



ScreenCraft Works Cross-Border Conversation: Editing and the Phantom Menaces

Conversation between Tomoko Hirasawa, Paul Martin Smith and Chris Wyatt

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Elizabeth McIntyre:

Welcome to our virtual conversation. My name is Elizabeth McIntyre and I am the co-director of ScreenCraft Works along with my colleague Rebecca del Tufo, who is also here this evening. First of all a hearty thank you to our sponsors Genelec – thank you for supporting this series of Cross-Border Conversation talks. Thank you also to our mentor scheme partners Brunel University London, who are operating the technical management of the talks, and of course to our speakers, room hosts and participants.

So what is ScreenCraft Works all about? We're a not-for-profit virtual community for cross-border knowledge share and a chance to widen your networks across local borders and international borders and it's for all production and post-production people. In terms of the cross-border conversations, this is a chance for experts to share their knowledge and their insights between those who are at different career stages and from different countries, and speakers are drawn from our mentoring group.

So I'm delighted to hand over to editor Tomoko Hirasawa, who is our host this evening.

Tomoko Hirasawa:

Thank you, Elizabeth. Hi everyone, it's a pleasure to host this event. I'm Tomoko Hirasawa, my pronouns are she/her. I'm a Japanese editor based in the UK, Spain and Japan. I'm currently working for change.org and I edit unscripted films, commercials and online content. Editing has been my passion for the last 20 years, and to me it is a wonderful job to pursue.

Today we've got two legendary editors with us with decades of experience in British and international films and TV: Paul Martin Smith – known as Martin - and Chris Wyatt. Thank you for giving us your time today and it's really great to have you both

here. So could you give us a little introduction to tell everyone who you are? Would you like to go first, Chris?

Chris Wyatt:

I'm Chris Wyatt, I'm a film editor and I've been doing it for more years than I care to remember. Way back in the day, I used to work as Martin's assistant and prior to that I used to neg cut lots of commercials and documentaries for Martin as well, so we've had a long sort of professional friendship relationship over the years.

Paul Martin Smith:

Hey, I'm Paul Martin Smith – Martin – and I've been in the film business since '67, first in the camera department and then I went over to editing and edited everything from music videos, news items, documentaries, commercials and features.

Tomoko Hirasawa:

Let's get started with a very important question: what inspired you to have a career in editing?

Chris Wyatt:

I think from a very very early age I felt I had the desire to work in the industry but didn't quite know as what. It transpired that if I looked at all the jobs that were available, I wouldn't actually be any good at any of them. A certain prerequisite skill was needed. But then I read somewhere about editing, and editing was described as somebody who decides how much of a black car on a white car you show in a car chase. So I just thought, well how difficult can that be? So it was just one of those one of those things. But retrospectively what happened for me was that I found that it was much more about thinking and dealing with a different kind of application, so you didn't actually need to have a physical skill. You know, Martin saying that he worked from the camera department – I didn't have any urge to go down that particular route, so it was good for me that this was something that was more about an intellectual idea rather than a different kind of skillset that was needed.

Tomoko Hirasawa:

And you, Martin - so you worked in camera department before you started working in the cutting room. What made you go in that direction?

Paul Martin Smith:

Well it's rather complicated. I was in theater first of all in school and found my niche there. After I left school I was hitchhiking across the east coast. I came back home and decided somehow I wanted to get into something or other, I wasn't sure what. But I was down in a shop buying some pants and the phone rang there and there was an assistant who said across to the owner, "Hey, John, we've got somebody who needs a runner on a film," and I went, "I'll do that".

I ended up as a runner and the DP was a German guy called George Vollmer, who I absolutely adored. He took me on as his assistant cameraman, mainly 16, and for two years we shot around Washington, basically news items and White House stuff and stuff like that. Then I produced a documentary, which again won some awards,

called *The Animals are Crying*, and the editor was an editor for Robert Kennedy back in the days, way back early, when they were doing political broadcasts. I noticed what he was doing so I decided from that moment on I had to become an editor.

