

## The Editor's Cut - Episode 061 - "EditCon 2021: When TV Saved Us"

Sarah Taylor:

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Stephen O'Connell:

We're creative beings. And we tend to be very conservative and timid about our place in the world, but we have needs, and I think our basic needs, and the reason we choose these jobs, I think is that we have this need to output. To feed the endorphins and to feed yourself, your soul. And that's just how we're built. It's our DNA. And I think when somebody pulls the plug, we really feel it.

Sarah Taylor:

Hello and welcome to the Editors 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 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 is 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's episode is part three of a six part series covering EditCon 2021 that took place virtually in February 2021.

When TV saved us. The shift to home viewing as the world settled into lockdown, TV entertainment went from distraction to lifeline. With audiences trying to make sense of world events, stories, and characters mattered more than ever. As the entertainment landscape shifts to meet an unprecedented need for engaging content delivered on demand to audience stuck at home. How will this change the stories we tell and the way we tell them?

The editors of some of the most binge-worthy shows reflect on how their work landed in this time and place. And what the stories meant to audiences and how that affected their process during a pandemic.

In today's episode, we hear from Amy E. Duddleston, ACE. Editor of Mare of Easttown, The Killing and Vita. Wendy Hallam Martin, ACE, CCE. Editor of the Handmaid's Tale, American Gods and Queer as Folk. Laura Zempel, editor of Room 104, Euphoria and Dispatches from Elsewhere. And Stephen O'Connell, editor of The Name of the Rose, Howards End and Normal People. This panel was moderated by the wonderful Christopher Donaldson, CCE. Known for his work on the Handmaid's Tale, American Gods and Penny Dreadful.

Speaker 3:

And action.

Sarah Taylor:

This is the Editors Cut.

Speaker 4:

A CCE podcast.

Sarah Taylor:

Exploring, exploring, explore the art-

Speaker 4:

Of picture editing.

Christopher Donaldson:

Great to have you all here. Thank you so much for joining us today and all the other editing types here at EditCon. This is an interesting topic for me in so far as, I kind of feel over the past year, I've not only have I gained a great insight into what I want to watch, but also how I want to work and how I'd like to work. I guess my first question for everybody is how would you say that TV saved you over the course of the pandemic? And how about we go and reverse alphabetical order here, Laura?

Laura Zempel:

Well, for me, I think TV gave me something to look forward to when I didn't have much to look forward to when I was stuck at home and the days all bled together. Having TV and entertainment gave me something... like brought inspiration into my life when I haven't had much. It saved me I think in that way where it was something to look forward to and then since I wasn't working much, I kind of used it as an opportunity to observe and probably think more critically and like, "Oh, I'd like to work on that." Or like, "Wow, that's amazing how they did that." And so I used it as a tool to keep my muscles fresh. So when I went back to work, I didn't feel like I lost too much time.

Christopher Donaldson:

I agree. I think the perspective was one of the main things for me. You know, Certainly, I have three kids and I felt as long as the wifi holds, I think we're going to be able to survive this. But then, it became something much more on some level, rich. Now going in reverse again, alphabetical order, Steven, how did TV save you during this pandemic?

Stephen O'Connell:

Well, I think it made me watch more things that kids watch. I was forced to witness what was keeping them going. I don't want to say that it saved me or it did anything bigger than it normally does. I think from an industry point of view, it maybe made me value what was being made more. So, it made me focus on the lengths that we go to, to actually produce material and to be a little bit more discerning because I think we all binged and we didn't feel very good after it. So, I think it maybe helped me hone my taste a little bit down to what was important at that particular time.

Christopher Donaldson:

You know, certainly, in my house, we watched, finally all five seasons of Breaking Bad, excuse me, Better Call Saul. We finished The Wire. It was that moment where you're like, "It's impossible." We'll never catch up to all this TV. All of a sudden we had that. And I had the opportunity to finally see the shows I've been waiting to see but for lack of time. Amy, how about you? How did TV save you?

Amy E. Duddleston:

TV kept me employed 50 weeks out of 2020. Let's just say it saved me that way. I was lucky to be on a show. When we had to shut down, we moved to working from home and through this weird circumstance, it's a limited series on HBO and I became the editor of all of the episodes. So they made me... they let one of the editors go and made me recut the entire series of what we had.

So, I was employed the entire time during their hiatus, which was March, April, May, June, July, August. And then they started shooting again in September. We're getting ready to air the series soon so that way, it saved me, like literally. But also bingeing shows like you said, it was like, "Oh, I can finally... there's finally time to watch seven seasons of Buffy, The Vampire Slayer with my daughter." It was time to do that. So, that's what happened. That was the show that we watched together a hundred and some episodes of... that was a great experience.

