---

**Article:**
Dobson, J.L. (2016) Special Affects – Reconfiguring Melodrama in De Rouille et d'os (Rust and Bone, Audiard 2012). Studies in French Cinema, 16 (3). pp. 215-228. ISSN 1758-9517

https://doi.org/10.1080/14715880.2016.1231450

---

Dobson, Forthcoming Studies in French Cinema November 2016

**Special Affects – Reconfiguring Melodrama in De Rouille et d'os (Rust and Bone, Audiard 2012)**

The commercial and critical success of Audiard's *De Rouille et d'os* (Rust and Bone, 2012) can be largely attributed, along with strong performances from Marion Cotillard and Matthias Schoenaerts, to its skillful weaving of a largely realist mise en scène with prevailing narrative and thematic elements of the melodrama. Over the last decade, film studies (and cultural studies more broadly) have witnessed a resurgence of critical engagement with the evident power and extensive presence of melodrama as a modality or expressive mode which is capable of articulating more than repressed, individualized suffering. I will explore the exploitation and extension of the melodramatic mode in Rust and Bone through nodes of narrative and film language which also accommodate social drama before focusing on what I will argue is the film's shifting of melodramatic focus from one of embodied suffering as repressed trauma to a reconfiguring of body and agency in the affective impact of gesture. Whilst public and critical response to Rust and Bone have often started from its startling use of special effects, I want to suggest that there is a comparative complementarity between these effects and the film's production of special affects.

The projection of the melodrama as a rigid generic template has long ceased to be a salient approach to this or to other genres. Altman's seminal reworking of genre theory, which includes the assertion of the inherent hybridity, evolution and ideological functions at stake in the multiple investments in genre production and reception (Altman 1999), has enabled critical approaches in which genre can be flexible and fluid, indeed affirmed as 'whatever we collectively think it is' (Moine 2002: 172). The discursive oppositions between auteur and genre-led production that have been prevalent across both French film heritage and contemporary production, and which serve, in both contexts, to support classical discourses of auteurism, have always been reductive, partial and sited predominantly within the discourses of film criticism, rather than in those of film production and popular reception. Such oppositions are, in a contemporary context, increasingly subject to more explicit

confluences and reconciliations (Dobson 2012). Indeed, Moine provides a striking analysis of such re-mappings within the nationally-dominant generic field of French comedy in her identification of the broader shift enacted on the cultural hierarchy of genre and auteur film through the identification of 'auteur comedy' (comédie *d'auteur*) (a form which, for her, still remains positioned in strategic relation to a Hollywood model, described as 'action comedy' (*comédie d'action*)) (Moine 2005: 224).

The shifting presence of generic modalities is strikingly evident and further reconfigured in relation to Audiard's oeuvre as his serial employment of the explicit mapping and mixing of generic codes, establishes genre hybridity as a main feature of his auteur identity itself (see Dobson 2008). These now familiar mash-ups - heritage and thriller in A Self-Made Hero (Un Héros très discret (1996)), heist and romance in Read my Lips (Sur mes lèvres (2001)), indie polar and bildungsroman in The Beat my heart skipped (De B*attre mon coeur s'est* arrêté (2005)) simultaneously exploit genre conventions and, through the knowing interweaving of their projected meanings, stretch their acknowledged respective parameters to the very limits of narrative feasibility and spectatorial engagement. Audiard's films are thus constructed on the foundations of a formal parallel to the dominant narrative dynamics of the odd couples that populate his narratives, as seemingly incompatible genres co-exist and create explicit vectors of plural genericity within his films. These creative tensions generate, in themselves, shifting rhythms of narrative suspense (Read my Lips, The Beat my heart skipped), complex characterization (The Beat my heart skipped, A Prophet (2009)) and frameworks of spectatorial identification and distanciation (Regarde les hommes tomber (See how they fall (1993)), A Prophet). Audiard's films thus contain hybridized narratives in which layered frameworks of generic conventions and expectations coincide at central narrative and visual nodes. A clear example can be identified in The Beat my heart skipped in which the repeated motif of close ups of the central protagonist's hands signal both the bildungsroman mode (potential self-transformation through music as self-expression) and the gangster thriller (visceral and bloodied markers of violence). In interviews, Audiard has described the origins of Rust and Bone as located in generic specificity – his desire to make a 'trashy melodrama' (un mélo trash) (Audiard 2014) - as a contrastive response to the homo-social milieu and tense, confined spaces of his previous film A

Prophet. His assertive espousal of a form of popular culture (heightened by the emphatic 'trashy') perceived as falling outside of the indexes of cultural capital associated with his position as one of the key figures of contemporary French auteur cinema, is tempered by the subsequent careful mixing of the melodramatic mode with one that represents a higher cultural capital in contemporary film – that of social realism.

