

A PINWOOD DIALOGUE WITH JIM JARMUSCH

Jim Jarmusch made his mark as a director with the deadpan comedies *Stranger than Paradise*, *Down by Law*, and *Mystery Train*. His astonishing film *Dead Man*, a poetic and beautiful black-and-white nineteenth-century western starring Johnny Depp, featured a soundtrack and songs by Neil Young. Following the lengthy, demanding production of this exquisitely crafted yet underrated film, Jarmusch continued his collaboration with Young by making *Year of the Horse*, a spontaneous, energetic combination of concert film and road movie. In this wide-ranging conversation, which took place on the last day of a retrospective of his films, Jarmusch talks about his approach to writing and directing.

A Pinewood Dialogue following a screening of *Year of the Horse*, the short film *Coffee and Cigarettes (Somewhere in California)*, and the Neil Young videos, *Dead Man Theme*, and *Big Time*. Moderated by Chief Curator David Schwartz (October 5, 1997):

SCHWARTZ: Please welcome Jim Jarmusch.
(Applause)

Have you ever thought you might quit smoking?

JARMUSCH: I've quit a few times! It's not that hard. (Laughter) I don't like being controlled by things. When I was writing my script for *Dead Man*, I was up in the Catskills, and it was that really heavy winter we had, and I realized how addicted I was when there was five feet of snow, and I was counting my cigarettes. It was kind of a drag, really, to be controlled by something.

SCHWARTZ: And how do you feel about all the anti-smoking laws now? Is there too much control? There seems to be a tremendous amount of coffee now in New York.

JARMUSCH: Well, I just think people should be aware. They should be aware of what things are dangerous and then should be allowed to decide for themselves. I think that's true of drugs and cigarettes. Cigarettes are a powerful drug. I think it's kind of sad that tobacco companies deny that they're addictive. I mean, ask anyone who smokes. Of course they're addictive. But once you know

that, then it's really your choice what you do with yourself.

SCHWARTZ: I want to talk about *Dead Man* and your relationship with Neil Young, which started with *Dead Man* and then continues with *Year of the Horse*. But did the music video "Big Time" happen after *Dead Man*? When did you start working together?

JARMUSCH: Yeah, the first thing I did with Neil was the score for *Dead Man*. He gave this beautiful score to the film. And then after that we had a funny thing. He made a soundtrack record for the film, and he used some things that weren't even in the film. He added sounds. He kind of made his own collage soundtrack of sounds using music from the film. But it also had a '48 Chrysler engine and things that had nothing to do with the film.

So then he asked me to make a video for the film, and there was one mixed theme that's the title theme in the film that he refused to put on his record that was one of my favorite things. And I kept saying, "Neil, don't you want to stick that on as a bonus track?" And he said, "No, no, man, I like it the way it is." So then he said, "Hey, you want to do a video, with images from the film and stuff that you shot of me while I was recording, and make a video for my soundtrack record?" And I said, "Yeah. Can I use any music that I want from the film?" And he said, "Sure." So I used the theme that isn't on his record. And then I sent it to him, and he called me up saying, "Okay, Neil one, Jim one!" But he liked it a lot. So he's very contrary. So then after that, he

asked me to do a video for “Big Time” from the *Broken Arrow* record, which you saw. And then later we did this new film *Year of the Horse*.

SCHWARTZ: Speaking of improvisation, I read that he improvised the score for *Dead Man*. That sounds unusual.

JARMUSCH: Yeah, it was very strange. He played along directly to the film—a rough cut of the film. He had some themes and ideas that he brought in, but his score is an emotional reaction of his to the story through his electric guitar while he was watching the film. He did that three times over a two-day period, and then we later selected parts and mixed it together. We worked together in the final mix. But we didn’t move any of the music. It all stayed where he recorded it in terms of the picture.

SCHWARTZ: And was this the first film that he scored?

JARMUSCH: Yeah, I think so.

SCHWARTZ: Do you consider *Dead Man* a big departure? It certainly seems very different from the previous films. There [are] similarities of theme, and ideas—it’s clearly your work, but it’s a period film. It’s meticulous in creating period atmosphere. There are a lot of things about it that seem very different. Could you talk about how you came into doing *Dead Man*?