Christopher Donaldson:

Beyond now just wanting to watch shows that take place in diners and really pedestrian things. I don't need to go to outer space. Literally, watching people eat breakfast in a diner just is incredible. And I think that reconnection to what we'll call ordinary life, I think has probably been for me anyway, the treasure of this. Like Stephen, I spent a lot of time watching with my kids and Amy too. And we're able to connect in a way and take a breath from work, which was extraordinary. With all this, how did it affect what you thought of your work? That's what I'd be curious to think of. How did it change the way you thought about your work?

Laura Zempel:

I think, for me, it's really funny. I tend to get really consumed by my work and I get really stressed and anxious about it and it feels like very big and heavy. And I think, for me, in the pandemic, when everything outside of my work is so big and heavy, it made me actually think of my work as more fun, like, "Oh my gosh, I get to make entertainment that makes people feel good. How lucky am I?" And I just could not wait to go back to work.

Unlike Amy, our show was supposed to come back. It was supposed to be first day of production when LA shut down so we didn't even get season two. And then, because of the delayed pandemic, it was like, "Oh, six to eight weeks. Okay, September. Okay, January and now, it's just been pushing."

So, thinking about work actually made me really happy and I'm hoping I can keep this perspective as I go forward because it's been a really nice shift to actually enjoy all of it and think of it as fun rather than something that is causing me stress.

Christopher Donaldson:

Wendy, would you concur with that idea?

Wendy Hallam Martin:

Yeah, I think during the pandemic, I have not really watched a ton of television since, especially since we've been back at work. And when I did, I started off bingeing on the drama, but I then switched over into the news and documentary world a little bit. So, that kept me away from doing too much bingeing.

Christopher Donaldson:

Did the break from work, give you a different perspective on our work in general? Like our career and how we do our work and so on and so forth?

Wendy Hallam Martin:

Yeah. I missed it so much. I thought at first, it'd be like, "Oh, super cool. We'll get a bit of a break and get some family time and that was all fantastic." But I really missed the creative outlet. I mean, I started painting again and listening to a lot of music and that kind of thing but, yeah. No, we're very lucky to be able to do what we do. I'm so happy to get back.

Christopher Donaldson:

Amy, what's your thoughts on that?

Amy E. Duddleston:

On what we do? Just going on Twitter and seeing all the people that are watching television shows, I felt like really good about what I do for a living. Like, "Oh my God. Everybody's watched all 10 episodes of Hunters and I'm getting emails." And that was really fun. And just people discovering shows that I worked on a million years ago, that was really cool because, "Wow, everybody's watching television and now I work in this industry." That like, "Wow. I'm so..." That made me feel great. What I do actually contributes to somebody's sanity. I'm happy to do that even if it made me insane at one point.

Providing that entertainment, because I was working during the worst part when we were all shut down, I was so grateful to have a job. I will never not be grateful for the fact that I was working. That will stay with me for a bajillion- like my life. It just will. I'm so lucky to do what I do. And I was so lucky that I was working nonstop.

I worked from home. We had internet issues at our house because my daughter was homeschooling so I had to go into the office where I was the only person there. To use the internet, to talk to the director. It was crazy but we started keeping these really nice hours where I was literally like, "You're working from nine to five or ten to five." And you're like, "This is great. Why can't it be like this all the time?"

And even when we moved permanently to our house, it was still like the director wants to stop at five. Even if we're working on [inaudible 00:11:36] together or six o'clock, it's still like a nice day. Because it's really intense working on the computer, but I'm just grateful.

Christopher Donaldson:

I completely concur. I mean, I think we can all relate to being tied to the production heart attack schedule. The idea of we're shooting, we need to know, we need to do this right away and that is addictive. And yet, also, as Laura said, I think consuming. Just having the space to breathe and Wendy and I were very fortunate to live in Canada, where there was a social safety net and, you know, various things kicked in and we didn't necessarily have to worry about not being able to feed our family. And so that gave me a breath that enabled me to, in a sense, find its place within my life. The person that is the editor, that is the artist. Stephen, how did this pause give you a different sense of perspective?

Stephen O'Connell:

Yeah. It's interesting that we all have very different experiences of it. And I think it's really great, really valuable to talk about it because I don't quite know my take is that we're in the middle of this tornado and we won't really get perspective until we're out of it. But I think, we finished mixing Normal People in March. The last two episodes were done in isolation. And there was a build up to that in going out in- at the end of April.

So the timing was interesting but it wasn't financially very prudent for me because the nothing was happening. Nothing was going on, obviously. So unlike Amy, I was cut loose and nothing to do. I did a few commercials over the summer that just about put bread on the table.

When it came to doing the next job, which is what gave me a bit of perspective. I started on a job for Amazon over here in Dublin. I think in the beginning of November. And the day before... Well, I guess, the morning I went in for the first day of dailies and making coffee and bringing up a jug and putting it in on the table and sitting down and watching synced rushes has to be one of the best moments of my life. I just felt so giddy and grateful. There was relief. There was love. There was just gratitude for being part of the 1% on the planet and a huge amount of perspective.

