Jim Jarmusch Regis Dialogue with Jonathan Rosenbaum, 1994

Bruce Jenkins:
To say that tonight is actually the culmination of about four and a half years worth of conversations, letters, faxes, and the timing has finally been propitious to bring our very special guest. Why we were so interested in Jim is that his work came at, I think, a very important time in the recent history of American narrative filmmaking. I would be one among many who would credit his films with reinvigorating American narrative films, with having really the same impact on filmmaking in this country that John Cassavetes had in a way in the late '50s and early '60s. In coming up with a new cinema that was grounded in the urban experience, in concrete details of the liberality that was much closer to our lives than the films that came out of the commercial studio system.

Bruce Jenkins:
You'll hear more about Jim Jarmusch from our visiting critic who was here last about three years ago, in connection with the retrospective of William Klein's work. If you have our monograph on Jim Jarmusch, we'll have his writing. It's Jonathan Rosenbaum, who has been our partner in a number of projects here, but most especially our advisor in preparing both the retrospective and dialogue for this evening and the parallel program that plays out on Tuesday evenings, the guilty pleasures and missing influences program, and gives you a little bit of a sense of the context of the work that lead to a really unique sensibility in contemporary filmmaking.

Bruce Jenkins:
So Jonathan Rosenbaum from the *Chicago Reader* and co-author of *Midnight Movies* with Jim Hoberman, a forthcoming volume called *Placing Movies* to come out with his earlier autobiographical *Moving Places*. Then finally an extraordinary volume that he put together with Peter Bogdanovich last year on the writings of and critical commentary by the late Orson Welles. So it's been about four years to say this but it gives me a great deal of pleasure to welcome here to the Walker Arts Center for a Regis dialogue, Jim Jarmusch and Jonathan Rosenbaum.

J. Rosenbaum:
Thanks.

Jim Jarmusch:
What are all these people doing here?

J. Rosenbaum:
It's very hard to see you all.

Jim Jarmusch:
No slam dancing or body surfing during the show.

J. Rosenbaum:
I thought maybe one way of beginning, let's say, is asking Jim. How did you first get interested in movies? When did it start?

Jim Jarmusch:
In making them or just enjoying them?

J. Rosenbaum:
Enjoying them, first.

Jim Jarmusch:
The first movie that I remember really having an impact on me was the Robert Mitchum film *Thunder Road* that I saw on vacation in a drive-in theater with my mom and my sister in Florida, when I was about six, I think. And previous to that, I'd only seen Walt Disney movies like *Son of Flubber* and those kind of things. And to see a movie with all that violence and action, that's when I really started being interested in the screen being alive like that.

J. Rosenbaum:
How old were you then?

Jim Jarmusch:
I don't remember exactly, maybe six or seven. I think.

J. Rosenbaum:
After that, did you see lots of movies or ...

Jim Jarmusch:
Well, I didn't have much ... I grew up in Akron, Ohio and there wasn't a big selection, although there was a theater called the State Theater that had Saturday matinees that they would show like *The Fly* or *Attack of the Giant Crab Monster*. So they would show a double bill every Saturday and my mother used to drop me off there so that she could, really I guess, get rid of me for the afternoon. So I used to go there a lot, I loved going to see those films. Other than that, in Akron, there really wasn't much until I was a teenager and there was a ... What was back then they called an art house, which meant they showed like European sex films, on the weekdays. And on Friday nights, they had this program called “Underground Cinema,” and we used to go there all the time and we had fake ID cards saying that we were old enough. And there we saw like a lot of different things, including *Chelsea Girls* by Andy Warhol and some Stan Brakhage films mixed in with, you know, *Reefer Madness*.

J. Rosenbaum:
So this was like in the '60s.

Jim Jarmusch:
This was in the late '60s, early '70s. Late '60s.

J. Rosenbaum:
Well, at what point in all of this did you decide you wanted to make films?

Jim Jarmusch:
Well I didn't decide at all until ... I went to college to study literature. I really wanted to be a writer, and my last year I guess at Columbia, I studied in Paris. And it was there rather than attending the classes I was supposed to be attending, I ended up spending most of my time at the cinematheque or in movie theaters. And when I returned to New York, I had no clue what to do with myself. So I was really interested in movies by that point and my writing was

starting to take on elements of screenplays as a little ... Sort of like, I don't know if you know the Burroughs book *The Last Words of Dutch Schultz*-

J. Rosenbaum:
Oh sure.

Jim Jarmusch:
That's written in a way like a screenplay. Kind of fake screenplay. And some elements like that were entering into my own writing. And then I applied to go to NYU Graduate Film School, but I was just ... I don't know why I even tried because I had no money and I had never made a film. And for some reason, they accepted me. I guess that's why. So then I got financial assistance and went and started studying film there.

J. Rosenbaum:
That's interesting. So actually was the trip abroad at Columbia your first trip out of America? Or ...

Jim Jarmusch:
Yes, it was the first time I had ever been. I don't even think I'd been in Canada, which is way out of America. If you're from Akron, you know, Toronto is like-

J. Rosenbaum:
Well no, I'm mentioning it just because it seems to me, one thing that's, to me, a most unique for your films is that they're the films of someone who actually ... Of an American who actually seems to feel at home outside of America, in some ways. Which is very unusual, so it was something I'd never gotten around to asking you when you first been to Europe, but that was ...

Jim Jarmusch:
Yeah, I don't know if it's that I feel ... How did you put that?

J. Rosenbaum:
Well, at home. I guess what I mean is-

Jim Jarmusch:
I think I feel not-at-home in America, but not necessarily at home outside of America.

J. Rosenbaum:
Yeah. Well that seems a better distinction actually. Yeah.

J. Rosenbaum:
So I take it, it was while you were at NYU that you actually made *Permanent Vacation*, or was that after?

Jim Jarmusch:
Yeah, well, that's ... I began making *Permanent Vacation* as my thesis film at NYU Graduate Film School, but I had been given a ... I had gotten a, ironically enough, a fellowship called the Louis B. Mayer Foundation Fellowship. You know, so I ... They mistakenly sent the money to me, rather than directly to the school to pay my tuition. So, I used that money to make the film rather than pay tuition. So I did make the film, although I didn't at that time get a degree

from the school. They weren't pleased with the fact that I didn't pay tuition. They also weren't pleased with the film I made, so ...

J. Rosenbaum:
Oh. And was that the very first film you made or did you ... Had you made any shorts?

Jim Jarmusch:
No. I had made two or three short films before that. As a student. Which I think are lost. Hopefully lost forever.

J. Rosenbaum:
And was, in terms of ... So it was basically the Mayer grant that paid for the film altogether or you had to go to other sources too?

