In Conversation with Lynn Shelton

MAI: Hello Lynn.

Lynn Shelton: Hi. How are you Neil?

MAI: I'm really well. How are you?

LS: I'm good. Did you have a chance to see the new film?

MAI: I did. I really loved it. It's great. It’s so funny. It's a character study wrapped up in a screwball mystery.

LS: Oh my God I love that. See, that's why I need to talk to people like you.

Filmmaker Lynn Shelton gives me the incredible honour of seeing her latest film, Sword of Trust (2019), before its world premiere at Austin’s famous South by Southwest (SXSW) festival. This is so our wide-ranging, in-depth conversation about her film and TV career can include discussion of her latest work, a comedy drama set in Alabama and led by Shelton’s friend and now frequent collaborator Marc Maron. I’m pleased to get to see the film before our conversation because, in addition to 2017’s superb drama Outside In, the film marks a new direction, depth and confidence for Shelton as a filmmaker. Her trademarks, those that have seen her create a significant body of work in American independent film starting in 2006, alongside a formidable list of TV credits including Mad Men (AMC), The Good Place (NBC), Love (Netflix), Master of None (Netflix), New Girl (NBC) and Glow (Netflix), are all present and correct in her latest films. Her focus on character and the subtleties of human interaction and co-existence are still front and centre but Shelton is branching out considerably in terms of location, central dramatic cruxes, inter-personal relationships and genre. It’s thrilling to see and it was a pleasure to talk to her about her career and process for the authorship issue of MAI. Over the course of our conversation Shelton takes my questions as mere starting points, seeking always to answer the questions but also engaging with deeper themes that are personal to her. She seizes this rare opportunity to talk at length about her film work and seems pleased that it is seen as significant and authored, giving vivid insight into her approach to film craft and showing a fascinating level of self-reflection regarding her work and level of, relative, privilege. One of the most invigorating aspects of our talk that I hope comes across, is how confident she is in her abilities and talents, that are well earned and established now in both film and TV. It’s still maddeningly rare to hear a woman own her talent and contribution as Shelton does here. That’s one of the reasons this interview is so long, that and that it contains so many wonderful insights and reflections. This interview was conducted via Skype on Saturday 2nd February, 2019.

MAI: Let's start with tolerance and kindness because I think that is there throughout your films. There are these really awkward and complicated and messy situations but so often the characters are striving or kind, or they're striving to be kind. They end being kind to each other and understanding that ultimately we have to get along, because what else is there, and I wonder if that is something that you've seen in your own work?

LS: Definitely. Tolerance, kindness, redemption. I'm not interested in flat characters that don't feel real. Probably my number one pet peeve is feeling like I'm looking at a character that is not based in reality, a cardboard cut out facsimile, a Hollywood facsimile of what a real person is. I want to see people on the screen who resonate because they are recognisable as real, specific human beings. Which means they've got to be flawed. Every single one of them has to be flawed in some way because that's what makes us human. We are all of us cracked vessels. That is a quote that I cribbed from somewhere and it stuck. That’s the key to my whole body of work really and the challenge I love to take on is to make all my characters lovable and sympathetic in spite of or even because of their flaws.

At the very beginning of Your Sister’s Sister (2011), you’re introduced to Mark Duplass’s character in a way that you could easily turn off him. There's this guy who seems to be railing against the dead, his dead brother, and insulting him and making everybody uncomfortable and he's drunk. You think, what is this guy's problem? And I want you to. But I want you to love him too. And the same with Rosemarie DeWitt’s character who does something that some people would find completely unforgivable and unconscionable and I want you to be able to see that she didn't mean harm. She made a mistake and it was probably not the best choice and she you knows it. But you want to love her. I felt drawn to this because I felt like this person was lying and doing all these terrible things on paper but that you understand and you sympathize and you're compassionate towards her.

It’s the same with the wife in Humpday (2009). I wanted to end this this idea that she's just this square little person who needs to be protected or she's the nagging, stick in the mud wife who doesn't let the thing happen [the premise of the film is that two old, male friends reconnect and decide to make gay porn film for an art project]. I didn’t want her to just be needed to give him permission to do this thing. I needed her to be an entire human being with layers that her husband didn't even know about. That's a really important thing for me. My general outlook is one of optimism. I have a real genuine deep love for humans and I'm endlessly fascinated by them and it always comes back to the key component for me, the theme of who am I? What is the self that I've been developing since I was a wee babe and who am I in the world in response to and in relationships with a variety of different people? Who am I compared to who I thought I was? I have this idea in my head of who I am and then all of a sudden there's a mirror held up to me by some old friend or some person who I can relate to in a lot of other ways and I realize, Oh my God, I'm not the person I thought I was. I'm not the person I thought I would turn out to be. Holding mirrors up and having people go through little crises of identity is something that I think all humans go through at different ages and in a variety of moments and that's the kind of thing I find really interesting.

MAI: What's also interesting about your characters is how they're introduced and how stories pivot around them. As an audience member you think your characters are going to react in a certain way and they don't. They have very human reactions but they aren’t obvious film reactions. Over the course of watching your films back to back it's clear that you've got a really great way with people and tap into something, which is inherently dramatic, but also softly subversive. Particular in terms of how they end. How they kind of resolve or don't resolve. You're really great at understanding context. In Your Sister’s Sister Duplass’s character is raging but he’s clearly still grieving and he’s revealed to the audience in an atmosphere of having to face up to one year since his loss. In Outside In (2017), the context is that this person has been in prison for 20 years and you meet him as he is just getting out and has to see all these people, some of whom he knows and some he can’t remember. That's good storytelling.

