouth way of getting information brought me into contact with a number of neighbors who graciously shared with me what they knew and ventured outside in the bitter chill of Chicago December nights to track down the janitor. Sometimes we would find the janitor, sometimes we would not: he held down another full-time job in order to make ends meet. Sometimes when we found him he would not have the keys.

From one perspective, the rental management of Big Red was highly inequi-

7. The Northwestern colleagues with whom I worked on the Ford Foundation Changing Relations Project were Paul Elkonin, Jane Mattenbichler, and Al Homer, assisted by graduate students Mary Landman, Jerome Klein, Yvonne Goodwin, and Yang-Sun Park. I wish to acknowledge support from the Ford Foundation, which funded the Changing Relations project through the Research Foundation of the State University of New York, Grant 240-1147-A. The Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research (CUAPR) at Northwestern University facilitated the work of the Chicago team of the Changing Relations project. I thank the staff of CUAPR for their expertise and cheerful support. I am particularly grateful to my colleague Jane Mattenbichler, who carefully read earlier drafts of this chapter and offered many helpful criticisms and suggestions.

8. The conditions and people of Big Red can be seen in segments of two documentaries: America Remembers, produced by Don Sil Kim Gibson for the Ford Foundation, and The Heart Broken in Half, produced and directed by Tappert Siegel and Dwight Conquergood.
Life in Big Red

The physical dilapidation of Big Red is evident from the inside. On the other hand, the absence of a managing authority made all the residents interdependent. By the time I was ready to move in, I was on friendly terms with several neighbors and had received offers of help with the move, including the loan of a car. The physical dilapidation of Big Red is even more apparent from the inside than the outside, but it is mitigated by the warmth and friendliness of the people. Indeed, the chronic state of disrepair, breakdowns, and emergencies requires for survival a neighborhood interdependence unheard-of in efficiently managed middle-class properties. Crises create community, but this is particularly true when the crisis relates to physical space that people share over time. When the plumbing on the third floor leaks through the second floor ceiling with every toilet flush, the residents of those two floors get to know one another in intimate ways.

It is the human quality of life in Big Red that chides outsiders. The following NRC memo (1989) captures coldly the physical state of disrepair in Big Red. Even though it notes that “the building is currently fully occupied by low-income families,” it discursively evacuates the human element, forgetting that people transform a tenement into a home:

Due to neglect by the previous owners over the past 15 years, the property has declined into a critical state of deterioration. The building has suffered severely from a lack of any capital improvements. The mechanical systems are only partially operative or not performing at all. Prior attempts at building security have been feeble so that the apartments and common areas are open to abuse by anyone willing to gain access. The major apartment components are functionally obsolete and that, coupled with cosmetic neglect, greatly limits the marketability of the apartments and presents potential health and safety hazards. A few recent examples include a total lack of hot water, the collapsing of a back porch, rats and roach infestation, and small arson fires in the vestibules.

From the inside, one gets a more detailed experience of the building’s deterioration, but that is complemented with a complex understanding of how people maintain human dignity within difficult structures. A casual inspection would reveal scores of housing-ordinance violations but might not capture their meaning in the day-to-day lives of the urban working class and under-employed. The children complain of mice in their beds. Housewives trade stories of “roaches in my refrigerator.” They make stoic jokes about this indignity, dubbing them “Eskimo roaches.” They say that the roaches move more slowly but can survive in the cold. “Just like Eskimos.” One day I opened my refrigerator and discovered a mouse scurrying around inside. The refrigerator was decrepit, and the door did not always stay shut. There were jokes about “super-rats” so big that the traps would have to be “anchored.” These and other vermin stories about aggressive mice and flying cockroaches resemble “fish stories.”
Even highly vulnerable people are not simply contained by the structures, both physical and socioeconomic, within which they find themselves. Through imagination and human energy they contest and create "dwelling spaces" inside even forbidding structures.

The tenants of Big Red exploited the marginality, illegitimacy, and transgressive nature of Big Red in manifold ways. They turned the owner's negligence, which bordered on the criminal, to their advantage. While they suffered, to be sure, from the owner's neglect and lack of building maintenance, they also used his irresponsibility to circumvent typical middle-class restrictions, rules, and "tastes" pertaining to residential life, such as the use of stairwells, courtyards, and alleys. Among women, rapists off a section of the front courtyard and planted a vegetable garden during the summer of 1988. The rest of the courtyard was an intensively used social space: the center was a playground for a group I call the Courtyard Kids, while the fence between sidewalk and courtyard served as a volleyball net for teenage girls. The back area bordering on the alley was converted into an unofficial parking lot and open-air garage for working on old cars that were always in need of repair. Some back stairwells were used as well for during the summer of 1989, when dealers set up operations in two Big Red apartments.

The back area also was used for weekend bracero alley parties. Whereas the courtyard and front sidewalk of Big Red were informally designated spaces for the evening sociability of women and children, the back alley, at night and on weekends, was a masculine space, so marked by one section of the back wall used as a urinal. This is the time when braceros shared the price of a case of beer, with a sensibly enforced code that those who were unemployed or newly arrived would be graciously exempted from any pressure to contribute. For those holding jobs, it was a source of esteem to assume a greater responsibility for financing these parties. This was a time for dramatizing the hardy stubbornness of their jobs by complaining about sore backs, tight muscles, blisters, and cut hands. Friendship networks of exchange and sharing developed at these alley parties. It was a sign of my acceptance when I was first invited to join these parties and them allowed, after initial protest, to contribute to the cost of a case of beer. Soon afterward, the three neighbors who worked at the Easy Spuds potato chip factory began offering me free sacks of potatoes that they brought from work. Both the tests and the labor that helped me mount the steel security gate next to my back door came from contacts made at the bracero parties. The front stairwells and lobbies were prime sites for display of gang graffiti, and during the winter the stairwells were used as aprilower rooms for social drinking, talk, and smoking. In some respects, the residents had more autonomy and scope for use of Big Red than would have been possible within a better maintained, middle-class building.
The Courtyard Kids

De Certeau’s discussion of spatial practices is eloquently apt for the Courtyard Kids: “To practice space is thus to render the joyful and silent experience of childhood; it is in a place to be other and to move toward the other” (1984:110, emphasis in original). Big Red lacked many material amenities but was rich in children. Its families typically were large. For example, I shared my stairwell with two families with six children each, two families with four children each, and another family with three children. Mrs. Gutierrez, who lived in my stairwell, had reared nine children in Big Red; all of them visited frequently with a retinue of grandchildren in tow. Across the courtyard, an Assyrian family had ten children.

