CHAPTER TWO

The Mill and the Cathedral

Schwitters' creation of a cathedral model as his "first piece of Merz architecture"

coincided with a contemporary interest among architects about the use of the Gothic cathedral as

a symbol for a new German architecture. For Walter Gropius, the director of the *Arbeitsrat für*

Kunst (Workers Council for Art), this new architecture would find its "crystalline expression" as

a *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total work of art) and metaphorically "shine its light into the smallest things

of everyday life."[1] Christof Spengemann attributed a similar role to *Haus Merz*, that he argued

would soon become the "*offizielle Kunst*" (official art) of Germany.[2] For Spengemann though,

Schwitters' cathedral was not a literal representation of this new architecture because Schwitters

placed gears in its nave.[3] Although Spengemann did not provide an interpretation of the role the

set of gears played in the nave of *Haus Merz*, he did claim that they were an "artistic necessity"

in the composition of it.[4]

---

1. In a speech to the Bauhaus students during July 1919, Walter Gropius used the image of light dispersed through a crystal as a metaphor to describe how his conception of a new German architecture as a *Gesamtkunstwerk* would have an affect on the making of all things. See: Walter Gropius, "Speech to Bauhaus Students," (July, 1919). Translated into English by Rose-Carol Washton Long in *German Expressionism, Documents from the End of the Wilhelmine Empire to the Rise of National Socialism,* ed. and ann. Rose-Carol Washton Long (New York: G. K. Hall; Toronto [etc.]: Maxwell Macmillan, cop., 1993), 246-251. See specifically 251.

2. Christof Spengemann, "Merz - die offizielle Kunst," *Der Zweemann*, no. 8, 9,10 (June-August 1920): 41. (All translations by author unless otherwise noted).

3. *"Mit der Arbeit „Haus Merz" hat Kurt Schwitters seiner Kunst ein neues Gebiet erschlossen: das der Architektur . . . Jener Architektur, die nicht Zweckform ist . . . Diese Kathedrale kann nicht benutzt werden. Ihr innerer Raum ist mit Rädern so sehr angefüllt, dass Menschen keinen Platz in ihm finden."* (With the work "*Haus Merz*," Kurt Schwitters had opened his art to a new area: that of architecture . . . That architecture, which is not a purpose form . . . This cathedral cannot be used. Its interior space is so filled with wheels that people cannot find room in it.). Ibid.

4. *"Ihr innerer Raum ist mit Rädern so sehr angefüllt, dass Menschen keinen Platz in ihm finden. Er ist nicht deshalb mit Rädern angefüllt, damit Mernschen keinen Platz finden; - das wäre gedanklich. Er ist es aus künstlerischer Notwendigkeit."* (Its interior space is so filled with wheels that people cannot find room in it. However, it is not filled with wheels so that people find no room in it; - that would be thinking. It is because of an

As early as 1919, Schwitters began to create depictions of small cathedrals with gears in his *Aquarellen* (watercolors) and *Stempelzeichnungen* (stamp drawings). In these drawings, Schwitters depicted gears on people and in mills to suggest a metaphorical comparison between them. For Schwitters, this image of a mill was an important allegory in his *Merz oeuvre* that he used to describe the transformation of discarded materials and the destroyed buildings of post World War I Germany into Merz art or architecture.[5] By including the gears in *Haus Merz* as an "artistic necessity," Schwitters integrated this allegory with it, not as a model of particular structure, but as a model for the making of "Merz architecture." This chapter examines the gears and cathedrals in Schwitters' own work to elucidate how he merged *Haus Merz* with similar themes explored by the *Arbeitsrat für Kunst*.

Figurative Experiments

During an early stage in the development of his Merz art, Schwitters decided to transform one of the small cathedrals that appear in his watercolor and stamp drawings into three dimensions and constructed *Haus Merz* in 1920. With the exception of a few Merz collages from

artistic necessity.) Ibid.

5. Reflecting upon the time that he first invented his Merz art in 1918, Schwitters recalled how everything had been destroyed in Germany and Merz meant the creation of art from the fragments: *"Aus Sparsamkeit nahm ich dazu, was ich fand, denn wir waren ein verarmtes Land. Man kann auch mit Müllabfällen schreien, und das tat ich, indem ich sie zusammenleimte und –nagelte. [...] Kaputt was sowieso alles, und es galt aus Scherben Neues zu bauen"* (Out of parsimony I took whatever I found to do this, because we were now a poor country. One can even shout out through refuse, and this is what I did, nailing and gluing it together […] Everything was broken down anyway and new things had to be built from the fragments: and this is Merz). Kurt Schwitters, "Kurt Schwitters," in *Gefesselter Blick: 25 kurze Monografien über neue Werbegestaltung*, ed. Von Heinz und Bobo Rasch (Stuttgart: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Zaugg, 1930), 88-89. Reproduced in Kurt Schwitters, *Das Literarische Werk*, ed. Friedhelm Lach, vol. 5 (Köln: DuMont, 1981), 335. Hereafter references made to Lach's compendium of Schwitters' writings will be abbreviated as follows: *LW*, followed by a volume number and pagination; Schwitters use of the mill as an allegory for his Merz transformation of found objects into art and architecture is discussed in the section, "The Merz Mill," of this chapter specifically.

the same period, Schwitters' Merz works between 1919 and 1921 tended to obscure the original

identities of the materials used to assemble them (figs. 54-58). In these instances, Schwitters

collected natural and man-made objects, including torn and cut pieces of printed matter, and

pasted them onto canvases in various angles or directions making their original uses as utilitarian

objects or pieces of text unimportant.[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."[7] However, the criteria that Schwitters claimed he

intended to employ in his selection of a found object for a Merz collage differed from those he

assembled in his early three-dimensional work that tend to retain their original objective

identities.

Shortly after the first exhibition of his Merz art at the *Der Sturm* gallery in July 1919,

Schwitters explained that he began experimenting with his Merz use of "all conceivable

materials" to create sculpture and architecture.[8] For Schwitters, this expansion meant to

"*modellieren*" (to sculpt or model).[9] As Schwitters explained in "Merz," "At present I am

---

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 organization of the other elements in the collage. Rather, they appear to be the use of an element in the collage as a way to name it. By contrast, Schwitters did make a handful of collages in which the original identities of the elements utilized in the making of the collage were use objectively, including: *Radblumen* (1920), *Mz 180 Figurine* (1921), *Frau – Uhr* (1921) and *Mz. 151 Wenzel Kind Madonna mit Pferd* (1921). A special consideration should be given to *Merzbild 1 A: Der Irrenarzt* (1919), in which objects made for other purposes are assembled onto the canvas in connection with painted forms to create the profile of a man. See: Kurt Schwitters, *Catalogue Raisonné: 1905-1922,* vol. 1 (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2001), 213-433.

7. See: Kurt Schwitters, "Merz," *Der Ararat* 2, no. 1 (January 1921). Reproduced in *LW*, vol. 5, 74-82. This English translation by Ralph Manheim in *LW*, vol. 5, 407.

8. Schwitters gave this description of his materials in an article that accompanied his exhibition at the *Der Sturm* Gallery in 1919. See: Kurt Schwitters, "Die Merzmalerei," *Der Sturm* 10, no. 4 (July 1919): 61. Reproduced in *LW*, vol. 5, 37. This is an excerpt from the English translation in John Elderfield, *Kurt Schwitters* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985), 50-1.