JARMUSCH: Boy, this is going to be a problem, because I’m the least self-analytic person, and I don’t—for example, when my films are done, and I’ve seen them with an audience in a theater that has paid to see it and doesn’t know I’m there, then I never see my films again. So even seeing these shorts was kind of weird for me. Although I’ve seen *Coffee and Cigarettes* a few times because I actually like watching that one. So I don’t know. I don’t even know how to answer that. I always look forward. I think that *Dead Man* is different from my previous films in that it’s not a comedy *per se*, where I sort of think of the other ones, except my very first film, as comedies. And a period thing, so it is different in those respects for sure.

SCHWARTZ: The interest in Native Americans is something that—I read somewhere that it was actually your grandmother who got you—that there

was a lot of influence from her in terms of your getting interested in Indians.

JARMUSCH: Well, yeah. When I was really small, my grandmother used to give me arrowheads and used to teach me things about native culture, and she was very interested in it. So I had an interest [in it] from when I was a child.

SCHWARTZ: You moved to New York in the early 1970s. And I want to ask you about the film...

JARMUSCH: The mid-1970s.

SCHWARTZ: Mid-1970s. The film culture in New York around that time—people always tend to be nostalgic, things are always better then. It seemed like a very lively film culture in terms of interest in all sorts of alternative films. You were at school at NYU working with Nick Ray and there was a very lively repertory scene and interest in European films. If you could talk a bit about that, just that time, coming to New York at that time and your getting into film.

JARMUSCH: Let’s see. Shit, I don’t remember anything about it! (Laughter) It was a sort of exciting time, although I don’t like that idea “things were better back then,” because that’s never true. Well, I guess maybe sometimes it is. But it was exciting because in like 1976, 1977, the music scene in New York was so vibrant—and Max’s Kansas City and CBGB’s—there was a lot going on. And it was made by musicians that were not necessarily virtuosos. And so there was a really strong spirit of people being allowed to express themselves or people wanting to express themselves rather than be real professional about it. I remember at one point in maybe 1979 there were flyers up all over the East Village that said, “Everyone Here Is in a Band.” Which was practically true at the time.

But that was great, because it influenced filmmaking. There was a group of filmmakers that they called—there was a storefront on St. Marks Place called The New Cinema. And they would shoot films in Super-8 and then transfer them to video and show them on a screen, a large screen. It was Charlie Ahearn and James Nares and Bette Gordon and Eric Mitchell. A bunch of people. And that was interesting. And Amos Poe had made his films *Unmade Beds* and *The Foreigner* that are kind

of punk rock in spirit, I guess. And you could see a lot of foreign films in New York, too, then. There were repertory houses. And this was before Ronald Reagan changed the antitrust laws and allowed studios to own theater chains. So there was a different way of film distribution, too, which made a lot of foreign films or different kinds of films more accessible than they are now, that's for sure.

SCHWARTZ: Working in Super-8, "Big Time," the video that we saw—it was filmed in Super-8?

JARMUSCH: Yes.

SCHWARTZ: Were you doing the camera?

JARMUSCH: Yeah. I also had L.A. Johnson, who produced, and also shot Super-8 for *Year of the Horse*—also shot some of it. But we just shot it all in Super-8.

SCHWARTZ: How hard is it to shoot Super-8 these days? Just in terms of getting film—getting film processed.

JARMUSCH: Oh, there's this incredible place in Los Angeles and Boston, a place called Super8 Sound. And any existing Eastman Kodak material they will cut and sprocket and load into Super-8 cassettes for you. So on *Year of the Horse* we were able to shoot like 500 ASA high-speed color negative Super-8. But if you just go and try to find it in a drugstore that's really difficult. (Laughter) Not a lot of Super-8 activity.

SCHWARTZ: What was it like for you to be shooting? For you to be behind the camera?

JARMUSCH: It was fun. I shoot a lot of still photographs, and I've shot Super-8 and video stuff for my own amusement. So it was fun. I like shooting. It's pretty messy-looking. It's like the cinematic equivalent of kindergarten scribbling, I guess. But I like shooting Super-8 a lot.

SCHWARTZ: *Dead Man* must have been a very difficult logistical shoot, and every shot and every frame seems so beautifully composed. Was there a feeling of wanting to do something the opposite or something very spontaneous, going into *Year of the Horse*?

JARMUSCH: Probably, although I wasn't really

conscious of that. But yeah, I probably wanted to do something where the image, the framing, was very shaky and not so precise, probably as a reaction. But I'm not really conscious of those things.

SCHWARTZ: Just to jump back again to the 1970s period, I did want to ask you about Nick Ray and that relationship, because his name is always associated with yours from that period. You worked together—can you just talk about what his influence was?

