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The Two Break-throughs. Polish art after 1955 and 1989, (Dwa przełomy. Sztuka polska po 1955 i 1989 roku, 2012),
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Schwitters Meets Heidegger Against the Backdrop of the Adler Car*

Introduction

The National Museum in Wrocław stores a small collage *Merz (Merzzeichnung 225, 1921)* by Kurt Schwitters (1887-1948). It was once the property of Dr. Erich Wiese (1891-1979), director of the Schlesisches Museum in Breslau until the Nazis came to power, and later an antiquarian in Hirschberg, during the reign of Hitler. After the Second World War, when the German city of Breslau found itself within the new national borders as Polish Wrocław, the collage found its way to the Wrocław museum in unknown circumstances. However, it was stored for a long time in the warehouse, as German art was not shown in national institutions as part of the project of ridding the city of German residues and influences. Today you can see the collage on a permanent exhibition (but just as easily overlook it due to its size). This article explores the operability of the so-called turning to things in re-telling stories about the art of the city, doing so in two major steps: firstly – focusing on pre-war Breslau, and secondly – on post-war Wrocław. The combination of these two periods and their juxtaposition with each other was impossible for a long time, because under communism Poles, when officially referring to the history of the city at all, they most often invoked the history of the Polish Piast dynasty (medieval art) or even earlier times, i.e. prehistory, but not to German times¹. In the public space, the biggest changes took place only

» 1 * The successive inclusion of other historical periods in the history of Wrocław is discussed by P. Łukaszewicz, *Głos w dyskusji*, [in:] "Klio" 2005, No. 7, p. 97-100. See also: P. Łukaszewicz, „Wrocławska Akademia Sztuki i środowisko artystyczne tego miasta 1918-1933”, [w:] *Co robić po kubizmie*, ed. J. Malinowski, Kraków 1984, p. 173-189.

after 1989, their by far the most spectacular culmination to date being the exhibition at the National Museum in Wrocław and the accompanying book *German Painting from Classicism to Symbolism* (2012) by Piotr Łukaszewicz. Since the time of communism in Poland was a time of forced silence about German heritage, censorship and the growing generation of the inhabitants of Wrocław – as Łukaszewicz noted – looking for “taking roots in the surrounding reality, wanted to get to know and come to terms with the local history”², in the new Poland (after dismantling of the Iron Curtain) some literary works have been created, resurrecting both Breslau and the pioneer period of Wrocław (including a series of crime novels by Marek Krajewski, or *Dom tęsknot* [A Home of Longing] by Piotr Adamczyk³). These expectations, it seems to me, may be fulfilled also by the history of art, especially that inspired by Hayden White and his reflections on the status of fiction, or by Mieke Bal and her reflections on pre-posterity⁴. Following White, I try, then, through conscious and undivided fictionalization and narrativisation, using the figures of “Schwitters”, “Heidegger” and “Geppert” (and not – because it is impossible – real characters), reach the silenced reality of the city and of its art. Following Bal, in turn, I try to invoke a presentist, individual reception. Thus, I open history up to the future and – applying the concept of *Erwartungshorizont* (horizon of expectation) coined by Reinhart Koselleck – to rethink imagination as a category between experience and expectation⁵. In the first part of this article, I wonder if Schwitters could possibly inspire Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), or vice versa – as both the artist and the philosopher, almost contemporaries, if espousing different political views, were interested in quite similar matters, or things, their use and living in their environment. In the second part, I look in depth into the relation to the objects characteristic of Eugeniusz Geppert (1890-1979), the first director of an arts tertiary school in Wrocław. A somewhat surprising combination of the three names – Schwitters, Heidegger and Geppert – in the context of the return to things personalized in Schwitters’ “Wrocław” work (it is not known in what circumstances and where the artist donated his work to Dr. Wiese) – will inspire reflection on the construction of art history not only based on verifiable sources, but also on possible and probable facts,

» 2 P. Łukaszewicz, *Głos w dyskusji*, p. 98.

» 3 M. Krajewski, *Śmierć w Breslau*, Wrocław 1999; P. Adamczyk, *Dom tęsknot*, Warszawa 2014.

» 4 See M. Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1999.

» 5 R. Koselleck, “‘Erfahrungsraum’ und ‘Erwartungshorizont’ – zwei historische Kategorien”, [in:] *eadem., Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten*. Frankfurt/Main 1989. p. 349-375; A. Schinkel, “Imagination as a Category of History: an Essay Concerning Koselleck’s Concepts of *Erfahrungsraum* and *Erwartungshorizont*”, *History and Theory* 2005, no. 44 (February), p. 42-54.

ones that stimulate our imagination. The reasons for the vicarious meeting of Schwitters, Geppert and Heidegger are obvious: it could not have happened because of Nazism and communism and the prejudices generated by these ideologies. Generally, the reason for the mutual dislike of the artists and the philosopher – whose rationale probably expired in the 21st century (!) – was moreover a lack of agreement when it comes to art, the role of the artistic medium and the way of conceptualizing tradition. So we can say that today conditions should be created to make a meeting of Heidegger with Schwitters and Geppert finally possible, to explore the freedom of art and thought and the overcoming of toxic ideologies. The impetus for and the patron of this meeting is *Merzzeichnung 225* (1921), a ‘drawing’-collage of an artist who believed in the role of art in the spiritual rebirth of man, an idea familiar to Geppert and Heidegger. Schwitters pinned his hopes on what was weak and fragile; this idea also manifested itself in Heidegger’s thought and in Geppert’s painting.

