

A PINWOOD DIALOGUE WITH DANIEL DAY-LEWIS AND PAUL THOMAS ANDERSON

Daniel Day-Lewis's magnificent performance as the ambitious and ruthless oil tycoon Daniel Plainview is at the core of Paul Thomas Anderson's critically acclaimed movie *There Will Be Blood*. In this discussion, which followed a Museum of the Moving Image preview screening of the film, the actor and director playfully and thoughtfully discussed their intense collaborative process.

A Pinewood Dialogue following a screening of *There Will Be Blood*, moderated by chief curator David Schwartz (December 11, 2007):

DAVID SCHWARTZ: Paul Thomas Anderson. (Applause) Daniel Day-Lewis. (Applause)

I'll just say what I think is clear from that response, that this character Danny Plainview is just one of the great characters now in America cinema. An amazing man, who's a loner and vicious character, and of course, couldn't be such a great character if he wasn't surrounded by this amazing movie. Not just the other actors in the film, but every element of the movie—the music, cinematography, production design—everything is amazing. So congratulations for this piece of work.

I'll start, I guess, by asking about Danny Plainview. Let's just start with his character. Maybe Paul, if you could tell us a bit where he came from? Because I know the [film] was inspired by the Upton Sinclair novel, *O!!!*, but also by a real life person.

PAUL THOMAS ANDERSON: Yes. I'm nervous that you called him Danny, because I think he'd kill you. (Laughter) Daniel Plainview would kill you if you called him Danny, probably. (Laughter) But we did base it loosely on Edward Doheny, and pieces of it come from a character that Upton Sinclair created in *O!!!*. We were just thinking about it today, and I remember there's an amazing line that Upton Sinclair wrote in that speech that says, "I have the business connections, so I can get the lumber for the derrick. Such things go by friendship in a rush like this." I thought, "Well, anybody that can say that

is pretty cool, you know?" Those sorts of things helped creating whoever the hell it is, really, you know.

SCHWARTZ: So you created the character, and also got immersed in this whole world of the oil culture in California. Could you just talk a little bit about what that immersion was like for you?

ANDERSON: It's actually quite easy. You just have to drive to Bakersfield or a town called Taft, which is just southwest of Bakersfield. They've done an amazing job of keeping their history alive, just through photographs and letters. Anything that constitutes history, they've really kept alive, in what are essentially trailers with all the old oil gear lying around. It was really as simple as driving up there. And the drive alone helps you use your imagination to think, "Driving in *this* car is kind of a pain in the ass; what would it be like to drive in a Model T to get to the place where you were trying to go, to see if there was the possibility that there might be oil there?" So your imagination is pretty well fed by the time you get there. And then to be there and to see all the great history that they've preserved of what the camps were, and what the towns became as a result of the oil actually being there. It was really quite easy, and really quite fun to just be around and be in.

SCHWARTZ: Could you talk, Daniel Day-Lewis, about what attracted you to the script? How did the script take hold for you and get a hold on you? I think as we all know, you do a relatively small number of films, compared to what you could be doing. It

seems like it has to be a special choice, when you decide to make a film.

DANIEL DAY-LEWIS: Well, Paul came to me in the form of the script for *There Will Be Blood*, and I felt immediately drawn into the orbit of a world that I knew nothing about. It seemed mysterious and intriguing, and I thought to myself, "God help me, I'm going to have to do this thing." And that was it. The bag was packed. You know, I sort of went through some sort of coy period of courtship of Paul, you know, where we met and flirted and had numerous breakfasts together and so on. (Laughter) But really, there was no avoiding this extraordinary possibility that Paul had laid before me. So it came to me in that form.

I don't know, I wouldn't even want to try and describe—for myself or anyone else—what it was about that story, but it was in the essence of the way in which Paul has created the world, even on paper in the script. It's very, very unusual to come across real writing, and writing that comes from a place where somebody has imagined themselves into a world, has seen that world through the eyes of the characters that they're creating. I was lost, that was it.

