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'The First Cut is the Deepest'

Excerpts from a Focus Group on Editing Music Videos, with Explanatory Historical and Theoretical Notes

EMILY CASTON

It is often said that one of the lasting impacts of music videos is the fast 'MTV edit' in mainstream narrative film. In this edited collection of excerpts from a focus group on music videos, British music video editors challenge the idea that the fast edit was the sole overriding concern, and talk about the impact of changing editing technologies, aesthetics and commercial practicalities on their craft. The editors participating in the group included: Tony Kearns who, between 1989 and 2005, edited iconic videos for The Prodigy, Radiohead, Blur, Paul Weller, Suede, Chemical Brothers, Coldplay, Manic Street Preachers, and Pulp, amongst others; Art Jones, whose credits include Adele, Armand Van Helden, Kaiser Chiefs, Stereophonics, Feeder, Moloko, and The Streets; Tom Lindsay who has cut videos for Will Young, Kasabian, Franz Ferdinand, the Arctic Monkeys, and The Shoes' 'Time To Dance'; director Dawn Shadforth who has directed videos for Oasis, Kylie Minogue, Moloko, All Seeing I, The Streets, Goldfrapp, and Jamiroquai; Julia Knight who has cut videos for Dizzee Rascal, Coldplay, Arctic Monkeys, and FKA Twigs; and Adam Dunlop ex-Head of Music Video at the Oil Factory, ex-Director of Music Video at Sony Music 1999–2003, and subsequently an editor at Swordfish.

Introduction

One of the ambitions of this research project was to draw academics' attention to the work of creatives other than the director in music videos. In this article we present the views of leading editors in the industry on their craft. We invited a number of leading editors to a focus group at the British Universities Film and Video Council on 26 November 2015.

The 'focus group' is a research method we used for gathering data about a number of core research questions in this project. The idea is to bring industry practitioners together to discuss questions and themes. The rationale underlying this method is that in a small creative industries community such as the music video community, many memories are held collectively; by bringing freelancers together, the momentum of the discussion and sharing of anecdotes can lead to the revelation of a much richer oral history than the individual interview. Each of the focus group sessions held thus far has lasted approximately four hours. Preparation for each focus group begins approximately four months before the event when a draft list of between 20 and 50 videos is emailed to the participants for their comments and feedback. Participants are invited to suggest video titles. A digital package containing viewing copies of these videos is then prepared by the research assistants for viewing during the session.

For the editors' focus group, I prepared a short presentation outlining the ambitions of the project. I then chaired a discussed around a set of pre-prepared research questions and viewing schedule. The discussion was recorded and transcribed by our research administrator. In my outline presentation I asked the editors to talk about the British videos that had a real impact on their careers and the development of editing techniques and styles in those videos.

It is generally agreed that the origins of the editing syntax were generated in the mid-1960s with films such as Richard Lester's *A Hard Day's Night* (1964). In the sequence in which The Beatles are seen to perform 'I Should Have Known Better' in the train compartment Lester and his editor established the core principles for editing instrumental and vocal performance to camera, delivering synchronous editing both so that the eye of the viewer sees the realistic source of the sound (hand on guitar, for example), and so that the viewer is 'duped' into believing that the vocals were recorded simultaneously to the image. The early principles for recording and editing performance in music videos broke the innovative rules established early on in film following the transition to sound between 1928 and the early 1930s when innovators such as René Clair and Jean Vigo insisted that film should not duplicate sound and image in such synchronous fashion. Bands such as Pink Floyd have avoided realistic synchronous images of band performance and have preferred to commission graphic metaphoric representations of their music with videos that serve both as music videos and as films for back projections in live performances.

From the mid-1960s to the present day, directors and editors have continued to play with this idea, and synchronicity and authenticity have remained important principles. In his acclaimed video for 'Close To Me'

for The Cure (1985), Tim Pope plays with this when he shows a cut of a hand strumming a comb rather than a guitar as the band attempt to play their song trapped in the wardrobe as it falls over the edge of a cliff. From the mid-1980s onwards, directors increasingly sought to avoid synchronous sound editing, preferring to visualise the instruments and rhythm in other ways, but the *performance* video remains an important genre in music video in which British directors such as WIZ and Sophie Muller have specialized.