Jim Jarmusch:
Yeah, I got some phony like car loan too at the time, from a bank. So, I was able to make the film. The budget was about $12,000.

J. Rosenbaum:
Now one thing that I've ... It seems like it's true of a lot of your films, but I'm not sure if it's true of *Permanent Vacation* too. I have the impression that you actually do casting before you write your scripts often. That, in other words, when you write your scripts it's with very particular actors in mind. And I'm wondering if that was true at all of *Permanent Vacation* also.

Jim Jarmusch:
Yeah, it was. I mean, I still consider myself, and I don't consider this to be derogatory really even, but I think of myself as kind of a fake film director. Because I started making films with my friends, basically, and writing things with them in mind. And have kind of continued that procedure, although my availability to actors or to people with more experience has widened. So, you know, that's changed and because I've made films and traveled and met people because of the fact that I've made films, I've met people who've also worked in films and actors. And so now that scope has widened, but it's still pretty much the same premise. I write with an actor in my head for a particular character, and if I'm not able to hoodwink that person into being in a film or whatever, then I rewrite thinking of someone else, but I still work that way.

J. Rosenbaum:
Well I know that like John Lurie is in *Permanent Vacation*, and I think he ... Well, let's see, the only one in let's say a very large role, I think, that would probably stay with you in other films, but ... Were many of the other actors also at NYU or any of them, or were they-

Jim Jarmusch:
No. None of them. In fact, none of the people in *Stranger Than Paradise*, except for Eszter Balint, were actors at the time. John and Richie Edson were musicians and had not acted. Although John had made several Super 8 films of his own in a kind of Jack Smith style, I don't know if you've seen them, one's called *Men in Orbit*, and I forget what the other one is.

J. Rosenbaum:

Well what about Chris Parker?

Jim Jarmusch:
Chris Parker was a kid that I met on the street, a friend of mine. He was 14 when I met him, and he used to ... We used to go to CBGBs almost every night back then, this is late '70s. And Chris Parker was a real kind of fast talking con man, and he had a way to ... He knew Hilly Crystal, who owns CBGBs still, who used to let ... Somehow he'd get in and then he'd go to the back door where they load equipment in and open it for me to get in, because we didn't have money to pay to go in. Not every night. So he was like ... I used to hang around with him and he used to sneak me into CBGBs and he was a friend of mine, very interested in all kinds of music, particularly bebop and punk rock, which seems like a kind of odd combination but somehow makes more sense now, I guess.

J. Rosenbaum:
Well maybe that's ... That sounds like a pretty good lead-in to actually the first clip we're going to be looking at, which is from *Permanent Vacation*, and features Chris Parker along with an actor named Frankie Faison, is it? Or-

Jim Jarmusch:
Faison.

J. Rosenbaum:
Faison. So maybe we could look at that now? And I'd be very curious to know like where exactly that story came from.

Jim Jarmusch:
That's a joke that ... I forget the comedian who originated it. I heard it on the radio, late at night once, and just lifted it, you know. I don't remember who's joke it is, but I think you can see why they didn't want to give me a degree.

J. Rosenbaum:
At the same time though, the poster that you see behind them is for *The Savage Innocents*, which is a film of Nicholas Ray and Nicholas Ray was one of your teachers at NYU.

Jim Jarmusch:
Yes.

J. Rosenbaum:
Did he play any role at all on budging you on this film?

Jim Jarmusch:
Well, that was the main reason why I went back to NYU. It's a three year program and my third year, when I had run out of money, I went to the director of the school, Laszlo Benedict, who directed *The Wild One* and he said, "Listen, Nick Ray is going to teach you this year and he needs an assistant. And I think you'd be good." I said, "Yeah, but I came in here to tell you that I'm not coming back to school. I don't have any money." So he said, "Listen, come tomorrow and meet Nick and I'll see if I can help you get this fellowship to come back to school." The Louis B. Mayer Fellowship.

Jim Jarmusch:

So I came and I met Nick Ray who was like a big hero to me at that point, before I ever met him, and he asked me that day if I would be his assistant in the school year. So that's why I returned to school basically. And I was writing this screenplay toward the end of Nick's life actually, and was showing him the script and he ... Well, that's kind of a boring story about the script.

J. Rosenbaum:
Well I know, but he did advise you on it though, to some extent?

Jim Jarmusch:
Yeah, he kept telling me ...

J. Rosenbaum:
All right.

Jim Jarmusch:
All right, okay. He was telling me that ... He kept giving me advice about the script, saying that the script is too slow, there's not enough action, this kid should kill his girlfriend and she should have a gun in her purse, et cetera. And my script had much more action at that time than it eventually did because whatever he would tell me to do, I would do the opposite. And so I kept taking the things out that he liked, somehow. And at the time, I don't really know why I was doing that. Now I realize why, because I didn't want him to think that I was just, you know, just a puppet and would do whatever he said. So by the end, when I kept bringing him back the script with more of the action taken out, and I would watch his reaction which was usually, you know, he was dumbfounded. And then he would say, "Well, I don't ... You know, it's getting further in the other direction." And finally when I gave him the completed script, he said that he was very proud that I didn't take his advice and that followed my own style, so ...

Jim Jarmusch:
But I really wasn't conscious of why I was doing that at the time.

J. Rosenbaum:
One thing that's really interesting in this, it's sort of like ... It's kind of like a hallmark of your style that we'll be seeing in some of the other clips, is that this is mainly a very long take, this sequence. There are two cut aways to Chris Parker, but otherwise it's just kind of giving the camera ... Giving the screen to an actor and sort of letting them go. Was this something that you arrived at through a conscious decision of wanting to do that? Did economics play any role in it? Or-

Jim Jarmusch:
Certainly. Yeah, I mean I didn't ... I only did one take I remember, the long joke. I didn't even have a second take to select from. But primarily that style came from ... Just purely from economics. And I made this film too, partly inspired by a film by Amos Poe called *The Foreigner*, that he shot for like $5000 or something in '77-78, which was a kind of punk-spirited film. And you know, he and his friend Eric Mitchell who became my friends were saying, "Come on Jim, you could make a film too, you know?" So I was inspired by them, and they used that same kind of ... Basically similar style, because of financial reasons. But one thing I wanted to say, this scene's shot in the lobby of the St. Mark's Cinema that doesn't exist anymore, where at the time I was working as an usher. It was like a two dollar theater or something and I was the new usher so they used to make me do things like, you know, "Jim, get your flashlight and tell those Hell's Angels there's no reefer smoking and stuff like that."