SCHWARTZ: Did you talk much in advance about what the whole production process would be? Living, basically being based in this ranch in Marfa, Texas for so long. I mean, do you need to know a lot about how the film's actually going to be made before you decide to go ahead with it?

DAY-LEWIS: Well, happily, there's like—you know, with the irrevocable sense of something that can't be avoided, there's a kind of anaesthetic comes with it. You can't begin to imagine what it's actually going to involve. If you could imagine that thing, you'd definitely not get out of bed. So, no; I think we knew without talking about it that it was going to be a demanding time. But the demands are the things—you know, the joy is in confronting those obstacles every day. You know, Paul created the playground that we were going to work on, and so for all that it sometimes perhaps stretched us to our limits, it was a time of great joy, just in the playing of the game.

SCHWARTZ: You know, one thing I love about the character is that he's both incredibly taciturn—

Daniel, I'll call him now, Plainview—and charming. He's able to sort of do both. He's got this sort of—I'll call it Irish charm, because I did think of John Houston's voice when I was watching the film—but the sort of tight-lipped toughness that we associate with certain American characters. So could you maybe talk about how you kind of built the voice and the characterization?

DAY-LEWIS: Well, it's hard to recreate something, the idea of something. For my own sake (and it may just be that I need to kid myself in that respect, as well as in many others connected with the work) but I don't dismember. You know, confronted with a life that you can't conceive of—and that's how it always begin—I'm more often than not intrigued by a life that seems utterly exotic and mysterious to me, so... But I don't try to dismember that into its separate parts. That would lead me off course very quickly.

You know, we had a long time to work on it, and during the course of that time, as far as possible, I try to allow that life, whatever it's going to be, to reveal itself. Of course, there are things that have to be, things that need to be understood in connection with the period that we're working with, the society of that period, that particular group working within the society, the skills you might need to learn—although, in fact, digging a hole in the ground, I mean pretty much anyone can do that! (Laughs) You choose to borrow another person's life, and like a child, that's what you do, and as far as possible, it needs to gradually appear to you in its entirety, rather than in its separate bits and pieces.

SCHWARTZ: I want to ask you both about the opening scene, because that seems like such a microcosm of the film. The ambition and physicality and loneliness of the character—so much is expressed. It's a classic. I mean, I don't know how many minutes that sequence is, but it's a classic sequence. I also had heard that you shot the film somewhat in sequence. But could you maybe each talk about what filming that beginning was like?

ANDERSON: Well, my memory of it is that we filmed the beginning at the beginning. I can remember the excitement of going to work on the first day, and being at the bottom of a fifty-foot mine shaft. There was an entrance vertically and an entrance

horizontally. It was all so simple for the first couple hours, because it was just Daniel hacking away. And then things started to have to fall, and he started to have to fall. And then he did really fall, and he broke his rib. And then I thought, "Well, alright, now we're making the movie." (Laughter) It's probably not a movie until Daniel breaks a rib or two, you know? (Laughter)

DAY-LEWIS: The first assistant offered me a banana at that point. (Laughter) I'm not quite sure what medicinal effect he expected that to have.

SCHWARTZ: So you've done eleven movies, because that's how many ribs you have, I guess. (Laughter) What about playing a character—I had mentioned this loneliness aspect—he is such a loner, and every time you're in a scene with another person, you're trying to charm them or win them over or deceive them somehow. What is that like?

DAY-LEWIS: Well, going back to your question before, certainly one of the things that drew me so quickly into the story that Paul wanted to tell was, as I turned page after page after page, I thought, "How long can he keep this going for?" And it's described in such beautiful detail. In fact, that sequence before you hear Plainview speaking was a much longer sequence in the script; indeed, we shot a much longer sequence—which finally, the entire film couldn't hold—but we shot a much longer sequence of that, and there was something so beautiful to me about the idea of revealing a character. Everything you needed to know about that man, about the savagery of his existence at that time in his life, you discovered without any single person saying a word. I thought that was quite wonderful.

