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## Objects yet to Become: Nikolaus Gansterer in conversation with Claire Scanlon

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### ABSTRACT

This article takes the form of an email dialogue between the artist Nikolaus Gansterer and Claire Scanlon – guest-editor of the special issue journal ‘Demands of the Diagram’, in which this article features. The conversation is motivated by five of the most recent *Objects yet to Become* in Gansterer’s ongoing series of hand-drawn image-text provocations. In the exchange, Scanlon takes up the challenge set by each *Objects yet to Become* in turn, thereby situating in practice a broader discussion of the diagrammatic as ‘an experimental system of notation and reflection’ in Gansterer’s wider oeuvre. The conversation is punctuated by five, full-page illustrations of each of the chalk-on-blackboard *Objects yet to Become*, reproduced for the reader from their give-away postcard format.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

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Objects yet to Become; inner forms; diagramming; drawing; installation; performance; artistic research

## #11

CS: I am happy that we have decided to focus on your ongoing *Objects yet to Become* series (2016–) as it seems to me, it represents a kind of synopsis of your extensive research-practice oeuvre. Would you agree?

NG: Yes, with this series I found a way to further explore key relationships of my work at one time and on parallel levels: between artwork and the audience, between drawing and writing, between language and sensation, between conception and perception, between score and piece, between objecthood and subjecthood.

CS: It will be interesting to see how far we can explore your particular use of the diagrammatic in focusing here on just the five most recent *Objects yet to Become* from the ongoing series (#11, #12, #13, #14 and #15).

NG: Well each of them addresses, so to speak, a different trope or problem ...

CS: To start with # 11 seems particularly apt, as it explicitly explores the space between verbal articulation and sight, thus allowing us to introduce your practice in the context of this (Q&A) email conversation. Although, I know the material form of the *Objects yet to Become* has varied in exhibition contexts, I have here a set of A5 postcards, which

reproduce your signature blackboard drawing style, and which were a take-away/gift from one of your lecture-workshops (Figure 1).

As we can see, #11 has the image positioned above a text instruction in portrait format. In conventional layout terms this puts that textual instruction in the subordinate role of caption to the image above, as supplement to the image, but one which ‘anchors’ its meaning to a specific context. However, the diagram may also be ‘read’ as illustrative of the text, suggesting a way of enacting the instruction, albeit rather obliquely. In this sense the card presents an interesting double negative, with image as illustration and text as caption, both in ‘minor’ relation to the other with neither dominating. This would suggest a co-dependence between what is viewed and what is read, or indeed between seeing and saying ... and already I am being drawn into the limbo that #11 challenges us with!

NG: You are absolutely right, in the whole series I am working with a form of ‘paradoxical pro-active gap’, it’s a sort of hinge or relay – translating or even transforming one reality into another – but in a non-hierarchic sense – by allowing their specific agency to be fully operable yet still gently rubbing against each other in order to create ‘an interstitial third’. It’s this fragile relationship I am interested in, neither illustration nor description – rather a two-component glue!

I think these objects are also informed by a former artistic research project of mine, ‘Drawing a Hypothesis’, where I was specifically researching diagrams and their poetic semantic space – by inviting various authors for written interpretations and speculations.

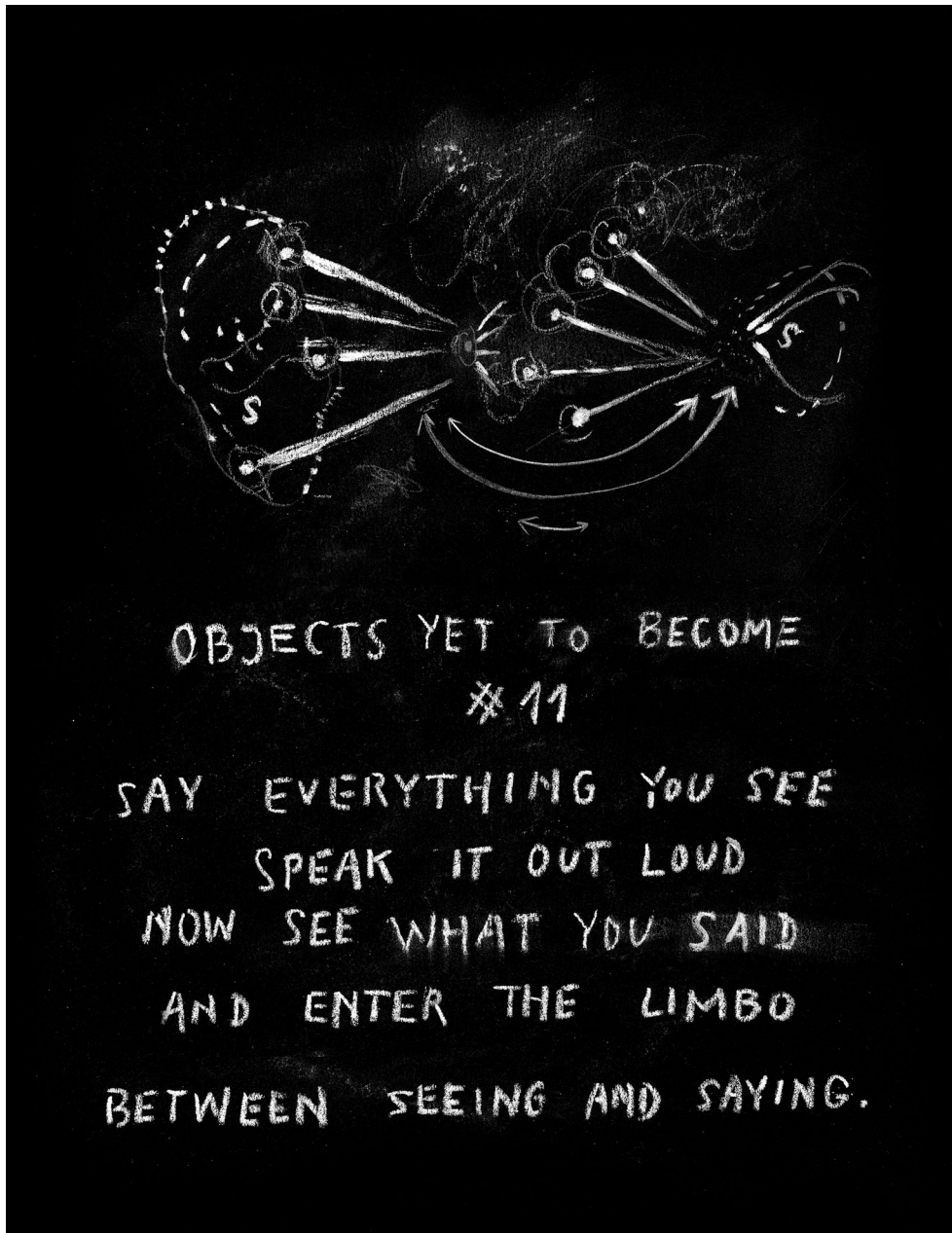
CS: The challenge to speak everything we see (an impossibly endless task) might function in the manner of a phenomenological research method – a kind of non-judgmental ‘thick description’ in which things are ‘realised’ via the symbolic realm of language – but it also takes us to a place of non-sense which is in the spirit of the absurd. Either reading seems to bring us to a place between – the space of the diagrammatic perhaps?

