

The Editor's Cut - Episode 056 - "Editing Unorthodox with Gesa Jäger and Weißbrich Hansjörg"

Sarah Taylor:

This episode was generously sponsored by Jack's, a creative house, Annex Pro and Avid.

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

In the beginning when I first started editing, I dreamt in loops. So I am very happy that this was only in the beginning because otherwise he would get a little, I don't know.

Gesa Jäger:

How short were the loops? Like three seconds or three minutes?

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

Three seconds. [inaudible 00:00:26]

Gesa Jäger:

Oh my God!

Sandy Pereira:

That's very stressful. So good on you.

Sarah Taylor:

Hello and welcome to the Editor's Cut. I'm your host, Sarah Taylor. We would like to point out that the lands on which we have created this podcast and that many of you who may be listening to us from are part of ancestral territory. It is important for all of us to deeply acknowledge that we are on ancestral territory that has long served as a place where indigenous peoples have lived, met and interacted. We honor, respect and recognize these nations that have never relinquished their rights or sovereign authority over the lands and waters on which we stand today. We encourage you to reflect on the history of the land, the rich culture, the many contributions and the concerns that impact indigenous individuals and communities. Land acknowledgements are the start to a deeper action.

Today I bring to you the master series that took place on October 18th, 2020, editing Unorthodox with Gesa Jager and Hansjörg Weißbrich. Released in spring 2020, Unorthodox became one of the most popular titles on Netflix immediately after the premier. With millions of views around the globe, this mini-series received rave reviews and eight primetime Emmy Award nominations, and a win for director Maria Shrader for outstanding director for a limited series. This talk focused on the collaboration between the series' two highly successful German editors and their journey in making the project a success. This panel was moderated by editor, Sandy Pereira.

[Show Open]

And action!

This is the Editor's Cut.

A CCE podcast.

Exploring the art-
Of picture editing.

Sandy Pereira:

Thank you everyone for joining us today for this discussion and welcome, Gesa and Hansjorg.

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

Hello.

Gesa Jäger:

Hi.

Sandy Pereira:

Hello. So I guess first, question, how did you come to work on this project? How did you become involved?

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

Actually, I worked with director Maria Shrader before, especially on Stefan Zweig: Farewell to Europe, which was the Austrian entry for the Oscars that year. And Maria asked me if I would like to do the show with her and was clear from the beginning that we would have more than one editor. So Gesa came on board as a suggestion from the production. I knew Gesa a little bit, but we never worked together. And I'm very happy that we took Gesa on board because it has been a fantastic team.

Sandy Pereira:

And Gesa, so how did you get involved? Did you get the script? Did you know anyone on the production or how did that happen?

Gesa Jäger:

I didn't know anyone. I just got call from the production and they told me what the story was about. And I thought, okay, well it's a strong female character. I could connect to that right away. And then at that point it was not yet official that Maria was going to direct it, but I asked who's going to direct it. And they said, "It's not really official yet, but it's Maria Shrader." And then I was like, okay, because I loved her. And then I asked, "Okay, this sounds like there's more than one person editing, who's going to edit it?" And then she said, Hansjörg Weißbrich. That was kind of my moment when I was like yeah, I know him because Hansjorg has edited most of the German films from the early 2000s that I love. And at some point when I got into editing, I realized that all of the films from that time span that I like are edited by him. So that was my connection and that was one of the reasons why I wanted to work on this project.

Sandy Pereira:

That's definitely exciting. Yeah. I know having worked with somebody I admired and who hired me as an assistant and being able to mentor under them, it's like, you have that moment where you're like, this is life, is this real life, is this is happening. So that's amazing that you two got to work together. What drew you to the series? You mentioned, Gesa, that it was a strong female character. Did you get to read the

script or any of the script ahead of time, an outline, how much information did you get before you actually got to work?

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

When Maria asked me at that moment, there were no scripts at all. I think that there was not even a summary or something, but of course there was the book by Deborah Feldman. And I met with Anna Winger, the producer and the showrunner. She gave me the book by Deborah, so I knew basically what it was about. And as Gesa already pointed out, a strong female character, but also the cultural background was something that I was very interested in. When Maria asked me, and we are good friends. I was sure that it was something relevant, emotional, and a story worth telling. So it was a little bit blind date with a script to come, but it-- worked out

Sandy Pereira:

It worked out.

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

It was interesting because I rarely am in a situation where you don't have a script and you have to make a decision, but if you can rely on the people involved, you can be pretty sure that something good is coming out of it.

Sandy Pereira:

And did you get a chance to read the book then before you started?

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

I was in the middle of another project and I was waiting for the script for the screenplay to come. Then I got episode one and couple of weeks later, episode two and so on.

Sandy Pereira:

And Gesa, did you get a chance to read a script before you started?

Gesa Jäger:

The script, yeah. Also the novel, I think I ordered it the same day they called me because I wanted to know right away what it was about. I still haven't read it through yet because shortly after, that the scripts came and then I thought, okay, now I'm going to confuse the novel and the scripts. So I stopped reading, but I liked it as far as I got. But knowing what it was about was enough and knowing the people involved was enough. So I didn't need the script to make my decision. Also, I edited a documentary about a guy leaving this kind of community three or four years ago, so I could connect to the whole theme very, very fast. I wanted to do it right away.

Sandy Pereira:

Yeah, so a leap of faith from both of you to work on this, which is pretty cool actually. A testament to the people involved, that's for sure. So when you did start working, how did you collaborate? How did you split up the work and how long did you work on the project? How long did this take?

