

Performances in *Adaptation*: Analyzing Human Movement in Motion Pictures

by Cynthia Baron

Close study of essentially any screen performance will show that performance elements are as integral to a film as its framing and editing selections. Examining film performances that require actors to address particular challenges—performing a dual role, creating complex secondary characters, or suggesting character development and change in character relationships—can provide particularly valuable insights into the choices that structure the performances we see in film. Analyzing work by actors that has garnered critical acclaim can illuminate the way performance elements contribute to meaning in film and, at the same time, tell us something about contemporary audience expectations.

Adaptation (2002), the follow-up to Spike Jonze and Charlie Kaufman's collaboration on *Being John Malkovich* (1999), has several features that make it a useful film to consider in a study of screen performance. First, the work of all the key actors is marked by a clarity and economy. Their performances appear on screen as concentrated collage fragments in the film's dense audiovisual design, which features short scenes, disparate locations, and multiple temporal settings—primarily the present (when Charlie and Donald Kaufman write

their screenplays); three years earlier (when Susan Orlean writes *The Orchid Thief*); and four and a half to five years earlier (when John Laroche is charged with orchid poaching and Susan first visits Florida). Second, *Adaptation* gives Nicolas Cage the opportunity to take on the challenge of portraying identical twins, and it presents Meryl Streep and Chris Cooper with the challenge of creating multifaceted characters whose

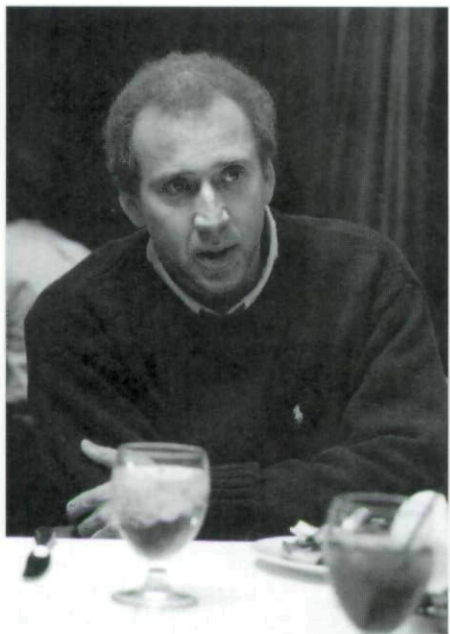
in a Supporting Role. The performances by Cooper, Cage, and Streep were also honored at the Golden Globe Awards and the British Academy of Film and Television Arts Awards and were singled out for recognition by film societies across North America. Todd McCarthy's review in *Variety* declared that "Cage's dual performances as the twins in *Adaptation* [represented] his best work in years." McCarthy found that "Streep gives a quietly alert performance that permits emotional revelation in well-judged stages" and that "Cooper's Laroche evolves into a deeply realized figure."

Knowing that the performances in *Adaptation* have been critically acclaimed is a start. But what aspects of the film's performances have prompted critics and professional peers to value the work? More specifically, how does Cage's performance contribute to viewers' impression that Charlie and Donald are two distinct characters? What is it about the performances by Streep and Cooper that suggests Susan and Laroche are linked by an "intuitive sympathy," even though the deepening relationship between the refined writer and the artless orchid thief involves "a blending of opposites," a process in which each one tacitly begins to make up "the deficiencies of the other" (Dyer 49-50).

Cynthia Baron's close reading of the body language employed by Nicolas Cage, Chris Cooper and Meryl Streep in Spike Jonze and Charlie Kaufman's complex comedy opens the book on movement analysis in film.

poignant dilemmas convey the overarching mood of the piece, even though they have limited screen time. Third, the wide critical acclaim that Cage, Streep, and Cooper received for their work in the film suggests that contemporary audiences identify good acting with performances that operate in concert with one another.

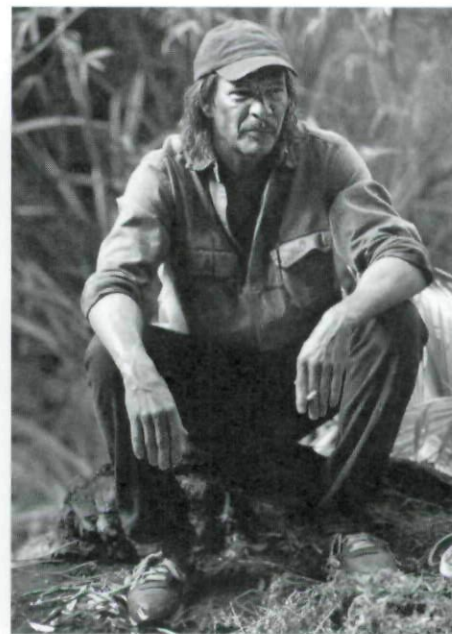
Cooper was given an Academy Award for Best Actor in a Supporting Role. Cage received an Oscar nomination for Best Actor and Streep an Oscar nomination for Best Actress