One can of course say that since Schwitters, Heidegger and Geppert never met, this should forever make similar considerations null and void. Schwitters had to escape from a Germany where Heidegger felt comfortable. Can a historian arrange for them to meet, however? Can a historian imagine a fact that did not happen, but which nevertheless does or at least can take place, to those who, after seeing the said collage, will return from the museum to their homes or libraries to get immersed in *The Source of the Work of Art* by Heidegger? The collage, created a mere three years after the hecatomb of the first European great war of the twentieth century, was preserved miraculously after the apocalypse. It could therefore become an icon for refugees from Breslau and those who arrived in Wrocław, because it embodied the dreams of how to start from scratch without the omnipresent toxic fumes. These dreams had been expressed clearly earlier, including in *Ursonate* by Schwitters, already in the first phrase: “Fümms bö wöö tää zää Uu, pögiff, kwii Ee”, as well as in his collages and assemblages, re-composing the world from old but wonderfully refreshed and re-sculpted matter.

That “Heidegger” and “Schwitters” finally met each other became not only a fact but a specific overcoming of toxic 20th-century ideologies, the real end of World War II. It does not matter that Heidegger died in 1976 and Schwitters in 1948. The attitude of Schwitters is usually described in the context of Dadaism, including e.g. Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), who transferred ordinary objects into the realm of art; therefore both *The Fountain* and *Merz* may, paradoxically, be considered the embodiment of Heidegger’s ontological approach to the work of art, questioning the aesthetic-optical primacy. *The Fountain* assumes a new system of meaning and thus proposes a new world, arranging things anew, a point of con-

vergence with Schwitters. Vattimo believed that *The Fountain* is a work showing how a work of art can discover new worlds and sanctify not only everyday life and triviality, but also obscenity and vulgarity⁶. Commenting on that, Santiago Zabala wrote that this attitude resembles Heidegger's, especially his appreciation of Being (Dasein), convergent with anti-aestheticism as a rebellion of the avant-garde and with stressing the fundamental significance of art for human beings and their lives. The important components of aesthetic reflection were no longer – as Zabala explained – beautiful objects, but rather the fact that there are generally works of art not satisfying any needs and their existence is not necessary for any reason that could justify them⁷. With regard to Duchamp and his *Fountain*, Vattimo defined this important moment as structuring the entire work of art so that its order was subject to its own internal laws, which of course fully reveals the misery and downfall of such a concept as an aesthetic canon. The internal law of the work cannot be clearly reduced to an external norm by which it could be judged. Thanks to overcoming metaphysics (or appreciating ontology), Dasein becomes a post-metaphysical translator of Being, entering into an active, lasting dialogue instead of just recognizing and appreciating only static perfection in a work of art, wrote Zabala about Vattimo's interpretation. Here begins the process of hermeneutic interpretation, in which the work of art cannot be a destination but a starting point and instead of asking what a work of art means, one should rather ask – in an ontological account – what it wants to tell us. As Vattimo puts it, the truth of a work of art is constituted in the process of listening and answering: “the task of art is not to represent the truth of the world but, rather, to take a stance in the name of the project of a transformation”⁸, because the truth requires action, i.e. not leaving things as they are. This moment is of course also tangent with Schwitters' thinking about a work of art.

I. Schwitters Meets Heidegger

It could have been like that:

– Schwitters:

Ooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo,

» 6 “Vattimo even suggests that Duchamp's *Fountain* is a better illustration of art's revolutionary potential than Heidegger's own example of the Greek temple.”, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/heidegger-aesthetics/notes.html#16> [access: 23.09.2017]; see *Art's Claim to Truth*, Gianni Vattimo, ed. by Santiago Zabala, transl. by L. D'Isanto, Columbia University Press 2008, p. xvi, 45-47, 105 and 159.

» 7 S. Zabala, *Introduction*, [in:] *Art's Claim to Truth*, Gianni Vattimo, ed. by S. Zabala, transl. by Luca D'Isanto, Columbia University Press 2008, p. xv.

» 8 S. Zabala, *Introduction*, *Art's Claim to Truth*, Gianni Vattimo..., p. xxi-xxii.

dll rrrrr beeeee bö
 dll rrrrr beeeee bö fümms bö
 - Heidegger:

So we must move in a circle. This is neither ad hoc nor deficient. To enter upon this path is the strength, and to remain on it the feast of thought assuming that thinking is a craft. Not only is the main step from work to art, like the step from art to work, a circle, but every individual step that we attempt circles within this circle.

Most probably as early as 1923, Schwitters began the transformation of his family home, first of a single flat at Waldhausenstrasse 5 in Hanover, into a strange and unique space he himself called Merzbau. This was a natural consequence of the Merzbilder (and Merzzeichnungen), composed of various objects and shown by Schwitters in Der Sturm, Herwarth Walden's Berlin Gallery in July 1919. At that time, he also developed a specific grammar of his set of shatters, i.e. collages and assemblages. He concluded that limiting oneself to one medium is one-sided and spiritually undeveloping; he stressed the use of non-artistic materials for the effectiveness of spiritual development and the indispensable lack of logic and rationalism in combining them. The small scale was originally needed by the artist to consistently re-organize the universe from the tiny fragments of reality found and to re-invent the language, to create from old words other entities. Merzbau, created in another, much larger scale, is an extraordinary living space, constructed in a continuous process, variable and amorphous, where the artist used various items found, ordered and prepared (the complexes of ready-mades) and stereometric – as if Cubist – solids, which created a dynamic relationship of formlessness and geometry. Created in the poetics of the assemblage as if by Baudelaire's chiffonier (rag collector), the columns housed various caves and recesses, space-reliquaries and in them such "treasures" as the artist's urine, the tip of Goethe's pencil, a piece of a shoelace, a cigarette butt, a cut-off fingernail, a piece of a tie, a broken feather⁹, a Persil advertisement, fetishes stolen secretly – like Sophie Taeuber-Arp's bra, talismans – like Hans Richter's hair band and various gifts, including works of art; all of this mixed up the ordinary and the trivial with it what high-brow and seen as valuable. And the artist himself constantly demanded gifts, for example theatre tickets or business cards, which he could incorporate into his construction. Merzbau became, over time, a time capsule, a transformation room, a Wunderkammer, and a mausoleum¹⁰. Visiting this space meant that

» 9 H. Richter, *Dadaizm*, transl. J.S. Buras, Warszawa 1983, p. 254.

