TRANSCRIPT

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

A PINEWOOD DIALOGUE WITH **SIDNEY LUMET**

Sidney Lumet's critically acclaimed 2007 film *Before the Devil Knows You're Dead*, a dark family comedy and crime drama, was the latest triumph in a remarkable career as a film director that began 50 years earlier with *12 Angry Men* and includes such classics as *Serpico*, *Dog Day Afternoon*, and *Network*. This tribute evening included remarks by the three stars of *Before the Devil Knows Your Dead*, **Ethan Hawke**, **Marissa Tomei**, and **Philip Seymour Hoffman**, and a lively conversation with Lumet about his many collaborations with great actors and his approach to filmmaking.

A Pinewood Dialogue with Sidney Lumet moderated by Chief Curator David Schwartz (October 25, 2007):

DAVID SCHWARTZ: (Applause) Thank you, and welcome, everybody. Sidney Lumet, as I think all of you know, has received a number of salutes and awards over the years that could be considered lifetime achievement awards—which might sometimes imply that they're at the end of their career. But that's certainly far from the case, as you're about to see, if you haven't seen the movie *Before the Devil Knows You're Dead* (2007). It's an amazing film, an incredible piece of work. It opens in theaters tomorrow. We do want to thank THINKFilm, which is distributing the film, and really helped make this evening possible. The film has amazing performances, and this has been true, it's been said over and over again about Sidney's films, that he's an actors' director. You're going to see three actors tonight who are incredible in the film—and there are more great performances than that. Ethan Hawke is our renaissance man of the evening. Please welcome Ethan Hawke. (Applause)

ETHAN HAWKE: Thank you very much for having me. Thank you for saying that. I guess I join a long list of very accomplished actors who have had the privilege of working with Sidney—it is a privilege. It was different than I thought it would be. I don't know what I thought it would be like, but it was different. I remember I said to Phil [Seymour Hoffman], about halfway through shooting, "I feel that there's another film crew on the other side of town with the same script and a different cast, and we're trying to beat them." (Laughter) "You know, trying to wrap the movie ahead of them. It's like a race." I remember saying that "you know if this movie works, then I'm going to have to rethink my whole idea of process, because I can not *imagine* that this will work!" (Laughter) I've never seen such a deliberate—I'm going to steal your words, Phil, but—a focus of energy, and use of energy.

There's so much to learn from Sidney. It's a funny thing; people ask me that all the time, "What did you learn?" The thing I come to when I ask myself is: You just can't fake that much experience. I've worked with a lot of people who have theories about how to do film, and theories about how to tell stories, and theories about how to conjure performances and how to conjure the muse. Sidney has a tremendous amount of experience about how to do that.

The thing that shocked me the most was how prepared you were, Sidney, and how much all the young filmmakers that I've worked with could learn. Everybody likes to complain about how they don't have enough money to make their movie or tell their story, and then they just burn money everywhere because you know, "All things be ready if our minds be so." I have yet to work with a director who was as ready as you were, and who knew how to focus energy, how to focus our energy. It was really, really challenging, and I

was really, really happy when it wrapped (Laughter) because it was one of the most unpleasant characters I ever played in my life, and it was absolute misery every day. And I'm so proud of the movie, and I'm sitting here rethinking my process, because it worked—and you work—and it's an honor to speak on your behalf. (Applause)

SCHWARTZ: One thing that I hope we can do tonight is dispel a few myths about Sidney Lumet. There are two myths that I want to deal with right now. One is that he does drama, that he doesn't do comedy. I think what you're going to see is that he knows how to do comedy and mix it in with drama.

The other is that he's mainly a director of men. Maybe the fact that his first film that he directed was called *12 Angry Men* (1957) got this reputation started. But I want to just read you a list of some of the actresses that he's directed over the years—and these are actresses who played in starring roles in the film, not in supporting roles: Sophia Loren, Anna Magnani, Katharine Hepburn, Anne Bancroft, Candice Bergen, Simone Signoret, Vanessa Redgrave, Lynn Redgrave, Ingrid Bergman, Lauren Bacall, Faye Dunaway, Diana Ross, Christine Lahti, Julie Christie, Jane Fonda, and Sharon Stone. That's just a partial list, and they are amazing performances by all of them. When you see this film, you're going to see another incredible performance by an actress who you're about to meet: Marisa Tomei. (Applause)

MARISA TOMEI: (Laughs) Well, you were just talking about all those amazing women that Sidney has directed, and one of the things that I found so remarkable was that he put himself— he loves actors; that's his reputation, and it's true. So many directors are scared of actors and don't really want to talk to us. (Laughs) "You be over there and have your emotions and…" But Sidney likes talking with us, even when he doesn't have to. (Laughs)

One of the most striking things for me, in working with him, was that he put himself in each of the actors' character. I could see it happen to him. I could see it kind of overcome him; shapeshift. The muses coming in, and him going into each character. I felt that way with my character; female character. This woman was—he was insider her head; he was inside her body.

