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What can Schwitters tell us about the Lake District? What can the Lake District tell us about Schwitters?

Elizabeth Fisher

The circumstances of Schwitters' arrival in the Lake District immediately frame the rural in terms of notions of exile, displacement and outsidersness; he was after all the quintessential cosmopolitan modernist marooned in a remote rural corner of England.¹ Like many refugees, he ended up in Ambleside as a consequence of historical forces beyond his control. Unable to get the papers which would allow him to travel on to the USA where friends such as Kate Steinitz and Katherine Dreier were, or to Norway, where Ernst settled immediately after the war, the Lake District was one of few options available to Schwitters, who could not afford to stay in London without Ernst.² Nevertheless it had its appeals; the cost of living was lower than London, and Schwitters had always enjoyed a degree of distance from the artistic centres of Europe in provincial Hannover, Lysaker and on the tiny island of Hjertøya. At the same time he was not unfamiliar with the area, having made at least two trips to the Lake District before moving to Ambleside in June 1945. The first was a two-week holiday in Grasmere with Edith Thomas in September 1942, from where they sent Ernst a postcard of Grizedale Tarn,³ then in December 1943 Ernst gave him a joint birthday and Christmas present in the form of £15 'towards a fournights [sic] holiday at Seathwaite Cottage, Ambleside, Lakeland, any time next year, all expences [sic] prepaid'.⁴

From the avoidance of distractions to his evident delight in being close to mountains, the benefits of a simple life in rural isolation were not lost on Schwitters, who, once settled in Ambleside, found himself 'completely free' to paint.⁵ In light of the disorienting strangeness of the UK, and the rootlessness and uncertainty of his situation in 1945, the Lake District kindled memories of Norway and happier times;⁶ it was a pastoral landscape that perfectly suited the mythic naturalism of Rousseau and the Romantics, offering a source of continuity and renewal, as indeed nature had been for his compatriot George Grosz, whose preference for landscape painting over political satire following his move to America in 1933 signalled 'a desperately wanted new beginning'.⁷ The romantic notion of nature as a retreat, and the association between self-imposed isolation and intense creative or intellectual activity, was as popular in the

twentieth century as it had been with the Romantics; think of Wittgenstein's cabin at the innermost end of Norway's longest fjord or Heidegger's hut in the mountains of the Black Forest; the solitude sought by Agnes Martin and Georgia O'Keefe on remote mesas in New Mexico, or Ivon Hitchen's retreat to his woodland home in Sussex at the outbreak of WWII. The creative benefits of his rural exile perhaps go some way to explain Schwitters' prolific activity during the last years of his life.⁸

Schwitters evidently enjoyed wild mountainous landscapes. He belonged to the *Wandervogel* generation, a back-to-nature movement led by young people around the turn of the century in Germany in protest against industrialisation, modern city life and the social conservatism and materialism of the Kaiser Reich. Many were proto-hippies from well-to-do, middle class families, seeking a simpler way of life connected more closely to nature, and pursued all things 'outdoors': activities included hiking, folk culture, sleeping out under the stars and communing with nature in the woods.⁹ He was also among the wealthy middle classes who could enjoy the relatively new cultural practice of an annual 'summer retreat' to the countryside to escape the increasing pace and intensity of urban life; in the interwar years, he followed the adventurous upwardly mobile to the Swiss Alps, and then to Norway on the recommendation of fellow artist Hannah Höch.¹⁰ Throughout the 1930s, Schwitters' family holidays involved camping, hiking, skiing, swimming and canoeing in remote landscapes.¹¹ Their summers on Hjertøya, for example, were spent largely outdoors: their tiny cabin was one of only three buildings on the island, and without running water or electricity; they ate and cooked outside and, between 1932 and 1935, slept in a tent while Schwitters worked on the interior of the hut.¹² In the Lake District, despite fragile health, Schwitters made several strenuous treks which included walking a distance of 28 km. over the fells from Keswick to Dungeon Ghyll in September 1945, and climbing Conistone Old Man with Ernst in November 1945.¹³ He was out of doors as often as the weather and his health would allow — mornings were spent foraging for materials or painting on Wansfell or Loughrigg, two of the smaller fells encircling Ambleside, then taking a picnic with Wantee to one of their favourite spots in the afternoons.¹⁴