Yes, as you quite rightly said, the solitary nature of what he's doing—which of course, you know, these men who lived like animals in holes in the ground then necessarily had to become showmen and salesmen, and develop a silver tongue to sell themselves; the idea of what they were doing to these poor hapless families that were going to empty their pockets into the coffers of some impossible dream. The idea of that loneliness somehow still, that isolation, the sense of being somehow outside of humanity remaining throughout the whole experience, even when you have to deal with humanity; and in his case,

Plainview always sees the very worst of people. He looks for it, and he finds it—as we all tend to look for and find the thing that we're looking for. So that transition from the solitary nature of his work into the showman was very interesting as well.

SCHWARTZ: This film, I mean to me, seems to be so much about what America has always been all about and sort of what it still is today, in a kind of messed up way. Do you latch onto anything like that; an idea about American movies, American cinema, or about America itself?

DAY-LEWIS: Not at all, no—because that's not part of my job. You know, I could think about it now, and maybe go off on some riff about it. But my work is—Paul's work is very different, as far as, to whatever extent as a writer, he gouges into his own subconscious; as a director, he has to oversee the entire workings of the thing that's going on around him. But my job is a much... I have a much narrower focus, and it's vital that I don't objectify the story in that way, think about it in any broader terms than the very specific thing that's set before us.

SCHWARTZ: So can you just respond to that, in terms of what you're thinking about when you're...?

ANDERSON: Yes, it's not part of my job, either. (Laughter)

SCHWARTZ: Okay, good! You—in the recent *New York Times* Magazine piece—laid this big clue, I thought, by talking about *The Treasure of Sierra Madre*, and what that film meant to you; I believe you said you watch it every night or turn it on every night. Could you say anything about how that film might have inspired you or related to this?

ANDERSON: Sure. You know, even before we started filming the movie, people were sick of hearing me go on about it. I know they're *really* sick of me talking about it now.

I knew that film just because everybody knows it, and I'd seen it and loved it. But in the middle of struggling with writing, at some point early on, I remember just coming across it and feeling like, "Wow; thank God I came across this, because that really helps." It really helps to see how economical and raw storytelling could help us—could help me

try to tell whatever was happening with the story that I was trying to write. *The Treasure of Sierra Madre* is just mad, it's great—because it's really just watching someone go slowly insane, over ninety minutes—and what could be better? (Laughter) But really going the way; not faking it. Not getting halfway or three-quarters of the way and copping out. I mean, really going through to the fucking end and saying, "This is it."

To see that in a film, or see that from these filmmakers, is encouraging. You say, "Shit. You know; okay. That's good." But more or less, too, is that when I look at it, it's an adventure film or it's an action film—but it's really just a play. It's really just these three guys at each other. It's just dialogue and the three of them desperate, and ambitious, and jealous, and greedy, and all those things. It's a play between the three of them, but because of the setting and everything else, it's really an adventure film, an action film. I thought, "Fuck, alright, that's good, you know?" And really, more than anything else, it was a way to figure out how to economically tell a story, because I knew that to try to tell the story, we weren't going to have that much money to do it. So it was, "How to do kind of an epic story, but in a small way, with a few settings?" I could go on and on about *The Treasure of Sierra Madre*... Daniel is so fucking sick of hearing me talk about *The Treasure of Sierra Madre*! (Laughter)

DAY-LEWIS: Oh, God!

SCHWARTZ: One aspect of your filmmaking process that I've read that you're very involved in (and it's similar to Robert De Niro, who's another actor who really works a lot with the costume designer) deals a lot with costume as a way of finding character. Is that true? Is that an important part of the process, the choices? It seems like the choices of the hat you wear, every little thing seems to be expressive here.