During the first year of research on this project, it became apparent that a more viable definition of a music video is a work that is edited to music rather than originated to music because of the number of important videos made in Britain that were cut using found footage. Examples include the videos for Paul Hardcastle's '19' (1985) and Armand Van Helden's 'Koochy' (2000). Not all concepts for music videos in the professional music video are originated for a particular track; many are born from ideas that the director has been nurturing for months or years, waiting for a suitable piece of music or artist. The creative contribution of editors in music video cannot be underestimated, although little has been written beyond a small number of publications referring to an 'MTV edit'.

In her essay 'The Kindest Cut', Carol Vernallis (2001) presents a grammar for music video editing and argues that edits in music video create meaning differently from their filmic counterparts. For Vernallis, editing in music video is different from mainstream Hollywood film editing because it is not a slave to a 'continuity editing' that preserves time and space in the service of a narrative. The aims of music video for Vernallis are not to use continuity editing in the service of a narrative story because the aims of music video are to sell the music and sell the star:

> A music video's aim is to spark a listener's interest in the song, to teach her enough about it that she first remembers the song and second, purchases it. Music video's disjunctive editing keeps us within the ever-changing surface of the song. Though such edits may momentarily create a sense of disequilibrium, they force the viewer to focus on musical and visual cues, allowing her to regain a sense of orientation. In addition, the dense, oblique quality of a string of imagery can serve to showcase the star.
>
> (2001, p.3)

Music video editing functions exceed the functions of narrative film editing because the editing responds to musical features – not just rhythmic but timbral, melodic and formal. She says that early commentators observed 'cutting on the beat' (2001, p.18), and, as a result, 'music

video creates an experience more like listening than viewing' (2001, p.20). Vernallis argues that music video editing has more in common with the work of the Russian formalists Kuleshov, Pudovkin, and Eisenstein. It often uses the 'graphic match', an edit which joins two frames of similar compositional colour and structure. The graphic match appears rarely in narrative film. Music videos also use 'jump cuts' in the vein of the Nouvelle Vague. These are brusque edits that make a dramatic change in terms of content, colour, or scale. These types of edits are one of several types of 'disjunctive' edits used in music videos.

In the 1960s, the first music videos were shot and edited on film. Peter Whitehead, for example, shot all his videos on 16mm himself and cut them himself. In the 1980s, the big budget British music videos adopted their editing model from commercials, shooting and editing on 35mm. In the mid to late 1980s the offline edit and offline editor emerged. And that is where the story of this journal article begins, because it was in that moment that a new group of creatives emerged in London: the offline editors specializing in editing to single releases for *The Chart Show*, The Box, MTV Europe, and MTV USA.

The editors participating in our panel were Tony Kearns, aka 'The Colonel' (TK), who specialised in editing music videos from 1989 until 2005 when he branched into TV commercials and films. Between 1989 and 2005, he edited iconic videos for The Prodigy, Radiohead, Blur, Paul Weller, Suede, Chemical Brothers, Coldplay, Manic Street Preachers, Pulp, The Avalanches, PJ Harvey, Snowpatrol, and The Lightning Seeds; Art Jones (AJ), who began editing videos in the late 1980s and has cut videos for Adele, Armand Van Helden, Kaiser Chiefs, Stereophonics, Feeder, Moloko, and The Streets, amongst others; Tom Lindsay (TL) who has cut videos for Will Young, Kasabian, Franz Ferdinand, and the Arctic Monkeys, and most notably cut the video for The Shoes' 'Time To Dance' (2012), directed by Daniel Wolfe; director Dawn Shadforth (DS) began her career editing her own videos as well as directing them and has made videos for Oasis, Kylie Minogue, Moloko, All Seeing I, The Streets, Goldfrapp, and Jamiroquai; Julia Knight (JK) who has cut videos for Dizzee Rascal, Coldplay, Arctic Monkeys, and FKA Twigs; Adam Dunlop (AD) began working as a producer at the Oil Factory in the 1990s where, as Head of Music Video, he produced videos for bands such as The Proclaimers, The Style Council, Manic Street Preachers, and the Happy Mondays before he began as Director of Music Video at Sony Music (1999–2003), and subsequently an editor at Swordfish.