Children naturally are threshold-crossers and boundary-benders. Curious, inquisitive, spared the self-consciousness that descends at adolescence, children are most open to others. Although there was a great deal of interaction among all the groups within Big Red, the free-for-all mingling of ethnicities was most intense among the Courtyard Kids, even when they played up the block at River Park.

The courtyard, extending into surrounding sidewalks and the street, was their space. There were no Nintendos in Big Red. As apartments were crowded and without air conditioning, the courtyard was far more inviting and exciting than any private apartment. In the shared public space of the courtyard, twenty to thirty kids, sometimes more, could organize games of dodgeball or improvise mud fights. Even in the cold Chicago winters, the courtyard was the place where the children of Big Red passed the time, throwing snowballs and building snowmen (see Sutlej 1968:75–77).

What few toys or items of sports equipment the children possessed, they shared with the group. The one football in all of Big Red belonged to a little Hmong boy in my stairwell. This football was enjoyed by all the children in lusty contested courtyard games between “Assyria” and “Chinatown.” Actually, the team on which one played had more to do with the time one joined the game than ethnicity. Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, whites, Cambodians, Assyrians, African Americans—all played interchangeably for “Assyria” or “Chinatown.” Mothers served as courtyard monitors, using English to resolve disputes in the larger group and using their native language when checking on their own children. The mothers clustered at the sidelines and chatted among themselves while observing the play of the Courtyard Kids. Sometimes a mother would join a game as a player, particularly if there were no other women in the courtyard with whom to visit. Often I saw Mexican, Hmong, Assyrian, and (later during my tenure) Appalachian mothers visiting among themselves while sharing child-supervision responsibilities. Mothers also cooperated in feeding the hungry children after a period of vigorous play. As a result, the Hmong children were introduced to pita bread from the Assyrian households, and this be-
came one of their favorite foods. One white mother of three who moved into Big Red in 1989 was quickly absorbed into the nurturing network constituted around the Courtyard Kids. She proudly remarked how all the kids called her Mom.

When an African-American family moved into Big Red during 1989, no one commented except white families. At first, an Appalachian family made some racist remarks, and the white mother whom all the Courtyard Kids called Mom asked that her mother had said, "Those Black kids better not start calling me grandma!" But her son soon started playing with the African-American child, and that opened up relations between the two households. The white family helped their African-American neighbors find a new job. The white and African-American fathers began working together on back-alley mechanical repairs for their weather-beaten cars. One day the white mother saw the eight-year-old African-American son doing some mischief, and she took him by the hand and returned him to his mother's apartment, where both women scolded him. On another occasion, passing through the alley, I saw the teenage son from the white family carrying sacks of groceries up the back stairwell and inside the apartment for the African-American family.

During the summer of 1988, there was only one bicycle in Big Red, and it was broken. The Courtyard Kids often talked wishfully about owning a bicycle. One kid told me that his father said that maybe when he graduated from eighth grade the family could afford a bicycle. In the meantime, the Courtyard Kids made do with taking turns riding Tony's borrowed bicycle. Tony (Assyrian), who lived across the street, was called "rich" because he owned both a bicycle and a skateboard.

The sixteen-year-old son of the white family that moved into Big Red during the winter of 1989 had "street connections" that opened up a source for used bicycles priced at ten dollars or less. By May 1989, every Courtyard Kid owned a bicycle. That summer the courtyard became the site of much bicycle trading and dealing. The wheeler and dealer in used bicycles drew in East Indian and Pakistani kids from across the street and Cambodian kids from around the corner, as well as a large circle of Latino, white, African-American, Assyrian, and Hmong children. The Courtyard Kids developed and honed entrepreneurial and mechanical skills as they swapped bikes and borrowed tools from neighbors to tear down bikes, trade parts, and customize their purchases. It was an exciting time. The courtyard was abuzz with the talk of bike culture: "wheelsies," "ollies," "bunny-hops," "cherry-pickers," and "mags." Not only did all the Courtyard Kids own bicycles, but it seemed that each one owned a different bike each week. By the end of the summer of 1989, ten-year-old Stevie (Assyrian) had owned seven different bicycles.

It is not easy to raise a large family in the conditions of Little Beirut. Parents seek, share, and welcome help from others, particularly with the counsel, care-giving, and even disciplining of the children. Mrs. Gutierrez, referring to African-American kids from across the street, represents the community pattern of shared parenting: "I feel sorry for them. They don't have any money. I talk to them like a mother. When they ask me for money, I say, 'You be good, I'll give you a quarter. But if you see you do something bad, no more quarters!'"

My rapport with many of the households was established through the nurturing network constituted around children. Men are important participants in this network as well as women. The bravura alley parties, for example, were off-limits to women, but children frequently inserted themselves briefly into the circle for a hug or a whisper before scurrying off with change to purchase a treat from the musical ice-cream trucks that ply the streets in the evening. As I passed through the courtyard daily and became a more familiar figure, the Courtyard Kids began calling out to me for acknowledgment, attention, and advice. They announced the news of the day and shared their successes and concerns: "Hey Mr. Dwight, it's my birthday today," "These are my cousins—they're living with us now because my uncle died," or "Mr. Dwight, Frankie failed second grade." Parents told me time and again to help them watch their children: "You see my kid do something wrong, catch him—talk to him." Courtyard Kids asked me to accompany them to school on the day parents were required to pick up report cards, so that their parents would not have to take all half a day from work. Several times I accompanied a mother to the school principal's office when a child was in trouble. I also went to the police station with (and sometimes without) the parents to sign out teenagers who had been picked up for misdemeanors. This nurturing network expresses one of the strongest ethics of Little Beirut culture: children are cherished. Gang leaders in the area affirmed the community norm: "We look out for the little kids; we be watching that nobody messes with the little kids."

Not counting middle-class residents, only one person ever complained about the Courtyard Kids and challenged their access to the courtyard. This example underscores the power of this norm, while demonstrating the scrappy resourcefulness of the Courtyard Kids. In the spring of 1989 the absentee landlord hired an Appalachian man as the new on-site janitor for Big Red. He had been a day laborer before he moved into Big Red and lobbied successfully for the job of janitor. He seized this opportunity to make something out of the position. One of his first acts was to buy (with his own money) a flashing neon sign that said "Building Manager" and mount it in his window. As a way of undercutting his pretensions, the residents nicknamed him Mr. Jethro, after the television character from "Beverly Hillbillies.