NG: Exactly! It’s also a way to become aware of these so-called inner processes, this permanent stream of consciousness, the permanent urge to name things, to make sense, the construction of meaning within all the chaos around, maybe also the (tragic) absurdity behind it, the logic of rational thinking and also of the impossibility to grasp reality only by means of spoken language – it’s maybe an applied form of ‘Sprachspiel’, a language-game, to borrow a term coined by Ludwig Wittgenstein.

CS: In reading the semiotics of the #11 diagram, we can see both letterforms and marks which appear to represent gestures for movement. I also see the thickened ‘full-stop’ mark as indicative of a body in space, as in dance/choreographic notations. The radiating pulse is repeated twice suggesting a processual event, and the letterform S appears at both ends of the diagram, presumably indicating both speaking and seeing, or maybe the acting ‘subject’ per se.

Is it fair to say that the verbal instruction presents us with an image of thought, while the diagram *is* an image of thought in action?

NG: That is a beautiful way of framing it! Yes, my drawings, or often I refer to them as figures, are attempts to capture this fugitive figure of thought when reading the text. It’s a



**Figure 1.** *Objects yet to Become #11.*

bit like drawing the movements of thinking. I believe the act of thinking is a choreography performed with the whole body even when remaining still.

Although the text appears as an instructive figure of speech it subverts itself as it has a form of absurdity or impossibility implemented. I think this strategy is similar to instructions and scores formulated by the Fluxus movement. Yoko Ono, Alison Knowles, George Brecht and certainly John Cage come to mind.

A further point of reference could be the *One Minute Sculptures* by the Austrian artist Erwin Wurm, though these are much more interested in expanding the notion of sculpture and are often performed in a white cube art context, to create a visually appealing (and absurd-looking) outer form/posture with objects and I guess may be less concerned with a body-mind experience ... although I am aware it's a thin line! I would not neglect my interest in 'outer forms' – as you know I have a background as a sculptor and many of my works take the shape of installations – but with *Objects yet to Become* I am more interested in the creation of 'inner' forms, forms of awareness, situated-ness, a state of presence, a state of becoming. The realisation and the 'outer form' and appearance of an *Objects yet to Become* might look very different each time it is performed or rather actualised by myself and others. For me each *Objects yet to Become* is an 'open form in flux' which is mediating or rather oscillating between inner and outer form for, allowing various interpretations and misinterpretations. *Objects yet to Become* hand the authorship to others and in so doing they share a form of empowerment with the audience. There is a crucial text passage in 'The Logic of Sense' (Deleuze 1990) which inspired me when searching for a title for this series. Deleuze states:

