

ARTFORUM

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by Amy Taubin

Stanya Kahn, *Stand in the Stream*, 2017, HD video, color, sound.

STAND IN THE STREAM, the title of Stanya Kahn's recent hour-length video, has taken on an extra layer of associations in the final two weeks of its exhibition at MoMA PS1. So has the opening image of a woman in a heavy-duty military-like jacket and helmet, standing, her back to the camera, on a beach next to some kind of motorized, perhaps amphibious vehicle. I think I've seen something like it on TV today, ferrying stranded Texas flood victims to shore. Or maybe not.

Kahn lifted the title from a bit of dialogue in Bertolt Brecht's *Man Equals Man* (1926), an early play about the dehumanizing effect of capitalism. In Kahn's video the phrase becomes an injunction to action—to enter the stream of life where the personal and the political meet to form a secondary stream, that of images. Modestly, Kahn barely attempts to distinguish her video from the chaos of pictures streaming around her. Instead she incorporates them, so that half of *Stand in the Stream* is composed of rerecorded live-streams of news footage—largely political protests and street fighting—alternating with desperate and grotesque chat-room attempts at connection. The other half is home-movie footage—of friends and family, of a birth and a death. The material, gathered between 2011–16, is not arranged chronologically, but the entire work is dominated by the decline of Sandra Kahn, the artist's mother, who suffers from Alzheimer's, just as her mother had years before. Kahn touches on four generations—her grandmother, her mother, her son, and herself—but it is Sandra's bravery and self-awareness, even when she has lost the words with which to communicate her experience, that makes *Stand in the Stream* a particular and memorable work.

My favorite of Kahn's videos is *Sandra* (2009), a portrait that weaves together two conversations between mother and daughter. In one, Sandra talks about being involved with a man who could have gotten her into more trouble with the law than her own political radicalism might have. In the other, she matter-of-factly details exactly how she wants her body to be handled after her death. Toward the end of *Stand in the Stream*, we see Stanya and others carrying out the burial rituals exactly as Sandra once described them.