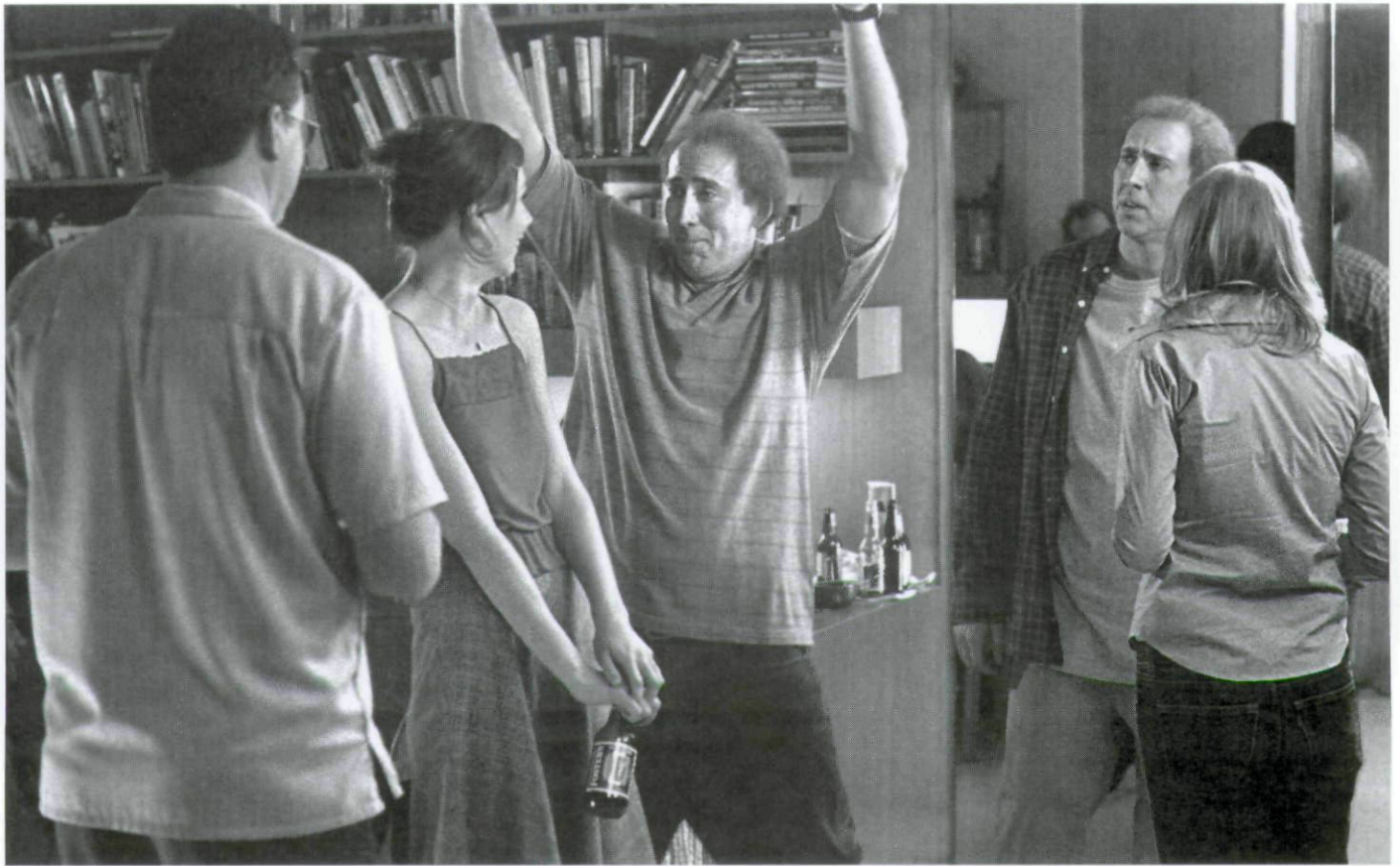
Nicolas Cage as screenwriter Charlie Kaufman in *Adaptation* (photo courtesy of Photofest).



Meryl Streep as *New Yorker* magazine journalist Susan Orleans in *Adaptation*.



Chris Cooper as obsessive orchid hunter John Laroche in *Adaptation*.



Nicolas Cage received an Academy Award nomination as Best Actor for his dual performance as screenwriting twin brothers Donald Kaufman (left) and Charlie Kaufman in *Adaptation* (2002).

There are, of course, many paths that could increase our understanding of the central performances in the film. In the discussion that follows, I will explore a line of inquiry that begins actually with the recognition that the motion of inanimate objects can be described and analyzed solely by reference to the laws of physics, but that the human movement of performances cannot, even when it is presented and encountered in motion pictures. The first section of the essay provides an overview of the movement patterns that help make the performances in *Adaptation* function as an orchestrated group. The second section offers some background information on movement analysis, movement training for actors, and the physical dimensions of acting. The third section returns to the performances in *Adaptation* to show how the actors' movements and vocal expressions contribute to our impressions about the characters. The final section outlines some ideas on the way movement analysis can contribute to our understanding of acting in film.

Movement and Ensemble Performance

In direct contrast to the predictable motion of inanimate objects, the spatial and temporal dimensions of human movements are endlessly variable and the types of energy that can infuse human movements are largely unpredictable. In contrast to the mechanical motion of objects, the ephemeral quali-

ties of human movement reveal a great deal about the circumstances, disposition, intentions, and methods of a person or filmic character. Thus, to get a sense of what critics have found so impressive about the performances in *Adaptation*, and to see how Cage addresses the challenge of portraying twin brothers and how Streep and Cooper create believable characters involved in a relationship that has discernible stages, it is useful to examine the dynamic qualities that infuse each actor's movements. By studying the actors' movements, it is possible to see that the qualities of their movements contribute to our understanding of the characters' abiding dispositions and transitory feelings and to our sense of their tacit connections and lasting differences.

Our understanding of the characters in *Adaptation* depends on the structure and detail in Charlie Kaufman's Academy Award nominated screenplay, the directorial choices of Spike Jonze, the contributions of the entire cast, and the work of the production and postproduction crews. Yet, if we focus on the way Nicolas Cage moves and speaks when he is portraying Hollywood screenwriter Charlie Kaufman, it becomes clear that, in spite of the character's incessant ruminations and expressions of doubt and self-loathing ruminations, Cage makes Charlie a distinct character by using sustained and sudden movements that are invariably *strong and direct*. Sometimes Cage uses pressing or squeezing movements and

vocal expressions to depict Charlie's anxious personality and state of mind. Portraying Charlie at particularly agitated moments, Cage verbally thrusts, shoves, and even punches at his brother Donald, his sleazy agent Marty (Ron Livingston), and Valerie (Tilda Swinton), the executive who so admires Charlie's work.