Although in his income levels, dress, speech, and apartment decor Mr. Jethro was as far away from the middle class as any other Big Red resident, he had aspirations for finer things. He soon announced to everyone that he was "taking the building back." By that he meant that he would introduce more middle-class standards of taste and notions of public space. Unhappy on his own initiative, and out of his meager wages, he bought "Keep off the Grass" signs and string...
then with ropes around the courtyard. Next he mounted “No Parking” signs for the back alley. He roped off the intensively used social spaces by the back stairwells and the sites of evening *branen* parties for his announced plans of cultivating grass and shrubs.

Soon Mr. Jethro entered into battle with the Courtyard Kids in his attempts to “take back” the courtyard and transform it into a lawn. The kids did not surrender their playground without a fight. They threw eggs at his window, set his door on fire twice, broke all the windows of his car, then dropped marbles into the oil spill and ruined the engine. He was not seen for two weeks; his wife explained that he was in bed “with the nerves.” Then he emerged from his apartment one day, rafted, and one more time attempted to chase the kids off the grass. All of a sudden, Pit Bull’s brother (Pit Bull) is a well-known Puerto Rican gang member, with his namesake dog, bounded into the courtyard and menaced Mr. Jethro. Pit Bull’s brother and other gang members warned Mr. Jethro about what would happen to his “skinny ass” if he ever mistreated the Courtyard Kids again. Mr. Jethro was admonished to fight like a man, if he wanted to fight, and that no man worth anything would yell at little kids. The gang members shoved Mr. Jethro around a little bit to clinch their point, then left.

At that moment, Mr. Jethro dropped his beautification campaign and became quite conciliatory toward the Courtyard Kids. On one of the hot Sundays later in the summer he hooked up a water sprinkler in the middle of the courtyard for the kids to run and splash through. He brought a lawn chair out to the sidewalk, where he spent a pleasant afternoon watching the kids play around the sprinkler. For the July Fourth weekend he mounted a huge American flag outside his front window and clamped a spotlight on the sill so that the flag was illuminated at night. Next to the flag he positioned a mena-board sign that he had purchased at a fleamarket with this lettered message: “Have a Happy and Safe Fourth of July Weekend.”

The Art of Making Do: On Kinship, Kindness, and Caring

Tenants stretched scant resources by “doubling up,” a common practice enabled by the irregular management of Big Red. In order to save money on rent, two or three families shared a single apartment. The one-bedroom apartment directly above me was home to a Hmong family with three small children, and another newlywed couple with an infant, plus the grandmother. Nine people (five adults and four children) shared this one-bedroom apartment. The one-bedroom basement apartment sheltered two Mexican sisters. One sister slept with her four children (ranging in age from seven to sixteen years old) in the single bedroom, while the other slept with her three small children in the living room. The Assyrian family of twelve lived in a three-bedroom apartment. A Mexican family with six children shared a one-bedroom apartment. These “doubling up” arrangements probably would not be permitted in middle-class-managed buildings.

Perhaps the most vivid example of this practice is the large heteroglot household that lived above me during the summer of 1989. Grace, an Appalachian mother of six children with a Puerto Rican husband, lived with Angel, her Puerto Rican “business” partner, who brought along his girlfriend, his younger brother just released from prison, the brother’s girlfriend, and his African-American friend (who before the summer was over went to prison), as well as a single pregnant mother and her best girlfriend—fifteen people in one three-bedroom apartment. The household was anchored by Grace’s Public Aid check and Angel’s street hustling activities. Two years earlier, Grace had been homeless, living on the streets with her six children; the girls had panhandled and the boys had stolen food and cigarettes from stores. She had a network with street people, and Angel was plugged into the prison culture, so three to five extra people would “crash” at the apartment at any given time. This household was the most multicultural one in Big Red, embracing whites and African Americans who cohabited with several Latinos and one Filipino. The illicit lifestyle of street hustling and drugs brought together several ethnic groups in strikingly intimate ways. Their mixed household had many problems, but racism and prejudice never surfaced.

The gathering together of extended families and the creation of “fictive kin” (Rapp 1987:232) are primary tactics for “making do” within Big Red. A twelve-year-old Assyrian Courtyard Kid articulated this conventional wisdom: “It’s good to have friends and relatives nearby so you can borrow money when you need it.” Indeed, the culture of Big Red was characterized by an intimacy of interactions across apartments, expressing in part the kinship networks that banded together these households. When I surveyed the apartments at the end of my first year of residence, I discovered that every household but two (one of those being mine) was tied by kinship to at least one other apartment in Big Red. The young Mexican family with three small children directly below me in A1r, for example, had strong ties to the B stairwell. The husband’s widowed mother lived in B1l, along with his sister, thirty-year-old single brother, and three cousins. His older brother lived across the hall from the mother in B1r, with his five children. Their cousins lived in B3r. Further, the three brothers and half-brothers all worked at the same place: the Eazy Spuds potato-chip factory in Elmurst. The families all ran back and forth from one another’s back porches. Rain in A1r had three children, Salvatore in B1r had five, and two or three children always stayed with the single adults and grandmother in B1l, so there were many cousins to play with, circulate outgrown clothing among, share transportation, and collectively receive parenting from multiple care-givers. The grandmother in B1r had high blood pressure (one of the first things I was told when introduced) and was always surrounded by caring relatives. Maria, the daughter-in-law from A1r, spent so much time with her frail mother-in-law in B1l that it took me some time before I figured out in which apartment Maria actually lived.
The emotional importance of this propinquity with immediate relatives became clear to me when I visited the family of a friend of mine, Maria, who lives on Whipple Street. Her two brothers and sisters live nearby, and she was able to visit them frequently. This close relationship with family members is a common feature of life in Big Red, as is the case with Aurelio, who lives on Whipple Street. His family consists of eight siblings, and he is able to visit them regularly. This close relationship with family members is a common feature of life in Big Red.

Aurelio (Mexican), who lived across the hall from me on A3, had a sister with a large family who lived in D3r. Over the summer, two of his younger brothers arrived from Mexico without papers, and they lived with his sister. Aurelio had eight sisters and seven brothers: all but the youngest lived in or near Albany Park. Their brother’s and their families had lived in Big Red for several years. Aurelio’s baby boy was born in the house. Thanksgiving 1989 was celebrated jointly with six turkeys. My first week in Big Red I could not find anyone with the key to get me my mailbox unlocked. Gabriel, one of Aurelio’s brothers, lived on Whipple, passed by, pulled out a knife from his pocket, and forced the door open for me. That incident represented the quality of life in Big Red, the lack of communication between households and the spontaneous offering of assistance.

Aurelio’s family was also tied strongly to the financially strapped family (two sisters and their seven children) who lived in Big Red. The same is true for Paul and Hilda, directly below me, and their relatives in B3r: they had come from Whipple along with Aurelio. The president of the Whipple block club, a white woman, remembered Aurelio and his relatives; she had had an altercation with them that led to a court hearing and the breaking of all the windows on two sides of her house. She described the entire group negatively as “dramatic.”