I began by asking our panel about the big changes that had taken place in editing. In 1971, Sony introduced commercially a video cassette format which would become widespread and adopted as an industry standard for editing: the ¾ inch U-matic tape. It did so after working out industry standards with other manufacturers in a prototype it had trialled since 1969. Sony later refined it to Broadcast Video U-matic or BVU. Most offline editing was done on a two-machine U-matic system from the late 1970s to the mid-1980s. Then Sony introduced the Betacam in 1982. By the late 1980s this had become the industry standard for online mastering. When the DigiBeta was introduced in 1993, this was used for online mastering, and Beta copies with identical timecode were used to load the rushes into Avid for offline editing. I asked the focus group about the significance of these changes.

EC: What are the dates of the big changes in editing?

AJ: There were two big leaps, I guess: moving from film to tape would be the first, moving to Avid would be the second.

TK: Moving to tape would have been in the late '70s.

AD: Yeah, early '80s

TK: When I started out in the business three decades ago, I started as a runner and then assistant editor in a place called Visions. They were doing all the Duran Duran videos, all the big jobs, and there was no off-line; it was edited in the on-line. There was so much money: reel-to-reel, tape, the whole lot. They would just spend, and do it at night because there would be a reduced night rate […] You needed razor blades to cut the tape and spool it up onto a plastic spool.

TL: Andy Morahan was famous for that […] I think it would be about a hundred pounds an hour at those times.

TK: In those times, thirty years ago in the late '80s.

AJ: How long did that take?

TL: They would be quicker because a bit of it would be the shuttling down from shot to shot. You'd be there, so Andy's whole thing was the one-inch machines would run a lot quicker than U-matics. You'd have them all on different machines that you'd pay extra to hire more machines. And it would spool around. So it would be quicker than sitting watching this whole thing, get it done, get it done. But it was…

TK: It was basically, the history in a way is, the history of music videos has been ever decreasing budgets and money. But then the next leap was obviously, we went from doing it in the on-line and spunking the money, to doing cutting on U-matic. The old RM-440 controller. Not time code based, just cutting away. And you look at stuff… and the limitations

of the controller. Like you'd want to trim something by six frames and you'd count: 'Was that five or six?' (TK taps table repeatedly). Anyway then the next thing after that was non-linear editing - digital based – in which the footage was transferred – shot on film and transferred to tape – and then ingested: sucked into the output.

AJ: When did that start?

DS: Early '90s.

TK: Early '90s yeah. About '92, '93.

DS: '92. In '93 I cut on tape originally.

TK: Well I remember cutting a narrative video with Pedro Romhanyi and he was, you know, talking about Avid and the way we'd done it. We'd cut in on U-matic and we realised that was a much better way of doing it, because, with narrative, if you want to drop something in and push out things later you'd have to dump it off and put it back in again. I think it was for the Pulp track, 'Mis-Shapes' that he realised that the non-linear way of doing things was…

AJ: Your technique for cutting videos, Tony's way of working when I used to work next door to him, when I used to go and see his timeline and you'd work from the beginning and cut it half way through, and half way through he'd have half the video. And then at the end he'd have the whole video. And that would be it. It was amazing. We do little bits but Tony worked from the start in a linear way.

TK: Yeah well it's an old fashioned way, you know.

DS: Do you still work like that?

TK: Yeah I would, I mean, but it's…I just kind of look at the rushes and log them in my head. Like if there was a shot for a particular that was good for a part of a track, I'd place it. But I like the challenge of the risk of starting cutting from the beginning and the figuring I am going to hit these parts. Kind of gives me a bit of a buzz, rather than playing it safe … And we used to wind up directors, because … [t]here would be a lot of blank space. I would just be enjoying the blank space getting less and less. But it's… and then I would go back and do the first third. Because I'd get into a groove about a third of the way and then just tidy it up. I just love, there's just something I like about the way to do it.

AJ: It's crazy, how can it be so good?

