Professoriate Platform Lecture by Andrea Luka Zimmerman

Introduced by Helen Brooks
Introduction to Andrea by Michiko Oki

Intuitive Cinema, Possible Film?

A Poetics for the Politics of Now[1]

Thank you all for coming, and to everyone who made this invitation to the professorial platform possible, including Lynne for all her behind the scenes work.

I am Professor of Possible Film, a title that I will explore in this presentation. For me to stand here today feels very special because nearly 30 years ago I was in the midst of my BA here at Central Saint Martins, and this month marks the 35th anniversary of my coming to London.

CLIP 1 Art Class

Already in my early teens I had wanted to be a filmmaker but then there was no one around who could advise me on how to do that, and so I became a hairdresser in Vidal Sassoon's Munich salon. This led me to come to London, transferring to the salon here. I would tell everyone, everywhere I went that I wanted to be a filmmaker and ask, did they know how to do it? Eventually someone at a night bus stop told me about an access course in filmmaking at Tower Hamlets College.

Because of this, and so much more, I feel a kinship with those who have had to hustle to survive; those who learned to hide what happened to them behind closed doors; those whose bodies were not welcomed by disabling structures, and those who, as kids, received no touch other than violence. I lean towards those who feel shame even after many years of trying to overcome it; those who feel sorrow and confusion at

[1] Thank you for the inspiration of *Poetics and Politics, a practice-led research symposium* held at the University of California Santa Cruz May 14-17, 2026

the foundation of their being; who, though they might not always be able to – but they always try – want to make a world that is liveable for all, including the more-than-human; and those who did not make it through, but who still are with us, the company of the dead.

My deepest gratitude goes to all those teachers and mentors who recognise something in someone who has been overlooked elsewhere, who nurture these seeds. Thank you, John D, for showing me how an essay works, even though I pretended at the interview I knew, and how there is never shame in not knowing.

Those who then taught me at Central Saint Martins - Mary Pat Leece, Tina Keane, Vera Neubauer, John Smith and Isaac Julien - encouraged us to question, to upturn, to always search beneath what appears to be the case, and eventually to become peers.

Later, because of the kinship of *this* place, I learned to practice what it means when we say our bodies are political, to create nests and shelters in which unusual shapes might feel they belong, to co-create community *otherwise*.

It showed me how to respect my own non-binary body, and those of my trans kin and all those bodies that diverge from the narrow definition of acceptability. As we know, these struggles continue…

I have huge respect for what people can and have achieved but am not reverential. No one is ever above you and no one is ever beneath you. Perhaps I lack reverence also because, as a student, some of the more ‘famous’ guest speakers were also my hairdressing clients, and hairdressers get told *everything*…!

We know and we don’t know how and why things come to be. Much more recently, in a public conversation with me on the ethics of my work, photographer and curator Tom Hunter described my practice as ‘Intuitive Cinema’. This term, which I immediately welcomed, has helped me clarify certain priorities about what, how and why I make films.

Art relies on intuition, but this needs to be placed in tension with the grounded reality of things, and made of use with and for others, so that its subjectivity does not tip into a rhetorical fixity. My Intuitive Cinema hopes that its 'poetics' heighten its 'politics', while the latter contextualises the former.

I explored this question, with many vivid contributions, including from colleagues present today, in my film *Art Class* during the nomination year for Film London's Jarman Award, which I subsequently won alongside Project Artworks, Michelle Williams Gamaker, Jenn Nkiru, Hannah Quinlain & Rosie Hastings, and Larrissa Sansour. We declared a collective allegiance to the idea of a shared prize in the first year of the Covid pandemic.

Who art is for and who makes it has changed profoundly over the last decades.

Art Class explores the perennial tension between the two key words in its title and favours wit over weaponizing, and reflection over rhetoric, but does not pull its punches when it comes to the real obstructions, or to the strategies necessary to overcome seemingly outmoded yet ever so present hindrances faced by working-class artists.

CLIP 2 Art Class

As of today, *Art Class* is freely available via my CSM profile and here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V5Wl8zkjOjA]

Art and Class are both tangible realities and something felt or experienced, resisting fixed definition. Similarly, cinema operates on the border between the seen and the suggested, the material and the metaphysical. While the camera can only film what its lens looks upon, the meaning it makes is inextricably bound up with what that seeing *implies*, and with context, history, expectation, desire and much more besides; in short, with what can't be perceived, held in the hands or 'shot'.

I often think of film language as a lexicon of conflict, and I am certainly not the only one to note this, as the technology developed alongside military usage. How then to work in this language, consciously, responsibly, and beyond its association with *shooting*, *target*, *cut*? The moving image, across platforms, is used so pervasively now, as a surveillant extension of power, by armies, nation states and corporations.