9. "*Solange ich male, modelliere ich auch"* (As long as I paint, I also model.). Schwitters, "Merz," *Der Ararat* 2, no. 1 (Munich 1921): 3-9. This excerpt from the reproduction in *LW*, vol. 5, 79. This English translation by Ralph Manheim in *LW*, vol. 5, 407.

making Merz sculptures: *Lustgalgen und Kultpumpe* (Lust Gallows and Cult Pump). Like the

Merz paintings and Merz collages, the Merz sculptures are made from various materials. They

are conceived as round sculptures that can be looked at from all sides" (figs. 59 and 60).[10]

Unfortunately, it is impossible to know the exact scale and type of objects that Schwitters

assembled in *Lustgalgen* and *Kultpumpe*, because, like *Haus Merz,* they are missing.[11]

Nevertheless, from two remaining photographs of the sculptures, it can be seen that they are

fashioned from found materials, including fabric, paper, wire, and other industrial or household

items. Additionally, *Lustgalgen* and *Kultpumpe* are also similar in that each is dominated by

vertical and horizontal elements arranged on a rectilinear wooden base and contain a large

circular element, a disc in *Kultpumpe* and a wheel in *Lustgalgen*. With the exception of some

early academic portrait busts, *Lustgalgen* and *Kultpumpe* appear to have been Schwitters' first

attempts at sculpture.[12] Other Dada artists during this time including Max Ernst and Marcel

Janco were also exploring the use of assemblage as a medium for creating sculpture. Although

Schwitters had already assembled *Lustgalgen* and *Kultpumpe* in 1919 when he first met Ernst in

1920, it is possible that he had seen Janco's *Construction 3* from 1917 in reproduction during

this time (fig. 61).[13]

---

10. Schwitters, "Merz," in *LW*, vol. 5, 79. With my inclusion of the "*Lustgalgen und Kultpumpe,*" this English translation by Jerome Rothenberg and Pierre Joris in: Kurt Schwitters, *PPPPPP: poems, performances, pieces, proses, plays, poetics*, ed. and trans. Jerome Rothenberg and Pierre Joris (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 217.

11. In his monograph, *Kurt Schwitters*, Werner Schmalenbach translates "*Lustgalgen und Kultpumpe*" into English as "Gallows of Desire and Cult Pump" and explains that, based upon a conversation with Ernst Schwitters, both sculptures were "constituent parts of the *Merzbau* in its first phase." See: Werner Schmalenbach, *Kurt Schwitters* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1967), 130, n. 166.

12. For this conclusion, see: Elderfield, 112.

13. Janco's published his *Construction* in the first issue of the journal *Dada* from 1917. Elderfield contends that Schwitters is almost certain to have seen this issue. Elderfield also argues that Schwitters visited Max Ernst in Cologne during spring 1920 and showed him his collages and reliefs. During this meeting, Schwitters would have

Despite comparisons with the work produced by Schwitters' contemporaries, his early

assemblages of architecture and sculpture tended to explore, in three dimensions, the abstract

figures and motifs in his watercolor and stamp drawings from the late 1910s and early 1920s. For

instance, the wheels found in *Lustgalgen* figure prominently in watercolor drawings *Aq. 21:*

Anna Blume und Ich (Aquarell 21: Anna Blume and I) and *Aq. 30: Dies ist das Biest das*

manchmal niest (Aquarell 30: This is the Beast that Sometimes Sneezes) from 1919 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 (figs. 62-64). Art historians found these gears and wheels similar to

those in Francis Picabia's 1919 print, *Réveil-Matin* (Alarm Clock). This print was published on

the title page of *Der Dada 4-5* that Schwitters undoubtedly owned before making *Haus Merz* in

the next year (fig. 65).[14] Whether or not Schwitters' *Haus Merz* was directly inspired by

Picabia's *Réveil-Matin*, the overall appearance of it is remarkably similar to the small, naively

drawn churches that emerge in his watercolor drawings: *Aq. 11: Bild Frau-graus* (Aquarell 11:

Picture Woman-Goose) from 1919 and *Aq. 24: Der Kopf unter der Mühle* (Aquarell 24: The

Head under the Mill) from 1920 while in the stamp drawing *Ohne Title: Drucksache* (No title:

Printed Matter) from 1919, a cross on the steeple indicates that they are a Christian one (figs. 66

and 67).[15] Similarly, Elderfield observed that individual components such as the lighted candle,

---

encountered Ernst's three-dimensional works even though he had already been experimenting with the creation of
his Merz collages into three dimensions. Ibid., 113, n. 61-2.

14. Neither Elderfield nor Dorothea Dietrich made a direct comparison between *mit Rot vier* and Picabia's
Alarm Clock. However, Elderfield, does cite a connection between Schwitters' watercolors and drawings with
Picabia's "mock-machinist drawings" and later associated the *Alarm Clock* specifically to Schwitters' rubber stamp
drawings in general. By contrast, Dietrich references Elderfield and directly compares the *Alarm Clock* to the wheels
in Schwitters' watercolor drawings. Here, Dietrich also elaborated upon Elderfield's reference to a letter from
Schwitters to Tristan Tzara confirming Schwitters awareness of Picabia's *Alarm Clock* during 1919 by showing his
ownership of the May 15, 1919 *Der Dada* issue no. 4-5 upon which it appeared. Elderfield, 45-47. See especially 47,
n. 72; Dorothea Dietrich, *The Collages of Kurt Schwitters: Tradition and Innovation* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge
University Press, 1993), 86, n. 9; Elizabeth Burns Gamard, *Kurt Schwitters' Merzbau* (New York: Princeton
Architectural Press, 2000), 75.

crank-handle (possibly from a coffee grinder), and the dressmaker's dummy in the sculpture *Die heilige Bekummernis* (The Holly Affliction, 1919) also emerged in Schwitters' drawings (fig. 68).[16] Compared to the objects Schwitters depicted in his watercolor 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.

Haus Merz and the *Zukunftskathedrale*

That Schwitters created his "first piece of Merz architecture" as a cathedral during the early twentieth century is understandable not as the advocation of a particular religious belief but as a symbol for a new German architecture. After Germany's defeat in World War I and the abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm on November 9, 1918, many architects joined with the Socialists in Berlin to help forge a new German Republic.[17] These architects believed that they had a symbiotic relationship with the workers who had caused the external political revolution and formed groups including the *Novembergruppe* and the later *Arbeitsrat für Kunst* to support what they referred to as the internal, spiritual one.[18] The *Arbeitsrat für Kunst* strived to reform art education by organizing exhibitions and worked to develop a new German architecture. In effect,

---

15. Dietrich reinforces this observation that Schwitters frequently depicted cathedrals in his drawings suggesting that: "*Haus Merz* may have been Schwitters' first three-dimensional articulation of the cathedral theme, which played such a prominent role in the watercolor drawings of 1919." Dietrich, 171.

16. Elderfield, 113.

17. Joan Weinstein, *The End of Expressionism; Art and the November Revolution in Germany, 1918-19* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 1-106; Ida Katherine Rigby, "Critics, Artists and the Revolution," in Rose-Carol Washton Long, ed., *German Expressionism,* 173-4.

