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DRAWING: FROM DREAM TO AWAKENING.

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Abstract: The paper relates observations and reflections made during practice-based research into 'becoming' and 'disappearing.' By drawing and then erasing the work through various methods, it became apparent that nothing actually 'becomes' or 'disappears.' Only the material form changes, along with the linguistic concept. In this paper, I will suggest that these linguistic concepts are 'abstractions' from my direct, sensory experience of drawing. Direct experience is perceived in a dream mode of perception, giving rise to a poetic and metaphorical form of language. Then a waking form of perception occurs, and forms delimited concepts as 'abstractions' from my direct experience. In relation to Walter Benjamin's theory of language, this can be perceived as a process of translation; from the language of things, into human language.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is based on preliminary observations made during the process of drawing. The paper relates to observations and reflections on my own drawing practice, and is not a general theory of drawing. The paper is not a fully worked out thesis. It needs further elaboration in relation to current drawing practice based research, and into the relationship between embodied cognition and metaphorical language. These preliminary observations and reflections have been related to Walter Benjamin's conception of perception and language, and also to the language philosophy of Johann Georg Hamann, who influenced Benjamin's thinking.

The observations and reflections in this paper come from drawing practice based research into becoming and disappearing as aspects of an underlying unity, or medium of experience, from which all things form and to which they return. They also engage with the possibility that this medium of experience is language. This follows Walter Benjamin's suggestion in his essay 'On Language as Such and on the Language of Man' of, '... language as an ultimate reality, perceptible only in its manifestation, inexplicable and mystical.' (Benjamin, 2004a, p.67)

The investigation into 'becoming' and 'disappearing' evolved from a non-intentional quality that manifested in my drawings and photographic works. Drawings in graphite on paper had a very light touch. There was also very little differentiation between the trace of graphite and the supporting paper. (Figures 1, 2) A body of photographic works also had a lack of tonal differentiation, and a lack of differentiation between the subject of the work and its surroundings. (Figures 3, 4) In the drawings, and the photographic works, it appeared as though something was either visually emerging or about to disappear.

In order to investigate this latent focus of the work, a research method was developed that embodied 'becoming' and 'disappearing,' through the becoming and disappearing of the work itself. This method consists of drawing, using materials such as graphite, charcoal or chalk on paper, and then erasing the work through various methods. These methods

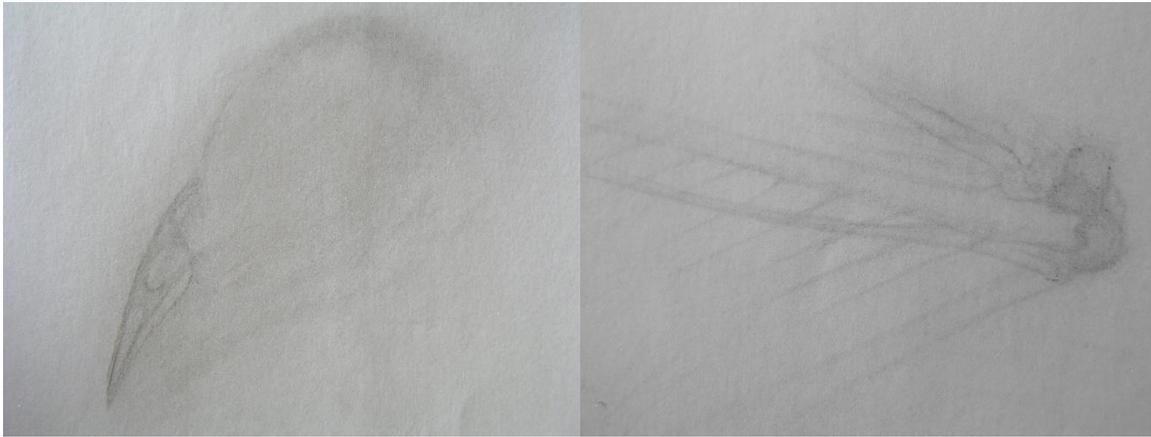


FIGURE 1.

FIGURE 2.