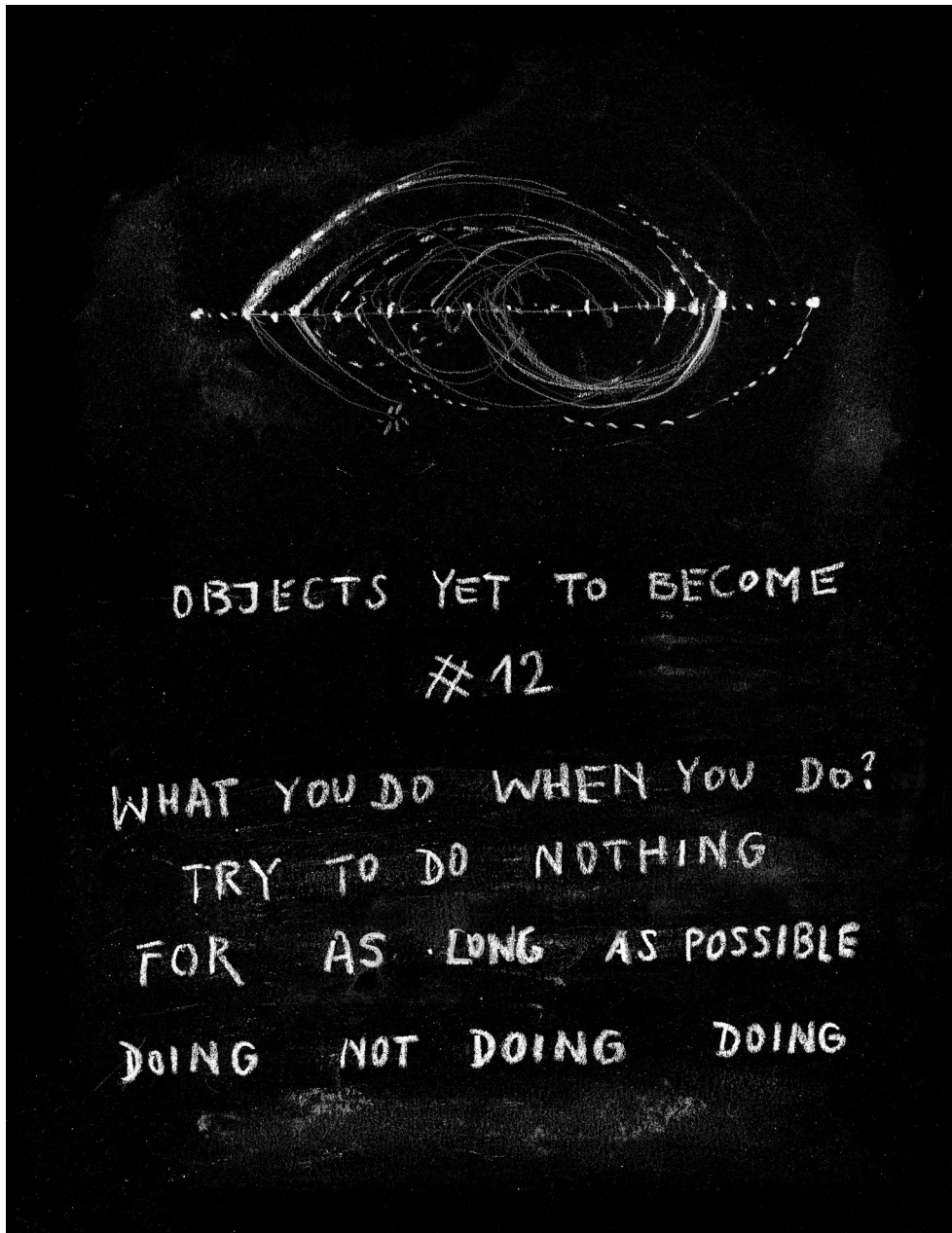
The first effect of Others is that around each object that I perceive or each idea that I think there is the organization of a marginal world, a casing or ground [found], where other objects and other ideas may come forth in accordance with laws of transition which regulate the passage from one to another. I regard an object, then I divert my attention, letting it fall into the ground. At the same time, there comes forth from the depth a new object of my attention. If this new object does not injure me, if it does not collide with me with the violence of a projectile (as when one bumps against something unseen), it is because the first object had already at its disposal a complete margin where I had already felt the pre-existence of objects yet to come, and of an entire field of virtualities and potentialities which I already knew were capable of being actualized. Now, such a knowledge or sentiment of marginal existence is possible only through other people. (305)

With the *Objects yet to Become* series I expand the coming into a be-coming as it addresses an affective other. In order to inhabit it and to become it, you have to find an entry point for yourself each time anew. In this sense my *Objects yet to Become* are also resonating with Michel Serres concept of 'quasi-objects' (Serres 1982, 47), as they function like operators that can activate audiences by drawing humans together in particular relations as well as drawing people's attention into relations with other more-than human objects (Figure 2).

## #12

CS: It is interesting to hear that Fluxus has been influential in your wider practice. I can see how the performative inscriptions of those artists resonate with your idea of the 'paradoxical pro-active gap', which is a great way of describing it!





**Figure 2.** *Objects yet to Become #12.*

I would like to pick up on the ‘inner’ forms of the body-mind experience, which you say is the particular focus of the *Objects yet to Become* – what you refer to as ‘forms of awareness, situated-ness, a state of presence, a state of becoming’ – as this feels particularly acute in the instruction for *Objects yet to Become* #12. The active doing of nothing is apparently paradoxical, but it is also familiar in meditation-type practices where the effort of holding empty space, or rather emptying space, is, as you say, both paradoxical and recursive, as the effort fills up the space it empties ...

Action and inaction, movement and stillness, awake and asleep, work and rest are the ‘doing not doing, doing’ rhythm of our lived experience. Yet if doing is more than auto-nomic being, then it implies a production – a production of nothing? So, might ‘not doing’ in this case be something like forgetting? Something we are unaware is happening to us until it strikes us as a loss?

NG: It is doing and not doing but also doing not-doing and not-doing doing at the same time ... like a Zen *koan*. A simple script, a score to self-reflect but also to clear and empty out.

CS: Looking closely at the diagram in #12, I can see that in figuring this paradox you are using a variety of intensities in the mark-making. This is a nuance in your diagrammatic practice that does not fit the usual uni-dimensional mark of conventional diagramming. The fading and juddering of the chalk mark is evocative in its *energon* (Barthes 1979), in that it both performs the energy of its own production and the movement of the non-thought it traces. Yet these expressive marks are structured by an horizon line which makes them readable as diagrammatic.

NG: Yes, I had to think of a kind of a forward and backward movement, a state of mind when the focus is shifting like an auto-focus camera lens that tries to capture a pulsating breathing movement and is maybe searching for something that has already gone. The idea is to blur or even break binary thinking and our habit of parsing world/experience into dichotomies, I think that addresses a very fundamental core operation of our mind.

CS: This resistance to binary thinking is interesting because you might say the diagrammatic line can operate in two modes simultaneously. For example in *Objects yet to Become* #12 the line works both *as* time, as in a kymograph (albeit one in which every event swallows itself and then reoccurs) and as a score *in* time, as a ‘two-steps forward one step back’ action-metaphor suggestive of dancing. In other words, there is semiotic legibility in the recognisable diagrammatic forms and aesthetic resonance in the expressive mark-making. Could you say something more about how the compositional matrix of your diagrammatic syntax developed? And the ways it incorporates the performative?