JARMUSCH: When Nick was asked by the director of the school, László Benedek (who directed *The Wild One*)—he brought Nick Ray to teach directing there. And Nick was living in Soho at the time, and he wasn't in good health, so he didn't like coming to the school. So he would have classes at his house. A lot of students weren't even interested and didn't really show up, even. He asked me to be his teaching assistant. So there were times when there were only a few of us just hanging around his house. And then he worked with Wim Wenders on the film *Lightning Over Water*—they made it together—and Nick asked me to sort of be a gopher for Nick personally. So I got to watch that film being made and work with Nick. And I just got to spend—really, I'm so lucky to have spent a lot of time with Nick Ray and talked with him about a lot of things, film and otherwise.

SCHWARTZ: The time between *Permanent Vacation*, which is, I guess, your thesis film or a film done at school while you were at NYU, and *Stranger Than Paradise*—*Stranger Than Paradise* has such a distinct style and was so different from anything else that was being done at the time. I'm asking you to sort of go back in time for a minute and talk about how that came about.

JARMUSCH: Well, partly the aesthetic of the film was dictated by certain limitations, because I was given some leftover unexposed film stock from Wim Wenders and his partner. Wim had seen my first film *Permanent Vacation* and liked it, and he offered me this black-and-white 35mm film material that was left over from a film that Wim made called *The State of Things*. And it was enough material to make a half-hour film if I basically shot everything in one take and one setup per scene. So I sort of—the story was designed, the style of the film was kind of

designed, to facilitate just having that much film material. And so we made the film—the first third of the film—as a short film. And while I was editing that on an upright Moviola in my tenement apartment, I wrote a script to make it a feature length film.

SCHWARTZ: Now you said that if you had made *Stranger Than Paradise* two years before it might not have had the same reaction, that there was something about being in the right place at the right time. It happens with movies a lot of times that they just hit at the right time and seem to catch something that's going on—just an element of luck and timing involved. What was it about *Stranger Than Paradise* that made it of that moment?

JARMUSCH: I don't know. I think I was very lucky, and if I had not made the first part first, I could have—no one would have ever given me any money to make it based on a script. So I was able to at least show the style and make the long version of the film. But I don't know. Again, I'm not good at analyzing those things. And I don't know why people did like the film at that point or why they like it at all. I still don't really know.

SCHWARTZ: Were you surprised at the reaction? The incredible reaction it got almost immediately?

JARMUSCH: I was very surprised, yeah. I thought that, "Well, I got to make another film, and I'll never make another one, but at least I made these." And then I was able to—knock on wood—still make them.

SCHWARTZ: You've had a different distributor for each film and you've been able to somehow finance your films in a way that lets you have complete control while they're made. You own the negatives to your films, own the rights to the films. Can you talk about how that idea of financing projects came about and how you've maintained that? Because you really have kept that consistently.

JARMUSCH: Well, that's sort of a long story. I got screwed on the first part of *Stranger Than Paradise* by the former partner of Wim Wenders, who had the negative in the lab under his own name rather than my own, and...I had to buy it back from him with money that I borrowed from someone. That was a

real shock to me very early on. And I also had the advice of my lawyer at the time—now a producer—Jim Stark, who I worked with for several films. And he was really savvy, and he saw me go through that period and helped me unravel that, and we sort of came up with this plan of, like, "Well, I am going to own my own negatives." And it was sort of unprecedented, but it was a way to have complete control artistically over the films. It started way back then, and I've just kept that same kind of structure of financing ever since. And I'm really stubborn about it. So I don't—I'm very stubborn anyway; I want to make films my own way. I'm not that ambitious. I don't really care about whatever my place is in the history of cinema, or whatever. I just want to be able to make things the way I want to make them, collaborate with the people I choose. And otherwise, I'd rather do something else. So I'm not a player. I'm not good at that.

If I had to work in Hollywood, I'd probably be in jail for knee-capping some executive. (Laughter) I just don't want some guy in a suit telling me how to make a film. I'm not that kind of person. And I'm really getting bored with this independent label they stamp on everything. *The English Patient* is an independent film, it doesn't mean anything anymore. To me, it means having control artistically over your film and choosing who you collaborate with. And that, to me—at one time I thought that was what independent meant. Starting with [John] Cassavetes and people like that. I don't know what it means anymore. It's just like alternative music. (Laughter) It's a way to sell things, I guess. I don't trust those kinds of labels anyway.