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

I started editing during shooting and I did a rough cut for all the four episodes. And then Gesa came on board and took over episode two and three. We discussed how to split the work best. And there were several options in the beginning. I think that there was a plan to even get a third editor on board for just three weeks. And we constantly had to switch episodes, Gesa and I preferred to not to switch so much and make it more a plan that splitting episodes as a whole would be better. And finally, we found a solution not to get a third person on board, and I think it was a very good decision.

Gesa Jäger:

You have this kind of Netflix post-production schedule. I don't know if you've ever worked for Netflix, they have a very... quite a strict plan what happens at point to what episode. And that was why we had to switch so much. You have one week for your editor's cut, one week for director's cut, one week for the show runner's cut. And then there's three Netflix cuts. At the end of the week you give the episode to Netflix, then they have one week to send their notes and then you rework the episodes. So I think after the rough cut, every one of us had six to seven weeks per episode.

Sandy Pereira:

Okay. That doesn't seem like a lot of time.

Gesa Jäger:

It's not.

Sandy Pereira:

Yeah.

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

I think it was about 12 weeks during shooting and then 12 weeks for each of us after shooting, 36 weeks. Yeah, editing, which I think is better.

Sandy Pereira:

It's just, when you have so many people involved, sometimes that just doesn't feel like enough time, but you did it.

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

The plan was, when you give one episode to Netflix and wait for their feedback, you continue working on the other episode. So we too also switched between our respective episodes, but that was the basic plan. And we somehow stick to that plan. But of course, there were episodes or scenes that took a little more time or more attention, of course. And somehow we did our own schedule, except for of course, that there were the dates you had.

Sandy Pereira:

You had to hit certain dates, but you could kind of massage what you needed in between.

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

There was not so many remarks on one episode, you could steal one or two days for the other one.

Sandy Pereira:

Right, exactly. Do what you have to do. Four episodes, two editors, several timelines, well, two different timelines, more than two different timelines. And then there's also the story of Moishe and Yanky and her aunt and Bobby back in Brooklyn. There are so many stories and layers at play. How do you manage it all, splitting the work, making sure it's a cohesive whole? You had assistants who I imagine would've helped in sort of trying to manage this. How did you see the bigger picture while you were trying to put this all together?

Gesa Jäger:

Since I started editing, I've been using magnetic boards. I don't know how you work, but we had this great apartment in which we were editing in, which was like a whole space just for us. Hansjorg had his room, I had mine. We had two great assistants, Daniela Schramm Moura and Sandra Böhme. They both had their own rooms. And then we had a big kitchen. And between that, there was a hallway. And in this hallway, there was a big magnetic board. So we chose still frames from every scene. We had printed them and put them on this magnetic board. And so we could take a step away from the puzzle and then get back to the Avid, which always helps me a lot. And in the beginning, I think Hansjorg said he doesn't need it, but then he was quite happy that it was there.

Sandy Pereira:

You were a convert.

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

In fact, I'm used to edit feature films and not series. And I somehow prefer to do it on the Avid and watch it and see if it turns out or not. But of course in this specific case, the stretch was a little longer and it was far more complicated with, as you said, the two different timelines and the three different storylines. It was in fact, most of the time that we spent a lot of time on structuring the show. And we did change a lot in fact and with a help, by the way, of Anna Winger, who was the writer, producer and show runner on film. And she was very open to, sometimes she was the first to say, "This doesn't work, let's change it. Or what can we do?" And the magnetic board was very, very helpful because we tried a lot, different orders...

Sandy Pereira:

Yeah. Were Maria and Anna in there changing things around as well? Or was it mostly the two of you?

Gesa Jäger:

Sometimes it was Maria and Hansjorg and I was standing behind them being amazed how fast they can think.

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

Sometimes we had a coffee in the morning, Gesa and I, and we thought, well, how can we solve a specific question? And it was a very open atmosphere.

Sandy Pereira:

It sounds like it. It sounds really ideal, like it was just sort of this hub where you guys could stand around and really look at the big picture. You can't really do that in the Avid. You could watch it and talk about it, but to actually see it all in one, it's a handy tool that's for sure.

Gesa Jäger:

Yeah. It makes it easier to put a scene from one episode to another, which didn't happen very often. I think just once or twice maybe, but that's easier, just to take it and put it there, seeing at all.

Sandy Pereira:

And even placing flashbacks. If they come in at the wrong time, you really notice it so having something visual sometimes to just play before you actually get in there and do the work was probably really handy with something like this, because it really is layered and complicated. There is one moment, I think it's in episode one where we're in a flashback and then that flashback goes to a flashback. So you've got these and you would think something like that might not work, but it does. But I know a lot of this sometimes is trial and error. I'm not sure how much was written, but we'll get to that later. I don't want to jump ahead of myself. I guess we should start talking about the first episode, which Hansjorg would have been your episode. You cut episode one.

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

The moment when Esther finally decides to liberate herself by putting off the wig. She doesn't undress to take a bath, so she takes that bath fully dressed, which somehow explains the difficulties of course, she will face in the new environment. And then the whole moment is loaded with, of course, with the ritual of the Mikvah that we will see later on in episode two. And the past, you mentioned it, an artsy past of Berlin, especially of course, the capital of Germany. It's of course a difficult decision to go specifically to Berlin for her. Why would she do that? But of course, she follows her mother. And I specifically like the moment when we see the photo of the grandmother being taken out of the envelope, she lived through that past and she is wearing the wig. And it all reflects the now and the past, and the really complicated decision Estee is taking for herself.

