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Merzbau, the grave of the logocentric self: He who screams becomes the space

Translated by Ana Carolina Azevedo

ABSTRACT: This article will discuss the Merzbau in Hannover as a “para-architecture” experience and as a doctrine on environmental comfort, connected to intense mnemonic feeling and relaxation. The Merzbau, the Gothic cubic *Traumhaus* (dream house) by Kurt Schwitters, is depicted here as a laboratory of sensory stimuli where an aesthetic control of oblivion, and of annoyance, has been practiced.

KEYWORDS: Merzbau. Kurt Schwitters. Modernism. Art. Architecture.

I felt myself freed and had to shout my jubilation out to the world... One can even shout with refuse, and this is what I did, nailing and gluing it together.

Kurt Schwitters, *Ich und Meine Ziele*, 1931.

In DIETRICH, 1993, p. 206.

To avoid mistakes, I must expressly tell you that my working method is not a question of interior design, i.e., decorative style; that by no means do I construct an interior for people to live in [...]. I am building an abstract (cubist) sculpture which people can go into. From the directions and movements of the constructed surfaces, there emanate imaginary planes [...].

The suggestive impact of the sculpture is based on the fact that people themselves cross these imaginary planes. It is the dynamic of the impact that is especially important to me. I am building a composition without boundaries, each individual part is at the same time a frame for the neighboring parts, and all parts are mutually interdependent.” (In LEMOINE, 1994, p. 139).

Kurt Schwitters, Letter to Alfred Barr, November 23, 1936

As a part of my research on the “para-architecture work of art”,¹ I intend to bring this article into a comment on the content and the methodological process that contributed to the formation/construction of the first *Merzbau*, the hybrid architectural designed intermittently by Kurt Schwitters (henceforth K. Schwitters or just K.S.) at his parents’ house in Waldhausentrassé, in the German city of Hannover during a period between 17-14 years (from 1919/1923 to 1937).

1. C.f. POUSADA, Pedro. *A Arquitectura na sua ausência. Presença do objecto de arte para-arquitónico no Modernismo e na Arte Contemporânea*. Universidade Coimbra: FCTUC, 2009.

At an “atmosphere of nursery, kitchen and stable” (FALGUIÉRES, 1995, p. 155), K. Schwitters developed a device of accumulation and concealment, with olfactory, tactile, optical and mytographic properties that, as per the readings of his contemporaries and posterity, was omnivorous, arborescent or architectural.

This text shall undertake to talk about the drive to order/reorder the perceived world that led him to build this device suggesting that this symbolic energy emanates from idiosyncratic characteristics of its subjectivity, of external stimuli from the German and international artistic community and the materials and historical conditions conducive to the modernization of the concept of “*Gesamtkunstwerk*”; On this concept of modern art, Gabrielle Bryant clarifies:

In what was considered an “aesthetic revolution”, art is elevated to the metaphysical level, and religious concepts and policy objectives are introduced in the field of art as is exemplified in the notion of “aesthetic state” and in the project of a new “mythology” as “the most artificial of all artistic works”. [...] Art no longer fulfills the role of imitating its social and historical context, but society should follow the ideals and the rules defined by the artistic creation. Art serves as *Vorschein* (aesthetic anticipation) and is a catalyst in the creation of new things. The transfer of spiritual and revolutionary aspirations (or reform) to the arena of aesthetics; the artistic autonomy operating as a vehicle of utopian ideas that propose a spiritually and socially more advanced society; all of these elements built the conceptual basis of what would be the quest for a modern *Gesamtkunstwerk* [...]. (BRYANT, 2004, p. 158)

In 1910, Austrian architect Adolf Loos (KLEINMAN, 2007, p. 57-59) noted the advantages of a work of art in relation to architectural work, arguing that the first was, by its nature, immune to setbacks of public reception, for the production of aesthetic consensus was not a condition of its existence; Loos insisted that works of art should avoid contentment by being understood as a poetics of antagonism,² the active opposition between a *subjectum* and an *objectum*: the work of art cannot be played or used; In contrast, the mere design of a domicile entailed for the architect to fear the confrontation of multiple sensitivities and political, aesthetic and psychological contingencies³ and the painful awareness of the entropic afterlife of her artifact.