SCHWARTZ: Because what's considered independent these days is very much inside the system. Your films seem very interested in the idea of countercultures, of outsiders, of all different sorts.

JARMUSCH: Yeah, look, anyone who says they're an independent filmmaker and yet they don't have final cut over their film should be gagged and put in a closet or something. (Laughter) Just tell them to shut up, you know. (Laughter) I'm just getting really bored with that.

SCHWARTZ: I think what's going on in filmmaking extends not just to how films are financed. And if you look at the people in independent films, and

the idea of society in films in general, what was striking about both *Dead Man* and *Year of the Horse* is they're really about opposition to American society, and outsiders, both on one hand, sympathy with Native Americans, and there's almost—I don't want to say a 1960s feeling to *Dead Man*, but there is an idea of sort of critiquing American society that is just very rare in films these days. Films don't seem to be engaged with that.

JARMUSCH: Well, yeah. Because it has some historical perspective, because it's a period film. So it does—one level thematically of *Dead Man* does speak about America on that level, although it's not a didactic political film or anything like that. It's just a story, but it's about a lot of other things, too. About death, and about life, and the voyage that we make, being living creatures.

But since I can rag on commercial cinema, the other thing that really bothers me about studio films or Hollywood films is that these people are so timid. They are so frightened of everything. It's like, the film's got to be test-marketed in a shopping mall, and if those people don't have a good reaction, they flip out, and they've got to recut it, or it has to have a happy ending, or the music's got to be more upbeat, or they have to remake *McHale's Navy*. There are no new ideas.

Anything that is interesting usually comes from somewhere in the margins of things, in any form. So, to me, I would think they would be looking in the margins or trying to find things that, I don't know, that are daring in *some way*. But they are so frightened that it amuses me, but it also pisses me off. I don't understand why they're so frightened. Everything has to be so politically correct and a certain way. I don't know. It's kind of condescending to people who like film as a form. And I love all kinds of films. I like commercial films, and I like big-budget films. I like the way film is used for so many different things. They should all be able to exist.

SCHWARTZ: *Dead Man*, how was the response to it in other countries? You've been pretty open about your feeling about how the film was distributed here. It was basically dumped. It was bought and not really released seriously.

JARMUSCH: I was sort of punished by the distributor,

who wanted me to recut the film—and I have adamantly done things my own way this long. I'm certainly not going to break a contract, which they agreed to, which was that they bought the film for U.S. distribution, a finished film. And then they test-marketed it and wanted me to recut it or allow them to recut it, and when I said, "Hey, look, that's not the deal. You know that about me. It's pretty obvious I'm not going to do that." At that point, they seemed not to be very interested in putting much behind the film. So I think I was sort of being punished.

But I'm not bitter about that, because I feel we kind of got over just by making the damn film. I mean, it is an odd film, and it's not fashionable, and it's not geared toward a certain marketing analysis. It's a film we believed in. So it was very difficult to make, and I'm proud that we made it, and it does exist. I don't look back, anyway. I like to keep looking forward.

SCHWARTZ: (Repeats audience question) Two questions. First, what can you say about upcoming projects? And then about your decision to shoot *Dead Man* in black-and-white and, of course *Stranger Than Paradise* and *Down by Law*, also filmed in black-and-white...

JARMUSCH: I'm writing a script now that I hope to shoot in the spring of next year, but I am very superstitious, so I never talk about things in advance. But I do plan to shoot a new one, hopefully in the spring.

As far as black-and-white or color goes, when I am writing a script I start visualizing it from that very early stage, and I stick to that. I've never changed. So if I see a story or feel it in black-and-white while I'm writing, then it ends up in black-and-white. Which sometimes is a real fight, because I could have gotten enough money—actually enough money—to make *Dead Man* properly if I had agreed to make it in color. But, as a result, we were really a couple of million dollars short, and it was really hard to make the film.

But I just stick to what I see. I don't understand why people say, "Yeah, but black-and-white—we have color film now, why shoot in black-and-white?" (Laughter) That's like saying, "We have computers now, so you can never write with a pencil again. "

Or “Photography is invented, so all painters are useless.” I think you sometimes need a certain thing for a certain story, and the texture of it, the visual quality. You have all of these things at your disposal, so you should use what you feel is right. Sometimes you need a hammer and a chisel instead of a chainsaw. So you’ve got to choose what it is that suits the story you’re trying to tell. So I just sort of stick to the first impressions I get when I am writing.