Nature was an important resource for Schwitters, who spoke of an unbroken line of development from the early naturalistic studies to the Merz abstractions, and an ongoing conversation between what he saw in nature and created in the abstract works as early as 1920.¹⁵ In answer to a questionnaire in the journal *Abstraction-creation*, he declared, 'Dans mes compositions abstraits, il y a influence de tout ce que j'ai vue dans le nature, par exemple les arbres / *In my abstract compositions, there is influence of everything I have seen in nature, for example trees*'.¹⁶ His first major survey exhibition, which toured Germany in 1927, included several figurative landscape paintings, still lifes and portraits in amongst the abstract Merz drawings and assemblages. While his avant-garde colleagues and patrons saw his penchant for

landscape as either an eccentricity or financial necessity, Schwitters repeatedly affirmed his commitment to the practice, arguing that ‘a new, sober, passion-free study of nature, plus the results of this portrayed in the picture, is not only allowed, but is an important complement to abstraction’.¹⁷

Schwitters’ *Catalogue Raisonné* includes thirty-nine paintings and twenty-five sketches of Lake District scenes painted between 1942–47. Of the Merz collages, paintings and assemblages that can be dated to the period when he was living in the Lake District, many allude to the natural world in some way, sometimes in titles that are also place names (i.e. *Untitled [Ambleside]* (1946, CR 3276), *Untitled [Ullswater]* (1947, CR 3643), or refer to seasonal and atmospheric conditions, as in *Early Spring* (1947, CR 3550) or *c.35 Paper Clouds* (1946, CR 3322). Some titles, such as *High Mountains* (1930 (CR 1651/1947, CR 3420) are also used more than once, linking back to earlier works. The two works which bear this name share similar traits, despite being seventeen years apart. Both are abstract oil paintings, compositions dominated by highly worked surfaces, overlapping veils of stippled shading and curving lines that intersect with straight edges, creating segments of contrasting tone and texture, suggestive of the sharp edges and receding planes of mountain landscapes. The earlier work, inspired by Schwitters’ first holiday in Norway, incorporates a few small collaged elements, including the familiar circular punctum, that assert the play between overlapping planes and illusory depth; the later painting, done in the Lake District, relies solely on fluid painterly effects to achieve similar results. The two years he lived in the Lake District clearly contributed to the ongoing evolution of a rustic, biomorphic aesthetic in his late works and a lyrical painterliness suggestive of the natural world, from the organic shapes and fluid lines around which abstract paintings such as *Untitled [White Round with Blue Oval]* (1947), *Untitled [The Pool]* (1945/47) or *Untitled [with Fish Shape]* (1945) are constructed, to the clear echoes of ripples on water in the stippled blue paint marks of works such as *NB* (1947) or the horizontal and vertical rhythms of larch and pine trees he repeatedly sketched in 1946, rhyming with the textured verticals of *47.15 Pine Trees c.26* 1946/1947).¹⁸ Many works directly incorporate the natural world in the form of feathers, stones or driftwood as formal elements; see for example *Untitled [Golf Tee]*, *Untitled [STANDARD, mit Holz]*, *ted matter*, or *47.17 blue light*, CR3465 (all 1947) – or talismanic tokens, like the perishable gentians or the shell recently found buried in the Merz Barn wall, whose half-spiral form Schwitters described in 1933 as ‘the most important of my forms’.¹⁹

According to John Elderfield, the half-spiral was often associated with Vitalism, a theory of life based on the presence of an underlying creative force that gained popularity within the European avant-garde in the early decades of the C20th as part of a surge of interest in the natural world, esoteric philosophies and scepticism towards scientific rationalism. Drawing heavily on Henri Bergson’s notion of *élan vital* or

