

Below the Radar

Experimental Documentary Practices — with Andrea Luka Zimmerman

Speakers: Paige Smith, Am Johal, Andrea Luka Zimmerman

[music]

Paige Smith 0:02

Hello, I'm Paige Smith with Below the Radar, a knowledge democracy podcast. Below the Radar is recorded on the territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh peoples.

This time on Below the Radar, host Am Johal speaks with Andrea Luka Zimmerman, an award winning filmmaker and cultural activist. In this episode they talk about her experiences engaging in long-term, deeply-researched, collaborative filmmaking.

We will be showing one of Andrea's films at SFU's Vancouver campus next week. Join us on October 15th at 5pm for a free screening of 'Here for Life', a film that blurs the lines between reality and fiction, created by Andrea Luka Zimmerman and theatre-maker Adrian Jackson.

I hope you enjoy our conversation with Andrea Luka Zimmerman, and if you're in the area, I hope to see you at the theatre on October 15. Head to the show notes for event details and enjoy the episode.

[music]

Am Johal 1:03

Hello, welcome to Below the Radar delighted that you could join us again this week. Really excited to have Andrea Luka Zimmerman with us today. She's a filmmaker and an artist, a curator. Welcome, Andrea.

Andrea Luka Zimmerman 1:17

Thank you so much for having me.

Am Johal 1:19

Wondering if we can begin with you introducing yourself a little bit.

Andrea Luka Zimmerman 1:22

I'm a filmmaker, but I also write and I program other people's work. And in terms of my filmmaking, I work often very collaboratively over very long periods of time, and with deep research, exploring counter memories to structural violence, predominantly, but really, finding, I guess, wayward and fierce dreams that we can dream together to make a world that we can all live in.

Am Johal 1:46

I'm going to ask you about some of your specific films, going back, but maybe I'll start with what got you motivated and involved in in filmmaking? What was your sort of entry point into the world of making films.

Andrea Luka Zimmerman 2:00

Originally, or many years ago, I always knew I wanted to make films. But I come from a very, I guess, sub working class background, where there was absolutely no support for anything creative. Or any support even from within the family structure I inhabited then. So I had to kind of navigate away and I left school very early, and I didn't know how to, how to even do it. Like, it sounds crazy now, but like, I literally didn't know, all I knew was I wanted to and then when I came to the UK when I was 19 or 20. I met somebody, I was a

hairdresser, and I met somebody at a bus stop was telling me about a course you could go to, to learn filmmaking. And I went there, and it was all pre internet, right? But I went there, I didn't have a portfolio, nothing. But I talked, I felt like for my future, and I got in. And that's how I started.

Am Johal 2:48

I'm gonna ask you about one of your films, which I haven't had a chance to watch as of yet but, Taskalfa from 2013, and it's set in Istanbul. I'm wondering if you can talk a little bit about the making of that film and sort of the ideas behind it and what you're trying to do with that film project.

Andrea Luka Zimmerman 3:06

Taskalfa was like my first long form film, and it was made wandering the streets. And I learned everything, I think about filmmaking through making this film because first of all, I went to Istanbul for a different project, and I saw the street animals and the street dogs and how the different communities cared for them, sometimes they didn't. But more often than not that they did, and so became very interested in their history and also the way in which the municipality and the country in general, because it's not just Istanbul, try to get rid of them. But throughout history, every time they were banished from the city, in cruel ways, very cruel way. So if you think about, like, for example, they were put on an island to die of thirst and hunger to eat each other. And many, many 1000s tried to swim back and drowned. Because they wanted to be back in the city and other attempts, like, for example, to make lampshades out of their skin. So horrendous, horrendous ideas were practiced. But every time something like this happened, the city burnt down, or disease came or whatever. And so that became part of the kind of myth, so long as they're the dogs, so long as they're the Turks. And I thought that was very interesting. But also, there's a particular form of Islam, which is very gentle, and an interpretation of it, that means we have to look after every living thing, including the plants, we are responsible for them, because we are also sharing the space. And so the kind of relationship between, on the one hand, a structure that has its own history of violence, also within communities, be it Kurdish and Turkish, and Armenian, and Jewish, and Greek, and all of these communities that are still within this place, but have been wedged apart through historical circumstances. And then you have the street dogs, which feel they have the power on the city, but actually they have no power, they are given and granted that power of protection by the communities. So I needed to make this film and then add that. Yeah, I mean, the question of how to start, then I made a treatment and I knew I wanted representation and I set all these interviews with people and then I realized really quickly it was my wandering the streets, that was the way to make this film. So it was me and the producer, we did everything. So during the days and nights, we just looked around, often me also by myself with the camera, and then we translated each evening and we did the transcription. And we did the pre edit everything like this. And I realized that through like another object, almost like in this case, the street dogs, and they're so sensual, right as a sensuality of another being around you in a city, you feel it. Everybody who's going to these places you feel it, if there are cats and dogs and other street animals that are well looked after you. There's there, there's the sense that we don't have here, for example, in Europe or North America, and so to how to hold that, how to hold that level of care that we all afford to these creatures. Those people that did, and also people from all kinds of stratas of society, like homeless people up to the very wealthy. And I wanted to show how the relationship between the commodity of a dog like the dogs you buy for a lot of money. I mean, I don't know what happened in Canada. But here, for example, in the UK during lockdown, so many people wanted to have dogs that all the rescue centers ran out of dogs, and all the pedigree dogs now cost minimum 3000 pounds, which is extraordinary. So you can buy a dog for 6000 pounds. Now, I mean, I've never seen anything like this.