Sandy Pereira:

It's almost like, this is my religious background, it's almost like a baptism. She walks in, she takes off the wig. It is like the Mikvah as well, but this sort of baptism and she's faced with the past and she's faced with her future. And it's just this layered moment. Her friend, Dasia, is sitting on the beach watching her. You don't even really know this character yet, but you really feel. And that's something that I have to say, and I'm wondering how you arrived there, we start with Estee escaping, the whole series, we start with her escaping essentially, without knowing her, without knowing why she's escaping, why she's leaving, why she's so desperate.

We get a sense, but we don't really know her yet. And even in this moment, still don't really know why she needs this escape, because like you said, she's in Berlin. On the car ride over, she talks about how this is a horrible place for her, this is a place of historical horrors. And yet here she is basically being welcomed in this lake. How in the cutting room were you able to make that moment have such an impact when we've only really just begun this series? We've only really gotten to know these characters. Was there a lot of discussion? Was this scripted this way, or did you rework the script and the opening to make that work? How did that all land?

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

Well, I think it has to do with the way the scene builds up. And of course we worked a lot, especially on the beginning of the show, with the escape and how much information do we give the audience and how much do we stick to the lead character? Because originally in the script, it was a little bit more intercut with the action in New York, with Estee missing in New York, with people wondering where she is. We cut that a little down to stick to her and to have her arrive in Berlin a little earlier. And then there's a funny thing in the script.

There was a scene in the music academy when she first meets her future friends, they invite her to join her for the lake. And she sneaks into the bathroom and takes her wig off for the first time, like to find out if she would be able to do in public. So she did it for herself, but it felt like giving away the moment. So I suggested to cut that scene out to have the full impact when we see her first without the wig and with the short hair, which is a revelation as well at that moment of the show. So I think these are the questions that build up the emotional impact of the scene as well.

Sandy Pereira:

Yeah, definitely. And removing that scene was a wise, I think, very wise choice, because seeing that reveal in the lake really hits you. And if you had teased it beforehand, it definitely wouldn't have hit the same way. So yeah, great suggestion. One of the things that I noticed the most in the series is this feeling of authenticity. There's so much detail and so much specificity to this culture and way of life that sometimes it almost feels like a documentary. There are moments that feel so objective, but yet you never feel like you're not with the characters.

But there are these moments, and the wedding is one of the ones that, the whole ritual leading up to the actual marriage, there's just this feeling that you're watching a documentary. I think it's a combination of the sound, of the way it's shot, of the location. There's just so much there that's going on. And then you have these like ultra tight closeups of her face and her eyes and the back of her head, which just kind of break that up. How did you balance that? Balance the objectivity and the subjectivity so that yes, you're feeling like you're watching something very authentic and you're immersed in it, but to remind everyone this is really Estee's point of view. How did that play out?

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

Generally, I think the overall topic for Anna Winger and Maria was to be as authentic as possible. They didn't want to characterize the cultural environment as bad or something like that. It was clear from the beginning that they are telling Estee's and how Estee experienced that environment and what brought her to flee the community. They had an advisor on board throughout the whole process, Ellie Rosen, who grew up in an ultra Orthodox community. And he advised the whole shooting, the preparation, the whole shooting and the editing process also in terms of language. He came once or twice to the editing and approved the final editing. So that was very, very important to the producers and to the director.

Sandy Pereira:

Let's talk about the wedding. And A, how complicated was this wedding to put together and I imagine shoot, but put together in our case? And how were you able to keep it as authentic as possible, but within Estee's POV? I imagine it got restructured and how you managed to sort of weave that into that second episode.

Gesa Jäger:

Okay. So that's a lot of questions.

Sandy Pereira:

A lot questions, I'm sorry.

Gesa Jäger:

A lot of things to say. First, there was an immense amount of material. It's five scenes, five wedding scenes, and they've shot at least three of them, I think with two cameras. Hansjorg, do you know? The first two parts and the dancing, at least one of the two dances I shot with two cameras. So there was a lot of material. And I took over Hansjorg's rough cut, which for these four scenes, I think, or five scenes, was about 40 to 45 minute long. And every episode is 55 minutes long so it had to be shortened a lot, and with authenticity. Because all of these rituals, which each of them is really important for this kind of ceremony and deciding what part of the ritual you can take away without taking away the essence was hard, but we had Ellie Rosen guiding us through this.

And there's also this music that's being sung live by the men in the takes. Like for the first scene, we had to loop it a lot and try to de-synchronize it a little so it sounds like they're starting and we had to make it a lot longer to have the whole procession a lot longer. So that's a part that we had to, not to tighten, but to make longer.

And then it was written as one block in the script. We looked it up earlier. Episode two is one of the episodes that got restructured all the way. I think the Mikvah was in the beginning of act two, and the wedding was the whole act three. It was a five act structure. And the wedding was one block. And we very early had the feeling that we couldn't show it in one because it's so intense. It's so emotional. And you get so close to Estee and to Yanky. You have all of these moments where they get really, really close to each other. And if you use that and weave it into the present tense, the present gained so much from this intensity they have in the past.

So we tried to put it in groups of two. The first one, we just watched where in the end, all this tension and this pressure comes off for a moment, which is a great moment to get back to the present. Most of the time we were just under Estee's veil. I kind of fell in love with that in the script because we were supposed to only see feet for minutes, only feet and hear the rituals. I kind of liked that, but I still connect to that being under the veil a lot. And I think that you see that wedding kind of being shot with a, is the English word, hand camera.

Sandy Pereira:

A handheld camera?

Gesa Jäger:

Yeah. The camera was moving all the time so it felt a little more documentary. And then we have these very strong closeups seeing Estee under the veil. And I remember that we tried to show her a lot just being under the veil and moving, being close to her even if we can't see her. And the moment of the revelation of the face gets even stronger. The authenticity part, I feel like I'm a little lost with the authenticity.