'life force,' Vitalism spawned 'an expanding field of Modernist art in which artists embraced nature, intuition, instinct, spontaneity, chance, intense emotion, memory, unconscious states...and a psychology of time'.²⁰ Dada was one of the movements associated with Vitalism; its aim, according to Jean Arp, a prominent voice in the Zurich group and long-time friend of Schwitters, was 'to destroy the reasonable deceptions of man and recover the natural and unreasonable order. Dada wanted to replace the logical nonsense of the men of today by the illogically senseless...Dada is for the senseless, which does not mean nonsense. Dada is senseless like nature. Dada is for nature and against art. Dada is direct like nature. Dada is for infinite sense and definite means'.²¹ Although never a formal member of Dada, Schwitters was closely associated with the movement and developed strong friendships with both Arp and Theo van Doesburg, both of whom were strong proponents of neo-Vitalist aesthetics.²² Arp, for instance, deployed the Dada technique of automatism to invoke automatic processes in nature, such as breathing;²³ prompting the critic and art historian Carola Giedion-Welcker to comment in 1935 that 'today Arp identifies himself entirely with the great irrational phenomenon of nature'.²⁴

Arp remained an important reference point for Schwitters who, in 1947, wrote to Giedion-Welcker affirming a connection between his friend and the Merz Barn: 'The third Merzbau will later be in the center of a nature park, connected to nature, with wonderful views in all directions. I am very happy to stand beside Arp and to hate John Heartfield.'²⁵ Aligning himself with their mutual friend, whose mode of biomorphic abstraction represented an interpretation of Dada that is almost diametrically opposed to that of Heartfield's mobilisation of art as political commentary, Schwitters was not asserting an apolitical stance; on the contrary, by invoking Heartfield he framed nature as political terrain. In the political climate of 1930s, Arp had posited nature as form of resistance to the logic, reason, and aestheticism of modern capitalist society; for him it represented a model for artistic creation and a repository of essential values that were increasingly under threat in European society. Arp sought 'another order, another value for man in nature. He was no longer to be the measure of all things, no longer to reduce everything to his own measure, but on the contrary, all things and man were to be like nature, without measure'.²⁶ It was a very different approach from that of the instrumentalist Heartfield and one which Schwitters tacitly espoused.

Schwitters also identified metaphors for artistic creativity in nature. In the catalogue accompanying his 1927 exhibition, he wrote: 'Art is never the imitation of nature, but grows according to equally stringent laws, like nature herself.'²⁷ Schwitters also embraced an intuitive sensibility and Elderfield notes that ideas about nature and chance informed some of the earliest articulations of Schwitters' Merz technique: "'i' grasps the work of art in its natural state. The only artistic forming that comes in is the recognition of rhythm and expression in some part of nature.'²⁸ In

1926, Schwitters elaborated, presumably invoking the notion of the universal, animating life force that was believed by the Vitalists to run through both art and nature: 'From my 'i' picture you will see that Nature or Chance often carries together things which correspond to that which we call rhythm. The only task of the artist is to recognise and limit, to limit and recognise.'²⁹

Various scholars have also noted the correlation between Schwitters' key Merz principles of *formen* (form) and *entformeln* (un-form)³⁰ and natural processes of metamorphosis, which underpinned Vitalists' conception of life as constant transformation, or what Henri Bergson called 'creative evolution'. The concept of 'nasci,' which Schwitters developed with El Lissitzky in 1924, was also based on the principle of organic evolution, drawing clear parallels between the creation of art and creative processes in nature: 'Nature, from the Latin nasci, means to become, to come from, that is to say, all that by its own force develops, forms, moves.'³¹ 'Nasci' resurfaces in the distinctly organic aesthetic of Schwitters' late works — from the painted layers which Elderfield described as having a 'vegetable density',³² to his choice of plaster as unifying sculptural medium — evoking fluid natural processes and principles of accretion, growth and mutability that also echo Arp's reference to 'natural processes of condensation, hardening, coagulating, thickening, growing together'.³³ There must also have been a connection for Schwitters between the Merz Barn and Arp's earlier efforts to link his work with nature by placing sculptures in the forest near his home at Meudon, 'anonymous in the huge studio of nature'.³⁴