So there's this commodity of a certain type of value now attributed to these creatures. And then that the street dogs, which are just roaming around and have fleas, and are sort of looked after. And I wanted to really explore like, what is coexistence? And how might coexistence allow us to find a way through through the kind of, yes, structural violence that we've made in this world and continue to make and what are the processes of encounter and seeing each other. And also work with John Berger, the writer and critic on the film. And he wrote a very, very beautiful book called King, which he published without his name on it on the first edition. And then in the second edition, they just put his name on even though he didn't want to, because he wanted to make a book that wasn't dependent upon his fame at the time, and he wrote it. But it could be encountered in a different way. And

it's told through the eyes of a street dog living within a community of homeless people and drinkers and survivors and hustlers and it's the dogs' love for the details of what life is and right at the end of the book, so gentrification happens, as happens in Istanbul as in much of my work, right? The kind of city clearance and stuff is always present. The bulldozers come in, and demolish the houses that the people have built out of cardboard boxes and everything they could find. And the end of the book, the dog runs and says: Come on everyone, we're gonna run to the sea, and we're going to start afresh and anew. And the dogs running and running and running, and the inferno is happening. And then by the end, dogs exhausted but it's just about it made it to the sea with the whole group of people and things and it turns around, and there's nobody, and it's such a devastating book. It's so, I felt for me, it was such a profound book on who is allowed to dream and what are the heroic dreams we have, in spite of everything that is going on. There's always also this, with without the dreaming, we will not survive. So I wanted to make a film where it could dream about coexistence. You know, just by shaping the lens a little bit.

Am Johal 8:31

I was going to ask you about the Estate, a Reverie, which we've had the honor of screening here in in Vancouver at SFU. I am wondering if you can talk a little bit about where that project started from, it is quite an immersive active filmmaking you know, filmed over several years.

Andrea Luka Zimmerman 8:47

So, Estate was made where I also lived for a long time so it was my community and I started it because we knew that the Estate is going to be demolished. So we had just lost our campaign to save it, and I thought okay, either I can make a, I can just move on. I was working all over the world, and I didn't want to really work in my immediate environment because I just thought it was too close and it's too close and involved and these are my friends and this is my life. But it changed everything I think for me though, because I started to go around with a camera trying to see what is actually there. And I found for example, a hairdressing salon on my Estate which I had never noticed because I have a shaved head since I'm 18 and but anyways there's a hairdresser so I walked in and her youngest clients over the whole period of time we were filming with her for years, was in her 70s, so it was 70 and above. So it serves a certain purpose, her hairdressing salon and it was welcoming. So people could bring their pets into the hairdressing salon, which is very unusual in London. There was a beautiful, beautiful space. And a lot of knowledge was in that space because people had lived in the neighborhood sometimes for you know, born here or came just after the Second World War, when they were kind of repatriated. And it was really an amazing space. And a lot of the people who were kind of put or lift on this Estate were put here almost as a dumping ground, because it was a very, very economically marginalized community. And there were drifters from all over the place, but also people who were awaiting, for example, asylum status were put here. So temporary accommodation, and there were many people from all over the world, but also people who had just come out of hostels, or prisons, or people like me, who took flats, which were hard to let, and because I had absolutely no money, and ended up living here for 18 years instead of two. And, like we all did, and we made this incredible space together. And I wanted to show the lives of all of these different people again, about coexistence, because we all have to make this life together. And we all had to negotiate the space, without ever, for example, calling the police to solve problems, or how to deal with neighbors when there's conflict. And it became a safe space also for young people to go through because the community would look after or try to look after younger people who were running away from gun violence, for example, which was very, very prominent in this neighborhood. And so it was, I learned a lot, a lot, a lot. And I thought how to do this justice, because it would just be erased by the new narrative that was proposed, through the government, in particular around our Estate saying this is a sink Estate, and we're going to have progress and going to have a lively, diverse and vibrant community. And it was such a lie. And I was like this, you know, of course, I can fight it in with language. But I wanted to make a counter memories. So I really, instead of making an expository film, I decided even though I filmed a lot of the campaigns and everything around it, but I decided to, to make a film, where people's lives could be shown in the fullest, because we all have full lives. And the circumstances are always wedging us apart and also are blaming each other for the demise, for example of the Estate. Oh, it was the people who came later. Oh, it was these people. But actually, once you start to really think about it, it's all the structural, and it's using the kind of pitting against each other of usually one, you