Another example of a kin network in Big Red was the Assyrian family with ten children in D3r. They were on Public Aid with monthly rent of $450. Unable to afford a telephone or transportation, they were among the most needy, even by Big Red standards. In this case it was the wife who articulated the kinship lines. Her sister and husband lived two floors above them in D3r. The sister drove them to church, which was the hub of their social and economic sustenance (they obtained free meals there and clothes for the kids). The mother lived with the sister on the third floor, but every time I visited the family in D3r, the mother was there helping with caring and cooking for the kids, the oldest of whom was sixteen. The wife’s brother lived just around the corner on the Guimond side, in E3r. The brother’s apartment was one of the more nicely furnished in Big Red. The D3r family depended on the brother for telephone use. The Assyrian family directly across the hall from them were cousins. The first time I was invited to this family’s home for Sunday dinner, the children had picked leaves from trees in River Park; the mother stuffed the lemons with rice and served them with yogurt made from the powdered milk that is distributed once a month at the Albany Park Community Center.

The two ethnic Chinese families from Cambodia were intimately connected. The wife in E3r was the oldest daughter of the family in E3r, and both families helped manage the sewing shop in the basement.

The Huong are noted for their kinship solidarity. Because they lived on the top floor, they were large, and they could leave their doors open. Related families faced one another and shared back and forth, one apartment becoming an extension of the other. The kids ran from one apartment to the other, ate together, and shared the household boundaries. The Huong in the United States have not assimilated to the model of the nuclear family. My observations of the Lao and Assyrian families suggest the same, but the extended-family pattern was strongest among the Huong. The Huong neighbors directly above me had an apartment the same size as mine, one bedroom. It housed five adults—two brothers, their wives, and a grandmother—as well as the four small children of the older brother (the oldest child is eight) and the baby of the younger brother. They got along handsomely in this one-bedroom apartment. The kids skipped down to my apartment frequently for cookies. They were extremely happy children, polite and very well behaved.

This same Huong family in A3, the Yangs, demonstrated remarkably the importance of having kinfolk nearby. In December, when their Huong neighbors across the hall moved to an apartment just across the street because they had suffered for a month with a waterless toilet (it was the same family whose back porch had collapsed in August), the Yangs could not bear to be alone on the top floor of their stairwell. Within two weeks they moved into the courtyard to the D3b apartment in order to close to their cousins living one floor below them in D2r. The mother explained that they had moved because she needed kin nearby to help with child care. This was the family’s third move within Big Red in order to achieve closer communal ties with relatives. Their understanding of “closeness” differed from that of white established residents. First, the Yangs’ departing friends A3 had only moved across the street.
still in the 4800 block of Albany, within sight and shouting distance. Further, their cousins in 2A were in the same building, just across the courtyard. The Yanes, however, wanted a degree of intimacy that required side-by-side proximity to relatives or friends.

Even families from different ethnic groups expressed their friendship in "the idiom of kinship" (Stack 1974). The Mexican family in 2A told me that their new downstairs neighbors (Appalachians) in 1Cr were their "cousins." They claimed knowledge of a family tree that traced the Appalachians' family roots back to Spain, where the connection was made with the Mexicans' forebears. When I pressed the Mexican teenager who told me this, he did not know the specifics. But that did not seem to matter; he was delighted to have "relatives" living directly below him. He informed me that his neighbors—"call them "cousins"—had told his family that they were also related to him, tracing their Irish side to my Scots background.

This interconnectedness with intimate others is highly functional for the people of Big Red. Carol Stack notes: "The poor adopt a variety of tactics in order to survive. They immerse themselves in a domestic circle of kinfolk who will help them... Friends may be incorporated into one's domestic circle" (1974:29). Notwithstanding the unpleasant physical conditions, Big Red was an extraordinarily pleasant and human place to live because of the densely interwoven kin and friendship networks. My neighbors were not self-sufficient; therefore, they did not privilege self-sufficiency in the same way that the white middle class does. Sometimes they had difficulty making it from one paycheck to the next. They worked at connecting themselves to one another with reciprocal ties of gift-giving and the exchange of goods and services, as well as the less tangible but extremely important mutual offerings of respect and esteem. What Jane Adams observed almost a century ago still applies to Big Red: "It became permanently impressed with the kindness of the poor to each other; the woman who lives upstairs will willingly share her breakfast with the family below because she knows they are hard up; the man who boarded with them last winter will give a month's rent because he knows the father of the family is out of work" (Adams 1910:123-24).

This ethic of care and concern for one another cuts across ethnic groups. The older sister of the Cambodian-Chinese family in 1Cr cut the hair of Latino neighbors, and the Latino youths in turn "looked out for" her family. I was amazed when the sixteen-year-old Mexican from the basement apartment walked through the courtyard on her way to the high school prom. She was beautifully dressed, with all the accessories. I knew that this household of nine sharing a one-bedroom apartment did not have the resources to finance such an outfit. I learned later that the dress had been borrowed from an aunt, the shoes from a neighbor, the purse from a cousin, and the hairbow from another neighbor, and that her hair had been styled by the Cambodian neighbor.

This ethos of solidarity was expressed in the common greeting—used by Latino, Hmong, Assyrian—"Where are you going?" "Where have you been?" "I haven't seen you for a while." They expected answers and explanations. They were interested in one another's business. It was from the Mexicans that I learned the Hmong paid $20 a month for their garden plots in the vacant lot down the street. An Assyrian man I had not yet met knocked on my door one day and asked me whether I could help him patent an invention. He explained, "I look through your window and see all the books and thought you must have a book on this."

Talking my cue from neighbors, I started a back-porch "garden" in June 1988. Within the first week of setting out the pots, I had gifts of seeds and cuttings from four of my immediate neighbors.

One of the poignant examples of interethnic sharing deserves a full transcription. Ching, a small eight-year-old Hmong boy from 1Cr, approached me one day in the courtyard.

**Ching:** Mr. Dwight, do you know Julio (twenty-year-old Mexican resident of Big Red)?
**DC:** Yes.
**Ching:** Obviously (touche) Is he gang?
**DC:** In order not to violate street ethics, I declined Ching's question.
**DC:** Why are you worried about that, Ching?
**Ching:** Nard (at ground, voice sad) Because he's my friend.
**DC:** He's your friend, too. How is he your friend, Ching?
**Ching:** Because he's nice to me. He always gives me lots of toys, the toys he used to play with when he was a kid.
**DC:** Why do you think he's in a gang?
**Ching:** Because people say he's gang.