» 10 R. Cardinal, *Collecting the Collage Making: The Case of Kurt Schwitters*, [in:] *Cultures of Collecting*, ed. John Elsner, Roger Cardinal, Reaktion Books 1994, p. 76.

the view of the work had to give way to its temporal experience and the existence of an impartial observer was put into question. During the visit, the viewer became part of the work of art, its extension and movable part, ready to be removed at any moment, as Megan R. Luke described. Together with the observer, the whole work changed into a mobile, looking body, never set in a petrified and complete state. Thus, in turn, Schwitters questioned the spatial separation into interior and exterior and asked whether aesthetic contemplation is secondary to the process of creation. For these reasons, the description is so difficult because the understanding of the work stems from inhabiting it¹¹. The artist worked on Merzbau until 1937, when life in Germany became impossible for him and he escaped from the Nazis to Norway. In November 1943, the entire house at Waldhausenstrasse 5 was bombed in a British (Allies') air raid on the city. This is one of the scandalous paradoxes of war, theoretically aimed against enemies, in which, however, ultimately our neighbours get killed and our cultural heritage gets irretrievably lost. In 1929, photos of Merzbau were taken by Käthe Steinitz, followed by Wilhelm Redemann in 1933, and two years later (1935), in the absence of the host, the surprising Hanover premises are visited by Alfred Barr Jr., who purchased one of the artist's collages for the New York MoMA collection. The admiration of the director of the Museum of Modern Art for the Hanover project is so great that the artist's works were displayed in New York at exhibitions *Cubism and Abstract Art* (1936) and *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* (1937). Placing German modern artists in MoMA was of course a gesture of solidarity with those persecuted in their home country. For the same reason, New Burlington Galleries in London held in 1938 an Exhibition of Twentieth Century German Art. What this solidarity towards persecuted German artists looked like in Poland calls for separate studies. We know that when after the war Bożena Steinborn organized the European Art Gallery as a permanent exhibition at the National Museum in Wrocław, it was Merzzeichnung 225 which appeared in the 70's for the first time, in such a maximally neutral (i.e. not literally German) context as an exhibit¹². Coming back to Merzbau: it was created not only in Hanover, but wherever Schwitters stayed for longer – Kijkduin, Lysaker, Hjertøya, Douglas, Elterwater – everywhere living for him was synonymous with building. The synonymy of building, habitation and thinking invariably directs us to the famous Heidegger's 1951 lecture *Bauen, Wohnen, Denken* (Building, Dwelling, Thinking) during the Darmstadt Symposium. Schwitters was dead then, but Dr. Erich Wiese, banished in 1933 from Breslau, had become a year

» 11 M.R. Luke, *Kurt Schwitters: Space, Image, Exile*, University of Chicago Press, 2014, p. 104ff.

» 12 Information on the exhibition of the work of Schwitters obtained from Dr. Piotr Łukaszewicz.

earlier (1950) director of the Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt. Did they meet and talk about Schwitters? We'll never find out. It was August; perhaps Dr. Wiese went on holiday?

So in 1951 in Darmstadt – perhaps also to Dr. Wiese – Heidegger spoke as if about Schwitters: “Thus dwelling would in any case be the end that presides over all building. Dwelling and building are related as end and means. [...] For building is not merely a means and a way toward dwelling – to build is in itself already to dwell. [...] Mortals dwell in that they save the earth-taking the word in the old sense still known to Lessing. Saving does not only snatch something from a danger. To save really means to set something free into its own presencing. [...] Yet space is not something that faces man. It is neither an external object nor an inner experience. It is not that there are men, and over and above them space; for when I say “a man,” and in saying this word think of a being who exists in a human manner—that is, who dwells—then by the name “man” I already name the stay withing the fourfold among things. [...] I am never here only, as this encapsulated body; rather, I am there, that is, I already pervade the room, and only thus can I go through it. [...] The nature of building is letting dwell. Building accomplishes its nature in the raising of locations by the joining of their spaces. Only if we are capable of dwelling, only then can we build. [...] But that thinking itself belongs to dwelling in the same sense as building [...]”¹³.

The language used by Schwitter to describe the Merz project comes close to philosophy. As Elizabeth Burns Gamard observed, already in such salvific dual concepts as *Formung* and *Entformung* – assuming dialectical negation and annihilation with simultaneous renewal and rebirth – the artist’s language is similar to the Hegelian idea of *Aufheben* (to lift up, transcend or sublimate)¹⁴. *Entformung* is a neologism (new words were so favoured by Heidegger, too), defining formation through metamorphosis and separation, i.e. change and rearrangement of old, existing materials in order to create a new culture from the old. John Elderfield, the artist’s monographer, noted that *Entformung* creates together with *Eigengift* and *Urbegriff* the magical triad of nouns, and with the word *konsequent* it makes up a significant rectangle. In order for the transsubstantiation of *Entformung* to succeed, it was necessary to cleanse the objects from their *Eigengift*, a poisonous essence (this type of surgery is carried out by Heidegger even in *Living, Dwelling, Thinking*, where he explains that *Friede* (peace) means *das Frye* and *fry* means: preserved from harm and danger,

» 13 M. Heidegger, *Building, Dwelling, Thinking*, [in:] M. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, transl. by A. Hofstadter, New York 2013, since p. 141.