know, community against another who are all struggling to survive. So became really important. And it was possible because I obviously lived here, so it didn't cost me anything. And then I couldn't easily raise funding for a film, which was so process oriented, I still have the same problem now, right. And it's between art and film, it's between community work and activism. So it doesn't really sit anywhere, even though in the end, it becomes this film, which is full of poetry. And it's you know, surviving still has been shown all over. So I had to train people to help, because I couldn't do it all as sometimes we had 80 people in a scene and I needed support. So yeah, I trained people from the Estate up to help with camera or with sound or everything. So everybody got the kind of knowledge, we had like a mini film school, on the Estate in order to make this fun. It was an amazing, amazing experience.

Am Johal 12:58

And, you know, one of the things that's really striking about it for me and looking at documentary experimental or other films that delve into these issues, it's very clear where your social political orientation or allegiances and solidarities lie. But in choosing not to go the route of a more didactic kind of mode, there is a kind of, an aesthetic turn of a kind of radical poetics that's built into the way that you work. Because you mess with a kind of temporal and traditional narrative form. And I'm wondering, what is it about that form of filmmaking that particularly draws you in because in some sense, the other way is kind of the easy way to go. This is like a choice in a turn, in a way but also perhaps broadens how it's received in a kind of affective sense.

Andrea Luka Zimmerman 13:51

So for me, it's always important, like I love cinema, and I've really loved cinema. So even before I had the chance to make films, I was really drawn to because I couldn't sing right, I otherwise would have done music probably. I'm drawn to the poetic as an expression, where is the vernacular, is something that can't be squashed almost by the forces to be, I feel like because it's intangible almost, for me, the deeply poetic, like, poetry and spoken word in particular often comes into this kind of genre for me. And music in particular is a rebellious practice as well. And it's wayward because we celebrate each other with joy. So formally, I feel it's not enough to have just one genre, it's not enough. It's ideological, actually, for me, to campaign against the singularity of certain genres, be the documentary genre, whatever it is, because our lives are not reducible to just one way of expressing and often they're expected to be reduced to one way of expressing so it's about the idea of the gaze. And often funders, for example, I had the opportunity at that moment, and it was filming it, because we were the first big housing campaign that became visible because we did a large scale public artwork, on the facade of our building to start this whole process. And it was so suddenly became very written up in magazines and newspapers. And so we had a lot of attention. So I had this producer who wanted to make this film and said, but you have to do a three act, and you have to go, this is our struggle, this is how we struggle, and this is what happened. And then I go like, this could be just any struggle. Yes. And it's important because the solidarity across the struggles is what gives us this hope. But actually, what I needed to do, I felt like really deeply was to go against any of these desires of the narrative that already haven't helped us in our fight, because it's always grassroots level up, and we have to have joy in our activism. And we have to have the love for the other human being or, or creatures we work with too, you know, like, because otherwise, I just see us from my perspective, and we have to make, I wanted to make a space where I could discover my neighbors on a different with a different framework. Almost like by providing a framework, I just want to give some examples, like one of my neighbors, so there were a lot of people from all over the place. So we had, we had a lot of difference, or, or even like cultural differences, right? Like, how do we meet? Where do we meet? How do we make a campaign? Who will benefit in what ways from the campaign? So there were a lot of very long conversations, but then there were also a lot of health issues. And, for example, one of my neighbors, he had severe Parkinson's disease. And he was an elderly man, and he lived alone all his life, and he had never married. And it was progressively getting worse, and he couldn't get the support, because a lot of people in this very, more or less abandoned communities didn't get medicated adequately, because there was not even time for the medical establishment to really consider these people properly. So some of the aspects of the film, for example, are now used for medical students how to speak to people who have such a different life experience from the, from the people who are usually going into these professions. And so John would come by and had this, when you when you have this adjustment of medication, and you can have this very wobbly, you become wobbly. So he was very