By comparison, the way Cage moves and speaks when he embodies novice screenwriter Donald Kaufman is *strong but flexible*. As Donald, Cage delivers his lines by pulling and plucking his words out of possible options. He elastically stretches out Donald's phrases by infusing them with a rhythmic cadence and gently rising inflection. Always flexible and free flowing, as Donald Cage accents certain moments by shifting his bearing and demeanor so that his movements are throwing movements. For example, there is a strong but flexible tossing or lobbing movement to Cage's vocal delivery when Donald poses the question, "Are you a former Fulbright scholar?"

The characteristic movements and vocal expressions that Streep and Cooper use to portray the film's supporting characters complement the direct-flexible opposition that emerges from Cage's portrayal of Charlie and Donald. As embodied by Streep, Susan's movements and vocal expressions are marked by their *direct but light* quality. Susan's characteristic way of moving through the world is conveyed by Streep's gliding movements and vocal expressions.

While some scenes late in the film feature Streep's rigid, tightly bound smearing movements, when Susan varies from her characteristic glide, the way Streep moves and speaks usually involves direct but light dabs or taps. Recall, for example, the scene that introduces us to Susan's character, with the sound of her fingers lightly tapping on the keyboard and the crisp, dabbing way Streep delivers the lines when Susan describes Laroche as "a tall guy, skinny as a stick, pale eyed, slouch shouldered, sharply handsome, despite the fact he's missing all his front teeth."

Chris Cooper's portrayal of John Laroche completes the ensemble because his movements give Laroche a discernible lightness and flexibility. Cooper uses floating or stroking movements when Laroche is tethered by his connection to the things he loves—when he is wading through the swamplands in search of orchids, describing the magical connection between orchids and insects, recalling the way his mother soothed his fears, or admiring Susan as she basks in the sunlight. When Laroche is adrift and off balance, Cooper's movements and vocal expressions are still *flexible and light* but they become sudden rather than sustained. For example, early in the film, when Laroche is confronted by the park ranger, Cooper rocks back and forth, and his gestures, poses, and line deliveries, are all marked by an odd assortment of flicking, flipping, and jerking movements.

Impressions about the quality of the actors' movement are influenced by the way the actors are positioned in the space and the frame. In the first conversation between Charlie and Donald, the actors' respective spatial positions emphasize the contrast between the two characters. As Charlie, Cage often sits directly upright to make his points, consistently shoving his negative remarks across the room to Cage as Donald, who lies on the floor, flexibly lobbing his questions and observations upward and out-

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ward into the room. That same type of contrast is suggested by supporting actors' relative positions in spaces and frames. Cooper's flexible, free-flowing movements are sometimes emphasized by his horizontal position, for example, when he answers Susan's phone call that leads him to talk about the traumatic events of his past, while Susan's agenda-driven personality is suggested by the more vertical place Streep initially occupies. Their entirely different positions at the conclusion of the flashback sequence sug-

gest, of course, that Laroche has been heartened by having an empathetic listener; as the scene closes, Cooper is seated and Streep is lying down as she cradles the phone.

Not surprisingly, cinematic elements that surround the actors' performances also shape our ideas about the quality of the actors' movements. In the restaurant when Charlie first tells Valerie how he plans to adapt Orlean's book, the fact that he presses or squeezes his voice out of a narrow space is underscored by the static framing of the shot/counter-shot sequence that sharply contrasts the direct, tightly bound movements of Nicolas Cage with the flexible, free-flowing movements of Tilda Swinton. When we are first introduced to Susan, the gliding camera movement that brings us into her office at night sustains and enhances the gliding quality of Streep's intonations and inflections in the accompanying voice-over. The

first time we see Laroche comfortably wading in the chest-high water of the swamp, the light and flexible quality of his movements is emphasized by the framing and camera movement that mimics Cooper's floating and stroking movement through the water. The first time we hear Donald's voice as it fills the stairwell of the apartment, the rising and turning camera movement that shows Charlie pressing up the stairs is keyed to and helps to emphasize the strong and flexible qualities of Cage's rising inflections when he portrays Donald.

There is, of course, more to say about the actors' performances than is suggested by a division of their characteristic movements into patterns of direct and strong (Charlie), flexible and strong (Donald), direct and light (Susan), flexible and light (Laroche). The way Cage outwardly manifests each brother's personality warrants further consideration—even if one knows about the contributions of Harris Mann, Cage's body double, and about the film's extensive use of body appliances, dental prosthetics, audio playback, and motion-controlled cameras—for, as Joe Fordham notes in his discussion of the film's special effects, the different temperaments of the twin brothers are conveyed "most potently through character interplay and Nicolas Cage's distinctive performances" (18).

The bearing, deportment, demeanor, mien, manner, and carriage that Streep and Cooper use to portray Susan and Laroche also warrant further consideration. The quality of the movements that structure Streep's performance contributes to observers' sense that Susan "spends most of her time absorbing things and turning them over in her mind" (McCarthy 28). The remarkable range of impressions created by the varying qualities in Cooper's performance is one of the primary reasons critics



As Laroche, Chris Cooper's movements are light, flexible and free-flowing in *Adaptation*.



