The Merz Mill and
the Cathedral of the Future

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Introduction

Kurt Schwitters' small cathedral model from 1920, *Haus Merz* (House Merz), provides an extraordinary point of entry for the study of a key moment in German architectural history when artists and architects set aside their divisions to project a new German architecture as a *Gesamtkunstwerk* (Total Work of Art). It is during this time that one witnesses a fundamental change in the approach of German architects towards the use of materials for conceiving new architectural form. Compared to normative design practices that employ drawings and models to materialise an architect's ideas in physical form, Schwitters proposed that architects should find inspiration for new designs in the process of assembling their materials. Haus Merz demonstrates this approach to constructing architecture by reusing materials that have been found already transformed into the products of everday life – a set of gears, a trouser button and a spinning top. In the imagination of the architect, the selection and placement of each material is dependent upon its abilty to change identities and represent an element of architecture.

Early musings on this approach emerged from Bruno Taut whose 1914 article "*Eine Notwendigkeit* (A Necessity)" promoted a turn to architectural building materials
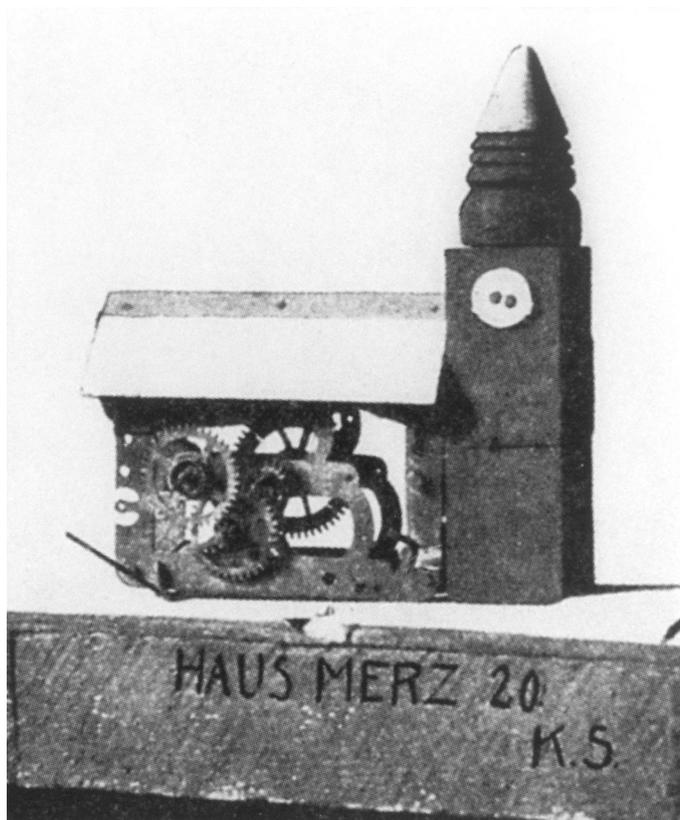

Fig. 1 Kurt Schwitters (1920). *Haus Merz* (House Merz) [Photograph, Kurt Schwitters Archive, Sprengel Museum, Hanover, Germany, © 2013 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn]

as inspiration for the invention of new architectural form. To this end, Taut encouraged his fellow architects to follow the contemporary Expressionist painters in developing a new architectural spirit. What Taut had in mind was not the painting of facades or an "adoption of the external forms of painting" to architecture but to emulate the artistic processes of "construction" in painting in the construction of architecture (1914: 174-5). Holding up the Gothic cathedral as the favoured prototype, Taut called on architects to lead the other arts in creating a new crystalline architecture of glass that would unify architecture, painting and sculpture into a single artistic form (1914: 174-5). After the end of the First World War, his call for a new architecture was again taken up by German artists and architects in the *Arbeitsrat für Kunst* (Working Council for Art). These individuals rallied themselves around Taut's manifesto, *Ein Architektur Programm* (An Architecture Program) and Gropius' proposal for a new German architecture as a *Gesamtkunstwerk*. For Gropius, this new architecture would manifest itself as the *Zukunftskathedrale* (Cathedral of the Future), a structure whose effect on the design of all things he compared to the emmanation of light from a crystal (July 1919).[1]

