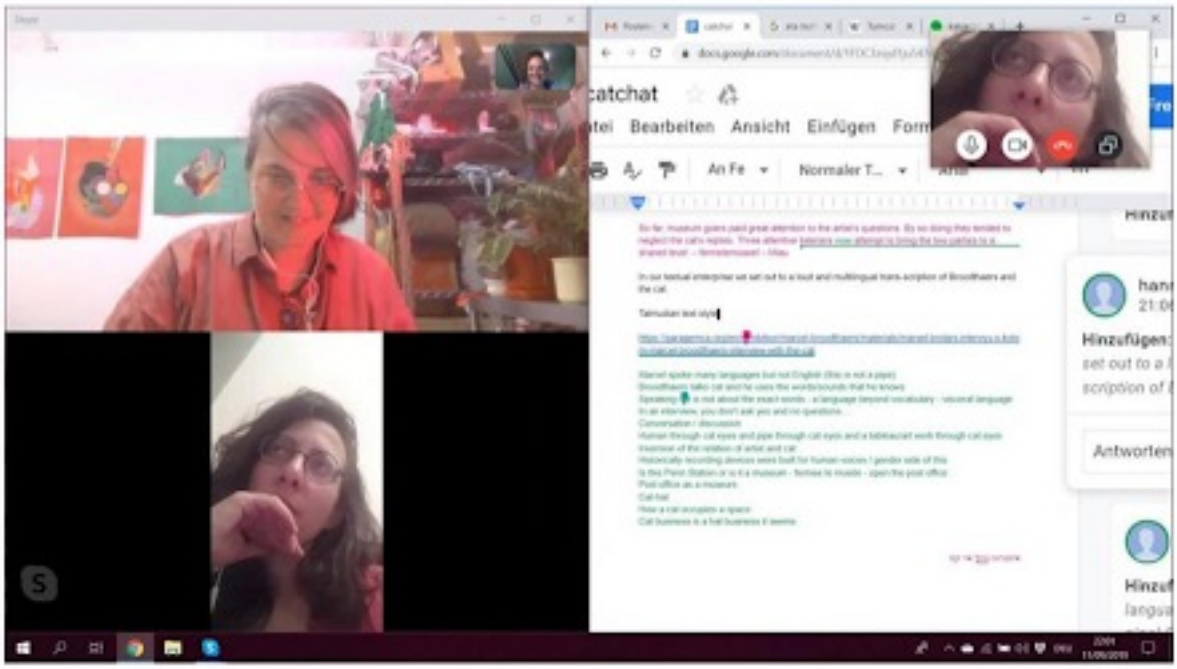
M(B)R VSTS #2: Noa Ginzburg With Hannah Bruckmüller

After their collaborative project “Cat Chat,” discussing the interview Marcel Broodthaers conducted with a cat, Michal B. Ron initiates an online studio visit at Noa Ginzburg’s studio, with Hannah Bruckmüller. They talk about the idea of Radical Coziness, domesticity, extra ocular objects, and jumping in public places.

Column / Michal B. Ron March 2, 2021

Skype had become our studio even before COVID-19 made international online meetings into a thing: I am in Berlin, Hannah Bruckmüller in Vienna, and Noa Ginzburg in New York – the place that brought us three together. Soon after, when Hannah and I had already returned to the other side of the Atlantic and Noa was still in the New World, we produced our collaborative project “Cat Chat” over Skype and Google Docs, discussing the interview Marcel Broodthaers (yes, him again) conducted with a cat in 1970. Hannah and I listened to the artist in art historical, textual ways, whereas Noa, an installation artist living with two cats named Auggie and Mies, was more attentive to what the cat was expressing. We commented, elaborated, and interpreted the discussion between M.B. and C. and contributed our “chat”, in the form of a Talmudic page, to *Protocols* magazine, for their special issue on tongues (January 2020). We also phonetically transcribed the whole exchange between man and cat into Hebrew letters: Noa and I understand Broodthaers’ French the same way we experience the cat’s meows and Hannah wishes to learn a new alphabet.