J. Rosenbaum:
Actually I didn't recognize that it was St. Mark's but that seems very appropriate because that was the kind of auteurist theater in a way. I remember seeing things like Howard Hawks' *Red Line 7000* there and I'm ... It's one thing that's curious though is that the soundtrack, if I'm not mistaken, that one hears during this scene is not *The Savage Innocents* but-

Jim Jarmusch:
No-

J. Rosenbaum:
It sounds like-

Jim Jarmusch:
It's a double-bill-

J. Rosenbaum:
Sergio Leone. Is it a Sergio Leone?

Jim Jarmusch:
Yeah, but it was a double-bill and you couldn't see the other poster there. Yeah, it's from *The Good, the Bad, and The Ugly*.

J. Rosenbaum:
Well what ... Tell me, what happened when this film, let's say, was finished? What ... Did you find a way to show it or did it take awhile or ...

Jim Jarmusch:
Well, I first gave it to ... NYU was having a film festival of its films by its students. And not only did they reject the film and send it back to me, but they sent a really nasty letter saying, you know, basically, "What is this shit?" So then I was lost. I was playing in a rock band at the time and I thought, "Okay, well, I made a film. I'm not going to make any more because no one's going to let me, but at least I made one film." And then this guy Mark Weiss in New York had ... He somehow saw the film and said that he would like to select the film for a film festival in Germany, in Manheim. And I didn't even know any film festivals existed except for ... I had heard of the Cannes Film Festival. And so I said, "Wow, great." And the film was shown in Manheim and not only that, he said, "Well, you know, they'll fly you there and you can go to the festival." And I was amazed by that, I had no idea I could get a free trip to Germany out of this film.

Jim Jarmusch:
So I went there and the film won a prize there that was about $2000, and I had no money. I was behind on my rent and I had these kind of mafia landlords and stuff. And so I came back not only with the $2000 but then WDR bought the film for German TV, which paid back the cost of the film. And the film was then asked to be in the Berlin Festival, and then the Rotterdam Festival, so then it sort of started for me.

J. Rosenbaum:

Yeah, I remember. As I recall, after your first film, an issue of the German film magazine, *Film Critic*, that was devoted to you-

Jim Jarmusch:
Yes.

J. Rosenbaum:
Or devoted to the film-

Jim Jarmusch:
Yeah, there was.

J. Rosenbaum:
Yeah.

Jim Jarmusch:
Yeah, all of which was a huge shock to me.

J. Rosenbaum:
And at this point, it hadn't shown in the United States apart from at NYU-

Jim Jarmusch:
To this point, I don't think it's shown in the United States.

J. Rosenbaum:
Except for this clip.

Jim Jarmusch:
Yeah.

J. Rosenbaum:
So, all right, that's interesting in itself. In the sense that ... That you, in this sense, had your . Let's say were discovered in Europe, long ... Well, let's see, certainly well before *Stranger Than Paradise*. Now, there's obviously, in terms of financing *Stranger Than Paradise*. I know that started out as a short. I mean, with the intention of making it a feature.

Jim Jarmusch:
Yes.

J. Rosenbaum:
Is that right?

Jim Jarmusch:
Yeah.

J. Rosenbaum:
And I know that there were ways in which you were helped at different times by things like getting footage and so on ... Or maybe raw stock, by I think both Wim Wenders and Jean-Marie Straub and Daniele Huillet at different stages helped you. But how ... What point did that happen? In other words, how did you initially get it set up?

Jim Jarmusch:
Initially Wim Wenders and ... I had worked because I was working with Nick. Nick Ray had asked me to be his kind of gofer during the making of the film *Lightning Over Water*. And at that time, I didn't really ... I of course met Wim Wenders, but I was the only person on the crew that was asked by Wim, so I was pretty much treated ... I mean asked by Nick to be part of the production. So I was kind of treated as an outsider, but then Wim saw this film ... I started shooting this film the day after Nick died, actually. It was shot in 10 days. And Wim say the film after it was done. And then two years later or a year and a half later, Wim and his partner at the time Chris Sievernich said that they had some film, unexposed film material, leftover from the film *The State of Things* and said, "Look, you can have it, and you can make ..." That's a lot of the cost right there, "There's enough to make a 30-40 minute film."

Jim Jarmusch:
So then I wrote the first part of *Stranger Than Paradise* because I had that film material available to me. And then Jean-Marie and Daniele gave me other film material to be exposed for the black sections, as leader. So they both helped me. And then I was further helped when making ... While I was editing the first half hour version, I wrote a script for a longer version. And when the short version was done, I also had a script to try to continue it. And I was helped by Paul Bartel, who loaned me some money to actually buy the rights of the first part back from Chris Sievernich, who did some kind of fishy things legally to me, and had the negative under his name in a lab and things like that. So he kind of held it up for ransom and Paul Bartel loaned me the money ... Who I met just by chance, also I think at a film festival.

Jim Jarmusch:
And he had just had some success with his film *Eating Raoul* I think at that time. And he said, "Well what's the problem?" And I explained to him and he said, "Oh, well, you know, I'd like to help somebody starting out because I'm in the position to. I have a little money and you can pay me back in a year." And he was really kind of an angel, in that way, it helped the film. That allowed me then to get, you know, the money from German TV. Before that, I couldn't get financing because I didn't own the film. So he helped me and I got German TV money and a German producer named Otto Grokenberger to help finance the remaining part of the film. So I had really amazing people helping me out, I don't know why, but they did.

J. Rosenbaum:
One thing I've always been curious about is ... Well, the Hungarian aspect of the film. Does that relate to anything in like your family background or is it in terms of people you knew or ...

Jim Jarmusch:
Well it's two things. My family on father's side was Czech and my grandmother, who was a lot like the Aunt Lotte character, was Czech. And Eszter Balint was a member of the Squat Theatre group in New York, a theater company that was a kind of experimental theater company from Budapest that were friends of mine and a lot of our friends used to hang out because they lived communally on 23rd Street in one big building, which was also their theater. So it was a combination of those things, I guess.

J. Rosenbaum:
Well I think ... It sounds like we're probably at a good point where we could look at a clip. I think the clip we're going to be looking at from *Stranger Than Paradise* is fairly early ... It's in the first section of the film and it's shortly after Eszter Balint turns up in New York and arrives in the apartment of her cousin, Willie I guess, and her name is Eva. And so this is actually the first scene when she gets to meet Willie's friend Eddie, played by Richard Edson.

J. Rosenbaum:
I noticed in this scene there's another sort of little film reference, when Eddie's reading from the paper, the one title of the film which is real I think is *Tokyo Story*.

Jim Jarmusch:
Well, they're horses. The names of racehorses.

J. Rosenbaum:
Yeah.

Jim Jarmusch:
But there's a few Ozu in there.

J. Rosenbaum:
Oh.

Jim Jarmusch:
Ozu films.