In *Adaptation*, Charlie Kaufman's timidity prevents him from approaching Susan Orleans, the subject of his screenplay, even though he has traveled across the country in order to meet her.

have argued that, in the end, *Adaptation* gives audiences a "nuanced portrait of Laroche" (Zalewski 28). Yet before examining the quality of the actors' movements more closely, some basic information about characterization, movement training, and movement analysis is in order.

The Physical Dimensions of Performance

Debates surrounding the supposed opposition between internal and external acting methods are grounded in perspectives that emerged in the late eighteenth century. The ascendancy of internal 'method' over external 'technique' was probably most visible in the 1950's and early 1960's, with many practitioners assuming that "if an actor was really *feeling* inside, all the edges were supposed to take care of themselves" (Sabatine 14). The rupture between "method" and "technique" has had a lingering influence. Writing about academic actor training programs, Richard Hornby notes that even the 1990's voice and movement courses were sometimes taught as nonacting courses, despite the fact that "a move, a way of standing, a gesture, a tone of voice, a dialect, are more than just external refinement; they are often the emotional key to a scene or even to an entire role" (245).

The shared understanding that character emotions, drives, and psychological complexes become visible only in the qualitative details of actors' observable actions predates the era when Lee Strasberg's version of the Method was popularized. As Hornby notes, practitioners like Bertold Brecht "recognized that physical positioning on stage, vocal intonations, movements, gestures, and so on, are not mere externals, but that *staging carries meaning*" (204). Moreover, attention to the physical dimensions of performance has informed actor training programs and acting methods since the late 1960's. As Jacques Lecoq, whose work combined mime, circus, pantomime, spoken theater, and dance, explains, "the great social and psychological upheavals of 1968" prompted a return to interest in the actor's physical expression (Lecoq 142). Director Julie Taymor, who studied at Lecoq's mime school when she was sixteen, finds that attention to the physical dimension of performance is crucial for actors and directors. Noting that "the body is a complete resource you can use to express anything, including emotions," Taymor makes clear that "it's not about 'acting' sad" but instead about maintaining a focus on asking, "What is it about 'sad' that makes the body hard or soft? What rhythm does 'sadness' have?" (Schechner 64).

While the physical dimension of performance has been an increasingly important part of actor training and acting methods since the late 1960's, some programs and companies were already using physical approaches to characterization in the 1940's. In the U.K., Joan Littlewood and Ewan MacColl's Theatre Workshop combined Stanislavskian techniques "to create the inner truth of the characters" and the work of Rudolf Laban "to structure the expressive techniques of performance" (Barker 115). Actors in the Theatre Workshop Company regularly explored different uses of time, weight, direction, and flow in the theater games and improvisations that were part of the process of establishing "the rhythmic patterns" of the performances produced by the company (Barker 119). Laban's *The Mastery of Movement on the Stage* (1950), which emerged from his collaboration with the Theatre Workshop, was the first comprehensive guide to movement analysis and physical characterization for actors in the West.

Since the early 1970's, acting professionals have seen courses in movement as necessary training for actors working in theater or film. In some cases, movement courses are designed to balance training that prompts actors to strive for the type of "close, per-



In the orchid show scene, Chris Cooper's gliding movements and Meryl Streep's floating movements suggest that their characters are blending, taking on the qualities of the other.

sonal identification with the role" suggested by Strasberg's version of the Method (Sabatine 16). Sometimes it is designed to harmonize with other visions of the Method, for example, Stella Adler's focus on script analysis or Sanford Meisner's concern with engaged interaction between actors. In other programs, movement training, in particular training grounded in Laban's work, is seen as "a perfect complement" to Stanislavsky's multifaceted System or Jerzy Grotowski's methods for developing performance (Preston-Dunlap 273). Laban's insights are especially compatible with rehearsal techniques suggested by Stanislavsky's Method of Physical Actions which assumes that "emotional life may sometimes be more easily aroused and fixed for performance through work on the physical life of the role, rather than through inner work" (Carnicke 26; see Litvinoff 106). Laban's work is also a good fit with Grotowski's approach to performance because the actor training program Grotowski developed in the 1960's at the Laboratory Theatre in Poland was designed to eliminate obstructions that might come between "the germination of a living impulse and its manifestation through physical action" (Wolford 200).

Movement specialists see an important distinction between 'fundamentals' and 'specialized skills,' and the type of movement training designed specifically for actors involved in the creation and presentation of characters ("ATME" 4). Movement teacher Jean Sabatine explains: "Mime, ballet, modern dance, jazz dance, T'ai Chi, karate, physical education, rolfing, fencing, stage combat, approaches like Alexander technique and effort-shape, and so on—none of these disciplines is movement for actors' training in and of themselves" (14). Instead, movement training is designed to give actors "the means for finding and

developing whatever is needed in movement for any production, any style or character" (Litvinoff 104). Summarizing the key tenets already established by 1980, movement specialist Valentina Litvinoff explains that movement training for actors contributes in three crucial ways: it helps actors shed "hindrances: rigidities, flabbiness, misalignments, and mannerisms" (104); it enhances their ability to develop coordination, strength, flexibility, endurance, and an increased kinesthetic awareness (105); and it gives actors systematic tools for finding movement cues and for locating movements appropriate to the dramatic situation and character's given circumstances (106).

While the work of François Delsarte (1811-1871) and Jacques Lecoq (1921-1999) contribute to some programs, the insights developed by Rudolf Laban (1879-1958) have been more influential in movement training programs because Laban's system provides such a comprehensive way of exploring and describing the "impelling inner action" that colors the movement an actor performs to convey a character's intention and disposition (Litvinoff 107). As Jean Sabatine points out, Laban's work has had the widest and most extensive application largely because Laban's systematic terminology for describing and classifying movement reflects his "meticulous graphing of exact and minute combinations of space, time, and energy," the basic components of all movement (112).