As the example of Ching makes clear, people value the intangibles of friendship and caring as much as the tangibles of money, food, or toys that change hands. That is not to deprecate the real need for material support. Julio's hand-me-down toys are the only ones Ching has. Ching's family moved into Big Red because they had lost their savings on a house they bought. The house had been burglarized twice, and they had lost everything. The father told me that they had moved into Big Red to recoup, to start over again.

The other Courtyard Kids were as poor as Ching. One day as I was passing through the courtyard Azzid (Assyrian) came running up to me, calling out. "Hey Mr. Dwight, today's my birthday. I'm thirteen. I'm a teenager. Tony [cousin who lives across the hall] and I have the same birthday. He's twelve. So my dad said that we can't afford to do two birthdays. So this year we will do his. And next year we will do mine." I spontaneously decided to take Azzid and his eleven-year-old brother for the treat of his choice. He chose McDonald's. Before placing his order, he conferred with me about the total price, worried that I might not be able to afford his Big Mac, fries, and small Coke. The boys told me that this was the third time in their life they had been out to eat.
All the Courtyard Kids were very conscious of the price of things. When I returned from shopping, they rushed to carry my grocery bags and ask the prices of items. Often one or two of them walked to the grocery store with me. They had a clear sense of price differentials at the local stores. Poo, an eighteen-year-old Hmong boy informed me: “Dominick’s is cheaper than Jewel’s, but Aldi’s is the cheapest. Vanilla wafers are 79 cents and at Dominick’s they’re $1.09. But bags [at Aldi’s] are 4 cents so we just carry the stuff in our hands.” Observing me as I bought a newspaper, a Courtyard Kid remarked, “Newspapers is wasting your money, isn’t it, Mr. Dwight? ‘Cause you can get the news free from TV.”

My neighbors have borrowed a variety of things from me: money for milk, newspapers, pliers, dustpan, toilet paper, flashlight, books, suitcases, hair dryer, Band-Aids, aspirin, toothache medicine, videocassettes, cancha medicine, and clothes. Not everyone who borrows from me lives in Big Red. Propinquity affects the frequency and intensity of borrowings. The Mexican–Puerto Rican family directly across the hall from me borrowed the most costly items. The two teenage girls borrowed my camera. But that came after months of interaction. When Aurelio returned to Mexico for a short visit and Carmen’s telephone stopped functioning, she borrowed my unit and plugged it into the outlet in her apartment. She did not directly ask to borrow it. She met me in the stairwell and asked me first whether I could fix her defective telephone. Then she confessed how frightened she was at night, being alone with six children. When I offered her the use of my telephone, she was appreciative but worried that sometimes I had to go out in the evening and she would be stranded. Finally, I recognized her indirect request and offered her my entire telephone. She protested but soon gratefully accepted the offer. This family also requested my services as a photographer at the joint baptism of their baby son Alfredo and four of his cousins, as well as the quinceañera celebration of Aurelio’s goddaughter. Carmen asked me whether on washdays she could extend her clothesline across my back porch.

In return, the family did many favors for me. They kept an eye on my place when I was away. They gave my rent to the landlord, thus freeing me from having to stay home on rent-collection days. They offered me rides in their car when they saw me walking on the street. They cooked meals for me and shared their intimate family problems and life celebrations with me: baptisms, birthdays, circuncisions. Aurelio invited me to the alley parties of the bravas. During the water shutoff in June, they began looking for another apartment; finding a building that had two vacancies, they suggested that I could move with them. When they actually moved in November because of a fight with the landlord, I bought the floor-to-ceiling steel security gate Aurelio had installed on his back door. He and a nephew mounted it for me.

I was the recipient of manifold kindnesses from other neighbors throughout Big Red. The Hmong who lived directly above me gave me a hand-embroidered textile wall hanging and a beaded window hanging they had made. Mrs. Gutierrez (Puerto Rican), the “dean” of Big Red, was concerned about mail getting stolen from my mailbox with its defective lock. Consistent with her senior woman-in-the-building status, she took charge of the situation. Without consulting me, she instructed the Puerto Rican mailman, whom she had known for years, to put all my mail in her box—she has one of the few locked mailboxes. Then she would copy me from her window as I walked through the courtyard and would station herself at the top of the stairwell, smiling grandly with my mail in hand. Until another neighbor showed me how to fix my lock, I was dependant on Mrs. Gutierrez for my mail.

The Big Red ethos of familiarity and reciprocity continues, for even though many of us have been displaced from the building, we still live in the area. In early July 1990, two teenagers (Assyrian and Mexican) snared me as I carried a bag of groceries down one of the streets of Little Beirut. Consistent with local custom, they examined what was in my bag and said, “Thanks, Dwight,” as they reached for two yogurts. There was no need to ask for the food. The nature and history of our relationship enabled them to assume this familiarity. Two days later, as they were riding around the neighborhood, they spotted me again and pulled the car over; the Assyrian fellow leaned out the window and offered me some of his food: “Hey Dwight, you want some of this shake?” These two incidents capture the quality of life in the Big Red area. At a micro-level, every day is filled with a host of significant kindnesses and richly nuanced reciprocities. To use a term from the streets, people are “tight” in Little Beirut (meaning tightly connected, not “tightly” with their money). These micro-level courtesies provide a buffer against the macro-structures of exclusion and oppression. They enable people to experience dignity and joy in structures like Big Red, refashioning them into “dwelling places.”

The fine-grained texture of the daily acknowledgments and courtesies that characterize life in Big Red provides a counterpoint to the blunt treatment the residents sometimes receive when they enter the system controlled by established residents and bureaucracies. Teenagers expelled from school have asked me to accompany their mothers to the principal’s office for reinstatement because when the mother went alone, as one student put it, “they did not see her.” In a communication system that required a different style of insinuation, she was invisible. When I accompanied Mexican and Guatemalan mothers to school offices or police stations, all the attention and eye contact would be directed toward me, the white male. One time, after the high school principal had been persuaded to give one of my young neighbors a second chance, the mother gratefully extended her hand to thank him. But the principal reached right past her to shake my hand. Quite literally, he did not see her. A short, dark-complexioned Mexican woman, she had three factors that contributed to her invisibility: race, gender, and class.