NG: Not exactly sure where and how it started but for a long time I had a fascination for all sorts of maps and diagrams and visual forms for representing complexities. In 2005 I had a fellowship at the Jan van Eyck Academy, where I started my artistic research project *Drawing a Hypothesis - Figures of Thought*, which I mentioned earlier.

My initial question was how all these relational visual artefacts could be comprehended from an artistic point of view. Intuitively I started to redraw hundreds of found diagrams (from scientific books and the internet). I guess by doing so I was sort

of learning or rather appropriating ‘the diagrammatic grammar’. But when re-doing them I intentionally left out all textual information. It was a process of ‘stripping diagrams’ until they were laid bare, disclosing their inherent relationality.

Then I began to send these ‘open and highly re-active figures and poetic radicals’ to various interpreters (artist, scientists, poets) with a request for a ‘micrology’: a short or long written associative interpretation or as Donna Haraway would say ‘a speculative fabulation’ about the diagram. In return I reacted to these texts with further diagrammatic drawings. Through this intensive exchange of thoughts, the most varying ideas, hypotheses and theses developed, eventually achieving the form of captions, (sci-fi-) stories, and longer essays on the themes of the nature of the figure, drawing, hypothesis and diagram. The resulting contributions are of very different kinds, reflecting their authors’ particular fields of knowledge in the fractious borderland between art, science and fiction. You could say diagrams were used almost like a Rorschach test for scientists. I think it worked well as the diagram has become a global visual lingua franca.

Finally, in 2011 a publication (Gansterer 2017) resulted from this five-year exchange of figures of thought and figures of speech, describing, from various angles, the reflexive and dynamic character of diagrams. To my surprise, within a year the book was out of print – it must have resonated with the on-going diagrammatic turn. In 2017 I was able to release a second edited edition which is still available. I think what is unique about *Drawing a Hypothesis – Figures of Thought* is that it’s not so much a research project that’s just writing about diagrams, as it actually diagrams the logic of diagrams with and through the form itself.

It made me understand that there exist two different ways of approaching the nature of diagrams. One is the aim to create tools for order and stability in order to comprehend the world logically, for example when you look at infographics, or data visualisations. But another aim is to allow those tools to flip to destabilisation and discovery. The fascinating thing is that the nature of the diagram can precisely comprise both aspects at the same time – the anarchic-paradoxical and the logic-rational – like an ever-turning Janus head (Figure 3).

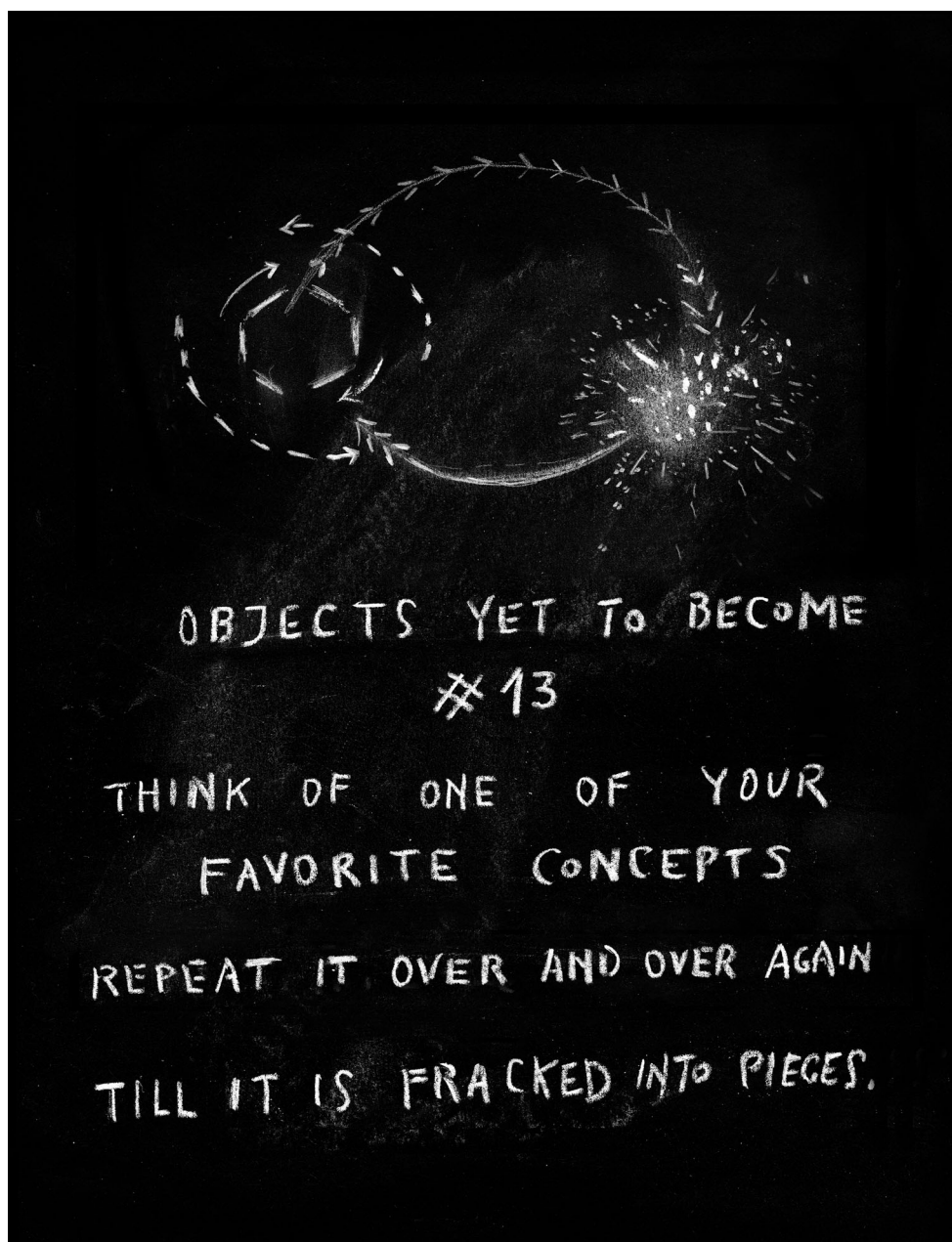
## #13

CS: In #12 your challenge was to find a ‘middle way’ in the movement of thought through a kind of meditation practice like a Zen Koan. You also describe this process by way of the great visual metaphor of an auto-focus camera lens ... one I now imagine trying to focus on a white wall ...