I flew out to Britain, because I grew up most of my life in Europe anyway, and spent two years trying to get into the business. I ended up finding a guy called Martin Bowen, who was a great guy, who was an editor, and I was going to be his assistant for no pay. Eventually I actually started cutting a year later.

Chris Wyatt:

I always wondered if that was folklore or not because I remember you saying that. But wasn't it that you actually had a little set rate for every new thing you learned?

Paul Martin Smith:

What happened was after a few months he felt guilty so then he started saying, "OK, you're going to get £10 if you can sync up rushes and £10 if you make sure in the morning you call the lab to find out where the APs are," – this is a commercial company. In the end we were so fast we would blow clients away how fast we were. Basically he became one of my best friends. Barry Leith, who was directing stop-motion stuff, was a part of the group, and I ended up cutting all his commercials and AD-ing – I was also AD-ing at the same time.

Chris Wyatt:

I remember that also, years later when we did *Arctic Heat*, or *Born American*, you did the whole second unit stuff and actually got all the good action stuff.

Paul Martin Smith:

It was interesting because Renny Harlin - he was called Lauri Arjola then if you recall - and we ended up in Helsinki. He fired two ADs one after the other, and he called me up in the middle of the night and said, "Martin, I want you to come and AD this picture for me," because he knew I was AD-ing music videos and things like that and then cutting them. I said but we have to cut the movie and he said we would do that later. So I ended up with the last half of the movie AD-ing it and also second unit directing and camera work too.

Tomoko Hirasawa:

Now we're going to look at some scenes from films that Martin and Chris have worked on and after each clip we'll discuss the process behind it. I wanted to start with a big one, the 1999 box office number one film, *Star Wars Episode 1: the Phantom Menace*. Martin, this is a film you edited.

Paul Martin Smith:

[\[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VS5e6aaiyEU\]](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VS5e6aaiyEU)

We chose this scene because it was six hours worth of rushes, they shot 33,000 feet, and because young Jake wasn't particularly good at remembering his lines, George kept on turning over. So there were little bits here and little bits there and it was all over the place. In the end, because of all the craziness, they missed the most important line - it's in the middle of the clip - which was, "So are you a Jedi?" So we

had to go back and pick that up three or four days later. The other thing is George during the cut was saying, "Jeez, you know at the end I wish I had a look from young Anakin, and he looks over at Liam". We didn't have that shot but we had it so I reversed it put a head on top of his body and had a smile put on there so it's a completely made-up shot. George came in and said, "Where did you find that?" I said, "We made it up".

Chris Wyatt:

When I knew you were going to be showing this, I was trying to put myself in a similar position and try and think what is there? I've never had the forgetting a line thing - that's really great. But certainly a scene of that length, of that magnitude, with that kind of coverage. There was a scene for me in a film called *This Is England* where, in the middle of the film is quite a crucial scene which shifts the whole emphasis of the film. Again, there was just so much footage, so much coverage, and I just remember for days putting it off and putting it off and putting it off and thinking, there's this thing that's sitting there, it's waiting for me, I just know I have to address it, and then thinking, OK, it's now going to be today. I remember that decision but I cannot remember a single editorial decision that I made while doing it, so it says the whole thing about how you go into this other place. I remember the going in and I remember coming out the other end being shattered, but I actually cannot remember any part of the actual process. And I just wondered if it is the same for you. And also, Tomoko, as well with documentary where you're always dealing with vast amounts of footage as well. You know, that whole thing about where do you start, how do you start, what's the way in, all that kind of stuff. I'm just curious to know how that works.

Paul Martin Smith:

The other thing is is looking at a scene years later or a couple of years later or whatever and going – why did that look so complicated? Why was that so complicated at the time? Look at it. It works. Because you have no recollection of how it went.

I think that when you talk about how much footage you go into it, you just gotta start assembling stuff - you just put it together slowly. And I do exactly the same as you, Chris. I put off stuff. I mean fortunately I didn't put off that particular scene because we had the line missing which I went, "Oh my God, we're missing that line". We were looking for it everywhere. There are certain scenes that I'll just – you know – the stuff will start coming in and I'll just leave it and leave it and you've got production saying, "Where's that scene?" You need to sort of draw it in, you need to dream about it, you need to, you know, you have to take a shower with it - all that stuff. And then slowly it sort of... I could do... what do we? – you know – and then you start building it that way.