catchat skype.jpg



[1]Screenshot of Skype conversation, 2019

In light of our online collaboration, it made even more sense that the next studio visit I conduct in this column, under Corona conditions (CC again), will be there again, online, on Skype, investigating Noa's artistic production during the crisis (another C). Naturally, Hannah joins the visit. We make our date for Monday morning, but what time zone is Noa at? In the time it took us to schedule it the odyssey continued, and she just had to fly from New York to Tel Aviv. She packed her Brooklyn studio and apartment into boxes and left them in storage, and took her two cats with her directly into quarantine. Is our meeting at 4:30 pm New York time, she asks? Her calendar is full of online appointments, showing a parallel life with normal routines of art and work. The calendar is confused: 10:30 am in New York would be 4:30 pm in Tel Aviv, whereas we are meeting at 10:30 am Berlin-Vienna time, which in Tel Aviv is 11:30 in the morning.

For our virtual meeting we all have our "Radical Coziness" hats on at the same time (I like the German word "dabei" – which means nearby, present). These are caps that Noa embroidered with the words "RADICAL COZINESS," with colorful embroidery spreading into abstract elaborations, unique to each one. The term "Radical Coziness" stemmed from the title of a text by James Chrzan, accompanying "*Full Moon Saloon* [2]", Noa's collaboration with Amra Causevic.1 Chrzan explains "the Umwelt of House Cats," who practice many hours of sleep and claim their cozy spot to lie down in, in every corner they occupy: "the kitchen countertop, the computer keyboard …" In their interactive installation Noa and Amra invited the visitor to look for the "cozy tone" a cat experiences in the domestic environment. "Radical Coziness" hats came up next, first those Noa had made for herself, with words only, and after people started to ask for them for themselves, too, Noa made more hats, and the new elaborated embroidery appeared.