J. Rosenbaum:
Oh, *Passing Fancy*-

Jim Jarmusch:
Late Spring, *Passing Fancy*-

J. Rosenbaum:
Oh yeah.

Jim Jarmusch:
I stuck a few in there.

J. Rosenbaum:
That's right. It's worth putting out that in this series here, there's going to be *The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice*.

Jim Jarmusch:
Not a good name for a racehorse.

J. Rosenbaum:

No. But would you say there was ... Do you feel an affinity with the, let's say, simplicity of Ozu's style? The idea of just sort of putting the camera in front of characters and ...

Jim Jarmusch:
Oh yeah. Very much. I mean, I'm kind of contradictory in my own tastes. I like very much things that are very pure, in a way. Ozu's films or the films of Carl Dreyer, or you know, things by Joseph Cornell or Cy Twombly or music by Anton Webern or The Ramones, for that matter. Things that are very pure really appeal to me strongly. I also like very messy things too though, like ... You know, I like Blucher or paintings by Jackson Pollock or de Kooning or I like *King of New York*, films like that. Detour by ... You know, things that are also messy appeal to me as well, but my own aesthetic tends to go toward a more kind of pure form of things.

J. Rosenbaum:
Well one thing I've always liked about the stretches of black leader in *Stranger Than Paradise* is that they make me think of the shots as being almost a little bit like blues choruses. That it's sort of like ... It's a way of bracketing scenes, in a way. You think of them as units much more. Just like ... Reminds me of in the earlier clip when he tells the joke, he says, "This is the joke that has this title." How did you hit on the idea of those ... Did you spend a lot of time editing them? I mean in terms of timing and so on.

Jim Jarmusch:
I spent a lot of time figuring out how long they should be, and they do vary somewhat. But they were originally in my script, because I wanted a way of ... I didn't want a hard cut from one place to another. I like that, you know, like a blues chorus or almost like a respiration, you know. Way of like letting the image sink and before another one hits you. So they were intended from the start but we did play around with exactly how long they should be. I remember.

J. Rosenbaum:
Did it make the shooting of this film ... The fact of having those kind of long takes, would you say it made it harder to do or easier?

Jim Jarmusch:
Well, it works both ways. I think it's better for the actors, because it's more like theater where they maintain their character longer rather than having to be ... And working with actors not really experienced with film acting and myself not experienced as a director, that was helpful. It also makes it more difficult because we had very little film material and if any one of us makes a mistake, then the take is ruined, you know, so you have to go back and start the whole thing again. So it kind of worked both ways.

J. Rosenbaum:
I'm also curious that both before and after you made this film, how easy or difficult was it that the film was in black and white? In other words, did you encounter any resistance from, I don't know, distributors or people putting money into it or ...

Jim Jarmusch:
Yeah. Definitely, because they would always say, "Well you can't ... We can't sell it ... We can't get a good price for video, or we can't sell it to television, so we can't pay you much for it." Before making the film was not a problem because the film material offered to me was black and white, and when I wrote the story I knew that it would be black and white. But after the fact, it was kind of problematic and at that point in 1982 and 1984, even then black and white

was not like fashionable on MTV or whatever. It was still kind of ... You know, they really kind of balked at it as far as distribution and sales to TV and video. So it was kind of problematic selling the film, although more so in the States than in Europe for some reason.

J. Rosenbaum:
Well I guess black and white hung on much longer and it seems like even now it's still easier to make probably a black and white ... Maybe not now, but at least up to a few years ago.

Jim Jarmusch:
In Europe?

J. Rosenbaum:
Yeah.

Jim Jarmusch:
Probably still now, I think.

J. Rosenbaum:
It seems like there's even still labs where it's possible to do it in Europe, which becomes harder.

Jim Jarmusch:
Well it's getting difficult everywhere because the really great black and white technicians are old guys that have retired or, you know, they haven't passed that expertise along really. So ... And it's a very different thing to light black and white also than color. Although, you know, directors of photography are aware of that, you know, younger ones, because they can shoot. But now black and white is more expensive to shoot than color. The processing is more expensive. So ...

J. Rosenbaum:
So it's becoming now ... Now it's the luxury, in a sense.

Jim Jarmusch:
Yeah, there's still a lot of resistance to it, you know. I know that Tim Burton had a lot of trouble. He had to leave one studio to make his film about ... What's the film he just completed we were talking about?

J. Rosenbaum:
Oh, the biopic about Ed Wood-

Jim Jarmusch:
Ed Wood.

J. Rosenbaum:
Ed Wood, Jr.

Jim Jarmusch:
Ed Wood, Jr., yeah. He had a lot of trouble making that in black and white. Tim Burton.

J. Rosenbaum:
Well maybe *Schindler's List* will help him along now. Have you had some of the same problem, I mean this comes up in the later films actually but when ... Do you use subtitles? Or is that ... In other words, has there been a comparable resistance from anyone about-

Jim Jarmusch:
Yeah, I've had trouble in Europe because I have refused, with few exceptions, to allow my films to be subtitled*. And it was in Italy it was very unusual to release *Down By Law* with subtitles, because the Italians dub their own films. Even the ones in Italian. So ... And that's been a problem, I have not been able to make TV sales to larger TV stations for primetime viewing in Europe or whatever, with subtitles.

*Mr. Jarmusch requested it be noted that he does allow his films to be subtitled, however he does not allow dubbing of his films.

J. Rosenbaum:
It's always seemed to me that there's something contradictory about it, because I mean although it's considered box office poison in the United States, a film with subtitles, people tend to forget that *Dances With Wolves* has lots of subtitles. More recently, *Schindler's List*, that there seem to be lots of films that have subtitles that don't bother people.

Jim Jarmusch:
Well also if you have an interesting actor, you know, their voice is 50% of their performance, so you're taking that away as well. It's kind of like being ripped off, I think, when you dub an interesting actor. You know, sometimes dubbing is funny, I like the kung fu style dubbing. "Now I will take you to my father!" You know?

J. Rosenbaum:
Yes. Well I've heard in Italy, one reason why it's so important to dub so much there is because accents are very important. That if you ... For different parts of Italy, there have to be different kinds of regional accents and if they do it wrong, people laugh in the wrong places and so on.

Jim Jarmusch:
But Fellini ... I met Fellini. The first time I met him was when *Down By Law* was being released in Italy and he said to me, "Jim, why you don't dub the film?" Because Fellini will shoot a scene and have the actors just say numbers, just count, and he'll write the dialogue later and put it in. So, he ... "I like the face but not the voice. So I choose one for voice, one for face," so he was very-

J. Rosenbaum:
In a sense-

Jim Jarmusch:
Confused by why I was adamant about it.

J. Rosenbaum:

Well in a way, I think what it means in effect is that most Italian filmmakers like Fellini are really silent directors. In a sense-

Jim Jarmusch:
Fellini maybe, particularly.