We're creative beings and we tend to be very conservative and timid about our place in the world, but we have needs. And I think our basic need, and the reason we choose these jobs, I think, from reading other stories about what we do and the greats have gone before us, and is that we have this need to output whether you're a painter or a sculptor, or you're making film, you're a cinematographer or anything in the arts.

If you work in theater, you need to be producing to feed the endorphins and to feed yourself, your soul. And that's just how we're built. It's our DNA. And I think when somebody pulls the plug, we really feel it. Me, personally? I get really down. I mean, I get anxious unless there's something for definite coming up. It's really interesting for all of us, I think. And not just in our little business, but perspective is really, really interesting, but it's given me personally, anyway.

Christopher Donaldson:

Yeah. And as you say something that will just continue to grow over time as we actually digest what is still happening to us and how it changes us and what we do. Where are people working from? It sounds like most people are working in studio. Is that if we start with Wendy? Well, Wendy, I know you're working in an editing room right now.

Wendy Hallam Martin:

Yes. I'm going in.

Christopher Donaldson:

And how about you, Amy? And-

Amy E. Duddleston:

I'm working from home. I've been working from home since October. They've closed our office, finally. So, it's been interesting.

Christopher Donaldson:

And Laura?

Laura Zempel:

I'm working in an office right now. It's a small office and it's just me, and my assistant, and our director comes in and we're in together. We wear masks the whole day. So...

Christopher Donaldson:

And Stephen, are you in studio?

Stephen O'Connell:

Well, I'm at home now, but I'm in a post facility in the middle of Dublin. The entire company has gone remote. They do a lot of VFX work and it's a very old Georgian building. Not very space efficient in terms of what we do, but I've got one floor to myself and my assistant is upstairs and as the exit was happening, we just snuck in and we happened to have that.

We have the building to ourself. I'm working with Amazon at the moment. We get the director coming in, occasionally, so we're tested twice a week. So there's a bit of security there. So, yeah, we're going against the flow. I can work and I did do a couple of weeks on this job on the 14th or 15th week at this now.

I craved the commute on my bike and I craved meeting any stranger will do, you know, just somebody. The routine of a coffee shop and masks and all. And with the assistant, I mean, I was really keen to give her a positive experience as well. As much as we could within being safe and all that. So, yeah. If it gets any worse, we'll certainly button down the hatches and we have all the tech in the world now to make it easy.

Christopher Donaldson:

Wendy and I are both working on the Handmaid's Tale right now and they gave us the option to where I'm working at home with a system that is streaming my Avid over the internet. So I don't have the media, I'm just streaming. I have a computer set in my basement and it actually, I was like, "That is never going to work." It actually works.

Amy E. Duddleston:

It works pretty great.

Christopher Donaldson:

And yeah. And the amazing thing is- and this is the perspective that came from me is that I get to have dinner with my family. I have three kids. The oldest is... they're still fairly young and that's just not something I was able to even consider for most of their lives.

Amy E. Duddleston:

I get hugs at lunch time.

Christopher Donaldson:

Yeah. Oh, my God. My son makes hot dogs. I've eaten more hot dogs in the last month. You actually can get sick eating hot dogs. I didn't think it was possible. But that thing, of also, part of working and collaborating with Wendy is seeing her and hanging out with her and showing scenes to one another and not having that is strange. I mean, Wendy, right now, what's it like? There's not a lot of people around is there? Around the editing room?

Wendy Hallam Martin:

No, there's me and Max, our assistant. The two other assistants work from home and our PA, poor Jesse who sits in the main room by himself. And we have our own offices that close. And like you, Stephen we're being tested and we're completely separate from everybody. And we wear double masks when

we're out in public spaces. So it's really safe. I don't feel in any danger at all. However, like you, Stephen, I need that social interaction. So, I enjoy getting in my car and doing the commute and seeing people.

Christopher Donaldson:

Yeah. And just going for walks and it's hard when you're working at home. I don't know Amy, if you're doing this. It's hard to shut off. It's like, "Just go. I'll finish that later. I'll go." And that sort of thing.

Amy E. Duddleston:

It's like the music editor texted me and like, "Oh, well. Let's just have a spotting session." It's like, "Oh, I have 45 minutes." It's seven o'clock... seven something. And it's like, oh my God, I should have said no but it's right there.

Stephen O'Connell:

We have two editors in New York and three assistants over there working on the same project and a post producer and a supervisor and various assistants. So they're obviously five hours behind us. So our day already is quite a long day because we were available. We talk up until midnight. So for me, it's very important to have the end of some of that day. So, at 7:00 PM, I leave the building in town and I come home and it becomes a different part of the day becomes that other bit, the American end where it's mostly emailing and some FaceTimes and whatever. So if it was an entire... if it was a 16, 18 hour day in one location that wouldn't be- it would draining.