3 pics.jpg **[3]**

[4]Triple selfie with hats, October 5, 2020

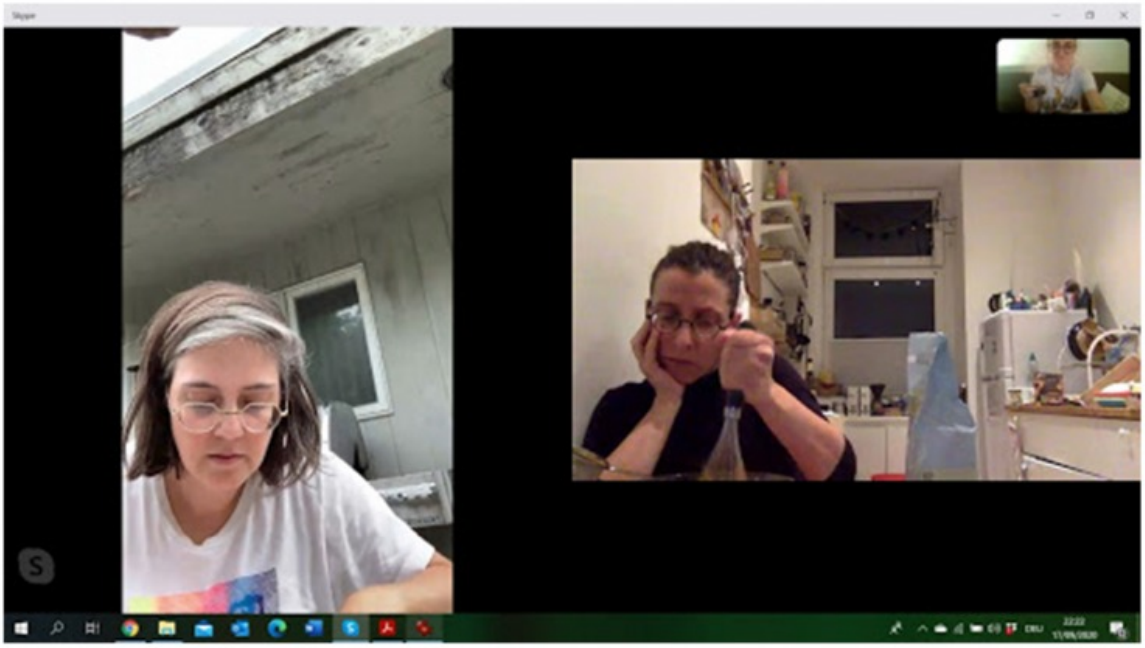
skype on rooftops.jpg **[5]**

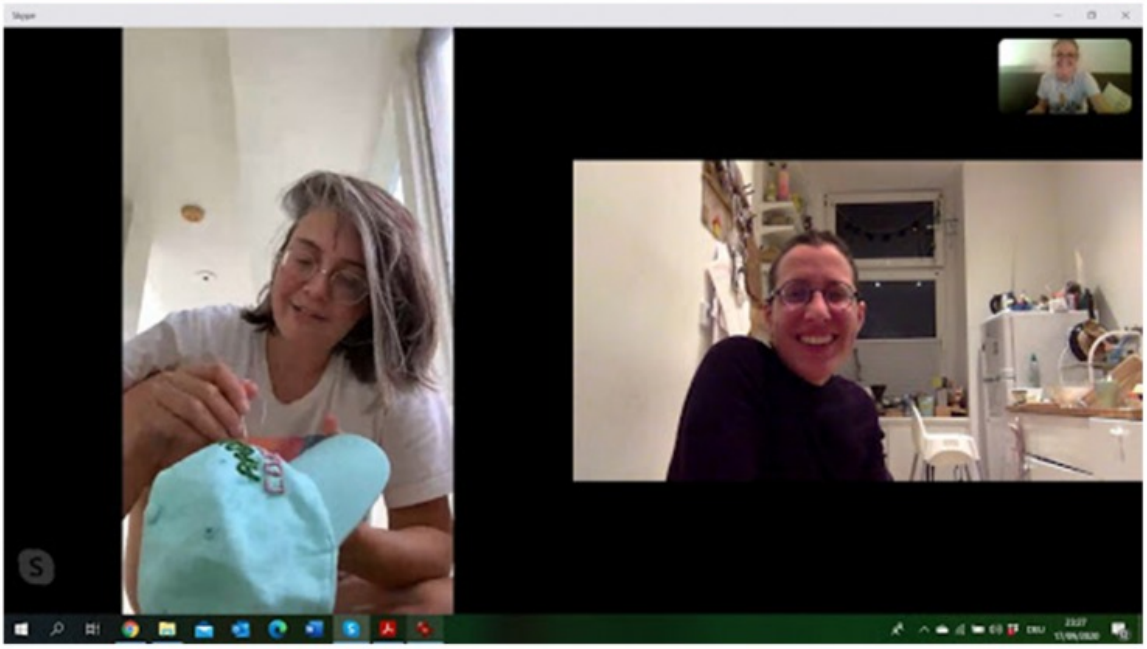
[6]Screenshot of a Skype conversation, October 2020