The Merzbau’s materiality was based on this double condition

2. Maybe it was this argument that Picasso used three years prior, upon facing the negative reaction of the Bateau Lavoir group, Apollinaire, Braque, the brothers Leo and Gertrude Stein, in front of his “Chicas,” the *nec plus ultra* of the female nudity: the right of the object (in this case pictorial) to suspend the aesthetics and to refuse connection to the word of the subject.

3. Here the political is read in the sense of socially determined conceptions of family intimacy.

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of a space conceived to be contemplated from a distance—as the subject of a speech and a biography—and to be lived as the demonstration and intensification of habits and everyday needs, as an unconscious prototype of that which would be referred to as *participatory aesthetics* in the 70's.

Therefore, the Merzbau worked as both a puzzle and a dialogic structure, and it was from this opposition of terms (the opaque curtain of not transferable memories produces messages) that K.S. used to question the European modernist community and gave a (spatial) shape, an outline, to its presence within that community.

Dorothea Dietrich⁴ stresses that K. Schwitters projected his artistic praxis into everyday life, in this place of socially determined deprivation, but he did not use the artistic gesture to make the separation of everyday life from this determinism into irreducibility (the inescapable repetition and fragmentation of daily experience), but to exploit and intensify the contact points between the smaller moments and the higher moments of this life.⁵ Thus Art, placed as the pure form of public activity, serves less to save (the aesthetic revolution recognizes its emancipatory limitations) and more to contrast (the mundane chiaroscuro rises as the raw material and subject of the artistic act); the artist works in the social arena, sometimes as prey, sometimes as predator of culture. The Art of K.S. was an “art of living” everyday life, which led to its failures and inconveniences; for example, in the four years (1933-1937) during the German Reich, a self-inflicted alienation, a conviction to expose this absolutely innovative evil (because it introduced and honored itself as the Correcting Good that puts an order and saves the German people from its enemies and from themselves) with the belief that the poetic attitude could remain sovereign, intact and relieved of political action.

As we shall further investigate, one of the intentions of this ticket of “poetic vision” “on a prosaic world of activity” (BATAILLE, 1998, p. 30-35) is the naturalization in the speech of the German culture of an anti-rational creation of the modern creator, whose genealogy dates back to the Romanticism; the design has something of an oxymoron, because it proposes that, in the dispute for the hegemony, in the same biography, there are a pessimist ready to surrender before the chaos of bourgeois moral order, ready to admit the impossibility of existing in change and accepting the *internal exile*, in Art itself, and a motivational *Prophet*, agonist in their “moving on”, which prospects this chaos (this disorder programmed

to keep things in order), in order to gain *momentum* and impetus to overcome the barbed wire of the same, this is preserving this autonomy but putting hinged doors in it and placing it in the middle of the social facts.

On the other hand, in addition to the new issues related to the mechanisms of image reception offered by the symbolic revolution, one may identify in K.S.'s modernist works the pre-industrial behaviors known to the primitivism of expressionist heritage (the ritualized fashion of collecting, saving and hoarding) as well as other, more ambiguous, which can be found on bourgeois culture and adrift from the machine age (leaving a trail, a copyright mark in time, the collections standing between the cabinet of curiosities and capitalist accumulation); Therefore, the Merzbau denotes the *synapses* of the modernist visuality and accumulates elements of modern urban culture. Perhaps the strongest of these elements is the notion that the use value of the objects had been increasing in precariousness: in everyday life, premature archaism of goods produced is installed, and premature obsolescence remains as residue.