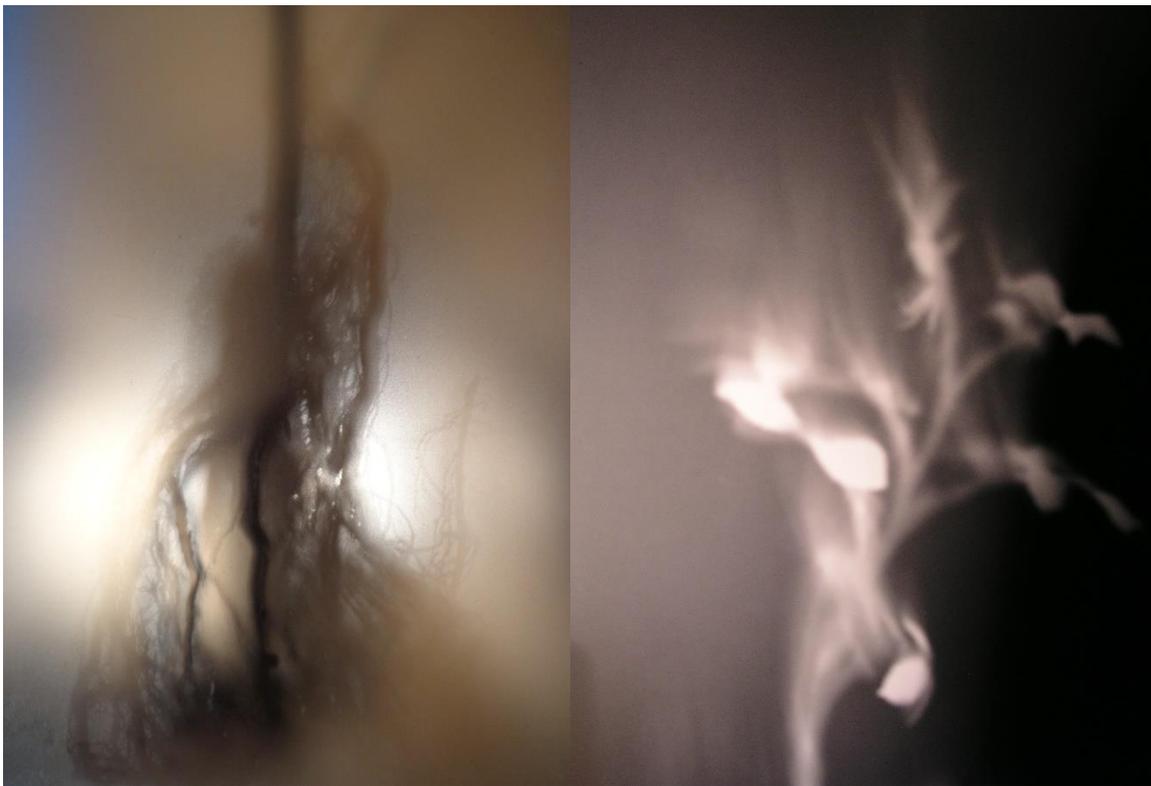


FIGURE 3.

FIGURE 4.

include erasing with a putty rubber, sanding the work and the supporting paper away with sand paper or a power sander, or washing the work away in water. Digital photography is used to record, and evidence, the process. The observations and reflections, on this process of drawing and then erasing, have then been related to the work of Walter Benjamin. In particular, to his theological conception of language, as influenced by Johann Georg Hamann.

By drawing and then erasing the work through various methods, it became apparent that nothing actually ‘becomes’ or ‘disappears.’ My direct sensory experience of sanding down a drawing, and the supporting paper, made this very clear. Only the material form changes, along with the linguistic concept. If a drawing, and the supporting paper, are sanded down with a power sander, it is no longer a ‘drawing,’ but ‘dust.’ (Figures 5, 6, 7, 8) Prior to the creation of the drawing, the materials already existed and have existed, in many different forms and as many different linguistic concepts. ‘Becoming’ and ‘disappearing’ are simply the arising and passing of delimited linguistic concepts; whereas the material constituents have not disappeared, but have changed form.

