

Dare to be free

Translating the Poetic Possibilities of Documentary Imagery to Narrative Cinema

This research stems from an experience of creative loss — a loss of artistic agency and presence. In my work as a cinematographer I move between fiction and documentary. But it is in the documentary space I have felt a true connection to the images I create. It is in this context that I have created cinematographic images with a seeing that feels intuitive, poetic, and alive — what I would call a loving look.

This project explores the possibility of translating that loving look into the realm of narrative cinema. What follows are my reflections on love, freedom, and how to battle fear with love.

” Look at all the responsibility that is involved in the act of seeing.

Look at the pleasures of digging deeper. Look at the rewards of putting yourself into very presence of a person or a thing or a landscape.

Let the glance out of the corner of your eye lead you to really look and recognize and see each other, the world and its radiance with more durability, with more sincerity, with more pleasure, and with more communion happening.”¹

I dare you to slow down.

I dare you to stop for a moment and feel the chair under you.

Trust that the chair and the ground will hold you.

Relax your shoulders and breathe in... out...

What are the farthest and closest sounds you can hear?

Did you get a tingling sensation at your fingertips? How does the surface feel?

Your vision sharpens.

Now.

What does it mean **to be free**?

To be free is to stand on one's own legs. To be aware of only your 'self'. Not the ego – the conceptualized "you"-avatar you project yourself upon. But the You that is flowing through all of us. The You reading and reflecting on this text.

The *You* that thinks.

Freedom is a choice.

Freedom is acknowledging your free will.

Freedom is inside of you. Rather than something of outer circumstances.

You can be free at any point.

Yes, you can be free even in the midst of the darkest hours on this planet.

As long as you say that you are free – you are free.

When you recognize yourself fully – you are free. When you say I for a You.

Because to film someone with care – to be fully present – is to say *You* through the camera.

Not *It*. It's not about idealizing or romanticizing the subject, but seeing them in their wholeness. And that requires something from me as the one behind the camera: to be whole myself. To be present. To say I.

Be whole – in order to see wholly.

"Hate is by nature blind. Only a part of a being can be hated. He who sees a whole being and is compelled to reject it is no longer in the kingdom of hate, but is in that of human restriction of the power to say You. /.../ He is therefore compelled to reject either the other or himself. At this barrier the entering on a relation recognizes its relativity, and only simultaneously with this will the barrier be raised."²

When I am fully present, when I see clearly, I am capable of recognizing the subject in front of me as You. But presence is not always easy to maintain — particularly in a production culture driven by speed, hierarchy, and inherited notions of authorship. As a female cinematographer, I have had to navigate an internalized image of what a “real” DoP looks like — white, male, fit, operating a camera like a weapon. I tried to become that image, and in the process, I lost connection to the images themselves. My gaze became fragmented and performative.

It's first when we interpret and act with sovereignty — when we choose our perspective — that we open ourselves to the poetic possibilities.

The framing is a choice.

The exposure is a choice.

The depth of field is a choice.

The position is a choice.

The movement is a choice.

The subject is a choice.

The duration is a choice.

Documentary or Narrative cinema..? It's a choice.

Let's open up for making choices.

Blur the lines.

Let's experiment and see what the world brings us.

Through a site-specific shoot, we opened up the possibility of fictionalizing a real encounter — re-creating it with the participation of the actors, and letting the sun take the lead. She guided the dramaturgy as the earth slowly turned.

How about love? Shoot a documentary about the feeling of a lost love? How does it look?

How does it feel?

Stay for a second or third sight and see what's there.

Seek possibilities — because I've experienced loss.

Love — because it's the only way to overcome fear.

Be free — because it's the only way of peace.

I dare you.

EXT. SERGELS TORG, STOCKHOLM - NIGHT

As the camera zooms out from Sergels Torg's black and white brick-pattern to overlook the skyline of Stockholm, we read:

*The victory will mean
see clearly from afar
see everything
up close
and everything shall have a new name.³*

I double dare you.

Christine Leuhusen
MA25 Cinematography
Stockholm University of The Arts
13/6 - 2025
Stockholm

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, likely belonging to Christine Leuhusen, is positioned to the right of the typed text.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Wim Wenders & Mary Zournazi, *Inventing peace a dialogue on perception*, (I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd. 2013) p. 156

² Wim Wenders & Mary Zournazi, *Inventing Peace: A Dialogue on Perception* (I.B. Tauris, 2013), p. 72
(Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (T&T Clark, 1937))

³ Stefan Jarl, *A Respectable Life*, 1979, TC 01:37:37
https://youtu.be/EvKRyyazTYU?si=nQ2rIKwDI0tCJ85_