J. Rosenbaum:
Yeah.

Jim Jarmusch:
"Marcello. I awoke from a strange and disturbing dream." It's like that some of those Italian movies, they have the same guys, you know, dubbing each film. You start to recognize the voices.

J. Rosenbaum:
Speaking of Italians, how did you meet Roberto Benigni, or how did you encounter him, let's say?

Jim Jarmusch:
I met him in Salsomaggiore in Italy, in a small film festival where I was the one and only, first and last time that I was a member of the jury, and he was also. And I met him, he was on the jury and also we had a mutual friend. And from the moment I met him, I just fell in love with the guy. And he spoke no English, and I spoke no Italian. And we spoke for hours in gestures and bad French. And if French people would have heard us...

J. Rosenbaum:
So "not enough room to swing cat," something that Roberto had come up with at one point?

Jim Jarmusch:
Well, we collected so many things, I don't remember where. What came from where anymore, but possibly I know that when I first met Roberto, he had subscribed to a magazine in Italy that was to teach you English and had a lot of ridiculous expressions. So a lot of those we pulled together from there and it ended up in the film.

J. Rosenbaum:
How'd you hit on the idea of doing this [*Down By Law*] in Louisiana?

Jim Jarmusch:
Mostly through music from New Orleans. I'm a big fan of blues and R&B fan, so I had never been to New Orleans when I wrote the script but I had a lot of images in my head, mostly just from music of New Orleans. So that just kind of drew me there.

J. Rosenbaum:
And were you thinking of present films much that you'd seen, or ...

Jim Jarmusch:
No, actually I wasn't really. I was trying to figure out how to get characters that don't like each other stuck together. And you know, prison's one quick way of doing this.

J. Rosenbaum:
Yeah. There's an interesting way for me, which one of the themes of *Stranger Than Paradise* is how the characters' saying that you keep ... You know, no matter how much you keep moving around, things stay the same, and there's a way in this film that certain things repeat themselves. Like after they break out of prison, they find themselves in a shack where even the bunks where they're staying at are sort of like in the same kind of ... It seems like a duplication of where they were before.

J. Rosenbaum:
Was this a much harder film to shoot, would you say, than *Stranger* or was it easier?

Jim Jarmusch:
This film was a lot more fun to make. *Stranger* was harder. We had less time, less money, and *Stranger Than Paradise* we shot, if you see the whole film, there's a sequence where they're in a hotel in Florida, a motel, and that motel had three rooms in it. And we all, the whole crew and cast, stayed in those rooms, taking turns who would sleep on the floor, you know. So it was not that much fun, making *Stranger Than Paradise*. This was more fun. We had a real motel. We shared our own room, even.

J. Rosenbaum:
And did you-

Jim Jarmusch:
That rundown motel, but it was fun there.

J. Rosenbaum:
Did you have lots of time to scout locations and so on?

Jim Jarmusch:
Yeah. Yeah, I did. I did for *Stranger* too, though.

J. Rosenbaum:
Yeah.

Jim Jarmusch:
But I love New Orleans. I still love it. I just went back there a few months ago and I just really love that town.

J. Rosenbaum:
And were the locations that you used, did you do much to change them? I mean to redress them, or were they pretty much as you found them?

Jim Jarmusch:
In this film-

J. Rosenbaum:
Yeah.

Jim Jarmusch:
Almost always the way we found them. We only changed them by the way we lit them or moved some furniture around. There's a scene where, early in the film, Tom Waits' character and his girlfriend Ellen Barkin stay in a house ... Live in a house that has graffiti and things on the walls, that was exactly the way we found ... You know, it was someone that we met there. A girl lived there, and her former boyfriend had been a disc jockey or something. There were records everywhere and we just used her house exactly as it was.

J. Rosenbaum:
And this was an actual prison that you ...

Jim Jarmusch:
Yes. The central lockup, or the Orleans Parish Prison in New Orleans proper.

J. Rosenbaum:
So there were real prisoners there at the time that you were shooting?

Jim Jarmusch:
Yes, there were. In fact, I don't know what was in my head but I decided it would be a brilliant idea for Tom Waits and John Lurie and Roberto, and myself since I was making them do it, to be locked up in the prison for a day without the guards in that cell block or the prisoners not knowing that we weren't real new prisoners. So, I was put in a cell with Roberto and Tom and John were put in a cell, and it was pretty scary. We had to do everything you do, keep your hands in your pockets when you're out of the cell, and we were treated pretty roughly by the guards and the other inmates. But it was good for Tom and John ... Well, not that Tom doesn't have experience in jail cells. But they were actually kind of frightened by the experience. I on the other had, I was also but I was in the cell with Roberto who thought the whole idea was useless and was only talking to me about, "Yes, Jim, this is interesting, but tonight which restaurant should we go? I would like a linguine al dente, very ..." You know, so it had no effect on Roberto at all.

J. Rosenbaum:
So I guess it must've been a relief when ... Did the other prisoners feel angry when they found out that you were-

Jim Jarmusch:
Well, we were gone by the time they found out, so-

J. Rosenbaum:
Yeah.

Jim Jarmusch:
Carefully orchestrated exit, so ...

J. Rosenbaum:
I gather he must, through the experience of making this film, he must have learned English a lot better.

Jim Jarmusch:

Quite a bit, yes, and he's very quick obviously. Very intelligent man, he learned really fast. But we played a lot of games on him, tricks on him, teaching him the wrong things. And to this day still, although he now knows it's not correct but he didn't for years. We taught him that to piss or to pee was "to flame," we told him. And for years after he was, "Excuse me, I go now to flame. I will come back after I flame."

J. Rosenbaum:
How did he find out he find out he was wrong, I wonder?

Jim Jarmusch:
Well he finally found out and he played a trick back on John Lurie in Cannes at the film festival, where an Italian TV crew was interviewing John, but they did not speak English, so Roberto, "No problem, I translate for you." So, they would ask things like, "How do you come upon your craft as an actor, of Stanislavsky or method acting or is it intuitive or what?" In Italian, and Roberto would say to John, "I don't know why, but they want to know what did you have for breakfast." So John's response would be, "Bacon, eggs." So he looked like a real idiot, and he did get back at us.

J. Rosenbaum:
It seems ... It's interesting that there's a way in which from ... Actually it seems like a steady ... Well I don't know, almost a curve that from *Stranger in Paradise* to *Down By Law* to *Mystery Train*, your films become, let's say, more and more bilingual in some way, or even trilingual. In the sense that more and more of a foreign language is sort of like used, it becomes more let's say central to what's going on, in some ways. Now, do you think this is partly a consequence of the amount of traveling around you did with your own films and being in like other countries and so on?