Christopher Donaldson:

Laura, quickly, I'll ask you this. Just this idea that's Stephen brought up of there's editors in New York and there's editors in Dublin, do you think that this sort of flexibility in terms of production is something that producers now because of the pandemic have realized, "Oh, maybe actually we all don't need to be in one place. Maybe actually, we can hire an editor in Dublin or Los Angeles and have them work on the same project at the same time." I mean, have you heard of any other examples like that or what are your thoughts on that?

Laura Zempel:

I think it's very exciting that we could be able to do that because I think that just opens up the world for all of us and we can now work with whoever we want to work with or whoever wants to work with us. And I remember when the pandemic first started, I thought there's no way they're going to let us work from home. Well, security issues, all of those things and to see it working as well as it's working, it's really exciting. I'm curious more so to see if studios are open to work from home or if this will continue to be an option once it's safe to go back to work or if we'll still be expected to be in the office. Because I think people with families, it's nice to have that flexibility. And so, I'm actually really excited to see if my hope, which is maybe a little optimistic, is that a more productive work-life balance could be a positive results of all of this.

Amy E. Duddleston:

That's my hope too.

Christopher Donaldson:

I've never seen it quite so possible as I do now. Wow.

Amy E. Duddleston:

Well my assistant is in Chicago. We're just all on video cast all day long.

Stephen O'Connell:

We're talking about whether it's going to go back which way it's going to go. And maybe it will be a bit of both. There was a really interesting discussion at EditCon earlier on about all this as well. But, I think, maybe it's up to us. Maybe there's a chance now rather than sit back and go, "Oh, it went back." Do you remember it went back to the way it was? Or this maybe we have an opportunity to get into that gap and go, "No, we're calling the shots now." I know traditionally, our craft has been a long day, long weeks, relentless self-sacrifice.

And now, maybe we have the chance to go, "Well, there is another way." That is just as productive. Can we bring... can we move forward with the developments in science, and medicine, and self care, and creativity and understand that no, we can actually deliver episodes and movies and do that in a civilized timeframe.

We seem to have gone on for the last... certainly, as long as I've been working, it's a given that you're going to throw away... You're going to be working 20 hour days or 18 hour days. And if you're not, you're not going to cut it.

Christopher Donaldson:

I think that's a great hope for the future. And certainly, the one that I have that this is going to reframe how it is we do and the importance of how we do it. Now, this has been great, but I also wonder if maybe people are hungering for a little shop talk and so on and so forth.

So, we're coming to the clip section of our panel. We're going to start with a clip from Euphoria, episode 103, you know Euphoria is really special. Stephen was talking about all this bingeing and people bingeing. It is not a show I can binge, it's a show I need to watch it and then be like, "See you next week." So if wouldn't mind, if you could set up the clip we're going to watch.

Laura Zempel:

Sure. So this is the end of episode 103. Rue is a drug addict and she's having a hard time staying sober. She's having feelings for her best friend, Jules, and the scene before this, she's just kissed Jules and Jules gave her shocked reaction and she rushed out of the room and she's going over to her drug dealer's door. And this is Fesco, who's kind of like a big brother to her even though he's her drug dealer. But anyway, so that's where this scene comes in the episode.

Christopher Donaldson:

What I'm so excited to talk about is that I think for somebody who says isn't necessarily familiar with what we do or is... that's a scene, that beautiful and simple is can be so incredibly challenging in a ways that people look at action films and go, "Well, that's editing." Whereas aren't like, "No, that's editing." And you spoke a bit about the collaborative nature of how you work on Euphoria. So, first of all, I'd love to know why you wanted to talk about this clip. Why this scene was important to you?

Laura Zempel:

I think this scene is, well, for me, it was the hardest, hardest scene that I cut, which is interesting. And it's for that same reason, people watch Euphoria, the camera's always spinning and there's push-ins and wet pans. And it's like, "Well, that's all done in camera. And that's the easy stuff to cut." The ruse emotional

journey is the hardest thing to cut. And the show really... addiction is a big part of the show. And this scene specifically, it's a pretty big moment for her in the arc of her character in the show. And everyone knew that this scene was- we had to get it right. And this scene was the only scene that they shot that day, which it's two and a half minutes of the episode, but they spent a full day shooting it.

And so, it does seem deceptively simple, but actually it was one of the hardest and most important scenes in that episode and maybe in the series. I also know that this is the episode they submitted for Zendaya's Emmy episode and she won. And I really think it's because we all worked so hard on this episode and that scene maybe, specifically.