Following closely on the heels of the *Arbeitsrat für Kunst*, Schwitters identified a similar aim underlying his new Merz art. For an exhibition at the Expressionist Sturm Gallery in 1919, Schwitters explained that "Merz" denoted his artistic transformation and re-assemblage of discarded man-made and found materials into new matrixes. For Schwitters, each object in a Merz work began as a unique combination of material form and immaterial idea that had to be lost through a mental process he would describe as a kind of "milling". Like Taut and Gropius, the ultimate manifestation for Schwitters' Merz milling of found materials was the creation of a *"Merzgesamtkunstwerk"*. Contrary to Gropius' use of a crystal to describe the effect the *Zukunftskathedrale* would have on the making of a new German architecture, Schwitters sought to use Haus Merz as a model for the imaginative projection of architecture through the constructive assembly of its materials. This paper explores a confluence of themes concerning the role of the material and immaterial in Haus Merz that has been largely overlooked by scholarship on Schwitters' *oeuvre*. In comparison to Gropius' *Zukunftskathedrale*, Schwitters approached his materials not as a receptacle for an architect's ideas but a determinant source of inspiration for the discovery of new form.

Merz and its figurative experiments

Schwitters' Merz art and architecture emerged after 1918 following explorations in several genres of art, including Academic painting (1909–1914), Impressionism (1914–1917), Expressionism (1917) and Abstraction (1917–1918).[2] Reflecting on the years leading to his invention of Merz, Schwitters suggested that a new sense of freedom following the end of World War I led him to quit his architectural studies at the Technische Hochschule Hannover (Hanover Technical College), and his job as a mechanical draftsman, to devote himself full-time to being an artist.[3] During this time, he developed a method of assembling found objects into art that he called "MERZ", a term coined after a word fragment in his first collage (1927: 99-100). For Schwitters, "Merz" meant "the combination of all conceivable materials" into a physical *Ausdruck* (expression) of art.[4] However, as Schwitters would later explain, the materials in his Merz art already had an individual immaterial identity he called an *Eigengift* (inner poison) (1923: 8-11). For Schwitters, in order for an object to be included in a Merz work, this *Eigengift* had to be lost through a mental process by which its identity or purpose changed even as the physical appearance of the thing remained unaltered.[5]

1 My English translation of "Zukunfstkathedrale" as "Cathedral of the Future" contrasts with Wingler's "structure of the future" (1978 : 31-33).

2 This chronology of dates is developed by John Elderfield (1985: 14).

3 For Schwitters' military service and employment as a mechanical draftsman see: Schwitters (1926). Typewritten manuscript reproduced in Schwitters 1981: 240-42, especially 241; also see Webster 1997: 29, 40). For Schwitters' enrolment in the study of architecture at the *Technische Hochschule Hannover* see Schwitters (1926). Typewritten manuscript reproduced in Schwitters (1981: 241).

4 In *"Die Merzmalerei"*, Schwitters explained that the term "Merz" meant "the combination of all conceivable materials for artistic purposes" (1919: 580). This English translation (hereafter denoted simply as 'ET') by Elderfield (1985: 50-1); later, in "Merz", Schwitters claimed every combination of materials has a unique *"Audruck" (*expression) that was ineffable (1921: 5).

5 Ibid.

With the exception of a few Merz collages from the same period, Schwitters' Merz works between 1919 and 1921 tended to obscure the original identities of the materials assembled in them. In these instances, Schwitters collected discarded objects, including torn and cut pieces of printed matter, and pasted them onto canvases in various angles or directions making their uses as utilitarian objects, photographs or pieces of text unimportant (2001: 213-433).[6] As Schwitters explained in his article "Merz", the materials in a Merz assemblage were "not to be used logically in their objective relationships, but only within the logic of the work of art" (1921: 7).[7] Compared to these constructions, the selection criteria that Schwitters intended to employ for the found objects used for a Merz collage differed from those he assembled in his early three-dimensional work that tended to retain their original identities.

Shortly after the first exhibition of his Merz art at the *Sturm* gallery in July of 1919, Schwitters began experimenting with found materials to create sculpture and architecture (1919: 580). As he explained in *Merz,* this expansion into three dimensions meant to *modellieren* (to sculpt or model) (1921: 6). In the text that followed, Schwitters introduced Haus Merz as his "first piece of Merz architecture" and included a quote from his friend, the art critic Christof Spengemann, who published a photograph of the small assemblage in his article "Merz: Die offizielle Kunst" (Merz: The Official Art) and identified it as *die Kathedrale* (the Cathedral) (1920: 40-1). Schwitters' statement in *Merz* was the only explanation he made of the small assemblage's intended role in his Merz *oeuvre*.