18. The programs and writings of many individuals involved in these groups, especially Taut, Behne and Gropius, emphasized the spiritual revolution of art and the presence of a symbiotic relationship with the worker. See: Bruno Taut, "Ein Architektur-Programm," in Ulrich Conrads and Hans G. Sperlich, *The Architecture of Fantasy*, trans., ed. C.C. Collins and George R. Collins (New York: Praeger, 1962); Walter Gropius, "Baukunst im freien Volksstaat," in *Deutscher Revolutions-Almanach*, ed. E. Deahn and E. Friedegg (Hamburg and Berlin: Hoffmann und Campe Verlag, 1919), 134-6 and Adolf Behne, "Graphik und Plastik von Mitgliedern der Novembergruppe Berlin," *Menschen* 2:14, 81/86 (December 1919): 2.

this group of architects had the goal of transforming society through the arts. For the members of the *Arbeitsrat für Kunst*, the model for this new architecture was embodied in the Gothic Cathedral as a unity of the arts in one structure.

As early as 1914, Bruno Taut proposed the Gothic Cathedral as the greatest example of the unification of the arts.[19] In the postwar period, Taut revived this idea of synthesizing the arts as the major component of "*Ein Architektur-Programm*" (A Program for Architecture) that he wrote as director of the *Arbeitsrat für Kunst* in December 1918.[20] A year later, Walter Gropius took over as director and again used the image of a cathedral in the pamphlet for the 1919 *Ausstellung für unbekannte Architekten* (Exhibition of Unknown Architects) mentioned in chapter one. 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 *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total work of art) as the *Zukunftskathedrale* (Cathedral of the Future).[21] In a speech delivered to the Bauhaus students in July of 1919, 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.[22] It was this conception of the *Zukunftskathedrale* that Lyonel Feininger

---

19. Bruno Taut, "Eine Notwendigkeit," *Der Sturm* 4, no. 196-7 (February 1914): 174-5.

20. Bruno Taut, "Ein Architektur-Programm," (December 1918). Reproduced in Ulrich Conrads, *Programme und Manifeste zur Architektur des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin; Frankfurt/M; Wien: Ullstein, 1964), 38-40. For a discussion of Taut's *Ein Architektur-Programm* and his involvement in the *Arbeitsrat für Kunst* see: Dennis Sharp, *Modern Architecture and Expressionism* (New York: George Braziller, 1966), 64-7 and Bruno Taut, *Modern Architecture* (London, 1929).

21. Walter Gropius, Bruno Taut and Adolf Behne, "New Ideas on Architecture," in Ulrich Conrads, *Programs and Manifestoes on 20th Century Architecture*, 46.

22. Gropius, "Speech to Bauhaus Students," 246 and 251.

synthesized into his famous woodcut for the cover of the 1919 *Bauhaus Manifesto* (fig. 69).[23] A

few years earlier, Gropius already described the work to be created in the new Bauhaus academy

as "impregnated with an intellectual Idea – with form" in a letter to the Saxon State Ministry

during 1916.[24] As a "medium for the expression of a supra-personal transcendent content,"

Marcel Franciscono has argued that the cathedral of the future would embody a similar aim for

architecture that Taut and Adolf Behne, his co-founder of the *Arbeitsrat für Kunst,* were

exploring during the same period.[25] The conviction that one structure could embody all the

various arts as the unity of transcendental Idea and material form revived the Jena Romantic

concept of a *Gesamtkunstwerk* and ties Schwitters' *Haus Merz* to the *Zukunftskathedrale* of

Gropius, Taut and Feininger.

Schwitters, like the architects of the *Arbeitsrat für Kunst,* was deeply interested in the

Romantic concept of a total work of art, not only as a vision for the future of German

architecture but also as a way of extending his Merz art to architecture. As Oskar Walzel

explained in his popular 1908 book, *Deutsche Romantik,* the aim of Romantic art and poetry was

to create a description of the absolute beyond the phenomenon of the empirical world.[26] This

Romantic desire to give poetry a transcendental function was synthesized in Friedrich Schlegel's

23. Feininger's woodcut and the ideas surrounding it is discussed at length in Diana Periton, "Bauhaus as Cultural Paradigm," *The Journal of Architecture* 1, no. 3 (September 1996): 189-205.

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

25. Marcel Franciscono, *Walter Gropius and the Creation of the Bauhaus in Weimar: The Ideals and Artistic Theories of its Founding Years* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1971), 113.

26. Oskar Walzel's book *Deutsche Romantik: eine Skizze* was very popular during the early twentieth century and went through five printings between 1908 and 1923. The first and fifth printings are: Oskar Walzel, *Deutsche Romantik: eine Skizze* (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner and Company, 1908) and Oskar Walzel, *Deutsche Romantik*, 2 vols, 5th printing (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner and Company, 1923). For the aims of Romantic poetry see: Walzel, *Deutsche Romantik: eine Skizze*, 21.

theory of a "universal progressive poetry" in "Fragment 116" of the *Athenaeum* Journal. In this

conception, poetry was to be "universal" in striving to embody all its actual and possible forms

while at the same time being "progressive" by aiming to express an invisible transcendental unity

behind what Schlegel and Friedrich Schelling understood as ceaselessly becoming.[27] The

ultimate form of this expression was through a *Gesamtkunstwerk* where, as August Schlegel

suggested, "we should try to bring the arts closer together and seek for transitions from one to the

others. Statues perhaps may quicken into pictures, pictures become poems, poems music . . ."[28]

Following closely on the public embrace of the Romantic *Gesamtkunstwerk* by Gropius and the

members of the *Arbeitsrat für Kunst,* Schwitters identified this theme in his own work by stating

in 1920:

> My aim is the *Merzgesamtkunstwerk* [Merz total work of art], that *zusammenfasst*
> [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 have driven 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.[29]

---

27. Friedrich Schlegel, "Fragment 116," *Athenaeum* (1798). Reproduced and translated in Friedrich Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 32. As Schlegel suggests in *Gespräch über die Poesie*: "*Alle heiligen Spiele der Kunst sind nur ferne Nachbildungen von dem unendlichen Spiel der Welt, dem ewig sich selbst bildenden Kunstwerk.*" (All the sacred play of art, is only a distant copying of the infinite play of the world, that work of art which is eternally fashioning itself). Friedrich Schlegel, *Gespräch über die Poesie* (1800), in Friedrich Schlegel, *Athenäum*, vol. 3 (Berlin: Heinrich Fröhlich, 1799-1800; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1992), 107. Citation is to the Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft edition. This English translation by Arthur Lovejoy in Arthur Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being*, 22nd printing (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 304. Walzel describes Schlegel's conception of Romantic poetry as "transcendental poetry" in *German Romanticism* and connects it to Schelling's organic conception of art as the Neo-Platonic intelligence in the process of becoming. Oscar Walzel, *German Romanticism*, trans. Alma Elise Lussky, 5th ed. (New York: Ungar Publishing Co., 1932), 42-45 and 52-59.

28. August Wilhelm Schlegel, "Die Gemälde," in *Athenaeum*, ed. August Schlegel and Friedrich Schlegel (1798-1800), vol. 2 (Stuttgart: J.G. Cotta, 1960), 50 after August Wiedmann, *Romantic Roots in Modern Art*, (Gresham Books, 1979), 6, n. 15.