» 14 E. Burns Gamard, *Kurt Schwitters Merzbau: The Cathedral of Erotic Misery*, Princeton Architectural Press 2000, p. 29.

preserved from something, safeguarded, which in turn implies *einfrieden* (enclose, surround)¹⁵. Rejecting *Eigengift* in turn meant that combining the work into a new organism should be *konsequent* – i.e. logical and rigorous, but according to autonomous laws that have yet to be discovered. In this way, a possibility arises of identifying a real, corrected total reality. And because the purpose of art in the Schwitters project is to free itself from the chaos and tragedy of life, it was important to reach *Urbe-griff*, or the original concept, a world of cleanliness and order¹⁶. Heidegger uses the metaphor of a Greek temple in *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes* (*The Origin of the Work of Art*, 1935-1936) to explicate the sense of a work of art. He wrote, among others: “By means of the temple, the god is present in the temple. [...] The temple first fits together and at the same time gathers around itself the unity of these paths and relations in which birth and death, disaster and blessing, victory and disgrace, endurance and decline acquire the shape of destiny for human being”¹⁷. But the same Heidegger, writing so beautifully about the sacred, cites elsewhere – in his Letter about Humanism (*Brief über den “Humanismus”*, 1947) – an anecdote about Heraclitus, which describes very bluntly the transformation of everyday life into sanctity, so important for Schwitters. The anecdote spoke about newcomers wishing to visit the famous philosopher, but when they saw Heraclitus from a distance, freezing and warming himself at a bread oven, they got so disappointed that they would not enter and talk to him. They wished to see something unusual, while ordinary circumstances, when the thinker did not appear to busy himself thinking, discouraged and irritated them so that even the faces of those who did not turn away at once bespoke a disillusioned curiosity. Heidegger explained this situation derisively, pointing out that they were driven by a certain desire to see someone deep in brown study, immersed in thoughts: “Not in order to be overwhelmed by thinking but simply so they can say they saw and heard someone everybody says is a thinker”¹⁸. The moral of this story would also constitute Schwitters’ apology, because it is actually about the transforming *Entformung*, if Heidegger had bothered to look at the Dadaists. As we know, the thinker never did that. However, he quoted Heraclitus, who invited the sad and resentful newcomers with the words “Here, too, the gods are present.” Such a transubstantiation of everyday life and banality lay not only at the basis of Schwitters’ art, but also – if we are to believe Arthur C. Danto – Duchamp’s appropriations, starting from

» 15 M. Heidegger, *Building, Dwelling, Thinking...*, p. 143.

» 16 J. Elderfield, *Schwitters*, London 1985, p. 237-238.

» 17 M. Heidegger, “*The Origin of the Work of Art*”, [in:] M. Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, transl. by D. F. Krell, London 1993, p. 149-150.

» 18 M. Heidegger, “*Letter on Humanism*”, [in:] M. Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, transl. by F. A. Capuzzi, Cambridge 1998, p. 270.

the famous Fountain through such spectacular examples as Brillo Boxes by Andy Warhol (1928-1987), which spectacularly ended a purely visual assessment of art¹⁹.

Things – wrote Bjørnar Olsen, a Norwegian archaeologist, in defence of things – are more insistent than thought. They definitely last longer than speech and gesture. Things are tangible and bring stability, although to varying degrees²⁰. People meet with things, which mediate interpersonal relationships, allowing – according to James J. Gibson’s theory of affordances – specific actions, and even insistently demanding them. We need a language to express the immediacy of experiencing the material world, without pre-determined scenarios, if we want less anthropocentrism. And while creating new visions of the present and future, we also construct a different past.

Actually, everything is a thing, wrote Heidegger in *The Origin of the Work of Art*, since a thing = res = ens = a being; all being, all that is not nothing is a thing. He gave a few examples: a painting hangs on a wall like a hat or a hunter’s rifle (the very sentence, as Anita Alkhas observed, could be ascribed to Duchamp²¹), and Beethoven’s quartets lie like potatoes in a cellar in a publisher’s warehouse; every day we might think easier about a plane, a radio, a stone, a clod of dirt, a piece of wood, an axe, a hammer, a shoe, or a clock, but there are also ultimate things, such as death and judgment. Despite this, we refuse to use the term “thing” to refer to God, man, and even to a beetle and grass – wrote the philosopher, adding that all things have something thingness (*Dinghafte*) and “other”, because the work acquaints one with the Other, reveals the Other. He demanded that in order to come into contact with the reality of a work, one must first think about what is thingly in the work. He made firstly two interpretations of the thingliness of things, outdistanced and immediate: “The concept of the thing under consideration represents, not so much an assault on the thing as an extravagant attempt to bring the thing to us in the greatest possible immediacy. But this can never be achieved as long as we take what is received by the senses to constitute its thingness. Whereas the first interpretation of the thing holds it, as it were, too far away from the body, the second brings it too close.” In both cases the thing is lost because of a certain exaggeration – in the first, because the thing is kept too far from our corporeality, and in the other, because it is too close to it, instead of leaving the thing in its resting-in-itself. [“The thing must be

» 19 A.C. Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. 1981.

» 20 B. Olsen, *W obronie rzeczy. Archeologia i ontologia przedmiotów*, transl. B. Shallcross, Warszawa 2013, p. 242.