SCHWARTZ: What is the writing process like? Literally, how do you work? How do you organize a script?

JARMUSCH: Well, I carry ideas around for, like, quite a long time, usually a year or so. And I write them down. I take notes, and then I use notecards, on a big board that I just thumbtack up, with scenes on them, so that I can kind of visualize the story in that way. And then I start writing. I just write by hand in a notebook and use my notes. I use a small tape recorder...often to write dialogue—to me, dialogue—my dialogue—I’m most happy with it when I’m not thinking about it, and I just start hearing the characters talk. So I just kind of channel them and start talking for the—I just hear them in my head and let them talk. And if you think about dialogue too much, it gets stilted or forced for me. Everyone has their own way to do it.

SCHWARTZ: But do you go straight through, scene to scene, not knowing, or do you have pretty much the shape of the narrative mapped out?

JARMUSCH: I have the basic shape mapped out, and I start writing, but I don’t always write in order. I might write a scene that’s in the middle and then go back to the beginning, and jump around. It depends on when I start hearing them talk or I start visualizing the scene.

SCHWARTZ: You said you could have got more money if you shot in color, *Dead Man* in color. Why is that?

JARMUSCH: Because I think a lot of really old guys who make these decisions remember when they were, like, the first people on the block that had a color TV! (Laughter) So they think color’s more valuable. So they force a lot of people to believe that color is worth more on TV, because people

don’t want to see black-and-white because they paid for their damn color set! Why would they want to see black-and-white? (Laughter) I think that’s why. I think it’s arbitrary. I think black-and-white is very—I love to watch films on TV that are black-and-white. It’s somehow soothing. And it depends on the story. So I really think it’s that.

SCHWARTZ: (Repeats audience question) How involved are you in the editing of your films, and do you work on computer or on flatbed?

JARMUSCH: Well, I’m very involved in the editing because I’m really particular, but at the same time I’ve worked with, now—for the last three or four films—with Jay Rabinowitz, who I hope to work with for as long as I make films, because he is really a great editor, and he is someone that I can—we understand each other really well. And he sort of helps bring out the best in me somehow and helps me and makes my films a lot better than if I cut them myself. So I work with him very closely and the last few films have been cut on Lightworks or the Avid system. Before that I worked on flatbeds, and before that upright Moviolas.

So I like the computer because it’s faster, but it does have certain drawbacks, too. It’s like, you have to get used to that. Sometimes when you have to change a scene on a flatbed, and you have to re-splice it and it takes time, you have a—there’s time built in that allows you to think about the change you’re making. And that can be valuable instead of, like, okay, in four seconds here is version twelve. I know that Marty Scorsese had a lot of trouble with cutting *Casino* because it was the first time he and Thelma [Schoonmaker], his editor, worked on a computer. And he would save, like, 72 versions of each scene. (Laughter) And he is like a maniac, so he’s like, [impersonating Scorsese] “Yeah, let’s look at version number 52. Okay, let me see version 42.” And I think it drove her nuts, and it was hard on him, too. So I think you have to get used to it.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Could you talk a little about your shooting process.

JARMUSCH: Well, I have been really lucky to collaborate with really great people. Early on: Tom DiCillo and Robby Müller and Fred Elmes are the people I’ve worked with. Because I try to visualize

things while I'm writing, I have a pretty good sense of whether I want the camera moving a lot or static, or what kind of light quality of the film, how the film material is used. And then I try to give as much information as I can to the director of photography and work really closely, showing him drawings or paintings or photographs or scenes from other films or whatever I can. And then, because I work with such amazing people, then they bring something and elevate it generally beyond what I would have done, in the same way as working with Jay Rabinowitz the editor. Because film is such a collaborative thing that it's really, like, who you get to work with that makes all the difference. It's really a collaboration as far as actors and everyone on your crew. So I try to work with them as closely as I can. I try to design scenes, but I often defer to them when—sometimes we have arguments, which is very good because then it either makes you sure of yourself or else they show you a way that is stronger than what you thought. But I'm pretty particular. But again, I have gotten to collaborate with some real masters. So their work is in the film.

SCWARTZ: Back there.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: [Inaudible question about the depiction of Native Americans in *Dead Man*]

JARMUSCH: Well, there were a few things. Most particularly, Native American characters in cinema, American cinema, has generally really been annoying to me. It's either that they are savages who have to be sort of controlled by the white man in the same way that nature does, or else they are like noble savages who are somehow grand. I don't know, there's a human quality to Native American characters in movies seemed lacking to me.