The complex interactions between melodrama and film criticism are reflected in the marked surge of critical engagement with melodrama in recent years, which support the now well-established rehabilitation of a genre previously aligned with an explicit (and therefore vulgar) narrative manipulation, aesthetic conservatism and reductive constructions of 'feminine' spectatorship and sensibility. The convergence of recent critical rehabilitations includes a feminist reappraisal of the association of the central mechanisms of melodrama with devalued and reductive constructions of femininity and gender (see Byars 1991, Kaplan 1983), the 'affective turn' which has foregrounded attention to the body's capacity to affect and be affected by the impact of 'forces other than conscious knowing' (Gregg and Seigworth 2010, 2), and the presence of increasing and diverse melodramatic forms across transnational auteur productions (including Almodovar, Haynes, Kaurismäki and Ozon). A renewed embrace of melodrama foregrounded a move away from set taxonomies of melodrama to think with and through it as a modality or expressive code, which provides access to networks of meaning (Gledhill and Williams 2000). Williams asserts further that, rather than treating melodrama as a separate and culturally undervalued genre, melodramatic modalities should be recognized retrospectively as persistent and prevalent across the broad vernacular of classical (North American) film narratives. Such narratives are identified as eliciting sympathy for a vulnerable or victimized hero and feature narrative denouements marked by a recognition of that hero's moral worth via either a 'paroxysm of pathos' (identified with family melodrama) or through action-centered variants of the same (Western and action genres) (Williams, 1998, 58).

Within an auteurist framework, Rust and Bone (a very loose adaptation of two short

stories by Canadian writer, Craig Davidson[1]) displays a set of Audiardian tropes and it is striking that several of these correspond closely to melodramatic markers. These features include central protagonists in liminal settings and marginalised situations, corporeal suffering twinned with limited verbal and emotional articulacy and a redemptive dénouement founded on self-transformation with and through the other (see Dobson 2008). Homeless, jobless and penniless, ex-boxer Ali and his 5 year-old son are presented from the first sequences as marginalised figures engaged in unarticulated struggle with social and economic forces beyond their control (unemployment, family breakdown, homelessness). The seeking of economic and physical shelter at Ali's sister's house tests familial ties, revealing difficult and unresolved family dynamics and Ali's emotional inarticulacy is complemented by a visual focus on his explosive physicality. Working as a bouncer at a nightclub, Ali helps out glamorous whale trainer Stephanie when she is involved in a fight, yet this initial encounter only to exposes the incompatibility of their different worlds. A central melodramatic event occurs soon after this meeting as, in a terrible accident at Marine Land, she is crushed by a whale and loses both her legs. Physically and psychologically traumatised by her injuries and socially isolated, she calls Ali whose lack of sensationalised or sentimental pity supports her recovery. His pragmatic role in her rehabilitation soon includes sex 'to check if it works' (pour voir si ça *fonctionne)'* and a faltering relationship develops as Stéphanie's struggle to regain mobility and agency is matched by Ali's participation in brutal bare-knuckle fights for cash. Stephanie accompanies him to fights and takes over as his manager. Ali's naïve involvement in workplace surveillance and his lack of class solidarity leads to further family conflict as his sister loses her job. Ali relocates alone to re-train as a boxer. During a visit, his son becomes trapped under ice in a frozen lake and almost dies, freed only by his father's desperate punching through the ice. Ali's rescue of Sam from under the ice and its conversion to emotional rescue in the triggering of his abrupt declaration of love to Stéphanie corresponds to the melodramatic timings of key narrative events as 'too late' or 'in the nick of time' (Williams 1998, 64). The melodramatic close encounter with loss forces a breach in Ali's emotional articulacy and a further emotional rescue is triggered as he declares his love for Stéphanie. The

[1] Craig Davidson—"Rust and Bone" and "Rocket Ride" However in Davidson's texts the whale trainer and the boxer are both men, and they never meet.

final sequence shows Ali, Stéphanie and Sam reunited and celebrating Ali's victory in a commercially legitimised boxing match. Stephanie and Ali face parallel narratives of traumatic loss and exclusion which it is suggested, are countered at the film's redemptive closure by their implied reconciliation with the new identities that each provides for the other. The emphatic use of music to reinforce moments of emotional intensity - including a B-52s accompaniment to Stéphanie's wheelchair dance, Katy Perry's huge pop hit 'Firework' (twice) and Bon Iver's melancholy accompaniment to the final scenes - are present as elements of melodramatic mise en scène.

These numerous features of melodrama present in the film narrative are imposed emphatically on the spectator and, if enumerated in isolation from other generic vectors, might be seen to deliver what the Cahiers du cinéma review of Rust and Bone framed negatively as 'a total manipulation' ('une manipulation totale'). Yet it is clear in Audiard's film that the presence of melodramatic elements or modality is by no means the whole story. The presence of the melodramatic mode is countered and complicated by its generic interweaving with that of social drama to create layered readings of the narrative and a dialogic, hybrid form, which exploits the conventions and expectations of melodrama whilst redirecting its impact. The commercial and critical success of Rust and Bone is, I would argue, less attributable to the melodramatic mode than to the correlations created by its interaction with realist social drama.

