

Assembling the Ineffable in Kurt Schwitters' Architectural Models

Matthew D. Mindrup

ABSTRACT

During the early 1920s, the German artist and poet, Kurt Schwitters, developed a method of creating models of architecture using found objects based upon his Merz approach to art. While many leading architects joined the *Arbeitsrat für Kunst* and Bruno Taut's *Gläserne Kette* at the end of World War I to speculate upon what to build for the new post-war German architecture, Schwitters challenged the predominant views by probing how it could be designed through models. Compared to the normative practice of molding clay and casting plaster into scale models after completed designs, Schwitters assembled found objects into two models, *Haus Merz* during 1920 and *Schloss und Kathedrale mit Hoffbrunnen* in 1922, to imagine new combinations and transformations of material, form and space in building designs. Schwitters' Merz interpretation of found objects as models of architecture held that all materials have an ineffable transitory content that contributes to their identities as natural or man-made utilitarian things. In the Christian medieval exegesis of religious objects, the interpretation of materials as a dichotomy of visible form and invisible content was described as "anagogy." However, unlike this Christian conception of the invisible that was transcendental and *a priori*, the anagogical Merz interpretation seeks to find the invisible within the visible through the active imagination of found materials assembled as a model of architecture. This dissertation examines Schwitters' proposed use of found objects to construct architectural models as an anagogical approach to the material imagination of architecture.

DEDICATION

To an *Edle Frau*, Franziska (my wife).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation on Kurt Schwitters' architectural models is a study that is many years in the making. It has its beginnings in the development of a series of models for the design of my undergraduate thesis project at Penn State. These constructions first stimulated my interest in understanding how architectural models can play a role in the inspiration of new architectural ideas. During the course of my studies that followed, many people have stood by me in their support of this project.

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