» 21 A. Alkhas, *Heidegger in Plain Sight: “The Origin of the Work of Art” and Marcel Duchamp*, *Journal of Philosophy: A Cross Disciplinary Inquiry* 2010, No 5 (12), p. 1.

allowed to remain unmolested in its resting-within-itself itself. It must be accepted in its own steadfastness”²²]. So, thirdly, another interpretation refers to the material being formed and the distinction between material and form that settle in something created specifically for being used, i.e. an equipment that mediates between the thing in itself and the work. [“In this definition of the thing as matter (ύλη), form (μορφή) is posited at the same time. The permanence of a thing, its constancy, consists in matter remaining together with form. The thing is formed matter. This interpretation of the thing invokes the immediate sight with which the thing concerns us through its appearance (εἶδος)”²³]. Here again a problem arises, because we “also mistrust this concept of the thing, the representation of the thing as formed matter”. Then, Heidegger asked: “Where does the origin of the matter-form schema have its origin; in the thingness of the thing or in the work-character of the artwork?”²⁴. To ask the question means to make a step forward into the disclosure or unconcealment of the truth, because the truth of the being has set itself to work in the artwork. Let’s look for a moment at the third case not only because the coherence of matter and form plays a great role in the disciplines of art history and aesthetics, and Heidegger himself called it a guiding interpretation, but also to notice a characteristic gap in the philosopher’s argument. He does not even think that a work of art can be a finished ready made object. This is hardly surprising, given the place and date of delivering the *Ursprung des Kunstwerkes* lecture, i.e. the Third Reich in 1935 (the publication is one year older). However, skipping a ready-made is a rather surprising gap when we read deeper into the text, analysing the bonding of material and form. Heidegger did not see what he had at hand. In order to look at the way that leads to the usability of the equipment (tool), the philosopher chooses peasant shoes painted by van Gogh. Meanwhile, the eponymous Anna Blume from Schwitters’ poems, and specifically from *Merzgedicht I*, puts on shoes and walks on her hands (“Du trägst den Hut auf deinen Füßen und wanderst auf die Hände”)²⁵.

Maybe it could be like this:

– Heidegger: Everyone knows what shoes are like. If they are not wooden or bast shoes, there will be leather soles and uppers held together by stitching and nails. Equipment of this kind serves as foot-

» 22 M. Heidegger, *The Origin of the Work of Art*, [in:] *Off the Beaten Track*, transl. J. Young, K. Haynes, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2002 [1950] “The Origin of the Work of Art”, p. 8.

» 23 M. Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art”, [in:] *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 8.

» 24 M. Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art”, [in:] *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 9.

» 25 K. Schwitters, *Anna Blume: Dichtungen*, Hannover 1919, p. 5.

wear. Whether it is for work in the field or for dancing, material and form vary according to use.

– Schwitters: Anna Blume puts her shoes on her head (a hat on her feet) and walks on her hands.

II. Helpless Eugene Geppert in a German Adler in the middle of an intersection

The apocalypse that took place at Breslau confronts us with the issue of dealing with the end, understood as an anthropological and cultural boundary, because the city abounded in things from the previous culture. Attempts were made to treat the border irrevocably enough that the liquidation of foreign objects was taken quite seriously. At first, there was no question of any metamorphosis, an *Entformung*, but about a cleansing elimination. The then legal validity of strict selection and unspeakable quietness of things makes not only social and political history, but also the history of art part of the “triumphant” history, commemorating political victories²⁶. The problematic closure of the old world was related to the specific production of the legacy and identity of the new inhabitant of post-Breslau Wrocław; the present day of the city turned out to be completely different from the one that could result from the conceptualization of the past. Bitter radicalism led, in turn, to another demarcation line, generally associated with reflection on the end of the paradigm of science with its Enlightenment roots, or categorical demarcation²⁷.

At the beginning of the post-war, Wrocław part of this story, you can ask a simple - though purely rhetorical – and hypothetical question (a kind of horizon of expectations): were there exhibitions here after the war that would commemorate the German artists who had to leave the city in the 1930s due to persecution by the brown regime? Taking over the city after the Nazis due to complicated political arrangements, assumes after all hope for respect for the victims of the regime. Schwitters received a scholarship from the New York MoMA after the war. We still know little about Erich Wiese, apart from hard facts, including his directorship in Darmstadt; of the processors of the Breslau Academy, Oscar Schlemmer did not survive the war, dying in 1943, while Oskar Moll died four years later. In turn, Schwitters, the protagonist of our story, passed away five years later. They died before Wrocław was ready to host and acknowledge them.

For Kurt Schwitters, the First World War was apocalyptic enough; after it ended, he came up with creating a new world from the bits and

» 26 E. Domańska, *Historie niekonwencjonalne*, Poznań 2006, p. 40.

» 27 *Ibidem*.