Sometimes the erasure is not so subtle. While standing in line at the Perry
Drugstore checkout line, one of my Assyrian neighbors gave me an updated report on her finger, which had been bitten by a rat as she slept in Big Red. Although the bandage had been removed, the finger still looked as if it had been slammed in a car door. The cashier, a white woman in her late fifties, treated my neighbors very curtly at the checkout. Before the Assyrian woman was out of earshot, and as the cashier was ringing up my purchases, she began talking to the neighboring cashier, also an older white woman. Here is the two of them said, in full view of the Assyrian woman, her husband, her granddaughter, and me:

Cashier 1: Can you believe it? If my father were alive to see what's happened to the neighborhood.
Cashier 2: I know, don't get upset.
Cashier 1: I hate getting upset first thing in the morning.
Cashier 2: They're not worth it.
Cashier 1: I know I shouldn't let them upset me.
Cashier 2: They're not worth it. They're trash.

Tactics of Resistance

The residents of Big Red coped with their oppressive circumstances typically through evasions, survival tactics, and seizing opportunities. They did not have the courage or skill to confront the system head-on. They survived via connections, evasions, street-smart maneuvering, and taking advantage of opportunities. De Certeau describes the "tactical" thinking of people everywhere who must find space for themselves within oppressive structures:

The space of a tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power. . . . It does not, therefore, have the options of planning general strategy and viewing the adversary as a whole within a distinct, visible, and objectifiable space. . . . It must vitally make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers. It peaches in them. It creates surprises in them. It can be where it is least expected. It is a guileful ruse. (1984:37)

The Big Red tenants turned the "absence" of the landlord to their advantage to enact spatial practices and temporal rhythms that would not have been tolerated in well-managed buildings. They had their tactics for dealing with the landlord. Mrs. Gutierrez from time to time would unleash a blistering tongue-lashing on him. She always announced to neighbors, days in advance, that she was going to "really shout at him this time." She would gather more complaints from the neighbors, gradually building up steam for one of her anticipated confrontations, and then, at the opportune moment, she would "really let him have it." Though none could match the explosive force of Mrs. Gutierrez, I overheard many women as they stood on back porches and denounced him.

Perhaps the best example of tactical resistance unfolded when the city shut off the water supply to Big Red because the landlord was $26,000 in arrears for payment. This action was taken at the end of June 1988, during a summer in which Chicago broke its previous record for days in which the temperature rose above 100 degrees Fahrenheit. During the three days of the water shut-off, temperatures soared to 105 degrees.

Attempts to work within the system were ineffectual. I contacted NRC, the powerful community organization, but it could do nothing to remedy the immediate crisis. I personally called several agencies and officials in the city, including the Water Department. It is legal, within the City of Chicago, to shut off water supply for a large building as a method of collecting debt payments. The only result my flurry of telephone calls produced was that a city inspector did visit Big Red during the time we were without water, wrote a report, sympathized with us, then drove away. We never heard from him again. If we had depended on his official intervention, Big Red would still be without water. What all the city bureaucrats told us was that they did not have the authority to turn the water back on until the debt was cleared, or at least a partial payment was deposited. The owner, of course, was unaffected by the city's action. Never easy to reach, insulated in his lakefront condominium, he did not even know that the water had been shut off.

By the third day without water, the situation was intolerable. The gross inconvenience, the outrage of having no water for drink, bathing, or flushing the toilet, intensified by the 105-degree heat, incited radical action. It is hard to say whose idea the final solution was, because I think we came to it collectively. I remember that we were all standing in the courtyard, quite bedraggled and exhausted. Mrs. Yang, the Hmong mother from C31, kept insisting, "We have to do something!" Spontaneously, we decided to take action into our own hands, dig down to the water main, and turn the water back on ourselves. This action was not only unauthorized, it was illegal.

This plan required several steps of coordinated action across lines of ethnicity, gender, and age. The hue and cry raised during the first day of the water shut-off drew in the white Democratic precinct captain, who lived one block north of Big Red. He became involved in the day-to-day drama of the water crisis as it unfolded. He donated his tools and garage workshop for the Hmong smiths to fashion a custom wrench to turn on the water valve. Mexican, Hmong, and Assyrian residents of Big Red all took turns with the digging. This activity attracted several "sidewalk supervisors," many of whom were homeowners from across the street, others just passersby, including African Americans and whites. The diggers reached the water main only to find the valve sheathed in an eighteen-inch sleeve filled with dirt. A Puerto Rican woman volunteered her vacuum-cleaner hose, and extension cords were plugged into the nearest apartment outlet, which happened to be Assyrian. The Hmong ran back and forth with the white precinct captain to fashion the wrench that would turn the valve. This took several attempts. Once they got it to fit, the next problem to
The Big Red water crisis demonstrated clearly that even though marginalized people are highly vulnerable, they are not passive (Clifford 1988:16). This incident is only one dramatic example of myriad tactics and highly creative forms of resistance employed by the weak (Scott 1990).

The Rhetoric of Transgression and Redevelopment

We look at the material solidity of a building . . . and behind it we see always the insecurity that lurks within a circulation process of capital, which always asks: how much more time in this relative space?

DAVID HARVEY

CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE URBAN EXPERIENCE (1985)

On August 1, 1989, the president of Oakwood Development Company, who was also president of the Albany Park Landlords' Association, took control of Big Red. The absentee owner had failed to make his mortgage payment, and the building was being cited in criminal housing court because of building code violations and physical deterioration due to his negligence. Notices had gone up warning of another water shutoff because of the owner's failure to pay the water bill. The court appointed Superior Bank as receiver. With NRC urging, the bank appointed Oakwood Development Company as manager of Big Red. Empowered by the state and allied with community organizations, an Oakwood Development crew used sledgehammers to break into the basement of Big Red to take charge of the utility meters and other facilities.

Almost immediately after the takeover, Oakwood and staff interviewed various residents and quickly pinpointed two drug-dealing apartments, the busiest one being the apartment above me that Bao Xiong and her family had formerly occupied. Oakwood used the crisis of drug trafficking as an excuse to evacuate the entire stairwell. With hindsight, I believe the drug dealers, who were real, became the lever Oakwood deployed to start emptying Big Red as quickly as possible.

When Oakwood took control in August, Big Red was fully occupied and still had a vital building culture and ethos of solidarity. Within four months, half of the Big Red households were displaced. One year later, thirty-one of the thirty-seven apartments were vacant (figure 3.4). Empty and boarded up, Big Red looms like a ghost building. The wrenching violence of this intervention was muted in the euphemisms that Oakwood and NRC used to describe their actions: “turning the building around,” “turning the neighborhood around.”