LS: I’m always thinking of how can I use the story to help do the work of getting these characters in a position where I can explore the complexities of them. Something I learned a long time ago was that you can take characters and put them in a scenario like lab rats, stick them in a situation and see what they do. How do they react? With both of those films that you just mentioned I've been really lucky. My very first film wasn't quite like this. I've often approached my screenwriting in a kind of slightly upside down way, where the catalyst for the entire movie will be an actor I want to work with and then I'll start to put them in different scenarios in my mind's eye. Like, Marc Maron. I really want to work with him. How? What scenario do I want to see him in or who do I want him to be? And then I stop in front of a pawnshop one day. I'm in a cab at night and it pulls up to a stop sign and I look over and I see this incredible looking pawnshop. I think, oh my God, he has to be a pawnshop owner and that's the beginning of the whole thing. Then I go to him and I say, do you want to be a pawnshop owner, and there's some sort of a con? It's very vague. When I come to him he's like, sure. Then I can build the character with him. Same with Jay Duplass [Duplass plays the lead in Outside In]. I had a really rough scenario. I knew the backstory and a lot of detail but I didn't know what was going to unfold. I said, here's the backstory. There's this guy and what I want is to see you stretch your wings and do something that you've never done before. How would you feel about playing this guy who's been in prison for 20 years? Then I built that character with him and as I build the character with him I know how he's going to react believably in each scene that’s unfolding as I write the script but also I go back and forth and say well let's add this little detail to the backstory, which will then help the plot. They can help each other. Character development should fit like a glove on the actor so that they really feel connected to and invested in and understand thoroughly who that character is because there's a part of them that's in there. Also we can then mold the story and the character together so that they will serve each other. So again, going back to Humpday, with a wife who isn't given as much screen time, I wanted her character to feel as real and three dimensional as the two guys. This was very important to me because how many times have you seen that…

MAI: …the tell off girl

LS: …yes, completely. Just there to serve the other characters but isn't a real person herself. That was important to me and I’m probably as proud of her character as any other aspect of that film. What would make her give him permission? We were able to come up with backstory for her that served that plot point. It's a helpful thing. Adding that extra component of starting with the character and the actor is often very helpful to me. Sometimes I've lost an actor after I’ve built a character with them, but I've now created this completely three-dimensional person that fits really well in the context of the story. Edie Falco [Lead actress in Outside In] didn't come on board until quite late because we had lost our previous actress. By then we really knew who this character was but Edie's such a great actor that she was able to come in and understand whose shoes she was filling and also to bring so much of her own input even though she didn't have months and months to prepare. She's just fabulous.

MAI: To look your body at work as whole, in quick succession, is to see many different styles coming in and out. The films all seem built around an idea, a “what if?” It’s fascinating to know that you start with an actor that you're putting into thought “what if?” scenario. When you've got your scenario and your actor how open do you feel about the process in terms of what they're going to bring to the story? Are you aware of any internal resistance to ideas because you've got a certain way that you want it to go or have certain things that you want to cover? Is it literally just let's see what happens?

LS: It’s different every time but the truth of the matter is that I have a very strong vision and I'm a strong decision maker. I know when something feels right and when something doesn't. When I am collaborating, depending on the scenarios, depending on the person and the chemistry, I sometimes have to really work hard to stay open because if I get pitched a lot of ideas that I hate I have to make sure that I'm still open when one gets through that is like oh, that's a really good one actually. I feel like when I'm at my best as a director I am actually a curator of the best ideas. I'm in a collaborative state where it means that I'm collecting and open in a very ego free way, as much as I can be as a control freak, gathering up all of these different ideas. Then my job becomes pruning away the ones that are not serving the story. As I see it I'm using my instinct as a storyteller to guide me through. The development of Your Sister’s Sister started with Mark [Duplass] coming to me with the seed of this idea that he and his brother [Jay Duplass] had in a drawer. This drawer full of ideas, starting points for films. He said, you know we're never gonna direct this but I feel like there's something there, and maybe you’d like to turn it into something? It ended up being very different from the original two sentence sum up, because originally it was supposed to be a guy and his best friend, and a Mom. There was no lesbianism, no baby, none of it. There was this weekend when all of us [the actors Shelton developed the story with] were in Los Angeles and the four of us got into a room and all kinds of ideas came up. Some of them were really great and some of them were really out there. Then it was my job to go away and be by myself in a room and say OK this one is not going to help us at all. This one is just going to be in direct contradiction to this other idea that I think is a lot stronger. How are we going to make it into a story that I'm going to want to tell, that I would want to see?

That’s the process but even though I've made films with improvised dialogue some times, and I have friends who work in that way who will literally show up on a day and say let's see what happens, I'm never like that. I know exactly what needs to happen. I know what the emotional dynamic shift has to be. Sword Of Trust (2019) is very plot heavy and that was really challenging because sometimes there were four or eight characters instead of [the usual] two or three and we only had twelve days to shoot it. It was nuts and I was much more hands on. On something like Humpday there were two cameras at all times, mostly two people scenes, and sometimes I would just say, ok just go, and we'd have a 40-minute take and a lot of the writing would get done in the edit room. I would just let them go and go and go and find the zone as actors and find this groove. Sometimes I would say well let's do it one more time but let's reduce that story about the princess with a hat into a sentence instead of telling the entire story in five minutes which I'm never gonna be able to include. I'd give them little notes because even though I know I'm not going to use half the stuff I just let them go because there might be something that would just emerge in an organic way. I never want to insert myself and burst that bubble, that beautiful zone that's being created between two actors.

But later, when I'm been working with different kinds of actors or I just don't have enough time and I need them to get to these different points, I insert myself more. There is always a lot of structure even though I'm inviting them to find their way through the beats of a scene. I give them freedom to use whatever words they really want to use if they don't like what I've written. I've always written some kind of a script. So, with Your Sister’s Sister it was about 70 or 80 pages of dialogue that the actors could use or not. The actresses [DeWitt and Blunt] were not veteran improvisers so they needed that safety net. Humpday was a 10-page outline and I don't think there was any dialogue written down at all. Sword Of Trust was a 46-page script. Sometimes it did have the dialogue, like in the scene I was in, between Deirdre and Mel. That was probably more scripted but we were very loose with the actual words because again I'm looking for naturalism. I was giving something slightly different every take, every take would be a slightly different version of why I'm making my case for him to give me the loan. But his responses were pretty much as I wrote them: “You know, I’m not a charity, It’s not the Salvation Army here.” He would say the same things but would always be able to genuinely react if I gave them a slightly different pitch. He would throw in a new reaction.

MAI: You mentioned naturalism there, which I think is really what comes across. The films feel scripted, they don't feel improvised, but there's a real naturalism and I think from what you're saying there comes out of giving ownership of the characters to actors in a really in-depth way and having them trust that you’ll not let them fail.

LS: Yes it's all about creating trust with the actors and it's about finding the right people and then really putting your trust in them so they can be completely emotionally safe to risk everything, risk making themselves look like a fool onscreen because I am never going to let them be a fool and it's really helpful to have built a body of work that proves to people that I’m not going to fail them.