Thus, since the birth of the Merz-saulen (Merz-column) in 1919 up to the Merzbau in 1930, the images were built as a politics of everyday life in which the ability of reinvention of the individual in their struggle against the same and against a cognizable gift melt into oblivion (in the grave, the dematerialization of things lived) and on his return as reflective memory (the fields of the archetype, the beginning: the monument).⁶ Another of Merzbau's ideological element, in addition to the cult of the *objet trouvé* and the fetishization of objects, is that it creates awareness in itself about concerns dear to modern architectural practice on the idea of dwellings, on their journey between the centuries-old uterus and the urn (between interiority and closure, which are read as anthropomorphic indexes); notes that the modern division between work and exist—the reification of the specialized work (understood critically as a praxis notify and compartmentalized, an activity that lacks ontology), and intimacy as the possession of the world—are questioned by Merzbau. So much so that its surface puts on the same level the routines and the entropy of the workshop-archive (control of the chaos, the desire of a unitary direction) and the domestic interior (this place pervaded of the re-do, the inscription and the irreversible).

One aspect with which we have to work is that the testimony of Kurt Schwitters, his testimonials and public interventions, as well as the artistic community that has joined, the circle of friends and of complicity with which he built his social identity, ceased to exist

4. DIETRICH, Dorothea. Op. Cit, p. 204-205.

5. JAPPE, Anselm. *Guy Debord*. Lisboa: Antígona, p. 93-97.

6. C.f. TEYSOT; Georges, Op. Cit, p. 60.

and gave its place to artificial mechanisms of recoding and reconstitution (the archive, the monographic construction of modernism, the cultural industry of new media) that made the history of this historically and culturally missing, monumentally structure possible (KELLEY, 1993, p. 11-26 as well as DICKERMAN, 2005, p. 103). The *situation-specific* in analysis here is now a non-existent material, surviving on a deferred and incomplete mode, depending on secondary images. The original construction partially succumbed to an Allies' bombing in 1943 and K. Schwitters' attempt to retrieve Merzbau's damaged but recoverable parts was interrupted by his unexpected death in 1948. The letter he sent to Alfred Barr in 1936 (a piece of which can be found in the beginning of this article) corresponds to one of his first attempts to save the Merzbau by making him "emigrate" to the MoMA, headed by Barr at the time.

Nevertheless and despite the scarcity and redundancy of visual records that reveal pale after-images of power struggles between theatricality and quotidian reality; Despite also being faced with a multiple object that no longer exists, the fact is that the Merzbau still raises, today, an attention and a retrospective interest to which this article aspires to be another contributor.

Kurt Schwitters' project's wealth of critical acclaim is significant. Only in the last century's 90th decade, there are at least six distinct readings and monographic character that took Schwitters as their theme since the early 80's (1981-83) with the construction and exhibition of a partial replica at the Sprengel Museum in Hannover; this replica was made by Peter Bissegger, based on photographs that Walter Redemman had taken of Merzbau in 1933.

These are the contributions made by Dorothea Dietrich, who included a chapter on the Merzbau in his *The collages of Kurt Schwitters—Tradition and Innovation* (Cambridge University Press, 1993); by Jean Christophe Bailly, who turned the Merzbau into the very main character of their book, *Kurt Schwitters*, published in 1993; by Dietmar Elger and Patricia Falguières, who did two different studies on the Merzbau in the *Catalogue Raisonné Kurt Schwitters*, published by the CNAM-Georges Pompidou in 1994; by Gwendolen Webster's book, *Kurt Merz Schwitters* (University of Wales Press), from as early as 1997 but just as relevant to clarify some gaps in the history of the Merzbau; by Elizabeth Gamard's monographic study, *Merzbau The Cathedral of Erotic Misery*, published in 2000. More recently, specifically in 2005, we can mention Leah Dickerman's text, *Merz and Memory - On Kurt Schwitters*.

The importance of John Elderfield as one of the first investigators of the work of K. Schwitters also deserves mentioning. It is

due to their work at the MoMA that, in 1985, the first major exhibition of the work of Kurt Schwitters was held (SUDHALTER, 2007). J. Elderfield is to the dissemination of the work of K.S. as Camilla Gray was in 1962 to the rediscovery, in the West, of the Russian avant-gardes, and Robert Motherwell to the redefinition of the Dada adventure, with his 1951 anthology, *The Dada Painters and Poets*.

