

A PINWOOD DIALOGUE WITH STANLEY TUCCI AND FRIENDS

Actor/director Stanley Tucci is one of the most accomplished creative figures in New York film, television, and theater. His films as director include *Big Night* (1996) and *The Impostors* (1998), and his memorable performances include *Road to Perdition* (2002), *Winchell* (1998), and *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006). In this informal conversation, Tucci discusses his art and craft with some friends: the chef and restaurateur Mario Batali; actress Hope Davis, who has worked with Tucci on five films; actress Natasha Richardson; and actor Steve Buscemi, who has formed a new company with Tucci, Olive Productions. The conversation was moderated by author Gay Talese.

A Pinewood Dialogue with Stanley Tucci and Friends moderated by Gay Talese (May 21, 2008):

DAVID SCHWARTZ: Now it's time to meet Stanley and his friends, whom I'll introduce one at a time. First, we'll start with a man who has turned cooking into his own form of art and performance. A multi-talented artist who runs a dozen great restaurants, including Esca, which is right around the corner—but it's fully booked for tonight, I checked. He's written half a dozen books. I told him, "Whatever you do, don't dress like Gay Talese tonight. Wear something different." (Laughter) Here he is, Mario Batali.

MARIO BATALI: Thank you. (Applause)

SCHWARTZ: The actress who has worked with Stanley more than anybody else is our next guest. Like Stanley, she has moved between independent films and mainstream movies, from *The Daytrippers* (1996) to *About Schmidt* (2002). Her movies with Stanley are *The Impostors* (1998); *Joe Gould's Secret* (2000); *Kiss of Death* (1995); *Daytrippers*, and *The Hoax* (2006), I'm very pleased she's with us tonight. Please welcome Hope Davis.

HOPE DAVIS: Thank you very much.

SCHWARTZ: It didn't always used to be that great actors were also great directors, but here is somebody else who, like Stanley, can really do it

all. You know his many, many great films roles, and he's a great filmmaker in his own right. Now he is also Stanley's business partner; they started a production company called Olive Productions, and we can't wait to see what they produce. Please welcome Steve Buscemi.

STEVE BUSCEMI: Thank you. (Applause)

SCHWARTZ: Natasha Richardson is one of our great stage and screen actors. You know her from many films: *Patty Hearst* (1988); *The Handmaid's Tale* (1990); *Asylum* (2005); last year she had the movie *Evening* (2007). If you go to the theater a lot, you also know her incredible stage work on Broadway: her amazing plays include *Anna Christie* and her Tony Award-winning role in *Cabaret*; she was recently in *A Streetcar Named Desire* as, of course, Blanche DuBois. [Museum director Rochelle Slovin] said at the beginning that we had a great cook here; we actually have two great cooks, because Natasha Richardson is a serious cook. She is here tonight, so please welcome her.

NATASHA RICHARDSON: (Applause) Can we make one correction? This is a chef; some of us are cooks.

SCHWARTZ: Yes. (Laughter) Gay Talese now, who I'm very pleased agreed to moderate the event tonight. The dapper, elegant, great writer and observer worked for many years at *The New York Times*, in the old building on 43rd Street. Among his

many great books is *The Kingdom in the Power*, which is about *The New York Times*. His other titles include *Honor Thy Father*, *Thy Neighbor's Wife*; *The Bridge*; and recently released, *A Writer's Life*. There's a great biography about Gay Talese on his website, which of course is gaytalese.com; you can look at that for more. I'm really pleased that he's with us tonight. Please welcome Gay Talese.

GAY TALESE: Thank you. (Applause)

SCHWARTZ: Here he is; I can tell you his wife is a great cook, and here is the man, Stanley Tucci.

STANLEY TUCCI: Thank you, thank you.

DAVIS: Stanley!

TUCCI: Is it over yet? (Laughter)

TALESE: I have the honor of asking the first question, a question that I hope might also be answered by the other distinguished people that are before you tonight. It is a question that many of you in this audience might share, that is: when does an actor believe he or she is truly a professional actor? We've seen the accomplishments and the versatility of Stanley; we could just as well see this in the other people here. But when they are young, do they think they're actors? Are they actors when they are out of work? I read something about Stanley—I think it was in *The New York Times*—where he told this reporter in the middle 1990's, I believe, that there were times, for months, when he didn't have work. He used to spend some of his free time pondering his life and looking at great art at the Museum of Modern History [sic]. So I would like to ask, perhaps Stanley first, and others if they wish, when do people recognize themselves as professional actors, as opposed to aspiring actors? And just parenthetically, Mario, you might also want to answer this because you're an actor, and working in all these restaurants are waiters who are not waiters but in their heads, are actors between roles. (Laughter) Well, Stanley, tell us. When did you think you were going to succeed as an actor? Were you eleven? Were you twenty? How old were you?