MAI: So it’s got easier? It's a big leap between Humpday and Your Sister's Sister in terms of convincing someone like Emily Blunt to go with your process, particular because how those early films were discussed, and the kinds of films they were discussed alongside [the so-called ‘Mumblecore’ movement that included films by the Duplass Brothers, Joe Swanberg and Andrew Bujalski that Shelton’s early work was considered part of], was quite disingenuous.

LS: It's funny to me that this whole idea of how to approach filmmaking in a different way came from the experience I had trying to make a film in a very traditional way, my very first feature [We Go Way Back (2006)], because I didn't know any other way. I never went to film school and I'd only been on the post side of things so the only experience I'd had was as an editor. Before that I was experimental filmmaker and just made everything myself. I would make completely non-commercial art where I was holding the camera and I was playing with sound design and was doing everything. I was literally on the set of my first feature film going around introducing myself and saying, oh what's your name? Ryan, oh you're the gaffer, what does a gaffer do? I had no idea. So that was my first experience. I'd been an actor before. Before I was an editor, I was a photographer, before that I was an actor in the theatre. I felt like I’d be able to direct because I could speak to actors, I knew their process, not realising that directing is a completely different thing. At the start I was in Seattle using local theater actors because there was very little film being made in Seattle. In the audition process I was getting these beautiful naturalistic performances out of people and then on set it was this mayhem of 50 people running around, there were smoke machines and panic and the actors became like deer in the headlights.

Many of my ideas of filmmaking came out of the reaction of what happened to me in that first experience of making a film. Traditional filmmaking fits the paradigm of how you structure your day and your entire schedule. The way a set is run is like it's designed to be an obstacle to the central work of making a film, which is the acting. If you don't have the conditions for good performance you don't have good acting. It doesn't matter how beautiful what you see in the frame is, it doesn't matter how well lit it is, what camera, what cool camera moves or whatever. Without performance you've got nothing, you've got shite. I'd done theater acting where get to live an entire experience, the entire arc of a story from beginning to end. It's very organic comparatively as an actor. In film it was, oh we got to do this all out of order and we're in one place and then another and there's all these people standing around saying you've only got five minutes to nail this scene or we lose the light or we're losing the location. It was mayhem for the poor actors especially because I wasn't working with Robert DeNiro or Meryl Streep. Some of my actors had never been in front of a camera before. So, the second time I made a film [2008’s My Effortless Brilliance] I stripped away everything. I just wanted tiny digital cameras, Dogma 95 style, fly on the wall, no lights, no crew, building the characters for the actors themselves. I just wanted to feel complete naturalism. The goal for my second film was just to make it feel like real people. I didn't even have a plot really, it was almost pure character study.

Once I realised I could make a film that way, with Humpday I got slightly more experienced actors and also created a plot where the audience could be on the edge of their seat. That film changed everything because it got into Sundance and so more people saw it. A friend of mine was a producer for Darren Aronofsky and we were at the Indie Spirit Awards together and I met Darren who had just made The Wrestler (2008) and I started telling him about how I write. I'd read about how he shot The Wrestler and I said I really felt a kinship because that was how I made Humpday and I was describing the film and he kept looking at my friend and saying, you're going to give me a copy of this right? I need to see this! And then a month later I get this email. He'd seen it with Rachel [Weisz] who he was with at the time and she had written to me saying she would like to work with me, that she loved Humpday. I happened to be in London with that film and I saw her in A Streetcar Named Desire and we had dinner afterwards and she was just completely intrigued by the idea of working in that way. And eventually I pitched her Your Sister’s Sister.

I was able connect with Emily because she wanted to work with Rachel and they'd never met. It was easy to actually connect them because they shared the same agent. We developed the characters together, but what ended up happening was because of scheduling Rachel had to pull out at a very late date. But Emily was so invested in the project at that point that luckily she didn't leave. So yeah, Humpday really struck a chord with a lot of people. It was how I got my first job in television. Matt Weiner and executive producer Scott Hornbacher saw the film and said, even though it’s totally the polar opposite aesthetic of Mad Men she's so good with actors and we want total naturalism. Liz Meriwether was a fan of Humpday and she was putting together her directors’ roster for the first year of New Girl and that's how I started working in network sitcoms. I kept making more films. More people saw Your Sister’s Sister and to date that's probably the one that most people will say that they love. I’ve been in various places with Cinephiles or people in the industry and people love that film so much. That film got a lot of actors interested in working with me because they love the performances in that film.

MAI: It’s interesting that you have a background in editing because one of the things I really admire about you is your confidence in letting a scene play out and knowing when to cut. The revelation scene in Your Sister's Sister is perfectly cut. You've got three actors who absolutely nail that scene in terms of the tone but the cutting of that scene is so good.

Being an editor before makes sense as a director as it feels like you know exactly what cutting is. Do you feel it was an invaluable experience in terms of how you allow your stories to unfold? You're working with a lot of different tones and different genre flourishes here and there but you're always able to respond to what the film and the dramatic moment needs.

LS: I can't imagine doing what I'm doing without having been an editor first. I literally cannot imagine it. My editor brain is never off. It’s what is helping me make every single decision. Where the camera's going to be, how many setups I need. Not to brag, it's just a fact. I get so much love when I do television from the crew and the cast because I'm very precise. I don't do an excessive number of setups or takes because I know what I need and I get enough. It's not like I'm getting some sort of skeletal amount. I always cover enough. I'll get that extra shot that I may not use on occasion but in general I'll really be pretty surgical about what we need because I'm editing it in my head as I go. I just know how many items I'll need in that shopping cart to take home and make dinner. I don't need to get 20 extra ingredients. I know what shots will cut together. Joshua and Mark were completely convinced that we didn't have the ending of Humpday. We checked into a hotel at 7pm at night and checked out at 9am the next morning and shot the entire shot list and I knew I’d have it when I went in to the edit.

MAI: Something I wanted to ask, from a technical point of view, how many were in the room that night shooting the finale of Humpday? It felt so intimate.

LS: That was the most improvised part of the whole movie because we shot the whole thing in order and it was actually Mark’s idea. It was quite brilliant. He said let's just leave the ending open. And so I said to the two of them you really know who you are at this point you really know these two characters inside and out and I'm going to trust you to find your way through this. As those two characters really would. And so it was very pure. And we did it in sections.

We had two rooms next door to each other. In the other room to us was our assistant editor who was logging the footage as we gave him the chips or whatever they were at the time. We had all the equipment in there too and then in the room next door where we were shooting it was the two actors, the DP, I was the other camera operator and honestly some of my favourite shots, like the two of their bellies together, that's all my camera work actually. Then our sound guy with a bag, who performed both as the boom operator and mixer. It was just the three of us.