Merzbau's hermeneutic saturation (and surplus-valuable) has thus progressed from academic article to academic article, each exploring, in a legitimized (albeit asymmetric) manner, the symptoms of this "*composition without borders*" such as Kurt Schwitters himself describes. The intertextual dimension, the discursive spatiality of this surface became, in fact, its more defined location: the Merzbau can be found and located in the extension that separates its production (metabolic) from its acceptance (undetermined).

The work's richness awareness and semantic ambiguity begin in the twenties, as a matter of fact, but remains with strong evidential and impressionistic features. There were numerous visitors, and sometimes unintentional taxpayers, who recorded in writing the experience of socially interacting with Kurt Schwitters or of his sculptures in the process of transforming domestic spaces/reinventing themselves. Tristan Tzara, for example, contacted him in 1922 and described him as an artist who could laugh at his own self (a feature of character that Tzara must have felt that André Breton and his acolytes lacked), living in "*a house covered by tram tickets, pieces of paper and glued newspaper*" (TZARA, 1975, p. 604). Tzara also described the original Merzbau column as well as some of Kurt Schwitters's *gratte-ciel* monumental project for his sculpture.

Hans Arp, El Lissitzky, Van Doesburg, Mies van der Rohe, Hannah Hoch are other *passengers* of this environmental and constructive experience. But there is no doubt that the primary sources of the holistic Merzbau experience are the testimonies by Schwitters's wife, Helma Schwitters, in particular her letters to Hannah Hoch in 1933: "*You can sit there for hours, just looking, and you will always find something new and interesting*" (HOCH, 1989, p. 56), as well as the testimony of the couple's only son, Ernst Schwitters, who undertook to keep his father's work safe from oblivion.

The self-sustaining characteristic of this enigmatic place; the drifting, obscure policies that choose what to keep and what to forget, what to reveal and what to hide, become important ideological enhancers of its social existence; of an existence that is not only reproduced and defined in its inside but also extends in size and in media on the outside that shall take the shape of time. The *once upon a time the Merzbau* constitutes a compulsory reference of any

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serious study on the relationship between artistic and architectural installations.

Hannover's Merzbau is, therefore, an extraordinary *post-mortem* survivor. Its persistence in the imagination of many contemporary artists (Robert Motherwell, Allan Kaprow, Claes Oldenburg, Robert Rauschenberg, Gregor Schneider, Thomas Hirschorn, Andrea Zittel, Natasha Reid, Aaron Curry) might come from what it offers us to understand what separates and brings the contemporary artistic process that defined modernism. The Merzbau anticipates the aporetic space installed on the contemporary artistic creation, playing its convictions between the object of *ambiguous kindness* of technique, the purified, seductive and uncommunicative object, the object that admits there is something of tragic, isolation and structural conflict in between disguise and authenticity.

One of the added values of this contemporary revival process is the fact that the Merzbau is organized between two extremes of the topology *unheimlich* of housing, respectively the attic and the basement. Kurt Schwitters understood the space as representation (the space as the image of a production) and as a medium; through this methodology reflected on the possession and use of space, its commodification, in a perspective that is still valid in our post-industrial civilization where its scarcity (the lack of space for living) prevails: the one of responding poetically to a concrete and urgent need of a shelter, of a "shroud".

Merzbau reflects on a wish that the technology of then and of today couldn't (or were not allowed to) solve: the production of an indentation bandage with egomorphic characteristics; Schwitters was, accordingly, the internal survival of "being in the world" in a "*making of worlds*" (In CRUZ, 1988).

In Merzbau, Schwitters introduces the idea of architecture in historical allegory, superstition and the restless universe of folk tales (where they are more prominent as penalties but also as provocations, bypass and error). The architecture appears simultaneously as an *once upon a time* and a place, as the assembly of different uses and appropriations of space and the deposit of non-historical parts of space production. K. Schwitters questioned art, its unequal development, explored factography, the myths of Great Germany, and stressed the anti-aesthetic possibilities of *passion* journalism in the attempts of finding, in the atomization of facts and products of human experience, manners of disruption of the eternal present.