DAY-LEWIS: Well, it's important, but it can only be important in the *right* way, if it happens at the right time. In other words, if you have begun to understand the world—or at least to believe that you understand that world that you're creating through the eyes of this other life—then you begin to look at clothes in a different way. You try and imagine the vanity; you try and feel the vanity of that particular man.

We all present ourselves. We choose. Look at people in the street. You know, you see fellows with a certain amount of dignity walking down the street with shopping bags, which slightly reduces that dignity. (Laughter) You can't quite pinpoint why, but you sort of imagine the man who commands the attention of millions and has a checkbook the size of the telephone directory at his disposal, and you imagine him standing in front of a mirror deciding between this pair of underpants or that pair of underpants, and the hat, and the coat. Every single one amongst us makes these decisions about the way in which we choose to present ourselves. In that context, yes, the clothes then become very important. Why would I choose this pair of boots, as opposed to that? So yes, then it becomes interesting; yes.

SCHWARTZ: Okay, let's open it up, and I'll repeat questions so people can hear. (Repeats audience question) Okay; the child who plays your adopted son; I guess [what was] the process of working with him, Paul—casting him and working with him?

ANDERSON: The simplest answer is that he's naturally gifted, quite honestly. It really begins and ends with that, because I know Daniel probably thought he had to do some explaining to Dillon [Frazier] about some of the nastier scenes. Dillon didn't need that. Dillon looked at us like, "I get this. I got this from the second you guys started talking to me about it." Just a natural gift that he has—not really as an actor, but as a person, I think. He's a young man. He's an old man trapped in a young man's body. He was ten when we made it... no, he was nine, turning ten, so ten, mostly, while we were filming it. He's from a town called Fort Davis, in Texas... It's hard to describe him. I mean, you saw it; that's him. I remember there was a scene that was written, perhaps it called for him to cry, or become emotional, or something like that—and he wasn't having any of it. I mean, it didn't make sense to him, and it didn't make sense to him. He wouldn't do it. He just... You know, I said, "Well, what would you do?" He said, "I'd get angry; I'd give him a stink eye." So alright, that's it then, you know? Give him the stink eye.

There's a great moment where you've written something and you have to hand it off to somebody and you hope... you know, it's their job now. Dillon took charge of his role and contributed things

constantly—ideas and his point of view—on it. We didn't guide him through it and paint by numbers—"Stand here..."—at all. I mean, it was very quick. Within a few a days, he was, "This is what I would do." He was being himself, and he was being this character, and he was applying both of the things constantly, and he was a natural. I can't tell you, it was every second. The days that he wasn't there, there was a gaping hole. We were just all miserable and waiting, whatever, two days, until he would come back. (Laughter) Looking at each other like, "Ah, fuck, let's just get Dillon back, you know?" (Laughter)

SCHWARTZ: Do you want to add to that?

DAY-LEWIS: That's it. (Laughter)

SCHWARTZ: Okay, right here. (Repeats audience question) Well, I guess the question is that this script has less dialogue than previous scripts, and I guess the question is whether that had to do, somehow, with the adaptation process? Was there anything specific in terms of how you approached dialogue?

ANDERSON: Ironically, most of the quiet scenes are scenes like the scenes at the beginning are—I wouldn't say that they're original, but they're kind of based on stories of the period; they're based on Edward Doheny's first discovery of oil in downtown Los Angeles, you know? Different mining experiences and accidents that I've read about... That stuff took care of itself, because I just couldn't imagine what they'd be saying to each other, even... I mean, Daniel's alone, so he's not going to talk to himself, and even those guys out there, you just can't imagine them [saying], "Hey, look at how much oil we got!" you know? (Laughter) "We're going to need more buckets!" or something like that, you know? (Laughter) Most of the scenes that come from the book were really dialogue scenes, actually. The real estate scene, the dinner table scene more or less, is very similar. That opening speech, that's pretty straight from the book.

