

GRACIE TORREZ 2021

Genius Theory

When thinking of the concept of being a genius, what artistic figures come to mind?; Kurt Cobain, Van Gogh, Thomas Pynchon, Robert De Niro, Daniel Day-Lewis? Why is Nicolas Cage not presented in the majority of genius lists? Why is his name not brought up in a majority of best actor arguments? I seek to explore the case for Nicolas Cage's genius in his acting capacity and to understand why he often goes unmentioned in the public and critical eye as anything more than an over actor and a meme.

Nicolas Cage is an actor unlike any other. His style has been described by reputable critics and filmmakers as anything from the physical equivalent of jazz music (David Lynch) to emotion-heavy garbage (In/Frame/Out). The perception of his acting is one of the most striking debates in cinema circles even to this day. One group sees Cage as a basket case while the other sees him as a genius. According to *The Advanced Genius Theory*, published and written by Jason Hartley in 2010, a genius is a completely original and completely unpredictable person that alters the landscape of the world and the views of the general population. According to this ideation, Nicolas Cage most certainly is a genius (Gibb).

Need for Change in Film Industry

Cage is creative within the corporate machine. Being born into one of the most prolific families in Hollywood, the Coppolas, Cage was placed in the machine from the beginning of his career. Having first starred in a film by his uncle, Francis Ford Coppola, Cage had little difficulty landing roles. Nepotism was his leg up into Hollywood circles but he quickly outgrew his need for Uncle Francis Ford Coppola as soon as he started making his own choices in his acting style. A prolific actor in his own right, Ethan Hawke, is also in the group of people who agree with Cage's genius. Hawke is quoted as saying "He's the only actor since Marlon Brando that's actually done anything new with the art of acting; he's successfully taken us away from an obsession with naturalism into a kind of presentation style of acting". While Cage does utilize Stanislavski's method of emotional realism, he still often defies the constraints the method presents and the traditional disciplines of acting as a whole (Gibb).

Style and Form

Nicolas Cage's acting style has evolved throughout his time in Hollywood and has morphed and changed in each project according to the style, tone, and director he works with. He utilizes method acting, Impressionism, German Expressionism, and a style of his creation named Nouveau Shamanism among other shorter-term ideologies such as Western Kabuki (Wisecrack). Take Cage's impressionistic portrayal of Ronny Cammareri in *Moonstruck*. Upon first meeting Cher's character, Ronny boldly proclaims his speech of woe while screaming and

staring at his wooden hand. "I lost my hand! I lost my bride! Johnny has his hand! Johnny has his bride!" is the line he delivers in this scene and in a sense, this is ridiculous. But if you consider

that Cage's Ronny is an opera fanatic, then this grand gesture is fitting (Wisecrack). He's playing to the back row of a crowd in his volume and movement. Cage draws upon his vast knowledge of art and culture in order to appropriately bring to life a character who's way out there in terms of his head and in terms of his nature. It's this level of nuance and detail that creates these rich and layered characters Cage is known for (Gibb).

In *Vampire's Kiss*, Cage's portrayal of Peter Loew captures the concepts of German Expressionist approaches to cinema with flying colors and tremendous impact. Cage plays Loew as strange, repulsive, and grotesque as humanly possible. In one scene he eats a live cockroach and in another, he runs around New York wielding a wooden stake. When taken out of context, these scenes are hilarious and seemingly random. But, when you watch with prior knowledge and you understand some level of nuance, you can observe that even when he runs around the streets, he emulates the body language of Max Schreck in *Nosferatu*, a famous German Expressionist film (*In/Frame/Out*). Cage utilizes all of these ideas on their own to create this less-than-human character, but it works well with the mental state that Loew is in for much of the movie, torn between reality and his delusions (Wisecrack). The expressionistic choices Cage made complete sense in this film and it's starting to gain more recognition beyond the meme fame brought to it by the age of the internet.