It is in this context that the simultaneously aerial and undergroundly nature of the Merzbau is explained, and the convergence that it manifests between the topologies of basement and attic,

between tomb and resurrection, between the natural and more than natural

The physical and psychological experience of phantasmagoria, that which is repeated through innumerable instances, arising forever more, leaving traces of its imminent return as if fragments and residues; that which is morbidly curious about the past of life, of things that have been found and things that have been kept secret, the denial of communication, the sharing of a code (hereupon donning architectural thickness, becoming a specific place of the building, like a cavity, an insert, a hidden closet), are all themes that intensify the space we call Merzbau. This topology does not only own properties linked to the *return of the repressed*, but also works as an anthropological separator in relation to nature, the world of living things. The basement and the attic are both areas prevented from touching the house and dissolving into the earth by a thick layer of cement, secluded by a layer of tiles that separates it from the firmament, the immeasurable. These two polarities accentuate the metabolic finiteness of the house—of any house, for that matter.

KURT SCHWITTERS, ANTI-HERO OF MODERNISM

Rimbaud's prophecy has come true through the combination of words that are "accessible to the five senses"
Moholy-Nagy on Schwitters

Kurt Schwitters, was a good man, funny, an elegant but clumsy petty bourgeois, rival of Harold Lloyd, who added to his good manners a seemingly irrational cult of the spoilage that, same as his contemporary artists, (The Futurism of Marinetti to Boccioni [BANHAM, 1979, p. 183-184], Marcel Duchamp and his painting "Bride" from 1912, Francis Picabia and his "Parade Amoureuse", 1917, or Max Ernst during the period at the Die Schammade magazine, 1920) conceived the machine as an anthropogenesis, admitting free will as a common human emotion, and as the psychological life as propriety of the mechanisms and subproducts (industrial and domestic trash). "*An artist from head to toe, possessed by art*" (HOCH in ADRIANI, p. 36), Kurt Schwitters belonged to Hannover section of the German Dadaists but also part of the group of abstract artists in the same town, with Vordemberge-Gildewart, Domela and Buchheister.

Inventor of the active principle "Merz", a productive combination of the vagabond collection and constructivist *caboucos* (the

7. In MOTHERWELL, 1981, p. xxix-xx.

aesthetic revolution optimistically erring among the sprawl and public works), K.S. was asymptomatic as a Dadaist, not brandishing with fanfare the corpse of culture or the social bankruptcy, and not even being very clear on which side he was; he had always thought of himself as an *art believer*, not intending to break ties with the historic intent of art. Additionally, Richard Huelsenbeck had issues with Schwitters' Dadaism and even with his ability to overcome the parochialism of the German province. Unfairly, he baptized him as the Caspar David Friederich of the Dada Revolution" (BAILLY, p. 35). He admitted in 1921 that the Merz was not Dadaist; the artistic program had some relation, but it was definitely not the same thing. Merz was inorganic and more concomitant practitioner than the Berliner's anti-*ars bellum* gregarism: "*Schwitters moves like a Florence Nightingale. He is of a Franciscan temperament. [...] wants to heal and ween on, [...] is like a nurse for Dadaism, [...] prefers glue to scissors.*" (ROTTERS, 1978, p. 158).

His complacent temper, his belief in the social advantages of aesthetic contemplation and in the conversion of the bourgeois public to modernism via the scandal but also the habit turned into a programme of action. At his residency, the house in Hanover, he threw events for artists to perform and promote their work, thus encouraging lectures given by European vanguard activists (Arp, Doesburg, Haussman, Lissitsky), singing nonsense poems to a heterogeneous audience—according to the testimony of Hannah Hoch, these sect-like initiatives gathered "*friends, but also curious enemies and people whom Schwitters had, in a way, due to his temper, forced into his idea of art. These were not only factory heads but also cobblers. He likes very much that his guests demonstrated contrary beliefs to these events, because then he could introduce them to hannoverians*" (HOCH in ADRIANI, p. 45).