I wrote the character of Nobody for Gary Farmer, and I really wanted to work with someone to make a very human character that was Native American. That's why I like that he is a big guy, that he's not some svelte, muscular young brave (Laughter), and that he is also a real Native American. It's not Victor Mature playing Crazy Horse. And he's very human and complicated. He's a little crazy. He's not a perfectly centered individual. So that was one of the main things I wanted to get in the film, was a real human Native character.

SCHWARTZ: Down here.

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AUDIENCE MEMBER: In *Dead Man*, how did Robert Mitchum come to be in that film, and what was it like working with him?

JARMUSCH: Oh, man. (Laughter) How did he come to get to be in the film? Well, we called him up. The producer Demetra MacBride got in touch with his agent, and I then had to go to Santa Barbara to have lunch and meet him, and I had an amazing, unforgettable three-hour conversation with him. He drank, like, six double martinis and smoked a pack of Pall Malls. And he told me incredible stories about his life and films, and it was just amazing. A lot of unrepeatable things, he told me.

And then he agreed. He called two days later—his agent, saying he got on well with me and would like to do the film. So then working with him was strange because he is an old-school actor. He's very self-effacing as a person, really funny. And he would not—you had to give him his dialogue all written out two days in advance, and he sticks to that dialogue. And when I made a minor change in the dialogue, I went to his trailer on the set, and I talked to his assistant and said, "I've got to talk to Mr. Mitchum." And [the assistant] said, "Oh, I see you have some script pages. You didn't change the dialogue, did you?" And I said, "Well, only one sentence. Just a little minor change." And the guy said, "Oh, good luck!" And he opened the door. So I went in there and said, "Hi, Mr. Mitchum, how are you doing today?" "Terrible." "Look, I have..." "I see what you have: script changes." And I said, "Yeah, but they're very minor, just changing one sentence. I'm sorry to do this to you." "Oh, you're sorry to do this, you're sorry. That's what they say to Gary Gilmore, isn't it?"

But he did the changes. He's just a really funny character. A very strange man. We were filming a long text where he was in two positions, either leaning over a desk or standing up, and I kept changing lenses, and we'd pick up the dialogue again, and he would forget which position he was in. And he said, "Was I in the receiving position, or was I fully erect?!" "Uh, you were fully erect Mr..." "Damn right, I was fully erect!" (Laughter) He was really a character, really an amazing man. He kept saying, "Acting isn't even a manly profession, goddamn it. I'm just a thirty-foot tall masturbatory symbol. That's all I am. They just take advantage of me. It's not even a manly profession." (Laughter)

SCHWARTZ: How about Crispin Glover, since we are on the subject of interesting actors. Is there anything you can share about him?

JARMUSCH: Oh, man. This is a genuine eccentric. He is not a fake eccentric. When there are lightning storms where he lives in Silver Lake in Los Angeles, he rushes to get on his bicycle to ride in the lightning storms because it's exhilarating, the possibility of being struck by lightning. And that's true. This guy is very strange and an amazing character. I consider him a really interesting artist. And he does a lot of strange things, but I wouldn't want to go into all of them. (Laughter)

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I want to ask you what the function of humor is in your films. And I also have another question: how tough is it to make a film? How many people in this room could make a great film if they had the money?

JARMUSCH: We have to ask the wizard behind the screen. (Laughter) I don't know. Dennis Hopper, I saw him say on TV, he said, "It's just as hard to make a bad film as it is to make a good one." And it is really hard—it is hard to make a film. I heard the painter David Salle on the radio once, after he made a film a few years ago. And he was saying, you know, being a painter is one thing, but making a film really kicks your ass. (Laughter) And it's true. It is hard to make a film, good or bad. It just takes a lot of—you have to work really hard, and it really will take a lot out of you. Especially directing, because you have to make so many decisions constantly that it can really wear you down. I always—I stay together. I can shoot for eighteen hours a day. I shoot six days a week. And I stay together physically.

But every film I've made, after we're done, I fall apart. I get the flu. I just get—I don't know. I keep it together to a certain point, and then I'm exhausted. So it is hard, just physically and mentally, to do it. I guess if you had a lot of money, you could shoot five-day weeks or you could do things to make it easier. I have never had that luxury. But as far as—as many people as there are who want to make a film or try to make a film, there are that many ways of making films.

