

The Future is already Built

Traditional urban theory often dichotomizes change into two modes: the “top-down” master plan (reform) or the violent overthrow of existing structures (rupture). However, in her work *Praxis and Revolution*, the philosopher Eva von Redecker offers a third modality: interstitial (interspatial) change. She argues that true transformation occurs not by “smashing the machine,” but by cultivating “anchor practices” within the cracks—the interstices—of the existing order. This short text examines Redecker’s concept of interstitial change as a framework for urban regeneration. By comparing the dense, appropriated interstices of The Kitchen (New York) and the KW Institute for Contemporary Art (Berlin) with the extensive spatial availability of Chicago, I argue that Chicago offers a unique, radical manifestation of Redecker’s theory.

Founded in 1971 in the kitchen of the Mercer Arts Center, The Kitchen represents the classic interstitial strategy of the creative class. In New York, space is the ultimate commodity; therefore, interstitiality is defined there by scarcity. The Kitchen appropriated a neglected utility space within a functioning structure, transforming a place of service into a place of production. However, as New York gentrified, this “crack”—this space of experimentation—solidified. The Kitchen became an institution. In this context, Redecker’s interstitial change is often halted; the “anchor practice” (experimental art) is co-opted by the dominant logic (real estate value). Here, the interstice functions as a temporary autonomous zone struggling to avoid becoming a luxury good.



While The Kitchen fought against density, the KW (Kunst-Werke) engaged with decay and made it its own. Founded in the early 1990s in a dilapidated margarine factory in Berlin-Mitte, the KW embodies the specific “interstitial time” of post-Wall Berlin. Klaus Biesenbach and his colleagues occupied a ruin with unclear ownership at a time when the state was in transition. Here, Redecker’s metalepsis operated through the appropriation of emptiness. The KW did not initially renovate the building; instead, they inhabited the “crack” of crumbling East German infrastructure. Unlike Chicago, however, this interstice was a closing window of time. The “anchor practice” of exhibiting art in a ruin quickly became the marketing aesthetic for the “New Berlin”. The interstice of the Scheunenviertel was rapidly filled by high-end retail and galleries. The KW demonstrates how an interstice can be so successful that it unintentionally repairs the capitalist fabric, thereby becoming a pioneer for gentrification.

Chicago presents a radically different condition. The deindustrialization of Chicago’s South and West Sides has not only created “cracks” in the system but has produced vast, contiguous fields of interstitial space. Redecker’s theory suggests that revolution occurs when new practices in the cracks connect to form a new whole. In Chicago, the cracks are often larger than the actual structure. The interstice here is not a hiding place (as in NYC), but a landscape. This allows for a scaling of Redecker’s anchor practices that is impossible elsewhere. Theaster Gates’ work on the South Side occupies not just a single building (like The Kitchen), but entire city blocks. Through the transformation of the Stony Island Arts Bank or the Dorchester Projects, Gates utilizes the “spatial availability” of the neglected neighborhood to create a circular cultural economy. This is Redecker’s metalepsis in action: the form looks like a bank or a house, but the function has been completely metabolized into a mechanism for community wealth building.



Applying Redecker’s analytical framework consistently reveals a startling possibility in Chicago. In cities where the capitalist fabric is still tightly woven (NYC, London, Berlin), interstitial change is limited to tactical urbanism—small, fleeting interventions. But in Chicago, the interstices have become an archipelago of availability. The vacancy of the post-industrial city is not a vacuum; it is a reservoir of potential energy for metaleptic change. Paradoxically, the lack of development pressure in certain neighborhoods protects these anchor practices, giving them time to mature, take root, and network. Eva von Redecker warns that the “phantom ownership” of the old order continues to echo long after its utility has vanished. In Chicago, these phantoms have largely fled, leaving behind a “spatial availability” that is terrifying in its emptiness, yet revolutionary in its potential.