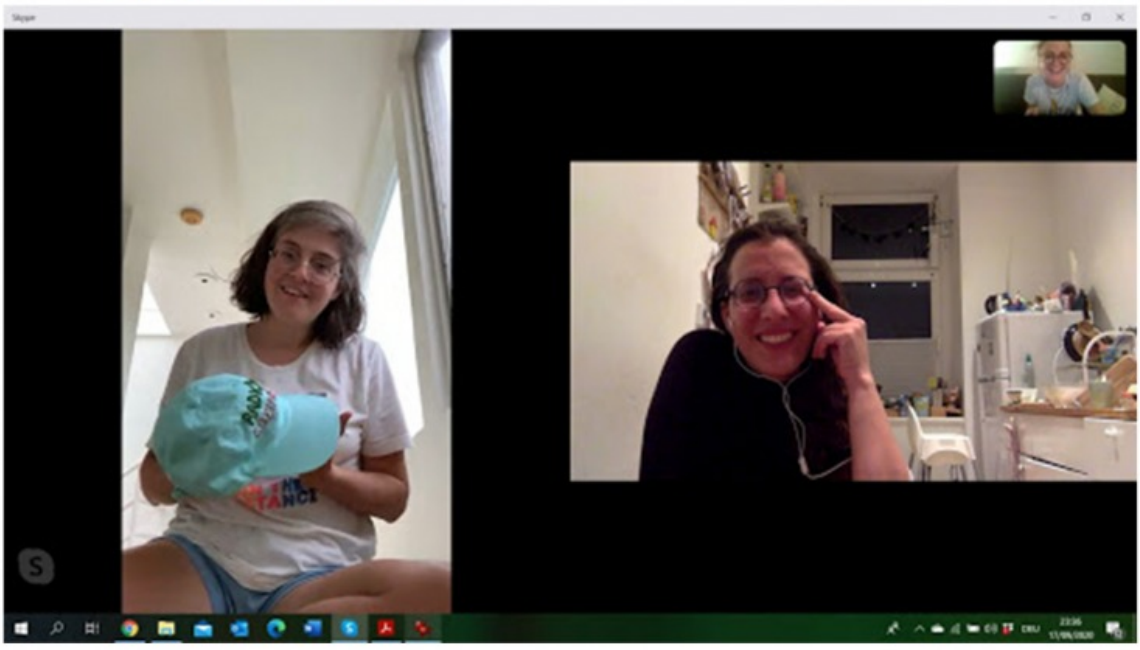
- “Are you working on ‘Radical Coziness’ hats right now?”

I asked Noa, thinking it would make sense in quarantine, having no studio. In our skype dates during lockdowns, Hannah and I experienced Noa embroidering on New York rooftops, where she was often visited by neighbors’ cats. These dates, an ongoing visit that spread over the course of four months and 4 or 5 apartments on Noa’s end, had become more and more domestic, apropos home office and domestic publicity,2 and well, Radical Coziness. Again questioning the possibility of domesticity when moving or without our "stuff..." or hyper domesticity when we “staythefuckhome.” Domesticity, even its possibility and its conditions, is at stake when it comes to moving, to packing crates, to being surrounded by someone else’s *interieur* or to simply being without the private property of “your own stuff” – or, we must add in pandemic times, to be locked-down inside. Barbara Cassin’s reading of odysseys through languages comes to mind, and she asks: “When are we ever at home?”3 #staythefuckhome results in a specific kind of hyper domesticity, putting Radical Coziness on the high-speed track and causing some confusion in the production of goods. Accustomed to writing, we suddenly produce while talking: Hannah knitting arm warmers from wool yarn, and me baking a honey cake for Rosh HaShana, for the kindergarten.

3 pics2.jpg **[7]**







Screenshots of a Skype conversation, September 2020

I remember being especially struck by a black-on-black “Radical Coziness” hat that Noa completed and posted on Facebook on May 27 – with the arising unrest storm of the Black Lives Matter movement following George Floyd’s murder by police two days before. “It is the only hat I made several of,” Noa tells us. For the first, she was following a request by a woman who saw her working on a hat in the subway and ordered one with this specific request: black on black. With the pandemic came many orders for hats, Noa tells further. Apparently “this is what people need right now. Like cats and objects – funnily enough, a hat on the head helps one to feel secure.” I told Hannah and Noa how I had to take my “Radical Coziness” hat out on my walks in the parks, which were still open during the first lockdown in Berlin. To take my art, that is, the art in my possession, in my collection, out to the public – me as an exhibitionist exhibitor. For Hannah, in Vienna, as Noa described it, it was a matter of protection from the general hostility and physical loneliness the pandemic had brought along.

black hat.jpg **[9]**

[10]Noa Ginzburg, Black on black Radical Coziness cap, 27 May 2020

mihal and baby1.jpg **[11]**

[12]Michal B. Ron + kitten, with Radical Coziness hat, in the park during lockdown, 2020

“Is this your brand?” Noa was once asked, wearing her “Radical Coziness” cap in an independent fashion store. “I resist turning it into a brand,” she says. “Each hat is made for a specific person and I don’t have an inventory. I look for something that I sense is needed (by me, by others) at the time I make it. After George Floyd was killed, for example, I was working on a hat for a friend who is a painter. It was early June, I was overwhelmed by the police violence, struck by the public response, it was getting warmer and my friends were outside, marching. As an immigrant, it didn’t feel safe to protest. I needed to convey that energy and frustration elsewhere”.