Laban Movement Analysis takes its name from its originator, choreographer-philosopher-movement educator Rudolf Laban, who, by 1913, had established an alternative vision of dance by using "body rhythm rather than musical meter as the impetus for movement" in his choreography for open air movement choirs (Partsch-Bergsohn 15). Born in what is now Bratislava, Slovakia,

Laban "emerged as the first European dance artist to develop a clear concept of dance movement as an art form separate from free movement, different from gymnastics, and independent of music" (Partsch-Bergsohn 26). His appointment as ballet director of the National Theater in Mannheim, Germany in 1921 secured his reputation as a "leader of the new art form, recently termed Modern Dance" (Partsch-Bergsohn 28). By 1926, Laban was recognized as the "actual creator and founder of the modern art of dance" in scholarship on European dance (Maletic 27). Working in Germany during the Bauhaus and Expressionist periods, he developed "theatrical and recreational dance programs," founded schools, produced books, journals, and other publications (Bartenieff ix). Forced to leave Nazi Germany at the height of his career in dance theater, Laban worked in the U.K., expanding his studies of movement through collaboration with theatre directors, educators, and industrialists.

Movement Analysis as a Portal into Adaptation

Laban Movement Analysis directs our attention to "actual movement, rather than its completed result" (Lamb and Watson 7). That focus is extremely useful when studying the performances in *Adaptation*, for the meaning of the actors' gestures and expressions is not disclosed by a single frame but instead by the direction of the actors' movements, the speed of their movements, the degree of resistance and control in their movements. Laban Movement Analysis facilitates consideration of the spatial design of the actors' movements and the qualitative energy in their movement. It provides terms for describing their performances in relation to space, time, weight, and flow; for determining whether their movements through space are primarily direct or flexible, whether a particular gesture or line delivery is sudden or sustained, whether movements in a scene are light or strong, whether the flow of movement is bound or free.

With spectacular action limited to the final scenes of *Adaptation*, audiences learn about the characters' feelings primarily through their word choices, intonations, and inflections. The quality of their vocal expressions can be studied as human movement shaped by inner impulse. Describing the physical dimension of vocal expression, Laban expert Jean Newlove points out: "Try saying the words 'Yes' and 'No' with thrusting. The voice will be strong, sudden, and direct [and] whatever the bodily movements, the meaning will be quite clear. Here is someone who has made up their mind and is quite emphatic about their decision" (99). Continuing, Newlove explains: "Try a similar exercise with floating. Could you honestly say that this person appears just as emphatic? Does the essence of floating lend itself to such clear and unequivocal deci-

sions?" (99). Background information about Cage's performance in *Adaptation* suggests that studying the actors' line deliveries is crucial. As Joe Fordham's discussion of the film's special effects makes clear, Spike Jonze and visual effects supervisor Gray Marshall worked to ensure that Cage was allowed to "concentrate on his department and the energy of his delivery" (18).

While information about the production, and about actors' training, preparation, and methods of execution invariably leads to a deeper respect for acting and effective collaborations between actors and directors, studying the performances by Cage, Streep, and Cooper to see if and how they contribute to impressions about the characters does not require us to have background information about their working methods. That is because Cage, Streep, and Cooper, like other actors, express their characters' abiding personalities and changing inner experiences through the physical and vocal dimensions of their performances. As a consequence, systematic study of their work as seen and heard on screen is one of the best ways to appreciate their contributions to the film.

The performances in *Adaptation* illuminate the characters' given circumstances, their objectives, the actions they take to achieve their objectives, and the beats or units of action that structure their dramatic (and comedic) interactions. In other words, analyzing the performances by Cage, Streep, and Cooper reveals the Stanislavskian structure of individual scenes and of the film as a whole. The integral connection between the physical and vocal dimension of the actors' performances and our impressions about the characters' dispositions, objectives, and actions becomes much easier to analyze when considered in light of Laban Movement Analysis, which features an extensive and coherent set of action verbs that observers can have at hand when studying the film.

Earlier in the discussion, I proposed that Cage uses direct and strong movements to portray Charlie, but flexible and strong movements to portray Donald. I suggested that Streep uses direct and light movements to portray Susan, and that Cooper uses flexible and light movements as Laroche. That is one way to describe the carefully orchestrated behaviors that Cage, Streep, and Cooper use to embody their characters' personalities and the actions their characters rely on to achieve their objectives. My sketch of the direct-flexible contrast (between Charlie and Donald and between Susan and Laroche), and my outline of the strong-light distinction (between the brothers and the lovers), is also one that emerges from analysis of the 'efforts' that infuse the actors' movements in the film. While the term 'effort' is often associated with activities that require a substantial expenditure of energy, in Laban Movement Analysis it refers simply to the

expressive qualities of exertion that are visible in any human movement (Maletic 97). Laban used ballet terms (*battu*/thrusting, *fouetté*/slashing, *glissé*/gliding) as a point of departure for a system of terms linked to eight basic 'efforts'—pressing, thrusting, wringing/swinging, slashing/quick swinging, gliding, dabbing, floating, and flicking.