Oakwood, a multimillion-dollar company that specializes in managing low-income rental properties, works closely with NRC. The NRC director of housing development lives in an Oakwood building. Oakwood and NRC estimate that it will require a $1.5 million loan to purchase and rehabilitate Big Red. NRC Housing Development is working on getting a low-interest loan package through
Chicago Equity Fund® and Community Investment Corporation. The NRC Housing Development director explained the plans for Big Red: "We want to make it a community project—bring together Oakwood experience and profit-making know-how with NRC philosophy and provide quality rehab for poor people. Make it a good solid community, but integrated with the rest of the community" (emphasis mine). The partnership of Oakwood's "profit-making know-how with NRC philosophy," united against the market individualism of "standards" as much as the transgressive tenants, is a classic example of the complex way investment property mirrors "the internal tensions within the capitalist order" and anchors a condition between private investment and the public sector in advanced capitalist societies (Harvey 1985:61). The absentee landlord of Big Red was displaced along with the residents; his locks were smushed with Oakwood sledgehammers on the day of takeover. The competitive tensions and profit-making dictates of capitalism are softened, elided, and simultaneously enabled by the moral rhetoric (NRC's "philosophy") of community organizations concerned with the public good. Community organizations like NRC produce strategic definitions of "the public good," "quality of life," and "good solid community" that are advantageous to capital development. "Community," David Harvey argues, "plays a fundamental role in terms of the reproduction of labor power, the circulation of revenues, and the geography of capital accumulation" (1983:252; see also 255–57).

NRC brought Big Red to the attention of a subcommittee of the U.S. Congress. Frank Annunzio, U.S. Representative for the district encompassing Albany Park, chairs the Subcommittee on Financial Institutions, which oversees the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC). In order to guarantee that Superior Bank would not sell Big Red to the highest bidder without a rehabilitation entitlement—"slumhanger types who would rent to multiple families that would overrun the place," according to NRC staff—NRC pressured Annunzio, who was waging a tough reelection fight because of the savings and loan scandal. He needed the support of Patrick O'Connor, Fortieth Ward alderman; NRC worked through O'Connor, who then pressured Annunzio. Annunzio was re-elected, but at the time of this writing Big Red still awaits repairs.

The NRC phrase "but integrated with the rest of the community" codes the middle-class anxiety about Big Red. Big Red transgressed the system by remaining outside it. With an unresponsive absentee landlord and an array of mostly new-immigrant working-class tenants, Big Red eluded middle-class strategies of containment and control. The plurality, fluidity, and openness that made Big Red accessible and accommodating to new-immigrant and working-class tenants were among the very qualities that the middle class finds forbidding. Situated in the center of Little Bismarck, Big Red focused and displayed
middle-class fears and ambivalences about difference, density, deterioration, and demographic change.

The domination and displacement of the residents of Big Red were underwritten by a rhetoric of redevelopment. Before the Big Red residents were physically evicted, they were discursively displaced. Drastic measures in the service of capitalism were discursively mediated as desirable and natural inevitabilities. Defined as dirty, disorderly, deteriorating, and dangerous, Big Red became ripe for redevelopment, making it "licit to intervene . . . in order to exercise the rights of guardianship . . . to impose "the good" on others" (Todorov 1984:157). To legitimate the wholesale disruption and displacement of families, community organizations, in league with real estate interests, defined Big Red as the alien, transgressive Other that threatened civil order and neighborhood stability (see Stallybrass and White 1986; Skogan 1990).

The rhetoric of transgression turns on a symbolic equation of dirt with danger. Mary Douglas helps us understand the symbolizing powers of dirt. Inspired by William James's insight that dirt is "matter out of place" (Douglas 1966:164), she argues: "Dirt is essentially disorder. There is no such thing as absolute dirt . . . Dirt offends against order. Eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organize the environment" (1966:2). That which is out of place, marginal, different, and therefore dirty gets charged with danger and becomes subject to the moral imperative for correction, rehabilitation, development, all in the name of restoring order.

The rhetorical valences among these loaded terms can be schematized as a triangle with disorder at the apex and dirt and danger forming the base (figure 3.5). Density and deterioration are intensifying links in the extended causal chain that sets up development as a moral necessity. Underneath all these terms is difference, that which cannot be spoken without disrupting the discourse of liberal pluralism upon which the rhetoric of redevelopment draws. The president of Oakwood Development, for example, takes pride in being "a socially conscious real-estate developer" ("His Niche Is Low-Income Housing," Albany Park News, 27 February 1990, p. 1). Sanitized celebrations of "diversity" elide deep fears of difference. Local commercial boosterism promotes Albany Park's diversity as a "salad bowl," "mosaic," "orchestra," "symphony," and "bouquet" of cultures, but these metaphors invoke emblematic icons of the middle-class containment and taming of difference. Fredric Jameson critiques this form of "liberal tolerance":

Much of what passes for a spirited defense of difference is, of course, simply liberal tolerance, a position whose offensive complicacies are well known but which has at least the merit of raising the embarrassing historical question of whether the tolerance of difference, as a social fact, is not the result of social homogenization and standardization and the obliteration of genuine social difference in the first place. (1991:341)

Anxiety about dirt and disorder sets the stage for the elimination of difference and mobilizes efforts to patrol boundaries and purge the environment.

The discourse of transgression legitimizes official systems of surveillance, reform, enforcement, and demolition. A proposal from the Report of the Albany Park Planning Committee, an NRC group, vividly clarifies the connection between discourse and power (Foucault 1979): "We propose that the City use its powers of condemnation to inspect, acquire, demolish and prepare for redevelopment" (unpublished archive, 1980:3). The rhetoric of transgression features three definitional strategies for classifying buildings and areas as dirty.

dangerous, and therefore in need of redevelopment: (1) metaphors of disease and decay, (2) images of flux and instability, and (3) temporal retardation. These three strategies interact in complex and mutually reinforcing ways.

Community activists deploy organic metaphors of disease and decay to identify targeted buildings and urban areas with dangerous powers of pollution and contagion (Sontag 1979). The NRC Housing Development director called Big Red a “blight” on the neighborhood. Likewise, “cancer,” “epidemic,” and “plague” are frequently invoked terms of contamination. This trope is rhetorically potent because it imparts a sense of life-threatening urgency through images of rapidly spreading infection, debilitation, and death. The executive director of NRC unequivocally defined Big Red as casting a deathly presence over the neighborhood: “Big Red is the dead heart of the neighborhood. It’s where it’s situated. It’s the dead heart of the neighborhood. It casts a pall over the entire neighborhood.”

Gangs and drugs are particularly potent signs of urban disease that create re-

The rhetoric of transgression and redevelopment combines the bacterial met-

The boundary anxiety of “immune system discourse” renders confrontations with difference more acute. The symbolism of the vigilant Immune system appeals to “the rules of purity, propriety and continuous production which govern bourgeois reason” (Stallybrass and White 1986:107).