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

Basically, I think it's a decision taken earlier on costumes, research, shooting. The way that the scenes are shot are really shot in a documentary style. And I think everyone involved knew that the scene wouldn't be 40 minutes in the end. And that was the funny thing. I remember in the first script I wrote, there was just scenes from a Yiddish wedding to be researched, something like that. And I think that indicates the process. It was very much about research, documentary style for this specific wedding scene. And yeah, they shot it, I think in two days.

Sandy Pereira:

Over two days, wow. Yeah.

Gesa Jäger:

With immensely long takes. They've been dancing and dancing and dancing and they were sweating. It felt very real.

Sandy Pereira:

Yeah, I could see why. It really comes off like there was a wedding and somebody shot it.

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

Our DOP is a very famous for his handheld documentary style camera. So I think there's also an artistic influence in it.

Sandy Pereira:

Yeah, it's beautifully done. And to go back to the subjectivity of it, sometimes it's the opposite. We see lots of subjective tension happening, and then we break to something wide or objective, and then we get that relief. And I think this is the opposite. We have this long ritual, very real, very authentic, very naturalistic and then we smash to this like ultra closeup, or the veil or something that is very subjective. And so it's doing the opposite of what our expectations are, which I find really striking in this, because I think that also reflects a lot of what's going on in Estee's world. We're in her community and then we're outside and we're in just her sort of her point of view. And anyway, this scene, when I first watched it, I thought, oh my God, that would be the scene that would come in that you would keep saying, I'm going to cut that later. Because that's what, five, six bins, multi camera. Okay, I'll get to it. Let me cut all these small scenes first. Was that a little accurate?

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

Yes. So Gesa said she took over my rough cut. I think it was more like an assembly, because that's exactly what [inaudible 00:29:42] when I got the material. And there were some more urgent topics or scenes to work with. And as I knew that Gesa would work on the scene or on that episode anyway, it was somehow a little bit like you described

Sandy Pereira:

Procrastinate a little bit on that one because it's overwhelming, two days. Anything that is that intensive footage wise, you really have to steel yourself for it. And then to rework it over and over again, it's a lot of work, but it truly pays off because I think that whole arc of the wedding and the relationship with Yanky, it all pays off in the end. So it's a Testament to a lot of hard work on both your parts. Bravo.

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

I like the cut how the wedding ends. I just re-watched it with the shaving, it cuts straight into the shaving and that is a very, very powerful cut I think. And that's something that Gesa and Maria found out in the editing because originally, episode two would've ended with a shaving. So they replaced it earlier.

Gesa Jäger:

Yeah, because the shaving of the head is something, we've already seen her with a shaved head multiple times. She had a big reveal she had in episode one. So closing the episode with something we've already seen multiple times wasn't that strong, but putting it at the very point where they start getting close to each other and then showing the other side of the coin, was so much stronger. And also ending the episode with being let down by the very person you love in the world, and she hangs up on her is so much stronger as a.

Sandy Pereira:

As an ending, yeah. That image of her getting her head shaved, it's funny, you would think it would be horrific, but the way she played it. I know you didn't have a lot of options to cut there, it looks like there's only a few shots, but you don't want to cut. You don't want to cut away from her face because it's a mixture of letting go, of grief for her hair, but it's also there's joy in her face and not what you're expecting in that moment. And so it's incredibly powerful.

Gesa Jäger:

It was a shot on the first day of shooting.

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

[inaudible 00:32:26] a good wife and have children. Yeah, it's multi-layered.

Sandy Pereira:

Very multi-layered, yeah. So her hair that she has is a wig normally.

Gesa Jäger:

It's her real hair that gets shaven off it's on the first day of shooting.

Sandy Pereira:

Wow.

Gesa Jäger:

The Mikvah scene is her real hair and then this one is her real hair that gets shaven off. And after that, she always wears a wig when we go to the past.

Sandy Pereira:

Okay. So that's another wig.

Gesa Jäger:

Yeah.

Sandy Pereira:

I didn't know that. That's amazing. So she's started it off with a bang. Good for her. That's a tough one.

Gesa Jäger:

So everything we see is real, the whole range of emotion is kind of real. And that's just one shot, shot with two cameras, one from the side and one from the front.

Sandy Pereira:

And then some reactions. And even the reactions, those kids, they're just fascinated, it's just so great. I could watch that scene over and over. So we have a question, actually, Travis [inaudible 00:33:28].

Audience Question:

As an editor in Quebec who is somewhat bilingual, I find it difficult to work in my second language, French, when cutting dialogue. How do you overcome the barriers to work considering you are German working in the English language?

Sandy Pereira:

And also Yiddish in this case, there's three languages really.

Gesa Jäger:

We have English in school very early on and almost everything I watch, I watch in English. Most of the German TV is dubbed so you hear it in German. But at one point I stopped watching TV and started watching things in the original languages. So I'm very, very used to the rhythm of the English language. So that didn't feel like a bigger problem to me. Yiddish was another thing, but we had subtitles from a very early point on. And after some time you could even turn that off because you knew what they were saying. And the rhythm is quite close to German. There are even words that are very close to German. So that wasn't that problematic as I thought. I've also edited in Arabic once. That was another thing. So if you are really lost with rhythm, then it's really hard to edit something, then you need someone by your side who can help you. But in this case, I didn't feel like it was such a big problem. I don't know. What do you think Hansjörg?