NG: Yes, I am interested in this pulse between zooming in and zooming out. Touching and keeping distance. It’s an exercise to achieve a state of mind where one allows oneself to drift between focussed attention and peripheral attention. a ‘not-either-or’ but ‘as-well-as’. I know this phenomenon from eye exercises which can also be applied to listening or other senses. I think here of perception or rather attention understood as a form of practice – bending attention, like a flexible muscle.

When looking at our western knowledge societies I sometimes imagine our entire science system as these precise and very focussed drilling machines into that humongous





**Figure 3.** *Objects yet to Become #13.*

wobbling reality-sphere. We got all these millions of micro tunnels and routes through it. I think many of them are running next to each other, though sometimes the paths are surprisingly criss-crossing. I guess this is also the reason for the recent and on-going wave of all these inter- and trans-disciplinary approaches. However, in order to be able to fully focus on one thing we have the tendency to suppress, mask and ‘turn off’ other phenomena – selective perception – which is an old but necessary dilemma (of science), no? In fact ‘we experience more than we can analyse’ (Whitehead 1938). Therefore, I think it is of great interest to experiment with disclosure for bridging the various states of attention.

CS: I think our modes of thinking are conditioned and limited by education systems that mostly privilege a specific kind of knowledge acquisition that involves selective focussing (and memorisation). This idea of holding attention open or maintaining an unfocussing-focus is less familiar to the western mind, one that can nevertheless be learnt and practiced. Perhaps, this is why the challenge of #13 feels more familiar as it appears to draw on thinking as a practice of intellect ... we shall see! It begins by eliciting a favourite (always a popular opening gambit) and then the challenge really begins ... one of my ‘favourite’ concepts is that of art as radically useless.

I think this idea has its roots in Oscar Wilde’s pronouncement about art being ‘quite useless’ where he is making the point about beauty and aesthetic experience not being utilitarian. But it becomes a maxim of avant-garde art and is ideologically radicalised during the 60s and 70s when art took up the business of resisting commodification through institutional critique – which paradoxically gave art critical purpose over its aesthetic value. Much later I think it was John Timberlake, in an interview discussing the consequences of professionalisation in art education, who coined the phrase about art’s radical uselessness, arguing ‘the radical quality of art is that it has *no* use in a culture that is dominated by profit, loss and use value’ (Timberlake 2011, 41). We might dialectically ‘frack’ this position as idealistic or unrealistic given the very real financial value of the contemporary art market to international economies, and even in the way this marketisation of art is proposed by HE institutions to prospective students as the rationale for its pursuit! Alternatively, we could frack the concept through repetition, as your challenge instructs us ... art is useless, art is useless, art is useless, useless, useless, art is useless, useless, useless art etc. – so we fall into non-sense through semantic satiation. What kind of energy or value would you say this produces?

NG: Well, firstly repeating something over and over again is a simple but powerful trick to check and double check a line of thought. It is also a tactic to remember how much our thinking is shaped through language and definitely not free of constraints.

Here the process of ‘fracking’ came to my mind. I had read about this method used by the petrochemical industry pumping toxic liquid into the ground. It’s a process of infiltrating and digging into underlying layers. This made me think of us humans, our structure of consciousness, our multi-layered personalities grown by billions of experiences ... like tiny sediments. All these particles are forming our principles, our root system, and are informing our daily decision making, no?

For me this Object #13 is a tough cookie. Personally, I regard myself as an open-minded person, but in the end we all carry a big pack of assumptions, concepts, principles,

patterns, and prejudices in us, deep down there are resentments looming which first of all are hard to detect and accept. It is even more difficult to crack them open, pulverise them, wash them out, let them go. Could this process of checking and fracking be seen as a value?

CS: It seems to me your use of the term ‘fracking’ is quite ambivalent – deliberately so perhaps. I’m not a geo-physicist, but I understand the process to be ‘extractive’, and so even if we understand it metaphorically as a way to extract meaning, it feels like a rather violent process. On the other hand, as you suggest, perhaps such force is appropriate to the task of checking and challenging the behavioural conditioning and cognitive biases which keep us stuck in ‘favourite’ concepts ...

I see your diagram shows this process as a series of rotating cycles of different energies and characteristics, suggesting a dualism of the sort you described earlier in #12 between the ‘anarcho-paradoxical and the logic-rational’ – the classical face-off between Apollonian and Dionysian forces bound together diagrammatically in an endless cosmic spin.

But in suggesting that diagramming might provide a ‘global visual lingua franca’ that might also help us to inhabit a ‘fractious borderland between art, science and fiction’, might we argue that in its mode as research art has found another purpose?

NG: I regard the art world as a system on its own. Sometimes it can feel very limited and limiting, with its own rules and concepts – which even contradict its demand for the freedom of artistic expression. However, it is a world on its own, a sub-system which often operates via a highly codified sign system on a more symbolic level with the rest of the world.

