

## The Haptic Mode of Vision and “Concrete Abstraction” (Abstraction by Contraction)

A Comment on Trond LUNDEMO's “The Colour of the Invisible ;  
Methodological Remarks on Haptic and Optic Visual Modes”

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How to overcome (or at least minimize) the dualism or schism between realism and formalism (or abstractionism), is one of the central issues of the film theory, and of the cinema itself.

Trond LUNDEMO's argument on the haptic mode of vision in movies opens up a new possibility to do so. What he calls the “haptic” mode of vision, especially after Alois Riegl and Gilles Deleuze, is seeing or watching something at close range, as if touching and probing it in the dark. It is neither figurative nor abstract in the sense that it is “a vision beyond the spatial coordinates of perspective” or “a visual mode beyond the bounds of figurative”, and still is related to real life, not to pure abstract forms as the aesthetics of modernist abstraction admired.

LUNDEMO's argument on the haptic visual mode reminds me of Henri Bergson's argument on abstraction by contraction<sup>1)</sup>, which is totally different from what is usually called abstraction. Abstraction in an ordinary sense discards from things what is not common among them. Bergson takes up as an example how to bring about the general idea of “colour”. The usual way is discarding from all the colours what they don't have in common. This is abstraction by discarding, and is usually called just “abstraction”. However, according to Bergson, there is one

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1) Cf. Henri Bergson, *La pensée et le mouvant*, Librairie Félix Alcan, 1934, 12<sup>e</sup> éd., P. U. F., 1941, pp. 259-260 (*Œuvre. Éd. du centenaire*, textes annotés par André Robinet, P. U. F., 1959, pp. 1455-1456.)

more way to extract or reach the general idea of "colour", that is letting all the colours go through a prism. What we obtain is white light, which is the general idea of "colour" and contains all the colours in it. This is the other mode of abstraction, that is abstraction by contraction, which I'd like to call "concrete abstraction", though this terminology seems an oxymoron and may be a little misleading. Through the argument on this other mode of abstraction, Bergson shows us a possibility of overcoming the dualism between idealism and materialism, and in case of movies between realism and formalism.

The haptic mode of vision is a case of this other mode of abstraction, because it goes beyond the bounds of the figurative to form images which "appear to be abstract" (and are in fact "concretely abstract", I should say). And I think what LUNDEMO explains about the black spaces in transformation films by Georges Méliès etc, is also true of some of the close-ups with white backgrounds in classical Hollywood movies etc. Such close-ups are in many cases incorporated into a continuous space by continuity editing, but in some cases are cut off the spatial coordinates of perspective, and made into abstract forms, though they are still concrete. And this is in this sense that Gilles Deleuze speaks of "lyric abstraction" in Josef von Sternberg's close-ups<sup>2)</sup>.

LUNDEMO's argument about the relation between white light and the haptic visual mode also shows that this visual mode is exactly a case of what I call "concrete abstraction". White light is not the negation of vision or colours, but contraction of all the colours and all the forms. LUNDEMO clarified this persuasively, taking up *Nine Lives* and SUGIMOTO Hiroshi's photographs as examples.

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2) Cf. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinéma 1. L'image-mouvement*, Ed. Minuit, 1983, pp. 132-135.