One of the core functions of Audiard's genre-splicing is to imbue the narrative with unpredictability and this dilutes a central dynamic of classic melodrama - that of the pathos created by the audience's privileged knowledge of a characters' fate or condition and this is only present in two scenes. Whilst the dreamlike underwater sequence of the Marine Land accident immerses us in dread and confusion it provides few anticipatory clues as to the loss of Stephanie's legs. Thus following silent hospital scene delivers a double trauma as the long shot of her radically changed body profile imposes a visual distance, which is simultaneously countered by our privileged spectatorial knowledge of the amputation of her legs (we see and know before she does). The classic melodramatic impact continues as she wakes alone to discover the shock of this loss and, as she weeps in her friend's arms, we are moved to tears also. This melodramatic charge - transmitted once more through an independently mobile

camera and point of view proxy - is repeated towards the end of the film when a long shot reveals Sam falling through the ice in the middle distance as an unsuspecting Ali dominates the foreground of the shot.

In analysis of the shifting modes of political engagement in contemporary French film, Martin O'Shaughnessy, identifies both the inherent dangers and the clear potential of melodramatic devices. He argues that, in the light of the apparent redundancy of political meta-narratives and the absence of collective discourses capable of replacing them, such devices may prove themselves capable of articulating an embodied social suffering (O'Shaughnessy 2007, 180). O'Shaughnessy suggests further that, in the face of the challenge posed to representation itself of globalized capitalism and its consequences, the corporeal can function as 'another symptom which speaks (of) the disarray and the withdrawal of the political'[2] (O'Shaughnessy 2005, 95). He tempers, however, this suggestion with the concern that 'ideological risks' to political engagement remain present in melodrama's conventional focus on the desires and fate of the individual rather than wider constructions of community (O'Shaughnessy 2007, 3). Deleuze reminds us of the flexible modalities of realism, that it can accommodate '… the fantastic, the extraordinary, the heroic and above all the melodrama' (Deleuze, 2005 124) and it is through the embrace of the dual modalities of Rust and Bone that the danger O'Shaughnessy identifies is overcome.

R*ust and Bone's* realist setting and narrative structure impose a series of exclusions and threats to agency, accommodates narrative and filmic anchors, which also support the melodramatic mode. Any assumption that these elements provide simply the contrasting narrative and aesthetic framework against which melodrama can be set in relief remains reductive. The coherent markers of contemporary realist social drama are present across setting (economic crisis, a paradoxically unglamorous Antibes), narrative (a focus on social exclusion, economic instability and family breakdown), sub-plot (work as commercial exploitation and personal alienation) and casting (Sam (Armand Verdure) recalls the socially marginalized boys of the Dardennes' oeuvre). The narrative is framed by initial and final sequences, which impose a realist mise en scene. At the start of the film we are introduced to Ali and Sam as they hitch,

[2] 'un autre symptôme "parlant" du désarroi et du retrait du politique'

scavenge through rubbish for food and steal. The handheld camera, acid green filter and stark initial dialogue (Sam's repetition of 'I'm hungry') underlines their socio-economic vulnerability. Their arrival in Antibes offers little economic refuge as the discourse of ever-threatening destitution continues – they sleep in a garage and rely on Ali's sister for food and offers of work. The periodic but striking foregrounding of the son's point of view in early scenes - from inside a dog's kennel (occupied through play, not exclusion) and from underneath a table - provide a striking representation of Brooks' description of the melodramatic view emerging in metaphors and perspectives of beneath or behind (Brooks 1976, 43) yet also underlines his social and economic precarity. The episodic assertion of Sam's point of view can be seen to further signal what Williams describes as the central melodramatic fantasy of asserting the origins of the self through the constructed possession of ideal parents (Williams 1991, 13), yet also reminds us of his unstable background and the absence of his mother. Ali undertakes the bareknuckle fights as an outlet for his explosive physicality which in melodrama would serve solely as symptom of is his emotional inarticulacy, but here it functions in realist mode to also supplement his low-paid work in security and shore up his sense of agency in a social situation in which he is entirely dependent on others. The film does not end with the melodramatic moment as dénouement (the rescue and recovery of Ali's son), nor with an affirmation of the triumph of the romantic couple against all odds, but rather foregrounds a social and economic rehabilitation that brings together the reframing of Ali's physical excess through victory in a commercially legitimized boxing contest, an attention to Sam's presence as dependent and the explicit framing, in long shot, of Ali, Stephanie and Sam as stabilized social unit. Rust and Bone thus employs the tendency of melodramatic mode to undercut the primacy of the biological family '…in favour of another family, one which the characters chose for themselves, through a kind of cooption or mutual recognition'[3] (Zamour 2016, 27-8) and indeed this is evident throughout Audiard's work (providing the unanticipated conclusion of A Prophet and the explicit narrative drive of his most recent film, Dheepan (2015)). The final sequence positions us on the other side of the large windows, with no access to their dialogue nor facial expressions through close-up, our gaze focuses on their shared

[3] 'la famille biologique…est souvent disqualifiée par le mélodrame, au profit d'une autre famille, celle que les personnages se choisissent, par l'effet d'une forme de cooptation, voire de reconnaissance mutuelle'

gestures and their collective shape as a new unit in the shared frame of public space. This shift is overwritten by the assertive soundtrack accompaniment of Bon Iver's 'The Wolves', enforcing the pathos with its insistent lyrical refrain of averted loss.