Kurt Schwitters is often associated with the Zurich show business spirit, cousins of Zurich's Dadaists, and to Tristan Tzara in particular, but there is a poetic depth, a *dénouement* of doubt and bitterness in the *anthologies of anachronism and metaphysics* which are Merzian combinations, jumping over the dead-end nihilism of Tzara. The clown Schwitters still loves and moves with the idea of a Total Art (Art in an endless succession of covering all expressions of life, from fashion to food, from poetry to technical literature, from the voyeuristic look to the introspective look), still believes in the social and socializing role of the artistic creator, in a role that unfolds with a subterranean consistency between absences and appearances. Art still manages to rise from the ashes in the middle of the cull and restructure itself from abandonment.

Herbert Read⁸ wrote an essay for the exhibition organized by K. Schwitters at the Modern Art Gallery in London (December, 1944), based on his visit to K.S.'s English *atelier* migrates the culture of the rejected into something that touches the unfathomable and incomprehensible. In this culture, the primitive and unpolished editing prevails, there is an asymmetric surface, an imperfect and pulsional in collage, uneven and incomplete in composition; Read defines it as possessing mystical traits, noting that Schwitters "does something with the stones that were rejected by builders" (READ in LUKE, 2012, p. 238). Read observes with cunning and skill that Schwitters' recurrent use of materials normally associated with waste, at the end of the chain of production and consumption, would accentuate this property imperatively in the "organic reality of art": the imprecision (the anomie, the absence of a name and of a finiteness that we add ourselves).

"[...] We can start over",⁹ Katherine Dreier reads from the resilient K. Schwitters in a letter sent by him from Norway at the beginning of his permanent exile, and in this statement of faith, announced by the process ontology: contemplate lost as a second chance, as a new beginning, as a return to the primordial moment; and the rags, the fragment, the found are like this *ur*, this Primitivism manifested in modernity. It is in this resilience that the Merz could be construed as a visual analogy of the field of knowledge that Roland Barthes set out to analyze in his course of seminars, *Comment Vivre-Ensemble* (1976-77). This is a field of knowledge that Roland Barthes has integrated the concept of *idiorrhythmy*. Barthes explains that the term is a conjunction of two Greek words, *Idios* (particular, belonging to the self) and *Rhythmos* (rhythm). It is a redundancy, since the idea of rhythm "is by definition individual".¹⁰ But in Barthes' writings, this repetition serves to separate the individual (the thinking into action, the thinker's unconscious and irrational) and rhythm as cultural form (in a Nietzschean sense, i.e. anti humanist to the extent that culture emerges as the "violence that thought is the subject":¹¹ culture as the moment when thought is required to dress up, to civilize, to become *paideia*, education,

8. READ, Herbert, *Paintings and Sculptures by Kurt Schwitters*, London:1944, in LUKE, Martin R., *Sculpture for the hand: Herbert Read in the Studio of Kurt Schwitters*, London: Art History, 35, 2, April 2012, p. 238.

9. "[...] Here I build a new atelier; it is the visible sign that a new life begins. It shall start, I am only fifty years and at this age we may start over. After all, life is so atrocious that it would be preferable not to have been born at all. With this premise, life becomes bearable." Kurt Schwitters, Lysaker October 13, 1937. In BAILLY, Jean Christophe, *Kurt Schwitters*, Paris: Éditions Hazan, 1993, p. 148.

10. BARTHES, Roland, *Comment Vivre ensemble, Cours et séminaires au Collège de France (1976-77)*, Paris: Traces écrites, Seuil Imec, 2002, p. 33-34 e 36-39

11. BARTHES, Roland, *Op.Cit.*, p. 39.

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training): “[...] rhythm took the repressive direction (see the rhythm of life of a cenobite or a phalansterian that has to move every quarter of an hour) and it became necessary to add the term *idios*.” (BARTHES, 2002, p. 39).