There's one scene that isn't in the film, but my character is stealing; she's having a hard time. She's, like, stealing little things from a drugstore, a pharmacy, and things like this. And it was a scene that could just kind of be overwrought, and we wanted to make it natural, but still have its importance. And he just—I saw you walk the aisles of that drugstore and kind of become me (Laughs) except do a much better job. He was just becoming my character. He looked at this little hairbrush, and then he came over to me and he said, "Why don't you just look at that hairbrush before you pick up the thing you're going to steal?" because he embodied her. I always felt that he was with my character, and that we were always creating it together. I can't say that I've had that experience, where the director's actor self is so alive, and his empathy and his heart with his actors and his characters, including—Let's face it, a lot of times the female character is just misunderstood and gets the short shrift. He didn't let that happen. I think that was really extraordinary. I thank you for that experience. (Applause)

SCHWARTZ: Please welcome Philip Seymour Hoffman. (Applause)

PHILIP SEYMOUR HOFFMAN: Hey. I was just listening to Ethan and Marisa, and I was thinking how lucky we were, how lucky I am, how lucky we all were that we had the cast we had. When I'm working, when I'm shooting a film, I get very… sensitive. I don't know, I'm trying to think of the word. Sometimes I feel sensitive about people being right off camera watching me, or this "eye line" stuff—you might've heard it before, someone being in your eye line—or being distracted. I've been like that for a while. On this film, I swear, Sidney could've been sitting on my head, and it would've been fine. In fact, I wanted him to. (Laughter) I literally have not done that with a director in years and years and years, and I don't know if I'll do it again.

I just wanted to say that, because I think that's the best way to put it is that *I wanted him there*. I wanted him there because I think ultimately, as

hard as it is to say this, I wanted to please him. I think what he's—I think he meant a lot to me. Obviously, as a filmmaker, before we started the film; but I think while we were rehearsing and then shooting, I think he started meaning a lot more to me, beyond that—and that says something. I think in order to make something, to create something that has some substance and humanity, the people making it have to get dirty. I don't mean that in a bad way, you know? They have to get intimate, they have to get close, and I think Sidney does that.

And I wanted to say, they sent me the—I was talking about this earlier today, Sidney, I'm sorry I'm going to say it again—but they sent me this reel for the clips that you're going to see tonight, of other films that Sidney's done. If you've ever watched a reel of someone's work, an actor—even a great actor, or even a great director—the reel's always a bit disappointing somehow, because the scenes are out of context and you're like, "Well, I remember that to be better than that," or something. You know what I mean? That's always my experience.

This reel is the exact opposite, and you'll see as you watch these clips. The clip would end, and you'd want to watch the whole movie again. I would watch this little two-minute scene, and I'd want to watch the whole movie again. I think the clips that are chosen are great, by the way, whoever did them, because there's a consistency in there. I watched through them twice, and both times—this probably says more about me than anything else—I was moved, and I, you know, was *really* moved. There are not a lot of scenes that you'll see about people grieving or anything like that, but there's this consistent thing throughout that I couldn't deny, which is that all these—You'll see these characters, you'll see them in an event, in a time in their life, in a moment, where you know that something that's going on is, *Why*? Why is life difficult? Why is it like this? Why can't I do it well? Why can't I have that relationship? Why is this all so screwed up? Why can't I figure it out? You know, and this thing that—And you see all these characters, and it's so *real*! And it's so *true* that we all walk around quietly in life feeling that all the time, and that these movies, these characters, these stories that Sidney's brought to us, allow that to come out. You know, that cathartic… You'll see what I'm saying.

I think in *Before the Devil Knows You're Dead*, that happens, too. You know, which leads to awful consequences, but… (Laughs) it happens. And I thought, "That's why all these scenes I'm seeing are so powerful, and mean so much, and make me want to watch the movie, because what I'm watching is the thing that I yearn to see." We often kind of get together in a room and go, "Yeah, it's just so fucking *hard*," this thing that we're doing, walking around breathing thing. (Laughter) Obviously, the classic moment of, "I'm mad as hell and I'm not gonna take it anymore!" I mean, I could go on… But that moment is in *all* those people… and it's a beautiful thing to see.

You'll see actors and you'll go, "Oh, that's *right*. *That's* that actor. My *God*, he's—I've never *seen* him like that!" You know? I was thinking that as I was watching these clips. They're being so brave, they're being so true, they're being so open—all these beautiful things—and that's what Sidney does. Yes, Sidney, you were right when you said earlier today, "It's inside of all of them." But the fact is, is that as actors, we're always looking for that person—because you know, the other thing you said is true, is that we're all very shy. Everyone thinks that actors want to be out and—we're all actually, just like everybody else, don't want to really show our emotions. We're looking for that person who we can trust and who will lead us to a place where we can feel like we can actually express those things, and make going to the film and the theater an exciting social event. That's it. Thank you so much for allowing me to be a part of this. (Applause)

SCHWARTZ: Well, let's just say it now: Best Director, Sidney Lumet. He's with us tonight, and even though this is a tribute, we're going to put him onstage now. So please welcome Sidney Lumet. (Applause)

SIDNEY LUMET: How about those actors in all those films?

SCHWARTZ: You're always prepared; you brought your own water.

LUMET: I brought my own water, yes. (Laughter)

SCHWARTZ: What does all this talk about age mean to you? All the press coverage of this film is saying you're eighty-three years old and… Two ideas. One is that only somebody younger could've made such a film; and the other is that all your experience is paying off in this film. What does that mean to you?