TUCCI: Well, no. I'm still waiting for it. (Laughter)

TALESE: After fifty parts?

TUCCI: I'm not kidding; I don't think it ever changes. I think every actor can attest to this, that you always feel—or the business makes you feel—that you're only as good as your next job. As your last job. As your next job. (Laughter) You're always searching. One of the reasons you're always searching is because the business is ever-changing, and *you're* ever-changing. So I think probably, for me, the last year has been... maybe for the first time, I've found some kind of comfort in the fact that I will keep working. But there is no doubt that I always, when I finish a job, imagine that it's going to take a long time to get another job.

DAVIS: I'm remembering the first day that I met Stanley, which was on the set of *The Daytrippers*, about fifteen years ago. Do you remember that? We were standing there in our underwear to do our love scene as a couple.

TUCCI: Right... that was comfortable. (Laughter)

DAVIS: That was funny. We laughed a lot. But I remember I met you, and we started to chat and you went into a *tirade*. You said, "I can't get arrested! I—I—I'll never make it! I—I—I don't have any money; I—I—I don't have anything to do! I—I—I don't know what I'm doing! I'll never, never work!" Do you remember this? Do you have any recollection?

TUCCI: No, no; I don't really remember that. (Davis laughs) But I say that every week, so I'm sure I did say that. (Laughter)

DAVIS: You scared the life out of me.

TUCCI: Did I? Well, I wasn't worried about your career, I was worried about mine. (Laughter) But it causes great anxiety. I was also trying to get *Big Night* (1996) off the ground and it didn't help, of course, that the day that we shot, the camera was stolen.

DAVIS: The camera was stolen on our first day of shooting.

TUCCI: And so there was no camera.

DAVIS: So we just talked forever.

TUCCI: I've always found it very hard to make a movie without a camera. (Laughter) It was found eventually, and the movie was made. But I think that anxiety exists perpetually. Natasha, do you feel anxious too? Ever?

RICHARDSON: I feel that this is completely a two part question. The first part is, when did you feel that you were a professional actor? Well, the first time I felt I was a professional *actress*—which I am, by the way, there's nothing wrong with the feminization of the word. (Applause) I'm an *actress*, not an actor. The first time I felt I was an actress was when I got my first job and somebody was going to pay me to act. I felt, "My God! I'm a professional actor, as opposed to an amateur!" My only other job was working as a waitress at a Caribbean restaurant. When I got my first money in my hand, I thought, "My God! That's the first money I've made!" So that was when I felt, "I'm a professional actress." But a feeling of "Ooh, I've landed. Yeah! Success. I'm okay now?" I don't know, I think we'd all agree that that never happens. Maybe if you do just think "Oh, well, maybe everything's alright," everything goes (makes groaning sound). It's all cyclical and so up-and-down. That's one of the hardest things about it, staying with it and riding those rapids.

TALESE: When did you begin to recognize yourself as an actor? How old were you?

BUSCEMI: I guess I was in my late twenties, and it was when I saw my name in the *TV Guide*. I did a *Miami Vice* (1985). (Laughter) That felt real. (Laughter)

BATALI: I saw that episode; it was *great!*

BUSCEMI: I had been doing theater before that, and low-budget movies. But when that was in the *TV Guide*, it was a way for my family and my friends—I don't even know if they watched the show—to think, "Hey I saw you in the *TV Guide!* So you're not kidding! You *are* an actor!" (Laughter) But it's true, every time a job ends... my dad has stopped doing this, but he used to say, "So... you're unemployed now." (Laughter) I would always say, "I'm *in between films.*"

RICHARDSON: Or even worse, "You're resting." Resting? I mean, what, you think I'm at home...?

DAVIS: Stanley, you don't rest very much these days, though.

TUCCI: No, I don't want to rest.

DAVIS: I mean, you're not a restful person.

TUCCI: No, I never have been a restful person. No, no, no.

BATALI: Resting is over-rated.

TALESE: Resting is over-rated, yes. (Laughter) As you can attest to. Do you *ever* rest?

BATALI: I'm resting right now! (Laughter)

TUCCI: You are... you just fell asleep for a minute!

BATALI: Yes, exactly. I have the ability to fall asleep at the drop of a hat, in a long elevator ride. (Laughter)

TUCCI: Do you ever fantasize about being an actor? Or an actress? (Laughter)

BATALI: That's a very good question. I would say yes to both of them. (Laughter) But my field is a little different. Although it's changed in the last twenty years, when I started in this field, cooking was the thing you did when you got out of the military, right before you went to jail. (Laughter) The only solace in actually becoming a cook is that once you become a pretty good cook, there's always a job for you—and it's not necessarily that feeling of freelance. I know a lot of people who are freelance in the cooking business or freelance photographers, and they don't have it like I have it, whereas I know where my paycheck is next May, provided all the restaurants don't burn down. I have that comfort of knowing that there's something always backing me up that I've spent a lot of time building.