Is a “kind of life” in which the subject finds her personal way, her rhythm, in order to integrate in a distant way, elusive, “on the social code”.¹² Idiorrhythm “refers to the kind of subtle kinds of life: moods, unstable settings, depressed or excited passages; briefly, the contrary of a fragmented cadence, unforgiving of regularity” (BARTHES, 2002, p. 39). We may better understand this association between Merz and the idea of idiorrhythm (of not being integrated and not being separated), by reading the testimonials and the apocryphal episodes with which his contemporaries designed K.S.’s silhouette.

We take advantage of Hans Richter’s description of the conventional image of the petit bourgeois artist from inside out: “Traveling from country to country, taking with them their essays and huge folders with their collages, sold for DM 20 a piece. This person, spontaneous, two feet tall, always full of unexpected ideas and tireless activity was, in itself, a true Dada movement. (RICHTER, 1972, p. 12). [...] The battle of Troy were not as varied as a day in the life of K.S. The Schwitters columns (his masterpiece) was a unique and unsaleable creation. These were hard to transport, how to define. At the center of a vulgar piece, stood a huge abstract plastic in plaster that reached the roof, crossing it¹³ to reach the upper floors, and kept on going, until it completely filled the lower and upper rooms.” (RICHTER, 1972, p. 96-97).

Naum Gabo met him in the early 20s, probably at the time of his arrival in Berlin in 1922, and describes him in the following terms: We used to take long walks on the outskirts of Hannover and its woods. In the middle of the most lively conversation [K. Schwitters] would stop suddenly and dive into deep contemplation. One couldn’t guess what fascinated him over that insignificant piece of ground. Then he would touch something that we would discover as a piece of paper with a special texture or a seal or a note that had been thrown away, clean it carefully and lovingly, and flaunt him triumphantly toward us; only then we would be able to understand that this piece of torn paper was of a peculiar color. (GABO in LODDER, 2010).

But as Hanna Hoch notices, “the life of the Schwitters was divided into two extreme forms, the markedly bourgeois and another linked to the Merz-Dada column”.¹⁴

K. Schwitters was also a diligent employee of the city of Hannover and a keen graphic artist, worried about finding customers and orders incorporating this effect on industrial and commercial visibility.¹⁵ At the end of the World War I, he was already an activist for the German modernism, popularized by his nonsense poem *Anne Blumme* (1919), but before that, his pictorial work was a combination of a late naturalism and unsuccessful neo-romantism.

Forced into exile at the end of the thirties (1937), first in Norway and later in England, K. Schwitters would resume this insipid painting, performing landscapes and still-lives in order to subsidize their precarious economic existence.

Upon his exit from Mondrian’s atelier, Brassai said that the man painted pretty flowers in order to live but wanted to live in order to paint straight lines; on Kurt Schwitters, it could be said something like this: He sucked up the many discomforts and hassles so he could build his “coenobium”, where numerous moments of everyday life and the weight of memory would merge.

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12. BARTHES, Roland, *Op.Cit.*, p. 39.

13. Here, according to ELGER, Dietmar (op. cit., p. 142), Hans Richter exaggerates and fantasizes about the dimensions of the Hannover Merzbau, and the project moved and *metastasized* by other parts of the paternal house; through columns, representatives different from the main body, solidified the *ethos* of the built environment; John Elderfeld described in a blueprint that Merzbau’s main room should not exceed twenty square meters.

14. Hanna Hoch, *Ibidem*, p. 38.

15. Cf. HEINE, Werner & HASTON, Annette, “*Futura*” without a future: Kurt Schwitters’ *Typography for Hanover Town council, 1929-1934* In *Journal of Design History*, Vol 7, Nº2 (1994), p. 127-140.

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CAPTION OF ILLUSTRATION

The image in this article can be viewed in the version in Portuguese.

Figure 1. Wilhelm Redemann (photographer), Kurt Schwitters, *Merzbau* in Hanover, 1933 (destroyed), Detail "Blue window". Photo: Sprengel Museum Hannover

English

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