So it's very hard to teach someone how to make a film. I like that Mark Twain said, "Don't let school

get in the way of your education." And I think it's really hard because you have to find your own way of doing whatever it is you do. And people that say they can teach you the way to make a film, they're liars. You can't really teach someone. You can learn a lot by being on a set, by watching movies, by reading interviews with people who make movies. But then you have to go and find the way that you want to make a movie. So I think probably the people in this room alone, all of us here, we could make better movies than they make in Hollywood. But how do we get them to give us the money? David? (Laughter)

SCHWARTZ: How about taking time in between films? Maybe filmmakers feel that they have to do a film every year and always be working. And you've said it's important to just stop.

JARMUSCH: Yeah. Well, my friend Aki Kaurismäki, the Finnish director, calls me World's Slowest Film Director. Because it takes me two, three years to make a film, from writing it and producing it and shooting to cutting it and promoting it. It takes a long time. And then, after that, I need a little break to collect some ideas for another one. But I'm not the most ambitious or driven person. I'm sometimes downright lazy. But I like to live and see my friends and read books and travel and listen to music and watch things. I like to observe things. I need time between things.

SCHWARTZ: A question about humor, and comic timing. It's been said that death is easy and comedy is hard—to get the exact right pacing and timing that you're able to pull off. Is there anything you can say about doing that as a director?

JARMUSCH: I don't know. It's just like having a sense of humor. I think life is very funny, and my films are often about small details in life rather than big dramatic things. That's why they're not really plot-driven. In fact, some critics say they have no plots at all, which I don't agree with, but the plots are not of primary importance to me. And I think funny things are found in small details of life. I saw two Italian guys telling an Asian guy in the street a couple of weeks ago—he was saying—this was on the Lower East Side. He was saying, "Where is East 74th Street?" And they said, "It's uptown on the East Side, not quite as far as East 84th Street." I thought it was great, just kind of ridiculous. But I think there

are funny things happening. People do funny things, and we shouldn't take life too seriously or we miss a lot.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: [Inaudible question about what filmmakers influenced him]

JARMUSCH: And what filmmakers influenced me? That's a really—do you have about four hours? I could give you a list. I like all kinds of films, and so that's a really rough question. I like mostly—well, I can't even say that. I was going to say I like things that are sort of a little bit on the edge or margin of things aesthetically, or, like, westerns. I'm not a John Ford fan particularly, but I like the more kind of outside westerns. Like, I like Monte Hellman's westerns. Or I like *Blood on the Moon*.

That's, like, such a horrible question—for me to answer, not for you to ask. I like Carl Dreyer and [Robert] Bresson, and I like Seijun Suzuki and [Yasujiro] Ozu, and I like so many different kinds of films. I like to watch kung fu films, and I like *Mothra*. I like all kinds of movies, so that's really hard. What inspires you is whatever that moves you, that speaks to you somehow. Like Duke Ellington, when he was asked what's good music, he said, "If it sounds good, it's good." Which is really a very pure, honest answer. Because if anything speaks to you, then it's good to you, and it doesn't matter what other people think. It's wherever you get your inspiration.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: You've worked with a lot of musicians. What's the specific attraction... Is there a musician or two that you like to work with?

JARMUSCH: When I first started making films, I was working as a musician, and I hung out in the sort of music scene, so I had many more friends that were musicians than film people. And now that I've worked in film for quite a while, I have a lot of friends that work in film as well, but I still tend to have a lot of musician friends. So that's how they sort of filter into my work. As far as particular musicians I'd like to work with, I don't really think ahead very much, so I can't really say. I am sure there are some, and there are people I would like to work with again—like Iggy [Pop], for example, who I think is capable of being a really great actor. But I don't have any specific plans, so I can't really answer that very well. Like all the other questions you've asked today. (Laughter)

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I wanted to ask you how you felt about—how you decided to become a filmmaker. And I wanted to ask you about your feelings on the discipline of cinema studies kind of as a pre-rec to becoming a filmmaker, or whether you feel it is more studying the craft and doing work. And the role of the study of cinema.

JARMUSCH: I don't know really how to answer because I think that everyone is different. But obviously, if you like film as a form, then it would seem logical that you would like movies. And if you like movies, then you should watch as many as you like to watch.

SCHWARTZ: Okay, thanks.

JARMUSCH: Thank you. (Applause)

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