Schwitters was no doubt predisposed to neo-Vitalist ideas and aesthetics as a result of his exposure to the German Romantic tradition. According to Nicholas Jardine, the prevailing characteristic of German Romantic literature was a 'nostalgia for the morning of the world when man was at one with nature'.³⁵ This longing for 'oneness' or unity with nature was a tenet of the *Naturphilosophie* movement which developed within Romantic thought, and emphasised the interconnectedness of man and nature. Schwitters himself was a student of the Romantic scholar Oskar Walzel in Dresden, at the height of a revival of Romanticism around 1918. Unsurprisingly, his contemporaries associated Schwitters with aspects of German Romanticism; beside the derision of fellow artists such as Max Ernst, who called him a 'Schleiermacher epigone' — a follower of the long-dead Romantic philosopher³⁶ — and Richard Huelsenbeck, who compared Schwitters to two of the most famous Romantic painters: 'we called him the abstract *Spitzweg*, the Kaspar David Friedrich of the Dadaist revolution',³⁷ Tristan Tzara noted the 'mechanistic Romanticism' in Schwitters' work,³⁸ and in 1919 art critic Walter Mehring coined the term *Gerümpel-Romantik* (roughly translated as 'rummage' romantic) when reviewing Schwitters' Merz collages,³⁹ while Giedion-Welcker, Schwitters' long-time friend and supporter, used Romantic theory to contextualise Schwitters' visual and literary output in an essay in 1947.⁴⁰

Schwitters would have been aware, however, that certain Romantic themes, namely *Naturphilosophie* and the notion of an innate connection to the land, were invoked to mobilise rising tides of nationalist sentiment in 1930s Germany with slogans like 'blood and soil' and the creation of the Nazi party's 'Green Wing'. The mythopoetic message of Vitalism and Romanticism thus had a sinister political undertow, highlighted in 1939 by Walter Benjamin in an essay on Baudelaire.⁴¹ Presumably Schwitters, who published a statement against 'National Feelings' in *Der Sturm* in 1924, was also sensitive to the ideological ambivalence of Romantic/Vitalist aesthetics.⁴² As Elderfield notes, Schwitters' practice was characterised by contrasting tendencies and internal conflicts, and in many ways shared what Pfannkuchen and Weatherby have called German Romanticism's ability 'to work between and around internal contradictions, to tease out and resignify objects'.⁴³ According to Dorothea Dietrich, Merz was also indebted to Kandinsky's notion of a harmony of 'antitheses and contradictions', which in turn drew on the Romantic philosopher Schelling's notion of the contradictory forces of nature.⁴⁴

Schwitters was equally cognisant of, and interested in, conflicts and tensions inherent in views of nature constructed by modernity and mass urban culture. In his essay 'The Tin Palm' (1937), the story of a tourist who went to Norway to be photographed in front of icebergs despite having no relation to them, is compared to a Dada performance in which two unrelated items (a sewing machine and a typewriter) collide.⁴⁵ Schwitters also recalls the indigenous Sami family who moved south from Lapland to live in a tent in southern Norway in order to make a living being photographed with tourists; a photograph of 'Helma with the Partapouli family', taken by Schwitters in 1935, exposes the 'mendacity' of the tourist's contrived snapshot. The 'tin palm' of the title is a photographer's prop, which Schwitters notes might just as well be transplanted to Djupvasshytta, high in the Romsdalsalpen.⁴⁶ For Schwitters, these examples demonstrated the camera's complicity in constructing fictions around our relationship to the natural world, fictions made possible with the advent of modern society (mobility, tourism) and modern technology.