All actors build something and, in the same sense, as a good cook, you're only as good as your last lasagna. But you have the right to choose all the ingredients in your lasagna. When you're only as good as your last role, there may have been other reasons why you took that role, or why it fell apart when you weren't the director or the writer of that role. There's a little bit less control over the

situation—which can result in something spectacular happening... but something the other side of that happens. So we keep cooking, and keep building, and doing things that give us a little inertia.

TALESE: Mario, confess. Did you ever fire waiters because they aspired to be actors and they were waiting for the phone call?

BATALI: Never. I'll tell you why: because in our field, there are a lot of people who pretend to be career waiters and are not good. I would rather have someone who had other interests, beside the greatness of our food and service, because it makes them a better person. It makes them a more interesting person to interact with when I'm asking you about a wine, or your suggestion on where to go after dinner. That's what makes a good restaurant even better: when people are not just obsessed with the moment, but with life in general.

DAVIS: What would you say your percentage of actor/waiters is? (Laughter) How many of them are professionals and how many...?

BATALI: Well, some of them are more committed and would actually say, "Listen, I need to take off a shift because I'm going to go do a trial," or something like that. I would say more than 50% in New York.

DAVIS: Wow.

BATALI: And of that 50%, maybe some of them are performance artists and/or strippers. (Laughter) I mean, there are a lot of roles out there to be played.

TALESE: You're a performance artist; on television, you seem to be very like the thespian that dwells within many of us.

TUCCI: You actually do something that every actor aspires to. I remember when I was in school living with David [Schwartz]—(Laughter)

BATALI: Ah, sweet David.

TUCCI: It was so great. (Sighs) When you're first up on stage learning how to handle props and say your lines at the same time, it's frightening. You go

to grab the glass, and you can't remember your line because you have to pour the water, and you can't do those two things at the same time, and everything's a *disaster*. (Laughter) It's all fragmented and compartmentalized.

When I watch you do your cooking show—and I've watched countless cooking shows since I was a kid, Julia Child being the very first one, of course—you do it with such facility, it's extraordinary. If you've seen Mario's show, he has this great kitchen set, three people seated at the counter, and a camera is facing us, at an angle like this. The camera is here; Mario is here; and the people are here. He interacts with the people, he interacts with the food, he's cooking this food, *and* he's also going on and on about the history of the dish that he's making, the ingredients, where they come from, *and* he's fielding the questions from the people, *and* he's sometimes talking to the camera. It happens so effortlessly and with such assuredness-lily-ness (Laughter) that it's extraordinary! It's like a perfect performance. You never "act cooking," which is what you find in a lot of cooking shows. They smile at every ingredient, they smile to the camera. And they're not really cooking. (Laughter) You could really give a shit if you're smiling or not smiling. You're having a good time cooking, and it's absolutely immediate and spontaneous. It's really fascinating to watch, and for that reason, it's more than just a cooking show, it's actually great theater. It's what you hope to get to as an actor on stage.

RICHARDSON: I'd like to use that moment to bring it back to Stanley if I could, Gay.

TALESE: All right. (Laughter)

RICHARDSON: Because that's why we're here. I think that that's one of the extraordinary things that Stanley does as an actor. One of the most confusing things about acting is that sometimes acting at its very, very best is invisible. It's so good that you're not noticing it going on. That's one of the great contradictions about Stanley: he's a great show-off and a great scene stealer, but he so becomes the character that he makes it seem like he's not acting at all. I find it annoying on that Actors Studio program when they go on and on and on about awards as though they're the be all and end all—which they're not. At all. But I really

was staggered that Stanley wasn't nominated for a Best Supporting Oscar for *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006), because he just *became* that character. It became invisible and it was very showy at the same time, that's where I think it relates to what Mario was saying.

TUCCI: Well, thank you for saying that. Thanks, guys. I didn't leave the house for six months when I wasn't nominated—No. (Laughter) But my wife said about that performance, she said, "Well, that was pretty easy for you, wasn't it?" (Laughter)

TALESE: You were talking about the glass and how one has to be conscious of almost everything, even if it seems like one is not conscious of [ones surroundings]. It seems to me that the thing that has to be dealt with as an actor—great actor or not great actor—is memory. I could never imagine being an actor because I could never believe I could remember the lines. (Laughter) Now all you great actors probably have a different way of memorizing. I wonder—since the audience is not made up of aspiring actors or actresses or anybody that aspires to anything other than sitting and listening to people talk about this business—how in the hell do you remember? (Laughter) What's your method of remembering?