Still, the art world is able to create model scenarios where reality – or to be more precise, manifold realities – are constantly tested, deconstructed, questioned, criticised, chewed over, basically repeated, again and again. And yes, personally I find mere formal aesthetic questions less interesting and prefer those more research-based practices with a critical self-reflexive approach – but for pity’s sake this means to still be able to smile or laugh about oneself, too. I have to say I personally find it problematic when artistic research projects turn into dry and old-school academia by explaining and rationalising itself.

Maybe we should think of art practice as a sort of mirroring activity. Yes, hopefully useless in the sense that it can’t be directly applied to and exploited to fix a concrete problem – but perhaps rather useful as a huge rear mirror on sense-making, non-sense-making, ‘worlding’, life as such ... , no? Though in the rear mirror ‘objects are closer than they appear’ ... in other words pretty distorted. I think of art as a humongous stomach which is digesting all the various inputs. In the bowels they are rubbing against each other, influencing each other, nurturing and decomposing, maybe even fracking, conflicting. And art is done by humans, therefore the art world is full of all these human sensitivities, logics, power games, competition, creativities, narcissisms, far, far from being value free, and I would argue at this point far from useless ... Or should we rather think of art as the multi-faceted activity of dreaming? Hmm, I guess the comparison might be easily misunderstood – definitely I feel attracted by art practices that deal with complexity and ambiguity ... or should I say, ‘ambiguous complexities’? (Figure 4).



**Figure 4.** *Objects yet to Become #14.*

**#14**

CS: It seems our conversation took a rather serious turn with #13, with talk of the art world system and the way it intersects with economics and education. Your powerful descriptors of art practice as a 'huge rear-view mirror' which distorts, a 'humungous stomach' digesting inputs, or modelling the world in order to test, deconstruct, question and criticise our 'logics, power games' and cognitive biases does sound like serious business to me! But with all this talk of value and purpose I also hear your plea to lighten-up, and so I am relieved to see that #14 appears to be rather more playful ...

NG: ... Well I think art is a slippery subject ... like a fish ...

CS: A mirror, a stomach and now a fish! Art is certainly hard to pin-down. Haha.

I love the start of the #14 challenge. Straight away we are clowning because to focus on your nose (with your eyes) effectively means going cross-eyed, and this has both funny and interesting consequences. As we know our nose is usually a blind spot in our visual field and to focus on it can produce some startling visual effects, but your challenge also suggests that as animals we underrate this sense organ as a means to inhabit and experience the world. So, the challenge seems to shuffle the hierarchy of our senses.

NG: Haha indeed I was not so much thinking to focus literally and visually on the nose. I immediately had to try it myself which makes it a wild and odd start. I like it! I suggest closing your eyes and really allow yourself to sink into the sensation of smell. With #14 I am interested in activating our instinct-organ, which is key for our constant, incredibly fast unconscious decision making. Maybe the nose is kind of a door to intuition and other rather non-rational informed forms of orientation? However, I think it triggers old areas of affect and reflex in our brain which operate in a complex modality prior to the emergence of translating experiences into spoken language. Recently I became more and more interested in these various 'species of presences' like atmospheres, moods and ambiances. In my current three-year artistic research project *Contingent Agencies*, I am developing experimental systems of notation and reflection for making tangible these precise, non-objectified but ephemeral and enveloping entities. I am fascinated to trace how agencies like smell, light, sound, etc. enable the co-emergence of an atmosphere with all its mutually conditioning relationships: every moment, every situation is a highly complex diagrammatic interplay. Every single morning breeze or every Autumn fog is a diagrammatic field of forces! You would probably agree that the space you are right in now has a very specific atmosphere, but it is quite difficult to describe and to rationalise it only by means of words, no?

CS: Scent has been a very under-recognised medium in art, but one I notice is becoming more established in performative practices, where there is more scope for creating atmospheres. You mentioned how you like to play with language or 'Sprachspiel' with the verbal element of the *Objects yet to Become*, through repetition for instance but it is also interesting to note how the shift of context provided by the verbal instruction allows certain geometric forms to connote differently in each diagram. For instance, in