Jim Jarmusch:
Yeah. It comes from two things I think, from the fact that I traveled and I met a lot of people that don't speak ... That English is not their first language. And also because I've lived in New York for so long, and I live on the Bowery, downtown, and in my neighborhood there are people speaking ... There are Dominicans and Puerto Ricans whose accents are slightly different. There are like Hasidic Jews and Sicilians, and you know there's a lot of people mixed in there. A lot of Chinese. And so it's that too, somehow. I hear different languages swirling around me every day when I leave my house too. And the fact that America is, you know, that's what America is, is a lot of immigrants who've committed genocide on the indigenous people here so they could take it over, you know?

J. Rosenbaum:
Well it's interesting, it seems like it's happening, I mean in a way all over the world, more and more, that people are making films sometimes in languages they don't know. For example, I mean I just discovered recently that Kieslowski's *Blue*, you know, which is in French, Kieslowski hardly knows French at all. That he had to, for example, speak to Juliette Binoche, the lead actress, in English when he was making that. The independent filmmaker Jon Jost just made a film in Italy, in Italian, and he knows very little Italian.

Jim Jarmusch:
Yeah. I think Max Ophuls always impressed me by making films in English, French, Italian ... He made that one Italian film, and in German. But he probably spoke all those languages though.

J. Rosenbaum:
Yes, and I think Dreyer did also, when he-

Jim Jarmusch:
But you know what? There's something interesting. I love to watch ... I really got into, since I've been to Japan a number of times, I bought a lot of videotapes there that were not subtitled, the films by Ozu and Mizoguchi and Suzuki and a lot of other people. And I liked to watch them without knowing what they're saying, I sort of got into that because language is a very ... Language is a code that we communicate through, but even within that code you can tell through someone's inflection what their emotional state is. And so acting, the language of acting, is not primarily a spoken language and you can read how people feel or where they're at emotionally without knowing what language they speak.

Jim Jarmusch:
So my first experience really was directing ... *Mystery Train*, was directing the Japanese actors in Japanese. French I understand, Italian I understand a little and learning more and more. Finnish I don't understand but Finnish people's emotions, they're very open. You can always read their emotions. So I think language is a secondary-

J. Rosenbaum:
One thing that also occurs to me, part of your background that might have led to this, at least the same background that we share, is that year you spent in Paris going to films at the cinematheque. Because when I used to go to the cinematheque, Langois used to ... Andre Langois used to have this philosophy, that he would just as soon ... In fact, even prefer to show you film without subtitles or if they did have subtitles, they wouldn't be ones that would help you. I mean, I once saw a Buñuel Mexican film that was dubbed into German and subtitled in Portuguese for example, and he liked to do things like that. And with the idea that it wasn't so ... I saw more movies than not. I mean most of the movies I used to see at the cinematheque were ones that ... In languages I couldn't follow and know.

Jim Jarmusch:
Yeah, I saw central European films at the cinematheque, and other films I had no clue what they were saying. The heart of the film, the heart of the story is still there though. I mean, unless it's a totally dialogue oriented film in there, but you know it's ... You can read that.

J. Rosenbaum:
Yeah, although it's a pity that there's so much of films in the world that are automatically considered non-commercial just because it's assumed that people won't be able to see something if it's in a language they don't understand. In a way, it seems like an awful lot of commercial decisions get made on that basis.

J. Rosenbaum:
In the case though, for example, of working out the dialogue for *Mystery Train*, did you ... In order to, like for example, get the right kind of Japanese idioms, did you basically work with translators suggesting sort of like ... In other words, was it always a question of trying to translate English ideas into Japanese or learning certain phrases and then trying to work with those?

Jim Jarmusch:
No. What I would do is I would write little ... I'd do a lot of rehearsing and improvs where the characters ... The actors are in character but the scene we're doing I write on the spot and it is not in the film, but it's maybe before the story begins. And with the Japanese kids, I would stick in like, "Okay, they're going to go to the movies and he wants to see a movie with Steve McQueen, but she wants to see a movie with Elizabeth Taylor." Well I have those two words I

know. I know Steve when he says Steve McQueen, and so I have some little guide in there. And then I give them the dialogue and a translator tells them the idea of the scene, and then I watch their interactions with each other. Then once my script was written, you know, we rehearsed it also and with a translator, discussed a lot of nuances of how to express things with the actors and we made joint decisions and eliminated phrases or replaced them, even though I didn't know myself. It was explained to me the difference of the nuance and then we would discuss which one was appropriate. So it was not really a problem.

J. Rosenbaum:
It's interesting, I have kind of like before and after questions about this. First, did you ever get to see *Mystery Train* with a Japanese audience?

Jim Jarmusch:
I don't think so, no.

J. Rosenbaum:
Yeah?

Jim Jarmusch:
I introduced it but didn't stay.

J. Rosenbaum:
No, I'm just wondering if you found out that there were in any way different responses to it, to the Japanese segment in Japan, or ...

Jim Jarmusch:
I don't know. My films are very ... They're very popular in Japan. I don't know why, and that one particularly, although *Night On Earth* did even better and *Down By Law* was ... All my films have been very successful in Japan, probably due to the distributors that I have, which they're really excellent. But-

J. Rosenbaum:
How did you ... Where did you find the two Japanese actors?

Jim Jarmusch:
Well, Youki Kudoh, the girl, I had seen. In fact, the first time I ever saw her was in a film in the film festival in Italy where I was on the jury with Roberto, a film called *Crazy Family*. She was 12 years old at the time that she acted in that, and she was hilarious and I was really drawn to her face and her kind of expressiveness and wackiness, you know? And then I wrote the part for her and since then, Bernardo Bertolucci told me to see a film called *The Typhoon Club* that was not released outside ... Not here anyway. I saw it in Japan and she was also in that, so I then wrote it for her and then cast for the other, the guy, which I was lucky to find Masatoshi Nagase in Tokyo. But I saw about 50 young actors before I found him.

J. Rosenbaum:
Did they speak English very much?

Jim Jarmusch:

Youki spoke a little, Masatoshi none really except, "Rock and roll!" You know.

J. Rosenbaum:
So you were having to direct through interpreters to some extent.

Jim Jarmusch:
Yes.

J. Rosenbaum:
Yeah.

Jim Jarmusch:
Yeah, completely. I mean I had an interpreter but it's funny, because even my language to them as a director was not somehow hampered by my lack of understanding the language, words, but we were still able to communicate somehow.

J. Rosenbaum:
That's interesting. It's like the experience you had with Benigni.

Jim Jarmusch:
Yes, and I taught them to speak ... To say some really foul things in English, which they were very proud of.

J. Rosenbaum:
Well maybe we're ready to look at a little bit of ... Actually happens right near the beginning of *Mystery Train*.

