



AN IMAGINARY TOUCHSCREEN

by Frida Sandström

SOPHIE VUKOVIĆ
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Take a moment to think about this word: *touchscreen*. A screen that is meant to be touched. It may be the most intimate matter that we have access to today, embodying both violence and soothing care. And as autonomous sensory meridian response (ASMR) grows more popular, the affective capitalism—or surveillance capitalism to speak with Shoshana Zuboff [1]—takes a stronger hold of daily life. The direct implication of extractions that follows on the proximity of senses is indeed a paradox. Ever since photography and film hit the world one and a half centuries ago, the question of how to refuse such dispossessions of liveness remains urgent.

In its original setting, Sophie Vuković's video work *Mother's Milk* (2019) is screened on a stiff, dried latex surface—a structure that reminds of thick milk that no one would drink. And as the projection leaks over the edges, the liquid characteristics of cinema, streaming deliberately beyond any physical frame—is manifested. In the context of Svilova's digital gallery, those frames are exchanged for your device, be it a smartphone or a computer. As the images move along, you may touch the screen, zoom in or even press pause. The liquid milk-

looking latex is exchanged for the liquidation of social presence as your online actions are exchanged for others', in a never ending loop of surplus attention. *Mother's Milk* embodies the reproductive potential of interfaces that function beyond such logics. It departs from the concept of milk, the fluid link between a mother and a child and a highly politicized nourishment in the crossroad of production and reproduction. While extracting the liquid for circulation, the autonomous exchange between two bodies uphold lifeforms beyond of the incessant capitalization of life.



SOPHIE VUKOVIĆ, detail from *Mother's Milk* (2019)
Photo by Milja Rossi *Images courtesy of the artist.



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It is at precisely that threshold that *Mother's Milk* takes place, inside the interminable labor at home, in the kitchen—and in the lively forest glade when inhabited by a child's imaginaries. In the encounter of these two worlds—the inventions and recoveries in the daily lives of the daughter and her mother—the persistently boiling milk forms a link between the struggle for life and the yet-to-live: generations, sediments, layers of skin. When heated, the milk solidifies in an elastic skin-like layer on top of the vivacious liquid, as if it needs a cover to shield its unrestrained actions from outer control. While the weary mother takes care of both the kitchen and her daughter alike, braiding her hair and washing up the dishes, the daughter slinks off into the forest that grows just as the skin on the milk, forming secret hide-outs for alternate realities. And it is precisely that skin onto which the film is screened, or touched—an abject matter beyond consumption, sticking on to your fingers and eyes and you cannot let go.

Soaked in the rays of sunlight that like herself leak through the foliage, the daughter welters on the soil where fresh and moldered vegetation blend in a timeless refuge from all linear upbringing. Walking further into the flora, she releases the braid that her mother made and the hair fluttering loosely, she starts to investigate comradings species around her. When grabbing a worm, she fluctuates from curiosity to dominance, and starts to play with its impotence. The interaction escalates until she stomps on it, mashing it into the fertile earth. It becomes clear that her independence can have an impact on other creature's dependence, and the cinematic progress takes a sharp turn. Returning back home, the sound of a hair trimmer puts an end to the tranquil scenery, and simultaneously, the milk is burned in the pot. The daughter makes a brief cut, and another, and another.

Throughout the piece, sharp cinematic cuts are accompanied by the sounding labor of mouths, hands and social encounters. It clicks and ticks in a rhythmic embodiment of the gaps between the frames, as if they were glued together by the thick milk. Voices and breaths blend, as the sonic scape of everyday life is heated from below, by the hands of the young girl who touches everything that she reaches, as if it were a part of her inner world—an imaginary touchscreen of a boundless future.

Frida Sandström

[1] Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*. (New York: PublicAffairs 2019).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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