3 pics3.jpg **[13]**

[14]Blue Radical Coziness hat for Noa C., Brooklyn, June 2020

In New York, she donated 50% of the income from selling the hand-embroidered hats to local Personal Protection Equipment makers, who supported frontline workers during a time PPE was in severe shortage, and later, to mutual aid organizations. “And in Israel?” I ask. “In Israel, I started to volunteer with one of the mutual aids, Culture of Solidarity, an incredible civil initiative that is hands-on supporting, feeding, and caring for people who were let down by institutions. Right now, I think I can help more by being on the ground”.

How would “Coziness” translate into Hebrew? Hannah tries to translate, and faces difficulties in the German language: in the dictionary she reads that Coziness is “Gemütlichkeit” or “Behaglichkeit”, and she adds “Heimeligkeit” – which brings us to the “Heim” – home, and to Freud’s “unheimlich” – uncanny. Noa suggests something between “חמימות” (hamimut), which would be warmth, and “רכות” (rakut), aka softness, in the space between comforting and comfortable, all that cannot live in the hot and sharp Israeli temperament, but maybe can wrap around it like a Christo and Jeanne-Claude work.4 Is Coziness now needed, when Israeli society is trapped between political and/or health related restrictions forcing people to stay home and the essential need to go out? It seems that under certain political conditions, cats in Israel might spend longer times outside than their fellow humans…

> But, the hat was there before! Before the pandemic (and within a second I am prompted to ask you, Michal, since you’re the expert on time here: Are we experiencing a time shift? Is this a new era? Will we count in pre-pandemic and…post-pandemic? If we ever get there?)! Anyways, this is for another text, but for here it is important to stress that Radical Coziness predates the pandemic. Might I remind you, dear Michal, about our hat-session in MB’s Jardin d’hiver in Antwerp?

Asks Hannah, revising this text.5 And she continues:

IMG_7971.JPG **[15]**

[16]Hannah Bruckmüller and Michal B. Ron in Marcel Broodthaers' Jardin d'Hiver, M HKA, Antwerp, 2019

> Is a hat a home that we carry along with ourselves?
>
> When are we ever at home, asks Barbara Cassin, and reminds us of Hannah Arendt. From her we learn that language remains.6 We are wearing hats with language on them. There is a message on these hats, a colorful message: Who is the messenger? We hide our eyes under the shield of the hat, and we adorn our heads with two words: Radical Coziness.
>
> Between public and private, we are in a blurry state of in-between-ness, hiding and hidden, messaging and messing around. Indeed, our world became quite messy. Or rather, riddled and ridiculous? "'I see what I eat' is the same thing as 'I eat what I see'", explains the Mad Hatter in Alice in Wonderland. Himself an expert on time, he has a clock that tells him what year it is: objects that speak. How does wearing a hat transform the hat?

At the heart of Noa's practice is having her work "activated" and leading to a shift in perception. She makes objects you have to hold, on your own or together with another person, like the *Extra Ocular Objects*:

> The *Extra Ocular Objects (EOO)* are assemblages, impermanent constructions, used by handlers to look through and with, make sounds and observe others. *EOO* are numbered chronologically, and not all of them still exist – some evolved into other *EOO* or sculptures. *EOO Number Five*, for example, is a hanging assemblage made of ribbons, twine, crocheted yarn and sequin threads and ceramic objects I have incorporated into it. When activators hold the *EOO* they are extending the sculpture to the length of their neck, body and arms, funneling their eyesight through two suspended viewfinders, allowing the *EOO* to transform into a puppet, a mask, a kinetic construction. They become performers or collaborators with others in the space. I called them *EOO*, thinking about the Extra-Ocular muscles, which help us see: the six muscles that control movement of the eye and one that controls eyelid elevation. I thought of these objects as an extension of our sensory abilities, potentially allowing us to shift the way we are naturally looking and sighting as we have to use our bodies and hands and potentially other living beings. How long will it take until we can do it again?