29. "*Mein Ziel ist das Merzgesamtkunstwerk, das alle Kunstarten zusammenfasst zur künslerischen Einheit. Zunächst habe ich einzelne Kunstarten miteinander vermählt. Ich habe Gedichte aus Worten und Sätzen so zusammengeklebt, dass die Anordnung rhythmisch eine Zeichnung ergibt. Ich habe umgekehrt Bilder und Zeichnungen geklebt, auf denen Sätze gelesen werden sollen. Ich habe Bilder so genaglt, dass neben der malerischen Bildwirklung eine plastische Reliefwirkung entsteht. Dieses geschah, um die Grenzen der Kunstarten zu*

Despite the broad application that Schwitters intended for his Merz *oeuvre*, in the text that followed, Schwitters did not apply this concept of a *"Merzgesamtkunstwerk"*[30] to his "Merz architecture" but reserved its application for the unrealized project of a "Merz theater."[31] On the contrary, the limited use of materials and artistic forms in *Haus Merz* suggests that his "Merz architecture" would achieve only a partial effacement of the arts.[32] Compared to the aims of the *Arbeitsrat für Kunst* in which materials were to be "impregnated with an intellectual Idea" of architecture, Schwitters' materials were already transformed into something and by assembling them, their pre-determined forms and shapes would hinder the "impregnation" of any Idea upon them. Nevertheless, the concept of architecture as a unity of material and Idea was a quality that Schwitters sought to affirm as an important attribute of *Haus Merz*.

In 1920, when Schwitters gave his only description of *Haus Merz* as "his first piece of Merz architecture," he repeated almost verbatim what Christof Spengemann had written about it.

> 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.[33]

---

verwischen." Schwitters, "Merz," in *LW*, vol. 5, 79.

30. Ibid; Jerome Rothenberg and Pierre Joris translate the phrase "*Merzgesamtkunstwerk*" as "total Merz art work" and Ralph Manheim translates it as "Merz composite art work." In my translation, I try to follow Schwitters' typical attitude of adding the word 'Merz' in front of the name of an activity or object in order to designate it as belonging to his Merz use of found objects. The German word *Gesamtkunstwerk* is a word assemblage that translates literally as *Gesamt*: 'total' or 'cumulative' and *kunstwerk* as 'work of art.' See: Rothenberg and Joris' translation of "Merz" in Schwitters, *PPPPPP,* 218 and Manheim's translation in *LW*, vol. 5, 407.

31. In the sentences following the description of his aim for a '*Merzgesamtkunstwerk'* Schwitters explains that "*Das Merzgesamtkunstwerk aber ist die Merzbühne, die ich bislang nur theoretisch durcharbeiten konnte"* (The Merz total work of art is however, the Merz stage, which so far I have only been able to work out theoretically). Schwitters, "Merz," in *LW*, vol. 5, 79.

32. Elderfield supports this reading of the "*Merzgesamtkunstwerk*." Elderfield, 31.

33. *"Ich sehe in Haus Merz die Kathedrale: die Kathedrale. Nicht den Kirchenbau, nein, das Bauwerk als Ausdruck wahrhaft geistiger Anschauung dessen, was uns in das Unendliche erhebt: der absoluten Kunst. Diese Kathedrale kann nicht benutzt werden. Ihr innerer Raum ist mit Rädern so sehr angefüllt, dass Menschen keinen*

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." In this regard, 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."[34] During the twelfth century, Abbot Suger gave one of the most celebrated descriptions of this anagogic function for Gothic art and architecture in his memoirs about the construction of the Abbey Cathedral of St. Denis. While examining the design of the cathedral doors and the cross of Saint Eloy, Abbot Suger explained how they 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."[35] This medieval perception of cathedral architecture and its contents derived from a dictum attributed to the early Christian theologian, Origen of Alexandria (ca. 185 - 254), 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."[36] During the nineteenth century, early German Romantics attributed a similar anagogic function to art as a guide to the invisible

---

Platz in ihr finden … das ist die absolute Architektur, die lediglich einen künstlerischen Sinn hat." Kurt Schwitters, "Merz," in *LW*, vol. 5, 79; See also: Christof Spengemann, "Merz – die offizielle Kunst," 40-41.

34. Gamard, 76.

35. In two separate instances, Abbot Suger describes the materials and craftsmanship of the cathedral doors and the cross of St. Eloy as having a similar effect - to elevate the mind of the viewer from material to immaterial. See: Erwin Panofsky, ed. and trans., *Abbot Suger on the Abbey Church of St.-Denis and its art treasures*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), 46-49 and 64-65.

36. For this claim see: Francois Bucher, "Micro-Architecture as the 'Idea' of Gothic Theory and Style," *Gesta,* 15, (1976): 71. See also: Origen, "How Divine Scripture Should be Read and Interpreted," *On First Principles*, trans. G.W. Butterworth (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1973), bk. 4, chap. 2, sect. 6, 278-9.

archetypes becoming in nature.[37] Consequently, by applying the Gothic and Romantic

perspective of anagogy to Spengemann's interpretation of *Haus Merz*, Gamard's characterization

presents it as a visible expression of a "spiritual intuition" of "heavenly things" above physical

reality.[38]

Nevertheless, Schwitters' *Haus Merz* and Spengemann's interpretation of it were not

based on a Christian conception of the invisible in cathedral architecture. In a review of Taut's

book *Die Stadtkrone* from 1920, Spengemann underlined his understanding of 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

within which the secular thought of socialism would replace "religious thought."[39] Spengemann

published his review two months before he wrote his commentary on Schwitters' *Haus Merz*. In

this way, Spengemann's statement indicates that when he interpreted *Haus Merz* as a

"Cathedral," he did not view it as a visible representation of a spiritual intuition deriving from

God, but from man. Instead, Spengemann's interpretation of *Haus Merz* as a "Cathedral"

conformed to Schwitters' understanding of his Merz art and architecture not as a representation

of Suger's "higher world" or Origen's "heavenly things" but a form of art or architecture that, as

---

37. The Romantic concept of art as a revelation of the transcendental Idea becoming in nature will be explained in more detail in the following chapter. For a summary of these concepts, see the chapter "*Die dritte Stufe der romantischen Theorie*" in Oskar Walzel, *Deutsche Romantik: eine Skizze* (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner and Company, 1908), 37-65.

38. Gamard, Ibid., 76.

39. *"Aber es ist nicht mehr die Zeit, Kirchen und Tempel zu bauen. Wir suchen Gott auf andere Art. Unsere Religiosität ist 'der Sozialismus im unpolitischen, überpolitischen Sinne, fern von jeder Herrschaftsform, als die einfache schlichte Beziehungsform der Menschen zueinander.' Wir künden Gott auf neue Art: indem wir diesen Sozialismus leben. Wir künden ihn durch die neue Kunstform, die aus diesem religiösen Gedanken erwächst."* (But it is not any more the time to build churches and temples. We look for God in other ways. Our religiousness is "Socialism in the un-political, over-political sense, far from any form of leadership, as the simple plain form of relationship of humans to each other." We announce God in a new way: by living this kind of Socialism. We announce it through the new art form that arises from this religious thought). Christof Spengemann, "Bruno Taut / Die Stadtkrone," *Der Zweemann,* no. 6 (April 1920): 15.

he explained in "Merz," was created in "the artistic evaluation of its materials."[40] Schwitters' selection of found objects was based upon "the demands" of a picture, since art was an invisible "*Urbegriff* (archetypal concept) elevated towards divinity" that came about as a unique combination of "lines, forms, colors."[41] Consequently, the determination of this *Urbegriff* in a work of art was very different from the Gothic and Romantic perspective of invisible Ideas that were transcendental and *a priori*. As an anagogical interpretation of a man-made "spiritual intuition," it was not the visible appearance of a small cathedral itself that was the primary concern for Schwitters in making *Haus Merz*, but how the assemblage of a button, spinning top, and gears could allow him to interpret this invisible content unifying them as one.