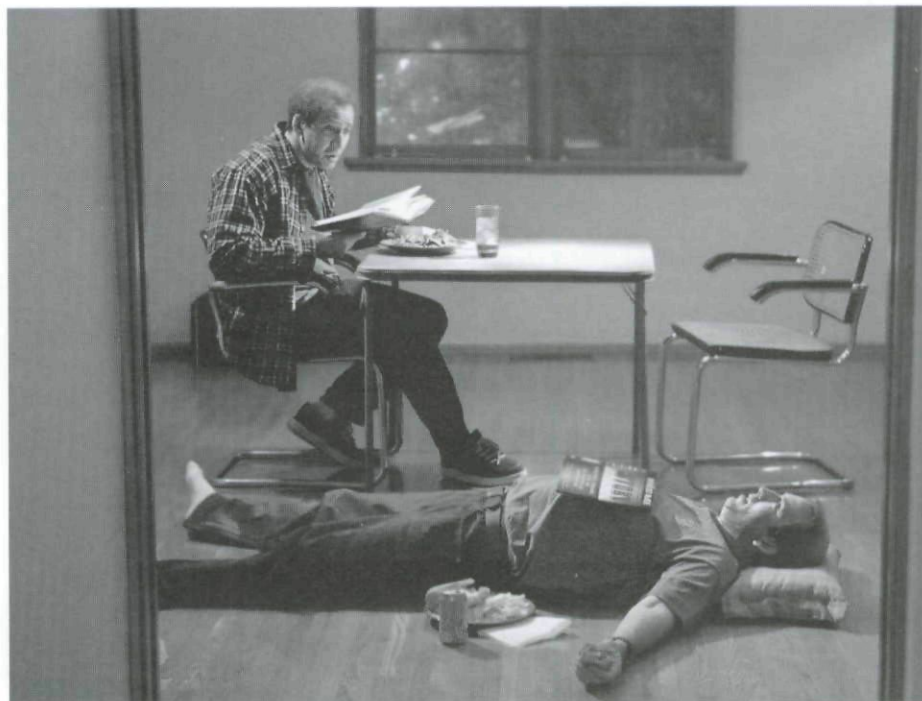
It is possible to discuss the performances in *Adaptation* as exemplifying the eight 'efforts,' and examining the actors' work in light of the 'efforts' effectively shows how the physical dimension of the actors' performances contributes to impressions about the characters. Using the Laban 'efforts' as a rubric highlights the fact that viewers learn about the characters' dispositions by attending to the movements that Cage, Streep, and Cooper use to portray their characters. It illuminates the fact that audiences develop interpretations about the characters' actions—including the actions they use in each unit of action in a scene—by studying the shifts in the actors' energy that signal a change in the characters' tactics.

While what we see and hear can be difficult to describe, as viewers we actually pay very close attention to the physical dimension of the performances by Cage, Streep, and Cooper to get evidence about the characters' basic temperaments and the strategies they use to get what they want. What Laban Movement Analysis provides are terms for discussing our impressions. It makes it possible to say, for example, that when Cage is Charlie, he often uses *pressing* movements that are direct, sustained, and strong, but that when Charlie is determined to make his point, Cage uses *thrusting* movements that are direct, sudden, and

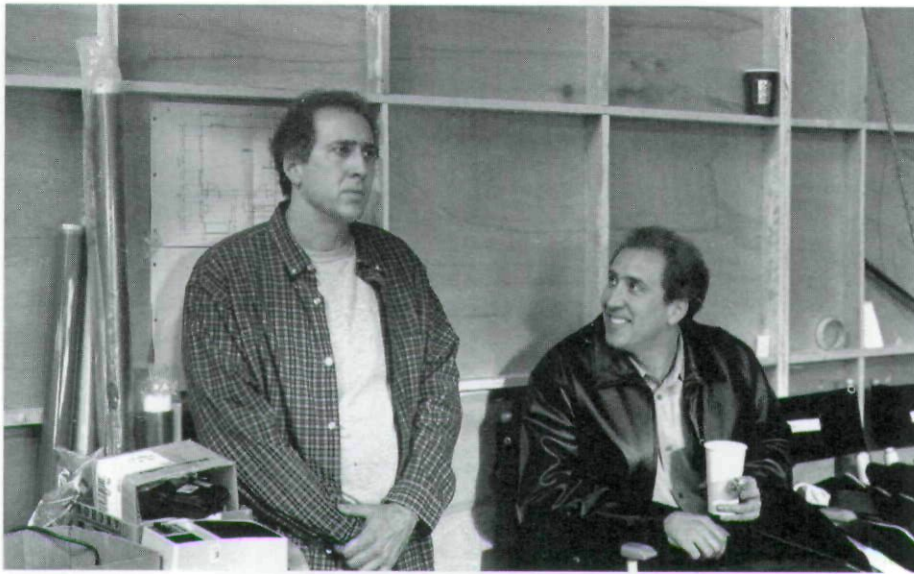
strong. The Laban system provides ways to locate and describe the difference and the resemblance between the brothers' movements, to see, for example, that as Donald, Cage often uses *wringing/swinging* movements that are flexible, sustained, and strong; and that when Donald is bolstered by good news, as when he can tell Charlie their mom called his story idea psychologically taut or share his discovery that Susan lied in the interview, Cage uses *slashing/rapidly swinging* movements that are flexible, sudden, and strong.

Laban terminology can also clarify the difference and the resemblance between the lovers' movements. It can help us see that Streep often uses *gliding* movements that are direct, sustained, and light, switching sometimes to the direct, sudden, and light qualities of *dabbing* movements. For example, when Susan introduces herself to Laroche, Streep slips in behind Cooper as he is about to get into his van, essentially tapping him on the shoulder to get his attention. Cooper's movements are somewhat akin to Streep's in that he uses *floating* movements that are flexible, sustained, and light, along with *flicking* movements that are flexible, sudden, and light.

In Charlie's version of Susan and Laroche's story, that is, in the scenes before he travels to New York and starts taking advice from his brother and Robert McKee, there are a series of scenes that delineate the evolving stages of the unrequited love affair. These include: Susan and Laroche's meeting in the parking lot; Susan's first interview with Laroche as they careen about in his van; the orchid show discussion when Susan begins to appreciate Laroche's perspective



In Laban Movement analysis terms, Cage uses direct and strong movements in *Adaptation* to portray Charlie but flexible and strong movements to portray Donald.