The photograph of Haus Merz included in Spengemann's article shows an open metal structure filled with gears standing next to a tower-like object supporting a trouser button on one of its sides, confirming Schwitters' own description. The tower of Haus Merz also appears to have the same proportions as a common children's toy building block from the popular German Anker Anker Stone Toy Building Block set (7.5 cm x 2.5 cm x 2.5 cm), making the tower clock only 1.4 cm in diameter, and the spire 4.5 cm tall (Mindrup 2007, 164). These are the approximate sizes of what Spengemann has identified as a trouser button and other scholars recognise as a small spinning top.[8] The entire construction was mounted on a rough wooden base inscribed with a title, date and signature: "Haus Merz 20. K.S." As architecture, the choice and selection of found objects for Haus Merz appears to have been based on Schwitters' decision that they could take on the forms and motifs associated with an actual cathedral. Yet, unlike the normative practice of tranforming materials into specific architectural elements, the objects Schwitters found and assembled in Haus Merz were not originally made to represent buildings or their parts, while the gears in its nave would leave little room for people to congregate in it.

Many of the elements that Schwitters used to compose Haus Merz were frequently depicted in his watercolour and stamp drawings from the same period of time. For example, wheels figure prominently in two watercolor drawings from 1919 including *Aq. 21: Anna Blume und Ich* (Water Colour 21: Anna Blume and I) and *Aq. 30: Dies ist das Biest das manchmal niest* (Water Colour 30: This is the Beast that Sometimes Sneezes) while in the stamp drawing *Ohne Titel: mit Rot vier* (No Title: With Red Four) from the same year, they take on the appearance of gears. Art historians found these items similar to the gears in Francis Picabia's 1919 print *Réveil-Matin* (Alarm Clock) that was published on the title page of *Der Dada 4-5,* an issue which Schwitters undoubtedly owned.[9] Whether or not Schwitters' Haus Merz was directly inspired by Picabia's Réveil-Matin, its overall appearance is remarkably
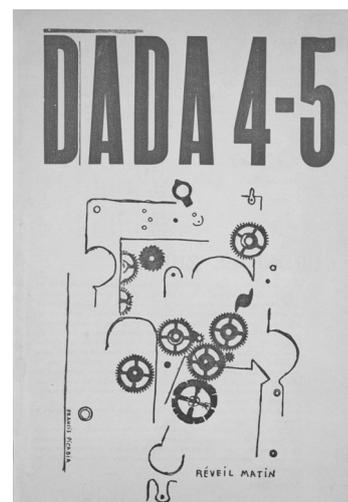

Fig. 2 Francis Picabia (1919). *Réveil-Matin I* (Alarm Clock no. 1) [Illustration: © 2013 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris]

6   There are many Merz collages in which a word or number pasted into the collage have become the title. These, however, do not appear to be directing the organisation of the other elements in the work of art but merely as a way to name it.

7   ET by Ralph Manheim in Schwitters (1981: 407).

8   For the different identifications of the objects in *Haus Merz* see Spengemann (1920: 41); Elderfield (1985: 113-4); Burns Gamard (2000: 74); Dietrich (1993: 170).

9   Elderfield (1985: 45-47. See Elderfield especially p. 47, n. 72); Dietrich (1993: 86, n. 9); Gamard (2000: 75).
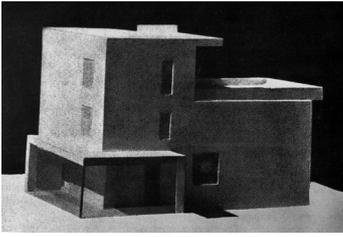
Fig. 3 Walter Gropius (1922). Plaster model of *Einfamilienhaus* (Single-family House) [Photo: © 2013 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn]

similar to the small, naively drawn churches that emerge in his watercolour drawings from 1920: *Aq. 11: Bild Frau-Graus* (Water Colour 11: Picture Woman-Scare) from 1919 and *Aq. 24: Der Kopf unter der Mühle* (Water Colour 24: The Head under the Mill) while in the stamp drawing *Ohne Titel: Drucksache* (No title: Printed Matter) from 1919, a cross on the steeple indicates that they are Christian buildings.[10] Unlike the objects depicted in Schwitters' watercolour and stamp drawings that maintained their identities as cathedrals, wheels, coffee grinders or candles, those that he assembled in Haus Merz represented the parts of another object, a cathedral model.