And the thing that I like about this scene so much is I have to give credit to the structure of how editorial worked. So, on Euphoria, we have Julio Perez, who's our supervising editor. And so, the way it works or with this scene, specifically, 103 was my episode. And I got all the dailies. I had over two and a half hours of dailies. I had 10 takes that were over, what I wrote it down. I had nine takes that were over 10 minutes. I had had one take that was 23 minutes.

So, I went through all the footage, pulled selects, pulled selects, pulled super selects, put super selects on different levels with different locators and then started to build the scene. Showed my first cut to Julio and this is how it would work. So I would, especially big scenes, if he's like, "Hey, how's that door scene? How's that coming?" I would do my first pass. And then when I felt like I was ready to show it to him, I'd have him come in and watch it.

And I made him cry with my first cut. So I was like, "All right, we're onto something." And then from there, we would work on it together. And he was like a sit-in director because Sam Levinson, our showrunner, directed a lot of the episodes, wrote all of the episodes so getting him in the room is really hard. So Julio is almost like a Sam proxy.

And so, Julio and I worked on it for a while. We got it to a place where we showed it to Sam. Sam watched it, gave notes. It's a hard scene because there's so much footage and they're so good that getting it down to time was actually really challenging. So Julio, I think at a certain point, then I was onto my next episode and Julio had some free time. So he worked on it, he cut it down a little bit more, but he was very precious and in love with it as I was. And then, once it got closer to lock, and we had to get down to time, Harry Yoon, our third editor, he came in my room and he was like, "Hey Sam wants to see if I can cut down the door scene, do you mind?" And I was like, "No, be my guest. I'd love to see what you do with it."

So all three of us touched this scene and I think, it's part of the reason I feel like we all contributed to it and it's a perfect example of all of us bringing ourselves to it. And I know some people are not thrilled about the idea of the supervising editor or maybe it's a deterrent for people to take those jobs. But I mean, for me, I really enjoyed it. I love working in a collaborative editorial environment where we were all able to set our egos aside and work on making the best scenes and episodes that we could. And I think that's why this scene is so special to me. And I think hopefully, why it's so good. Well, in my opinion, it's so good.

Christopher Donaldson:

No, it's great. And even watching it, you can tell, "Oh, I betcha. There's tons of footage here." I bet you, they just ran the camera and let the actors emote. And what I find when I'm managing that thing and that I find difficult is how very quickly it feels like less than as I make selects, selects, selects, selects, it starts to feel less and less and less and less. To the point that when I put it together, I look at it and I go, "Well, this wasn't... I've somehow lost some magic here." How did you navigate that sense of, "Okay. You remember the full, the select selects real?" How does it still feel organic and real to you as you... Did you have any tricks in terms of how you managed that process?

Laura Zempel:

Saving old versions and it's funny because I sometimes... one thing I learned from Julio is I tend to get like, "Oh, it's too long. I've got to cut it short." And he's like, "No. Make it good." And then worry about making it short, get all the best bits in. And so, keeping- saving like older versions as I go along is really helpful because then I can go back or see if I'm missing anything. Having my selects sequence saved. And I go back to that a lot just to see if there's anything else.

But I think with that, anytime in there, anytime we could hold on a performance, we did to hopefully make it feel more real and organic. And I mean, I know you edit... Euphoria is a very crazy show, but it's the editing is actually fairly restrained most of the time and we do that on purpose to help the emotional scenes like that land, where you don't feel like you're being manipulated. Where it actually feels real and you have to sit in it.

And we found moments. It's funny. Fez had a lot more lines. He had written dialogue and he's terrific. He's a great actor but watching him listen to Rue, actually, felt more painful to just have him sit there and experience it. So sometimes it's about losing dialogue and just living in these moments or watching someone experience something. And so finding moments that we could hold on Fez and moments that we could hold on Rue to just make it feel more authentic and less manipulated.

Christopher Donaldson:

And I just love that idea of the egoless collaborative environment. I think, in the beginning of my career, I did more features and then eventually was considered employable in television. And one of the things I loved about working in television is that collaboration is that... with Wendy is an incredible collaborator and I'm constantly going like, "Okay, is this as bad as I think it is?" And she says, "No, it's not that bad, especially if you do this or that and so on and so forth."

So I think, in the Big Little Lies team, talk a lot about that. Jean-Marc Vallée editors, passing versions of the scene back and forth to one another, trying different things. I think it's great that we're moving towards the idea that we don't necessarily have to be the one- because that we are creating something together. That is the true spirit of collaboration.

Thank you for that, Laura. Now, I'm going to go on to our, our second clip, who is, Stephen it's you. I didn't do alphabetical order. I maybe I did it by shows. No, I didn't, but somehow the technical people are ready for you. So, we're going to get just about ready for your next clip, which is from Normal People. And could you give us a little preamble or set up for the scene we're going to see?