pieces of the old one. A reflection on things, care of both Schwitters and Heidegger, returned in Poland (irrespectively) under communism, in the oeuvre of artists interested in art informel and assemblage. Wrocław, with its numerous venues of selling stolen or found objects, looting or plundering and various “excavations” had to be a particularly important place in this perspective. The ideological top-down de-Germanisation clashed here with the everyday life of German material culture. Wrocław-based artists acted confronted with the concept of the end, numerous (political and paradigmatic) demarcation lines, the birth of a new, breakthrough period. In Wrocław, Eugeniusz [Eugene] Geppert, one of the founders and the first rector of the Wrocław higher school of arts, did not refer, of course, to the Staatliche Akademie für Kunst und Kunstgewerbe Breslau, closed down in 1932. He could not care less for the Dadaists, either; their art was no longer housed in the collection of the destroyed Schlesisches Museum, because the Nazis thoroughly cleaned national collections from art castigated by the slanderous and defamatory term “degenerated”. Nobody in Wrocław seemed to miss avant-garde German art, much less the works of the Dadaists; Geppert was educated in Krakow and Paris and adored Raoul Dufy. Even Oskar Moll, a pre-war Breslauer, was considered not worth coming back to, and yet, like Polish artists, he loved Paris and Matisse; Schlemmer and his ballets was not acknowledged either! Instead of dancing, Geppert definitely preferred battle scenes. Although he collected various fine items, children’s dolls and horse figurines, he would never think of displaying a factory-made object instead of its picture. One day that he got it from the authorities an Adler car with a driver. Mieczysław Zdanowicz, the artist, recalled that because the driver was a blacksmith from a Metal Department and the car did not give in willingly to his efforts and often refused to drive properly. In this way, Geppert in a way became the hero of the first Wrocław “performances” and para-theatrical actions: “Sometimes a messenger came running from the city with alarming news that Prof. Geppert >stands< at an intersection waiting for help. Students abandoned classes and ran to the indicated intersection, then accompanied their rector in the Adler to the university. Of course, they had to push it all the way. It was certainly – let’s assume, contrary to what we read in the history of art in Wrocław – a kind of street theatre, preceding the Festival of the Street Theatre by many decades²⁸. Another famous Wrocław car from pioneer years is a Mercedes truck, military surplus with a capacity of 2.5 tonnes – a 1947 gift to the State Museum in Wrocław in the making. Before we move on to statements regarding the relation of the Mercedes and the Adler and subsequently those concerning their impor-

» 28 M. Zdanowicz, *Ogród-galeria na gruzach kamienic czynszowych*, [in:] *Szkice z pamięci*. Monografia uczelni, part 1, ed. A. Saj, Wrocław 1996, p. 141.

tance for understanding art, let us just add that Schwitters was an avowed driver and driving an automobile gave him a lot of satisfaction²⁹. Geppert, in turn, felt best on horseback and was completely helpless with respect to horsepower. He needed a driver.

The sounds of an Adler and a Mercedes served Heidegger to explain the need to bring things to the greatest possible immediacy with us. He warned us not to perceive the thingness with the pressure of sensations, although when hearing a Mercedes, we immediately distinguish it from an Adler. It's best to leave things in "its resting-within-itself"³⁰. Perhaps Geppert achieved this directness and immediacy with horses when painting them. Heidegger, too, arrived at things via their painted images. So here we have again the transformation of everyday life, which we have talked about so much in relation to Schwitters. Heidegger transformed the everyday when he traced the way that leads to the utility of the equipment; he chose shoes painted by van Gogh, because he could not imagine to reach all of his conclusions looking at the shoes themselves. Their painted representations were indispensable for him. Let us now ignore the fact that the philosopher did not specify precisely which picture he had in mind, because the Dutch master did not take up the subject of peasant shoes only once. He did not care which picture he referred to because a priori he craved for a recognized painterly masterpiece, and not about trivial shoes; however, he was able to beautifully talk about triviality quoting Heraclitus. The philosopher insisted that he derived his utility of the equipment by approaching the van Gogh painting and insisting that it was he who spoke on behalf of the peasant and "the dampness and richness of the soil". Only van Gogh made him see how the shoes vibrate with the silent call of the earth. However, it would be difficult not to admit that things might talk just as well as their painted images. And it could be a good starting point for a meeting of both, Heidegger with Schwitters.

Bjørnar Olsen wrote much later, that the work of Martin Heidegger, although containing a rather muddled concept of things, signals that attempts were made, successful and otherwise, to oppose the dominant anthropocentric thinking³¹. Schwitters' *Merzzeichnungen*, also a work from Dr. Wiese's collection, as well as the assemblages and the *Merzbau* from Hanover are an ideal work for Baudelaire's chiffonier and a Polish engineer-bricoleur from communist times, forced to practice the DIY poetry and to create *poèmes-objets* in a cosmos of perennial shortages.

» 29 K. Traumann Steinitz, *Kurt Schwitters; a Portrait from Life: With Collision, a Science-Fiction Opera Libretto in Banalities*, Berkeley 1968, p. 94.

» 30 M. Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art", [in:] *Martin Heidegger. Basic Writings*, transl. by D. F. Krell, London 1993, p. 160.

» 31 B. Olsen, *W obronie rzeczy. Archeologia i ontologia przedmiotów*, transl. B. Shallcross, Warszawa 2013, p. 24.

Bric-à-brac, a world of various objects and their remains, was the natural material of the first inhabitants of Wrocław. However, the collages and assemblages brought to life in their studios could not for this reason be seen as prestigious. Thus, the first Wrocław collages and assemblages were most likely doomed to oblivion. Strange miscellanea are a domain of vagabonds, tramps, hobos, flâneurs, the homeless and those on the road, people on the move. The inhabitants of Wrocław were precisely like that – if we get our imagination running after reading the memories of the pioneers! In the pioneer period the communist regime preferred painting to assemblages since the former helped acquire a distance to the actual state of the chiffonier, or scavenger, a conspirator who reassembled discarded bits and pieces and creating amazing worlds, combining the mundane with the heavenly. Apart from Baudelaire, this kind of conspiracy was emphasised by Walter Benjamin, too. Creating from garbage, however, is always at risk of squalor because, as Mary Douglas has shown in *Purity and Danger*, the ordering role of culture throws away objects that violate clear classifications and mental habits. In this perspective, the critical potential of waste, including the assemblages assembled from them, becomes obvious. It could become, as Piotr Majewski wrote, a formula of Polish modernity, only holding as close as possible to the easel painting³², perhaps because of the sublimation of shabby everyday life. Schwitters' radicalism had to be forgotten for a long time, but his hope of a brave new world and the Dadaists' disagreement to continue what had become exhausted and what had painfully disappointed is today an incentive to refer to Breslau from before 1933. The Dadaist tradition was of course almost inaccessible for Poles who came here in 1945. Not only was it rejected by the Nazis (who carefully erased it), but also by the communist authorities. Poles, forced to live under communism after World War II, took over a city subject to Nazi oppression for long 12 years. They did not have the chance to see the works symbolised here by the modest *Merzzeichnung*. The new authorities considered it not so much as *Entartet* (degenerated), but as simply invisible, because it was not suitable for spectacular purposes and did not enhance the prestige of power. A double Nazi-communist purge, however, did not manage to wipe out the tradition symbolised in the city by the *Merzzeichnung* 225 by Schwitters. It helped us to signal the possibility of writing another art history of the city, the traces of which do not necessarily have to be found in museums.