Nevertheless, despite its scale and Schwitters' naming of Haus Merz as "architecture", architects and historians discussing his Merz *oeuvre* have not come to terms with its purpose. Those who mention Haus Merz refer to it as a "sculpture" of "a model church" or an "assemblage representing a church edifice or cathedral", but not a model for creating architecture.[11]

Haus Merz and the Zukunftskathedrale

That Schwitters created his first piece of Merz architecture as a cathedral model is to be understood not as the promotion of a religious belief but as the representation of a new German architecture. After Germany's defeat in World War I and the abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm on November 9, 1918, many architects sought to join with the Socialists in Berlin to help forge a new German Republic.[12] These architects aimed for direct power within a decentralised government made up of workers' and soldiers' councils by forming into groups such as the *Novembergruppe* (November Group) and the later *Arbeitsrat für Kunst*.[13] In the founding manifesto for later organisation, Taut promoted a faith in the power of architecture to create a better future, a clear commitment to breaking down artificial divisions between the arts and argued for the architect to remain in control of the final design (1918: 16-19). Under Gropius' leadership, the *Arbeitsrat für Kunst* continued to strive for reform by organising exhibitions and working to conceive a new German architecture. For his colleagues, the model for this new architecture was embodied in a unity of the arts as a single structure – the Gothic cathedral.

As early as 1914, Taut proposed the Gothic cathedral as the greatest example of a new unification of the arts (1914: 174-5). In the postwar period, Taut revived this idea of synthesising the arts as a major component of *Ein Architektur-Programm* that he wrote as director of the *Arbeitsrat für Kunst*.[14] When Gropius later took over as director, he again used the image of a cathedral in the pamphlet for the April 1919 *Ausstellung für unbekannte Architekten* (Exhibition of Unknown Architects) (Franciscono 1971: 146-7). Here, Gropius echoed Taut's original call for "architects, sculptors and painters" to break down the barriers between the arts and be unified as the "architect" whose work, he explained, would create a Total Work of Art as the *Zukunftskathedrale* (Gropius 1919). In a speech delivered to the Bauhaus students three months later, Gropius claimed that the aim of their work was to create this *Zukunftskathedrale* as a crystalline expression of a spiritual idea that would metaphorically radiate its light into the design of objects for everyday life (July 1919). It was this conception of the *Zukunftskathedrale* that Lyonel Feininger synthesised into his famous woodcut for the cover of the 1919 *Bauhaus Manifesto* (Periton 1996: 189-205). A few years earlier, Gropius described the work to be created in the new Bauhaus academy as "impregnated with an intellectual Idea – with form".[15] The conviction that one structure could embody all the various arts as the unity of transcendental Idea and physical form ties Schwitters' Haus Merz to the *Zukunftskathedrale* of Gropius, Taut and Feininger.

10   Dietrich reinforces this observation (Dietrich 1993: 171).

11   See Elderfield (1985: 113-4); Gamard (2000: 74-76); Dietrich (1993: 170); Schmalenbach (1967: 129 and 184).

12   Weinstein (1990: 1-25); Rigby (1993: 173-4); Boyd Whyte (1982: 95-102).

13   The programs and writings of individuals involved in these groups emphasised the spiritual revolution of art and a symbiotic relationship with the worker. See Taut (1918); Gropius (1919: 134-6) and Behne (1919: 2).

14   For a discussion of Taut's *Ein Architektur-Programm* and his involvement in the *Arbeitsrat für Kunst* see Whyte (1982: 99-102).

15   Walter Gropius, paper sent to Grand Ducal Saxon Ministry in Weimar in January 1916. After Periton, 190, n. 5.

Shortly after the *Arbeitsrat für Kunst*'s acceptance of the Total Work of Art as the model for the new German architecture, Schwitters identified a comparable aim underlying his own work.

> My aim is the *Merzgesamtkunstwerk* that embraces all branches of art in an artistic unit. First I married individual categories of art. I pasted words and sentences into poems in such a way as to produce a rhythmic design. Reversing the process, I pasted up pictures and drawings so that sentences could be read in them. I drove nails into pictures so as to produce a plastic relief apart from the pictorial quality of the paintings. I did this in order to efface the boundaries between the arts. (1921: 7)[16]

Notwithstanding their similarities, Schwitters was not a member of the *Arbeitsrat für Kunst* nor can it be certain that he had any familiarity with its members or Gropius' *Zukunftskathedrale* when he invented Merz in December of 1918. Conversely, Curt Germundson locates the beginnings of the cathedral theme in Schwitters' Merz *oeuvre* to the early part of 1918 through his exposure to German Romanticism and his introduction to Wilhelm Worringer's concept of abstraction and empathy (Germundsen 2007). Yet, it is hard to imagine that Schwitters' sudden identification of the cathedral and total work of art as important themes in his Merz *oeuvre* during 1920 were merely a coincidence. During the opening of his first Merz exhibition at the Berlin Sturm Gallery, Schwitters would have become familiar with members of the *Arbeitsrat für Kunst* and Gropius' newly founded Bauhaus School. Since 1914, the Sturm Gallery enjoyed the patronage of Taut and his *Arbeitsrat für Kunst* cofounder, Adolf Behne, when, after the end of the world war, it became a source of faculty for Gropius' new Bauhaus school, including Feininger, Johannes Itten, Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee and Oskar Schlemmer. Two months before writing an article on Haus Merz, Spengemann published a review of Taut's book *Die Stadtkrone,* which is probably where Schwitters became familiar with Taut and his work in the *Arbeitsrat für Kunst*. Later, Taut himself must have recognised the relevance of Schwitters' Merz architecture to his own aims when he invited Schwitters to contribute the short article "*Schloss und Kathedrale mit Hofbrunnen*" (Castle and Cathedral with Courtyard Well) for the spring 1922 issue of his architectural journal *Frühlicht* (Schwitters 1922: 87). In his article, Schwitters sought to extend his Merz method of assembling found materials into art as an approach for architects to employ in creating a new German architecture as a *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