MAI: You can tell, in a good way. It is so intimate. So close. You can't get that without stripping everything back and saying, we're all going through this together.

LS: I find it so fascinating remembering what it was like. There was a French remake of Humpday, did you know this?

MAI: I didn’t.

LS: The French have remade two of my movies. Charlotte Gainsbourg plays the wife [in 2012’s Do Not Disturb, directed by Yvan Attal]. It was totally surreal. We made this movie for fifteen thousand dollars or something and they made it for, I don't know, five, six million Euros or something. Yvan reached out to me and said, you must be feeling nervous about what we will do with your baby. He was so sweet but I was like, no this is great. I mean this is amazing. I can't wait to see what you're going to do with it. He invited me to visit the set, so I visited when they were shooting the hotel room scene [the climax of the film where the two friends meet up to make the gay porn film]. They built a set for the hotel room and there's a huge crew. It was just the polar opposite of how we shot. It was so crazy. I prefer my film but it was very interesting to see the male version of the film.

MAI: Throwing money at something doesn't necessarily make it better.

LS: It was an absolutely fascinating lab experiment. The remake of Your Sister’s Sister [2015’s Half Sister, Full Love, directed by Marion Vernoux] was a much more successful remake for me. I loved that a lot actually.

MAI: One of the notable things about your body of work is this; My Effortless Brilliance and Humpday feel of a piece. And then, Your Sister's Sister and Touchy Feely (2013) feel of a piece. They feel like a movement away from the earlier films, in small subtle ways, an evolution from those earlier films. Then Outside In feels like a big leap and both that and Sword Of Trust feel like something new altogether. I wondered how you felt about how important it is to be able to grow as a filmmaker. Men get the chance to find out who they are as filmmakers. How important is it that you're given the chance to improve, change evolve and grow and then actually come to the place where it seems like you are now with these two films, which is really confident, really in charge of the kind of films that you want to make? And pragmatically, how much is working in the kind of TV that you do, important? To be seen as a working creator who can who can handle material, actors, tight schedules etc?

LS: Absolutely essential. I never expected this to be the case. The first, however many movies, five, six movies, I made 14 and 16 months apart or something crazy like that. I didn't start until I was 39 and I really had this sense of urgency. If I'd started at 20 or 25 I may have felt more leisurely about the pace or the amount. But, when I was on the set of my first feature film I had this visceral feeling of this is what I was always meant to do. I don't think I could have done it before this honestly. It's just who I am and how I've grown as a human and what I've learned in my long 20 year circuitous non-traditional journey that I ended up taking to get here. Now that I'm here I have to do this as much as I possibly can. Claire Denis was extremely inspiring to me because she made her first film at 40 and I knew it was possible but I knew I also needed to really devote myself to the art form. I wanted to be prolific but not just churn out any old piece of work. I wanted to be genuinely, completely passionate about everything I made. But, I did want to make sure that I didn't have the seven-year gap [it is sadly common for women to have an extended period between their first and second films and so on]. I just didn't have the time to do that. My first film I shot in 16 days, my second was shot in about 7 and a half days, Humpday was 10 days. Your Sister’s Sister was 12 days. I'm pointing this out because even though I made films at a fast rate the amount of time on set that I spent in those first few years making films was really tiny.

The idea of doing TV was to keep total creative control over my films and not to have to worry about them being big blockbusters or making some huge amount of money. I wanted to keep being able to make them and I wanted people to see them but I didn't want to have to be worried about the plot being somehow pleasing to investors. I want to be able to make what I want to make and stay true to my art. And so I'm going to lean on TV as a way to pay the bills. I thought I'd do a couple of episodes of TV a year to pay the mortgage and then I'd be able to keep making my little movies. But I found that TV was enjoyable and creatively fulfilling, in a lot of different ways. So I started doing more and more of it and I became in demand. I was being asked to do some pretty interesting projects. I found myself with this burgeoning TV career, which I never really planned on having. I live in Seattle, I don't live in Los Angeles so I'd go away for two weeks and come back and be home. It was really nice, in and out, and the pay was wonderful. I'm very grateful for the network sitcoms I did but as soon as I started doing shows like Master Of None or Marc Maron’s show Maron on IFC, or Casual, or Love, these shows that are very cinematic, they really gave me the opportunity to use my filmmaking prowess. Now I'm really in love with it. I can't wait to do the next high quality show with a great cast and great writing. I love TV.

But, mostly what it provided me with, which I didn't even realise it was providing me with, was the opportunity to be on set all the time. I just never could have done that had I just stuck to making movies. So, all of a sudden I’m logging hours and hours and hours and days and days and days and every single one of those hours and days I am learning so much. There was a three year gap between Laggies [released in the UK as Say When (2014)] and Outside In. It was the longest gap I've ever had as a filmmaker between films but I was on set constantly because of TV. When I finally got a chance to be on set again, with Outside In, I was struck by what a different filmmaker I was. It didn't register until I was back on the set of my own film. I was so much more confident. I felt so much more at ease and well versed. I just felt more of a sense of command on set. It was fascinating to me.

And then I really had to give the props to my time on TV sets. It really is like a film school because I'm constantly being given assignments, and challenges that I never would have given myself. I'd be too scared or not interested in giving myself a hot pursuit car chase, like I had to do in Shameless (Showtime), or having a teenager give birth on a kitchen table, in that same episode. I wouldn't have done stunts or fight scenes or wrestling scenes. So to have to roll up my sleeves and say, ok, here's a cast that I didn't choose and here is a crew I didn’t choose to work with and here's a script that I'm being handed; let’s make the best meal out of these ingredients. It's the best possible training ground, especially if they're all really high quality components.

MAI: Watching Outside In, it feels that the range of experiences you've had in TV have given you the confidence and chance to reimagine the types of stories and characters you are interested in bringing to the cinema screen. The characters in Outside In are very different types of characters to the characters in your earlier films. The place and the characters in Sword Of Trust also feel very different. These don't feel like the same kinds of people that populated your films previously. Were you thinking that when you got back to making a film you wanted to push the types of characters that you’re telling stories about?