Yet saying "I want to go back" would not be Noa's conclusion – "I hope we will not go back." Because we should think about our interactions, we lived with zero responsibility, says the artist. "Artists should set an example, but it doesn't necessarily need to be with the content of their work. They can be activists, join a movement or a mutual aid." In the wake of George Floyd's and Breonna Taylor's killings, she wonders: "who is going to be heard when the pandemic is over? We need to actively center folks and communities that are marginalized and dismissed."

Extra Ocular Object Number Five.jpg **[17]**

[18]Noa Ginzburg, Extra Ocular Object Number Five, 2019

Extra Ocular Object Number Eight.jpg **[19]**

[20]Noa Ginzburg, Extra Ocular Object Number Eight, 2020

Extra Ocular Object Number Nine in hand.jpg **[21]**

[22]Noa Ginzburg, Extra Ocular Object Number Nine, 2020

Meanwhile, the artist could continue her series *#Noajump* [23], using an Instagram hashtag as a tool of archiving. In these snapshots, the artist freezes between heaven and earth, in a way that makes me think of the current human condition - neither here nor there, caught in between. It is about time we write about time, dear friends. Hannah adds:

Noa has been jumping for years. It’s like a slide-show.

HB: When did you start to jump, Noa? Which kind of space-claim does *#noajump* enact?

Hannah begins to pose questions, and the visit turns into an interview.

NG: You know, I think I haven’t exactly contextualized it before outside of a couple of artist’s talks. It is a series that exists as an Instagram hashtag *#noajump*, started as a way for my body to exist in the public domain. The process has a sort of performative aspect to it, it requires setting up, and usually several attempts, during which the actions and even the sounds (of my phone’s camera, of my feet stomping) are loud. As someone who used to photograph others a lot, it was liberating for

me to be “in front” of a camera. This was 2012, before selfie sticks were a thing :)7 The jumps are memories of places and different versions of me. I acknowledge the importance of documenting: I was here. Instead of tagging the wall, I jumped. I spent a lot of time with street artists in Tel Aviv, documented their work around the city and in abandoned and underground spaces, right around the time I realized I wouldn’t pursue a career in science. I went to art school instead, and thought of occupying, embracing and claiming spaces that were not seen unless sought for. It made me conscious of choices made in the public domain, and think of ways to defamiliarize it; about demarcation and safe, or at least safer spaces. My installations during my BFA were drawn from these experiences, and I think *#noajump* is a part of that. I’m glad it is still with me.

HB: I want to pause a second on the question of the site as a place of production: What’s the difference between jumping in your studio and jumping in the public space?

NG: I jump in my studio only on rare occasions, like when I move in, or out, to note the significance of the matter. If I jumped indoors, it was probably a museum (I’ve had numerous encounters with museum guards that were really worried because of the sounds of the process!), in a gallery, in my installations, at a historic site or an abandoned place. Technically, there is the question of light, of capturing a movement without using flash or artificial lighting, so outdoor is more fitting, and only during the day. Dusk and dawns are more challenging. It’s funny, every now and then folks ask me to commemorate a visit at their studio or home with a jump - but I usually refuse :) The space needs to call for it.

