

Stand in the Stream

by Stanya Kahn ©2011-2017

HD digital video with sound, TRT 60:24

Courtesy of the artist.

*“The dialectical image is an image that emerges suddenly, in a flash. What has been is to be held fast—as an image flashing up in the now of its recognizability.”*

—Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*

*Stand in the Stream* defies categorization, an ambient digital feature about life, death, the inextricability of the personal from the political and the primacy of the image. Shot over the course of six years, *Stand in the Stream* captures historic shifts in popular uprisings and the nascent use of the internet to organize and document. Made during a period in which massive, unprecedented protest movements rose in Tunisia, Egypt, Brazil and Turkey, the film is anchored by the arc of the artist’s activist/worker mother’s deterioration and death as well as daily life amidst swiftly changing political and digital landscapes. Live-streams screen-recorded in real-time are intercut with footage Kahn shot on multiple camera formats, reflecting the artist’s “skin in the game,” and the constant reframing of our screen-saturated, contemporary perspectives without using “found footage.” With a dense and visceral sound score, *Stand in the Stream* moves through the home, the wild, online chat rooms and the streets. From the birth of a child to the onset of dementia, from Tahrir Square to Standing Rock and Trump’s (first) inauguration, *Stand in the Stream* is an urgent contemporary ode and a story for the people.

Edited with the speed and intensity of its soundtrack and driven by narratives of change, the film is grounded in local stories as it seeks to unpack what it collective. Kahn documents the deterioration of her mother, her own role as a mother, and the tactics, demands, and modes of visibility linking resistance movements across the globe. The film tries to locate our bodies as we consume the daily image-world and asks us to consider how we distinguish high stakes from low in a digital landscape that threatens to equalize everything in a currency of clips and clicks.

Set within the context of Kahn’s persistent shooting of daily life and screen recordings of live-stream events online, the intimately personal is woven with the radically public, caught with various devices, mirroring our increasingly blended on-screen and IRL lives. Where POV cameras are usually used for sports action footage to show off athletic prowess, Kahn’s tongue-in-cheek use of the devices here casts a side-eye on the unseen “prowess” it takes to pull off paid and unpaid workloads.

Against isolation, Kahn participates in community. public and protest spaces, records live-streams of international events as they occur, sometimes waking in the night to capture uprisings in other time zones. Real-time presence becomes significant in resisting the ease with which the internet allows us to view and forget, to detach and disconnect. Where one can easily download found footage and use it as source material, Kahn’s insistence on “shooting”/recording it herself is an act of maintaining a physical stake where virtuality increasingly offers an illusion of safety and the ability to turn off.

While the computer screen and its vortex of windows is a recurring location, and all interactions are mediated by a lens, *Stand in the Stream* returns to the body (human, animal, plant, the artist’s.) History here is speeding and dynamic, a storm to be watched and catalogued, even while it resists categorization. Personal life here is inextricable from politicized being. Varying stakes in participation and accountability move in and out of focus as we slide from the tangible world to comment feeds, to independent live-streams and back.

Kahn’s sound design includes original compositions by Kahn and by the musician/composer Alexia Riner (a solo artist and half of the duo Madame Gandhi.)

The title, *Stand in the Stream*, comes from the Bertolt Brecht play *Mann ist Mann* (Man Equals Man). The play is about the forcible transformation of an ordinary citizen (Galy Gay) into a soldier: the pliability of identity in the post-industrial West and the possibility, as Brecht suggested, that people are like machines and can be dismantled and rebuilt (not unlike identity and information construction

in the internet age.) In a brief interlude in the play, the character Widow Begbick tells the audience that “Herr Brecht hopes you will feel the ground on which you stand, slither your toes like shifting sand so that the case of Galy Gay the porter makes you aware life on this earth is a hazardous affair.” Then a voice is heard declaring the start of war. The Widow Begbick sings:

*Don't try to hold onto the wave that's breaking against your foot/ so long as you/  
Stand in the Stream/ fresh waves will always keep breaking against it.*