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

Same to me I think. English is somehow not the problem. And the Yiddish is very close to a German in fact. As Gesa pointed out, the whole rhythm is similar. So I did films in other languages that were more complicated for me than Yiddish in this case. But of course you have to double check in the end with a native speaker. And in that case, we had Ellie Rosen on our side, went through the whole film with him and that there were tiny little adjustments. In our case, the actors didn't speak Yiddish either. So I think it's far more complicated to deliver such a performance in a language they don't speak.

Sandy Pereira:

I would've thought that they spoke Yiddish. They were very convincing.

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

They learned it with the help of Ellie. I guess they were somehow familiar, Shira with some Yiddish of course, but they didn't speak it, they had to learn it.

Sandy Pereira:

Okay. And then I guess you have tools too as editors, you have a translation that you can work with, right? And your assistants, I imagine. Was it your assistants who subtitled the clips for you so you knew what you were? It gets complicated when you're cutting dialogue. You're cutting stuff out to make sure that it still makes sense and stuff.

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

Yeah. In fact, I did the rough cut without subtitles, with the script and the translation, and it helped that Yiddish was so close or familiar to German. Then we had the rough cut subtitled for the first time by my assistant. We also needed to subtitle every delivery, of course, to Netflix. So even if we spoke Yiddish, we would have to subtitle it. That of course is an enormous work for the assistants. All the delivery process for Netflix is quite a bit of work because they have certain specifics. Though both of our assistants [inaudible 00:37:16]

Sandy Pereira:

They had their work cut out for them with this one. But it's always fun. I've cut some stuff as well in other languages and we get sometimes a transliteration if it's in an alphabet that is not English in my case. And it's the cutting out dialogue that gets you nervous because you're like, is it going to make sense after if I cut out these words? If I reverse the conversation and start it here, and it's always handy to have, like you guys had a consultant who could do that. And so you always have to find someone.

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

Pretty well. I think during the editing, without a consultant, combining two takes also was not that complicated. But I did do films in Arabic, for example, or in Chinese or Japanese, that really is a problem.

Sandy Pereira:

Yeah. It gets complicated. Because obviously your English, you're fluent both of you, but you get into languages you really are not familiar with, it gets really hard. My next question would be, and we've talked a bit about this, about how much the script changed. And you talked about how the wedding episode changed a lot, the first episode changed a lot. How different was the final four episodes compared to the first four scripts? How much did it evolve in the edit? Was it like night and day or?

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

Basically we didn't cut out so much. The scene I mentioned earlier on was one of two or three scenes, I think, that have been cut out completely.

Sandy Pereira:

Just gone. Wow, that's it.

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

Yeah. Other than that, it was more like tightening and shortening and of course restructuring. I never compared the scripts to the final editing, but it changed a lot. But it was like the whole script writing, I think was kind of a process because the whole production took place within one year, from starting the scripts to the final deliveries of the show. You can imagine that there was not so much time [crosstalk 00:39:28] the script before shooting started. So it was a fluid process. And as I mentioned, Anna, the writer and showrunner, was so open and she considered it; I think that kind of process that there is not a script you have to stick to literally, but you have to work with the scenes you shot and put it together. And she also was in the editing of course and we worked together on the restructuring.

Sandy Pereira:

So this really was truly a series that was found in the cutting room in that sense, the way it's told. And so Gesa, was this somewhere where your board came in handy? Really, if it was this fluid, almost like a documentary in that sense where you're getting scenes and there was more of a script in the sense, but really there was this freedom to play around. Was it mostly because of the flashback structure or was it just because of all of the storylines and they just all needed to make sense?

Gesa Jäger:

I think it's all of the storylines, but primarily the flashbacks. Because sometimes I felt like there's a German expression, [00:40:42]. Hansjorg, do you know the English translation maybe?

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

You have plenty of options.

Gesa Jäger:

Yeah. That doesn't sound as beautiful.

Sandy Pereira:

Too many options?

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

An abundance of options.

Sandy Pereira:

An abundance of options.

Gesa Jäger:

And you feel like everything is there, it's just not yet in the right place. And then I felt like Hansjorg was pretty good at making these kinds of connections. Like my episodes, he remembered lines from scenes. I feel like this one picture you have, of course, has to reflect the whole scene when you're puzzling. And he sometimes remembered like that one sentence and said, okay, but if we stop at this sentence and then go to the past and not have these three more sentences, then the past would be like a magnet connected to the present or so. So the board kind of helped making those connections easier. For me, it's standing up, going somewhere else, leaving something behind, getting my head free, puzzling, going back and then trying out. It helps me a lot.

Sandy Pereira:

Yeah. A lot of trial and error with that. And a lot of moving things around.

Gesa Jäger:

Yeah.

Sandy Pereira:

Yeah. Getting up and getting a coffee and just leaving for 10 minutes, coming back, it's amazing how it'll just sort of reboot your brain a little bit. Sometimes I find, I don't know if you guys find this, if I go to sleep, I will dream. Do you ever do this? You dream about the scene because that's all you can think about. You don't do it?

Gesa Jäger:

No.

Sandy Pereira:

I do.

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

In the very beginning, but somehow I think I decided I stopped that.

Sandy Pereira:

Get out of my head.

Gesa Jäger:

Good for you.

Sandy Pereira:

Yeah, good for you. But the one good thing is sometimes I'll wake up and I'll think, I got it. Sometimes it's good and sometimes it's not, but it's the ultimate break, that sleep state.

Gesa Jäger:

For me it's the shower. I don't know why, but it's like almost every time I go under the shower that I have an idea. I have never tried that, doing it on purpose.

Sandy Pereira:

But it's probably the sound of the water, puts you in a meditative state.