noajump 2020.png **[24]**

[25]
#Noajump ***[23]*, October 22 2020, Tel Aviv, Israel.**

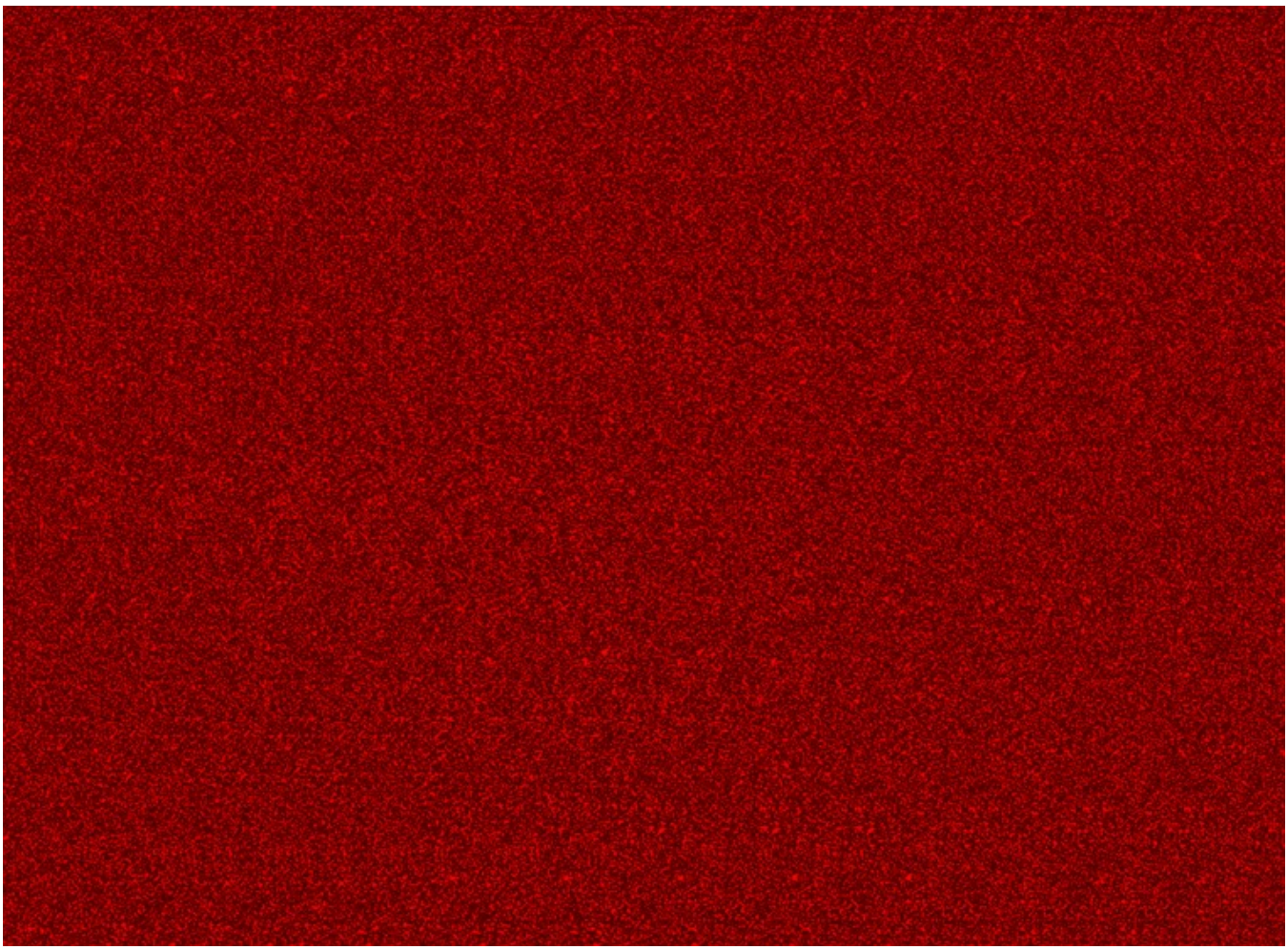
Hannah can’t help but think about *Radical Coziness*’s hyperdomesticity, and observes:

> Jump after jump we can follow the artist. But only assume that we’re in a chronological time order here. She might have jumped before. Or after. Her jumps turn into events only after she has jumped, as Judith Butler might put it.8 We can see the surroundings, sometimes we can decipher or at least guess where she is at this very moment in time and space. But is she really there? What makes us “be” at a place? Is it really the connection between the earth and our feet? “Where was I?”, asks the scholar, as Avital Ronell reminds us of Jacques Derrida.9 This is a tough one, a question that refuses to be answered singularly. Where were

> we? I think we got lost. And until then, we might jump. From jump to jump, we can follow the artist – and probably it's her jumps that freeze our time for an untimely moment. Or is it imperative? Are we to jump?