At the same time, Schwitters experimented with photography in the 1930s, compiling several albums, sketchbooks of sorts, with photographs grouped either according to an obscure hierarchy of 'best,' 'average' and 'bad' photos, or around formal relations and themes, and arranged in symmetrical patterns. At least one album brings together snapshots of family and friends with photographs of the Norwegian landscape which highlight natural features such as mountains, cliffs, fjords and waterfalls, as well as details of rock, ice, snow holes and grasses emphasizing strong contrasts or the play of light on surfaces. His son Ernst also began to take photographs of the landscape of Norway around this time. Although Schwitters abandoned photography by the time he reached England and eventually sold his Rolliflex camera in 1946, Ernst pursued it as a profession. His photographs of the Lake District from

1944/45 appear to pick up where Schwitters' albums left off, detailing the volumes and voids, textures and patterns of landscapes and dramatic skies. According to Isabel Schulz, Ernst's rejected prints would sometimes end up in Schwitters' collages.⁴⁷

People rarely featured in Ernst's or Kurt's landscapes, but Ernst did take a number of photographs showing Schwitters in the landscapes of Norway and the Lake District. On one level they are simply family snapshots; on another they reveal a young photographer learning his craft, perhaps even (given Schwitters' interest in the medium) a father and son in dialogue. Some of these self-conscious images invoke tensions that are alluded to in 'The Tin Palm', and relate to their presence in the landscape as tourists, explorers, exiles. Take for instance Ernst's picture of his parents on a glacier in Norway around 1933/34. The image is carefully composed, shot from below with the camera pointing steeply up across a snow-covered bank towards the sky. At the centre of the image are two hunched figures, a length of rope between them, hiking along an inclining horizon line between snow and sky. Their dark silhouettes anchor an otherwise abstract scene, reminiscent of the transcendental modernism of Alfred Stieglitz, with the shadows of the wind-blown snow below the horizon mirrored in the smoke-like clouds above. Although the photograph suggests that the Schwitters were authentic tourists – it looks arduous and the rope suggests the mountain landscape is hazardous – they did hike over glaciers; at the same time, the framing carefully excludes any identifiable landscape features, making it disorientingly placeless.

In another snapshot from 1935, Ernst captures Schwitters manoeuvring a rowing boat between overhanging snow cliffs on a Norwegian fjord, dressed in a suit and tie. Other photographs picture him painting at a makeshift easel under an umbrella in the high mountains of Norway and splashing around the weir at Chapel Stile, invariably dressed in the smart, slightly incongruous clothes of an urbanite, an outsider. A later photograph, *The Wanderer* (1945) (Fig. 10, page 28), is an image that self-consciously invites comparisons with Caspar David Friedrich's *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* (1818). The composition closely echoes Friedrich's; Schwitters' silhouette merges with the dark outline of the high fells on which he stands, overlooking a panoramic view of Lake Windermere lit by late afternoon sun breaking through menacing clouds. A typical example of Romantic themes, Friedrich's painting represents the alienation from nature associated with modern urban life. His wanderer is both conqueror and stranger in nature; the incongruity resonates with Schwitters, for whom nature is also a form of exile. Ernst's image, however, is a photograph, which as Luke explains, is 'indifferent to what it registers,' able to 'treat "art or nature" as equivalents'.⁴⁸ Schwitters would have known and appreciated this. 'The happiest day of my life was when I discovered that everything really was indifferent', he said in 1929.⁴⁹ For Schwitters, the 'mendacity' of photography permitted these images to speak of authenticity; not the authenticity of the image which cannot be established, but of our relationship to nature. It was one of many contradictions and

tensions that set the terms of Schwitters' engagement with the natural landscape of the Lake District: between tourist and native, natural and handmade, the mythopoeics of Vitalism and the alienation of the modern subject.