Despite this anagogical perspective of the objects assembled in *Haus Merz,* Spengmann explained in two sentences not quoted by Schwitters that the *"Räder"* (gears) in the nave of *Haus Merz* did not contribute to the normal use of a cathedral and were significant in giving the assemblage a non-literal meaning. With the two sentences missing from Spengemann's article *"Merz - die offizielle Kunst,"* the quote Schwitters used read as follows:

> I see in *Haus Merz* the cathedral: the Cathedral. Not the church building, no, the *Bauwerk* [building] as an expression of a truly spiritual *Anschauung* [intuition], of the kind that raises us to the infinite: absolute art. This cathedral cannot be used. Its interior space is so filled with gears that people cannot find room in it. **However, it is not filled with gears so that people find no room in it; -that would be *gedanklich* [thinking]. It is because of an artistic necessity.** This is absolute architecture, with an exclusively artistic sense.[42]

Schwitters' omission of the two sentences does not contradict Spengemann's description of *Haus*

---

40. Schwitters, "Merz," in *LW*, vol. 5, 76, This English translation by Ralph Manheim in Ibid., 405-6.

41. Ibid.

42. The missing two sentences are in bold lettering. The German text is "*Er ist nicht deshalb mit Rädern angefüllt, damit Mernschen keinen Platz finden; - das wäre gedanklich. Er ist es aus künstlerischer Notwendigkeit.*" The meaning and use of the term *"gedanklich"* is very strange in this sentence. In English, *"gedanklich"* means 'thinking' as in "you're really thinking now!" or 'theoretical' as in a "theoretical model" but also 'mental' as in a "mental connection." It appears that Spengemann's use of the term is to be sarcastic and that to believe Schwitters put the gears in *Haus Merz* to keep people out of it would be thinking to practically about the architectural application of the assemblage. Spengemann, "Merz – die offizielle Kunst," 41.

Merz as the "Cathedral" that cannot be used by people because of "gears" in its nave. However, the two sentences do provide a clearer understanding of the importance Spengemann saw the gears had in making *Haus Merz* a non-literal representation of a cathedral. Gears were, as Spengemann explained, not part of the conventional use of a cathedral building but Schwitters included them in *Haus Merz* because of an "artistic necessity." In this regard, the set of gears in *Haus Merz* was very different for Spengemann than the button or the spinning top. Nevertheless, Spengemann does not state or interpret the role the gears played as an "artistic necessity" in *Haus Merz*.

The Merz Mill

During the years leading to and following the creation of *Haus Merz*, Schwitters frequently depicted gears in his watercolor and stamp drawings to suggest a metaphorical comparison between people and windmills. Of the drawings that Schwitters produced between 1919 and 1923, the gears that he included in *Ohne Titel: mit Rot vier* and *Aq. 9: Windmühle* (Aquarell 9: Windmill) from 1919, closely resemble the one in *Ohne Titel: Ferienkolonie für Taubstumme* (No title: Vacation colony for deaf-mutes) from the same year (figs. 70 - 72). In the case of the stamp drawing, *Ohne Titel: mit Rot vier,* the circular stamps are comparable to those in *Ohne Titel: Ferienkolonie für Taubstumme* that are not gears in themselves, but Schwitters adds spokes and teeth to them. *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, like *Haus Merz* and the church in *Ohne Titel: Ferienkolonie für Taubstumme,* are integrated into its base. Compared to the other drawings 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 (fig. 73). During this same period of time, Schwitters' close friend, Hana Höch included a number of copies of this logo in her collage *Das schöne Mädchen* (The Beautiful Girl) from 1920, which suggests a familiarity amongst Schwitters' colleagues with the triangular shading on a wheel to describe it as being in motion (fig. 74). In a separate watercolor from 1919, *Aq. 10: Ich mühle, du mühlst, er mühlt* (Aquarell 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" (fig. 75). 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 (fig. 76).[43] In this regard, Christoph Bignens views the frequent inclusion of coffee mills and windmills in Schwitters' drawings neither as the copying of an artistic motif popularized by Marcel Duchamp and Vincent van Gogh nor as the mere inclusion of a familiar object from his daily life into art. Instead, Bignens argues in "Cogs and Wheels" that the "mill" motif in Schwitters' drawings is an indication of his interest with "the fact that mills can transform solid materials into homogenous powders."[44]

In 1923, Schwitters began to develop the emblem of a windmill to describe his Merz use of found objects to make art or architecture (fig. 77). He first used the emblem 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

43. 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, 159, fig. 83 and *Kurt Schwitters: Merz – A Total Vision of the World* (Bern: Benteli, 2004), 53, cat. 153. Published in conjunction with the exhibition "Kurt Schwitters: Merz – A Total Vision of the World," shown at the Museum Tinguely in Basel, Switzerland 2004.

44. Christoph Bignens, "Cogs and Wheels," in *Kurt Schwitters: Merz – A Total Vision of the World*, 110.

which the spaces between the arms are filled with the letters "DA." This image recalls the

windmills frequently seen on the Dutch landscape and in Schwitters' watercolor drawings

discussed previously.[45] In these structures, a tower enclosing a mill supports propeller blades

whose movement in the wind rotates a set of gears that cause a pair of stones to crush grain or a

saw blade to cut lumber. Schwitters continued to use his windmill emblem 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 of *Merz* in which the letters 'DA' and the word 'MERZ'

were removed. In "Related Opposites: Differences in Mentality between Dada and Merz," Ralf

Burmeister views Schwitters' windmill as having the intention to describe the differences

between Dada and Merz:

> The four sails of the windmill are the dynamic, actionistic moment: 'DA – DA – DA –
> DA' shout the sails as they spin around, turning the mill wheels that crush the seed of
> bourgeois thinking. Merz, on the other hand, is the mill itself: here the ground corn is
> stored in sacks, waiting to be baked into art.[46]

In this reading, the Berlin Dada activities, that Burmeister viewed as "thoroughly bent on tearing

down the bourgeois world of concepts with all its big phrases, hypocrisy and conventions" are

compared to the gusts of wind that move the propellers.[47] In the metaphorical sense, the

propellers drive the mill, Merz, to destroy the conventions and meanings of the objects

assembled in a Merz work. However, unlike the Dada wind that only destroys, in Merz the found

objects are milled in order to make new Merz art.

     Beginning with his 1920 article "Merz," Schwitters began to develop a description of the

---

45. A copy of the cover page for the January 1923 Holland Dada issue of *Merz* is reprinted in *LW*, vol. 5, 124.

46. Ralf Burmeister, "Related Opposites: Differences in Mentality between Dada and Merz," in *Kurt Schwitters: Merz – A Total Vision of the World*, 140.