TUCCI: It has to be integrated. Memorizing lines has to be integrated into you physically. There's no other way to do it.

TALESE: Do you read again and again and again?

TUCCI: No, no.

BATALI: How important is it to *exactly get the line*? (Laughter) That's why it looks so good on my show: because there *is* no line, I improvise the whole damn thing!

TALESE: Yes, but Natasha has to remember Shakespeare, and you don't fool around with Mr. Shakespeare.

RICHARDSON: Well, no, you don't fool around with Mr. Shakespeare. We're all kind of giggling here, because the truth is that for actors, it's mostly the easiest thing you do.

TUCCI: Yes.

DAVIS: Yes.

BUSCEMI: Yes.

RICHARDSON: It's the easiest part of your job; that's why we're all snickering. It's what you do with the lines once you've learned them which is the hard bit. But of course, Shakespeare you have to absolutely remember it. I'll ask Steve—he writes, he acts, he directs. How important...?

BUSCEMI: I never do Shakespeare. For that reason. I won't. (Laughter)

TUCCI: I think a lot of it has to do with the writing, in film.

RICHARDSON: It's repetition and rehearsal, in a play.

TUCCI: That's it, repetition; but it has to be integrated into your body, and into your emotional state.

DAVIS: Stanley, what did you just say to me over in our seats about that great moment in *The Impostors*, when you're outside the sidewalk and you have that startled look on your face? What you did you lean over and say?

TUCCI: Oh, yes. When I'm talking to Oliver Platt in that first scene, the little bitty scene prior to the cupcake, cream puff thing, I say, "Then you're going to do this. And then—" And my jaw...

TALESE: You really forgot your line?

TUCCI: I forgot my line!

DAVIS: He forgot his line.

TUCCI: And I *wrote* it! (Laughter)

RICHARDSON: But was it improvised, that scene, at all?

DAVIS: No.

TUCCI: No, we played around a little bit, but it's all there. *You* know. I mean, you said the stuff that I've written.

DAVIS: In film, it doesn't really matter if you remember your lines because they can stop and back up.

TUCCI: Right.

DAVIS: The last time I was on a set with you was for *The Hoax*, which was not that long ago. Do you remember that moment when you forgot your line?

TUCCI: I couldn't remember my line; I couldn't remember the guy's name.

DAVIS: I think it was the hairpiece that—you had this insane hair piece on.

TUCCI: Ughh! (Laughter)

DAVIS: He had a speech where he was really reading the riot act to Richard Gere, and you got halfway through it. Do you remember all of this? It was very funny, everyone else was laughing. He couldn't remember his line, and he was yelling, and then he would stop and say, "*What is it?*" (Laughter) The script lady would read the line to you and you'd say, "Okay, start again, back up—keep going. (Makes tongue-tied sounds) *God damnit! What is it?* (Laughter) *God damnit! God damnit!*" And she would read it to you. When you see the scene on film, you're on *fire* in the scene. It's so great!

TUCCI: You're giving away all my secrets! (Laughter) The key to great acting is never remembering your lines, I guess.

DAVIS: Everyone else around him is laughing, remembering the lines...

TUCCI: It's nothing! We just don't do it! (Laughter)

TALESE: But are not other actors who are playing with you thrown off?

BATALI: Aren't they depending on you?

DAVIS: Too bad. (Richardson laughs)

TUCCI: It's every man for himself, really, in this business.

DAVIS: Absolutely.

TALESE: Wait a minute; you've been on the Broadway stage, as well. What about on the stage? You can't wing it.

TUCCI: No, no, no.

DAVIS: You have to remember your lines.

TUCCI: But sometimes you forget them and then, you look at the other person and they see the horror in your eyes. (Laughter) Then you go, "... " And then somebody jumps in and fixes it. Then you go, "Oh yeah, here's where we are." It happens all the time, in every play.

TALESE: Does it happen to you, too?

RICHARDSON: It's happened occasionally with me, yes. It happens.

TUCCI: The two hardest, most frightening things are that you're going to forget your line or you're going to start laughing and you won't be able to stop. (Laughter) Right? I mean, that's the worst.

RICHARDSON: The worst forgetting-lines story I heard was from Ian McKellen, who was playing Prospero in...

TUCCI: There you go.

RICHARDSON: Yes, there you go. (Laughter)

TUCCI: You don't remember it. *The Tempest*.

RICHARDSON: Yes, in *The Tempest*. He decided he was a bit wobbly on his lines, so he had this sort of Book of Magic for Prospero the Sorcerer. In the book, he had all his lines (Laughter). After a while, this book began to fall apart. On the night that Prince Charles was visiting the RSC [Royal Shakespeare Company] or whatever, with him doing Prospero, he opens his book, and the stage management have decided to replace the book and they haven't put any of his lines in it. (Laughter) Well, he had to exit the stage!