Stephen O'Connell:

Okay. This scene is when Connell, our lead character, when his best friend takes his own life. And it's a moment of reflection for him while we've used the scene in flashback. I'm not quite sure, I didn't appear in the script and as a flashback so we integrated that into the counseling session that he partakes in.

Why I chose it was that it's an investigation into when the absence of a character you're feeling. And very often, in the scenes in Normal People, when there's a single character, it's always about the absence of the other character, which is quite interesting as a concept. It's a funeral scene so it's pretty grim. Sorry, Laura, I'm going to bring a tone, even lower down. But it's about loss, but it's also about exploration. And I think what was interesting, what Lenny, the exec and showrunner setup was this idea that we're seeing a lot of reversals of what you expect to see. So the absence of people, the moments where you're not used to seeing characters, the bits in between that are lost, like normally, the action is around these scenes, not these scenes. These are the bits that are in between that never make it even into the script.

And a lot of the show is about revealing those and letting them, giving them air where there's not necessarily anything dramatic happening, but there is inside somebody's head. So it's like another going... it's like 3D drama in terms of you're going into somebody's psyche almost and their turmoil while there's nothing happening externally. And that's a really interesting thing to play with. I think the absence of a B story in the whole series was a very- well parallels, the book, obviously. But it means that you have to stay with these characters. They are in every single solitary scene in the entire show.

So it's a high wire act. They are on a tightrope as characters. A really interesting thing happens with Paul Meskel as an actor where he just... Well, both actors, will they go with that? And we have just entirely trusted them because they were in... they were wired into the DNA of the story more than anybody else. There are moments like this where you get an actor or actors who are digging deeper than way deeper and successfully, mining a character. So I guess this is a little bit of that where we're just happy to be with them.

Christopher Donaldson:

I love that scene. I love that book. I love the show. And one of the things I find that is in this scene that is in your or series that was in the book is the subjectivity is the way that as desperate as we are for Maryanne and Connell to be together. They can't be. They can't seem to be in the frame. They can't seem to be together. They can't seem to be entirely honest together, and we're frequently seeing it from their perspective. So I'm curious as this scene as an example of which is to me, you're the absence of the friend, but really, I just want Maryanne to be in every shot with him and I want them to be together. So, I'm curious how you tracked that subjectivity, that keeping the two characters as you say, that you want to be together, but absent and separate for one another through the editing.

Stephen O'Connell:

With that episode, scenes moved around quite a bit. And to be honest with you, it is- it's entirely organic. I think it's a sequence of scenes. That episode is a sequence of scenes that on their own, you really can't tell one or two or three scenes what they do to you, emotionally. And what they say about the characters. And it's almost like we were trying different sequences within that episode to see which one revealed the essence of where those characters were. So, it wasn't as anything as strategic as tracking them. It was more about feeling where they should be.

And in the scripted running order, there was something that maybe wasn't... I was going to say it wasn't dynamic enough. That's not the word but it certainly wasn't. There was something not clicking, but it just took a few small little maneuverings of scenes. I think the content of the scenes are the same that make it land. And I think that's what's really enjoyable about what we do is where you go, you juxtapose scenes, and no matter how delicate, and these are all really, really delicate, very fragile scenes about Connell, about his breakdown.

And you find that just a slightly different ordering of scenes will open that door. And all of a sudden it's like the floodgates opening. It makes sense. And then within that at a more macro level, it's about spending a little bit more time with the characters and letting shots linger. And I think what I learned not to love in the show was although it doesn't necessarily reflect in that scene exactly, but the absence of cutting is sometimes really pleasurable now of just letting the actors do their thing and not get in the way. I think looking at that scene now, geez, God, it's far busier than I remembered, and I wish I'd maybe cut back a bit, but it was a really good example of letting them do their thing and trust them and almost be guided by them.

And I think the director was there facilitating them, and I'm just there facilitating them by proxy as well and not getting in the way that was really... because I think if you try it with something like this,

try and impose your own objectivity, it's not necessarily going to end well. I think you're going to tie yourself up in knots. Occasionally, I don't know what the others think, it'd be interesting to know, but I've only had one other experience on a film actually, where you get actors. And again, it was two actors who transcended the material to a point where they knew more, if not, they went through the novel out the other side to somewhere that possibly the novelist or a screenwriter wouldn't have gone, but loved it if you know what I mean.

And I think that was the case with this as well, where they saw more and you're almost led by them, which is really interesting. And then when you start trusting them, you begin to know them and know when they're going off a little bit, because they have their bad days and they're not always on because these were young actors and well, any actor will, they won't be on it all the time.