Gesa Jäger:

Maybe, I don't know. It's the shower and the early hours of sleeping or going to sleep, lying down, not wanting to think, but coming back to something and then having that idea. Happened to me two nights ago, I wrote something down that I needed.

Sandy Pereira:

Yeah. Hansjörg, you must sleep peacefully. You don't think about work, you just tune it out, shut it off.

Gesa Jäger:

Hansjörg doesn't sleep that much.

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

It's right. It's not related now, but in the beginning when I first started editing, I dreamt in loops. So I am very happy that this was only in the beginning because otherwise you would get a little, I don't know.

Gesa Jäger:

How short were the loops, like three seconds or three minutes?

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

No, no, no, three seconds.

Sandy Pereira:

That's very stressful. So good on you.

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

Restructuring the show, sometimes two options were not, which one would be the best. And I think trial and error, or with thinking about what could be best. Sometimes you don't find the solution which is best for all parts of it, because it's like a puzzle. And if you take something out here, maybe something is missing, but the part you take out is better at another place. So I think you also have to have the ability to decide in the end which options are the best. And there are always, I think, more than one option and it's especially difficult if you don't have an option which is totally the best or everyone agrees that it's the best. This is another topic in the editing, of course. There are lots of opinions and you have to deal with moderating, not specifically on this show, but in general.

Sandy Pereira:

And in this case, you don't just have your producer and your director, you also have your broadcaster. So they will have an opinion as well. And sometimes you have to figure out not just make everyone happy, but how to make sure that if they have a valid point, that it gets really addressed in the cut. And that can be difficult. So I have another question. So this is from Alex Shade.

Audience Question:

Hi everyone. And thank you for hosting this panel. My question is about the choosing of the assistant editors and on top of the language, what other requirements or skills were you looking for? Did they have anything to do with delivering to Netflix and their delivery requirements? So choosing your assistants, were these, I guess people you'd worked before, or how did you come to put your crew together, I guess?

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

In my case, I haven't worked with Sandra before, and it was very short notice to find someone. And Sandra worked for a Netflix project before, and that was something I was looking for because I wanted to rely on someone for all the requirements, because I didn't really want to get into that. Sandra was a very good choice.

Gesa Jäger:

Yeah. I've worked with Daniela before on an Amazon Prime series or show. There she was the third assistant and she came later on the project when the workload was getting too big. And she kind of saved our asses a little. And she was really good like making sound design and also has a personality that kind of soothes me in a way. So when I get stressed and I talk to Daniela I always feel better afterwards. So I knew she would be the perfect person for this.

Sandy Pereira:

Very important in the cutting room, to have that calm voice to kind of bring you down. I really would love to talk about the use of ritual in the series and how that was intercut and balanced out through the whole show. But episode three, it's throughout, but for some reason, episode three just always stands out to me as having all these sort of rituals and counter rituals. It's not final, but she's starting to shed a lot of these repressions and a lot of these inhibitions that she's been taught her whole life. And she has these moments where she feels like nothing bad is happening. I'm doing all these bad things, but nothing bad is happening.

And this scene, it's so beautiful especially because it is juxtaposed so starkly with that opening scene and with Yanky. Was that always scripted to be that way? Did this come organically? How did you make that all work? And also that scene in itself with music and everything, if you could talk a little bit about your work there, that would be great.

Gesa Jäger:

So these two scenes are in the place that were written that way. The episode was supposed to start with the ritual and end with the love scene. This is the first time Estee gets touched, like really touched by someone. We tried to reflect that, of course, in the way we edit that scene. I remember that Maria very early on had the idea to weave the club and the sex scene together. And I remember that at first she was not in the editing and I tried that and I worked into the wrong direction. I started the love scene in the club. I kind of let that glide into each other, not having them come home, but people dancing and they start touching.

And with that, taking away the whole essence of the scene. This moment when she doesn't know what to do and kind of jumps in his face and then realizes, okay, this is not the way this is supposed to be. And then him showing her in a very subtle way how to get close to someone. And when they were shooting the club scene, there was this real party crowd and Catnapp, she made the music life, the artist, Catnapp. And in one take, there was another version of the same song that Yansis playing the violin to. And it was this very slow version of that song.

And everyone started moving in some kind of wave, there were all these bodies. And the camera captured some of those moments very beautifully. And that was Maria's idea in the beginning to get Estee and Catnapp together. She's this version of her in maybe 10 or 15 years. She's someone Estee could look up to. And then we started to combine these two scenes and put more and more of those women's bodies into it. And then we had the luxury to get this track of Catnapp. She sent the stems to us. The howling of the wolf separately, it had the beat separately. It had all of those instruments.

Sandy Pereira:

Amazing to have that in the cutting room.

Gesa Jäger:

Yeah. We could decide at what point is the Wolf supposed to howl, at what point does the beat come in. And so we kind of layered that together with the touches and that works so well. I love the scene so much.

Sandy Pereira:

Yeah, it's so sensual. I think because it is this buildup too. And I think there's a lot about this series where there are these build ups. So they pay off later, but they're so worth the wait. And this is one of them, especially the way the episode is framed. You couldn't have two different sex scenes in one episode of television. It's amazingly done that way. And this brings me to another question which is the music in this series. Music is so central. Obviously, this is Estee's escape route, is through her music or her trying to come into this music community. But yet it's very spare the music that you've used in the series. It's a very quiet series. There aren't any huge musical moments. That moment in the club is probably the biggest musical moment. Was this a discussion beforehand? Was this a discussion in editorial? Was the composer brought in early, late? How did the music conversation come into play?

Gesa Jäger:

Sorry, Hansjörg, but do you feel also that it's such a quiet because I don't feel it's very quiet. It's interesting.