TUCCI: That is a nightmare, that's the actor's nightmare.

RICHARDSON: It is the actor's nightmare.

DAVIS: Oh, my God.

TUCCI: It's funny that you bring up this question because everyone asks it and you sort of give [a shrug] and go, "You just remember your lines." But I suppose this relates to the first question you asked, because you never do feel secure in this business. A testament to that, to me, are the dreams that I still have at least every couple of months. There are two different dreams, though sometimes they're in one dream. They are the classic actor nightmare, which is you're on stage and you don't have any clothes on. (Laughter)

TALESE: Which you've done.

TUCCI: Right, that happened. (Laughter) But no, I didn't mean that. You're in your own underwear, and you've just entered, *and you don't know your lines*. I have this *I don't know my lines* dream at least once every three months or so.

RICHARDSON: Or you don't know what play you're in.

TUCCI: Or you don't know what play you're in! Yes, that's the other thing. Everybody else is doing *As You Like It* and you're doing David Mamet's *A Life in the Theater*. (Laughter) You think, "Well, I can fit right in." Do you have those?

BATALI: That never happens in the kitchen. (Laughter) You know right where you are... and where the fire is, right next to you.

TALESE: How about you, do you share some of these sentiments?

BUSCEMI: Yes; I mean it's nerve-wracking. But I guess when you're doing a play, it becomes muscle memory. It's choreography; if you do it enough, then it's just in your body. It's the same thing with the lines. If you just relax about it then the lines will come. I've found that only when I start to obsess about whether I'm going to forget my lines that I think that I don't know them. But for a film, I just go through them, usually the night before. Sometimes writing out the lines helps me remember them. And sometimes when I'm acting in a scene, I literally have to visualize what the words look like on the page to remember a line. I

remember that that word started up here and I can see the line, that's how I do it.

TUCCI: Absolutely, yes.

BUSCEMI: It's terrible.

TUCCI: It really is sad. It's a sad craft. (Laughter)

TALESE: Do you ever record a script? Do you ever put on a tape recorder and then hear yourself...?

BUSCEMI: No, but sometimes I'll ask my son or my wife to run lines with me, just simple as that. But no, I don't think I've ever recorded myself.

RICHARDSON: The ideal is to try and remember the thought. That's what you're aiming for.

TUCCI: Yes. It also has to do with great writing. Shakespeare or Chekhov, if properly translated, or Tennessee Williams—stuff like that is actually very easy to memorize, because it's so beautifully written. One of the reasons they're beautifully written is that all the thoughts are connected, all the emotions are connected. There's a very clear emotional arc for each character, so it comes very naturally when you really look at them. Bad writing, which is so often what we get when we're sent movie scripts, is impossible to remember, because it doesn't make any sense.

DAVIS: It's all junk.

TUCCI: Yes; it's all ideas. I said this recently to someone I was working with about a script we were doing: "The scenes are not written. What the authors, the screenwriters, have done is they've written *about* the scene. But they haven't actually written the scene."

BATALI: Can you do a good performance with a bad script?

TUCCI: You can try your best but inevitably, you're going to end up changing lines. You *have* to, because you can't find the truth in them. It's like trying to make a good meal with that bad piece of meat. I can't cook it, I have to go out and get a new, fresh piece of meat. (Batali laughs) It's that simple. So you go, "Okay. We're going to cut this." And we've all had this experience. I've had the

experience of re-writing entire films while acting. It's excruciating.

TALESE: A nightmare. You mentioned nightmares.

TUCCI: This is kind of one right now. (Laughter)

DAVIS: No!

TALESE: No. You mentioned getting scripts that are badly written. But there was a time when the people here, you included, were not so successful. You didn't have the choice of scripts sent to you—through agents or unsolicited—on your doorstep. What about those periods when you do not get scripts, when you do not have parts? Without sounding too mordant about it, how do you deal with periods in your life when you are not an actor? And part B to that question: what can you do about it?

TUCCI: What I always did was I never stopped learning. It was the genesis of my writing and directing. Steve had the same experience; we did this kind of simultaneously. I think we were frustrated that we weren't working consistently. You were starting to be typecast, and maybe there wasn't enough meat to things. But also you had stories that you wanted to tell. You have to, like Steve said, keep that creative muscle working constantly. *Constantly*. If I'm working on a movie as an actor, I always feel that when I come home from work, I still haven't done enough. I have to look for something that's going to make me think about what I'm writing, or what I'm going to write next, or make notes about a movie that I'm going to direct, or draw/sketch something that will lead me to an idea. I never feel like—and this is just my neurosis, too—I never feel like it's enough. I think that, particularly when you're not working, you have to involve yourself in every aspect of life and of art in order to keep yourself creatively active. I've spent months and months unemployed over the years, and I'd always go to museums, go to movies. I went, really, to look at paintings and sculpture, more than I did movies. I found that that gave me some sort of creative energy or inspiration.