LUMET: David, I haven't the remotest idea. (Schwartz laughs) I kind of resent it, in the sense that it's just an automatic assumption that as you get to be older, you can't do anything. Which is nonsense. If you hate your work, I guess it's true. If you love your work, the way I do, hopefully—knock a piece of wood (Laughter)—hopefully, it's just going to get better. Because as you learn more, you're able to do more. And a little [inaudible Yiddish phrase] comes in there somewhere. (Laughter; applause)

SCHWARTZ: Well, you had a lot of experience before you made this film. You directed about 250 teleplays before you made your first feature film. But *12 Angry Men* (1957) has a lot of the qualities that we see—as Philip was saying, about your work with actors—right there in this first feature film. Can you tell us what this film, what doing this film was to you? What this experience was to you?

LUMET: You mean this last one?

SCHWARTZ: No, *12 Angry Men*. We'll jump around in time—so *12 Angry Men*.

LUMET: Oh, *12 Angry Men*. I never knew that it was difficult. Everybody said, "Oh, my God, it's going to be twelve people in one room. That's not even a movie." (Laughter) But nobody told me that till after I'd done it. The main thing that interests me, of course, is people, and defining human beings as best I can, and as smartly as I can. The use of intelligence. To me, it's not a movie just because a face is shot against a mountaintop. A face against the wall is also a movie, if the face is doing something. It's the face that I'm interested in, and I don't care if it's a mountaintop or a wall.

SCHWARTZ: And I think one thing that did become clear when I was looking at the movies to pick the scenes [that the audience saw], is that your movies are often about ideas—about things like how the justice system works—that's one reason we teach the film at the Museum. But ultimately, you seem to mainly be interested in these emotional moments. In *12 Angry Men*, what you're building to is Lee J. Cobb's character, and it's all about his relationship with his son, and the emotional breakthrough that he has.

LUMET: Yes, it's a question of revelation. What are you going to say about this character? What is the actor going to say about this character? And how are we going to say it? When you're functioning well, you pluck out those lovely things that we all have in common.

SCHWARTZ: There's a mastery here of close-up, of knowing when to go in for the close-up, which is tied into these emotional moments. I think you know when to use close-up for the most impact; we saw that in the scene with Philip and Ethan in *Before the Devil*.

LUMET: Well, it's one of the critical things in movies. You know, when I give a class to students and brand new young ones coming in, the first question is almost invariably the same: "How do you know where to put the camera?" When you think about it, that's a tough question; and it's got a simple answer. It's not really a simple answer; like all simple things, it's enormously complex—but you have to begin someplace, and the place you begin is very easy: "What do I want to see at that moment?"

So the choice of when to use a close-up, how to use a close-up is so critical, because it involves editing, it involves lighting, it involves the lens plot of the piece. One of the things, clearly, that happens in any piece of work is saving your tools for when you need them. If you start dissipating them, using them when they're not needed, they're not going to have the effect that you want when you do need them.

So that selection is critical. It was interesting, David; because I came from television, one of the things that relates to close-ups is the scale of the screen. The biggest difficulty I had adjusting from TV—by the way, this was live TV; none of it was on film—was adjusting my way of telling a story on a seventeen-inch piece of glass versus a forty-foot image. A close-up on a movie screen means a hell of a lot more than a close-up in television. In

fact, you're forced in television—because the screen is so small—you're forced to use it too much.

SCHWARTZ: Now, one thing about *12 Angry Men* that struck me, that actually relates to the new movie—And you'll pardon me for jumping around. I know, you know, you have a new movie opening tomorrow, and we're out there reading the reviews of this movie, and we're asking you to look at this fifty-year career.

But this streak of un-sentimentality. There's this idea which comes up in your book, that sentimentality in a movie can often be, to use your word, bullshit. Even writing about *12 Angry Men*, you said that you were worried about some of the scenes seeming sentimental. There's a moment when Lee J. Cobb is making bigoted remarks, and everybody else gets up and turns their back to him. It's a powerful moment. But you were afraid that that might be sentimental, sort of a movie sentimentality.

LUMET: Yes… and also I didn't believe it. I didn't believe it in the script. I think we got away with it, because I staged it wonderfully, and shot it well. (Laughter) But it's a very dicey moment. I cannot *really* imagine somebody going into a racist diatribe, one person among twelve, and the other eleven people *all* walking away from him. Not in our lives, not in our city.

SCHWARTZ: So to jump to this material, the new movie. *Before the Devil Knows You're Dead* is an incredibly tough-minded movie. Somebody said it can be compared to both *film noir* and to *Long Day's Journey Into Night* (1962); that's what one of the reviews said, and I thought it was great.

LUMET: Wow!

SCHWARTZ: I thought that was great. What drew you to this material—because it is a tough movie. I mean, I didn't even synopsize the plot, the idea of making a movie about two brothers who try to rob their own parents' jewelry store and everything goes wrong. What drew you to the script?