J. Rosenbaum:
Tell me, the spiel they get about Sun Records, is that a real spiel or is that a real tourist guide?

Jim Jarmusch:
Yeah, we got the text from Sun Studio, the tour guide text, and just had her deliver it in rapid fire. So it was a real text.

J. Rosenbaum:
And was this ... I guess this was ... Was it similar to *Down By Law* in terms of getting to know Memphis and so on that you had, in other words ... And it's again a case I guess of being interested in a place because of the music, but did you spend much time there before?

Jim Jarmusch:
Well, again, I hadn't been to Memphis when I wrote the script, but when I was done I went to Memphis to look for locations and so it was again music that kind of drew me to write something so that I could go there.

J. Rosenbaum:
And was ... Is Chaucer Street something you actually found there?

Jim Jarmusch:

No. We had that sign made.

J. Rosenbaum:
I see. Which is a ... I see it as a remnant ... Maybe a remnant of your English major background.

Jim Jarmusch:
Well there are-

J. Rosenbaum:
Because you had the idea of it being like *Canterbury Tales* in some ways.

Jim Jarmusch:
Yes, the form of the film is a little bit from *Canterbury Tales*, in a way. But there are a lot of streets in Memphis named after poets. Quite a few. Chaucer wasn't one of them though.

J. Rosenbaum:
Did you find, because you used a very small part of Memphis in this. Did you find that it was ... Did Memphis wind up surprising you or being very different from what you imagined?

Jim Jarmusch:
Yeah, it did. Because the main center of Memphis around Beale Street was completely torn down in 1968, '69, after King was assassinated, to prevent, you know, disturbances. So they just kind of razed the whole center of Memphis which had been the largest black inner city black neighborhood for years, in the South anyway. So it was a really vibrant, amazing place prior to that, and they just kind of tore it down. So the kind of empty lots and holes in places in the center of the city was very odd and kind of haunting and sad. But Memphis anyway consists of a lot of like closed down gas stations and empty parking lots and it still has a lot of ghosts around there. You know, you feel a lot of weird stuff in Memphis.

J. Rosenbaum:
And was-

Jim Jarmusch:
Also, one thing that we shot later, and a lot of this film takes place in a hotel, and the building that we shot the interiors in was connected to the building from ... Which on the back of it is right across from the Lorraine Hotel where Martin Luther King was assassinated, and they said that supposedly, you know, James Earl Ray supposedly assassinated king from that building, which was weird. We weren't aware of that when we selected it as a location.

J. Rosenbaum:
Did you find it was harder to shoot in a city than like, I don't know, sort of out in the country like ... Does it make much difference?

Jim Jarmusch:
I don't know, I don't think it ... You know, you run into different problems depending on where you are. It's just different, I don't think you could say one is easier than the other.

J. Rosenbaum:
There's an idea sort of that you hit on in *Mystery Train* that sort of carries over to your next film *Night On Earth*, which is the idea of all the different parts happening at the same time. Just wondering if there was anything in particular that inspired you to sort of start exploring that idea.

Jim Jarmusch:
Well there was one thing that I can recall, which was a book by William Faulkner called *The Wild Palms*, which is a book of two separate novellas that he wrote, that the publishers at the time said, "Yeah, but Bill, we need a novel here. This is two short novels, that doesn't sell." So he ... I don't know whether they suggested it or whether he thought of it, but he alternated chapters of two different stories that he wrote separately, and the kind of nuances and repercussions of doing that, the certain themes that exist in both stories and the way they work on each other is really, really beautiful and strong.

J. Rosenbaum:
I agree, although I think I always heard it a little different, the way he wrote it. He started writing one of the stories, I think it was the love story, and then he found that at a certain point, he thought it was missing something. So it was a kind of counterpoint. He started the other story and he actually wrote them in the alternating ... You know, in terms of alternating between one chapter and another. And that way it was published. What happened there was a problem, I don't know if originally but at some point they got printed separately, but I find that what's interesting is when you read them separately as individual stories they don't have anything like the impact of what they do when they're ...

Jim Jarmusch:
Yeah, I can't imagine reading them separately really.

J. Rosenbaum:
It's interesting though that in that case there's a simultaneity actually in the prose, but they're not necessarily taking place at the same time.

Jim Jarmusch:
Oh yeah. I didn't ... It wasn't the structure that I tried to imitate, but it was just that structure I found really inspiring. So I started a structure not the same but somehow inspiration came from that. Certainly the *Canterbury Tales* as well because it's a beautiful structure of people traveling and telling stories as they travel.

J. Rosenbaum:
Right. There's even a parallel with the religious idea because it's a kind of religious pilgrimage that's being made, at least by the Japanese couple, or you can say it's like ... You know, it's going to shrines, actually.

Jim Jarmusch:
Yes. And there's also Boccaccio's *Decameron* where they're waiting out the plague, sitting around telling stories, which contains some of the same stories as *The Canterbury Tales*.

J. Rosenbaum:

So when you were actually writing *Mystery Train*, were you working on the three stories at once or at all or just writing them quite separately? Or you were thinking of them all together though, obviously, because there's a way in which the third at least the ... Our memory of the first two become very important.

Jim Jarmusch:
Yeah, I think I hadn't ... As I always write, I make a whole lot of notes and collect them and then sit down and write them into the script. So, that simultaneity was in my head before I started writing, that structure.

J. Rosenbaum:
It's interesting though in sense what you've done, actually in a quite different way I think from other filmmakers is returned to the possibility of making shorts, even though they're interconnected shorts, which I mean of course there was *New York Stories* a few years ago but that was by three different directors. And in most cases, there are very few cases where you have one filmmaker actually making short stories that are sort of like put together.

Jim Jarmusch:
Well there's a tradition of Japanese ghost stories, like Kobayashi and a few other directors I think that have made episodic films like that.

J. Rosenbaum:
Yeah, I guess actually, come to think of it, *Kurosawa's Dreams* is one.

Jim Jarmusch:
Yeah, that's after, but yeah. And it's a kind of Italian-like comedy tradition but like you said, that's usually different directors to an extension.

J. Rosenbaum:
Right. I remember there was a seven deadly sins, an Italian one, in fact both a French and Italian version of the seven deadly sins.

Jim Jarmusch:
But after making *Mystery Train*, I never intended to do that again. To make an episodic film like that, with the exception of this thing I'm working on over a period of time, a collection of short films called *Coffee and Cigarettes*, but those I write as I go along. You know, it's not something ... A project that I just do that and then it's done as a film. I'm sort of collecting them here and there. But I never intended to make another film like that. *Night On Earth* was kind of an accident, because another script I had written, for reasons I won't go into, I was not able to make and was frustrated and I wrote *Night On Earth* extremely fast in about eight days, initially just to shoot outside of America and work with some friends of mine in Europe and stuff, so ...