wobbly, and he would fall over and we had no lift, and we lived on the fourth floor. And at that moment, our Estate had been half empty, or two thirds empty. So there weren't so many people and in our floor, it was just me and John. And on the floor beneath us was just one more person, then there was nobody and there was one more person underneath. So it was quite empty, but John felt completely free, or happy to come to our door and say: Can I sleep on your couch for a few weeks? Without any? Like he did, it seems natural to me, like: Of course you can. That was what the kind of community was and that's how the film was made. And so in the film, then I found a lot of his process over seven years. And when I edited it together, I always show people the footage before I put it into the fine cup. So they have a chance to veto it or I don't feel comfortable or this or bla bla bla. So people feel so free that they can trust me, they don't have to self police while we're making work if they try something out, for example. And I took a lot of his stuff out where I'm showing him quite vulnerable, also talking to his GP and stuff. And he wanted everything in the film. And he wanted it in the phone because he said let me use the space to show other people like me who have nobody and who have no family and who don't, are not married or have you know, the loneliness that they go through is shared by somebody like me. That was really important to him and that was such a, such a big, beautiful gift also for me to be able to have this relationship with another human being. And that trust that he knew that the work was good enough in his view that it will reach an audience, you know, that it wasn't just made for us. It was made for the world to see and to witness almost his life in relation to. I thought was beautiful. And there's a lot of joy also in the film, a lot of laughter and refusal to be pigeonholed. Even in the worst of circumstances people are, are, somebody called it early on like it's the wayward lives. Like there was a neighborhood movie where the Estate was standing was a very, very amazing, amazing neighborhood, which was full of all the people who didn't really fit in anywhere else would live here until the last 15 years. Now, it's gentrified, and it's one of the most expensive neighborhoods as it happens with all of them.

Am Johal 19:12

How long did the film take to make from when you started filming to when you felt like this is the final edit.

Andrea Luka Zimmerman 19:21

Seven years it was and it was just because that's how long it took for the Estate to be demolished from when I started. So once I knew that the estate would be demolished, I started filming, and then seven years. But I knew, so the end up getting, I didn't even know what's going to be. We just thought we're going to make it for an archive for the for the library. And just playing around and but then the more and more stuff happened. It was amazing because people also bring things to you. And then we started to have workshops trying to explore things and people wanted to do reenactments and creative reenactments, right? Like, not standardized reenactments, and they wanted to also perform versions of their lives and they wanted. They wanted to participate. And they wanted to be shown and seen. And yeah, and then by the time that my flat was boarded up, I was amongst the last people to leave it was seven years.

Am Johal 20:06

That form of immersive filmmaking where you know, you have deep relationships with people in the Estate that you live in. It takes its own kind of toll, that seven years is an incredible duration to be working on a project. I am wondering what kind of, clearly there's a lot of joy and excitement in the method and the process of the work, but there's also an emotional maybe I hit or something else in the process that can be quite personal. And I'm wondering how your mode or method of filmmaking affects you.

Andrea Luka Zimmerman 20:36

It's a very good question that really continues also into all my other projects, because each of them has dealt with people who have survived extreme circumstances. And, I have to hold spaces with people, and I can hold them because I myself, I feel like come from such a crazy childhood, like I've seen, like, I've experienced stuff, which was so bad that I feel like everything is really good now. It sounds nuts, but I have a huge tolerance. But I also have boundaries. Like, it's interesting because the object is the film right? so people know it's for the firm's, I'm not there to be a friend or a therapist. The friendships develop, because over time, like friendships develop, I feel like. But as respect, even with the, with the people I work with, whom I don't necessarily develop a deep

friendship with. But there's a there's a kinship, because we have, for example, also, over time, we negotiate the spaces, right? So I'm not, you're figuring out something together, and they have boundaries of people. I mean, I can't really describe it, but I have very good boundaries, I feel like, but that can't be fixed, either because they shift and the change. But I can say, I feel like I have to be able to say to somebody, I cannot have the time that you know, that space with, you know, because I'm tired or exhausted. And if I can't do that, then I know it's a dangerous territory, I'm not honest enough. So I feel like I have to just be very honest, as a human being to an approach, in such approaches. And it's almost more important for me to think about these kinds of structures when there's more, when there's a bigger structure involved, like with my film, two films after Here for Life, that became almost a much more important question because the structures that exist that are dependent very much on an idea of how to work that can be very troublesome in relationship to another way of working and you have to negotiate these structures and you have to have contracts or clear agreements with people.

Am Johal 22:32

I'm wondering if you can talk a little bit about your project, Civil Rights, I haven't had a chance to watch that myself, but I've read a few articles about it, but wondering where the idea for that project came from?