Within a year after his first Merz exhibition, he began to explore the cathedral theme in a small book of eight lithographs from 1920 entitled *Die Kathedrale* (The Cathedral). Schwitters did not include a religious structure on its cover, but a hastily drawn flat-roofed industrial mill. That Spengemann published his review of Haus Merz in the previous month indicates that Schwitters' model and portfolio were exploring similar themes. Yet, compared to the lithographs of *Die Kathedrale* that depict abstract compositions of hand-drawn wheels, coffee grinders, clocks, windmills and words, and stamped or printed materials, Haus Merz is a model of architecture that challenged a normative practice of using solid mass models for its conception.

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the use of solid wood, clay or plaster massing models to study the relationships of exterior building forms was a common practice among architects in Germany (Schreiber 1982: 91 and 95 ff.). In addition to conventional techniques, plaster models were also used by avant-garde architects including Taut, Gropius and Hans Poelzig.[17] In these instances, the plaster model required that the architect already had an idea of a proposed

Fig. 4 Hans Poelzig (1921). Plaster model of *Wegkapelle* (Roadside Chapel) [Photo: Badisches Landesmuseum, Karlsruhe, Germany]
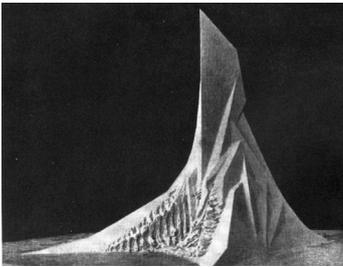

Fig. 5 Wassili Luckhardt (1920). *Konzerthaus Modell* (Model of a Concert Hall) [Photo: Public Domain]

project so that the forms of the model could be accurately fashioned to represent it. Unlike members of the *Arbeitsrat für Kunst* who viewed their modeling materials as impregnated with an intellectual Idea of architecture, the found objects Haus Merz proposed were already transformed into something and would hinder the 'impregnation' of any predetermined idea on them. Like his contemporaries Wassili Luckhardt and Herman Finsterlin, Schwitters' Merz architecture fostered the use of modeling materials to inspire new architectural ideas.[18] This concept of architecture as a unity of material and intellectual Idea was an important attribute of Haus Merz that Schwitters sought to affirm.

When Schwitters gave his only description of Haus Merz as "his first piece of Merz architecture", he repeated almost verbatim what Spengemann, had written about it in "Merz: die offizielle Kunst":

> I see in *Haus Merz* the cathedral: the Cathedral. Not the church building, no, the building [*Bauwerk*] as an expression of a truly spiritual intuition [*Anschauung*], of the kind that raises us to the infinite: absolute art. This cathedral cannot be used. Its interior space is so filled with wheels that people cannot find space in it ...this is absolute architecture, with an exclusively artistic sense. (Schwitters 1921: 6)[19]

In this instance, Spengemann interpreted Haus Merz not as the description of an architectural form, "the church building", but as a work of "absolute architecture" that had only an "artistic sense". As Spengemann suggested, Haus Merz is "not the church building" in the literal sense, but the "expression" of a "spiritual intuition" he called "the Cathedral". Elizabeth Burns Gamard argued in her book, *Kurt Schwitters' Merzbau,* that Spengemann's interpretation of Haus Merz as an "expression of a truly spiritual intuition, of the kind that raises us to the infinite: absolute art" had parallels with the "anagogic perspective of Gothic cathedrals and Romantic art" (2000: 76). During the twelfth century, Abbot Suger gave one of the most celebrated descriptions of this anagogic function for Gothic art and architecture that caused him to "reflect, transferring that which is material to that which is immaterial" and to be "transported from this inferior to that higher world in an anagogical manner" (1979: 46-49 and 64-65). This perception of art and architecture essentially derived from a dictum attributed to the early Christian theologian, Origen of Alexandria, that "the visible world contains images of heavenly things in order that by means of these lower objects we may rise to that which is beyond" (Origen 1973: 278-9). During the nineteenth century, early German Romantics attributed a similar function to art as a guide for the perception of immaterial archetypes becoming in nature.[20] Conversely, Schwitters' Haus Merz and Spengemann's interpretation of it were not based on a Christian conception of the immaterial in cathedral architecture but an extension of the anagogical interpretation to the imaginative conception of the *Zukunftskathedrale* in the assemblage of found objects.