TALESE: When you're in these periods of unemployment, or don't want what is offered to you because you don't want to repeat yourself, or whatever the stereotypical traps of being an actor

can be, what can you do, other than inner motivation, to enhance or to improve your chances of working? Do you get on the phone and change agents? What do you do?

TUCCI: Yes! You scream, you yell, and then you—there's not really much you *can* do, you know? There's not. The only thing you can do is—as we've all done here, to a certain extent—is generate your own work. You have to figure out a way to do that. I know Tasha has done this; Steve and I do it; we all do it, to a certain extent.

DAVIS: Not me.

TUCCI: You don't do it? You don't really want to?

DAVIS: No. I just wait at home until the phone rings.

TUCCI: That's great. (Laughter)

RICHARDSON: I think everyone's different as an actor. Like, my husband [Liam Neeson] is a wonderful actor, but he has absolutely zero interest in writing, directing, producing. I feel like I can't wait for the phone to ring, complaining that I don't have enough work. The phone isn't ringing, and so I'm always trying to read or think about something that I would like to do, and then go out of my way to try and make that happen. You're not always successful at it, but you keep trying. I do think it's slightly easier for women than men when we're not working, because you often have a man or kids to take care of. Also, the other thing that I do when I'm not working (which some of us have in common on this stage) is I cook a lot. This is my other passion in life. So I would not dream of cooking when I'm doing a movie or on stage, but I cook a lot when I'm not working.

TUCCI: You're a hell of a cook, too.

RICHARDSON: Well, thank you. So are you, Stanley.

BATALI: And an excellent eater, I may add. (Laughter)

RICHARDSON: Which doesn't go so well with the acting bit.

BATALI: Well, let me ask you. In your minds, do you have what you would consider to be a perfect year?

Like, is it three months of theater, one super-hero action movie, and three months in the Caribbean? (Laughter) Do you have an objective in mind, or is it just that you take as much as you can and turn work down when you're tired?

TUCCI: That's almost it. However, the ideal year is what Edward G. Robinson, I think, said; he likes to do three movies a year: one for money, one for art, and one for location. (Laughter)

DAVIS: That's perfect, that's perfect.

TUCCI: It *is* perfect! It really is the perfect year. I mean for me, it really depends. It is nice to do the big Hollywood thing. It's fun, you can relax, you have a nice trailer, and they pay you a lot of money—or they used to pay you a lot of money, not so much anymore. Then you go do a couple of independent things. Those can be really exciting, like with *Daytrippers*. This was a long time ago now, but I think I worked three or four days on the movie. Perfect! And I was paid \$7.00. (Laughter) But it was a great, great, *great* experience. It really was a wonderful experience. Then you can go in and do another movie. You can work for a week on a picture, have a great part, and not necessarily make any money, but have a great experience, explore a character, meet people that you've never met before, and then maybe do something on stage...

DAVIS: I feel very alone on stage right now, because I prefer not to work. (Laughter)

BATALI: So do I!

DAVIS: I don't think resting is over-rated. I like to stay home.

BATALI: It's all those pesky customers that keep me busy. (They laugh)

DAVIS: My ideal would be to work once a year.

BATALI: For a month?

TUCCI: For a day-and-a-half?

DAVIS: Well, for a couple of days.

TUCCI: A couple of days. (Laughter) \$1 million a day.

DAVIS: \$1 million a day is my ideal. (Laughter) I have small children, very small children, and I like to be at home and I don't like to go to work. I have to be dragged to go to work every time—because they're so little and cute. It's very hard for me to balance it. I've never written—thank God—or directed anything, and I hope that day will never come. (Laughter) I've always been so thankful to people like Stanley who call me up and say, "I've written something and I'm going to direct it, would you like to be in it?" I count on the kindness of strangers like yourself (Laughter) to bring me through.

TUCCI: Well, I'm glad you're there. And now I know you're more available, so that's good.

DAVIS: I'm free! (Laughter)

BATALI: Well, as a warning, they keep getting cuter. So it's not easier to go away as they become smarter...

DAVIS: No, I'm sure, I'm sure. It's torture, I know.

BATALI: ... and talk more, and eventually learn to talk back, so I hear.

BUSCEMI: Right.

TALESE: Do you ever have the feeling, Stanley—or anybody—that you're working too much? I know you're not included in this. (Laughter) But do you ever feel, "I've done too many parts this year"? Or worse than that, do you ever feel, "I wish I hadn't done that"?