Chris Wyatt:

I'm just thinking because, again, one of the major things as well about this, because, you know, this period for us, this was a huge kind of transitional change where we were going from a very mechanical way of working into the digitized, computerized time. We're now so readily doing those kinds of things and actually manipulating

moments. But even just a fraction, not even the whole frame, and I think that's also what's interesting about that, because again that would have been very early on.

I remember about that time when visual effects were just about starting and so post houses, all those sort of computer places, were just sort of doing weather replacement, swapping out skies, that kind of thing. That's the first time I heard the word terabyte. Going to this room and there's this massive machine which had hundreds of terabytes and I thought, wow, that's amazing. And here we are sitting with 5 terabytes on the desk. But we know, times change. But I think it's important because obviously these things factor in and all that stuff has to start somewhere and to my thinking that shot that you conjured up, that's one of the earliest recollections I can think of where you were actually breaking down a character, so changing eyes, changing a face, changing a head, whatever. So it's actually a wonderfully kind of liberating thing because we're no longer – because we both come from a period where you believe that what came out of the camera was what you had and that's what you had to work with, and that's all now changed because you now look at something and you kind of think, well, it just doesn't have to be this anymore. It can be anything you want it to be.

Paul Martin Smith:

That's interesting because that film with George, it was like playing 3D chess. There were takes that we were taking Take 2 of one bit, one character in the same shot, and Take 6, and putting it all together. In that scene, which looks fairly smooth, there is so much blinking that Jake did. He was always blinking. After he'd say a line, he'd blink, and then he'd look over, his eyes would look over at mom to see what she thought, which was not part of the story. The amount of stuff we had to clean up because of that.

It's interesting because there's a film just before that that I did, because for *Young Indie* we did a lot of this stuff, not blinking stuff but a lot of making up shots and stuff like that. I did a movie called *The Matchmaker*, which you worked with me on and you ended up by cutting too. There was a scene where she's in a window looking at a guy and they're going backwards and forth. I'd split out the frame so the timing was better and I remember the director coming up to me and saying, "No, no," after I told him. I showed him the scene, he went, "Oh, that's great," and then I told him what I did, he went, "No, no, you can't do that, that's too expensive, you can't do that." It was a learning experience for all of us.

Tomoko Hirasawa:

You both witnessed the really interesting turning point of technology from cutting film to digital. On that note, it may be a good place to segue into the next film, *The Pillow Book*.

[See the trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z4I75Rvb0zo>]

I know the director, Peter Greenaway, is interested in multi-screen cinema but you made that quite complex composition back then. Was that out of your confidence in digital film editing ... what was your approach?

Chris Wyatt:

I suppose in a sense it's kind of what we were just talking about with Martin. I mean this was just slightly before *Star Wars* so this idea of actually being able to physically change characters within a frame or changing their backgrounds or changing their scenery. I think what was nice about working with Peter was that actually just changing the visual language from not being constrained to one image on screen at any one time, and obviously split screens, those techniques, they've been around forever. So I'm not saying it's new but I think that what was interesting for me was how we were manipulating the idea of a frame and also again, a Pillow Book, it's based on a book, and one of Peter's big things always is that film is no more than illustrated text, which I think I agree with and I think that's one of cinema's great weaknesses that it's never moved on from that. So this was a way in which we could actually incorporate all those ideas but again not thinking of them as multiple images but thinking of them as straightforward single composite images. There are other examples in the film where certain things happen, certain changes happen, you make that transference from one scene to another, while you're still in one scene you move to another one through it. So it's very interesting for transitional moments and things like that.

Paul Martin Smith:

When I saw that, when you originally showed it to me, I remember I was mind-boggled. I thought that was really brilliant stuff.