In this case, the research investigation is concerned with the arising, and passing, of delimited linguistic concepts. In his *Metacritique on the Purism of Reason*, Hamann suggested that the oldest language was music and, ‘The oldest writing was painting and drawing, and therefore was occupied even so early with *spatial economy*, the delimiting and determining of space through figures.’ (Hamann, 1996, p. 156) If drawing can be conceived of as a form of language, then it should be possible to observe, in my own drawing practice, how these delimited linguistic concepts arise out of my direct sensory experience whilst drawing.

In relation to Hamann and Benjamin, direct sensory experience can be interpreted as an experience of the language that permeates creation. This needs a brief explanation, as both Hamann and Benjamin adopted an unconventional, theological conception of language. Benjamin Cates observes of Hamann’s language philosophy that, ‘Just as God’s word in the form of scripture is a communication to us, so is His creation a communication. In fact, Hamann sees the entirety of creation as an act of speech.’ (Cates, 2009, p.44) James O’Flaherty suggests that for Hamann, ‘Apart from the creative word of God, the world and its objects would not exist; but apart from the verbal representation of sense objects, there can be no real knowledge of the world.’ (O’Flaherty, 1966, p. 38)

In relation to Benjamin, Hans Ruin observes that, ‘...he presents a Hamannesque image of nature as entirely impregnated with language, or rather a protolanguage, in virtue of the “communicable essence” that it carries with it from Creation and the creative Word of God.



FIGURE 5.



FIGURE 6.



FIGURE 7.



FIGURE 8.

Everything is potentially meaningful, and everything strives towards its own expression, down to the lowest species and mute rocks.’ (Ruin, 1999, p. 147)

The paper will suggest that, whilst I am drawing, a process of translation occurs from this directly experienced ‘protolanguage’ into a rational form of language, in the form of delimited concepts. As Ruin observes in relation to Benjamin’s essay *On Language as Such and on the Language of Man*, ‘Translation in this essay is not primarily concerned with communication between different languages. Instead it is the transport between the language of things and the language of humans.’ (Ruin, 1999, p. 147)

Observation and reflection on my drawing process also suggests that two different forms of perception are involved in this process of translation. Whilst immersed in the activity of drawing, the work seems to evolve out of a dreaming form of perception. This form of perception appears to be receptive to the language of things. Then a waking form of perception occurs, that is rational and differentiates between things. Delimited concepts

form in this waking mode of perception. One form of perception evolves from the other, just like awakening from a dream. I have utilised Benjamin's distinction between dream and waking, as different forms of perception, from his essay 'Outline of the Psychophysical Problem'. This is in order to describe and explain the experience I have whilst drawing.

In 'Outline of the Psychophysical Problem' Benjamin writes of dream and waking as different modes of perception, he uses the terms 'perception' and 'consciousness' interchangeably. This suggests that, for Benjamin, perception is consciousness. Neither mode of perception can be true or false, '... neither of the two modes of consciousness is "truer" to life; they merely have different meanings for it.' (Benjamin, 2004c, p. 399) The reason Benjamin suggests that they can be neither true nor false, is due to the fact that as modes of consciousness they relate to life, to the actual world, rather than the true world, 'For in the world of truth, the world of perception has lost its reality. Indeed, the world of truth may well not be the world of any consciousness.' (2004c, p.399)

My interpretation of the true world, is that it is the expressionless and creative Word itself, in which, '... all information, all sense, and all intention finally encounter a stratum in which they are destined to be extinguished.' (Benjamin, 2004d, p. 261) Benjamin suggests that all language communicates itself, 'Or, more precisely, that all language communicates itself *in* itself; it is in the purest sense the "medium" of the communication.' (Benjamin, 2004a, p. 64) As Eli Friedlander suggests, it is the expressionless power in all artistic media, 'This expressionless power is the Pure Word, the manifestation of created life.' (Friedlander, 2012, p. 58) The true world can then be interpreted as the Pure Word, in which all appearance or manifestation occurs, as the actual world. All 'becoming' can then be said to occur 'in language.'

In relation to my own practice, that which 'becomes,' appears to be a form of rational, waking perception, that perceives delimited concepts 'abstracted' out of a receptive, dreaming form of perception. The dreaming form of perception I experience whilst drawing is, perhaps, simply experience of the language of things. It is not the knowledge of experience that occurs subsequently, that arises from it in the form of delimited concepts, as human language. The best way to explain this is by outlining my observations and reflections on my experiences whilst drawing.