Our latest triple collaboration that is about to be published, features another solution, or transition, between works in space and two-dimensionality. For our upcoming review of Paul B. Preciado's *An Apartment in Uranus* (domesticity again? PBP [26] again!),10 which is about to appear in the next issue of *Counter-Signals* [27], Noa contributed 3D stereograms.11

3 - remember the urgency red 11.11-2.jpg **[28]**



[29]Noa Ginzburg, Remember the Urgency, 2020

As they accompany the text they become more and more abstract: at the beginning, you could decipher capital letters that form words within the 3D ambience. On the next monochromatic riddles, you could, perhaps, see painted words. And in the last ones, you would see objects and installations, made flat as images and then re-translated into this trick three-dimensionality, again. If you could or couldn't see the images, depends very much on your age: were you around when stereograms were a thing, have you practiced crossing your eyes to see the hidden image? Noa certainly did, and so did I and still do, as an interpretive tool for viewing difficult art, but Hannah seems to be too young to get it. And you? Could you see the urgency?

- 1. James Chrzan, "Radical Coziness: The Umwelt of House Cats and Perceptual Shifts in the Full Moon Saloon," zine, on the occasion of *Amra and Noa Love Cats: Full Moon Saloon*, New York 2018.
- 2. Hannah Bruckmüller coined the term in a conference paper: "'like butter in a sandwich' – Marcel Broodthaers, Maria Gilissen, and Domestic Publicity," presented at "Untimely Media / Domestic Techniques. The 60s and 70s between New York and Vienna [30]." International Symposium held at the Institute of Art History at the University of Vienna, 23 – 25 May 2019.
- 3. Barbara Cassin, *Nostalgia. When are we ever at home?*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault (Fordham University Press, 2016).
- 4. And thus,
  Quite brutally, a world of symbols will cover all
  Things like the capacious cloths that cuckoo

[What is his name? Christo?], wraps everything with.
Yoel Hoffman, Curriculum Vitae, 2007, In free translation by Noa Ginzburg.

- 5. In the exhibition “Marcel Broodthaers - Soleil Politique”, M HKA Antwerp, October 4 2019 - January 19 2020, curated by Lotte Beckwé: https://www.muhka.be/programme/detail/1372-marcel-broodthaers-soleil-politique [31]
- 6. Barbara Cassin, *Nostalgia. When are we ever at home?*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault (Fordham University Press, 2016), p. 45. Cassin quotes an interview with Hannah Arendt, conducted by Günter Gaus. “To the question of whether she misses it, she responds by extending the question to the whole of Europe: ‘The Europe of the pre-Hitler period? I can’t say that I don’t have any nostalgia for it. What remains? *The language remain*s.’” (italics original) Are we building a Room of the Parrot? We quote from an interview here, given the fact that we started from an interview and are heading toward hijacking the visit and turning it into an interview.
- 7. The attentive reader would notice a moment when a visit or an interview becomes a chat. May I add here: <3 <3 <3
- 8. Judith Butler, “When Gesture Becomes Event”, in: Anna Street/Julien Alliot/Magnolia Pauker (eds.), *Inter Views in Performance Philosophy: Crossings and Conversations*, (Springer 2017), p. 171-181.
- 9. Avital Ronell, *Media Technology and Scholarship*, European Graduate School Video Lectures (2010), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VvV3n9-orLo&t=2323s [32]
- 10. Paul B. Preciado, *An Apartment in Uranus. Chronicles of the Crossing*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (Semiotext(e), 2019).
- 11. Hannah Bruckmüller and Michal B. Ron, with an artistic contribution by Noa Ginzburg, “From i-dentity to ur-dentity. An Odyssey to Uranus with Paul Beatriz Preciado,” *Counter-Signals* 4. Identity in Crisis (in preparation).

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[31] https://www.muhka.be/programme/detail/1372-marcel-broodthaers-soleil-politique
[32] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VvV3n9-orLo&t=2323s