Chris Wyatt:

But again it goes back, what I always remind myself, again it was this changing time. I remember showing that sequence at an Avid talk and this was really at the cusp where some people were jumping into Avid as the way forward and others were just saying, "Oh it's a flash in the pan, it's never going to happen". People walked out the room because they were so tied to the idea that film was going to be around forever. It was just interesting. What I love about that is you can take this and within a few minutes you can start using it as an element in an edit. That's interesting, I think. One is not constrained anymore to actually just what you get out the camera.

Tomoko Hirasawa:

Martin, you were a testbed for Avid when they were developing the software for the first time. Was the transition from film to non-linear editing a smooth transition for you or was it a struggle?

Paul Martin Smith:

I basically didn't want to do it at first because editing, the physical part of editing, is like walking, it's automatic, you don't think about it. A trim here or you need this bit there ... even in the digital world. So to have to learn how to walk again was a bit, 'Oh, I don't know if I want to do this'. I had been in London for 20 years, and my wife and I were planning at the time to come back to LA, because there weren't very many movies done in England at the time. I got fired off a movie called ... I can't remember what it's called, because the director got fired later. Anyway, so I went to a 3-day course with Avid and my mind was blowing up. I just couldn't handle it. And finally I got a job on Avid, and again I went back and had another three day lesson with, actually the teacher ended up being a good friend of mine. Later on I turned

down a movie that they didn't want to cut on Avid because it changed my whole life completely.

Tomoko Hirasawa:

The last time we very kindly talked you mentioned some editors didn't quite make it to the transition from film to non-linear and you know that's, when you think about it, it becomes like muscle memory how you edit. Such a big change. I'm glad you made it.

The next clip I wanted to show was *Behind Enemy Lines* that Martin edited, that was released in 2001, starring Gene Hackman and Owen Wilson. Martin, would you like to set this up for us?

Paul Martin Smith:

This is an interesting sequence. This is John Moore's first film and I had to convince Fox to do a previs, and Ted Gagliano, the head of post-production over there, was on my side and there were a few people going, "What's previs? Who cares about that stuff?" The director went off to Slovakia, which is where we shot it, and I prevised with David Dozoretz and his team for about two months. So this sequence, which, when we showed Hutch and a few others and John, a few of the producers, one of them said, "Wow, let's release this!" Joking, because of this previs, the navy pilots that were flying all the stunts had a call sign for each shot inside the previs, so we shot one day air-to-air and one day ground-to-air and then there's very few VFX shots. Some are not particularly good right now in today's world but on the whole most of it's flying.

Tomoko Hirasawa:

I know that it was the director's debut film feature and so I assume it was the first time you're working with the director, John Moore.

Paul Martin Smith:

He came from commercials and he said to me once – we were having some battle about something with the studio, and I said, "You're the director, John", and he said, "They just gave me 18 million dollars, I don't know what I'm doing here". He was very self-effacing. But he knew what he was doing, so it's interesting. We had a lot of different openings to this movie: we had political movie openings, we had all sorts of stuff.

Tomoko Hirasawa:

What was the process for cutting the sequence like this, for you?

Paul Martin Smith:

For me it was very basically - I turned the music up in my cutting room, removed the seat and cut it standing up. I was like – yeah – I was completely, totally lost in the whole sequence.

Chris Wyatt:

I have to say from my own experience of actually being in the room, Martin is the

most naturally gifted editor I've ever had the pleasure of being in the room with. It just comes to him, actually it just flows through his veins, and that is one of the great advantages I think, that was one of the great privileges for me was to be actually in a room with Martin and actually see that happen and that actually informed me so much in terms of going forward. Just to see that development of getting an idea and then seeing the execution, and then also about 2:30 in the morning, phoning the director up and saying "You have to get in here and watch this sequence". And he did and it was great. But I think some editors just have this natural ability.

Paul Martin Smith:

Watching rushes, I don't take meticulous notes. There are some editors who take meticulous notes.

Chris Wyatt:

Whenever I try it, I always look back and I realize I've made the same note about the – you know, if it's a two-minute shot, I've always made a comment about the bit that's 40 seconds in and nothing else.