LUMET: Well today, melodrama is a very sort of frowned-upon genre. I don't know why; I love melodrama! (Laughter) All it is is reality pushed to a certain extreme. All melodramatic stories are *highly* improbable. Where they come a cropper is when they're impossible. So the trick is to make sure that the story is highly *improbable*, but not *impossible*. So for me, it was very exciting. I've done a lot of melodramas. In fact, the first television show that I directed was a show called *Danger* (1951-1953), which was a half-hour melodrama. Began with a knife in a fence going (Makes twangy sound; laughter). I just always loved it.

SCHWARTZ: Of course, so much melodrama has to do with the family. You made a decision with this script, I believe—which I didn't know until today—but the script that you got did not have these characters as brothers. Tell us about that choice.

LUMET: No, they were friends. The first thing I realized about the script was that it had to be performed at a white-hot level; that the intensity in it had to be enormous; that that would help me reach that line of improbable, but not impossible. So it was a question of looking for the sources I could use to intensify the feelings on a real level. It occurred to me, "Oh, my God, if they're brothers, it's really going to make it agonizing, and it's going to be great for the actors, because they're really going to have something to come up against." And so we did that.

SCHWARTZ: Another thing that you've added—and this is my last spoiler of the night—is the sex. You start the film with a sex scene that is quite strong. Talk about adding that.

LUMET: I put that in, and I don't know how many of you know the pictures I've done, but I don't usually have sex in the movie at all. One of the reasons is I never believe it. It's always two actors (Makes spritzing sounds) they sweat them up with glycerin and then they've got to go (Makes panting sound). (Laughter) There was one, in one picture, in all the sex scenes I've seen, in one picture, I believed it… and it's because they were really doing it. (Laughter)

SCHWARTZ: (Repeats audience question) They want to know what film.

LUMET: You work it out. (Laughter)

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Come on.

LUMET: Oh, *you* come on! What do you think I am, a gossip? (Laughter) In this movie, the driving source, from the story point of view, is Philip's character. I therefore thought (again, in terms of making the stakes as high as I could) that the basic thing that we have to know about him—because it's not critical in melodrama to know much about the people *in fact*; where they come from, blah-blah-blah—those things aren't important. In melodrama, you're dealing primarily with story. But I did think for his character, it was important to know, "What does this man want?"

There are two scenes in which you (I hope subtly) find that out. The picture opens with Philip and Marisa on vacation in Rio, in a hotel room, and just having a terrific time. And that was to start him off, so that you knew later on, when you see them just having unsuccessfully made love in their New York apartment, "Ah-ha! That's the reason he wants to get back to Rio."

That, and there's one other scene, when he's in his dealer's apartment, and you see the way he treats that apartment. *That's* what he wants. He wants those two things. And God knows… Well, I know one thing about that scene, it's *wonderfully* done—and that's not the picture I was talking about! (Laughter) By God, the audience stops eating that popcorn and… (Laughter)

SCHWARTZ: I said before that I wanted to dispel some myths about you. Another thing that we hear often is that you're a realistic director, that you show things as they are and that your films are not stylized. I think that's not really true. I think we see some examples of that throughout the clips. In this film, you have a transition between scenes, a use of editing that's very startling. It's sort of a jumping back and forth between scenes that really makes the audience pay attention to the edits. Could you talk about that?

LUMET: Well, here's one of the things that the writer of the script, Kelly Masterson, did. I wish I'd thought of it, because it was a *wonderful* idea: He fractured the timeframe. So you come up to a certain point in the story, and then you jump back, but you're now jumping back with another person's point of view. You go up to the point you reached, and then a little past it, and then again, you jump back, but it's now with a third person's point of view. You might go through two incidents you've already seen, but it's different, because the point of view has changed. It was a *wonderful* writing idea, and it had great, great value for me.

SCHWARTZ: I'm going to use this as a segue to go back to another film that had a very interesting use of editing, *The Pawnbroker* (1964). In that case, you have a character played by Rod Steiger, again building up to a cathartic moment. We see what's going on in his mind through this introduction of flashbacks. Could you talk about creating this editing style?

LUMET: When the script arrived, it had fictional scenes in a concentration camp, but with instructions to use newsreel footage. There was no way I was going to do that. Nobody was ever there so that I could use it in a commercial picture, and so we had to create our own.

But then I face the problem—because it happens, I don't know, ten times during the movie. It's a big part of the movie, what he's trying *not* to remember. It's about his sealing himself off from his own memories. And again, as so often happens in these cases, you simply try to work out of yourself. I knew that that's the way my mind works when I'm trying to block something out: I'll be busy with something, and a flash will come through, and I'll concentrate more on what I'm doing; then another flash; and another flash. The flashes will last longer and longer, and sometimes, if it's an important enough memory, they'll take over and I'm totally in that flashback.

So we simply set about doing that in the editing room. It was technically very interesting because the common belief at that time was that your eye can not retain an image of less than three frames. There are twenty-four frames per second in 35mm film. That means that your eye won't retain anything less than an eighth of a second.

I got curious about that. We just made our own little experiments, and we found that if we led you to it gradually, you'd be able to see even *one* frame. But you had to get to it slowly. So just from

a technical point of view, that was a terrific adventure, because we were dealing with something that had been an age-old rule, and we found out that it wasn't true.

SCHWARTZ: Do you find, now that you're working—at that time, you were working on Movieolas, and now you're working digitally, so how do you find that changes the editing process? You're clearly a hands-on editor.