LS: Definitely. I knew I was consciously looking to expand in terms of genre. Sword of Trust fulfilled this desire, that I may continue to pursue, that I've had for a while, which is to make my own version of Pineapple Express (Gordon Green, 2008). That’s what I've been using as a baseline for characters who feel very real and who find themselves in over their head and get in to a caper scenario. I wanted to allow myself to really have fun with a not completely believable world but one grounded in an emotionally real place. And honestly, with Outside In I didn't really mean to make a drama. I was inspired by a real life story that I had read years before. It came to me again in the most vague manner but got me thinking about what if there were two characters who got to know each other long distance, via letters, in a very Abelard and Héloïse way over the course of two decades and fell in love without having an opportunity to even touch each other. So that was something that came from a long time of thinking about a specific kind of scenario. In terms of the types of characters themselves being somehow different that would be a more subconscious thing. I don't think I meant to branch out intentionally.

MAI: A better way to put it might be more that the world that they inhabit feels different.

LS: That was definitely conscious. I definitely wanted to explore place more. I'm always really into place, and I want the viewers to feel like they've actually experienced a place as much as they've experienced the story with these real people. That's always been extremely important to me and I redoubled my intention toward that with Outside In and with Sword Of Trust. I was in prep and happened to see Hell Or High Water (Mackenzie, 2016), which is set in West Texas, and it just felt like I was there. I want the audience to feel like they've been to these little towns. Take Granite Falls, in the foothills of the Cascade Mountains of Washington State [setting for Outside In]. I want to convey what it really feels like to be there. I really wanted audiences to feel the culture of the place and the people, even if it's really just through the buildings. Same with Birmingham Alabama for Sword Of Trust. I want it to be the local’s view of those places not a tourist board ad. I have a little hints about where they are. You do hear them say Birmingham at one point but otherwise there's no ‘Welcome to Birmingham’ shot.

MAI: One thing you do, which is really hard to do in low budget quickly shot films is convincing the audience that the characters and actors belong in a specific space. One of the notes I made is how we sense character’s lives through the accumulation of objects. You know what objects to show and how to surround people with things that allow the actors and characters to feel rooted in that space. That sense of place is so rich in your work which I think is related to your process of working so much on character because regardless of whether they're on the more privileged end of the social spectrum, in Touchy Feely they are a very urban, very middle class bunch of characters, or if it's the characters from Outside In, all very much working class, they all feel absolutely connected to their environment. That is hard to do on an independent level on such a repeated scale I think.

LS: Thank you.

MAI: Not much of a question, sorry.

LS: It's a huge goal of mine. Sword of Trust and Outside In were challenging for me because I didn't know those places. I had to get to know those places and I wanted the viewer to really understand that this is a real place. Whereas something like Touchy Feely is where I grew up. I know that city [Seattle], each one of those street corners, every one of those little neighborhoods. There's a scene in Touchy Feely where Rosemarie DeWitt’s character is on a bench in a park. She's tripping a little bit and Ron Livingston shows up. I’ve wanted to put that bench in a movie for, I don't even know how long, since I was a kid. It’s probably one of my favourite spots. In the script writing process I know it’s actually going to that neighbourhood and that she will be walking these streets when I am putting it in the script. I know she'll be on this street and then she's going to come down this little back street and then she's going to turn here. Every time I set a film in Seattle it will be completely geographically specific. I know where this character would have to traverse to get from this neighbourhood to the next neighbourhood and I'm going to show them on that route for real because I’ve seen the movie set in Seattle where there a running montage of John Cusack going from one neighbourhood to another [Cameron Crowe’s 1989 film Say Anything] and I know he's actually running through five different completely separate neighborhoods and it drove me crazy. I always said I'm never going to do that. Locals love it. I always thought it was something just to satisfy myself and other Seattleites but what I’ve found is that it works on other audiences wherever they are because they really believe in the geography; they can feel the specificity.

MAI: Because you're in the hands of a director who knows the place that the film is set in and you've created a body of work that is connected to that specific place, somewhere not shown on film very often. Also, the audience can feel you've not dropped in to shoot because of tax breaks or similar incentives. Also I think, what you're talking about in terms of the way you approach your filmmaking is smartness that is the key to being a good director. It's smart to shoot where you know rather than where you don’t know. You know how to shoot quickly. You know you've only got 10 days, or 7 seven days like this. It’s smart to think what will actually work. A lot people would try and find something exotic or different but with your work there’s a practicality that when coupled with your connection to the place already makes those two things work hand in hand really well.

LS: That's why I was a little terrified to make this last film [Sword Of Trust] because it was the first time I ever made a film that wasn't in a place familiar to me. Even with Outside In, I don't know that town Granite Falls that well, but I lived close enough that I could spend a lot of time going up there. It’s an hour and a half from Seattle so I could go up there and really spend time embedding myself during prep. In Alabama I had to really get to know the place more quickly and because I didn't know it in my bones like I know the Pacific Northwest I was worried I wouldn't be able to pull it off. But it was ultimately really satisfying. I tried to channel John Sayles because I know he loves to do that. He'll go to a different place and just soak it up, and write for that place. I thought, well I'm just gonna do that this time. With the plot I had in mind it had to be the South. I was excited by it, to try something new and give myself that challenge.

One of the most satisfying things to me is when actors really sell being a normal person with a normal job. In the very first scene of Sword Of Trust, with Marc Maron playing the pawnshop owner, I completely buy it. It was actually kind of funny because he’d asked to have a technical adviser, could he hang out and chat with a real pawnshop owner. And we found someone and we got them together for a couple of days but I felt like Marc wasn't even listening. He just kept looking through the used records in the store and he'd ask a question now and then. And the pawnshop owner would ramble on but I didn't know if Marc was even taking it in. And then he gets on set and it's like, oh my god you're just like a sponge, you were soaking it all up. He made it seem so natural. You're my first international spectator for the film so I'm gratified. It’s great to know how it plays across the pond. Although I really think that Trump is the backdrop to the whole thing.

MAI: It definitely feels timely. You wonder where it's going with its tone and its depiction of these characters in the South. The casting of Toby Huss is brilliant because his is the one character where it could really lurch into ridiculousness or caricature but because he's such a good performer it never feels like you're undermining anyone, or patronising a strata of society.

LS: He's so great. I was worried about that character because I didn't want anyone in the film to be a cartoon. I loved what he was doing but at times he seemed quite extreme, quite over the top. I was worried on occasion but what was really comforting was that most of the crew was local. They were from the South. Again and again they would come up to me and say what he is doing is brilliant, and, “I know that guy - that is a real person”. It was really comforting to know that.

MAI: When it gets to the moment where he realises that all is not what it seems, it's really sad.