Andrea Luka Zimmerman 22:43

So Civil Rights came after I finished Erase and Forget, which is a film which I made over 10 years that came up two years after its date. And it was such an exhaust, that was an exhausting project on other levels. Because it was dealing with such extreme violence, it was about special forces, former Special Forces soldier who was the inspiration for for many fiction films, but also he perpetrated extreme violence. And he was instrumentalized and a hero until he fell from grace when he turned against this government and then became an extremist in a different way. So it was very, I was very, that was my film about cinema almost like: How is cinema violent? How's the structures of cinema, the dreaming structures of cinema, perpetuate violence to ideology, and through the funding structures? Who is funding what and why? I was exhausted by because I also had written so many articles about it, it was such a battle against all the different structures in that way, and I just wanted to make a film without people. Like without faces of people, because people always identify, so when it comes to extreme cases, such as the Special Forces and international politics where we, for example, have somebody using even the language like friendly fire, versus killing somebody or whatever, or collateral damage. You identify with a face and we look at the face like Trump, it's like this whole film, which led to the kind of history where you could explore Trump or Reagan or the Dallas brothers, doesn't really matter, any of those. But there's an identification with the hero. And I wanted to make a film where I could, through very simple questions, explore again, the structures of violence, of racism, of poverty and of war in a really different way. And it was, it was kind of started through Martin, so I got a commission to participate and make a film for an event that celebrated Martin Luther King's anniversary of gaining a honorary doctorate in Newcastle at the university. And the footage of him receiving the doctorate had been mislaid, and then it was forgotten until it was dug up by a researcher. And so it was like a big scandal even like see, even this history was forgotten. So quickly. And it was also the context of like, right, yeah, right wing nationalism in the UK in particular at that time. And so I was asked to do this film, and I could have done whatever I wanted to do. So it didn't have to do anything with Martin Luther King. But his speech on poverty and war and racism and the intanglement between these three points. I believe in so much, and I wanted to explore them and I wanted to explore what does it mean today? So I just went again, like around the city of New Castle into all the different neighborhoods and just asking people the question: Why do you think we have war? What is poverty to you? And what is racism? And I went to work in all sorts of different configurations of communities again, and that was in order to have a shared exploration almost off that topic without being able to immediately judge people by say: this is, I can identify you as this person. So I wanted to rap to that a little bit and show the, through the voice and through the thoughtfulness of the responses the Yeah, the kind of result. It is a bit like Taskafa, it was a much more, was much similar methodology that used of Taskafa but without the image. And then the images were all the kind of places insights throughout history 400 plus year history of resistance, where events happened, for example, like a struggle against a racist attack or a struggle for women's or transgender rights or local cafe that would be welcoming to people even if they had no money that kind of stuff. So I was looking through vernacular but also official radical history and invited people to show me places and so became a mixture of places that are found

that historically matter already. But then also places that had previously probably been unconsidered because they were vernacular histories. So that's that film. It's a very tender, I feel like for me and gentle but also again, fierce exploration of these things.

Am Johal 26:46

I want to ask you also to talk about Here for Life, which I'm hoping to figure out a way to have screened in Vancouver's soon enough, but wondering if you can talk to us about that really, really interesting project.

Andrea Luka Zimmerman 26:55

So Here for Life was a project that it's like all my projects very dear to me. But that project because it's been so recent, is very alive still inside of me because we are still, we were just momentarily also stopped touring with it and we were just starting up touring again. It was a project that was made with a theatre maker, Adrian Jackson, who does specialize or specialist, he kind of developed or his whole company developed around forum theatre, which was the Theatre of the Oppressed by Augusto Boal. And he translated all of Augusto Boal's work into English. So all the stuff that I read on August Boal was his translations, and when we found out he was like: Oh, my God! and he made a film with a theater play on King based on King and John Berger, who was doing the readings of King in Taskafa. also participated in his King, but we didn't know that of each other. And so when he saw that my film was at the film festival, London Film Festival, he came in, and he said: Oh, my God, I've made this play. And John was there a few years ago, and he, his company is working predominantly with people who have experienced homelessness or recovering from addiction. And they're also like a very supportive network that help on all sorts of other levels as well and provide support for people and to be able to act and perform their lives and versions of their lives, but also, and put in place in all sorts of different ways all across the world. And so it's a radical pedagogic theatre practice, which I've always been drawn to. And so when we, then thought, okay, how can we make a film about survival in London today? So he and I, it was a very complicated collaboration, because theater is a very loud practice, you project outwards, right? You rehearse from the floor, you talk with the audience, you need the audience. And film is exactly the opposite. To me, it's quiet, a little moment, tells you everything, it is about time. So there was a lot of very vibrant conflict that we had to work through. And it was kind of important, I felt like for the work because the work is very, it's very wayward. It's wayward, and it's refusing to be pinned down. And it's refusing any any of those people in the film are refusing to be single, alive people. And you can't say this person is like this, or this person is like that. And that was, that came from this, from this process that was beautiful and painful in many, in many ways. And there's also play in the film. But the play was made for the film. And it was because of the audience. We wanted to tie in the audience. So there are all sorts of loops in the film that are, so from the extremely delicate, cinematic echo, you will see it because it's so it's very, very painterly, like it was one of the most beautiful films I feel like I've done. Or been able to do because there was more funding attached to this film. And so I could work with an amazing cinematographer and Taina Galia who I've worked with many times before, but I couldn't work with her on that scale and like to find this kind of expression. And then from that to the, to the kind of very collective unruly, improvised and overlapping scenes, and the fun plays a lot with storytelling. So what things over the appears it's like truthful documentary is really maybe not. And that which appears to be really not might really be. So it's anyway, you have to see it to, to know what I mean.

