

FILM

Bad Connection

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Left: Harry Dodge and Stanya Kahn, *Whacker*, 2005, still from a color video, 6 minutes 25 seconds. Right: Harry Dodge and Stanya Kahn, *All Together Now*, 2008, still from a color video, 26 minutes 52 seconds.

DISTINCTLY TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY HEROINES, the protagonists in the Los Angeles-set videos of Harry Dodge and Stanya Kahn exert tremendous willfulness and conviction, whether confronting social isolation or the apocalypse. The duo's rough-hewn, largely improvised work showcases the singular, motor-mouthed talents of Kahn, whose bizarre, hilariously detail-rich monologues are boastful claims and pleas for connection. In their first work, *Winner* (2002), Kahn plays Lois, a woman who has won a cruise on a radio call-in show; she's filmed by Dodge, in the role of a never-seen camera operator named Peter who simply needs an upbeat sound bite about her good fortune. Lois, however, only wants to show off her pathetic sculptures, neatly assembled in the trunk of her car: "This one is *Sad Nugget*," she says proudly while holding a lumpy seat cushion with a brown wooden egg on top of it. Lois reappears in *Let the Good Times Roll* (2004), trying to find a shuttle-bus in the desert that will ferry her to a rock concert. ("I can't wait to see Blizzard of Friends and White Chaps.") Dodge is behind the camera again, this time as "Dave," who films Lois's reflections on the tenth anniversary of "young Cobain's" suicide and her memories of an orgiastic night of fisting and "Ecstasy enemas." This unbearably lonely figure needs to constantly remind herself (and anyone else who will listen) of her capacity for belonging to—and being appreciated by—forces outside herself.

Kahn remains a fascinating presence even in the works in which she utters not a word. In *Whacker* (2005), Kahn, in a dress, heels, and sunglasses, defiantly takes on the chore of ridding a brown, cruddy hill of weeds. As cars pass by on the highway below and Elvis's "In the Ghetto" fades in and out, Kahn seems hell-bent on completing and repeating this Sisyphean task for her very survival. Matters of life and death are presented more grimly in *All Together Now* (2008), set in a post-apocalyptic LA of dead kittens, water shortages, and white- and blue-hooded beings who toil away in some kind of infernal sleeper cell. We first see Kahn bludgeoning something off-screen; her skin a sickly brown from toxins or too much sun, the Hoods monitor her as she siphons water from a stream. But even in this nightmare vision—as in Lois's pixilated reminiscences—there's a hint of hope, of the potential for some kind of connection, no matter how tenuous and fleeting.

— Melissa Anderson

"An Evening with Harry Dodge and Stanya Kahn" will be presented as part of *Modern Mondays* at MoMA in New York on November 9 at 7 PM.