Rust and Bone does not present melodramatic characterization to 'embody primary psychic roles organized in Manichaean conflicts between good and evil' (Williams, 1998, 64) but features equally flawed characters struggling to assert identity and agency within contexts of economic exclusion and social isolation. One of the nodes around which the melodramatic and realist modes intersect is that of Ali's family relationships. The tense scenes with his son and sister (all critical of his meagre parenting skills, his violence and social disengagement) are framed within socio-economic contexts. When Ali's work installing workplace surveillance results in her being fired this is framed not through any ideologically-informed intention to support the workings of late capitalism nor to undermine his sister, but as evidence of his lack of sociopolitical engagement and alienation from his own work (mirroring that of the supermarket staff who are fired as a result). Ali's socio-economic situation leaves little affective capacity to care for his son and Stephanie struggles to sustain her projection of a highly sexualized, embodied identity (she asserts her enjoyment of being the object of such attention)[4] in the face of reductive perception of her (embodied) identity as defined by disability alone and therefore undesired and undesiring. These marginalisations, twinned with their explicit physical suffering, ensures that the figure of the victim / hero of melodrama is distributed across central protagonists, seen to signal a wider socio-economic context and thus not inscribed upon a singular mute body but pointing beyond this to a social body. It is interesting that despite Audiard's description of Rust and Bone's affiliation with a 'trashy melodrama he and co-scriptwriter Thomas Bidegain repeatedly refer to the influence of Freaks (Browning, 1932) in relation to the challenges of combining naturalism and expressionism, and their identification of the emergence of such fairground films (films de foire) as linked to the context of economic and social crisis of the 1930s (Audiard 2012).

In addition to the mixing of melodramatic and realist modes, Rust and Bone

[4] 'I enjoy being looked at' (J'aime bien qu'on me regarde)

intervenes further into a reconfiguring of the role of the body in melodrama from site of inscription of unspoken suffering and loss to a site of resistance rather than repressed emotional trauma. Classical melodrama is associated with a positing of the female body as site of excess and suffering – presenting repressed trauma and / or desire as inscribed on the body in a move that echoes Freudian discourses of a gendered hysteria as corporeal spectacle (see Bernheimer and Kahane, 1990). Rust and Bone inscribes traumatic loss on the female body, yet this move, which itself opens up a doubly charged eroticization of the disabled and of Cotillard's star body, is not presented as the sole, or even central, site of bodily suffering in the film. Whilst the radical and hyper-visible loss of Stephanie's legs provides a hypnotic visual focus for spectators, the narrative drive foregrounds her regaining of agency and mobility over loss as also located in the corporeal. Rust and Bone offers counterpoints which prevent an uneasy fixation on the female disabled body as site of both loss and as fetishized object of the spectatorial gaze, the comparative force of the two sex scenes foregrounds Stephanie's agency, increased confidence and desire. Indeed, whilst Audiard's initial vision of Stephanie, suggesting 'a mermaid who has lost her tail' (dvd bonus), evokes Andersen's classic fairytale (and its popular reinventions),[5] the narrative focus presents Stéphanie's embodied response as capacity to adapt rather than presenting tropes of romantic suffering located in a transcendence of the body.

The hypervisible loss of Stephanie's legs is echoed in the comparatively minor losses that Ali suffers during his fights – magnified as they are by the use of slow-motion and close-ups of damaged hands (a key trope which supplants the facial close-up in all of Audiard's films) and the striking, extreme close-up of the spinning bloodied tooth.[6] Ali's body – a body which is physically whole but repeatedly damaged – serves as a more consonant site of suffering – yet its function as mode of self expression is not associated primarily with repressed or embodied suffering, but with an exuberant and visceral energy that serves as a primary articulation of his agency. A further recontextualisation of Stephanie's corporeal suffering is effected through Audiard's beloved cross-cutting connections or *'raccords'* – here the narrative and visual cross-referencing of the differently damaged bodies of the central protagonists

[5] In 'The Little Mermaid' (Andersen 1937) the mermaid sacrifices her tail for painful human form

[6] These hypervisible inscriptions of suffering on the body remain in contrast to Sam's near-fatal incident in which there are no visual markers of harm on the body but rather a strangely bloodless body, threatened not with bloody fragmentation but with a frozen wholeness.