Am Johal 30:13

Yeah, yeah, totally. Well, hopefully, we're going to screen it very soon. So, I wonder also, you also work as a curator and you've been involved in collectives before, like, Vision Machine, Fugitive Images, wonder if you can speak to some of your curatorial projects and also your involvement in in collectives.

Andrea Luka Zimmerman 30:31

So I think I'm a natural collaborator in that I've learned very early on in order to make the work of a scale that I wish to make it. I have to collaborate because it's so difficult to raise funding for that kind of work and collaboration stuff. But if you find the right collaborations, you can enable each other to be tenfold instead of just doubling. That's that's what the beauty about collaboration and so I collaborate across so micro collaborations or collectives, where across all sorts of different things. Vision Machine was with Christine

Cynn, Joshua Oppenheimer and Michael Uwemedimo, where we try to figure out how to make films with people in kind of self reimagining. And I mean, I don't know if you probably everybody knows Josh's work now, but like he made *The Act of Killing* and *The Look of Silence* and but we worked together for 10 years to develop these kind of methodologies with community groups and also through *The Globalization Tapes*, for example, which is a film we made in Indonesia, with a group of plantation workers who were unionizing. And instead of making again, an expository, expository documentary, it was about *prova*, how do you provide a platform where you can enable people to self represent, but it still also can become a film that can be shown internationally. So it's about holding spaces in a certain way with people and then people will go so much further than you could, if you were to make an expository film, right, imagination is so much stronger. So that was one collective for now, with fugitive images, it was a necessary beginning, because we needed to have a platform in order to raise funding for the works. But the people who were part of you did have images right from the beginning, also, we make very different works. And we have done many collaborations across architecture infiltration, into certain striders of architecture through activism, and poetry and filmmaking and writing. And we invite different people in at different moments as well. It's, you know, it's hard to to be able to facilitate, I would like to facilitate more, but it's hard timewise, because we also want to make my work. So what I'm trying to do is for example, so all my work. So before I go into the correcting, but all my work, when it makes the works I make with communities, all the funding is shared. So with the state what happened, because there was so many people involved in some people had passed away, some people moved away, couldn't find them. Because we're such a long period of time, the money goes back into a living archive, into a kind of community based archive that is growing with all the stories over time, and it'll be made public at some point soon. So we're just testing it, everybody's just uploading stuff over over some time already. And then in terms of your for life, everybody has a contract, and people already so we won two awards, which had money attached to it. And so people got an equal share, which I think is really important. And we often forget as filmmakers to do that, and I would encourage it. And also with me, it's not about that I have enough funding money because I have to work also to make money I don't come from money, I have no savings, right? So it's it's more about an ethics, I feel like you work with people, we have to respect them, especially when we work with people who come from from backgrounds where there's very little economic advantage. And that people really struggle and I feel like it's it's just not okay to just extract from communities in a way for the differently in different configurations, right? There are no rules by I feel like about people. And then in terms of curating. So I I, I've been mentoring quite a lot throughout the years, and then I try the, whenever I have an opportunity to put programs together or asked to create a screening program, I will make a mixture of experienced people and maybe less experienced people in order to also ask different questions from us around. For example, I've just been filming it in focus at the other fields Festival, which is a really small festival with 150 people only in order to have proper conversations and a lot of workshops, and I program five films for that festival. And they were all income in communication with each other. One was by Nadia Camilla, which she made a long time ago. And that was in in communication with her much more recent film that won a prize at the Amman International Film Festival of which he was a jury member. So they were like intergenerational communications around identity and identity across the political lines that are drawn, because we are often so much more than just one nationality in the world. And, and then, younger filmmakers or older filmmakers were just starting to make films, what was incorporated and that's what it's this kind of stuff more. So my curatorial staff is very much looking at films, often making expression as a conversation.