LS: He’s so sad about it because the trust he’s had in this relationship is broken. It’s moving because he’s saying I trusted you and I believed in you and now I don't know what to do with this information.

MAI: It is fascinating, having been an avid listener to his podcast, to see Marc Maron in a lead role. Knowing how he feels about his acting it is clear from his performance that he really loves working with you and that he values that relationship because he's so natural and he absolutely convinces as this character. Even when he's drawing on things you have fed him based on his character’s past it never feels contrived never feels self-conscious. To get that performance from a relatively new screen actor in 12 days is just astounding. You are are exactly who he should be working with. It’s a really wonderful performance.

LS: That makes me so happy. I really love working with him and I do think he really loves working with me too. I did his podcast 3 and a-half years ago. That's how we met. He asked if I would direct his IFC show [Maron], which he was still doing, and I directed the first couple of episodes of the last season and I immediately knew he was an interesting actor. At that moment he'd had three seasons under his belt. In the first season of that show, if you’ve ever seen it, he's pretty stiff because he just couldn't figure out how to be in his body. Then he's so much looser the second season and better still in the third season. So in the fourth season it was really interesting because when he comes to a scene at that point he's a little bit different, he knows more. He's totally untrained so he would come to a scene with the lines memorised and open, but without a sense of what the scene was. He was, in a cursory sense, molding clay. It was very funny because originally, when I—and he does this with everybody—gave him a note, he would push back and he'd say, well I did it this way because of whatever. But then he'd always take the note. It was just part of his process. And then when he took the note it was like Bam! I've never felt more useful as a director because if it was just Marc doing it on his own it was ok but unformed and as soon as I would give him an adjustment he would really click in. I’d give him another adjustment that would make it better and better and better and soon he started to naturally, in a very organic way, establish how to work like this. He trusts me. We established a rapport. So much so that by the end of the second episode, we decided we had to work together again.

We started to write a movie together, but the process was slow going. He was really busy and we knew it was gonna be a very slow process. I told him, I just want to get on set with you again. He said, well just write me another movie on your own and I'll do it. And that's what Sword of Trust was. And then, the crazy thing about Glow [Maron stars in the wrestling show] was that it was pure serendipity that we ended up working on that together. They booked me to do the show months before he even went out for the part. I think there's more to be mined there. But I'm so excited for people to see this film because I just want him to be cast, for people to realise the depth of his talent because he's so good.

MAI: I’d like to talk a little bit about Glow now. Compared to what is known from the outside about how TV is made, in the sense that you know you hear a lot about how it's made and directors going in and out and it all being made very quickly, it feels like there's a community, a collective spirit with this show which makes it stand out. I don't think it's just the content. It feels like it’s there in the way it's made. It feels like every director who goes in and does an episode is part of the Glow family rather than, this is the show and you come in and just do the show. There's energy to the collaboration that is really present in the experience of watching it. When you watch it, you really feel that everybody wants it to be great for the benefit of the show rather than some shows where it's clear the directors are coming in and being stubborn and selfish and doing their own thing. I wondered if that's a perception that resonates with how it feels on the inside.

LS: Absolutely. Even though I came on late in the first season, I did the second to last episode I believe, I immediately felt an instant rapport with the writers, the whole cast and, honestly, with the crew. There was this instant rapport with the show itself and I immediately felt embraced. The second season I was asked to do the opener, which I felt very honoured to do. When you’re asked to do the opener or the finale of the season it always feels like an honour to me. I was also the only director last year that did 2 episodes so that felt very special and I was thrilled because they were both amazing episodes. The consistency is pretty great. It all really starts with Liz and Carly [Mensch and Flahive, the showrunners] who are the creators and they are really great at not only writing but also creating this sense of camaraderie. They did a great job of setting up a scenario in which the women in particular and the cast as a whole could really bond. A lot of it is straight up too. They have to wrestle.

They wanted that from the beginning. They want the actors to do the wrestling and do all their own stunts, which is just not done [normally]. There was a lot of, well that's never gonna happen. You're not going to get the insurance. But they kept pushing for it. And what that did was it created this scenario where they got actors who were willing to do it and were really excited to do it. They knew what they were getting into and they were excited for this adventure and they were terrified because they all had to train and learn. And then they started training together and part of the whole culture of wrestling is that you have to trust each other. It's a total trust game because if you screw up you can really hurt somebody. It's the most supreme amount of bonding that you can get between people because they're literally putting their physical lives into each other's hands and it creates this very intense sense of intimacy. And it's contagious. It's a really beautiful thing. And it's very female centered.

I know Marc's talked about it a little bit on his podcast monologues but to see the impact that has had on him has been really interesting. He talked about that a lot after Season 1. He’s never been around this many women. I was the first and only woman director who worked on his show (Maron) and there were dozens of episodes of that show. He didn't have any women writers at all. It was completely male dominated and then he gets on this show and it’s all women everywhere all the time. He said it was really humbling and that it was interesting to be in the minority. It's eye opening and it shifted him a little bit.

MAI: That's why the kind of representation that happens on Glow, on screen but also behind the scenes, is so important because that's where shifts can occur. Women know what it’s like, they don't need to know, men need to know. They need to see it and experience it.

LS: I was having a conversation in the [Glow location scouting] van yesterday with one of the production coordinators. I don't know if you saw there was this Variety ad. It's been all over social media. It’s this ad with a list of 16 [women] directors and their films [Shelton is mentioned for Outside In, released by Netflix in 2018], none of whom have been recognised for awards [in the 2018 awards season that culminated with the Oscars]. She posted it and I said thank you for posting it. She said in her post that on Glow, now, it's the most remarkable thing to work on a show that has so many women directors. It’s not entirely women directors, but it is over 50 percent every season. And there are so many women behind the scenes. And she said, you know I've worked on TV shows that had no women, at all, ever. We started talking about that and I said, you know, even though my first TV episode was in 2010 I've been on many shows where I was the first or only woman who ever was on the roster as a director.

Somebody asked me how I got the A.P. Bio (NBC) gig. I directed the finale of the first season, at the end of 2017. I didn't know the show’s creator Mike O’Brien beforehand and I don't know anybody else on that show either. So I asked him and he said, well we were given this list of directors that were approved or recommended and we knew we wanted to have 50 percent gender parity... I was like, do you realise how incredible it is that you just said that to me, being a male show runner? He said, well why would you have it any other way? Same in the writer’s room. It doesn't make any sense that you wouldn't have half women. It's half the population. For him it was a no brainer. I think it's becoming more that way [on TV]. At least in some quadrants. Thank God. I really had a great time working with Mike and I ended up asking him to write Sword Of Trust with me. His background is comedy writing, 7 years working on SNL (Saturday Night Live, NBC). He's just a lovely human being. There are still shows that get called out for having never, in their fifth season, hired a women. That's crazy.

