

Stand in the Stream

By Stanya Kahn ©2011-2017

HD digital video with sound, TRT: 60:24.

Courtesy of the artist and Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects

“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 is an ambient digital film shot on multiple camera formats over the course of six years. Following the arc of an activist/worker’s deterioration and death amidst shifting political and digital landscapes, the film moves through the home, the wild, online chat rooms and the streets with Vertovian intensity, always pointing to the effects of power as it presses on people and as people create their own to push back. Using no found footage but only that shot by Kahn or screen-recorded by Kahn in real time, *Stand in the Stream* brings live witness to our screen-saturated perspectives, begging accountability, acknowledging participation. The film’s core conceptual framework—that resistance and resilience bloom despite the inextricable flows of socio-political power and capitalism’s acculturation in our very personhood—structures Kahn’s massive collection of footage, edited with high speed precision and driven by a dense and visceral sound-score.

Tense and pleasurable, the film is as sensual as it is tightly wound. Its narratives of change—the deterioration of the filmmaker’s worker/activist mother, her own role as a mother, the tactics, demands, and modes of visibility linking resistance movements across the globe—are grounded in physicality. Animals, plants, and the natural world recur constantly alongside physical labor and mundane survival. *Stand in the Stream* centers the immediacy of our bodies as we consume the daily image-world and as we are shaped, bent or broken by capital’s flows. It invites us into a world that is at once familiar and uncanny, and asks us to consider ourselves inside it: How to we watch? How do we act? How do we distinguish high stakes from low in a daily digital landscape that threatens to equalize everything in a currency of clips and clicks? History here is speeding and dynamic, a storm to be watched and catalogued, even while it resists this at every turn. From the birth of a child to the onset of dementia, from Tahrir Square to Standing Rock and Trump’s inauguration, *Stand in the Stream* is an urgent contemporary ode and a call to action.

Kahn’s sound design includes original compositions by Kahn and the musician/composer Alexia Riner (a solo artist and half of the duo Madame Gandhi.) Kahn thanks and acknowledges live-streamers around the world for the risks they took to record.

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.