47. Ibid.

mental activity involved with the interpretation of a found object as art or architecture that is comparable to 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."[48] 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."[49] Here, the disassociation of an object from its original context was an important step in the making of a Merz work.

> These things are inserted into the picture either as they are or else modified in accordance with what the picture requires. They lost their individual character, their own *Eigengift* [own poison], by being evaluated against one another, by being *entmaterialisiert* [dematerialized] they become material for the picture.[50]

In this description, Schwitters explains that in order for found objects to become material for a Merz work they have to lose their "individual character," their *"Eigengift."* The word *"Eigengift"* is a word assembly created by Schwitters that translates as both "inner content" and "inner poison."[51] For Schwitters, all materials had an "individual character" or identity as

---

48. Schwitters, "Merz," in: *LW*, vol. 5, 80. This English translation from by Ralph Manheim in Ibid., 407.

49. *"In der Dichtung werden die Worte aus ihrem alten Zusammenhang gerissen, entformelt und in einen neuen, künstlerischen Zusammenhang gebracht, sie werden Form-Teile der Dichtung, weiter nichts."* Kurt Schwitters, "Die Bedeutung des Merzgedankens in der Welt," *Merz*: *Holland Dada,* no. 1 (1923): 8-11. Reproduced in: *LW*, vol. 5, 134. This English translation by John Elderfield, in Elderfield, 43.

50. *"Diese Gegenstände werden, wie sie sind, oder auch verändert in das Bild eingefügt, je nachdem es das Bild verlangt. Sie verlieren durch Wertung gegeneinander ihren individuellen Charakter, ihr Eigengift, werden entmaterialisiert und sind Material für das Bild."* Ibi.d, 134. This English translation by Werner Schmalenbach in: Schmalenbach, 94.

51. The German word *'Eigen'* means own, inner or inherent, where *'Gift'* is associated with poison, venom or toxin. As a word construction, *'Eigengift'* refers to something as having an inner content or poison peculiar to

streetcar tickets, cloakroom checks, bits of wood, wire, twine, bent wheels, tissue paper, tin cans, chips of glass, etc. that had to be lost as they were assembled into a Merz work.[52] This does not mean that the objects must disappear but that "by being evaluated against one another" their "individual character" is "dematerialized." Consequently, the *Eigengift* of objects was not something physical but invisible and could be lost while the physical objects themselves, "as they are," did not change. In this way, Schwitters' "dematerialization" of the invisible *Eigengift* for a found object allegorically compares to the milling of trees into lumber or grain into flour. In the same way that trees are milled to into lumber to produce buildings and wheat is milled into flour to bake bread, so is the *Eigengift* of a found object "dematerialized" in order for it to become material for Merz art or architecture.

Schwitters' integration of gears in windmills and cathedrals in his drawings, watercolors and models between 1919 and 1923 suggest that he was exploring similar themes in different medias. Spengemann's inclusion of Schwitters' 1919 watercolor, *Aq. 3: Das Herz geht zur Mühle* (Aquarell 3: The Heart Goes to the Mill), in an article about his work from the same year, indicates that he was aware of Schwitters' mill theme in his watercolor drawings before he wrote his commentary on *Haus Merz*.[53] In his article, "Kurt Schwitters," Spengemann explained how the original identities of the objects played no role in Schwitters' art.[54] Although Spengemann did not describe the gears in *Haus Merz* as standing for the working parts of a mill in this article,

---

itself. See: *Langenscheidt's Schulwörterbuch: English* (Berlin: Langenscheidt, 1986), 411 and 447. s.v. "*Eigen*" and "*Gift*." For a similar interpretation, see also Elderfield, 51

52. Schwitters gave these objects as examples of the materials he would use to construct his pictures. Schwitters, *Merz*: *Holland Dada,* in *LW*, vol. 5, 134.

53. Christof Spengemann, "Kurt Schwitters," *Der Cicerone* 11, no. 18 (1919): 578-80. See specifically 579.

54. In a description of Schwitters' Merz collages Spengemann explained: *"Wesentlich ist, dass die ursprüngliche Bedeutung der Gegenstände keine Rolle spielt."* (Important is that the original meaning of the objects do not play a role.). Ibid., 578.

he did suggest in a second article titled *"Die Kunst von Heute"* (The Art of Today) that this motif in Expressionist art did not have the intention to be interpreted literally.[55] Spengemann published this article in the same issue of *Der Zweeman* as his review of *Haus Merz* and he used machine wheels as an example to describe how Expressionist artists, using the same term as Schwitters, sought to *"entmaterialisiert"* the identities of objects and give them new meaning in their artwork.[56] This suggests that although Spengemann argued that the gears in *Haus Merz* had nothing to do with it as a representation of the *Zweckform* (purpose form) for a cathedral, by explaining that they were in it because of an "artistic necessity" would have been an assumption that Schwitters intended to use them to describe something other than gears.[57] In this way, it can also be said that the thin pieces of cut metal in *Haus Merz* are not merely gears or the workings of a mill in the same way that the circular piece of plastic is neither merely a button nor a tower clock. Likewise, the assemblage of objects in *Haus Merz* creates neither a visible depiction of a small cathedral nor a guide to the perception of the invisible "Cathedral." Rather, the objects are buttons, tower clocks or guides to the perception of the invisible "Cathedral" because they are interpreted as these things. In this way, *Haus Merz* has the quality of what Umberto Eco called an "open work," a piece that the artist (or architect) creates as open to more than one interpretation.[58] Consequently, as Spengemann's anagogical interpretation of *Haus Merz* indicates, it may also be compared to Scriptures, which Eco used as an example for a work that is

---

55. Christoph Spengemann, "Die Kunst von Heute," *Der Zweemann,* no. 8, 9, 10 (June, July, August 1920): 28-30.

56. Ibid.

57. Spengemann refers to Schwitters' art as an *"expressionistische Formung"* (Expressionist formation). Spengemann, "Kurt Schwitters," 580.

58. Umberto Eco, *The Open Work,* trans. Anna Cancogni (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 1-7.

open to multiple levels of meaning, including not only literal and anagogical, but also tropological and allegorical. In this example, the application of the different forms of scriptural interpretation to a cathedral structure provides a description of the levels of interpretation in Spengemann's commentary on *Haus Merz*.

The Cathedral Allegory

As early as the first century, Christian theologians used the building of a cathedral as an allegory for the correct way to interpret Scriptures. The use of cathedral construction to describe the interpretation of the Bible had its beginnings in Judaism with Philo of Alexandria's allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament. For Philo, there were pieces of text that, taken literally, contained "impossibilities," "impieties," and "absurdities," which must be construed allegorically in order for them to have any meaning.[59] Philo explains in *De Sominibus* that allegories are likened to a wise architect who directs the superstructure built upon a literal foundation.[60] Using a similar metaphor, Saint Paul related the correct way to interpret the Old Testament allegorically by presenting his history of Christ as a foundation upon which others may build their own allegorical interpretations: "According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master-builder, I have laid the foundation and another buildeth thereon."[61] By the third century, Origen added a third form of tropological (moral) interpretation. In the fourth

59. Phillip Rollinson, *Classical Theories of Allegory and Christian Culture* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1981), 7-8. See also: Robert Grant, *A Short History of Bible Interpretation* (New York: The Macmillian Company, 1963), 76-77.