» 32 P. Majewski, *Malarstwo materii w Polsce jako formuła „nowoczesności”*, Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, Lublin 2006.

Conclusion

The world symbol of art created in Breslau before the Nazis came to power is, of course, not the accidentally found collage by Schwitters, but Oskar Schlemmer's Bauhaustreppe (Stairway, 1932), now in New York City, painted in the artist's studio at the Breslau Academy shortly before the artist's departure to Berlin. Schlemmer came to Breslau in 1929 at the invitation of Professor Oskar Moll from the Staatliche Akademie für Kunst und Kunstgewerbe³³. The Bauhaus Stairway, purchased first by Philip Johnson, was later donated to MoMA as a gift. Alfred Barr, Jr. hung the painting in the museum as an expression of solidarity with German avant-garde artists and a symbol of resistance to the Nazis. He chose many German works, not just those by Schwitters mentioned earlier. The collections of the National Museum in Wrocław house only one Schlemmer's work: a lithograph given to Dr. Wiese and his wife in the same year 1932 when he was painted The Bauhaus Stairway and he was preparing to leave. The Staatliche Akademie für Kunst und Kunstgewerbe Breslau in Breslau was closed in 1932 under the so-called Notverordnung (a special decree in the event of a crisis situation); Moll – the director of the Academy – also lost his position. The school was closed down in April, while in the autumn of 1932 Heidegger took his university leave, so-called sabbatical. We can say that the time was not favourable for our characters, because Schlemmer, after the school closed down, soon moved to Berlin and quickly, in 1933, lost his job in the Vereinigte Staatsschulen für freie und angewandete Kunst. When in June 1932 Heidegger gave a lecture in Dresden, Schwitters was no longer there, although he studied in the Saxon capital in 1909-1915 and his recitals, lectures and exhibitions took place in 1921, 1923, 1925, 1926 (a few times), and in 1929. The artist and the philosopher, however, pass each other constantly. One year after Heidegger's lecture in September 1933, Schwitters's works were shown in Dresden during an itinerant exhibition of degenerated art. Similarly, works by Moll and Schlemmer were considered degenerate, and the Bauhaus itself was brutally closed by the brown regime³⁴. In 1937, the Schlesische Museum der Bildenden Künste in Breslau got rid of Schwitters' works. Their advocate and admirer, Dr. Erich Wiese - director of the museum - had lost his job, as we already know, four years earlier – and left Breslau like Moll and Schlemmer. So where could Schwitters of Heidegger meet

» 33 R. Rózanowski, „Eine herrliche Entspannung in einer blöden Zeit“ – Die Breslauer Jahre Oskar Schlemmers, „Dyskurs: Pismo Naukowo-Artystyczne ASP we Wrocławiu“ 2014, no. 17, p. 306-307.

» 34 J.P. Stonard, Oskar Schlemmer's 'Bauhaustreppe', 1932: Part I, "The Burlington Magazine" 2009, vol. 151, no. 1276, Twentieth-Century Art and Politics, p. 456.

in 1932, when still – it would seem – a meeting like this could happen? In Schlemmer's Breslau studio? It was already empty when Heidegger had time to travel. And Schwitters then rented a house on a Norwegian island of Hjertøya and was turning it into the work called *Merz*. He built, lived and thought. A model Nazi exhibition *Deutsche Kunst in Schlesien* (German Art in Silesia), arranged in 1934 at the Exhibition Grounds in Breslau, was opened by none other than Alfred Rosenberg, a prominent NSDAP activist responsible for the ideological development of party members, an obsessive racist, who arrived especially for the opening from Berlin³⁵. Of course, there was no room for the “degenerates” at this exhibition; they had already been ridiculed at a big show *Kunst der Geistesrichtung 1918-1933* (“The Art of Spiritual [or ghostly] Current 1918-1933”) – at the initiative of Untergauleiter Hans Huebenett during the directorship in the museum of Dr. Wolf Marx. The works exhibited then for the purpose of ridiculing them were by, among others, Paul Klee, Georg Grosz, Johannes Molzahn, Oskar Moll, and Wassyl Kandinsky, who was a great inspiration for Schwitters. The show was conceived as a *Schreckenskammer* (a horrors chamber), but additionally as part of a conspiracy, the “Weimar system”, which should be fought against³⁶.