LUMET: Everything about digital is *infinitely* superior. I'll never go back to film.

SCHWARTZ: The next film that we're going to look at is *The Hill* (1965). We're going to show you don't only makes movies in New York. This time you went to Spain, and chose to go there at a time when it was 115 degrees everyday of the production. This is one of the examples that I think Philip was talking about, where we're going to see an actor, Sean Connery, who had—I don't think he had done anything quite as bold as the performance that he gives in *The Hill*.

LUMET: Harry Andrews up there is a miracle of an actor.

SCHWARTZ: Yes. Could you talk about—since you just made this film forty-three years ago, it must be fresh in your mind, the production (Laughter)—talk about working with Sean Connery and getting that performance?

LUMET: He's the best. An amazing man, an amazing actor. You know, it was so interesting all those years, people would say, "Oh, he's charming as Bond." *Charming* was the word, not realizing that what he was actually doing was really high comedy. That kind of performance and the techniques he was using would absolutely work with Sheridan, you know, or any of the great old English farces, the writers. It was *acting*. It wasn't… He's charming in person, yes, but only when he wants to be. (Schwartz laughs)

I knew from the Bond performances that he was a hell of an actor; that that wasn't accidental, nor was it charm; it was high comedy. So when this came up and we met to talk about it, in three minutes—All I had to know was would that be part of his—would he want to show that side of himself? That was all there was to find out about. And off we went. And then we subsequently did four more pictures together.

SCHWARTZ: But getting to that point where he showed that, was that an easy process?

LUMET: It never is, and yet it's like all simple things: it's simple, and yet it's so complicated. The three actors who were here today, this evening… You've got to understand one thing about actors: all good work, all good creative work, is self-revelation. It's through revealing ourselves that we hopefully encompass you. Hopefully, the chunks of humanity that we let out involve you, and you, and you, and you, and you, and you, et cetera. (Points to audience)

That process is very painful. It's not our natural instinct or behavior. It may be in some societies, but it sure isn't here… unless you're Jewish. (Laughter) It's why I quit acting. I was a pretty good actor, but really, after I got out of the army and I did two more plays, I didn't want to do that anymore. I got shy about it. I was not going to reveal myself to 1,500 or 1,200 strangers a night. And so the question is always—it's the main reason I rehearse: "What is the actor going to let us see of him- or herself?" The process of rehearsal is to develop enough of a mutual vocabulary and enough of a mutual respect, really, so that the inhibition disappears, and that the actor feels free enough to say, "Okay, I'm going to let you see that."

SCHWARTZ: You tell a great story about Paul Newman and *The Verdict* (1982) in the book, and that's exactly what this is about, about self-revelation because you—and I'll let you tell this…

LUMET: No; it's alright—tell it.

SCHWARTZ: Well, in the rehearsal process for *The Verdict*, you felt he was doing fine doing the lines as they were written, but something was missing. You let him find that on his own. So could you talk about that?

LUMET: Well, it's just that work is very complicated, our work. There are many ways of directing. There are no rights and wrongs about it. There are directors who like to get *inside* a person

and get them to reveal things, without the actor knowing it. In a sense, exploiting them.

I'm just the opposite. I don't like… I'm not an analyst, it's not my business. If there's something missing, let's talk about it. Give them the choice. It's up to them. Okay, so the performance is not as good, and therefore the picture is not as good. I'm not a believer in, "I'm going to get it if I have to kill everybody." If I have to kill everybody, it's not worth it.

So when I said that about Sean, what I meant was, would he let us see, is he—I'm sorry, let me just jump, I'm jumping around. Part of that self-revelation for an actor is *him- or herself*. It's *their* sexuality, it's *their* anger, it's *their* frustration, it's *their* feeling of love and tenderness. The instrument is the actor. He doesn't have a fiddle to hide behind. He doesn't have movement to hide behind. There's no hiding. The nature of the art is that the actor uses him- or herself for all that revelation.

And that's hard. In the incident that you brought up, we were getting a fine performance… and there was a piece missing. Paul and I were riding home—we lived right near each other—and I just told him frankly, I said, "Paul, look…" It was a Friday, we were not going to resume till Monday. "There's a whole section of this guy—the run-through was terrific; the picture's going to be just fine; your performance is more than fine. But there's a piece, I think, missing. And will you… whether you reveal it or not is up to you." He knew just what I was getting at. He didn't say a word, and he came in Monday and kicked ass, you know? (Laughter)

SCHWARTZ: Could you talk at all about how this process worked with the new movie, *Before the Devil Knows You're Dead*? You have characters whose lives are basically falling apart. What's great about this story is that we see these brothers and we see their lives unraveling. How do you get the actors to that?

LUMET: Well, again, it's a slow process. It doesn't happen the first day. It's a slow development of confidence; their confidence in me, in my ability to see it, because believe it or not, they're… A lot of directors get interested in very different things. A lot of directors get interested in, "Where am I going to put the camera?" "Yeah, you go ahead and do that and…" (Schwartz laughs)

It's not a shared proposition in any way. Here, because I knew I was going to ask for a lot of self-revelation, a lot of baring, in nudity as well as in emotions, we had to build that confidence slowly. And by slow, I don't mean forever—I mean, like, three days.