SCHWARTZ: (Repeats audience question) [Is there] anything you could say about the pacing of the film, a film that moves around through so many different periods in time?

ANDERSON: Well, a lot of it has to do with Dylan Tichenor, who's the editor of the film. We cut the movie in New York, ironically enough... and I think it really helped us, actually. It was great to go from West Texas and the middle of nowhere, and edit the movie in New York City. It was so strange. You know, all these quiet scenes and everything, and all you could hear was horns outside honking, and fucking steel, and metal, and everything else. I don't know, but I think it was good. It actually helped us pace the movie faster. (Laughs) Every Wednesday night, we would have steak and vodka night—where it was just steak and vodka; we'd have no sides—and we said, "This is what the movie should be, steak and vodka." (Laughter) So I hope that answers your question.

SCHWARTZ: (Repeats audience question) Okay; well, Paul Dano, amazing casting; but the decision to cast him as both brothers...?

ANDERSON: Well, it was a decision that happened. We'd begun shooting the film, and we'd done some rearranging with the cast. We'd had Paul playing Paul Sunday originally, and the idea came—just through a series of events, where we just thought, we just all sort of decided, you know—we should have Paul play this part, but not replace him. Any chance to do a Cain and Abel, I think, we were like, "Alright, well, let's try to do that." But we brought Paul in to play Eli on very short notice, which I think was a blessing for him. The way you hear him talk about it, he was just like, "Thank God I didn't have any time to think about it. I just had to jump in and do it."

(Responds to audience question) He's talking about [the] scene—there's a campfire scene. We put it on this website that we were, like, the horrible purveyors of, really lazy—and we just didn't need it. We didn't need the scene. But it was really good, and we wanted to just find a home for it, and we put it up there. (Laughs) Honestly, quite honestly, we didn't need it... or Dylan thought we didn't need it. I probably thought we needed it for a long time, and Dylan won that battle.

SCHWARTZ: I wanted to ask you something about the father/son relationship; it was just triggered by talking about this young actor who plays your son. I just wanted to know what playing those scenes were like for you, in terms of... The father/son

relationships are so important, and [the question of] whether the father actually loves his son, or what he feels like. In that restaurant scene... there are some very chilling scenes and fascinating scenes, and I'm just wondering what that side of the relationship was like for you.

DAY-LEWIS: Before we actually got to start shooting the film, I already felt very close to Dillon Freasier, and we spent a lot of time together and I was very fond of him. He's a just a wonderful young man, and I began to worry a little bit about what his experience would be when the story began to unfold. So I talked to him—Paul mentioned it—you know, I talked to him one day and said, "Look, you know, I'm going to speak to you harshly sometimes and I'm going to treat you roughly sometimes." And he looked at me like I was completely insane.

Plainview's relationship with his son, or his adopted son, is that of a man who has elevated a junior partner into a senior position and feels, you know, both affection and responsibility for him, but nonetheless, expects him to be able to come to work every day and do his job. Plainview, there's no part of him that understands what the responsibility is of a parent, and he's not so consciously cynical as to see—except perhaps at the end, when he's had time to ruminate upon his life and look back upon it—to see that this young man was a cute face to buy land. That, in effect, was part of the attraction. You know, he understood pretty quickly that it was no bad thing to have this appendage with him. There was real love, real affection; but nonetheless, he regarded this unnaturally mature child as a partner, as a working partner in his life.

The minute that he began to malfunction, he had no way of dealing with that. He had no understanding of how to deal with this very central figure in his life being—working—at a substandard level. So he kind of cauterizes the wound and excises him, pushes him away—as he tends to do with all figures, as he begins to bring them closer to himself, revealing then as he begins to see the fallibility of another human being, then he cuts them away and gradually separates himself, step by step, from mankind.

SCHWARTZ: And since somebody brought up Paul Dano—and it's such an amazing character, Eli Sunday—if you could talk a little bit about that

relationship, because these two characters are flip side of a coin, in a way.

