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Actions for Camera, Ambleside, 2016.

## Condensations

Nathan Walker

This project began with a single letter: 'W'. Due to a typo in Thomas Donald's 1774 *Historic Map of Cumberland* the highest mountain in England lost a letter. Scaw Fell and Scaw Fell Pike were renamed 'Sca'. The mis-spelling was subsequently perpetuated by Ordnance



Survey place-namers in 1867 and continues on maps of the area to this day. The misplaced 'W' results in a mispronounced place and contributes to the cleansing of the Cumbrian dialect from Cumbria. Tourists say 'Sca'; locals say 'Scaw'. The 'Scaw' remains on local guides and some postcards but is slowly disappearing and with it the sound of the place it indexes. My interest in the sound of words and language, specifically in relation to their visual appearance brought me back to my home-county of Cumbria and, in turn, to the Armit Museum, to Kurt Schwitters and to Cumbrian dialect.

*Condensations* is a project that brings together the writings of artists, poets, historians and Lakeland folk that are archived at the Armit Museum and Library, Ambleside, Cumbria. In June and July 2016 I was fortunate enough to be writer in residence at the Armit library. Founded by Mary Louisa Armit the library incorporated the Ambleside Book Society (1828) and the Ambleside Ruskin Library (1890s) and officially opened in 1912. This small and beautiful library contains a wealth of rare books and manuscripts including extensive collections related to Beatrix Potter, Harriet Martineau and John Ruskin. It includes the bequeathed manuscripts of *Wordsworth's Hawkshead* author T. W. Thompson, rare Lakeland photography from former Armit librarian Herbert Bell and collections from the Lakeland Dialect Society. It also currently houses the library of the Fell and Rock Climbing Club of the English Lake District. Nowadays the Armit Museum includes the UK's largest permanent exhibit of works by exiled German artist Kurt Schwitters, who spent the last three years of his life in Ambleside.

My residency explored three seemingly unrelated topics of particular interest to my creative practice: the collage and sound poetry practice of Kurt Schwitters; the history of rock-climbing in the Lake District; and the written dialect and

place-names of the county of Cumbria. These three areas of interest relate when considered through an expanded idea of language and writing.

The writing conducted during and preceding the residency uses the works contained in the library. I have collected together texts, pages from books, play scripts in dialect, hand-written correspondence and notes. I have mined these found texts through procedural 'treatments' of their pages, producing erased pages that take the appearance of visual and concrete poetry. These new texts treat the page spatially as a landscape. The landscapes are then processed further through a series of superimpositions, where words, letters, and grammatical marks are placed over one another, like in the collages of Schwitters. These textual collages create clusters of overprinted texts, constellations of illegible and almost legible writing that I am calling 'condensations'. They are visual texts for performance; condensed texts that blur, obscure and reveal fragments of language from the collections of the Armit library.

Like the Armit library, my 'condensations' bring together figures from Lakeland history. The meeting of these figures within the text assemble new relationships and new ways of reading their works. For example Schwitters' late collages, created in the English Lake District, are considered as maps; landscapes and superimposed trajectories to navigate. Cumbrian dialect is sound poetry. Aleister Crowley's rock climbing routes are spells, his ascent of the Napes of Great Gable (arguably the birth-place of British Rock Climbing) are incantations, scores for performance awaiting activation by the breath and voice of the reader. Maps and place-names of the Lake District are collages, cut-up word sounds from Norse and Celt tongues; they highlight the Border region not only of England and Scotland but the borders of visual and aural languages, the seams between relationships and meaning.

Whilst in residence I performed a series of performance actions within the library and the landscape of the surrounding fells of Ambleside. These interventions are presented here as photographic documentation.

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Nathan Walker is a performance artist and poet from Workington, West Cumbria. He has recently presented work at The Poetry Library and X Marks the Bökship, London; Baltic 39, Newcastle Upon Tyne; and Chapter Arts, Cardiff. He is currently based in York where he organises Oui Performance with the artist Victoria Gray and teaches performance at York St John University. *Condensations* will be published by Uniformbooks later this year. It presents visual texts for performance, collage and poetry in response to the Armit Museum & Library, Ambleside, Cumbria. [www.nathan-walker.co.uk](http://www.nathan-walker.co.uk).



*Actions for Camera, Ambleside, 2016.*

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3) Take the pipette and suck up a small amount of sodium hydroxide into it. Place a finger at each end of the pipette and tilt it so you can see the <sup>seeing</sup> that all the inside of the pipette is <sup>washed</sup> by the sodium hydroxide. Now tip the pipette into a beaker so it is washed right through as has been changed by the water in the pipette. Now take the pipette again and suck up some sodium hydroxide and see that the level of the liquid is above the first mark. <sup>Remove the mouth</sup> place a finger on the end of the pipette. By taking the finger off slightly allow the liquid to fall off till the level is at the first mark. Now draw up the liquid into the beaker. When the pipette has drained place a finger over the end and <sup>hard round</sup> it till the cause the air needs to be pushed out force out the remaining two drops of liquid without which the volume of liquid would be increased.

4) Close the top of the burette and pour a little of the sulphuric acid. place a finger over the end and over the acid all round inside the burette. Release the top and let the acid drain out. Close the top. Set the burette upright in a clamp and pour the acid to the rough mark on the glass. If there is any air-filled space out the excess acid through the top until the rough mark is reached.

5) Drop two drops of neutral solution into the beaker containing sodium hydroxide. The liquid gets the

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