SCHWARTZ: You do more rehearsal time than most directors.

LUMET: Yes, I rehearse for at least a two week period. On some pieces, I've rehearsed four weeks. *Long Day's Journey Into Night*… It depends on the complexity of the characters. Here, I knew on the fourth day that we were in business.

What I do is, I rehearse it like a play. The sets are laid out, exact proportions. Props are there—glasses, guns, whatever. Whatever we're going to need, handled.

The first scene is Philip and Marisa making love in this hotel room in Rio. I had very carefully added to the script an exact description of the positions I wanted them in because it has happened—and it's happened to, I think, every director—which is: "Scene eighteen, they're making love." Then comes the day, and the director says, "Okay, let's get rid of the clothes," And they say, "What do you mean? Get naked?" And you can't force it, because the union protects them that way, and rightly so. They can, at any point, refuse to be naked, and I knew I needed them both nude. And Philip is not a conventional leading man. He's not that physically… He's not Brad Pitt. (Laughter)

SCHWARTZ: You know he's still here, right? (Laughter)

LUMET: No, that's fine. And I wondered, it occurred to me, "Is Philip going to have more difficulty with this than Marisa—because he's never had to do this?" The way good actors are with each other, and how well they understand each other…

Because it was the first scene in the picture, it was the first scene I had to stage, block. There was a bed for the bed in the hotel room. We walked over to the set and Marisa hopped onto the bed, got up on her knees and elbows and slapped her ass and said, "Come on, Phil!" (Laughter)

Well, the generosity of that! (Laughter) No, I'm not kidding. I'm not kidding. How brilliant it was! She took *all* self-consciousness out of it. If Phil had been feeling self-conscious about it, it was over. And she did it. It was generous and giving and loving. I don't know, I'm sure—I don't think it ever occurred to her how generous it was. But she's got a generous heart, and that's what she did, without thinking. It was great.

Later on, she's got a scene where she's just about naked with Ethan. We got to shoot it, and everybody popped out of their robes, and Ethan, who I really didn't see naked in the shot, got naked and just said, "Okay, everybody here on the stage, if you want to watch the scene, get out of your clothes." (Laughter) And it was, again, a total generosity on his part, in the sense that he did not want oglers. You know, Marisa, if you've seen the movie, has a *ravishing* body. It's really so beautiful, and he was not going to have anybody hanging around watching it for their own pleasure. If you were going to watch it, take your clothes off, you know? Again: total generosity and love of each other. When you see that during rehearsals, you know you've been working well.

SCHWARTZ: So was that the first time you had to direct a film naked, then? (Laughter)

LUMET: As Philip told you, he wanted me on his head. (Laughter, applause)

SCHWARTZ: Okay; this blows my segue to *Serpico* (1973)… (Laughter) But what I was going to say about *Serpico* is that you let [Al] Pacino get to this place, the film really builds up to this point, where here's a character who's also falling apart. Whose idea was it to have him dress as a Hasid?

LUMET: I don't remember; I really don't remember. As soon as I see anything Jewish on the screen, I assume it's mine. (Laughter) But I don't remember.

Al has a motor that is one of the best I've ever seen. It turns over (Snaps fingers) immediately, and like so many magnificent actors, his concentration is almost psychotic. Once that engine goes, get out of the way, because something will happen. It's interesting. It's true of all really wonderful actors, and it was one of the great joys of *Before the Devil Knows You're Dead*, because it happened with both Philip and with Ethan. They do surprises. Absolutely unexpected things. Not for the sake of itself, but just coming out of the human truth of the moment. A scene like that, I think it's written for eight lines, twelve lines maybe. I saw that Al was cooking, and just let it go.

SCHWARTZ: Well, of course, he starred in one of the movies you did closely after this, *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975). And you know, one of the great things about the fact that you've done so many films is that watching the new movie, you see echoes of earlier films; sort of themes or ideas. It was striking to look at *Dog Day Afternoon* and realize, well, you've got those criminals. Pacino and [John] Cazale seem pretty inept; the new movie has probably even more inept criminals in Ethan and Phil. You're somebody who is so prepared all the time, and so on top of your craft and what you're doing. But you love something about these characters, who just are clueless. They obviously didn't plan anything beyond going into the bank.

LUMET: Well, it's wonderful to deal with characters who are doing things for the first time. (Laughter) There is a fantastic—it's one of the best acted sequences I've ever seen—scene in this picture, *Before the Devil Knows You're Dead*, between Ethan and Philip, where they're cleaning out the dope dealer's apartment of all the dope and all of his money because they've got to get out of town *now*. It rises to a hysterical pitch that's… I couldn't quite believe it while I was shooting it.

The reason is, neither of them have ever done anything like this before. Also, Philip has had to shoot somebody at the beginning of the scene. They are both in a world that they, in their wildest imaginations, could not have been aware of… and here they are doing it, and it's the first time. So that's one of the terrific things about all of *Dog*

Day Afternoon; it's a brand new experience for everybody.

SCHWARTZ: Could you talk a bit about working on location? It seems like you, in this film, are responding to the way the bank was laid out physically, in terms of how you blocked the scene. *Serpico* was filmed all around New York City, and it's something that you've done a lot. Going fresh into a location, does that spark ideas?