Am Johal 35:13

You know, perhaps I'm reading into it, I'm working on my own project related to friendship and community and one of the things I think about when I read about your work or see your work is this attempt to either form community or going into contexts where community is very ephemeral and shifting functions around the state functions, below the structures of domination and this attempt to try to capture it in a in a in a different way that's still moving, that's not fixed. And, and perhaps I'm just reading into it because my own work is kind of moving into that, but wondering how you think about friendship and community in the context of your film work and other cultural work, because it seems very present in your work.

Andrea Luka Zimmerman 35:58

I, for me, it's a kind of family making, because I don't have a family like a biological family. So for me, I think every work is part of trying to make a temporal community that might last longer. But it's about at that moment in time, we come together quite intensely to figure something out together, because I don't think we can figure stuff out by ourselves. And what I bring often to these projects, when I'm prompting them is I'm a filmmaker, and I bring these skills, but that doesn't mean that it's predetermined, what it will look like, but I will develop the cinematography and the I have a, I have a very particular sense about beauty and how to give beauty and how to do justice to lives, I feel. So I would show my work, and people can see it. And you know, people can also say, I don't want to work with you, for example, but like, so friendship. It's important, I think, in my work, that friendship doesn't have to be friendship. It can be collaborative, momentary friendship, that's based on making something together. But it doesn't have to be more than that. And often it will be more than that. But it takes away the pressure, it allows for, for difficult conversations to happen in a hopefully healthy way to when you're making a work with somebody. I mean, it's, it's, it might sound unformed, but like, because we, I just came out of this weekend where we did loads of workshops, and it was really talking about clumsiness. And sometimes I'm seeking, I'm seeking something, and I'm not quite sure how to get there. And I need time out, I need time to just think but be in a space. And that for me is when when people offer me a friendship, they give me the space people I work with, I feel it. And they will like they give me the time to figure that out. Or they figure it out for me by offering something else. And and that's usually that moment which the industrial filmmaking would say, Oh, she doesn't know what she's doing. Let's get a director, be a director be strong be this be. And so that's why we have all this kind of unfinished work. In my view, I see a lot of firms that are accomplished and whatever, but they're unfinished because they never went to this journey with the people. And why make that work? I feel like unless it's for money, why make that work? If your life is part of that, thinking through our lives are really precious and fragile. And yeah, so it's about seeking, seeking respect. And friendship, I guess friendship as is a gesture towards being a friend, which is different, I think so friendship as this. Wanting to, like a temporary community, almost like a temporary autonomous zone where things can happen, regardless and otherwise, and regardless of the, the structures of domination or oppression or whatever it's called, but without being denied the full expression of joy, even if there's no joy, if it's hard, but that you know that there has to be a refusal to be reduced. So that's the difference. I think, in my work to work with people who have sometimes go still through a lot, but it's not therapy. That's what's really important. I feel like

Am Johal 38:59

In your mode of making film, which artists or filmmakers have inspired your, your own work.

Andrea Luka Zimmerman 39:07

I just showed a film, which I really inspired my work, but there's also a lot of stuff wrong with it. And any changes Okay, can I just say it's probably pictures of the old world. I don't have anyone Have you seen it. But it's a film made with people at the time of radical shift of technology, and is asking the profound questions what is important in life and address, I mean, the way in which they use music is sometimes quite intense, comes from its time, but I think it's an incredibly incredible approach about old age in a different way. is about old age as as a celebration of having lived that long rather than I'm so sorry that you have gone so old. You know, I really loved it from so much and I've always been drawn to the kind of feistiness yeah of people. So that film is also if you can reduce and I think that dition Alex it was just starting to make films when you made that film. And it's clumsy, like I love clumsy or it's stumbling. It's it's unsure sometimes and I love That, when I see that in a film, where I can see the filmmaker is trying to be really open with an open attention. And it's imperfect in terms of the conventional way of seeing a film. I love that. And then, of course, I mean so many films, that the first film, which I fell in love with cinema was that it sounds such a cliché, because of all the adverts that happened 20 years ago, but it was Tarkovsky. It was Stoker, it was the film that blew my mind on a black and white television, I can't I and that level of working with nothing like with nothing, and yet it means everything is something I have, I strive to stone. And then, you know, belagavi, for example, loads of loads of very to deliver. I mean, like, oh, there's so many more October, I mean, there are so many Akira morozova was awesome. I think a lot of people who had to struggle to make films, I like their films, because you can see if they, if they they made from the car, like fuck off, I'm gonna just make make it how I want to make it if they

got, they didn't get enough support. And they had to find a way. It's those films, I tend to like a lot. If they had like a real vision, I think, yeah.

