

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. Edited with Vertovian intensity, the film’s footage (all shot by Kahn or screen-recorded by Kahn in real time) moves globally and locally through the wild, the streets, the home and online, in a visceral, phenomenological reflection of life, power and uprising in late capitalism. Moving with the premise that while we cannot extricate ourselves from the flows of the system, *Stand in the Stream* also affirms that we can and do resist it, raising energy, making new language and new ways to connect.

The film’s arc is shaped by the decline of Kahn’s mother to dementia, and the birth and growth of her son amid the shift of political and digital landscapes over time. An activist and former shipyard worker, her mother talks candidly about unions, NAFTA, the dangers of politicians in the pockets of lobbyists, how she wouldn’t want to get dementia like her mother before, as she deteriorates. Her illness and death are woven with lo-fi clips of Kahn’s home life raising her son, caretaking, repairing, working, always from the POV of a camera. Interspersed and ongoing, is Kahn’s persistent screen recording of live streams on the internet. From intimate chat rooms to feeds of global uprisings, this footage marks a time when the internet rises as a tool for organizing while also becoming a conduit for surveillance and marketing. *Stand in the Stream*’s mimics our screen-saturated perspectives, hinting at questions of accountability, acknowledging our participation in a sometimes voyeuristic and alienated consumption of the world through images. History here is speeding and dynamic, a storm to be watched and catalogued, even while it resists this at every turn. In Kahn’s massive collection of footage—edited with precision and an operatic sense of sound’s power to draw the epic from the mundane—we experience capitalism’s acculturation of our very personhood and also the blooms of resistance and resilience. From the birth of a child to the loss of the mind, from Tahrir Square to Standing Rock and Trump’s inauguration, *Stand in the Stream* is an urgent contemporary ode and a story for the people.

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.