DREAM PERCEPTION

The initial process of drawing, for example, drawing in graphite on paper from an object that I am observing, is difficult to explain. This is due to the fact that during the initial stages of drawing, my mind stills and I have no thoughts. There is no obvious thinking process that I am consciously aware of. Reflection on this aspect of the drawing process is akin to retracing the actions carried out whilst sleep-walking. I have become so immersed in the object that I am drawing from, and the activity of drawing, that no thought occurs. This suggests that the work evolves out of the form of perception that Walter Benjamin describes as dream. (2004c, p. 399)

The drawing I am working on appears to form itself through a process of accumulation or accretion. (Figures 9 – 14) Whilst I am drawing, it is nearly impossible to distinguish between the material and cognitive processes. They are inexplicably intertwined, there is no differentiation between them. Rationally this seems absurd, it makes no sense, yet it is difficult to separate them. This form of perception is not differentiating between mind and matter, or making subject/object distinctions, everything operates seamlessly together as one process. I am drawn to certain things or materials as much as drawing from or with them. There is an affinity between the cognitive process and the materials. The cognitive process is given material expression and the materiality of things suggests cognitive states.

This dream form of perception, appears to be a form of receptivity to things in which the materials, and the subject of the work communicate something through the senses of sight and touch. Sight conveys some of the material properties; if graphite is light and smooth it is likely to be hard and better for fine lines. If it is dark and matt it is likely to be softer, deposit more particles or have a powdery consistency. This initial impression is immediately confirmed through touch. The feel and temperature of the material conveys something about its molecular structure; if it is colder the material will be more compact and deposit less, if it is warm it will be less compact and deposit more particles. There is very little thought involved in the process of selecting drawing materials, something is immediately communicated from



FIGURES 9 - 14.

the materials to the body. This could be a form of receptiveness to the 'communicable essence' or 'protolanguage' that Ruin suggests permeates creation for Benjamin. (Ruin, 1999, p. 147)

In 'On Language as Such and on the Language of Man' Benjamin speaks of painting and sculpture as certain kinds of thing-languages. (2004a, p.73) Drawing can be perceived as a form of thing-language like painting and sculpture, 'that in them we find a translation of the language of things into an infinitely higher language, which may still be of the same sphere.' (Benjamin, 2004a, p.73) Benjamin speaks of nameless, non-acoustic languages issuing from matter; this is the material community of things in their communication, 'Moreover, the communication of things is certainly communal in a way that grasps the world as an undivided whole.' (2004a, p.73)

The form of perception my drawing evolves from seems to partake in this language of things, that grasps the world as an undivided whole. (Benjamin, 2004a, p.73) Unlike reason which differentiates between things. Benjamin suggests that language permeates the whole of creation. (2004a, p.74) It is not an imposition upon reality, but is immanent in creation. This conception of language is appropriate to art and explains Benjamin's sensitivity to the materiality of things. Matter communicates to us and it is not something that is drawn from, or picked up and used. There is an exchange between the materiality of things and ourselves.

The materials of traditional drawing practice are the same basic constituents of the human body such as carbon and calcium. There could well be affinities between these materials and the body imperceptible to reason. The thing-language of drawing appears to evolve from direct experience of materials, and grows through the depositing of tiny particles of dust; the residues of burnt wood in the form of charcoal, residues of the skeletal remains of marine plankton as chalk, carbon deposits in the form of graphite. It echoes the processes that formed the universe; dust clouds gathering and coalescing to form stars, planets, galaxies and even ourselves, later to be dispersed and returned to dust. We use the same language to describe our mental processes as we do to describe material processes. Perhaps this affinity allows drawing to communicate or convey something. This language evolves out of direct engagement with matter, a language in which materials speak.