TUCCI: Oh, yes. (Laughter) Yes.

TALESE: Can you name?

TUCCI: No; no, I can't name. But of course, there are some movies you do... I never see them. I don't want to see them. I don't *ever* want to see them. (Laughter) No.

RICHARDSON: I've done things that I wish I hadn't, but I don't think I've ever felt, "Oh, I'm working too much." But I have felt—and I don't mean to sound

pretentious about this—completely burned out by playing a part, and needed a real long break after it because it had taken so much out of me. I don't mean to sound—I'm not Daniel Day-Lewis—

TUCCI: No, you burn out. You can burn out.

DAVIS: On stage, probably more than film, I would say. Film is so easy.

RICHARDSON: Yes, exactly. But when you just—you become, "Ahh."

BATALI: What's the recovery time? What's a long break—three months? Or eight months? Or a year-and-a-half?

TUCCI: Two weeks. (Laughter)

BUSCEMI: It's an interesting question. I feel like I've played a lot of the same parts. That's one of the reasons why I want to write and direct more and shape more of what I do, because I get paranoid. I imagine casting sessions where *if* my name comes up, I imagine the director going, "Yeah... who else? Who else is there?" (Laughter) You know, "We've seen him. But who else? *Who else?*" I mean, that's the biggest fear that I have, and I think it's real; I don't think it's paranoia. I think it's happening. (Laughter)

BATALI: You've got to look over your shoulder.

TUCCI: No, but Steve, you've also been on that other side. You've directed four movies! You know, sitting in those sessions, the name comes up and then *you* go, "Yeah, yeah... who else?" (Laughter) And you know that's being said about you, too. I say it about you all the time. (Laughter)

TALESE: When *The Sopranos* was on, you were on a lot. Did you sometimes wish, "I can't wait till this series is over?" Did you feel you were too much in that?

BUSCEMI: No. Not enough, not enough.

TALESE: How many episodes were you in?

BUSCEMI: I was just in it for one season. And I was *supposed* to be in it for two seasons.

TALESE: Well, that's eight or nine episodes...

BUSCEMI: Yes, but I—I wasn't supposed to die so fast. (Laughter)

BATALI: We've all got to go sometime, I guess.

TUCCI: But you also directed those, and you've directed other television, and plus your own...

BUSCEMI: I'm not complaining, you know.

TUCCI: No, no, I know. I was just trying to make you feel better.

BUSCEMI: I know. Thank you, Stanley.

RICHARDSON: It's a weird thing, I mean, name dropping somebody who's a current co-worker of yours, Meryl Streep...

TUCCI: Yes, yes. (Laughter)

RICHARDSON: She says the audience gets bored of you. I don't think they get bored of Meryl, I just don't. But I don't know if the audience gets bored.

TUCCI: Well, no, I don't think they get bored of Meryl either, but there was a period where people started to sort of take Meryl to task because they felt that she was too technical, that there was nothing there emotionally, and she was so facile that it was a hindrance, or upsetting to them in some way. Do you remember this? There was a period in her career...

RICHARDSON: I do remember that. She was too damn good.

BUSCEMI: But who was saying that? Critics? I don't think audiences were thinking that, you know?

DAVIS: I don't think audiences.

TUCCI: I don't think so either.

RICHARDSON: But I do think that she's such a virtuoso that people think, "Oh gosh, this must come easily. Therefore it can't cost her, therefore it can't be so great."

TUCCI: Yes, exactly; I think you're right. There is a fear of over-exposure, particularly nowadays, that really has to do with the pressure that is put on younger actors. They may well be very talented, but pressure is put on them to have their films succeed right out of the gate. You have a young man or a young woman in their early twenties. They're really good and they have made, like, three pictures back to back. If two of those pictures don't happen—meaning they don't make \$100 million fucking dollars—then everybody kind of goes, "Mm... okay. Next!" And they move on. When Meryl started, it was very different. Now there's a *tremendous* amount of pressure on actors in particular, as though it's their fault that the movie didn't work. (Laughter) That's always my favorite. There are a lot of other people involved, you know?

DAVIS: I don't think it's just the young actors, though. The business aspect of our business I'm so much more aware of now than I was when I first started. Because there are so many people involved and attached to all of us now, we're just constantly pressured to be out there making money. I feel like I'm always being pressured to take the next job. When I'm working on something and I'm sent something else, it's just the same. I'm doing this movie right now, why am I going to do this again in three weeks? You're just always, they just always... Are my people in the audience? (Laughter) They just want you to be raking that dough in all the time.