DAY-LEWIS: Well, they're locked together in clear recognition of each other's fraudulence, really.

SCHWARTZ: (Repeats audience question) Big fan of Jonny Greenwood and his amazing score; could you talk about the process of scoring this?

ANDERSON: I approached Jonny about doing the film, and sent him a script. He'd never read a script before. And so he said, "It's great. It's great... but," he said, "*Catwoman* could've been great. I don't really know. I've never read a script." (Laughter) I assured him, "I think it is really good."

We talked a little bit about maybe the instrumentation, and sort of decided it should be strings or old stuff; no computers or anything like that. But he saw the film; I remember bringing the film to him in London. I'd put one piece that he'd written before in there, *smear*, and a little bit of the *Popcorn Superhet Receiver* piece, just to kind of show him, you know, "This is how the stuff that you've written can work against the picture,"—and I remember him just bounding out of the room being like, "Alright. You know, what do we need? We need some music." (Laughs)

And more or less, the way it sort of worked, just some back and forth. He's in England, and I was in New York at the time; just sort of back and forth, sending things back and forth, notes back and forth. Ultimately, he went off and just came back with a couple hours worth of music. I remember him sending me a note saying, "I've got some music, but I think I've gone a little bit overboard," you know. He did, he wrote so much more than was needed, but it was a pleasure to work with him.

SCHWARTZ: (Repeats audience question) The other Daniel. I guess the question's about what you go through, what this character goes through and how that affects you. Sort of: does it work for you from the outside in?

DAY-LEWIS: My feeling about talking about that specific part of the story (and indeed, any other part of it) would be that for my own personal sake—and everyone finds their own way of doing things—but the moment you step outside of something and

objectify it, then you distance yourself from the experience of that life, and therefore, as far as possible... No, there was no part of me that made any conscious decision about how the younger and middle aged Plainview would develop into the older Plainview. It just seemed to develop out of the story and his experiences, if that answers the question.

SCHWARTZ: Are you surprised when you see the finished film? You said before that you don't look at dailies, so it must be quite an experience to finally see this.

DAY-LEWIS: I can't honestly... Paul sent me a rough cut of the film fairly early on in the editing process, and I honestly can't remember how I felt the first time I saw it, except that it developed so quickly into the kind of correspondence, the to and fro, about how it might develop from there into something else or some other completely different thing. You know, Paul's attitude towards the work was so fluid, and [he] was obviously still very much searching himself, so I never felt the need to judge it at that early stage, as something that might be a finished piece. It just seemed to be in the process of becoming itself.

ANDERSON: I remember the first time that we saw the film. We'd been sort of leading up to it and really.... (Laughter) I'll tell you this, we swore to each other that we were going to watch the first time, we said, "No booze. We're not going to drink.

We're not going to fucking drink." (Laughter) You know? And it was like a comedy cut; cut to us in the fucking bar, drinking Guinness beforehand just like, "Alright, just one. Just one, and then we'll watch the movie." Of course, we had two or three, and then we sat and we watched the film. (But then we had a sober one the next morning, with our cups of coffee.)

DAY-LEWIS: We did have a kind of lover's tiff when Paul first told me he was going to show me the film. I said, "I don't want to see the film. Why would you think I would want to see the film?" (Laughter) And then he burst into tears and, you know, we went through that whole thing. But it was great when we made up again. (Laughter)

SCHWARTZ: Well, we'll take one more—but thanks for taking us through your whole relationship. Back there. (Repeats audience question) How would you say your previous films have sort of led towards this?

ANDERSON: Well, they've all led to this, I guess, because this is where we're at. (Laughter)

SCHWARTZ: Okay, that's pretty good. (Applause) I'd say that's a pretty good place to be at. So congratulations again to all of you.

ANDERSON: Thank you very much; thank you, thank you! (Applause)

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