TK: I don't know, it's kind of what I learnt…

AJ: But that came from U-matic and not linear... did it?

TK: Ah, no. Because I used to work... if you do a performance video you'd put down tape for the whole thing and then cut into it. Using the track and the shot going back and forth. And then you'd put that down and at least you'd get a feeling you'd done something. And then to cut in the performance.... But it was just when I started doing narrative videos. More narrative based, I just worked out, just telling the story cutting from the start. This is where it starts and this goes onto this point and then... Actually it was interesting as I learnt the... Radiohead 'Just' video ...

AJ: Which is absolutely my all-time favourite video.

TK: Tell them the story about when you watched it as kids.

AJ: I watched it on *The Chart Show* and we were like wow that's amazing and it said at the end 'You'll see what happens at the end next week'. So we tuned in next week. VHS was paused. Press pause, record. And they played a bit more of it. And then they said, 'You'll find out next week what happens'. And they did it for about three weeks and you never found out.

AD: You did various versions, didn't you?

TK: I did, but I cut away the music. I cut a film, I cut a narrative. And I didn't want the music to dictate the edit of the narrative. So I did a separate narrative thing – just cut the pictures and not listen to the music. Then I did a performance cut and married the two.

Avid describes a digital non-linear editing system that was widely adopted by the music video industry in the 1990s. The Avid/1 was based on an Apple Macintosh II computer. It was introduced in the late 1980s. By the mid-1990s, it was starting to replace editing equipment such as the Moviola and Steenbeck, and editors were beginning to cut feature films on the system. Music video editors began to move across to Avid in 1993/4. An assistant would load in and log the rushes. The editor might then create an assembly using the best takes of performance footage. After that, conceptual and/or narrative footage would be dropped in. This system was possible because of the 'non-linear' system created by Avid. Some editors preferred the Lightworks non-linear system, but within a few years, Avid had dominated.

AD: We've got a massive leap in time in the list between 1987 and 1993. That's all through the club, that's all through ecstasy isn't it. And there was no money in the early '90s.

TK: Basically the record companies got wise to people ripping them off in the late '80s. They went hang on a minute...

EC: I think we have got a constellation of videos in other links between this time in '87 and '92. But they're quite low budget. And so they haven't filtered through. There's a lot of dance videos in there which I think are iconic and classic but everyone says they're really badly crafted. And I'm like, yeah but they're drug induced, and it's really important. Russell Curtis's video for The Prodigy's 'Out Of Space' *is* one of Pitchfork's top 100 music videos. I just think it's absolutely brilliant. It's so British, and so faithful to the fans.

AJ: I tell you what, this would have been so different if it had, if it was post-dated Avid. It would have been so different.

JK: Would they have done any grading in Avid at this time?

DS: I did it all in Avid. I did all the grading at that time.

DK: This was shot; this was edited on...

TK: U-matic.

DK: I think they were probably doing grading by that point.

TL: Pre-Avid editing, the over glaze. You know, it's the video effects. They had these machines with the faders you could go positive, negative.

DS: Actually yeah another one that was an example that was. The video for Moloko 'Sing It Back' that we did, I don't know if it's the best edit in the world but we did lots of outputs of K-Scope and kind of used that. It just reminded me. But that was just based on the Michael Jackson video that did the same thing. But it's edited in the Avid so it's not what you're talking about. But then I found that they had dumped all those, the K-Scope all got trashed, you know no one in town kept one. So obviously you can do that in Flame but it doesn't look the same.

TL: Could you argue that it's part of the edit suite of the late '80s, that kind of having all those effects. Or is that part of the online?

AJ: I think it's part of the online, the VFX though isn't it? That's what VFX was. Going into an online suite and doing stuff.

TL: It's also when it's edited too, it's like...

EC: They weren't so separate, they weren't so separate stages. They were going...

TK: You would plug in on a vision mixer rather than... a machine plugged in.

JK: ... Doing that with sound now, because you're mixing sound effects and things breaking the music, adding stuff in and then exporting it back out as the main track that's then used for the video. So the editor is then responsible for doing the audio for the video that's going out which is kind of that once upon a time been unheard of. They wouldn't have touched the master.