This pathologizing of buildings and blocks as diseased bodies with dead hearts is an indirect way of stigmatizing the tenants, the socioeconomically least advantaged classes, caught in this “spatial entrapment” (Harvey 1985:40). In *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, Peter Stallybrass and Allen White insightfully discuss this “metonymic chain of contagion which led back to the culture of the working classes” (Stallybrass and White 1986:138). The inscriptive link between perceptions of decay and class difference is patent in the following phrase: “older, lower income, predominantly multi-family areas that suffer from stagnant and blighted conditions” (Cicero 1988:8). Densely, crowding, households’ “doubling up” in Big Red and other “multi-family areas,” and “bands of teenagers congregating on street corners” (Skogan 1990:2) are economically constrained spatial practices of the poor that affront middle-class norms of privacy, polite society, and property management. “Spatial practices,” David Harvey argues, “become imbued with class meanings. . . . They take on their meanings under specific social relations of class, gender, community, ethnicity, or race” (Harvey 1989:223).
The NRC uses the stigma of transience to differentiate the "deserving poor" from the "undeserving poor." An expansive quote from a commission staffer is revealing:

"Our vice-president has an expression: "There are poor people and there are slobs." Well, we’re not interested in the slobs. We’re not interested in people who don’t want to live between four walls... We’re interested in poor folks who need to live here because they’re poor. We are concerned that they, in fact, will be a part of the community and observe property rights. But there are concerns about people who move in and out of the community, people who are floaters, who will take and will not give. We’d like to see them move in and out of the community. That’s their problem; we’re beyond the point where we’re gonna sit and commiserate with them. (Albany Park Community Area 1982:44)

"Floaters" and "transients"—also named "slobs" and "trash"—embodies the instability of the "transition" neighborhoods they pass through and upsets. No one wants to recognize that their nomadic practices are economically constrained.

It should be pointed out that the same kinetic imagery of circulation, movement, and mobility, when aligned with entrepreneurial interests, takes on a positive valence. The circulation of capital is construed as dynamic, and mobility is celebrated insomuch as it is upward. Instead of "transient," nomadic capitalists are considered to be "on the fast track." There is control of the production of images are able to play it both ways with the imagery of motion: dynamic and directional for the ruling classes, disintegrative and anarchic for the subordinate classes. The rhetorical deployment of kinetic imagery underpins a "politics of representation" (Shaprio 1988) that is used both to displace certain groups of people and to keep them in a subordinate place.

Like motion, time is strategically manipulated in the discourse of redevelopment. As a term, "development" has the same temporal ring as "growth," "progress," "modernization,"—a sense of advancing confidently through time toward improvement, fulfillment, and enlightenment. In Keywords, Raymond Williams charts the political career of "development" and notes that its late-nineteenth-century use in connection with industry and commerce was preceded by its eighteenth-century association with the new biology, when it became the virtual equivalent of "evolution," in the "specialized sense of development from 'lower' to 'higher' organisms" (Williams 1983:121; see also
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stood empty since summer 1990 while Oakwood Development and NRC wait for the best interest rate and loan package for rehabilitation. In the meantime, the former tenants have been forced to relocate to substandard housing nearby. "Those who can afford to wait," Harvey notes, "always have an advantage over those who cannot" (1985:23). The president of Oakwood Development stated this time-based philosophy in a press interview: "And that's our philosophy; it's long-term. We own about 12 properties and we've sold two since 1973. We're hanging on for long-term gain" ("His Niche is Low-Income Housing," Albany Park News Star, 27 February 1990, p. 1). One of Oakwood's most effective methods of emptying Big Red was the five-day notice that warned tenants of eviction when their rent was late. Oakwood trapped and displaced the Big Red tenants with these "temporal acts" (Harvey 1985:29) while the company profited from "appreciation over time" ("His Niche," p. 1).

The people of Big Red have been displaced, but not erased. Victims of the bourgeois "will to refinement" (Stallybrass and White 1986:94) that purged the building, strained household resources, and dispersed the Courtyard Kids, most have redistributed themselves within Little Beirut with their friendship networks still intact. The culture of Big Red survives in remains and fragments.

It is now starkly clear that all the initial talk from Oakwood and NRC about "making Big Red a safer and more pleasant place to live" did not include the people of Big Red in that vision. Indeed, any Big Red neighbors were perceived as part of the problem that had to be removed. The public statements of both Oakwood Development and NRC champion "the rights of poor people to decent housing". "The people of Big Red, however, did not fit into the class of the deserving poor, a category that includes only those who embrace middle-class values.

Walter Benjamin's insight, "There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism" (Benjamin 1969:526; see also Brenkman 1987:3), can be transposed in the case of Big Red to "There is no act of redevelopment which is not at the same time an act of violence and oppression." In the words of Harvey, "The perpetual reshaping of the geographical landscape of capitalism is a process of violence and pain" (1985:29). The study tenants who had coped successfully with the gross negligence and greed of a slumlord, and made homes, reared children, and created an interdependent culture of warmth and neighborliness, were no match for the outside agents of middle-class order and stability who branded Big Red as a symbol of incivility, thus legitimating drastic measures of control and correction.

References


None of the tenants at Arborland, including myself, have taken too seriously management’s threat to evict tenant families with children. It has been over a month since we received the general notice and, to my knowledge, no action had been taken against any of the families in the apartment complex. I assumed, as did many of my neighbors, that the newly established “adults only” policy was designed as a strategy to attract potential young, single, middle-class tenants to Arborland in the context of the city’s current economic upswing. I imagined the policy would be presented to potential tenants but not enforced, since it would amount to losing over a third of the tenants in the back buildings.

That was until today. It’s now clear that management is dead serious about enforcing its new policy.

Maria and Elizama, two of my neighbors, were quite upset—almost frantic—when they arrived at my apartment this morning. Jose, one of the two Mexican-American maintenance personnel, visited both women yesterday afternoon and told them that Jim, head security officer, was giving the manager the names of tenants who had children. Jose told the women that several families had already been evicted. He then cautioned the women to keep their children indoors when Jim was on duty. Maria was especially upset, since she had just received an eviction notice this morning in which it was stated that she and her family had to be out of the apartment in three days. She stayed home from work today fearing that she shouldn’t leave her son alone. Her husband is in Chicago for the month where he has been working construction with his brother and, with no one to turn to, she has solicited my help. She asked me to call her boss and find out what she can do to postpone the eviction until her husband returns.

I called her boss, the manager of a nearby Mexican restaurant, and relayed the story to him. I was truly taken by his understanding tone and even more surprised when he said he would call the