Paul Martin Smith:

It's interesting because what I've done in the last few years is, I'll watch rushes, let's say there are 10 takes of a wide shot, I'll watch two of them, circled ones, and then the rest I'll just go through high speed, just to get to know, including the close-ups and things like that, just to get to know the coverage. And then when I go into it, I'll go to each individual tape of the sections that I need out of it and just check it out that way. I don't sit there for hours upon hours upon hours of watching straight rushes.

Chris Wyatt:

I think we're similar on this as well with that notion of almost leaving the script at the door. Obviously it's the foundation on which films are built and obviously one gets it in one's system, but the minute you start getting material, it takes on its own life, and that's why we're film editors, that's why we're not script editors. I think it has to come from that instinctive process that you actually just have to feel it, you have to feel that it's right. I think again that's another reason why I think it's so much about editors zoning out the background.

Paul Martin Smith:

I had an assistant once saying, "Oh, Martin's in the zone". It's exactly it. You wake up, four o'clock already, what the hell!

Chris Wyatt:

We have also done documentary, and again I know Tomoko is actually currently editing a feature-length documentary, but again there's that process of absorbing the material, because for me I think, we're talking a lot about how changing elements of frames and whatever or changing elements of shots, but there's something for me which is always great about going back to documentary now and again, because it feels so much purer in a sense. It is for me the purest form of filmmaking, because

the team goes off, shoots a whole load of stuff and there isn't really anything there until it comes into the edit suite.

Tomoko Hirasawa:

I've got a clip from a short documentary I edited a few years ago called *Mitaka Sumo School*. This film follows Japanese children at a small school on the outskirts of Tokyo. The scene I'm going to show is two-thirds of the way in, where the children we are following practise in the school are now at the national competition, which is a highlight of the film.

The whole film was just seven minutes, it's a very short film. I wanted to show you this because I wanted to talk about inclusiveness. The challenge I had editing this film was that at the beginning of the film you see children practising Sumo – they are boys and girls – and once you get to the competition, you only see boys. I didn't find any girls in the footage. I asked the director, Ruben Ventura, he's based in Barcelona, who also shot this. He said he couldn't get any girls competing because they are not allowed to enter the competition. Just to give you the context, we don't have a professional Sumo league for women, because women do not physically enter the ring. It's a full contact body sport, Japanese wrestling, and the reason, the quote said in the interview, was that when women have periods they're seen as impure and they are not allowed to enter. If you are Japanese, this is common knowledge, but what I didn't know was that it would apply also to children. So, the clip you've seen, I just did not want to exclude the girls who were also practising. They do exactly the same training menu as boys. And the competition, because it was the highlight of the film, if we didn't have that in the film, I wouldn't be able to take them to the arc and journey of the film. That wasn't because of their fault, it was because they are not eligible.

So my take away, it had a quite big impact on me personally, having the chance to edit this, because my take away was quite simple that filmmakers and editors especially can make a conscious and creative decision to be inclusive.

On that note, inclusiveness and diversity has been a topic that's more and more talked about in the film industry and you've been working many decades in the cutting room. I wanted to ask you what your experience was like and if you see any change happening over the last few years?

Paul Martin Smith:

On *Behind Enemy Lines*, I had an assistant who was a woman. I had my first assistant who was a woman on *Star Wars*. On *Arctic Heat* we had a woman sound editor. Editing started off as a woman's career and then slowly dissipated that. But some of the best editors around right now are women.

Chris Wyatt:

Part of this is packaged with that transition because, as Martin said, on *Arctic Heat* we had a phenomenal team of sound editors. In fact Alice Mackie, who's a wonderful film editor now, she was part of that sound editing team. But I think, once that whole transition had happened, even though we all felt that we were in a much more

positive place generally, but of course recent events and the political landscape at the moment shows us that we never really were in a better place. All of the horrible stuff was always just a mere scratch away. So I think that there was a failing. But also there were other battles. I mean once, when we were moving across to Avid, the whole restructuring of how crews were put together was an issue. It was very expensive to do it this way and so one would end up cutting back on crews. You would only work by yourself, you would assist yourself.

