

TRT: 74 minutes

Written, directed, shot, edited and sound designed by Stanya Kahn. Includes original sounds/music by Kahn and Keith Wood (*Hush Arbors*, *Chelsea Light Moving*). B Camera by Ignacio Genzon, Mike Stoltz and Chiara Giovando. The cast contributed primary dialogue.

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“People are going back and forth  
across the doorsill where the two worlds touch.

The door is round and open

Don’t go back to sleep!”

—Rumi

“When you affect something, you are at the same time opening yourself up to being affected in turn, and in a slightly different way than you might have been the moment before. You have made a transition, however slight. You have stepped over a threshold.”

—Brian Massumi, (translator, “A Thousand Plateaus”), from interview: *Navigating Moments*

With a run time of 74 minutes, *Don’t Go Back to Sleep* is a haunted tragic-comedy that functions as much as a symbolic meditation on citizen resilience as a metaphor for the violence of the state and the First World’s rapacious impact on the earth, driving the planet itself towards impending death. As medical professionals perform haphazard triage, mostly on each other, in vacant housing, we realize the protagonists may be some of the only people left: workers (The People) vs. the danger outside: the state (police/military/clampdown). In the tenuous relations between strangers collaborating under pressure, darkly comedic tenacity and regenerative energy rise in small, understated, human exchanges.

Shot in Kansas City, Missouri, in newly built homes left uninhabited and unfinished in the economic crash, *Don’t Go Back to Sleep* follows roving groups of frontline emergency workers adrift in nearly empty, end-times urban and suburban landscapes. In a series of uncanny scenes, dark joking emerges alongside efforts at cohesion and collectivity. Squatting empty suburban developments and luxury high-rises, depressed with the aura of so many displaced by the U.S. housing market catastrophe, nurses and doctors establish make-shift treatment centers within the architectural mundane: fixtures and countertops, carpet pads and exposed wiring, fireplaces and crown molding. Untouched appliances glow dully in the market’s wake. Time alternately slows and speeds as the characters recalibrate their stress responses, suspended in the in-between of waiting, activated by uncertainty, disasters already underway and the reverberations of decades of distress. Alcohol, cake and lunchmeat provide sub-par sustenance as the workers labor, sleep and bury their dead.

Further extending a video practice that allows fluid boundaries between the real and the fictive, between narrative and abstraction, Kahn directs an

ensemble cast of mostly non-actors to perform both scripted and improvised scenarios in which their agency becomes central to the film's construction as they create candid dialogue. Her sound design, anchored here with original compositions by Kahn and musician Keith Wood (of Hush Arbors and Chelsea Light Moving), holds a central role in the language of the film. The edits and the cameras' movements and fixations play with reconfigurations of space, time, materiality, alienation and the overworking of Nature. A quieter humor of anxiety seeks out the edges of despair while trying to connect.