Merzzeichnung 225 at the exhibition in the Wrocław museum is an impenetrable other, a meteor from a different reality and time, dragged from the non-artist, everyday world into the world of art. It breaks the rules of decorum, stressing that it does not belong to the language of the observer who has come to admire the painting. Crossing borders is its main prerogative, because it is a scandal and a metaphysical mystery at the same time, combining not so impossible feelings: contempt and worship. The distinguishing feature of *Merzzeichnung 225* is a peculiar silence, aporia, avoidance, stupor, and – by a paradoxical character – uniting the impossible and thus also the potential for renewal and resurrection, and of course a new metaphysics and post-secular narratives. Schwitters was fascinated by Kandinsky, who believed in the discovery of a new order thanks to a new, fresh look at what one has grown used to seeing. Modern artists of the twentieth century were looking for entry gates to other dimensions in ordinary everyday reality. In *Rückblicke* (1913) by Kandinsky we find a revelation of the everyday, when what is dead begins to tremble and show its secret face. This is even the case with cigarette butts in the ashtray and a trouser button lost by someone, lying in a puddle on a pavement.

» 35 D. Codogni-Łańcucka, *Śląskie Muzeum Sztuk Pięknych w okresie Trzeciej Rzeszy*, *Quart* 2015 no. 2 (36), p. 60.

» 36 See A. Saraczyńska, *Sztuka zwyrodniała*, *Gazeta Wyborcza* [Wrocław], 16 November 2007, p. 2-3.

I paid particular attention to the patronage role of *Merzzeichnung* 225, composed of rags and bits of paper, to effect a meeting of Schwitters and Heidegger (at Geppert's approval). Each of them conceived reality in terms of traces of the past and unearthing forgotten significance. However, everything went wrong. It might however went better if the surreptitious and neglected correspondence of things was shown, their new relations, new connections, a possibility of a metamorphosis, the potential of the materials. The dominant principle was probably that of equal treatment of individual objects (of a pitcher and horse in Geppert; of a ticket and a worn-out shoelace in Schwitters, of shoes and a bread oven in Heidegger) and a kind of equalisation of the colour of things with tubes of paint. The *Eigengift*, the essence of things, must be abandoned at the moment of its use in the painting and be obliterated by the *Entformung*³⁷. Under the powerful impact of Kandinsky and *Der Blaue Reiter* artists (other "blue riders" on blue horses were adored by Geppert!), Schwitters stressed the spirituality of inanimate matter. Schwitters recognised, as John Elderfield observed, that in the face of exhaustion of 19th-century materialism and the artistic paradigm, turning to things offers hope for spiritual renewal. The spiritual function of art has the power to challenge the tragedy of human fate³⁸. The artist's dreams after World War II, after his escape from Germany via Norway in 1937 and his settling down in England, were fittingly described by Stefan Themerson, who stressed the fact of a transfer of things as both fundamental and indispensable. The re-assembly of such trite objects as a train ticket, a flower and a piece of wood is by no means an innocuous matter of aesthetics because, as Themerson noted, tickets belong to the society of railways; flowers to gardeners, while bits of wood to timber salesmen. Mixing these things up, Themerson wrote, wreaks havoc in the classification system that is the core of the regime; it dislodges people of a road well-trodden and well-trodden thinking paths are the foundation of Order, be it New Order or Old Order. Therefore, as he wrote, if something gets mixed up in the well-known path of thinking, whether one is a Galileo or a Giordano Bruno with their funny concepts of motion, or an Einstein with his funny concepts of time and space, or a Russell with his funny concepts of sylogism, or a Schönberg with his funny concepts of black and white keyboard keys, or the Cubists with their funny concept of the painting, or the Dadaists or Merzists with their funny concepts of symmetries and rhythms instead of principle – one is, willingly or not, at the very heart of political change. Hitler knew this, assumed Themerson, and therefore, Kurt Schwitters was expelled from Germany³⁹.

» 37 J. Elderfield, *Kurt Schwitters*, London 1985, p. 46 and 49.

» 38 J. Elderfield, *Kurt Schwitters*, *ibidem* p. 32 and 42.

» 39 S. Themerson, *Kurt Schwitters in England*, Londyn 1958, p. 14, after: A. Saciuk-Gąsowska,

Most probably also because, after hearing the strong of words “Fümms bö wö tää zää Uu, pögiff, kwii Ee”, as we learn from witnesses’ accounts about something snapped in these people, something they had not expected at all – they experienced a great joy⁴⁰. Regimes are not to offer disinterested joy since then, as Themerson observed, one may find oneself in the very heart of political change.

Schwitters’ challenge and hope reached Poland belatedly; expelled from Germany, he did not find support in post-war Poland. Let us imagine, however, that we finally managed to do what had not been possible before. The collage hangs in a public place and that is why it brings to mind and confuses. This could not take place since the 1930s in Breslau. In 1932, Schwitters could not possibly drive Heidegger to Schlemmer’s studio in his Adler. They never got there and therefore could not encounter guests awaiting them, bent over *Merzzeichnung 225*. Besides, Dr. Wiese did not produce it from his portfolio. Nor were words that fittingly described the small collage, made of bits and pieces, and its space, where “the gods are present”. The photographs showing the final years of Dr. Erich Wiese, a Breslauer in Darmstadt, and professor Eugeniusz Geppert, a native of Lviv in Wrocław, depict deadly disillusion and sadness. Have we done everything today to restore smiles to them? The “great joy” that the witnesses of Schwitters’ recitals referred to? Have we done all to effect a meeting between Schwitters and Heidegger? Or perhaps, on the contrary, we have done too much, because it is an exaggeration to make Heidegger an initiator of ready-mades and Geppert that of happenings. ●

Wobec Kurta Schwittersa, [in:] Kurt Schwitters, ed. M. Bauer, A. Wesolek, Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi, Łódź 2004, p. 8.

» 40 H. Richter, *Dadaizm*, p. 239.