and their significance not as melodramatic fetishes but as part of a broader struggle for self-determination in contexts which threaten to strip them of agency. Thus any narrative focus on realist, psychological cause and effect, (including the more complex realities of amputee rehabilitation) are eschewed for a focus on parallel and connected enterprise - the struggle for the retrieval of agency by 'two life-cripples' (Kaganski 2012).[7] The melodramatic trope of the body as silent site of inscribed suffering is therefore acknowledged but diverted to accommodate the potential – realised by all Audiard's central protagonists - of resistance and capacity for change in the face of the threat of social and narrative (genre-enforced) exclusion. A key example of such a connection or 'raccord' can be seen in a sequence in which a shot-counter-shot presents not a conversation but a communication between bodies as we switch between a close-up of Ali's face as he is being beaten in a fight, to close-up of Stéphanie's prosthetic legs and back to Ali's face as he overcomes his opponent. The 'raccord' allows the bodies to speak, and to speak to each other, not as symptoms of repressed trauma but as signals and signifiers of a transfer of agency.

The significance of this 'raccord' can be extended further to argue for a reframing of the representational function of the corporeal in melodrama a consideration of the affective impact of the film – asserted both between characters within the narrative (as seen above) and to the spectator. Linda Williams' work on classical melodrama as a filmic 'body genre' (the others being horror and pornography) identifies the uncontrollable spasms of the physical in melodrama with weeping and sobbing – as the audience is encouraged via generic convention to mimic or exceed the emotional responses of the central characters (Williams 1991). Audiard's film is surprisingly free of such spasms and engages us rather in a shared affective response increasingly centred on empowerment and agency. Although Rust and bone frequently alternates sequences of interpersonal and family conflict or reconciliation with the action-led fights, it does not assert a 'dialectic of pathos and action' (ibid, 64) as, through the use of close-up and point of view shot, pathos is embedded within, and created through, the action sequences, such as Ali's fights. Social exclusion is presented as an embodied experience as our first encounter with Ali and Sam's physical discomfort (hunger and exhaustion) are presented alongside the heightened sound and materiality

[7] *'deux estropiés de la vie'*

of their prodding, unwrapping and tasting of discarded food.

The 'affective turn' in cultural studies provides a discourse through which to recalibrate the role of the body in Audiard's reworking of the melodramatic's repressed emotion. Massumi (following Deleuze and Guattari) describes affect as primary, non-conscious, non-linguistic, unqualified and intensive (Massumi 2002, 11). Affect is seen as distinct from emotion in that it includes the more open vectors of the body's capacity to affect and be affected by other bodies. The pioneering work of Viviane Sobchack (see Address of the Eye (1992)) and Laura U Marks (see The Skin of the film (2000)) foregrounded affect by renewing phenomenological accounts of cinema to shift critical attention from the analysis of visual representation to that of a haptic visuality and the sensations of the viewing experience. A shifted focus thus foregrounds the sensual and material aspects of the body (the body represented on screen, projected affects and those experienced by an embodied spectator) in relation to film. Such approaches have been largely associated with a cinema of the body or extreme cinemas but such constructions of meaning can be connected with what Williams describes as the 'sensational effect' in melodrama: '…felt as sensation and not simply registered as raciocination in the cause-effect logic of narrative – because it shifts to a different register of signification, often bypassing language altogether. Music, gesture, pantomime, and most forms of sustained physical action performed without dialogue, are the most familiar elements of these sensational effects' (Williams 1998, 52). I want to suggest that Williams' identification of 'sensational effects' are reconfigured as affect in Rust and Bone.

Rust and Bone brings together its key vectors –the 'sensational effect' of melodrama, the representational functionality of social drama and the affective power of film through the node of gesture.[8] Gesture, as suggested in some of the film's publicity posters, which foreground a set of isolated gestures, is thus central in the reframing of the body and embodied experience not as symptom or performance of suffering but as marker of embodied agency and communication (fig. 1). The film is permeated by an insistence on the silhouettes, shadows and close-ups of hands that communicate not

[8] The use of a code word 'opé' (for operational) that they use to signal availability for sex in text messages could also be considered as existing between verbal and gestural communication.

only in the place of words but speak much louder than words.[9] These performative sequences disrupt the narrative flow of the film to provide instances in which 'pure kinetic and gestural situations […] free the 'the body from the tyranny and the rigidity of narrative requirements' (Del Rio 2012, 14-15). The sequences in which gesture plays a central role in Rust and Bone do not demonstrate an embodied recognition of the inadequacy of representation and the limits of language to signal a melodramatic 'muteness' (Brooks 1976, 23), nor do their mute visual excesses signal a victimized subjectivity (Elsaesser 1987, 52). They rather serve as embodied counterpoint – the body serving as site of resistance and articulation of agency of the character.