TK: We were saying, near the beginning, there was people like Daniel Wolfe who were making videos that are kind of small films. And cutting up the music in and out so …

DS: I cut this on Avid and we then went in and did lots of passes…

AJ: And then recut it?

DS: Then recut it. Yeah and then did it again.

AJ: Because it looks amazing.

DS: It was shot on 35mm.

AJ: It's beautiful, isn't it?

DS: For 20 grand.

EC: 20 grand?

The editors involved in our focus group worked mainly in offline editing companies in Soho, London, although Dawn Shadforth began her career directing and editing in Sheffield. Most of the offline editing companies in the 1990s and 2000s specialised in one sector of film and television editing: commercials, music videos, television, or feature films. In feature films, many editors were freelance and the producer would engage their services and the facilities of an offline editing company separately. Not so editing, where the general rule was that an editor had a permanent base in one of the Soho companies. They would mix with editors from other sectors when they took their EDL (edit decision list) and rough cut into the online editing house for a conform with effects. These encounters made the editors aware of a certain hierarchy in the field. And this level of specialism meant that very few editors were regarded as talented across the spectrum of film and television editing. The art and craft of music video editing became a specialist skill, and I asked the editors to talk about some of the unique techniques and how they emerged in these years.

TK: What I love about cutting videos was the freedom that it didn't have to make sense. As long as it felt great. It felt good and you could juxtapose things, the juxtaposition could really enhance images and the track and just evoke something. You don't know, it wasn't even intended.

And I just love that. Kind of working on films now, you're basically working with a script and things have to progress but with something like this and with music video you could have the material…

TL: The music is your script, it's what you cut to, it's your map. The feeling you get, the changes in the music. The verses and the choruses…

TK: When I started those things had just… I remember being, David Yardley telling me about he really had a problem with film editors. He was saying, he met a film editor and he was like you're cutting film? And David said, no on tape. And the guy said, oh you're just an engineer then. And it really hurt him.

TL: Which is ironic because film is the more 'engineery' of the two.

TK: There was a snobbery about video at the time. Actually interestingly enough, until the '90s there was quite a degree of snobbery in other areas about music videos. They were quite dismissed as being like messing. Not proper filmmaking, not proper … It was really looked down upon. I mean obviously if you look at a lot of the videos from the late '80s I can understand why they were looked down on.

TL: The craft of video has got better … Video was an unruly art form to start with and everyone was just making it up as they went along.

TK: There is a relatively swift learning process going from shooting everything on video tape and then shooting on film and then getting more adventurous ideas. And also then exploring, being more innovative in terms of lighting techniques and visual techniques. And being ahead of the game.

DS: All of that stuff that you are talking about earlier, about just getting into it and making it up as you went along but that was feeding over into the film world…

TL: Has anyone seen *Natural Born Killers* recently? Because that was so 'music video'.

DS: I watched *Buffalo 66* and a lot of that was influenced by music video, especially towards the end. And Darren Aronofsky …

TL: *Requiem for a Dream.*

TK: Music video's gone from being a despised unruly kid in the corner to being actually aspiring.

EC: Because there's a sort of pyramid, a hierarchy if you like. And feature films are at the top. But music video is a total absolute art form in itself. You can't just judge it by other standards.

AD: Music video had to escape from being the little brother of commercials in a way. A new generation of people like Tim Pope came along and had to invent the form. Before then a lot of the new wave stuff was just a band in a room shot with a different set of gels and a video camera … It had to escape from being, you know, just a document. I think it was far more innovative in the '60s.

TK: I remember myself and Pedro were quite depressed when we saw this video for the Spencer Davis Group 'I'm a Man'. It was made in 1967. And it looks like it was made in 1997. It's got all the mad jump cuts; people doing mad dancing in the street; A lightbulb swinging back and forth. And a close up of … And we were watching this going … Pedro somehow had it on tape at the time. We watched it, do you remember when they were doing these videos, really fast double exposed. Fast cutting and shot on an H-16 Bolex? It was made in 1967.