Am Johal 41:28

What, what are you working on now? Or do you have other projects sort of on the go.

Andrea Luka Zimmerman 41:32

So I just finished a three screen installation called shelter in place, which I made during our lockdown, but it's not really about lockdown, but it was during the lockdown. Everybody that worked, there was supposed to be no homeless people left out on the street. And there were, of course, so many because so many people chose not to go into the hotels, because there was so dismal. But also people with no recourse to public funds were forced to survive in a different way, or people who were undocumented. So I work with one person in our local park, who chose to stay out in the park for circumstances was found themselves homeless, and just to stay out. And the community around that person, during the whole time of the lockdown was incredible, the way of support by people who had literally nothing and not treating somebody who was going through this as a victim, but saying this person is not just need some space, and we're going to cook for them while they need that space. Most of the most beautiful thing, and yes, I've just finished that and also looking at and you wouldn't know you would have not known if you were not attuned to what it means to live out and distributed as a lot of people who live our industry to, you know, pass as opposed to people as old as the whole question also of of what does it mean to be housed and unhoused and the kind of whole politics around it then in literally taking agency away from people by offering them housing when it's not really housing. It's something that concerns me obviously deeply, because of all the stuff that's going on around gentrification and the right to have to live a life with dignity. That is encroached on more and more and also nature and is a public park and is one of the very, very few I think, I was shocked after I made this film and I showed it and there were some talks also by architectures and city planning people who said that the I think up to 70% of London's parks are privately owned, but we still think they're public. So they're very very few public parks in London that are truly public and that was one of them that's why the police come with you on verse another Park I go to which always was convinced was public and then I saw the police which look not even like police they don't even have to identify themselves can move you on and it's not a public park anymore so that was that was really important to me to to think through also with their person was a was a really deep collaboration on all aspects and they made the sounds from the sounds from the park and then made a composition which is beautiful because their sound maker as well as a performance artists and so it was a it was an amazing collaboration but it was like about the deep question is around like public space and public ownership and public libraries public everything that's been taken away while we still have it. I might as well want to make your memory of it

Am Johal 44:21

Is there anything you'd like to add?

Andrea Luka Zimmerman 44:25

Yeah, I am grateful to have done this with you. I'm making two new films. I felt like a test took too much making two new films but they will take me a while to make that's all I want to say when is called with wayfaring stranger and another one is called I'm not yet sure. I mean that's not the title of I don't know what's going to be called yet but it's going to be in Ramallah over three years. I'm making it with people and the other one is going to be made across the UK and Portugal. So let's see what will happen. And I'm looking forward to your work as well to see you over Yeah,

Am Johal 44:57

Yeah. Andrea, thank you so much for joining us. I of course I'm a huge fan of your work and really wonderful to, to speak with you and to listen how you think about your work, I think hopefully, I know that in our own school for contemporary artists and a lot of young filmmakers that are going to be really interested to hear from you. So thank you so much for taking the time to join us.

Paige Smith 45:21

Screening October 15th at 5pm on SFU's Vancouver campus, SFU's Vancity Office of Community Engagement and Reel Causes present *Here for Life*. *Here for Life* is a feature film marking the culmination of a long collaboration between filmmaker Andrea Luka Zimmerman and theatre-maker Adrian Jackson, a group of Londoners, and a dog.

The cast dance together, steal together, eat together; agree and disagree, celebrate their differences and share their talents. They cycle, they play, they ride a horse. The lines between one person's story and another's performance are blurred and the borders between reality and fiction are porous.

Eventually, they come together on a makeshift stage in a place between two train tracks. They spark a debate about the world we live in, who has stolen what from whom, and how things might be fixed.

Register for this free event at the link in the show notes. Masks will be mandatory and guests will need to provide proof of vaccination against COVID-19. We hope to see you there!

[music]

Below the Radar is a knowledge democracy podcast created by SFU's Vancity Office of Community Engagement. Thanks for listening to our conversation with Andrea Luka Zimmerman. Learn more about Andrea's work at the links in the show notes. There, you can also find a link to the full transcript of this conversation. Thanks again, and see you next time on Below the Radar.

[music fades]

October 5, 2021

Transcript auto-generated by Otter.ai and edited by the *Below the Radar* team.