For his review of Taut's book, *Die Stadtkrone* from 1920, Spengemann underlined the spiritual role that a cathedral should embody during the early twentieth century, arguing that "it is not anymore the time to build churches and temples", but instead a "new art" should be created that would replace "religious thought" with the secular thought of socialism (Spengemann April 1920: 15). Schwitters, who was familiar with Spengemann's book review, frequently wrote about the spiritual role of the found objects in his Merz *oeuvre* not as a representation of Suger's "higher world" or Origen's "heavenly things", but as a set of criteria for making new architecture. For Schwitters, the selection of found objects depended

18   For the materials and methods these individuals employed in making their models, see Mindrup (2007: 34-5).

19   See also Spengemann (1920: 40-41).

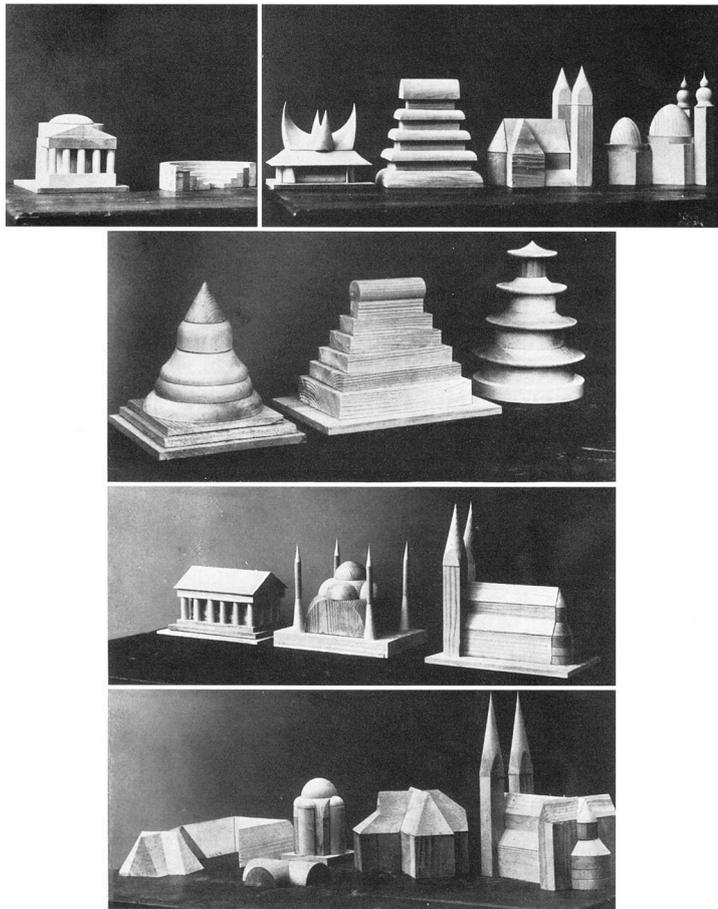20   For a summary of these concepts, see "*Die dritte Stufe der romantischen Theorie*" in Walzel (1908: 37-65).

upon "the demands" of a picture, since art was an invisible, immaterial "*Urbegriff* (archetypal concept) elevated towards divinity" that came about as a unique combination of "lines, forms, and colors" (Schwitters 1921: 5). The determination of this "archetypal concept" in a work of art was very different from the Gothic and Romantic perspective of immaterial ideas that were transcendental and *a priori*. For Schwitters, it was not the visible appearance of a small cathedral itself that was the primary concern in making Haus Merz, but how the assemblage of a button, spinning top, and gears describe the interpretation of found materials as art or architect. By including a set of gears in the nave of Haus Merz, Schwitters was reinforcing his coupling of a mill with a religious structure in his *Die Kathedrale* portfolio of lithographs. Schwitters' pencil and watercolour drawings from the same period reveal that the mill was an important theme in his work, and was used to describe the creative transformation of found objects in a Merz work.