MAI: Okay. I want to know why you made Laggies. There are moments that have your fingerprints on them but it starts unlike any of your other films. It’s very traditional for a film of that genre [romantic comedy]. And then when Keira Knightley’s character leaves the wedding and meets Chloë Grace Moretz’s character and then Sam Rockwell [playing Moretz’s Father] shows up the whole film shifts instantly. It's in that relationship between those three characters that you really excel and that the film feels like ‘you’ before returning to something very traditional. The film wasn’t written by you. What was your thought process here?

LS: I recently re-watched it for the first time year and during the first part I thought, what is this? I didn't recognise it as being anything to do with me. It felt so odd. It wasn't that it was bad, it just wasn’t me. And then as soon as Sammy [Rockwell] showed up I felt, all right, I actually do recognise some of this. There's plenty about this movie that I really love and am proud of but it was tough. That first quarter of the film was really hard to find my way in. So, the film. I've had representation since Humpday. I’ve been with UTA [talent agency] and also had a wonderful manager that entire time. They've been sending me scripts to read and I have been attached to a few that never got made. But, it's very, very, very rare for me to connect to them. Even if they're very well written I have to feel a really intense personal connection and that is rarely the case. There's always been this sense of, what is the movie that's going to bring Lynn to another level, whether that means budget or viewership or the multiplex or whatever.

When I read that script I found it really interesting because it reminded me of, and had me thinking about, my very first film [We Go Way Back]. My first film is about a 23-year old who's depressed and gets haunted by, and eventually sort of saved by, her 13-year old self. As I was trying to write that first film I thought, well is she really the 13-year old self of the 23-year old or is she like a proxy. When I was looking for my next project after Touchy Feely I had just been thinking what it would be like to revisit that same territory of my first feature film now that I actually know what I'm doing as a director more. Although I love that first feature for many reasons it presented a lot of challenges to me as a director that I wasn't quite ready for. There was so much there and I thought it would be nice to go back and either genuinely remake it or just remake it in a new format but revisit some of the same territory. It's pretty interesting to me and it is exploring who I am at different points in my life. So I had been thinking along these lines and then this script comes my way and it's was exactly what I'd been thinking about.

There were a number of things that appealed to me. I liked that it’s a Seth Rogen-ish slacker character, a person all at sea. A woman who gets to be super flawed and not know what she's doing. Usually it’s a guy who doesn't know what he's doing and he's tied to some woman who's totally on it. So it was a little bit of a gender switch. And I liked that. I love relationships that aren't supposed to, in the real world, work. I love the idea that a 16-year old and a 28-year old could connect in a genuine friendship. I liked the ideas behind it. I liked the characters behind it and my reps [agent and manager] were super excited because they felt like this was an opportunity to make a film that would be a little bit more accessible to a larger audience. So there was definitely that intention of making a film that could be a little bit of a breakout film but also a way to explore. A lot of romantic comedies come my way and I am really uninterested in romantic comedy unless it's something like The Philadelphia Story (Cukor, 1940) or Broadcast News (Brooks,1987) where nobody ends up with anybody else or you genuinely don't know who they're going to end up with. Mostly you can tell who is going to end up with who, right from the get go. This just seemed a little bit more outside the box than your standard romantic comedy. The work between the two characters that Sam Rockwell and Keira Knightley play, those characters and that chemistry and dialogue, that's great. There are certain things are just beautiful, that felt breezy and just really nicely written dialogue. There were other parts I struggled with though. For example, originally Keira’s old high school friends were not very relatable and didn't seem to have anything going for them in their lives as characters. And I needed them to, so the audience wouldn't lose total respect for her for hanging out with these people. We tried to work the nuances of that stuff out. But, honestly I think one of the biggest challenges in retrospect was that I had never worked with somebody else's material. Except in the TV realm. In TV the writer is the one who gets to have the final word. It's not the director. It's a shift in paradigm. The director isn't the one who gets final cut and is not the one who gets to decide ultimately what dialogue is used. The writer is the creative visionary. And I couldn't get out of that mode. There were times when Andrea [Seigel] the wonderful writer had to tell me, Lynn, this is your movie. I am working for you. I brought you this script because I want you to direct it. But I had a hard time really making it my own.

MAI: Well, you're also a writer as well. So that plays into it as well…

LS: Exactly, and I just I couldn't make the shift into taking her words and her script and really owning it. I probably should have just done a pass on the thing from top to bottom and I just didn't know that at the time. She was great. She really is a writer who sits in a room and writes and I'm not that kind of writer. I hate to write. So, I was happy to give her notes. Sometimes I did go in and put my paws in there, but not enough. Not enough honestly. There were things that I couldn't quite crack or I didn't try hard enough or whatever and then I am on set and I'm like, Goddamn it.

But, that movie gets a lot of love, actually. A lot of people really love it. There was some bad luck with the timing of the release, sadly. We were gonna come out in the summer and it turned out that Keira was in another movie that was coming out at the same time [Begin Again, Carney, 2013] and I guess it just seemed like it was too similar, because she was playing a contemporary character. Maybe if it'd been Atonement (Wright, 2007) or another period piece it would have been different. But we put the release off and it ended up that [distributor] A24 put it out in theaters, in 150 markets, October 1st, the same weekend as a bunch of horror films and also Birdman (Iñárritu, 2014) and Interstellar (Nolan, 2014). I wouldn't have gone to see it if I was going out to the movies that weekend. It was a bit of a lost cause but really the whole thing was a learning experience. I was really happy to get to work with the actors that I got to work with, especially Keira and Sam. Kaitlyn Dever who plays Chloë Moretz’s best friend, I fell in love with her. I knew we would work together again and she ended up playing Edie Falco's daughter in Outside In. Plenty of wonderful things happened out of that movie.

MAI: I think it's a good movie, but it's definitely an outlier.

LS: It’s the thing I have the most mixed feelings about. I don't feel like I failed by any means but I do feel like I could have done better.