Donald (right) asks for screenwriting tips from his brother Charlie in this scene from *Adaptation*.

on the world; the conversation in the van when Laroche confounds Susan's expectations by discussing some of his erstwhile consuming passions; their contemplative exchange about adaptation as they ride in the van together through the night; Susan's phone call to Laroche that leads him to reveal the traumatic events of his life; Susan's next call that reveals her need to see a ghost orchid; and, finally, their playful exchange about *The Orchid Thief* movie deal that devolves into their unfulfilled journey through the swamp.

Considering these scenes in light of terms and concepts made available by Laban Movement Analysis makes it easier to see and to describe how the actors' movements contribute to our impression of the characters' increasing closeness. Studying the quality of Streep's and Cooper's movements in the series of scenes, it is possible to see that Susan prevails in the initial meeting and first interview, with Streep's gliding physical and vocal movement controlling the final resolution of the scenes. Yet that pattern changes. At the close of the orchid show scene and the conversation about adaptation, Cooper's use of gliding movements and Streep's floating movements suggest that their characters are blending, taking on the qualities of the other. At the opening of the two phone call scenes, the dabbing or tapping quality in Streep's vocal expressions conveys Susan's hesitation and desire to get closer to Laroche; the flicking, jerking quality in Cooper's line readings give physical expression to Laroche's concern and excitement that Susan is interested in him.

In their final encounter (in Charlie's version of their story), Streep and Cooper start off using energy-filled dabbing and flicking movements, then as their characters travel aimlessly through the swamp, the energy in the actors' movements drains away, with Streep using increasingly sustained gliding or smearing movements and Cooper using

jerking and flapping movements. The changing quality of their movements suggests that, during the hours in the swamp, Susan has slowly resigned herself to disappointment, while Laroche resists the impending loss of Susan's interest.

Looking beyond the parallel stories of the brothers and the lovers, Laban Movement Analysis also suggests ways to see and understand the contrast between Laroche and the more conventional characters in the story. Using Laban terms and concepts makes it possible to see that the shifting energy in Cooper's movements helps give physical expression to a character that had struck Orlean's readers as "fun." In contrast to Cage and Streep, who use a primary quality of movement to portray their characters, Cooper often combines floating and flicking movements. Cooper's combined and quickly alternating use of floating and flicking movements perhaps seals audience impressions that Laroche is a quixotic, romantic, impractical character.

Laban Movement Analysis also provides a way to understand why Susan and Charlie seem rather lifeless and mechanical when compared to Donald and especially Laroche, for it prompts us to see that there is a comparatively small amount of increase or decrease in the force and speed of Streep's movements and Cage's movements when he portrays Charlie. Moreover, while there is a free flow of movement in Cooper's portrayal of Laroche and Cage's performance as Donald, there is a bound quality in Streep's movements and in the movements Cage uses to embody Charlie. Jean Newlove explains that movements with a bound, controlled quality create the impression that an "action can be stopped at any given moment"; she points out that bound movements allow characters to pause, sense an error, locate an adjustment, or find a reason to put a particular action on hold (48). Free flowing movement, however, can reveal vul-

nerability and convey the sense that a character approaches life not expecting errors or the need to adjust (Newlove 48). One can imagine that the free flowing movement in Cooper's performance and Cage's portrayal of Donald contributes to the idea that Laroche and Donald are the more vulnerable characters and thus the ones to die in the end.

Screen Performance in Light of Movement Analysis

Studying the performances in *Adaptation* reveals that performing a dual role, creating dense characters, and depicting characters in an evolving relationship, depends at least in part on the quality of the actors' movements. Examining the performances also suggests that the wide critical acclaim for the actors' work in the film has something to do with the fact that their performances satisfy a demand for ensemble performance by virtue of using distinct but complementary qualities of movement in their performances. Analysis of the performances in *Adaptation* reveals that human movement is not a simple change of position or location but instead something that involves combinations of change and successive developments of change that cannot be represented by single images. In contrast to set and lighting design, costume and makeup design, screen performances are not adequately represented in static images. Yet we can study the selection and combination of movement in performances, and here we are on surprisingly familiar ground, for cinema has long been understood as an art form that involves the selection and combination of images. To understand acting in film, we simply need to examine the selection and combination of actors' movements as a phrase of movement; to consider the linear or sequential 'melody' of a character's movements in relation to the 'harmonic' movements of that character and other characters; to look for rhythmic accents, corresponding chords, harmonies, and dissonances in actors' movements.

Still, analyzing movement in screen performances is not a simple endeavor. As Jean Sabatine points out, "There is an odd fact associated with movement: While all movement is essentially nonverbal communication, it is also, paradoxically, invisible" (103). She explains that for the most part, "we are unable to 'see' the movement of the world around us because we are so busy trying to understand it" (103). As if that were not enough, attempts to study movement in film performances are complicated by the fact that meaning conveyed by a movement depends in part on the context of the movement. In any film, we encounter actors' movements in relation to sound design elements, framing strategies, editing choices, and so on. In addition, the context for encountering movement is variable: films make different use of actors' expressivity

and the degree to which other filmic elements enhance, truncate, or modify the presentation of movements.

The challenge of studying human movement in the cinema is complicated even further by the fact that its meaning also depends on viewers' life experiences, cultural backgrounds, focus of attention, and so on. The degree to which audiences consider an actor's picture personality (a composite figure that emerges from an actor's portrayal in a series of films) or star image (a multidimensional image created by stories about an actor's off-screen life) shapes the context for interpreting movement. The degree to which audiences are familiar with the esthetic and cultural traditions underlying the selection and combination of actors' movements in a film influences the meanings they find in the human movement presented on screen.