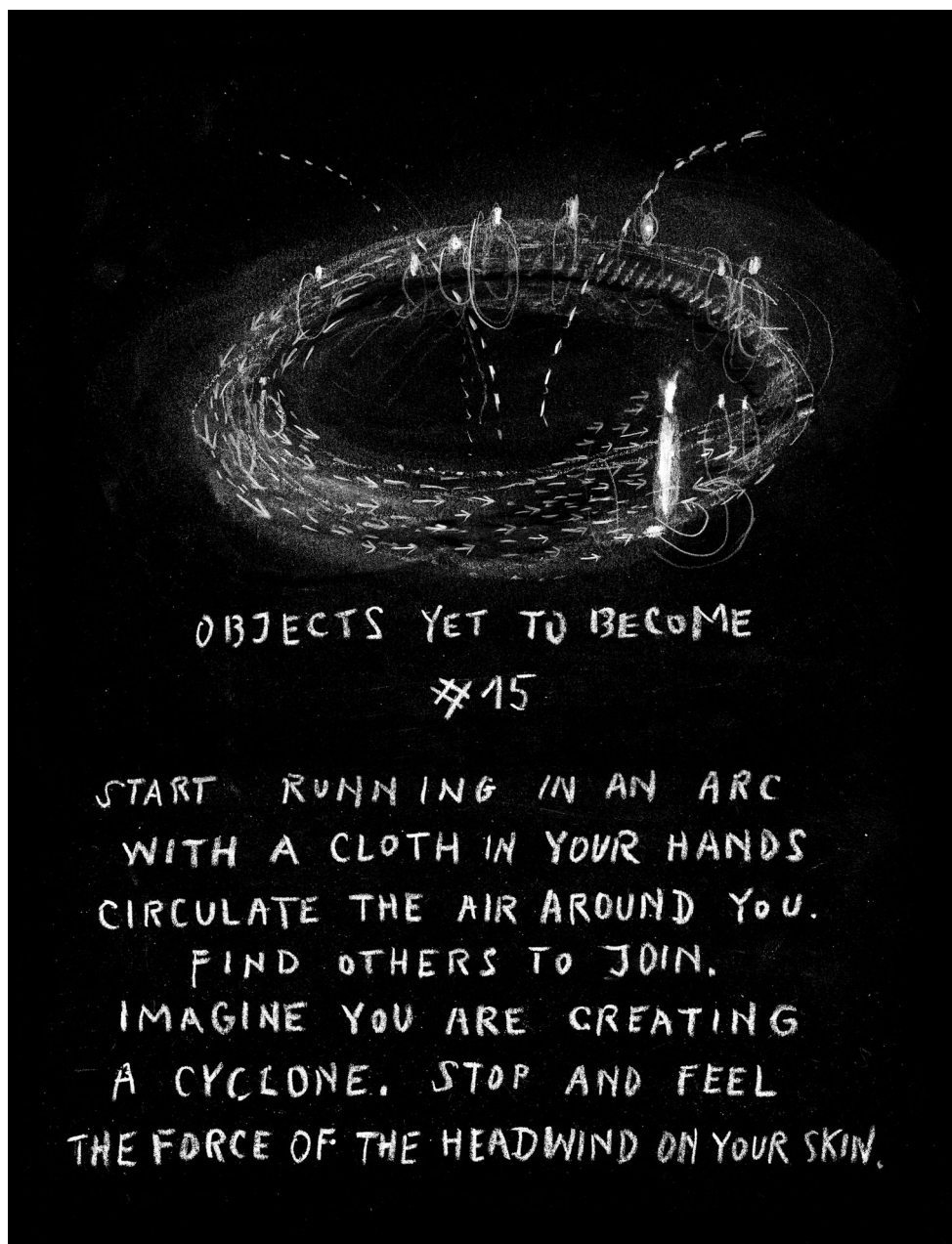
#13 the hexagon seems to stand in for something mechanical like a cog or nut, whereas here in #14 it seems to indicate a (smelly) chemical compound. As you indicated in # 11 the diagrammatic syntax is open to interpretation, but could you say something more about how you use diagramming to animate thought and vice versa, in the Trans-lectures for instance?

NG: A Trans-lecture is a specific performance format I've developed over the course of the past 20 years. The key element is me performing expanded live drawing in relation to a chosen source, ranging from another person giving a live lecture, or a recorded lecture or text; it can also be a conversation or discussion between several people. Whilst listening to the spoken words I do a form of translation or transposition into a diagram. I often use a table in front of me with a black board on top which is filmed by a camera above and projected again into the space. I work with chalk, markers, paper and various materials, objects and gestures. In this process I actually enter with my whole body into a very specific liminal zone of embodied sense-making and attention-building where processes of intuition, perception, conception, reflection, (mis)interpretation, cognition, are all in a state of flux – they oscillate and coalesce. Maybe similar to the process of simultaneous translation during a conference lecture, I am developing a language with signs, objects, gestures which I only partly understand and govern. A language which is just appearing in the making and which I am learning to speak while I am uttering, drawing, diagramming – not with the idea to illustrate what is said but rather to translate or even transform the content into a poetic mind space. The core idea is to transform one thought into another. Sensing the materiality of thinking. From one materiality into another. From line to sign and back again. Each movement, the slightest hesitation, each tiny twist, each object and its materiality is suddenly creating manifold layers of meaning in order to resonate with the other elements present. It is a high-tension act for making palpable the permanent constructed-ness of meaning and sense. Maybe a materialisation of inherent figures of thought. Rather than speaking the language I aim for the language to speak me. Here, diagramming is happening live and in situ.

CS: #14 also focuses on the body, place, space, and movement. Could you say something about the importance of these elements to your practice? And would it be fair to say there is an element of Dada-esque clowning in some of your performances?

NG: I would agree with the attribution 'dada-esque' but 'clowning' I would accept with slight reservations, not in a common popular sense as I am not so much in favour of comedy, hmm though if you think of actors like Lecoq or Philippe Gaulier then: yes! I regard humour as a fundamental and unique experience which can be an interesting artistic method, too. Not only since Freud or Bergson we know that humour is both an attractor of and connector to subliminal thought processes: this mental ability to bridge a gap, to short-circuit uncommon endings, to create parallel readings of a situation, by means to connect with others ... Isn't it again a paradoxical mental state of 'as if' but also 'as well as'? Bodily I love this tickling under the cortex, the felt firing of the synapsis ... this anarchic energy. But nothing is worse than a joke which is explained, no? You kill it ([Figure 5](#)).





**Figure 5.** *Objects yet to Become #15.*

## #15

CS: Apologies for my (humorous) misinterpretation of #14! I hope it served the ‘atmosphere’ of our conversation which is often quite difficult to create through words on a screen/page ... I agree that the comedic can be a difficult line to tread in art, even if we agree that laughter (like smell) is critical to our communications and well-being as a species.

Before I take the plunge into *Objects yet to Become* #15, I would like to linger a little longer in this subtle idea of atmosphere as a ‘species of presence’ ... Certainly, I found your image of an autumn fog as a ‘diagrammatic field of forces’ very evocative, especially from where I sit writing this, looking out over the Ouse valley – a view which is often obscured at this time of year by a mist over the river. One might argue that this kind of attunement to nature is a legacy of Romanticism, a movement which foregrounded human subjectivity, and which would consequently situate this discussion in the domain of aesthetics. However, along with Isabelle Stengers (2020) and others you cite, I believe that there is an urgent need to find new ways to model our ‘generative interdependencies’. So, I see your *Contingent Agencies*, which you describe as ‘experimental systems of notation and reflection for making tangible [...] non-objectified but ephemeral and enveloping entities’, as vital forms of research in this area. Perhaps this work advances our conception of aesthetics as a bio-semio-ethics, testing the Romanticist conception of nature and its implicit human exceptionalism with new theories of pansentience?