Such realisations led me to co-found the first of several filmmaking collectives around 2000. As Vision Machine, we hosted a free film school in London's east end, and developed a methodology of self-imagining and counter extractive filmmaking, using a hybrid form of staged scenes in actual environments. Vision Machine's methodology has been foundational to several feature documentaries made by its members, including The Globalisation Tapes, The Act of Killing, The Look of Silence, and my own Erase and Forget.

With that film I entered the deep entanglement of the relationship between Spectral and Spectacular Representations of political violence. The word 'secrete' has two senses that appear in peculiar tension with one another: to exude, and to make secret. It is this tension that informs the relationship between cinema and the spectral violence of actual 'theatres of operation', a phenomenon that has increasingly been shaping how we are to perceive reality.

CLIP 3-Trailer Erase and Forget

How can art- and film-making work in creative resistance when the telling, by power, of what happens has become twisted beyond all recognition - when words are inverted – when a genocide is described as its 'opposite – or drained of meaning entirely; when images are conjured out of AI air; when that same AI identifies kill or deportation targets, and when such actions are realised remotely through game console interfaces…

How to work when power pits people against each other instead of collectively against the structural conditions by which they are excluded…

Across my four year visiting residency from 2020 - 2023 in the Occupied West Bank, Golan Heights and Palestine / Israel, through which I made *here and not here*, an ongoing oppression moved towards its culmination…

When things are turned upside down, and those who protest against horrors are labelled terrorists, what can you hold on to so that you can still stand up, and not fall off the world? What things remain viable and true in the maelstrom? How do we stay *in relation* to these things, to others, to the more-than-human, to an olive tree?

CLIP4- here and not here

As someone who has emerged into a cultural profile from the societal margins and their all-too-ignored traumatic registers, as someone who lives and works with still marginalised and traumatised individuals and communities (and who remains one of them in many ways), I am often required to challenge mediated, ‘naturalised’ and even ‘asserted’ ways of looking at others.

To seek possible futures, employing possible film, there is a need to tell stories that refuse crude categorisation. In almost every realm we encounter binary positions. The pretence persists that we can all do well if we only try hard enough – but such an argument ignores the structural inequalities within which we live.

The writer John Berger, whose centenary is celebrated this 5th November, and with whom I was lucky enough to work on my first feature film, *Taskafa, Stories of the Street*, wrote:

CLIP5 Trailer Taskafa, Stories of the Street

I make films which attempt to conjure something that is already *there*, but which is often *unseen* owing to persistent cultural tropes, such as the ways in which my own, and others' pasts are frequently represented in the mainstream, for example, through the narrative arc of 'overcoming', like the now ever-present commercialised trauma plot – a trope that perpetuates a way of being visible based on erasure. Notions of 'giving voice to' others erases (lives and environments) and, crucially, masks this process, and hence tethers these lives to dominant, often extractive, methodologies.

So, my second feature film was made over seven years. *Estate, a Reverie* reveals and celebrates the lives of my friends, neighbours and fellow residents, people who are both overlooked and mis-presented by media and wider social attitudes. Interweaving intimate portraits with the residents' own historical re-enactments, landscape and architectural studies and dramatised scenes, *Estate, a Reverie* asks and embodies how we might resist being framed exclusively through class, gender, ability or disability, and even through geography…

CLIP 6 Estate, a Reverie

Filmmaking, to me, is shared and contested, troubled and wayward. I am drawn to lives and bodies that can show us what they carry; words are often not enough. And sometimes images too are not enough to reveal a feeling: some things cannot be shown.

Nomadic Gardens was a community project nestled between the train tracks off Brick Lane. Those using them, and various adjacent communities, built all the cabins, sheds and structures. There were allotment beds, a theatre, a bar and a forum assembly area. It was one of those places where truly everyone was welcome and where any difficulties had to be collectively resolved, which was not always easy. It was there where most of my and Adrian Jackson's Artangel-produced film *Here for Life* is set, a site which for many years resisted closure, until it was finally flattened in 2021 - the land was simply 'too valuable' for capital, which inevitably overlooked the worth already present.

Resistance, for me, is also about developing a language for tenderness and attachment beyond the social norms that limit love. One of the programmers at film festival CPHDOX summarised *Here for Life* as a film “against the dictatorship of normalcy”.

CLIP7 – Here for Life

In this way, possible film is intuitive cinema *in action*.