Gabriel Levy, speaking of Benjamin's language theory, suggests that, 'It is in the nature of all things, whether animate or inanimate, to communicate mental content. Thus we cannot imagine a total absence of language in anything.' (Levy, 2006, p. 30) In 'Outline of the Psychophysical Problem,' Benjamin writes, 'For it is the power of freedom that releases the living human being from the influence of individual, natural events, and lets him follow the guidance of nature in the conduct of his affairs. He is guided, but like a sleeper.' (Benjamin, 2004c, p. 398) This dreaming form of perception could be the 'guidance of nature,' as the communication of mental content. Benjamin suggests that,

This sea of sleep, deep in the foundations of human nature, has its high tide at night: every slumber indicates only that it washes a shore from which it retreats in waking hours. What remains are the dreams; however marvelously they are formed, they are no more than the lifeless remains from the womb of the depths. The living

remains in him and secure in him: the ship of waking life, and the fish as the silent booty in the nets of artists. (Benjamin, 2004c, p.399)

Benjamin writes that this sea of sleep is a symbol of human nature, which has its high tide at night. (2004c, p.399) This suggests that it is always present. In waking perception there is no connection between self and objects, but in dream perception it is different, Benjamin quotes Valery in *On Some Motifs in Baudelaire*, 'To say, "Here I see such and such an object" does not establish an equation between me and the object... In dreams, however, there is an equation. The things I see, see me just as much as I see them.' (Benjamin, 1999, p. 185) Total immersion in the process of drawing resembles this dream form of perception, perhaps in this mode of perception the language of nature directly passes into us.

Benjamin suggests that, 'The language of things can pass into the language of knowledge and name only through translation – so many translations, so many languages – once man has fallen from the paradisiacal state that knew only one language.' (2004a, pp. 70-71) Benjamin suggests that before the Fall from Paradise there was only one language. He refers to the following quotation from Hamann by way of explanation. (Benjamin, 2004a, p. 70)

Every phenomenon of nature was a word – the sign, symbol, and pledge of a new, inexpressible, but all the more intimate union, communication, and community of divine energy and ideas. Everything that man heard in the beginning, saw with his eyes, contemplated, and his hands touched was a living word. With this word in his mouth and in his heart, the origin of language was as natural, as near, and as easy as child's play. (O'Flaherty, 1966, p. 38)

Following the Fall, language lost its immediacy, hence translation is necessary. The process of drawing can be perceived as a translation from the language of things, into a metaphorical language of matter that evolves through the process of drawing. This metaphorical language, rather than being a linguistic displacement from a proper to an improper object, is more akin to Hannah Arendt's definition of metaphor as, '...the means by which the oneness of the world is poetically bought about.' (1999, p.20) This metaphorical language is then translated into reason in the finished work, it becomes an abstraction from direct experience once the work is perceived as an object, and not as a process, and this is the process of awakening.

WAKING PERCEPTION

It is only when some discomfort or distraction breaks my immersion in the process of drawing that rational thought intervenes, and at this point subject/object distinctions emerge. The drawing is then perceived as an object, rather than as a process. It feels like waking up, and once thought intervenes, corrections and alterations are made to the rather irrational accumulations that have manifested on the paper. These accumulations appear to have over spilled their boundaries, and have very little differentiation between light and shade. There is also little differentiation between the supposed objects in the work, which merge together in such a way that one cannot see the wood for the trees.

In relation to Benjamin's thinking, this could be interpreted as the making of judgments. In the language of knowledge, 'The word must communicate *something* (other than itself). In that fact lies the true Fall of the spirit of language.' (2004a, p. 71) In waking, rational perception, the desire to communicate something to others, to communicate something externally, leads me to make judgments about the work.

Once this rational, waking perception intervenes and makes judgments, the work is altered to give the drawing overall form, differentiation and definition. This is done by adding additional traces of graphite to darken some areas, and the use of a putty rubber to remove deposits and lighten other areas. The drawing becomes a delimited concept, it becomes a drawing of something; a bird, a heart, a shape or even a feeling.