Fig 10: Ernst Schwitters, *The Wanderer* (1945)

The notion of equivalence runs through Schwitters' theory of *Merz*. An equivalence between art, nature, and being in the world links his activities in the landscape, such as walking, painting from nature en plein air, taking photographs or searching for fragments of the natural world to incorporate within artworks. They were all means of assimilating his environment. For the Romantics (of which the Lake District has a few) walking was an aesthetic, contemplative pastime. More recently, the writer Rebecca Solnit described it as 'a state in which the mind, the body, and the world are aligned'.⁵⁰ Likewise the anthropologist Tim Ingold argues that the practice of drawing from nature should be considered 'a process of thinking, not the projection of a thought': a form of kinaesthetic awareness that follows or 'joins with' the forces and flows of materials, whether they be line, paint, plaster or bone'.⁵¹ Both conjure ideas about our relationship to nature that resonate with Schwitters' notion of the *Merzbau* as a 'sculpture you can walk into'.

According to Luke, Schwitters had begun to ponder 'what it might mean to "collaborate" with nature' while on Hjertøya, limiting his palette to the colours of materials he could find on the beach while extending his creative vocabulary to include effects of environmental conditions such as temperature on materials.⁵² Elizabeth

Gamard also notes that ‘it is clear that his creative work was not the end-game but a means itself: Schwitters saw art not in terms of the efficacy of objects but as a vital, open process of engagement’.⁵³ ‘In the art of inquiry,’ writes Ingold, ‘the conduct of thought goes along with, and continually answers to, the fluxes and flows of the materials with which we work. These materials think in us, as we think through them’.⁵⁴ This is never clearer than in the unfinished Merz Barn wall, which appears to have grown and thickened and morphed as it cleaved to the structure of the dry stone wall, learning its vocabulary of sharp wet stone, crevices and algae and repeating them back contrasting textures, hidden objects and colours mixed into wet surfaces. It’s a tense, unstable equivalence between art and nature that eloquently expresses as much about the Lake District as the artist.

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Notes

1. Schwitters was no stranger to being an outsider. Ridiculed as a ‘degenerate’ artist by the Nazi party, his apparently schizophrenic embrace of both figurative painting and abstract art divided his peers; the avant-garde admired the Merz work but rejected his traditional paintings; others lauded these and dismissed Merz. In Norway, he was regarded with suspicion and treated as a spy, then interned as an enemy alien in Britain.
2. Although Ernst was allowed to work (being employed by the Propaganda Department of the exiled Norwegian government in London), Schwitters was not.
3. The tarn is a 5.5 mile walk from Grasmere, in the high fells between Fairfield and Dollywaggon Pike (elev. 538m.). KS describes the location of the tarn and compares the experience of the mountains in summer to Norway. See postcard KS to ES, 10 Sept. 1942, Kurt und Ernst Schwitters Stiftung Hannover (henceforth KESS), que 06838990.
4. Ernst adds ‘...and with a sh. 7/6 daily ‘extration’. ES to KS, 24 Dec. 1943. A large number of Ernst’s photographs of the Lake

District are dated 1944. ES also mentions the cottage in the Lakes in a letter to KS in September 1945: ‘How I would like to buy the little house! Seathwaite Cottage in the Kirkstone Valley in the Lakelands in good old England! I did like the place!’ (ES to KS, 22 Sept. 1945, que 06838574). Given Ernst’s evident affection for the place, it is not inconceivable that all four stayed together at this cottage (which is still a holiday cottage and sleeps up to 12) in the summer of 1944. The cottage backs directly onto Wansfell, and several of the places Schwitters painted can be reached from there on foot. See, for example, ‘Auf dem Wansfell’ 1946, Kurt Schwitters Catalogue Raisonné (henceforth CR) 3285; ‘Ohne Titel (Sweden Bridge)’ 1945/47 CR 3197, ‘Ohne Titel (View from Sweden Bridge)’ 1946, CR 3279 and ‘Ohne Titel (Landschaft bei Nook Lane)’ 1946, CR 3281. All sources KESS.