Fig 1 Cinema poster for UK release of Rust and Bone (StudioCanal +)

Such sequences are central to an understanding of Stéphanie's shifting response to the radical changes in her embodied subjectivity after the accident as they suspend the linear narrative development to create connections between her past and present

[9] A focus on hands is a recurrent trope in Audiard's work its inscription of narrative suspense in The Beat my heart skipped and the relationship between seeing and knowing at the heart of the existentialist heist narrative in Read my Lips.

selves that she articulates through gesture. Stephanie's response to her therapeutic immersion in sea and sunlight (the shots of her face soaking up sunlight recall the therapeutic force of light to counter loss in Kieslowski's Blue)[10] triggers a euphoric wheelchair dance to the B52s 'Love Shack' in which she regains some sense of mobility and agency. The different modes are brought together most explicitly in two sequences that reconfigure the melodramatic function of the body and are simultaneously affective and performative. After sex with Ali and confirmation of her continued status as sexual subject, Stephanie goes out onto her small roof terrace in her wheelchair and performs the gestural routine that she used to direct and control the whales at Marine Land. The film then cuts to her return to Marine Land and the encounter between her and a whale through the glass wall of the aquarium.

Audiard employs the construction of complex sound mixes to create ambiguity as to the narrative function of this sequence. It begins in realist mode as the faint, tinny sound of Katy Perry's 'Fireworks' seems to enter the roof terrace as diegetic sound from a car radio or café terrace. However, as it builds to dominate the sound mix it occupies a powerfully ambiguous position as both subjective sound (signaling Stéphanie's subjectivity) and emphatic soundtrack imposed with the core melodramatic intention of manipulating the spectator's emotional response. Contrasting heavily with Audiard's usual eclectic choice of music (pushed to its limits with the incongruous inclusion of John Cooper Clarke's 'Chickentown'(1980) on Ali's playlist),[11] the use of Perry's international pop hit with its lyrics of banalised empowerment, would stretch our acceptance of melodramatic manipulation to its limits if it were not for additional motivated status within the realist narrative as simply the music which accompanies the routine at Marine Land (Brown 2012). Stéphanie's emphatic performance of the Marine Land gestural routine also constructs complex intersections of meaning. The music and gestures are clear reminders of the commercial location and bodily site of her traumatic loss yet exceed this to signify an embodied reconnection with both pre-amputation identity and embodied future. The

[10] There are indeed several evocations of Three Colours Blue (Kieslowski, 1993) in Rust and Bone, the scene of traumatic waking in hospital, therapeutic immersion in water and the use of sun flares on her face. Sam's accident also recalls the narrative and visual elements of the traumatic loss of a son in Dekalog 1 (Kieslowski, 1988).

[11] An equally incongruous use of the same song can be witnessed in Season 6, episode 'Stage 5' of international television hit series The Sopranos.

shift from static to independently mobile camera, which frames Stéphanie's hands and arms in mid-shot and in close-up profile against the sky, reinforces the sense of energy and mobility whilst also evoking the commercially, choreographed performance suggested by the sound mix.

The affective force generated by music and gesture in this performance may seem to be diluted as we switch to a long shot which frames her slow and solitary negotiation of the steps at Marine Land – yet it counters the melodramatic return to the site of suffering with an image of embodied resilience. The encounter of Stéphanie with the whale is visually overwhelming as the creature looms out of the blue and dwarves her fragile figure standing, her prosthetic legs highly visible, before the glass. She then repeats the same gestures, in striking silence, asserting them again, not as symptoms of a mute suffering, but as potent means of communication – both realist and affective with the whale. As Stéphanie signals to the whale and we witness responses in its movement and air-blowing, the affective communication, rendered more potent by its elastic meaning (regret, reunion, farewell) and a lack of access to her facial expression. Whilst melodramatic muteness might be suggested by the abrupt use of silence after the Perry song, this is underscored by the affective impact of the gestures in this setting – both in the affective transfer suggested in the careful communication between Stéphanie and the whale and that transferred between sequence and spectator. Indeed the affective transfer enabled rather than obstructed, through the large glass screen of the aquarium's viewing panel can be read as a mise en abyme of cinema itself with its directive intent and serial spectatorial frameworks intact. Complex renderings of performance and spectatorship throughout Rust and Bone are central to the negotiation of containing and liberating vectors of embodied identity. Stephanie's performance and the gestures associated with it can be read as practiced and contained within the parameters of the commercial exploitation of the whales at the heart of the Marine Land show,[12] yet also function as meaningful affective communication beyond this dynamic. Performance in thus foregrounded as a creative not mimetic arena in and through which affect can be mobilized, ensuring a liberation from narrative and verbalized content, that enable a becoming of identity, the reinvention of the self through creative agency central to Audiard's oeuvre and auteur

[12] A contemporary filmic and ethical context for this is provided by the influential documentary Blackfish (Cowperthwaite, 2013).

identity (see Dobson 2008).

Re-reading the gesture as embodied resistance not symptom corresponds with a Deleuzian framework which sees affect as signaling neither symptom nor state, but a capacity or potential power of the body for change (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 256-8). Thus if melodrama can be seen as a mode and apparatus that shapes suffering and redistributes its visibility (Zarzoza 2013, 28), the employment of the gesture as embodied response to suffering within its codes enables the power of affect to be felt as resistance for characters and audience alike.