LUMET: It depends, David, completely on the picture. For example, you have to make your decision at the beginning, "What is this movie about, and how am I going to tell this story?" That "how" is really that terribly misused word, "style."

On *Dog Day Afternoon*, the style couldn't have been simpler. You, audience, had to believe totally, had to *know* that this really happened. If it did not have about it the feeling, the texture, the smell—"Hey folks, this really happened!"—then it becomes a kind of cheap story. The only way it was going to be what I wanted it to be was that if you believed and knew. It's a film that's telling you every second, "Hey folks, this really happened." That became an obligation in the movie.

So what I did was, I didn't want to go into a studio; but I also needed tremendous maneuvering room physically, because I'm in that bank—I don't know; sixty, seventy pages. Literally, physically—the time in the movie, over half of it is in the bank. That means I've got to be able to pull out walls. I need the ability to put the camera anywhere I want to.

So what I did was I found a warehouse on this street, and we built the bank in the warehouse. And because we built it in the warehouse, we could take out any wall any time we wanted to. Its doors opened right out onto the perfect street. I didn't even want to use artificial light if I didn't have to, except to get the proper exposure for the camera.

One of the fortunate things about it—I mean, that's why we picked it for the location—was that the front of the building was almost white. It was a kind of egg-white. Now, the advantage of that was that we could then light it just the way it was actually lit, which was that there would be a police emergency van across the street, with these enormous lights on it, hitting the front of the bank. Well, the light stone of the front of the bank, the light bounced off it, and it bounced off it enough power that I could shoot the people across the street without adding any artificial light to it. All of those considerations go into the picking of a location. If you have to change a lot, then you better keep looking.

SCHWARTZ: You kind of like grungy locations, or locations that seem kind of nondescript. In the new movie, you find this strip shopping mall, suburban shopping mall, which is the most sort of ordinary looking mall, but it's so…

LUMET: Banal.

SCHWARTZ: Banal, yes; but it adds so much to the film. It just adds to the atmosphere of the story.

LUMET: Well, you see, there again, that's why I say every picture is an individual problem. I don't expect that you're going to believe this story the way you're going to believe *Dog Day*, and I don't want you to. What the advantage for me was, with the characters so extreme—Marisa's and Philips and Ethan's character, and Albert [Finney]'s character—everybody in the movie is very extreme, so I thought it would be most useful to have the backgrounds completely banal, un-memorable. I don't think you'll remember one thing about that store, except when the guy gets shot going through the glass door. So that the settings become a way of setting the characters off even more extremely. And as I say, every picture is different.

SCHWARTZ: But in the new film, it makes you as a viewer be able to relate to the story, because you feel like this is…

LUMET: It's a way of telling the story. Absolutely.

SCHWARTZ: Here are characters who— Philip's character's just trying to hold down a job, and he's just sort of barely holding his life together.

LUMET: Yes, their lives are crap.

SCHWARTZ: (Laughs) This sense of characters who are leading lives of crap, and who just have anger kind of just under the surface—*Network* (1976) is probably the most famous expression of that.

LUMET: I'm so glad I finally had a character who went crazy and it was funny! (Laughter)

SCHWARTZ: You have to be on the right wing to be that angry on TV, these days. (Laughter)

LUMET: Ah!

SCHWARTZ: But the film is, of course, very fresh today and relevant. You have Faye Dunaway's character pitching a reality show where she's going to follow a group of terrorists around.

LUMET: Right. Well, [Paddy] Chayefsky, what can I tell you. He was prescient. I don't know how many of you saw a picture of his that he wrote called *The Hospital* (1971); it's everything we're living through today... (Laughs) Including one terrific joke he had in it, where a guy was on a gurney and they put the gurney into an elevator, and he died, and nobody ever took him out. He just kept going up and down (Laughter) for two days. And the funny thing is, that is *exactly* what happened about four years ago in a hospital in New York.

SCHWARTZ: And you did a movie, *Critical Care* (1997)…

LUMET: Yes; good movie. Good movie. (Laughter) No, it is. I've got great affection (obviously, as anybody who's worked on them does) for the pictures that failed, either critically—commercially, I don't care so much about—but which didn't get the attention it deserved. And that's one of them.

But Paddy… You know, people used to ask us all the time, "My God, what a brilliant satire!" And Paddy and I said, "That's not satire, it's sheer reportage." And it turned out to be absolutely so.

SCHWARTZ: Yes, yes. Now, *Prince of the City* (1981), is really just such a great epic accomplishment—I know that one of the big fans of the film was Akira Kurosawa, the Japanese director, who really appreciated the artistry behind it.

In that film you have a character played by Treat Williams, and it's, again, one of these sort of incredible performances. He's an ordinary cop who has a breakdown and has—even similar to what we saw with Peter Finch [in *Network*]—but he's playing sort of an ordinary guy, and really struggling with these moral issues and building up to this breakdown. His character goes through so much in the film. We see so many sides of his character.

There were so many types of locations, and this is something I was suggesting about stylization in the film. These are all real locations you filmed all over the city. We have a lot of the location photographs in the Museum, location scouting photographs. But the different types of apartments that you film—and the contrast between this Central Park West, lavish apartment and some of the Queens, backyards where the cops do their barbecues—are so expressive. Could you talk about that?