5. Schwitters’ relief upon having settled in Ambleside is recounted by Edith Thomas in Powell 1975. According to Thomas, ‘Schwitters fell in love with the Lake District immediately and from this view, I think he was the happiest person for a long time. We soon became accus-

tomed to the atmosphere here and he said to me, 'if I am completely free to paint, I think we can stay here for much longer than we had planned.' He also wrote to Ernst, 'I am doing now very well here in the Lakes. In this week alone I painted four portraits. All are ready. My health is much better than in London. I am much out of the house and can practically work the whole day. I can climb mountains again.' KS to ES, 18 Aug. 1945, KESS, que 06838723. Mary Burkett quotes Thomas as saying, 'his arrival in the Lake District gave him a new found freedom. The quietness, and changing scene, reminded him of his beloved Norway, and was a great inspiration to him. Particularly the rock formations, the mountains, the trees and tree trunks; also the beautiful waterfalls, and river beds. He loved the sweet mountain air, especially in the autumn, with its divinely purple and reddish brown tints.' Burkett 1979, p.8.

6. As described in his postcard to Ernst, 10 Sept. 1942. See note 3.
7. Josenhans 2017, p. 211.
8. 'The years 1946 and 1947 in particular were probably the most productive in his life...The number and quality of the last works are extraordinary. They bring to fruition, in many different ways, themes and approaches that had interested him throughout his life.' Elderfield 1985, p. 210.
9. See <http://www.wandervogel.com/history.html#1>
10. Schwitters' parents owned a cottage in rural Isernhagen, north of Hannover and close to the Lüneburg Heath. During the 1920s, Schwitters continued to visit the Heath and also spent his holidays at resorts on the Baltic island of Rügen. I am indebted to Gwendolen Webster for this information.
11. See Schwitters family photographs, 1932-1939, KESS.
12. Photographs taken by Kurt and Ernst Schwitters show Helma preparing food outside their tent on Hjertøya, dusted in snow, in 1932: KESS 2009.06.12.001 and 06837735.
13. Schwitters describes the first walk in letters to Ernst, 5 and 28 Sept. 1945. KESS, que 06838721,T and que 06838724. According to the details given, Schwitters travelled via the Three Tarns, which are located at an elevation of c.700 m. on a col between the Borrowdale and Langdale valleys, underneath Bow Fell and Crinkle Crags. This walk would have required skills and experience of mountain conditions to navigate through the remote upland areas. Ernst mentions the walk up Coniston Old Man in a letter to KS, 19 Dec. 1947, KESS que 06839176. He includes four pictures from that walk in the letter. KESS holds a number of Ernst's slides showing various locations on Coniston Old Man, including abandoned mining sites, waterfalls and views of the descent.
14. See Crossley 2005, pp. 57-8. Photos dated 1947 show KS and ET picnicking next to Windermere and Wastwater, (nos. 23791, 23842) and letters reveal that they explored the area thoroughly; see for example, KS to ES, 3 July 1945, que 06838719; 17 May 1946: que 06838774; 20 June 1946. que 06838782. All KESS.
15. Schwitters 1920. Translated in Rothenberg/Joris 2002, p. xxii.
16. Schwitters 1933. Author's translation.
17. KS to Katherine Dreier, 24 July 1937, quoted in Luke p. 214.
18. Respectively CR 3413, 3159, CR 3274, CR3491, CR 3385-3387 and CR 3315. There are also formal correspondences with some of Ernst Schwitters' Lake District photographs, including *Beauty Secluded* (1943, object ID 22377) and *(Tree Trunks)* (1944, object ID 22357).
19. Schwitters 1933. Author's translation. Titles cited are respectively CR3401, CR3408, CR3498 and CR3465 (all 1947).
20. Jack Burnham also notes that an interest in vitalism was common within biocentric modernist circles such as Unit One and Circle in the 1930s, which included Jean Arp, Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, Naum Gabo and the influential critic Herbert Read. (Burnham 1968, pp.72; 94-95)
21. Arp 1972, p. 238.
22. Schwitters and Van Doesburg undertook a Dada lecture/performance tour around Holland in 1922.
23. Lynn Gamwell writes that Arp abandoned himself to chance processes in order to 'connect with natural forces' which 'occur below conscious awareness'. (Gamwell 2010, p. 210).
24. Giedion-Welcker 1935, p. 201. Quoted in Andreotti 1990, p.136, n.17.
25. KS to Giedion-Welcker, 19 Aug. 1947. Reproduced in Giedion-Welcker 1973, p.506-7.