60. "Let these things be laid down first by way of foundation; and on this foundation let us raise up the rest of the building, following the rules of that wise architect, allegory, and accurately investigating each particular of the dreams; but first we must mention what it is requisite should be attended to before the dreams." Philo, "On Dreams, That they are God-sent," bk. 2, (2.8) in *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*, trans. C.D. Yonge, 2nd printing (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 388. Beryl Smalley also discusses this quote in Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1952), 5.

61. 1 Corinthians 3:10-17.

century, John Cassian separated the allegorical interpretation of Scriptures into two and established anagogical interpretation as a fourth form.[62] Gregory the Great and Hugh of Saint Victor expanded Saint Paul's church metaphor in the sixth and twelfth centuries to include three of these four forms. Contrary to Saint Paul though, in his *Moralia of Job*, Gregory the Great used the construction of a cathedral as a metaphor, not only to illustrate the correct way to interpret Scriptures allegorically but also the application of the moral understanding that we take from it. In this way, the complete building of a cathedral, from the construction of its foundation to its interior painting became a continuous series of metaphors. As Gregory the Great related:

> First we put in place the foundations of *historia* [literal meaning]; then through the typological significance we build up a fabric of the mind in the citadel of our faith; and at the end through the grace of our moral understanding, as though with added color we clothe the building.[63]

Similarly, in his *Didascalicon* from the twelfth century, Hugh of Saint Victor repeated almost verbatim what Gregory the Great had written in his *Moralia of Job*.

> As you are about to build, therefore, lay first the foundation of history; next by pursuing the 'typical' meaning, build up a structure in your mind to be a fortress of faith. Last of all, however, through the loveliness of morality, paint the structure over with the most beautiful colors.[64]

---

62. In *De principiis* (On First Principles), Origen set out to explain the proper way to read and understand Scriptures that began by understanding Scriptures to contain both literal and hidden meanings in allegories, types and enigmas. Contrary to Philo, who compared the outer, literal meaning to the body and the inner, allegorical meaning to the Spirit, Origen found support for a threefold division of Scripture in a passage from Proverbs 22:20 of the Septuagint that he established as an anthropological division of flesh (body), soul and spirit or what scholars have identified to be the literal, the moral and the mystical sense. Origen, bk. 4, chap. 2, 275-276. See also Jon Whitman, *Allegory: The Dynamics of an Ancient and Medieval Technique* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 63; Karen Jo Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Method in Origen's Exegesis* (Berlin-New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1986), 40, n. 51-52. In the 5th century, Origen's threefold sense is separated by John Cassian into four distinct forms. John Cassian, Conference 14, chap. 8, sect. 4, of John Cassian, *The Conferences*, trans. Boniface Ramsey, O.P. (New York, N.Y.; Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1997), 510.

63. Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job,* Prologue ("Epistola ad Laendrum") 3 see *Corpus christianorum Series latina* (CCSL), no. 143, 4.110-114 after Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400-1200* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 18, n. 30.

64. Hugh of St. Victor, *The Didascalicon of Hugh of Saint Victor*, trans. Jerome Taylor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 138.

In these examples, Gregory the Great's "typical meaning" or Hugh of Saint Victor's

"typological significance" reference Saint Paul's allegorical interpretation of events in the Old

Testament as "types" that metaphorically prefigured those in the New Testament.[65] Gregory and

Hugh's moral interpretation of Scriptures provides practical instruction for how one should live

their life. This compares to a builder that both theologians argue interpret the foundation and

structure of a cathedral as practical instruction for adding the finishes to it. However, neither

Gregory the Great nor Hugh of Saint Victor included an example of an anagogical interpretation

in their exegesis of the cathedral. For early Christian theologians, allegorical and anagogical

interpretations were not separate but connected to an anagogical progression of knowledge. In

this regard, Christian theologians used two other structures to show the connection between

allegory and anagogy: a mill and a hoist.

In Christian descriptions of biblical exegesis, the mill and hoist were important tropes to

explain the allegorical interpretation of events in Scriptures. Beginning with Origen who

proposed only a literal, allegorical and tropological interpretation of Scriptures, he spoke of

allegory in his *Commentary on John* as a "leading up" of the intellect, such that in reading the

Bible we are to "*anagoge* [lift up] and allegorize" expressions which are seemingly literal.[66] The

use of the mill to describe the allegorical interpretation of Scriptures occurs most famously in

---

65. In St. Paul's exegesis of the story of Abraham, Sarah and Hagar (Genesis 16:21) he uses the participle "*allegoroumena*" (from the Greek *allegourein* to speak allegorically) in *Letter to the Galatians* 4:24 to describe a non-literal interpretation of an Old Testament event as prefiguring the New. In this statement, Paul interprets the statement from Genesis as an allegory such that the slave Hagar is a metaphor for the present state of Jerusalem and her son Ishmael a metaphor for the Jews who are born into slavery. In this way, the Old Testament was now viewed together with the New Testament as a single corpus such that the figures or events of the Old Testament pointed forward to the New Testament as a "type" prefiguring a New Testament antitype. The justification for Paul's typical allegorical interpretation of Scripture was put forward in his first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 10:11): "Now these things happened unto them for ensamples [typos]: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world [ages] are come." For this observation see Anna Esmeijer, *Divina Quaternitas: A Preliminary Study in the Method and Application of Visual Exegesis* (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Van Gorcum Assen, 1978), 11; For more on this interpretation see Phillip Rollinson, *Classical Theories of Allegory and Christian Culture* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1981), 30.

66. See: Origen, *Commentary on John*, I. 26, p.33, 23 after Grant, Ibid., 98.

Christian imagery with the depiction of Saint Paul milling grain in a stained-glass roundel of the "Anagogical Window" at the Abbey cathedral of Saint Denis (fig. 78). Abbot Suger explained this window design at Saint Denis as an allegorical description of Saint Paul milling the Old Law to make the salvific bread of the New Testament. [67] In Abbot Suger's memoirs of the Cathedral construction, he suggested that the window played a role "urging us onward form the material to the immaterial" and cited its accompanying verse:

> By working the mill, thou, Paul, takest the flour out of the bran.
> Thou makest known the inmost meaning of the Law of Moses.
> From so many grains is made the true bread without bran,
> Ours and the angels' perpetual food.[68]

In this quote, Saint Paul's allegorical interpretations of Moses' law in the Old Testament are compared to the milling of grain that separates the flour (types) from the bran in order to make the true bread (allegories). For Gregory the Great, this form of interpretation assists another machine to lift the soul to a contemplation of "higher things."[69] Gregory ascribes great value to this machine:

> But a human mind, having been raised by the machine (so to speak) of its contemplation, the more it looks above itself at higher things, the more fearfully it trembles in its very self;
>
> Allegory indeed, for a soul placed far from God, creates a kind of machine that by its means [the soul] may be lifted to God.[70]

---

67. For Suger's association of the mill scene with St. Paul, see: Panofsky, *Abbot Suger on the Abbey Church of St.-Denis and its art treasures*, 73-5. For the interpretations of the mill scene see: Louis Grodecki, "Les vitraux allégoriques de St. Denis," *Art de France* 1 (1961): 19- 46. See specifically 22-24.

68. Panofsky, Ibid.

69. Gregory the Great, *Expositio in Canticum canticorum,* par. 2, in *Corpus Christianorum Series latina* (CCSL), no. 143A, 3.14. After Carruthers, 168, n. 141.

70. Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job*, 5.32.56, in *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* (CCSL) no. 143, 258.80-82: *"Sed humanus animus quadum suae contemplationis machina subleuatus, quo super se altiora conspicit, eo in semetipso terribilius contremiscit"*; *Expositio in Canticum Canticorum* 2, in *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* (CCSL), no. 144, 3.14-15: *"Allegoria enim animae longe a Deo positae quasi wuandam machinam facit, ut per illam leuetur ad deum."* After Carruthers, 81, n. 76.

Here, the allegorical interpretation of Scriptures is likened to a machine that assists the elevation of the mind to God. In Gregory the Great's allegory of cathedral construction, the allegorical interpretation of Scriptures is compared to a hoist that anagogically lifts the historical stones into a new total structure constructed of allegories. Abbot Suger, a close friend of Hugh of Saint Victor, provides an example for this anagogical interpretation of an invisible unifying content for a cathedral structure.

During the twelfth century, Abbot Suger was deeply concerned with the anagogical function that the Abbey cathedral of Saint Denis would have upon those who visited it. In the design of the cathedral and its contents, Suger wanted to use the visible light entering the space and reflecting off different precious metals and gems to aid an anagogical interpretation of an invisible order of divine Light emanating from God. Suger's anagogical understanding of light was influenced by Hugh of Saint Victor's commentary on Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite's *Celestial Hierarchy*.[71] Using the Christian idea of creation as a single light that was commanded forth by the words *Fiat Lux* into all less pure and coarse material things as a metaphor, the Pseudo-Areopagite sought to demonstrate the presence of an invisible order above the veil of visible reality.[72] For the Pseudo-Areopagite, all visible things are described as "material lights" that mirror "intelligible" ones and, ultimately, the *vera lux* of God, such that "every creature, visible or invisible, is a light brought into being by the Father of the lights."[73] However, the process by which the emanations of the divine Light flowed down until they are broken up and

---

71. Grover A. Zinn Jr., "Suger, Theology and the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition," in *Abbot Suger and Saint Denis: A Symposium*, ed. Paula Lieber Gerson (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1986), 33-40.

72. The full phrase is "*Dixitque Deus fiat lux et facta est lux*" (God said let there be light, and there was light). See: Gen. 1:3, *Old Testament*.

73. Pseudo-Dionysius, "The Celestial Hierarchy," in Dionysius the Pseudo-Aeropagite, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works,* trans. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 145-6.

drowned in matter could be reversed and help us to rise from pollution and multiplicity to a

perception of pureness and oneness.[74] The Pseudo-Areopagite argued that by abandoning

ourselves to the divine radiance, the human mind, could be guided "anagogically" by materials to

contemplate their "immaterial archetypes" whose transcendent cause is God.[75] For this reason,

Abbot Suger found justification for his assembly of precious metals and gems in a religious

object like the cross of Saint Eloy. The physical brightness of religious objects was believed to

"brighten" the "dull" minds of the beholders and encourage them to "be transported from this

inferior to that higher world" by anagogically interpreting an invisible Idea of Light as their

source.

This anagogical exegesis of a church provides a useful example for understanding the

role that Spengemann viewed Schwitters' "artistic necessity" played in his creation of *Haus*

Merz as a non-literal representation of a cathedral. By applying the four levels of biblical

interpretation to *Haus Merz*, a historical interpretation would seek to chronicle the assemblage of

metal, wood and ivory to each other, while as an allegory, these events are compared

metaphorically to others from somewhere else. Conversely, a moral interpretation of *Haus Merz*

would take some practical instruction for the making of architecture while to interpret the

assemblage anagogically had the intention to perceive an invisible Idea unifying the different

parts as a "Cathedral." In these four instances, only with an allegorical interpretation is it a

---

74. "Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights. But there is something more. Inspired by the Father, each procession of the Light spreads itself generously toward us, and, in its power to unify, it stirs us by lifting us up. It returns us back to oneness and deifying simplicity of the Father who gathers us in. For as the sacred Word says, 'from him and to him are all things.'" Ibid., 145.

75. "Divine ray" is the term used to describe the outpouring of Divine Light. Ibid. 145-6. "αναγωγικως, -ας, -ην" (anagogical) were the Greek terms used in reference to the mind being "uplifted" from material figures and forms to interpretations and assimilations. See: Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita *"De Coelesti Hierarchia,"* in: *Corpus Dionysiacum*, ed. Günter Heil and Adolf Martin Ritter, vol. 2 (Berlin – New York: Gruyter, 1991), 7-8. The metaphor of "lights" having radiated from a single light in the first two sections of chapter 1 in "The Celestial Hierarchy," is associated with the immaterial hierarchies clothed in material forms and figures in section 3 and are also described as "immaterial archetypes" See: Pseudo-Dionysius, "The Celestial Hierarchy," 145-6 and 152.

"necessity" that the historical events making *Haus Merz* a cathedral are explained by something outside them. That is to say that for Spengemann, the gears were 'out of place' in his interpretation of *Haus Merz* but an "artistic necessity" in the work for Schwitters.

Whether or not Spengemann had a privileged understanding of the themes surrounding Schwitters' use of the gears in his watercolor and stamp drawings from the period, their presence in *Haus Merz* connect it to his use of the mill as an allegory for his the Merz transformation of found objects as art or architecture. That Schwitters was exploring the same theme in *Haus Merz* as the ones in his drawings from the period is suggested by the cathedral and gears he depicted in *Ohne Titel: Ferienkolonie für Taubstumme* mentioned previously. In these instances, the cathedrals become houses of Merz thought that interprets an invisible content unifying found materials as art or architecture. Compared to a House of God, whose thought is *a priori* and the cathedral is created as its imperfect manifestation, Schwitters' *House Merz* was created by discovering an invisible content unifying an assemblage of found materials. To metaphorically interpret the gears in *Haus Merz* as a mill is to associate the transformation of found objects into "Merz architecture" as allegorically comparable to the milling of grain into flour.

Conclusion

By affirming Spengemann's interpretation of *Haus Merz* as a "Cathedral," Schwitters constructed an analogy between his Merz transformation of found objects into architecture with the anagogical perspective of Gothic and Romantic art. While Gropius argued that, as a *Gesamtkunstwerk,* the crystal cathedral of *Arbeitsrat für Kunst* would metaphorically radiate its light into the making of all man-made things, Schwitters' cathedral proposed to mill the identities of man-made things into one. For Schwitters, the "Cathedral" was not a visible

expression of *a priori* Ideas deriving from God in the Pseudo-Dionysian tradition, but an invisible content discovered in the "artistic evaluation" of found objects. In this regard, *Haus Merz* did not represent the *Zweckform* for an actual cathedral since Schwitters placed the gears in the nave. Instead, the gears in *Haus Merz* were reminiscent of those Schwitters depicted in his watercolor and stamp drawings to describe a metaphorical comparison between a mill and the transformation of found objects into Merz art. Consequently, by including a set of gears in the nave of *Haus Merz,* Schwitters extended this analogy to "Merz architecture." The next chapter will look at the sources and precedents leading to Schwitters' creative development of his Merz interpretation of found objects in the history of anagogy and how this supports its application as a method for modeling the "representative material as well as constructive possibilities" of a planned construction.