LUMET: Well, I keep repeating this, but it's the basic thing that you work from: Every picture is different, every picture has its own style. *Prince of the City* looked like a very realistic picture. It is; nothing in the studio. But it's one of the most highly stylized movies ever made, it really is, and like all good workers, I never let you see the style—I hope. I hope you never spot it.

One of the fortunate things about it is that it's a long picture. I think it's two-and-three-quarter hours. So you never see the style happening. It's a very gradual change in the whole picture, photographically and in performance—and yet it is a true story. I don't know how Bob Lucie, the man who's story this was, I don't know how he lived through it; a seven-year nightmare. But the decision to not go in the studio, to use real locations, and then start stylizing them—that's complicated, and that's the way we did it.

SCHWARTZ: How would you describe that stylization? I'm assuming that's something that Kurosawa picked up on, that he appreciated. But what does that mean to you?

LUMET: There's a simple word for stylization, which is "how." This is *how* I'm going to do it.

How I'm going to shoot it. *How* I'm going to pitch the performances.

Well, like all simple things, it's enormously complex. Here, there is an obligation to let you know that it really happened. The fellow with the moustache there is playing Nicholas Scarpetta, who is your Fire Commissioner today. And toward the end of the movie, there's a character from the Southern—the Chief U.S. Attorney from the Southern District. His name is Giuliani. (Laughter)

So one of the things you begin with, for example, is controlling the palette, the color of the movie. It's not that stylized here, but for example in *The Verdict* (1982), you never saw the color blue. Too pretty. Also, in *The Verdict,* it's a picture about memory and it's an autumnal picture, and so everything is russets, and reds, and dark oranges. In this, the palette was very carefully controlled, especially the clothes, because you've got less control with the locations. So for example, you never see it happen, but in the final courtroom scenes, whoever is there is in black. There's a reason I have for that; it's not important to discuss it, because the only thing that's important about it is what you, watching it, feel. And I would never, as I say, want you to notice that and say, "Hey, look, they're all in black!"—and that did not happen, but it's done for a reason.

That kind of color control, lenses used—just a brief word about that; it may bore the bejesus out of you, I don't know. The "lens plot" of a movie—that is, the lenses that I'm going to use—are critical; because telling a story with one set of lenses will come out differently if I use a different set of lenses. Lenses are the eyes of the movie. In *Prince of the City*—which is a story of constant betrayal—nobody escapes. The government people are terrible, betraying all the time. The cops are terrible. He betrays—the leading character betrays—betrays the most, in fact.

So one of the things I did was I threw out what we call the "normal lenses." There are certain lens—no lens gives you what your eye sees, in the proportion, in the focal depth—but the 35mm lens and the 40mm lens are considered closest to what the eye sees.

Well, I never used them in the picture. I wanted either very wide angle lenses or very long lenses, so that nothing was ever quite what it seemed. So the distances were constantly distorted. You thought the person was far away, and all of a sudden they're right there. That's because of the lens selection, and it becomes a way of telling that story. Now as I say, I don't want you to see what I'm doing. All I want you to do is feel there's something creepy about this. (Laughter)

SCHWARTZ: I think possibly, *Running on Empty* (1988) fits in the category of an under-appreciated film. It has an actor who we lost at a very early age, unfortunately, River Phoenix, giving a great performance. One of your most overtly political films—that and *Daniel* (1983), probably, in terms of dealing with politics.

Your films always seem to come back to family and relationships. I mean this, as I said, is a political film. The story of the film had to do with a sort of sixties political activist family, and this character trying to break out of that to find himself. There's an amazing scene with Christine Lahti meeting her father that's a really powerful scene. Again, you're dealing with ideas, but ultimately, it's the very first thing you said, about dealing with faces and dealing with people.

LUMET: The thing of politics in movies—you know, that old sixties saying, everything's political? I'm a political person. I have very strong beliefs, but I don't want to proselytize.

We used to have an expression in the thirties and forties called *agitprop*. It was short for "agitation propaganda," and there were a lot of wonderful plays by Clifford Odets and many other writers that were pure agitprop. To me, it's bad drama. And if it's bad drama, it's bad agitprop. The thing about *Daniel* and about this movie is that—I'm certainly not denying that they're political films—but primarily, "what they're about" (to get back to that old phrase) is the cost that children have to pay for very committed parents—because that's who does pay. The parents are having a fine time. They're off making music or painting pictures or dancing or what have you. But the kids are not, and that's been something that I've been obviously concerned with. To see that kid working is just…

SCHWARTZ: Yes; I know, what a loss. For anybody who feels like the new film is some kind of comeback, the film you made just before this was a pretty terrific movie, too, called *Find Me Guilty* (2006), with a revelatory performance by Vin Diesel, who's mainly known for action movies, but is wonderful in this movie. When you're reading scripts, are there scenes that jump out, that make you feel like, "This is why I want to make this movie"?

LUMET: The first time I read it, I just let the whole thing wash over me. I might enjoy a scene particularly, but I don't get focused on any one thing. I'm dealing with all of it... which is right for me.

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