This article was triggered in part by the extent to which the critical response to Rust and Bone focused on its startling special effects – the green stockings, prosthetics and digital reworkings, which enable the visual amputation of Stéphanie's legs below the knee. Critical attention is in this case of course underpinned by a voyeuristic fascination that both reveals and exceeds the normalized fetishization of an 'intact' female body through the potently altered body of Stéphanie and the star body of Marion Cotillard. Cédric Fayolle, who worked on Rust and Bone, links this phenomenon to the projection of auteurist identity and construction of creative control, stating that 'Auteur directors, unlike those who work with traditional special effects, do not accept the technical limitations. They want their freedom and therefore require effects which do not call attention to themselves either on screen or during filming'[13] (Strauss, 2013). Such technical intervention that, rather than creating an attention-seeking spectacle, seeks and serves to provide an undetectable visual intervention has been described as a new kind of special effect that conjures 'the new never-seen'[14] (ibid). Alongside discussion of the digital cloning of limousines in the final sequence of Carax's Holy Motors and the digitally inserted view of Paris from the apartment window at the start of Haneke's Amour (both films released in 2012), Strauss references Rust and Bone, asserting that '[W]hen Marion Cotillard appears as

[13] « Les réalisateurs du cinéma d'auteur n'acceptent pas les contraintes techniques comme ceux qui tournent des films à effets spéciaux traditionnels. Ils veulent leur liberté, et donc des effets qui ne se font remarquer ni à l'image, ni pendant le tournage »

[14] *'le nou*veau jamais-*vu'*

an amputee […] the special effect almost disappears in the face of emotion, truth' (ibid).[15]

Such a reading has a paradoxical blindspot however as, whilst the technical apparatus (use of green stockings and careful positioning) is visually imperceptible in the finished film, the totemic absence of Stéphanie / Cotillard's legs renders the effect itself hypervisible – a hypnotising presence that threatens to break the audience's suspension of disbelief and identificatory processes. In contrast I would argue that Audiard's use of the nodal capacity of the gesture to reappropriate melodramatic conventions creates a special affect that empowers both character and spectator in a performance of embodied agency. The filmic manipulation of the spectator as such is marked as the narrative is frequently disrupted by non-realist point of view - in the strangely amniotic pre-credit sequence, in the water amongst the debris of the accident and in extreme close-ups of Sam's face. The disruptive glare of the sun and lights also often compromises our view thus reminding us of our ocular intent. Such a presence foregrounds the necessary mediation of relationship between bodies in sequences, which are both powerful and self-reflexive in their persistent mise en abyme of spectatorship (the audience at Marine Land, on the beach, in the gym, in the sex scenes, at Ali's fights and culminating in our shared view of Ali's desperate scrutiny of the ice as he tries to rescue Sam). This inclusion of an embodied spectatorship, engaged in affective flow that crosses the diegetic and extra-diegetic realms ensures the film succeeds in both its affective impact and broader sociocultural message which foregrounds the power of human agency to triumph against the odds, not in an individualized competitive capacity, but in a transfer of affect and understanding.

In an interview included on the dvd release Audiard reveals that one of the central questions is located around the difficulties of contemporary discourses of love in attempts to ascertain whether the dominant vocabulary constructs the emotion or the emotion creates the vocabulary. Rust and Bone's positive reconfiguration of melodramatic conventions of the body as symptom through affective agency provides

[15] Quand Marion Cotillard apparaît amputée […], l'effet spécial disparaît presque sous l'émotion, la vérité'

a response to the 'the problem of the sayable' (Audiard 2012)[16] as personal and socio-political discourse. Brooks' insistence on melodrama's moral function in a post-sacred world in which discourses of tragedy no longer held sway (Brooks 1976, 15) and more recent claims that 'melodrama is in some ways tragedy that is socially aware' (Bourget, 1985: 11) point towards a repurposing of the melodramatic mode. Zamour's discussion of the future of melodrama asserts that the dominant features of melodrama enable it to surpass the individual frameworks of identification to create a collective engagement with an inherent political function (Zamour 2016, 168). Rust and Bone, employs generic hybridity and the remapping of melodramatic discourses of embodied subjectivity and spectatorship transcend the representation of individualized pathology and alienated body to answer the problem of the sayable through gesture. The special effects that foreground questions of representation and loss are countered by special affects which assert agency and resilience.