J. Rosenbaum:
Was it hard to set up? In terms of-

Jim Jarmusch:
It was complicated.

J. Rosenbaum:

I bet. Actually, why don't we look at it a little bit now. I think what I've selected for a clip in this case is from the New York episode, which is the second episode in the film, and it's ... This occurs sort of like about halfway through that episode. But let's just see at least three of the actors-

Jim Jarmusch:
Is everyone still awake? Some people are awake.

J. Rosenbaum:
I have to apologize. I should've explained, for those of you who haven't seen the film, that Helmut Grokenberger who, incidentally his last name is an homage to your producer.

Jim Jarmusch:
Yes.

J. Rosenbaum:
Is in fact the one who is the cab driver but because he can't drive, it's Giancarlo Esposito who takes over the driving, which is why he's at the wheel. One thing I really like about this sequence is, in this case, about how the sort of foreigner and outsider, which happens to a certain extent I think in *Down By Law* too but not in what we see here, really sort of humanizes the other two, or at least makes a real change in the emotional temperature of sort of what's going on.

J. Rosenbaum:
Well I've been olizing Jim, up to now. I think maybe some of you would like to have some questions of your own. I can see you, a little bit. Yes?

Speaker 4:
Were you comfortable acting for Aki Kaurismaki in *Leningrad Cowboys Go America*. Did you enjoy doing that?

Jim Jarmusch:
Very bad acting. I don't know, it was just a little cameo in his film. He's one of my favorite directors, Aki Kaurismaki, the Finnish director. And I like his films, really a lot, so I was happy to do a little cameo in it. And then I just acted in a film, also a kind of cameo this past summer, shot in Finland. A biker movie called *Iron Horsemen*, which Aki produced and a young French-Swiss director named Gilles Charmant directed.

J. Rosenbaum:
Yes?

Speaker 5:
You and some many great artists come out of Akron. What is it about Akron?

Jim Jarmusch:
Well, I think the key is to come out of Akron. I don't know, Akron is a pretty dismal place. You know, when I grew up there, everyone's father worked for the rubber companies, including my own and my uncle and it was just a place where, you know, my friends and I knew we wanted to get out of. So ...

Jim Jarmusch:
What?

Speaker 5:
[inaudible]

Jim Jarmusch:
Well there was nothing to do there. So … n

J. Rosenbaum:
Yes?

Speaker 6:
A lot of the settings that you choose are those kinds of settings where there's nothing to do. They remind me of when I used to go to bowling tournaments with my dad in Elko, Nevada. So how… setting in your films can be as much of a character as actors. How carefully do you choose a setting?

Jim Jarmusch:
Well, you said it better than I could. I think the locations are as important or almost as characters in a film. So yeah, I choose them very carefully. And you're right, I do. And I do I guess because I'm from Akron, have a kind of weird or perverse kind of nostalgia for like kind of post-industrial places, you know? I find them beautiful, somehow.

J. Rosenbaum:
One thing I just want to interject. It's a pity, the one thing we don't have time to look at, although it'll be shown in this series, are some of the *Coffee and Cigarettes*.

Jim Jarmusch:
Oh, we're not going to look at the last one? We're too late now.

J. Rosenbaum:
I don't think we'll probably have time. But I think ... I'm curious that, in that case though, you've used a set. And I'm wondering, why that you decided to shoot those. I know there's a kind of use of overhead angle that you use, at least in a couple of them that's-

Jim Jarmusch:
Well it's not a soundstage, it's just a place.

J. Rosenbaum:
I see.

Jim Jarmusch:
It was actually ... It was a set built in a recording studio because the day before, we had shot this ... Did they see the video clip? You saw the Tom Waits thing, and then we used that same set the next day to shoot this short film, which was black and white unlike the video. We changed it a little bit but it was only a matter of convenience, you know.

J. Rosenbaum:
And is it true that you're hoping ... I mean I've heard you're going to be ... Wait until you've got enough of them, sort of like that you've made enough of those in that series and possibly release them all as a feature?

Jim Jarmusch:
Yeah, I think I will. My intention is for them to work on their own, but at the same time I have written dialogue that ... Little things repeat in each one, that reappears. So I have shot five of them now, and eventually when I have about 12 or however many makes up 80 minutes or something I'll at least release them on video together. I don't know if anyone would release them theatrically.

J. Rosenbaum:
It's also interesting to me the way that they repeat certain camera angles too, that they're ... I've only seen a couple.

J. Rosenbaum:
This was a series that actually started with *Saturday Night Live*, is that right?

Jim Jarmusch:
Yeah, they asked me to make a short film for them, and whenever the first one was, '86, '87, and they gave me the money so I made the first one. And then since then I've made ... This is the third and there are two more that are not edited but are shot, so ...

J. Rosenbaum:
Are they all in different cities or ...

Jim Jarmusch:
No, I shot three of them in New York and one in Memphis and one in California. I have more written too, or sketched, so I'm going to make some more of them.

J. Rosenbaum:
Well, I believe this is the most recent of Jim's works, perhaps we've got time for just a couple more questions before we call it a night. Yes?

Speaker 7:
You talked earlier about working with cinematographers. How did you come about working with Frederick Elmes?

Jim Jarmusch:
Hmm. I had seen ... Well, I had seen his work, the films he'd shot for David Lynch and particularly also a film called *River's Edge* that I really loved the photography, the way the photography fit the story didn't seem slapped on. It seemed to grow out of it, the nature of the film, the subject and the feeling of the film. So I was very impressed by his work and had met him briefly, and also had read an interview with him that was very ... What he said was very strong, and it was a lot like what I felt about cinematography, the way that it should grow from the essence of the film and not be a signature put over the film. And so I called him up and talked with him and then went to LA to meet with him and he agreed to do the film, *Night On Earth*.

J. Rosenbaum:
Yes?

Speaker 8:
How much leeway do you give your actors to change or alter your dialogue?

Jim Jarmusch:
Well we changed the dialogue a lot in rehearsals, like very much. I'm not interested in tying them to the script at all, except to the ideas of an exchange of dialogue but not exactly how they phrase it. So I like to keep them in, you know, within the way the script works, have things go back and forth, but how they say things, rarely am I adamant about ... Sometimes I am if it's a very particular joke that I want them to retain, but I'm interested in them being the character and believable as the character, so we changed things quite a lot and a lot of the best things in my films have been things actors came up with during rehearsal periods in improvs that I then note down and put in the script. So really, a lot of it comes from that.

J. Rosenbaum:
Well, I think we're out of time but thank you very much Jim and thank you all for coming.

Jim Jarmusch:
Yeah.