NG: When I think of atmospheres or ambiances they are not necessarily linked to nature, or more precisely an intact nature. I am also relating to a specific atmosphere or ‘genius loci in time’ under a highway bridge, at an industrial area or at a subway station. Each of these examples can become a unique case study into diagrammatic fields of forces and interdependencies. Specific species of spaces. And yes, to a radical aesthetic research in tune with ‘aisthesis’ – a deep sensate cognition based on perceiving and (maybe understanding) the world through with all senses. I agree this diagrammatic approach is more challenging on a personal level, but that is also what the research is tracing: the contingency which leads to the atmosphere – in other words, how the single components co-create a sum which is more than its single elements. Frankly speaking to understand how all these toxic plastic particles change the milieu of the ocean is beyond our capacity of imagination. This is a form of research I see as helpful to enable an awareness of our limitations, so that we don’t again put ourselves at the centre of the universe.

CS: This is contested ground in contemporary philosophical discourse of course, but I think you will agree that we urgently need to find new ways of being that are sympathetic to a greater range of earthly vibrations than we have generally been accustomed to if we (and other species) are to survive.

NG: Yes, you are absolutely right. At least I hope so.

CS: And so, when you talk of how you enter the performance mode in the Trans-lectures where your whole body participates in the transposition of sense through the attunement of all your faculties, including, I presume, those which are not consciously available (such as the digestive capacities of the bacteria in your gut), I am reminded of my last challenge

in *Objects yet to Become* #15. Where we appear to move out of the mists and into a maelstrom – one which we are invited to create ourselves!

NG: This is a beautiful way to put it ... , becoming aware of this process of widening the attention is for me a micro-political activity.

CS: Across the range of scores, I can see this recurring orbital motif like a whirlwind or cyclone. Here we have it most directly accompanied by the invitation to move at speed in a circle, waving a cloth and with others – which is nothing less than an invitation to dance!

NG: Hmm this dynamic I believe is a quite elementary choreography – ‘the figure of spiralling momentum’.

CS: And ... as I recover my breath (haha) ... I realise this movement seems quite universal in human dance cultures, from the traditional Morris Dances of England to the West African Borbodor Akpesse dancers ... and now we can see that the figures of the diagram in #15 have the specific character of choreographic notation ... Of course, whirling can also be understood as an ecstatic practice, as in Sufism where its function is to help the dancer lose their self-consciousness as a gateway to the divine – but it also strikes at the heart of why drawing can be a somatic practice like dancing, where the body leads the mind.

NG: ... and also in non-human dynamics, like wind and liquids and interstellar space.

CS: Indeed. and in this *Objects yet to Become*, we are not only encouraged to generate and feel those non-human dynamics but also to find others to join us, and in so doing we create a collective or collaborative energetics. Working with others is something you have done extensively in your research practices. I am thinking here of your collaborations with Emma Cocker, Mariella Greil and many other ‘sputniks’ as you call them, in the award-winning *Choreo-graphic Figures: Deviation from the Line* (Gansterer et al. 2017) project.

NG: In the last years my practice has become more and more performative and the Trans-lectures, for example with Erin Manning, had expanded into the space. This prompted me to dig deeper into the ‘relationscape’ (Manning 2009) between drawing, thinking and action. Over the course of my last four year artistic research project *Choreo-graphic Figures: Deviations from the Line* (funded by the Austrian Science Fund) in collaboration with writers, performers and choreographers we were able to develop various embodied practices of attention and practices of notation of ‘thinking-feeling-knowing in action’, with reference to Alva Noë (2004) and Sarat Maharaj (Maharaj and Varela 2011). A key question was how to research the complex relations between the processes of *figuring* (something out) and the emergence of *choreo-graphic figures*. Here enactivist theories (Maturana and Varela 1987, Noë 2015; Thompson 2007) and somatic practices informed our search for ways of diagramming these deep inter-relations between mind, body and world. These notations resulted in diagrammatic drawings on paper, but mainly in a score for embodied diagrammatics: a model for performing and naming these dynamic ‘forms of vitality’ Daniel Stern (2010) operating before, between and beneath the more readable gestures within (artistic) sense

making. This score provides a framework for a diagrammatic praxis for ethico-aesthetic experimentation which has wider political implications on a micro- but also macro level. For Erin Manning, to focus on the ‘minor gesture’ is to attend to the ‘force that makes the lines tremble that compose the everyday, the lines, both structural and fragmentary, that articulate how else experience can come to expression’ (Manning 2016). As our score is conceived as a *living* organism more than a system of organisation or representation, it has the capacity to develop and grow, and to be present in the manifestation of life.

Through our artistic methodology we found a long list of choreo-graphic figures and some we were able to describe in close detail, to give you some concrete examples. The Figure of Spiralling Momentum, The Figure of Vibrating Affinity, The Figure of Ventilating Meaning (Cocker et al. 2019).<sup>1</sup>

*Objects yet to Become* #15 clearly addresses a collective that triggers a simple choreography. – ‘choreo’ here understood in the sense of ‘at least more than one’. But instead of focussing on the human movement it shifts the attention on the circulation of the air volume, the millions of particles of air which are stirred and set in motion by the moving body/ies.

In the course of the recent Covid-19 situation, *Objects yet to Become* #15 gained somehow even more relevance. Honestly, who was aware of the existence, the shape, structure and the complex dynamics of micro air-particles? Since the pandemic I feel the immanent fabric and diagrammatic entanglement between matter, life, time and mind became even more tangible (on societal level) than before. The dilemma is that we have not yet started to radically act according to this knowledge.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## Note

1. See <http://www.gansterer.org/choreo-graphic-figures/>

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