**Resources**


Anon 'Interview with Jacques Audiard and Thomas Bidegain' http://www.viewlondon.co.uk/cinemas/jacques-audiard-and-thomas-bidegain-interview-feature-interview-4549-1.html

Audiard, Jacques (2012) Interview included on French dvd release *De rouille et d'os*

Bernheimer, Charles and Kahane, Claire (eds) (1990) *In Dora's* case: Freud - Hysteria – Feminism New York, Columbia University Press

Brooks, Peter (1976) The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama and the Mode of Excess New Haven and London, Yale University Press

Brown, Emma (2012) 'Jacques Audiard's Flesh and Blood' http://www.interviewmagazine.com/film/jacques-audiard-rust-and-bone

Bourget, Jean –Loup (1985) Le mélodrame Hollywoodien Paris, Stock


[16] 'question de la difficulté de la parole'

Bourget, Jean-Loup (2014) 'Mélodrame et théorie des modes' in Nasta, Dominique, Andrin, Muriel and Gailly, Anne (eds) (2014) Le mélodrame filmique revisité / revisiting film melodrama Brussels, Peter Lang, 49-58

Byars, Jackie (1991) All that Hollywood Allows: Re-reading Gender in 1950s Melodramas London and New York, Routledge

Collin, Robbie 'Jacques-Audiard; Why I said non to Hollywood' http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/starsandstories/9636132/Jacques-Audiard-interview-Why-I-said-non-to-Hollywood.html

Davidson, Craig (2006), Rust and Bone New York, W. W. Norton and Company

Delcroix, Olivier (2012), 'Jacques Audiard: J'ai fait un mélodrame d'aujourd'hui' http://www.lefigaro.fr/festival-de-cannes/2012/05/16/03011-20120516ARTFIG00674-jacques-audiard-j-ai-fait-un-melodrame-d-aujourd-hui.php Accessed 01/03/2014

Del Rio, Elena (2012) Deleuze and the cinemas of performance: powers of affection Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press

Deleuze, Gilles (2005) [1983] Cinema 1 London, Continuum

Deleuze, Gilles & Felix Guattari (1987) A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia (trans. Brian Massumi) Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Dobson, Julia (2008) 'Jacques Audiard: Contesting Filiations' in Kate Ince (ed) Five Directors: Auteurism from Assayas to Ozon Manchester, Manchester University Press, 38-58

Dobson, Julia (2012) Negotiating the Auteur: Dominique Cabrera, Noémie Lvovsky, Laetitia Masson and Marion Vernoux Manchester, Manchester University Press

Elsaesser, Thomas (1987) 'Tales of Sound and Fury, Observations on the Family Melodrama' in Gledhill, Christine (ed) Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and *the Woman's F*ilm London, BFI

Gledhill, Christine (2000) 'Rethinking Genre' in Linda Williams and Christine Gledhill, eds, Reinventing Film Studies Bloomsbury USA Academic, 42-88.

Gregg, Melissa and Seigworth, Gregory J. (eds) (2010) The Affect Theory Reader Durham and London, Duke University Press

Kaganski, Serge (2012) 'Deux estropiés de la vie' Les Inrockuptibles, 15 May, 33.

Kaplan, E Anne (1983) 'Theories of melodrama; a feminist perspective', Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory 1(1), 40-48

Marks, Laura U (2000) The Skin of the Film. Intercultural cinema, Embodiment and the Senses Durham, Duke University Press

Massumi, Brian (2002) Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation Durham, Duke University Press

Nikolaidis, Aristotelis (2013) '(En)Gendering Disability in Film', Feminist Media Studies 13 (4), 759-764

O'Shaughnessy, Martin (2007) The New Face of Political Cinema: Commitment in French Film since 1995 New York and Oxford, Bergahn Books

O'Shaughnessy, Martin (2005) '"Reprise" et les nouvelles formes du cinéma politique' in Graeme Hayes and Martin O'Shaughnessy (eds), Cinéma et Engagement, Paris, L'Harmattan, 83-98

Rizzo, Teresa (2012) Deleuze and Film: A Feminist Introduction London, Bloomsbury

Sobchack, Viviane (1992) Address of the Eye. A Phenomenology of Film Experience Princeton, Princeton University Press

Stewart, Michael (2014) 'Mute men and melodramatic renewal: the meaning of speechless faces in 'The Edge of heaven' and 'Son'' Studies in European Cinema 11 (2) 92-105

Stewart, Michael (ed.) (2014) Melodrama in Contemporary Film and Television London, Palgrave

Strauss, Frédéric (2013) 'Les effets numériques deviennent invisibles pour faire plus vrais' Télérama 3298 (2 April) http://www.telerama.fr/cinema/les-effets-numeriques-deviennent-invisibles-pour-faire-plus-vrais,95141.php#xtor=EPR-126-newsletter_tra-20130402

Williams, Linda (1991) 'Film bodies: gender, genre and excess' Film Quarterly 44 (4), 2-13

Williams, Linda (1998) 'Melodrama Revised' in Nick Browne (ed) Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory Oakland, University of California Press, 42-88.

Zamour, Françoise (2016) Le mélodrame dans le cinéma contemporain : une fabrique de peuples Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes

Zarzosa Agustin (2013) Refiguring Melodrama in Film and Television: captive affects, elastic sufferings, vicarious objects New York, Rowman and Littlefield