The Merz mill

Shortly before his creation of Haus Merz, Schwitters frequently depicted gears, people and windmills in watercolour and stamp drawings to describe the transformation of discarded materials into Merz art and architecture. Of the drawings that Schwitters produced between 1919 and 1923, the gears that he included in his stamp drawings and watercolours from 1919, closely resemble the one in *Ohne Titel: Ferienkolonie für Taubstumme* (No title: Vacation colony for deaf-mutes) from the same year.[21] In the case of the stamp drawing, *Ohne Titel: mit Rot vier*, the circular impressions are comparable to those in *Ohne Titel: Ferienkolonie für*

21   See for instance *Ohne Titel: mit Rot vier* and *Aq. 9: Windmühle* (Water Colour 9: Windmill) from 1919.
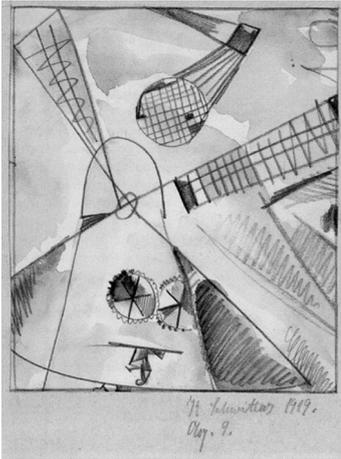
Fig. 7 Kurt Schwitters (1919). *Aq. 9: Windmühle* (Water Color 9: The Windmill) [Photo: Kornfeld Collection, Bern, Switzerland © 2013 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn]
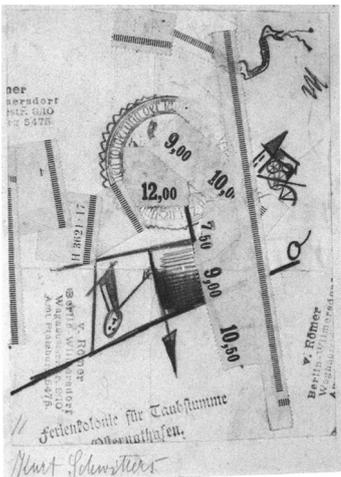

Fig. 8 Kurt Schwitters (1919). *Ohne Titel: Ferienkolonie für Taubstumme* (No Title: Vacation colony for deaf-mutes) [Photo: Galleria Blu, Milano, Italy, © 2013 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn]

22 *Ohne Titel: Mit Rot vier* and *Aq. 9: Windmühle* are also similar in that both gears and a windmill appear in the same drawing, although in *Aq. 9: Windmühle,* the gears are not separate from the windmill but, as in *Haus Merz* and the church in *Ohne Titel: Ferienkolonie für Taubstumme,* are integrated into its base.

23 This postcard is variously titled "Gears" by Dorothea Dietrich or "Pleasure Gallows" in the exhibition catalog *Kurt Schwitters: Merz – a Total Vision of the World.* See Dietrich (1993: 159, fig. 83) and Schwitters (2004: 53, cat. 153).

24 ET by Manheim in Schwitters (1981: 407).

25 ET by Elderfield (1985: 43).

Taubstumme that are not gears in themselves, but Schwitters adds spokes and teeth to them.[22] Compared to the other objects depicted in *Aq. 9: Windmühle,* Schwitters partially shaded the triangular spacing between the spokes of a set of gears that bear a striking resemblance to those in a 1917 logo for the German Bavarian Motor Works (BMW), inspired by the propeller of a plane in motion. In a separate watercolour from 1919, *Aq. 10: Ich mühle, du mühlst, er mühlt* (Water Colour 10: I mill, you mill, he mills), Schwitters makes a concrete association between a mill and a person by suggesting that he and everyone else are active "mills". Likewise, on a 1921 postcard to Walter Dexel, Schwitters placed the pie-shaped wheel motif found in Aq. 9: Windmühle directly on his forehead denoting the location of this milling in his mind.[23]

The repeated inclusion of coffee and windmills in Schwitters' drawings should not be seen as the copying of an artistic motif popularised by Marcel Duchamp and Francis Picabia, or as the mere inclusion of a familiar object from his daily life into art. Instead, the "mill" motif in Schwitters' drawings is an indication of his interest in mills that transform raw substances (grain and coffee beans) into material necessary for making something new (bread and coffee).