Susanne Langer, discussing Ernst Cassirer's theory of language and myth, suggests that for Cassirer language is essentially hypostatic, seeking to hold, distinguish and emphasize the object of feeling, rather than communicate feeling itself. This hypostasis gives unity, permanency and a form of substantiality to a thing that enables recollection and the ability to refer to something or think about it. This hypostasis, although it allows for discursive and even conceptual thinking, actually removes us from direct experience. (Langer, 1949, pp. 381-400)

This hypostasis also occurs when waking from a dreaming state. In *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin quotes Marcel Proust's description of awakening, which became important to his later thought. (Benjamin, 2002, [K8a,2], p. 403)

Perhaps the immobility of the things that surround us is forced on them by our conviction that they are themselves and not anything else, by the immobility of our conception of them. For it always happened that when I awoke like this, and my mind struggled in an unsuccessful attempt to discover where I was, everything revolved around me through the darkness: things, places, years. (Proust, 2005, p. 4)

The rational or waking perception I experience, resembles Proust's description of awakening. A cohering or coalescing into a delimited concept is occurring. This is then abstracted from the direct experience of drawing. This waking consciousness seems to separate all the different impressions, then fixes them. Whereas dream consciousness is much more fluid, things are less differentiated and less distinct, things merge and blend together. This may explain why it is so difficult to give an explanation of my drawing process, aspects that are merged and blended are difficult to separate and remain elusive.

Hamann believed that the Enlightenment conception of reason was an abstraction from direct experience, a process that in James O'Flaherty's words, '...involves a reconceiving of natural objects which omits the emotional connotations associated with the immediate, uncritically perceived impression. Hence there is no real understanding of nature.' (1966, p.14) O'Flaherty notes that for Hamann, the objects themselves are symbols of divine wisdom and energy, which must be symbolised further in human language. (O'Flaherty, 1966, p. 38) One way to interpret this is that direct sense experience is the perception of the symbols of divine wisdom. But in order to comprehend this, it must be translated into human language as reason. Reason itself rests on language, it arises from the directly experienced language in creation. For Hamann, the Enlightenment conception of reason was an attempt to divorce reason from experience. Hamann wanted to locate direct experience in everyday vernacular language, which by nature is poetic and metaphorical. He recognised that language represents the most important link with experience. (O'Flaherty, 1966, p.74)

Benjamin's thinking on language is similar to Hamann's. Benjamin writes that art, '... including poetry, rests not on the ultimate essence of the spirit of language, but on the

spirit of language in things, even in its consummate beauty.’ (2004a, p. 67) Benjamin then quotes from Hamann to suggest that, ‘*Language, the mother of reason and revelation, its alpha and omega.*’ (Benjamin, 2004a, p. 67) This suggests that for Benjamin, reason evolves from that which he calls the ‘spirit of language in things.’ (2004a, p.67)

Benjamin describes the Fall and the loss of the original paradisiacal language as, ‘...the turning away from the contemplation of things in which their language passes into man ...’ (Benjamin, 2004a, p. 72) Reason and knowledge as modes of perception, have turned away from this receptive contemplation of things and become language as means or empty prattle. (Benjamin, 2004a, p.72)

My drawing process suggests that poetic and metaphorical language evolves from direct experience of the language of things. A language that passes into us and is then translated into a form of metaphorical thing-language. In the finished work this is translated into reason or waking perception, in the form of a delimited concept. The delimited concept is an abstraction from my direct experience. Hamann in his language philosophy, realised that poetic and metaphorical ‘natural language’ gives rise to ‘abstract language,’ and for Hamann all rationalism arises from what he called natural language as the mother of reason. (O’Flaherty, 1966, pp.16-19)

For Hamann, ‘Before there can be anything like cognition, however, the objects of sensory experience, no less than the operations of reason, must be symbolised in language.’ (O’Flaherty, 1966, p.38) Benjamin makes a similar point in ‘On Perception,’ ‘The distinction that must be made is between the immediate and natural concept of experience and the concept of experience in the context of knowledge.’ (Benjamin, 2004b, p.95) Benjamin suggests that the two concepts have become conflated, ‘Paradoxical though it sounds, experience does not occur as such in the knowledge of experience, simply because this is knowledge of experience and hence a context of knowledge.’ (Benjamin, 2004b, p.95) The moment of awakening, in the case of my drawing process, is the moment that experience becomes knowledge, once it is symbolised as human language.