It is deeply collaborative, in how the thresholds between one way and another become a path through and beyond the limits of one’s own knowing (which itself is constituted by many influences already; by that which touches us, influenced us, held us dear or close, and by which I include the more than human).

Possible film works from, with and towards life; the past, present and future tense of fully lived experience.

Possible film celebrates and thrives on a kind of tension, on an unsettled, uncertain and constantly shifting boundary. It is an associative cinema, where the spaces *between* open up a possible vista towards another way of seeing, sensing and being; one that is truer to our lives but also to the priorities of these challenging times, and to the strengths of art itself at such a moment.

The kind of film I am drawn to, not only in the making, is one where psychic collisions and political wounds are present, at times even defining a way of presentation that defies re-presentation. These are moments, fragments, glimpses, *inside* the world of a film, and the world of its *making*, that seem inseparable to me.

Such forms are, of necessity, hybrid and layered, threading together towards a being 'of consequence', of ‘use’ in ways far beyond the purely functional. I can’t say what this next clip ‘does’ in the world, but it tells me – and others too, I feel – something about what the world can gift us…

CLIP8 – Estate: dog and cat watching a swan

Because I am most of the time my own cinematographer, I can centre tactility though the camera, and stay attuned to the presence of the other, in *proximity*.

I work with the ecological, or animals (horses, dogs, birds) in the same way as with human performers. What arises from these encounters, often after years of engagement, is not only socially embedded and rigorous, not only imaginatively and imagistically associative.

It is 'poetic' in the etymological sense (from the Greek, to make). It is a 'constructed' call to wider, deeper thinking, feeling and being. It centres process and becoming more than it does artefact and arrival.

I know that I am not alone in realising that my films change me. There is a change also in my relations to the people in the films.

Being as 'present' as possible is the hope – in all senses of the word, in the undeniable moment of the constantly receding 'now' (the only embracing location of the spatial and temporal, one that contains past confirmation and future proposal).

Intuitive Cinema is, for me, what is made when life is framed by life; that is to say, when the qualities of being alive – co-existent, flawed, digressive, contradictory, sensory, abject and sublime – are met, acknowledged and employed in the making of the work.

CLIP9 - Here for Life

I thank all the artists, writers and thinkers whose ideas have shaped me consciously or otherwise, people whose practices never stop seeking, as well as all the animals, insects and plants in my films because without them, none of anything would be possible.

I thank you, dear friends, co-conspirators, colleagues and students, for our overlapping, and sometimes even shared journey through life - you know who you are because I tell you often. I keep learning from you how

advocacy and worldmaking are deeply intertwined with tenderness; how to tread fiercely *and* lightly.

Thank you specifically to one of my long-standing collaborators, Irene Lusztig, and her colleagues at UCSC, for the invitation to their symposium earlier this year, the name of which I have amended as this lecture's subtitle. There truly is a poetics in the politics of their deeply committed feminist practice.

Thank you to those who wrote and continue to write references for me, including for this professorship, and those who administer and support such structures. It is an act of super-care.

A huge shout out to everyone in the Performance programme and those I am teaching with on our film MA and BA. You are the kindest, funniest, and most accomplished fellow travellers I could wish for.

I think of those who are not yet here, because of structural impossibilities or other challenges, and I will never forget how important every person that gives attention, offers consideration, or reaches out their hand, is.

It is a great privilege to even be able to be co-creative in the face of injustice and structures that benefit from violence on an increasingly unimaginable scale; while striving to make space (and being aware of how fragile that is) for those not yet able to participate, because the conditions are not yet adequate, or those actively excluded from it, sometimes even fatally.

Also, and always, to accommodate – both within oneself and without- what one does not know and may never know…

Universities, sites of learning like this one, were founded on the idea – which they embody – that learning and lineage are collective and collaborative, by definition. They are structures intended to enable a whole that is larger than the parts. However financialised the pressures upon them, this remains their pulsing imperative.

We know their worth because they are so readily destroyed as acts of war.

Possible Film has come out of my life's meeting with this place. It is not an ending but a beginning..

I will close now with a scene from my most recent feature, the Wapping Project-produced *Wayfaring Stranger.* Filmed in landscapes marked by centuries of ceaseless, often destructive, human interaction, *Wayfaring Stranger* asks what it might mean to embody a liveable life on one's own terms and without conflict with others and the environment.

The closing scene is performed by the poet Eileen Myles, alongside the late and much missed Ella. Both of them have taught and given me so much. They know what they know, and now I know a little of it too…

Clip10 - Wayfaring Stranger

Nadine Monem and Andrea Zimmerman, audience participation

CLIP 11 – Taskafa, Stories of the Street