RICHARDSON: Don't you also think, Hope, as actresses, that the pressure, the fashion aspect of the business has developed—which did not exist when Meryl was starting out in her young heyday?—The pressure that you have to look like a cover girl for a magazine. That you always have to turn up in the latest and newest outfit—this whole *crazy, insane* world. That wasn't a prerequisite of the job before, and it is now, which is a bit of a nightmare.

BUSCEMI: Yes, I think so. I mean, you know, for me. (Laughter)

TALESE: When you worked with Meryl on what we saw tonight, *The Devil Wears Prada*, did you feel that you also had a sense of pressure to make the film—even though she was the guiding light—a

commercial success? Or did you feel, "This is just an artistic film"?

TUCCI: No, no, no; I knew it was a commercial film. You could tell. This is very rare. I think that movie is very rare, because it's a very intelligent and artfully done, artfully crafted, studio movie—that is really funny, but doesn't really pander to the audience in any way. It realizes its genre and stays within these very strict confines, and it never goes too far one way or the other. For that reason, it's a perfect studio picture, but the script was excellent too.

TALESE: And they sent you the script?

TUCCI: They sent me the script after they tried to cast, literally, every other actor in Christendom who turned it down! (Laughter) I had three days to prepare for the role.

BATALI: I turned down that role. (Laughter)

TUCCI: You turned it down—I'm telling you! It probably went to *that* guy, you know? "Anybody but him!" But I showed them, didn't I? (Laughter)

TALESE: You really did. (Applause)

DAVIS: Is that really true, *three days*?

TUCCI: Three days! But that's why my wife said, "Well, that was pretty easy for you, wasn't it?"

TALESE: But Stanley, maybe it was easy for you, but it was such an exciting thing to be in the audience. I was in the audience.

TUCCI: You came, yes.

TALESE: Did the Stanley Tucci that we saw—was he a person that had read the script, or did he improvise on the script?

TUCCI: No, no, no; I read the script. I did exactly what was written.

TALESE: So the writer wrote all that brilliance that came out of your mouth?

TUCCI: Yes, it's a beautifully-written script! It's so intelligent.

TALESE: Is that right, it wasn't improvised?

TUCCI: No. I mean, maybe I'd throw a line in here or there but no, no. The thing about that picture is I never felt any pressure to think it was an "artistic film." It's just a good film of a certain genre that had to fit within confines that were studio confines, so you could only go so far. I knew Meryl socially, through Natasha. I was very excited to work with her—though I didn't really work with her that much in the film, oddly enough. It was mostly me and Annie [Anne Hathaway] and Meryl. I'm working with her now a lot on *Julie & Julia* (2009), every single day. The funny thing is that we've become very good friends, we laugh a great deal, and yet I cannot act with her. I can't do it. I'm still looking at her and thinking, "My God, it's Meryl Streep, right there!" (Laughter) And I'm terrible. Terrible! I look at the dailies and I look at my stuff and I go, "Oh, God. You're so bad. *You're so bad*. She's so good." I'll be doing the scene with her, and then I just—well, I just start watching her! (Laughter) And talk about forgetting lines! I think, "God damnit, that's good!" (Laughter) And then, you know, "Stanley could you..." "Oh, sorry!" It's really terrible. So what I find myself doing is actually breaking character as quickly as possible, and making jokes and laughing to make myself comfortable. Because I don't really want to be there acting with her. I'd much rather just be having a martini afterward.

TALESE: Which you do, I guess.

TUCCI: Yes, we do that, too; yes.

TALESE: Well, I was told by our dear host David that he wanted to have this limited to no more than an hour, and we're approaching that.

TUCCI: Alright. And where is he? (Laughter) There he is.

BATALI: He's fast asleep, but— (Laughter)

BUSCEMI: He's at Esca.

BATALI: (Laughs) He's at Esca.

TALESE: Unless you have anything you wish to add, David, I think we've heard what we all hoped we would hear...

TUCCI: ... Quite enough!

TALESE: No, no—just wonderful! The audience, I hope, shares my enthusiasm for what we did here tonight. (Applause) Thank you.

TUCCI: Thank you. Thank you, very much.

TALESE: Closing remarks.

TUCCI: Thank you. First of all, I'd just like to thank my friends for coming here tonight. This is so thoughtful and so humiliating... (Laughter) No! I'm so happy and I'm so glad that you're all here, I really greatly appreciate it and I so appreciate your talent, because you are extraordinary people in every way. And I thank you, Gay, so much...

TALESE: You're welcome.

TUCCI: ...for moderating this. I'm looking forward to reading some of your stuff. I've never read it, but I hear you're really great! (Laughter)

TALESE: Well, I tell you, I'm very grateful...and then you can rewrite it!

TUCCI: Yes, I will. I look forward to that. I'll improvise... I'd like to thank David and everybody at the Museum for having this tonight. And thank you for coming... we're leaving!

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