This may well explain why I find it so difficult to give an explanation of the initial stages of drawing. It is an experience and not knowledge. It is much easier to describe the activity of

drawing using poetic and metaphorical language. As Hamann suggests, metaphorical language is closer to direct sensory experience than reason. This direct sensory experience can only be translated or interpreted, and for Benjamin, translation is the afterlife of a work. (Benjamin, 2004d, pp.254-255)

THE AFTERLIFE OF WORKS

These two forms of perception and their related languages may well explain the ghostly manifestation of my artworks. In all the works there is a lack of differentiation between the trace of graphite and the paper, the works are barely there. The drawings suggest the point at which something is coming into awareness as a concept, or vanishing from it. This quality in the work led to the investigation into ‘becoming’ and ‘disappearing’ by drawing and then erasing the work. In reality, nothing actually becomes or disappears, the matter simply changes form. On another level something is becoming and disappearing. That which is becoming is the manifestation of rational, waking perception in the form of delimited concepts, emerging from a dreaming form of perception in which things are not differentiated, that is receptive to the language of things, and perceives the world as a unified *physis*¹ rather than as separate, differentiated objects or concepts.

It is only due to reason having created an ‘abstraction’ in the form of a delimited concept that the work can be perceived as having become or disappeared. This abstracted concept, has divorced itself from reality and the direct experience that gave rise to it. Once the work is finished it has become an abstraction from direct experience and like a dream, ‘... no more than the lifeless remains from the womb of the depths.’ (Benjamin, 2004c, p.399) This then gives rise to the afterlife of work’s as the works subsequent history. (Benjamin, 2004d, pp. 224-225) In the case of my drawings, most of them have been erased, but their afterlife consists of having been translated into different forms and media; such as digital images or even writing about the work. As an abstraction it also continues its ghostly afterlife in memory.

All these abstractions are translations from a direct experience of the language of things. They are the ‘afterlife’ of direct experience, its continued existence or life in Benjamin’s

¹ Physis being a term used by the pre-Socratic philosophers to denote nature as an underlying substance from which everything else arose or a pattern that unifies all things.

terms. (Benjamin, 2004d, p. 255) They become existing things in the world that can be encountered and directly experienced by others.

As an example, I did a series of drawings based on a photograph by Karel Plicka, *Mist in the Boublin Virgin Forest* from the book *Vltava*. (Plicka, 1965) Plicka's direct experience along the banks of the Vltava river had been translated into a concept; firstly, as a photographic negative, then into a photographic print, and then into ink on paper with a title. Derrida observes in *Archive Fever* that any concept dislocates itself, it is never one with itself, and this spectrality creates a disseminating fission from which concepts in general suffer. (Derrida, 1998, pp. 84-85) Derrida's use of the term 'disseminating fission' is interesting. In relation to Plicka's photograph, it has dislocated itself from the direct experience that gave rise to it. It has then been disseminated, as ink on paper, in many copies of the book *Vltava*. I then encounter a copy of the book and directly experience it. This could be described as a form of 'fusion,' the combining of my direct experience, with a conceptualisation of someone else's experience; someone no longer living. The book communicates something to me, and I begin to draw my own translations of Plicka's work. I then make further translations in the form of digital photographs. I also transfer the graphite residues from one drawing onto another sheet of paper, creating yet another translation. These works have then been exhibited at Leeds College of Art, along with the book, and experienced by other people. (Figures 15, 16) This could be described as the continued life (or afterlife) of language; a process of continual 'becoming.' The becoming of new combinations of concepts and experience, as translations.

CONCLUSION

Through observation and reflection on my drawing practice, I have suggested that two different forms of perception are operative in the 'becoming' of my drawings. There appears to be a dream form of perception, that is receptive to, and experiences, the 'protolanguage' in creation. In this dreaming perception, this directly experienced protolanguage is then translated, through the direct engagement with materials and the subject of the work, into a metaphorical thing-language. A waking form of perception then occurs that makes judgments about the work. This leads to alterations being made to the drawing that delimit and differentiate. The drawing is then translated into a delimited

linguistic concept. This in turn translates itself into the work's afterlife, in various different forms and media. The concept has a continued existence or life. It can then be perceived as an existing thing in the world, that can be directly experienced by others. There is a complex relationship between



FIGURE 15.



FIGURE 16.

the directly experienced language in creation, and its subsequent translations. This is a relationship that I am currently investigating through the practice, and in relation to Benjamin's translation theory.

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