

“Did he just Eat a Cockroach?”

Daniel Day-Lewis’s portrayal of Lincoln¹ was lauded amongst film critics who declared his performance to be the ...embodiment of the Great Emancipator, which transcends mere acting and becomes something more like live sculpting...² The consensus was that he disappeared from view, leaving the cinema-goer unfettered by connections between actor and character. Disappearance features in almost every review I’ve read, and is perhaps why people tell me its *THE* reason to watch the film. A friend described it to me like this:

*He’s pretty amazing, its like the only reason you know he’s there or think something up is because you’ve got Tommy Lee Jones, Joseph Gordon Levitt and Sally Fields all reciting their lines to this President who’s been dead for a 150 years. Which is sort of weird but amazing.*³

I ask if he thinks DD-L’s vanishing act means he has reached a zenith of his craft⁴ - is this what all actors should be trying to achieve?

Well, I guess the most important thing for an actor to do is make you feel something, or maybe that’s the director’s job? At least it’s the directors job in terms of using the performances he gets.

We cannot know how Spielberg really feels about his lead rendering with the background; the rest of the cast left to seem cut and pasted. But would the result be better if every actor was on the same level as DD-L?

Nicolas Cage’s portrayal of Johnny Blaze in *Ghost Rider: Spirit of Vengeance* 2011 was widely derided by critics and earned Cage his 4th nomination for worst actor at the Golden Raspberry Awards. The creator and currently sole practitioner of the Nouveau Shamanic method, he describes using the process on set:

*I would sew in ancient, thousands-of-years-old Egyptian relics, and gather bits of tourmaline and onyx and would stuff them in my pockets to gather these energies together and shock my imagination into believing that I was augmented in some way by them, or in contact with ancient ghosts. I would walk on the set looking like this, I saw the fear in their eyes, and it was like oxygen to a forest fire. I believed I was the Ghost Rider.*⁵

Cage lives and dies by his approach and choice of roles, he is without question my favorite actor. It is impossible not to think about his performance while you’re watching it. He plays on the perceived value of the film and acts how you would expect an actor to act in that film before flipping it or deliberately playing it off-key or flat. He over-complicates the role, makes it unreal, makes the audience see through the lie and wonder where this is all coming from⁶. It’s done without irony⁷ and with absolute conviction which is why it is so effective in causing a kind of screen bleed. Cage stared at a poster of Charles Bronson for 14 days to get into the mindset of a juvenile delinquent for his first audition.⁸ He was more interested in tapping into and disrupting the pop perception of a thug than channeling any real experience. Cage understands our belief in images makes them as legitimate a basis as any amount of real life observation.

*Acting implies lying in some way - Olivier said as much in his autobiography, and I don't want to lie. Thankfully Sean Penn said that Nicolas Cage is no longer an actor, and that's what I want. I want to find a way to make it more truthful.*⁹

¹ *Lincoln*, 2012, Dir. Steven Spielberg

² John Patterson; *Lincoln: Daniel Day-Lewis is first among equals*; The Guardian, 19th Jan 2013

³ There are no live recordings of Lincoln. DD-L’s performance is, for the majority, not being judged on written accounts but on a common perception composed from 38 on-screen performances by, amongst others, Walter Huston, Henry Fonda, Hal Holbrook (who also stars alongside DD-L in *Lincoln* 2012), and Gregory Peck.

⁴ Spending months with cerebral palsy sufferers, remaining in a wheelchair, demanding crew carry him around on set and being spoon-fed during the filming of *My Left Foot* (1989) helped define DD-L’s method.

⁵ Jen Yamato: *Nicolas Cage Has His Own Acting Method and It’s Called ‘Nouveau Shamanic’* Interview with Movieline.com 25th Feb 2011

⁶ Go and watch *Vampire’s Kiss* 1988 (its on youtube in full), its worth it just to see Cage recite the alphabet.

⁷ I will accept his character in *Kick Ass* 2010 as an exception, playing it as a parody of Adam West’s Batman, but I don’t think the same can be said of his Elvis inspired performance in *Wild at Heart* 1990.

⁸ In reality he was already a 19 year old high school drop out, with a bad temper and a less than straight-forward relationship with both parents.

⁹ Jen Yamato: *Nicolas Cage Has His Own Acting Method and It’s Called ‘Nouveau Shamanic’* Interview with Movieline.com 25th Feb 2011