MAI: You’ve mentioned Outside In and Sword Of Trust as a new phase of your filmmaking career. You talked about the evolutions and excursions into new genres and new places. It also feels like we're starting to get a sense of your relationship, in a wider context, to America. Through the locations of your characters’ lives, how you view the America that you live. Both of these recent films seem to be you engaging more with the country that you live and work in. I wondered if could discuss, in closing, how you perceive that shift, why now and where you think you and the country are going.

LS: There’s definitely been a shift in consciousness for me as an artist. But, Humpday really started from a place of wanting to explore the boundaries of gender and the boundaries of sexuality and challenging and creating thought provoking material that would be a conversation starter, something that would add to the conversation about these issues. Putting a couple of characters in a scenario that would be extremely complicated and uncomfortable for them and seeing what kind of circumstances you could put them in also served greater themes I wanted to explore in this particular arena of humanity. The character I play, Monica, and her girlfriend are really important. It was important to me to show that some people have no problem with fluidity of sexual boundaries. The variety of experience is something that was interesting to me.

I've become more aware of really wanting to have a diversity of characters. Somebody pointed out about Your Sister’s Sister that you don’t know if they have jobs. I was a little pissed off at this and one reviewer said, why don’t they have jobs and why don’t we know what they do? The idea being they're just privileged. It did make me more aware. I don't want my films to all take place in a world of hetero-normative white privilege. That's not something that I want to see or present again and again and again. I get bored with it. I'm bored with it. I'm certainly not the only one that's putting those people again and again and again on screen. So, that’s something I've really been aware of and I've wanted to show different kinds of communities. But, I want to make sure I'm representing from a place of some authenticity. Outside In is a completely white movie but it's a really economically depressed area of the country and I think it is important to show those cultures and communities as not just junkies in back alleys or some tragic story. It’s important to tell stories about people who are just getting by and living their lives and doing their best in the world but who have to face challenges that a lot of the folks sitting in the theater seats are not having to face themselves. During the last few years, for sure it's become something that's on my mind more and more because of the state of the country. But, it's also something that as an artist I've been yearning to do. I have other projects that I've been attached that deal with issues of race and white fragility and class that haven't come to fruition.

MAI: In Sword Of Trust, you have the neighbour friend come by and he’s the one person that you see Marc's character treat with respect and be comfortable around.

LS: And that guy. So good. I could not cast that role and then it ended up being a non-actor. He's not an actor, His character was so essential. It's a minor character but because of the plot with these other characters all going into a situation with what may be white nationalists, the kind of situation to do this deal means that none of the main characters could be people of colour. But it felt very wrong to be in this city with a lot of racial diversity and not have any people of colour in the film so that was a constant question for me.

There's this underlying theme of race and racism and it's definitely something I'm thinking about a lot. I want to deal with racism and classism and representation of marginalized communities and exploring stories that take place in parts of the country that you don't see and that I certainly have not explored in my earlier work.

MAI: Oftentimes when these communities are represented on screen they're represented through the contextual difficulties of their existence. In Outside In there’s the very human dilemma of attraction between two people who probably shouldn’t act on their attraction. That's the story and then everything else is context, which is how you manage to avoid a lot of the tricky issues of how the film is perceived in terms of what it's saying about this community. The community is just where they live. What you're interested in is how these two people navigate this problem that could destroy their lives. It’s heightened by the fact that the person who's got these has been in prison for 20 years and they are attracted to the married woman who helped get them released. In Sword Of Trust the characters are so well drawn that putting this crazy, screwball plot on top allows all those kind of other contextual themes to be so naturalised, rather than, we've got to make a point about this. It’s much more rewarding and refreshing to see films constructed that way rather than the other way round, where a story is placed on to something that someone wants to say.

LS: That's lovely to hear. Outside In was a balance for us. I really wanted to be accurate and authentic while not taking up too much of the background this story of re-entry, which is a huge issue. There are way too many people in prison in this country and I really wanted to represent the difficulties and challenges of that, and the state the character was in. I've got a friend who is the co-founder of the Innocence Project, which is an organization that helps get people out who've been wrongly convicted. He has spent a lot of time with folks who've been in prison who've gotten out and I wanted him to think that we did a good job. He said something really interesting to me which was that a lot of these folks went away to prison at 16, 17, 18, 19, and when they get out of prison, no matter how many years they are in there, they are in the same emotional and social developmental state they were when they went in. You are still that age because you’re never able to grow up naturally into being a fully functional adult. So in some ways obviously they're men but in many, many other ways they're still children, emotional development wise. They're stuck at that adolescent age. He thought that was captured really well.

Other people were worried that Jay’s character wasn’t angry enough but my friend said, listen, if you're angry, chances are you won't make it out of there. You'll get in trouble and stay in longer, or you'll get killed. So actually his defensive posture was actually very accurate. We did our research and we based all of those choices on real research. But I didn't want to make the movie all about that either. So, it was this constant balancing act. I appreciate your words.

MAI: You definitely seem to have reached a point in your career where you are able to balance all those different things really well.

LS: Thanks Neil.

MAI: You know how to shoot good stuff quick, which is why TV seems like a natural home for you. It’s really impressive to think your body of film work has essentially been created in about a month on set, in real terms. It’s really hard to get consistent level of quality over what is a very short amount of time.

LS: I think the key really is the development process and how very often, not always but very often, it involves the actors. Sword Of Trust was me saying I am going to make this movie happen. I invited every single collaborator, including the producers. They were people who wanted to work with me and were excited about the project. I get them involved and then they start to be participants. I would get together with Jillian [Bell] and Michaela [Watkins] and we would talk about the backstory of their couple and their characters and they came up with these amazing little things, like, she's tied to this dream of having an escape room. All of the music in the film is written by Marc.

MAI: I could tell. It was like the noodling at the end of his podcasts.

LS: Exactly, you probably recognise it. And he and I wrote his backstory. Marc’s sobriety is a huge part of his own backstory so it was very easy for us to come up with that part of the backstory and make it believable. That really helps because then you're not showing up on set with a bunch of strangers and thrusting a script at them. You're really putting in the time and the investment into inviting their participation early on. By the time everybody's there they are ready to go. They know the context, they know their backstory up the ying yang. Only some of it you get in little drips, little glimpses as a viewer. Mostly it's so they have chemistry and a sense of who they are. The set becomes a playpen that is so much easier to work within because everyone has such a sure footing of who these characters are. I just wanted to put in a word about that because it's not just a matter of being able to shoot quickly and show up. It’s really the time put in beforehand that makes that possible.