Sandy Pereira:

I feel it's so quiet.

Gesa Jäger:

I feel like we have quite a lot of music.

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

I was about to say, we have a lot music that is part of the scene, like it's played on screen in the scene or source music. So score somehow builds around those.

Sandy Pereira:

Maybe that's what I'm thinking of, is that there is not a lot of score.

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

So if you have that big arch, like the wedding song she sings at the audition in the end, this somehow book ends the film. You have the classical tune by Schubert that is connected to the grandmother also reappearing in the audition at the end. You have all the orchestral work, the music academy, the club music, and that is something you wouldn't use score, or maybe a score that takes over. But the tracks by Catnapp are so powerful by themselves that that was not really necessary, and no thought of using music

there. The composer, Antonio Gambale, came in at the very beginning, even before shooting. They had a pitch with several composers and he got the job.

And we worked with those pictures, four or five tracks. We decided from the very beginning that we wouldn't use any temp tracks from different soundtracks. Which always for me is ambivalent because somehow, you stick to the first sketches and using them somehow states effect at one point. Sometimes make that experience that when a composer comes in at the very beginning, you don't have, like what I sometimes do with temp tracks, I take one or two days and just try completely different things. In this case, we stick to what we got from him, and it fitted perfectly. Like the scene in the [inaudible 00:54:22] we saw earlier, this is one of his first sketches, based on one.

Sandy Pereira:

On one of his first sketches.

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

And it works perfectly. It's very emotional, it's very powerful. And we decided to use it as a light motif throughout the film. And then of course there are dozens of other parts he composed when he had the editing, of course. But also the main theme is based on one of his first sketches, the title theme, during the opening titles. This was somehow the process. He was involved, he would get the cut, he would adjust the composition. He would try new things and stuff like that, and it was somehow back and forth during the process.

Sandy Pereira:

Yeah. That's great. Because sometimes you're on a show or a feature and the composer doesn't get hired until late. So you are trying to build tone and mood with other music and it can be really difficult.

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

And again, gigantic temp tracks.

Sandy Pereira:

Yes. And then they all got thrown out. It can get complicated and people get attached. And so it's great to have somebody from the beginning and to set this tone and this motif as you have described.

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

But it was never, I think, never during the process, a discussion to have more music because you mentioned it. I think it was important for Maria and for Anna that the film doesn't have an overload of music and keeps also silent moments and pure moments that don't need emphasis with music because they're so emotional in itself.

Sandy Pereira:

They play on their own, they really don't need anything. And then when you have things, like in the wedding you have the men's chorus singing, they really stand out because it's not replaced by this overarching sort of composition. Rather, it's just feels more natural and organic. I guess that's what I meant by, it just never feels like the music is imposed on the series. We're into episode four. I was thinking we could talk about Yanky when he cuts his hair, the peyot, when he cuts his peyot. And I think

we've talked a lot about how some of the most emotional scenes are the result of this buildup, and they just have this payoff.

And this is one because I just love Yanky. And I know Yanky is one of these characters, you just want to shake him. And especially his relationship with his mother and how it imposed on their marriage. There's so much about Yanky you just want to shake, but he is never drawn as a villain, never portrayed that way. And I know you, like you said, you took great care to make sure that there was never any villainization or anything with this community. It's more about choices and more about freedom. And Yanky is someone who's very late to the game. He's just so slow in catching on.

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

[Inaudible 00:57:47]Unfortunately he was too late.

Sandy Pereira:

Too late.

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

The two of them coming together.

Sandy Pereira:

Yeah. And I think it's what makes the scene so tragic.

Gesa Jäger:

I need to cry every time.

Sandy Pereira:

Every time. You've seen it way more times obviously. I didn't actually watch it this time because it would've made me cry. It's just so emotional. He finally acknowledges her for her and he just, like you said, Hansjorg, he's just too late. And in a way, this is his lake scene. Not the shedding, he doesn't want to shed his culture, his community, but he's growing. And in a way, this is sort of his lake moment. This is taking off the wig in a way. And do you want to walk us through this and how we got it to this point?

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

Interesting because the scene in itself is very simple. It's shot very simply with shot and reverse shot. And I think the emotional impact is really what builds up to that moment. And the scene reflects the whole show we've seen, and the tragic of the two of them. It's the payoff of brilliant script writing, brilliant directing and especially brilliant acting, I think. And Shira, while she's so amazing, but also Amit is really, really great. You want them to come together because they could come together under different, or they could have come together under different circumstances.

And that is, I think yeah, the impact of the scene. Brings her that necklace with the musical notes, which was so sweet because it's where it all started in episode one with their first conversation about music. She tells him that she likes music and he says yeah, different is good. But then different was not so good. This is all comes together in that scene. Of course it's about editing. Also quite a simple scene, you have to carefully weigh the moments and the frames, of course, but you wouldn't be able to work that out if the whole buildup would not work as brilliantly as that.

It's one of my favorite scenes. And interestingly, we didn't change so much from my original assembly in this scene because it just worked very well. Of course, we carefully shifted frames, but the overall build up, I think, was pretty much what it is now in the very beginning.

Sandy Pereira:

Yeah. It really is one of those scenes that without all the pieces that came together before it working, would not have paid off as well as it does. It would always be, I think, an emotional scene, but maybe not as powerful as emotional. I've watched it a couple of times now and it just really punches you in the gut. It just really does because it's just so beautifully done. And again, I think one of the things that I find, all the themes that sort of you visit and the way that the show has been structured around a lot of rituals and a lot of these sacred spaces in this series, when he cuts off his peyot, it really is just this callback to everything that matters. It's not a simple thing that he's doing, it's not an easy thing that he's doing. He's doing it in a way that is showing that he's willing to change, but there's just so much history and context in what he's doing.