So it was very emotional cutting to a degree that's... it can be very upsetting at times because you end up doing a day's work and on a show like this and you're absolutely shattered and you've only done... only cut two scenes, but you're fit for bed for a week. The weekends of this job were knockout. It's like go to bed on Saturday or Friday night or wake up on Monday morning. I don't know yoga in between or anything like that.

Christopher Donaldson:

I can totally see that. And I think now, that's actually the perfect segway. If you're worried about being too dark, don't worry. We've got a clip coming from the Handmaid's Tale coming up. So we're just heading the downward trajectory. Speaking of super intense-

Amy E. Duddleston:

I feel so bad that I didn't bring a clip of my comedy, my half-hour comedy. Damn.

Wendy Hallam Martin:

That would've been good, Amy.

Amy E. Duddleston:

I ruined everything!

Christopher Donaldson:

So Wendy, if you could give us just a quick setup for what we're going to see here.

Wendy Hallam Martin:

Yes. This is the season premier of season two and season one ended with June, in the van being taken away and she doesn't know where she's going to, and she thinks she's in big trouble, even though she's been told by Nick that everything will be fine. So, this is an interesting scene where I was, I mean, I'll get into it a little bit after, but June isn't going to die, but continually, through the whole thing, you think she's going to die. So, it's got a nice juxtaposition of reality and what's in her head and what the audience expects and what ends up happening.

Christopher Donaldson:

I know you got pounded with footage and I know in many times in production they said, "Do we have it? Can we see it? When can we see it? Mike Barker, the director, wants to see it." And you were able to throw that together in a way that while I'm sure different, not appreciably different than what is in the

final cut very quickly. And I'd love to know what your process is and how you manage that because I would be a puddle if I had to get that scene out very quickly and you have the ability to do that. But also I'd love to hear whatever else you want to say about it, too.

Wendy Hallam Martin:

Putting that scene together was an out of body experience. It's not really typical of the Handmaid's Tale to have an action-y scene like that. And we live in June's head a lot of the time and therefore, we're on her face a lot of the time. And so, this was a scene where it was a completely different thing than we'd ever done before. That clip had to be cut the top end, the tail off of it. It's actually a 10 minute scene and I had bins and bins and bins of dailies. Four cameras running plus drone for pretty much every setup. And Mike Barker, our illustrious director, who I adore, was on a plane the next day after I got the second day of dailies, they shot it over two days.

So, I had to take an approach where I had to go with my gut instinct and put it together as fast and efficiently as I could, but also maintain the narrative of our series, which is June's perspective. So I found myself just really going with my gut. I couldn't breathe a lot of the time editing the scene because it was so intense. And it's funny because there was- the scene really told you how it needed to be cut and how long to be with certain things.

There was the hallway sequence and I tried to jam in more girls and it didn't feel right. You couldn't overstay your welcome in any situation, except for the ending where I extend that moment forever. It was just one of those scenes that just magically, I swear, something takes over you and you just cut it and then you look at it and you go, "Oh, that's okay. That's, that's working. Or no, I need to dive back into the bins and find this." And Mike Barker came in and sat on my couch and cried and left and said, "Great." So he really didn't have any notes on it, which was unheard of. So it was just a lucky scene.

Christopher Donaldson:

Well, I mean-

Stephen O'Connell:

It's fantastic.

Christopher Donaldson:

... not luck in its execution in any way, shape or form. I mean, it's masterfully done.

Wendy Hallam Martin:

It felt like it.

Christopher Donaldson:

And when you're managing, like what Laura talking about earlier, with reams of footage, for me, the hard part is getting out of my own way and not seeing the diminishment of it. Not going, "Oh, that was that." Or worse, the worry about the shot I missed in the bin. "Oh, I betcha. There's a better thing for that." And I was really amazed that we were able to, as you say, go to a different place and channel, whatever it was into bringing that to life very quickly. It was really astonishing to me. When you're working on a big... there's no doubt when you're looking at that, when you know this is the scene. This is going to be the thing they talk about in the entire season. I'd love to know what everybody else feels like when they

know... Okay, I'm working on that scene. Laura, you said it about Euphoria, too. This is going to be the scene that sells it.

Laura Zempel:

I feel terrified. I am terrified, but I think it's actually, I think there's been a lot of, on this panel, we've been talking about staying out of the way and trusting the actors and finding the footage. And I think, in those scenes, that's really... that's the main thing that I keep trying to do is like, "Okay, what's good? When am I as a viewer moved?" Because I'm the first viewer of the footage. And so I'll have a color for markers when I feel something. I put a cyan marker just in the daily. So when I go back into dailies, I know. Okay, I felt something around here or something really stood out to me around here. But yeah, I feel terrified.

Amy E. Duddleston:

It's scary. Yes. Having the big scene, but I love it too, because it's just going along with it. I'm working on the show right now that Kate Winslet is the lead actress, she's the lead. And I mean, there's nothing she can't do. So, I just get out of the way. You just get out of the way of Kate Winslet. I don't edit around her, I just don't. So there are a lot of scenes in the show that she's just talking about her past and you just stay on her because it's... you just get out of the way.