With the development of a windmill pictogram in 1923, Schwitters sought to synthesise his mediations on the transformation of found objects as an essential description of his Merz art and architecture. He first used the pictogram on the title page of the 1923 "Holland Dada" issue of his magazine *Merz* between the words "Holland" and "Dada". The drawing consists of a black square surmounted by a diagonally rotated cross in which the spaces between the arms are filled with the letters "DA". This image recalls the windmills frequently seen on Dutch landscapes and in Schwitters' watercolour drawings. Schwitters continued to use his windmill pictogram in an advertising poster for his magazine *Merz* from 1923 that included the word "MERZ" below the black square and again in the January 1924 issue in which the letters "DA" and word "MERZ" were removed. In this manifestation, Dada art is the wind that moves the four sails to turn Merz, the mill. As a windmill, the Berlin Dada activities that "began by shocking the bourgeois, demolishing his idea of art, attacking common sense, public opinion, education, institutions, museums, good taste, in short the whole prevailing order" compare to the gusts of wind moving the propellers (Janco 1971: 36). The propellers drive the mill, or the imagination, to destroy the immaterial, conventional meanings of the objects Schwitters assembles in a Merz work. However, unlike the Dada wind that only destroys, the original identities of the found objects Schwitters collects are milled to become material for new Merz art.

In "*Merz*", Schwitters began to develop a comparison between the interpretations of a found object as art or architecture and the workings of a mill. For Schwitters, the extraction and reinsertion of a found object from one context to another was likened to the assemblage and re-assemblage of words in a poem: "As in poetry, word is played off against word, here factor is played off against factor, material against material." (1921: 7)[24] Three years later, in the *"Die Bedeutung des Merzgedankens in der Welt"* (The Meaning of the Merz-Thought in the World), Schwitters elaborated on this comparison and explained how "in poetry, words are torn from their former context, *entformelt* (dissociated) and brought into a new artistic context, they become formal parts of the poem, nothing more" (1923: 8-11).[25] Here, the disassociation of an object from its original context was an important step in making Merz work. For Schwitters, all materials had an "individual character" or *Eigengift* – as streetcar tickets, cloakroom checks, bits of wood, wire, twine, bent wheels, tissue paper, tin cans, chips of glass, for example – that had to be lost as

they were assembled into a Merz work.[26] This does not mean that the objects must disappear but that "by being evaluated against one another" their "individual character" is "dematerialised" (Schwitters 1923: 8-11). Consequently, the *Eigengift* of found objects was not something material but immaterial, and could be lost while the physical objects, "as they are", did not change. In this way, Schwitters' "dematerialisation" of the immaterial *Eigengift* of a found object compares allegorically to the milling of grain into flour. In the same way wheat is milled into flour to bake bread, so is the *Eigengift* of a found object "dematerialised" in the architect's imagination so that it can be used as material to make Merz art or architecture.
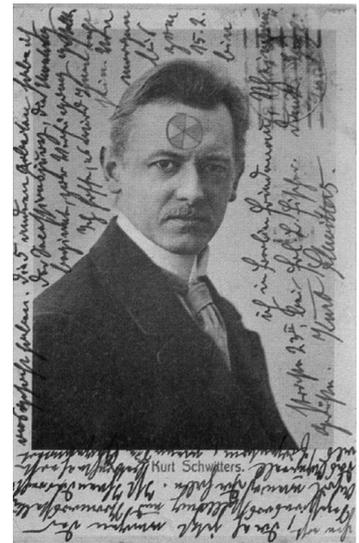

Fig. 9 Kurt Schwitters (1921). *Portrait Postcard to Walter Dexel* [Photo: Galerie Gmurzynska, Zug, Switzerland, © 2013 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn]

Conclusion

Schwitters created Haus Merz during a period in German architectural history when his peers at the Berlin Sturm Gallery embraced the crystal of Taut and Gropius as a metaphor for the construction of a new post-war German architecture. Like his colleagues in the *Arbeitsrat für Kunst,* Schwitters conceived architecture as a combination of material and immaterial idea. Yet, unlike Gropius and Taut, whose new architecture would become a medium for the exploration of architecture as impregnated with an intellectual Idea, the found objects Schwitters' cathedral proposed to use would hinder the imposition of any pre-determined idea upon them. As his 1919 watercolour drawing *Das Herz geht von Zucker zum Kaffee* (The Heart Goes from Sugar to Coffee) indicates, Schwitters had a strong preference for milled over crystalline substances. Rather, Haus Merz emerged during a period of time in Schwitters' *oeuvre* when he was exploring the metaphor of a mill in his drawings and watercolours to describe the interpretation of an immaterial content for the found objects that he could use as material for creating art or architecture. By including a set of gears in the nave of Haus Merz, Schwitters created it not as a description of the effect his cathedral would have on the making of a future architecture but as a model for the use of materials to inspire new architectural ideas.

Fig. 10 Kurt Schwitters (1923). *Drawing for the title page of Merz 1: Holland Dada* [Drawing: © 2013 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn]

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26   Schwitters gave these objects as examples. Schwitters (1923: 8-11).

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