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

You're right. Cutting off the peyot is somehow getting rid of the wig, of course.

Sandy Pereira:

Yeah. And one being in episode one and one being at the end of the show, it just frames the whole thing with again, choices, another overarching theme through the whole thing. I have a couple more questions for both of you. One is, how do you feel as editors, as part of telling the story, when you work on something that's based on a true story with such a weighted historical context, do you feel extra cautious when you are cutting out dialogue, cutting out certain moments like you were saying in the wedding ritual, not cutting out anything that's going to make it less authentic? Do you feel that there's almost a greater responsibility when telling a story like this on your shoulders?

Gesa Jäger:

I feel like it's a much bigger responsibility if you edit the documentary. But still of course it had a lot to do with respect for the rituals and for not cutting out something that might be disrespectful in a way. It's just her past that they used for the series and the whole [inaudible 01:03:23] It's not her personal story so all of this was a lot easier to work on and to cut out.

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

Deborah was somehow, while she was not directly involved in the process, but she was part of the process. And I think Anna showed her the cut before we locked it. So it was very important to Anna that Deborah was happy with it, and she was. So that is her very personal story. I think the responsibility, more with Anna, with the adaptation and Maria of course, with the directing, but I think the creative group was so much on the same page that there was no danger of being disrespectful to the story. And the other thing I think with the show is respect for the community. This is, of course, something which is sensible, that again was very important for everyone involved. So it was not specifically in the editing or for us as editors to prevent the show being disrespectful, because there was no danger because the show runner and the director were very sensitive.

Sandy Pereira:

Right. So it was always something that was kept in mind by the whole creative team. So my last question is, what did you learn on this series and how did working on this show contribute to your evolution as editors? And what would you take from this experience onto your next experience? What is the thing, or maybe there's more that is helping you now on your next show?

Gesa Jäger:

I have to be careful not to be fangirling again, but of course for me, it was great to see Hansjorg work and to see the way he thinks and what I talked about earlier, the way he connects things to each other. So I think I learned a lot also from taking over his assemblies or his rough cuts for my own edit, to see why and at which point did you choose what take, for example. And then also Maria, she's really wise concerning editing. And she always says she learns about everything from Hansjorg, so maybe that's like fangirling again.

But no, Maria's also an actress, not only a director. So she knows a lot about acting and about how to edit someone or something in a way that it gets really, really better. And from her, I learned a lot about pacing, about breathing, about when to put a beat and where and why. And I learned a lot what to think about before even starting to edit the scene. I think before this series, I was just looking at the material, starting to work and figuring it out while I was working. And from both of them, Hansjorg and Maria, I think I learned to first use my head and then my gut.

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

For me, it was a great experience working with Gesa as well, in a team and parallel that there have not been so many projects for me to work in parallel with someone else. And that is a delicate and sensible situation, I think. Every editor knows that I think, because the tiny little things you can't really explain, it matches or it doesn't match. And with Gesa, it was really great. We have a similar approach to things I think, and never ever had the feeling I would do that completely different, and what is she doing there? I was very, very happy that it turned out to be such a great team with Gesa. And I hope we will work on further projects again.

And the other thing for me was, for me it was the first experience working for Netflix and was the first full experience to work in a series format. Because I mostly edited feature films for cinema, but like 90 minutes or 100 minutes storytelling. Well, both the stretch of the story and working in an environment for Netflix where you really have a tight schedule, you have to deliver and cannot push very much and handle all sorts of other things probably not so much connected to the actual editing, was a great experience I didn't have before.

So personally for me, working with Maria again, a great experience and brought us even closer artistically and also as friends. And we are currently continuing our work on Maria's next film. Having a continuity with the people you work with is very nice because you get to know each other better and you can start on the next film, you can start a step ahead from the last one. So yeah, that was very great. And of course, I was very close to her when she got the Emmy because we were working together.

Sandy Pereira:

That's exciting.

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

And that was a great moment too, of course.

Sandy Pereira:

Yeah. And well deserved. And to grow together like that show to show and keep going, it's such a great reward for all this hard work. Thank you so much Gesa and Hansjorg for joining us. This was an incredible discussion. I'm so happy that you were able to make it and to take time out of your evening to join us. And thank you to everyone who came and asked questions, and to Pauline and Ali and the CCE team for putting this together. Good evening, goodnight. Thank you everyone.

Gesa Jäger:

Thank you for having us.

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

Thanks for having us.

Sandy Pereira:

This was lovely. Thank you so much.

Gesa Jäger:

Thank you.

Weißbrich Hansjörg:

Thank you.

Sarah Taylor:

Thank you so much for joining us today and a big thank you goes to Gesa, Hansjorg and Sandy. A special thanks goes to Jane MacRae and Alison Dowler. This episode was edited by Jason Konoza. The main title sound design was created by Jane Tattersall. Additional ADR recording by Andrea Rusch. Original music created by Chad Blaine and Soundstripe. This episode was mixed and mastered by Tony Bao. The CCE has been supporting Indspire: an organization that provides funding and scholarships for indigenous post-secondary students. We have a permanent portal on our website at cceditors.ca, or you can donate directly to indspire.ca, I-N-D-S-P-I-R-E. The CCE is taking steps to build a more equitable ecosystem within our industry, and we encourage our members to participate in any way they can. If you've enjoyed this podcast, please rate and review us on Apple podcast and tell your friends to tune in. Till next time, I'm your host, Sarah Taylor.

[Outro]

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