26. Arp 1948, p.48.
27. Schwitters 1927, 250-54. Quoted in Luke 2014, p.207.
28. Schwitters 1922, p.80. Quoted in Elderfield 1985, p.189, n.54.
29. Schwitters 1926, p.5. Ibid. n.55.
30. '*Kunst ist Form. Formen heißt entformeln*', in Schwitters 1924b, p.65. Author's translation.
31. Schwitters 1924, front cover.
32. Elderfield 1985, p.217. For a discussion of Schwitters' approach to materials in the Merzbarn, see Brookes 2020 and Pounds 2016.
33. Arp 1953, p. 10. Quoted in Andreotti 1990, p. 136, n.18.
34. Arp 1972, p.139. Between 1933-36 Arp produced a series of linked works entitled 'Sculptures to be Lost in the Forest.' Isabel Schulz also notes Schwitters' 'sideways glance to Arp' in Schulz 2013, p.132.
35. Jardine 1996, p.231.
36. Camfield 1993, p.67.
37. Huelsenbeck 1961, p.58.
38. Tzara 1952, p.4-5.
39. Mehring 1919, p.462. Quoted in Elderfield 1985, p. 53, n.23.
40. Giedion-Welcker 1947, pp.285-288. Luke also notes subsequent studies to examine links between Schwitters and Romanticism; see Luke 2014, p. 7 n.12.
41. Benjamin 1939/2007, 243. See Staudenmeier 2011 for an overview of the relation between fascism and ecology, and Sparrow 2019 for a discussion of Benjamin's critique of Vitalism.
42. Schwitters 1924, pp.3-4. Quoted in Leslie 2013, p.61.
43. Pfannkuchen/Weatherby 2017, p. 337. Schwitters wrote to Raoul Hausmann: 'in my soul live as many hearts as I have lived years. Because I can never give up or entirely forget a period of time during which I worked with great energy – I am still an impressionist, even while I am Merz... I am not ashamed of being able to do good portraits and I do them still.' KS to RH, 9 Dec. 1946. Translated in Reichardt 1962, p.150.
44. Dietrich 1993, pp.50-69; Kandinsky 1994, p.193.
45. 'Die Blechpalme' is mentioned in Luke 2014, p.221-22 and Leslie 2013, pp. 48-9.
46. Djupvasshytta was where Schwitters stayed every summer to explore and paint the spectacular surrounding mountain scenery. He sold his paintings to tourists and to the hotel manager, who hung them on the hotel walls.
47. Schulz 2006, p. 204. One such work is *Untitled [Doll]*, 1941-2, CR2827.
48. Luke 2014, p. 222.
49. Schwitters 1929, p. 76-8.
50. Solnit explains, 'The rhythm of walking generates a kind of rhythm of thinking, and the passage through a landscape echoes or stimulates the passage through a series of thoughts. This creates an odd consonance between internal and external passage, one that suggests that the mind is also a landscape of sorts and that walking is one way to traverse it. A new thought often seems like a feature of the landscape that was there all along, as though thinking were traveling rather than making.' Solnit 2000, pp.2-3.
51. Ingold 2013, p.128.
52. Luke refers to the 'lucky coins' that Schwitters fixed to mirrors in the hut with oil paint which, in the heat of summer, would slip and smear a 'lucky streak' of paint down the surface of the mirror. She also notes that on Hjertøya he began to collect materials that he recognised had already been 'devalued' for him by nature: colours bleached by sunlight, surfaces etched and worn, worked over by the sea. Luke 2014, p.206 and 238-9.
53. Gamard 2010, p. 21.
54. Ingold 2013, p. 6.

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