Even with these factors in play, movement analysis can increase understanding of actors' contributions to films, for studies that considers actors' movements in light of the basic 'efforts' are grounded in a systematic network of terms and concepts that make it possible to analyze the selection and combination of movements more or less objectively. Rather than starting from scratch each time we attempt to study performances, Laban Movement Analysis prompts us to examine the spatial aspects of the actors' movements, the temporal dimensions of their movements, the weight or strength that infuses their movements, and the contrast between the energy flow in the movements that constitute their performances. Laban terms and concepts enhance our ability to see how actors' physical and vocal expressions contribute to audience impressions about characters, and it can facilitate analysis of the underlying attitudes and objectives that color any human movement. When Laban vocabulary was first introduced in modern dance circles, it opened the way for describing and analyzing movement without limiting it to a particular style or star—ideally, its use in studies of screen performance will have the same effect. ■

Adaptation is distributed in DVD by Columbia TriStar Home Entertainment, www.SonyPictures.com.

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End Notes:

¹ Laban Movement Analysis highlights and clarifies distinctions between the easily calculated motion of inanimate objects and the unique movement of human beings. The illusion of motion is created by the serial projection of images taken at different intervals, and the inanimate motion of mechanical reproduction that makes it possible for audiences to encounter screen performances. Yet the terms and concepts used to describe the motion of inanimate objects have proved inadequate for describing the goal-directed human movements that constitute screen performances. We can say that "a car is ascending the hill" and that "a person is ascending the staircase," but the phrases reveal the profound difference between motion and movement, for the word, "ascending," carries different connotations when applied to inanimate motion and human movement. To say that a car is ascending the hill means that the car is going up the hill; to say that a person is "ascending" the staircase indicates that the individual is going up the stairs with a certain dignity, grace, and composure.

Discussing the important distinction between inanimate motion and human movement, Laban explains that "even the most minute [human movement or] exertion demands some kind of effort" (169). He points out that even when effort is unconscious and involuntary, it is "always present in any bodily movement" (21). In contrast to that, "no inanimate object can make an effort" (169). There is no "inner function originating" the motion of inanimate objects (20). The motion of inanimate objects has no visible "origin and inner aspect" (21). The prevalence of pub-

licity stills and frame captures has perhaps led observers to imagine that impressions about characters created by single images of frozen motion. The illusion of motion is created by single images projected in sequence, but audience impressions and interpretations about characters are not based on the perception of motion but instead on the apperception of complex human movements that have specific spatial and temporal qualities and a delimited set of highly-charged cultural connotations.

² Between 1913 and Laban's death in 1958, individuals such as Mary Wigman, Dussia Bereska, Kurt Jooss, Albrecht Knust, and Lisa Ullmann made key contributions to the terms, concepts, and notation systems that comprise Laban Movement Analysis. Laban was part of the European art world influenced by WW I and WW II, with at least tacit connections with Wagner, Ibsen, Strindberg, Appia, Craig, Stanislavsky, Reinhardt, Piscator, the Brecht-Weill collaborations, George Kaiser, Ernst Toller, Serge Diaghileff's Ballet Russe, and phenomenologists such as Merleau Ponty (see Maletic 32-36; 162-163; 189). At the present time, there are only two institutions that carry Laban's name, the Laban Centre for Movement and Dance in London and the Laban/Bartenieff Institute of Movement Studies in New York (Hodgson 12). That is quite surprising if one considers that between World War I and World War II, "there was hardly a major European city [that] did not have its Laban School" (Hodgson 3). Best known for his ground-breaking system of movement notation, in the years prior to World War II, Laban's dance theory and practice had "established his reputation as the...founder of the Central European school of Modern Dance" (Hodgson 5). Yet in 1936, at the height of his career, the German government put Laban under house arrest, his work was banned, and "Laban's name was forbidden to be used anywhere in the Third Reich" (Hodgson 42). Laban fled Nazi Germany and in 1938 began an almost entirely new career in England as a consultant to educators and factory owners. Rather than continuing to work in the world of modern dance, in the years during and after World War II Laban became known for his contributions to physical education curriculum and movement studies that were used in manufacturers' employee selection and job training programs.

The disconnect between Laban's career in dance and choreography on the continent and his subsequent work in England "in what was then called 'time and motion studies'" (Hodgson 110) caused Laban Movement Analysis to have a limited influence in several disparate fields, from sociology to early childhood education to physical therapy. Still, the Laban Dance Notation Bureau has been an important resource for the dance world since its founding in 1940 in New York. Moreover, sparked initially by collaborations in the 1940s between members of Laban's Art of Movement Studio and Joan Littlewood and Ewan McColl's Theatre Workshop, Laban Movement Analysis has become integrated into many actor training programs, especially programs in the UK (Hodgson 8; see Barker 115-122).

³ Film scholars and practitioners have vocabularies for describing framing choices, editing patterns, lighting schemes, soundtrack elements, and camera movements. Our vocabularies allow us to talk about slow motion, shallow depth of field, and wide screen formats. Actors, directors, and screenwriters have developed vocabularies for sharing ideas about the units of action that structure a scene structure and the levels of objectives that inform character motivation. Film scholars have borrowed terms and concepts from studies of narration in literature to understand how the flow of narrative information, in particular the order, duration, and frequency of presented elements, helps to establish the primary voice in a film as well as the more subliminal but overarching mood of a film. Yet today, film critics and scholars have only a limited vocabulary for describing the specific details of the screen performances we see or would like to create, even though we know that it is only through the use of their bodies and voices that actors create impressions and convey ideas about their characters.

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