Paul Martin Smith:

That was mainly in the UK, I think.

Chris Wyatt:

That's true. I think what the pandemic did, people did push back against it, as editors, if you wanted to work remotely there was always a push back. You can't do that. But clearly it did show that you can work remotely. Now I know we're all not in favor and I know that Martin very much is a very social person and wants to be in a room, which is absolutely fine. But the choice should be there. I think also certainly in some television...

I will front load this by saying that I have worked with and still continue to work with the most amazing people. I've been very fortunate with the people that I have worked with and seeing them go on and develop and become editors is the most wonderful, rewarding thing, so I don't have a single complaint about anybody that I've ever worked with. But certainly you would also get producers that would insist that they pick your team, which I think, if you're an editor, is not really right. I mean you should have the choice of who you work with. One does try but there seem to always be obstacles.

Tomoko Hirasawa:

The film industry is always - you can't find the entrance really.

Chris Wyatt:

This is what's so hard now trying to actually say to people when they start out. For me it's always that thing about getting your foot in the door, and then you spend the next 40 years of your life trying to keep it there. Even now I don't ever feel as though I've been actually invited in the room. So it's that thing. It's always a struggle in a sense.

I think the other great problem that we have in the industry, well we certainly have in editorial, is this pigeonholing. As Martin said when he kicked off, he's worked, edited on a wide range of stuff, and all three of us have worked in documentary, but we have been able to happily move between them and choose what to do if the right thing comes along. That option should be readily available for any editor. I mean naturally there should be things that one is – one might not want to do commercials, one might not want to do music videos – but as an editor you should be able to really just go and do whatever you want to.

Tomoko Hirasawa:

I think that's a great learning for me personally as well because I always call myself documentary editor and after chatting with you two I'm like, 'OK, I'm gonna stop calling me that'. Why would you narrow your possibilities if you can always widen them?

On that note, I think we've got time to play one more clip and I was thinking maybe *The Lost Children of Berlin*.

Chris Wyatt:

What's nice about *The Lost Children of Berlin* is that it's directed by Elizabeth McIntyre, who we saw at the head and is one of the founders of ScreenCraft Works, and Elizabeth made this film *The Lost Children of Berlin*, which is basically – Grosse Hamburger – the school in Grosser Hamburger Strasse in Berlin was the last Jewish school to be shut by the Nazis, and what Elizabeth filmed was the reunion some point later in the late 90s of the students coming together. The clip you're going to show – this is again, I suppose, the power of archive – and this particular sequence is basically where the names of some of the students who got lost during the Nazi atrocities are read out.

[\[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C_uD-xmKOCK\]](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C_uD-xmKOCK)

Tomoko Hirasawa:

Before we close I've got one question. I think it's about the first clip from *Star Wars* that Martin showed. What was the turnaround time for finishing?

Paul Martin Smith:

Two years. That scene? Oh that scene specifically? We didn't finish the one scene, basically it took two years to do the whole movie.

Chris Wyatt:

I kind of know how one keeps the staying power going but how do you keep re-energizing yourself during something of that length?

Paul Martin Smith:

I was down at ILM every morning at eight o'clock with John Knoll, going through his work, then I'd go into the cutting room. The pace was very relaxed. It's a nice place to work so it was never a question of revitalizing, from that point of view.

Tomoko Hirasawa:

Thank you both very much for your time today. It's been a pleasure and, sorry, the time flies when you're having fun!

Elizabeth McIntyre:

Thank you ever so much, Tomoko, and thank you for your amazing hosting - round of applause for Tomoko. Thank you to Martin and thank you to Chris for the three of you and your conversation. Thank you to Brunel University London once again and thank you also to Genelec for supporting this talk series. For anyone who would like to come to our next free of charge talks, don't forget to sign up to our community via screencraftworks.org or info@screencraftworks.org, drop us a line and Rebecca and

I can answer and guide you through to joining our community or how you can have our newsletter for information about our next events. So thank you once again and see you next time.

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