Stephen O'Connell:

I think it's really interesting what Wendy was saying there about going into an altered state. I think that altered state is probably- it's in your system. You're pre wired for that, I think. It's a form of surrendering, maybe? I wonder. Is it just becoming a viewer, becoming the audience because you can't actually connect with some material sometimes like that? And on a scene in... there's a scene shot in Italy for Normal People, there was a dinner scene that goes pretty badly. There was 10 hours of material and it was a really intense scene. And it was the one people were dreading in terms of... it was a big deal.

10 hours of material for a seven minute scene and in a less dramatic way than that scene that Wendy's talking about. You just have to surrender, just go in with your hands up. First of all, that's your opening gambit. Swim around and go, "Okay, what would happen here? What's the sequence?" And I think we have an internal rhythm that maybe takes over then that you just fall back on. And it's going into a driverless car. You just let it go.

Christopher Donaldson:

Amy, we don't, unfortunately, have a clip of Vita, but I'd love to ask you a question about Vita.

Amy E. Duddleston:

Sure.

Christopher Donaldson:

Vita is this really remarkable show that takes place in a neighborhood, a gentrifying neighborhood in East Los Angeles that is incredibly rich. And one of my... what I really loved about it in my pandemic was I got to go there. I got to leave my house. And I felt like I got to go to that neighborhood in Los Angeles. And one of the things that I thought was really remarkable was it felt extremely specific to a place and yet, universally, I could recognize it.

So my question was, how did you come up- Was there a process in the editing by which when we're cutting, we're usually incredibly efficient, be efficient in your storytelling. But I think that you had to have this dual thing of... it had to be instantly recognizable and uncommon upon for somebody who lives there and yet, recognizable to a general audience. So, I'm curious how you found that balance in the storytelling.

Amy E. Duddleston:

Well, it is ye oldie storytelling. You might be in East Los Angeles, but it's like maybe you have a bad relationship with your sister. Maybe you have a boyfriend that you just can't let go of. Or maybe... there's something, all of these characters have something that you can identify with, even though you don't even have any experience like they have, but you do. And so that's what really... it's about family. It's about creating family. It about all these things that it would touch you even if you didn't live off of in Boyle Heights. You had something that you could reach. There's something that you could identify with it and all of these characters. There just was.

Christopher Donaldson:

And would you ever say have the experience of when you're... say looking at the dailies or something where something that would go past you, but somebody who's more familiar with the neighborhood or would say, "Oh, they start laughing or something." And you go, "Oh, that's something I gotta...."

Amy E. Duddleston:

Oh for sure! All the time, all the time. I mean, that was a great thing about our editing room was I can speak Spanish, but it's I don't know lot of slang. And so, my assistant would teach me some of the slang or the showrunner, it was just like a nonstop process of learning stuff. Just stuff that goes way over your head. That the post producer would be rolling in the aisles. And I'm like, "Well, what is it?" And she's like, "Oh, no. It's the grandma. That's my grandma!" It was that kind of stuff. It was a very fun show to work on and I'm sorry, I didn't bring a clip to uplift everyone's spirits.

Wendy Hallam Martin:

Sorry.

Amy E. Duddleston:

I'm so sorry.

Stephen O'Connell:

Sorry.

Christopher Donaldson:

Our joyful spirits and speakings were enough to lift the moods of all the people who are here and amazingly, I can't believe it. It's actually 3:15, and I believe, we are out of time. So, I'd like to thank Laura Zempel and Stephen O'Connell, Wendy Hallam Martin, and Amy Duddleston. Thank you so much. This was far easier than I feared for myself and it was actually really great. So, thank you so much-

Amy E. Duddleston:

Thank you for having me.

Wendy Hallam Martin:

Thank you, Chris.

Christopher Donaldson:

Our pleasure.

Laura Zempel:

Yes. Thank you. Thank you so much, Chris.

Sarah Taylor:

Thank you so much for joining us and a big thank you goes to Jane MacRae and Alison Dowler. This episode was edited by Jason Kenosa. The main title sound design was created by Jane Tattersall. Additional ADR recording by Andrea Rush. Original music created by Chad Blaine, and SoundStream. This episode was mixed and mastered by Tony Bao. The CCE has been supporting, Inspire, an organization that provides funding and scholarships for indigenous post-secondary students. We have a permanent portal on our website at [cceditors.ca](http://cceditors.ca), or you can donate directly to [indspire.ca](http://indspire.ca), [indspire.ca](http://indspire.ca). 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 podcasts, and tell your friends to tune in. Till next time. I'm your host. Sarah Taylor.

Speaker 4:

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