AJ: If you're talking music sequences in films. There's two that stick out for me: *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner.* And *The Knack…and How to Get It* … They're amazing, they're as fresh now as they could have been in the 90s and now … Their sequences to music are amazing and they're like music videos in the feature film. The musicality to the editing those sequences is amazing. *A Hard Day's Night* did it as well, obviously, every single… most famously the bit where they're running around they escape.

TL: Antony Gibbs is the editor…

AJ: Antony Gibbs, that's it. He did *The Knack…and How to Get It* but he didn't do *A Hard Day's Night.*

TL: That's John Jympson….

The next excerpt from our transcript from the editors' focus group centres on the craft of editing performance videos on a non-linear editing system. The two videos we looked at were both released in 1996 and edited by Tony Kearns: The Manic Street Preachers' 'A Design For Life', directed by Pedro Romhanyi, and The Prodigy's 'Firestarter', directed by Walter Stern.

EC: Shall we have a quick look at Manic Street Preachers, 'A Design For Life'?

TK: This is a multi-camera film. It doesn't actually look… Pedro's idea was for it to be; you'd get continuity in movement from different cuts. But it actually turned out that there's not a hell of a lot of it from there to there. But it's shot on four cameras. I shot, I was given one camera.

DK: It was shot at the Roundhouse, wasn't it?

TK: It was shot at the Roundhouse, yeah. And then there's a mixture of the archive footage. This is where, like we were talking earlier, about the proper film optical effects. It's not digital or post. And it's been manipulated on film and scratched…

AJ: And hand processed and stuff.

TK: Yeah, and then I mixed in and out from the clean stuff back into being in and out. And then we did the projections in camera. Pedro asked me to shoot slow-mo. I just do mad stuff, kind of like, so I was kicking the camera and dropping it. He wanted to get something as it different. So it's a combination of considered shots and more chaotic. A little bit more. Which is then reflected in the overlays. This is where you've got the sense of the Roundhouse all in one take.

DS: Were the projections there for real?

TK: Yeah that's all in camera.

DS: So did you cut the projections before the shoot as well. You knew where certain frames were going to…

TK: Yeah exactly.

AJ: Yeah the projections were all synced to the track.

TK: We had to plan then where the cameras would be to kind of catch the…

AD: Are they film projections?

TK: No, they were video projections.

AJ: It's beautifully shot, isn't it?

EC: I mean this is clearly a project you were involved in right from the beginning.

TK: Yeah these shots here that's my excellent camera work. The camera assistant went nuts. He was trying to pull focus and I slapped him and said 'I don't need that'.

DS: So that's also in terms of curating the images that were going to be in the background and how they and emotionally how that connects with the music.

TK: And the obviously political message of the song was reflected in the footage.

DK: I feel a bit bad that I didn't feature it on *Promo* at the time.

TK: I've forgiven you, Dave.

EC: What about the Prodigy videos?

TK: 'Firestarter' is a great track with lots of stuff to work with. John Lynch did the lighting… there's so much going on in each frame. And cockroaches. I went through a phase where nearly every video I did had cockroaches in it.

EC: But that's really interesting what you just said there: you can't have a great music video unless you have a great piece of music, for a music video? Not many people would realise that. They think you can make a great music video no matter what with a piece of music. If you're not experienced…

TK: Well no, there was that *Not the Nine O'Clock News* spoof video, 'Nice Video, Shame About the Song'. But you basically get a director, a good person to work with, can't really work on a song that they don't relate to… So the song inspires the director and then if it's a bland piece of pop you're not necessarily going to get something that is like this, which is great music. You're just, you're going to get more from it. And this has got so much peaks and troughs.

AJ: 'Firestarter' for me is when technology … The first proper… when Avid, the tool Avid or the non-linear system. It's the one that went: 'this is how you make videos from now on'. In terms of the edit. Obviously 'The Changing Man' video predates it and… performance on that Prodigy, for me it's like 'the one' in terms of editing.

TK: The fact that it's one point of view looking down the tunnel made me explore the cutting.

AJ: Yeah, it pushed you to a different place.

DS: Were you cutting on Avid?

TK: I'd been cutting on Avid for a couple of years. But it was the limitations of the location and the performance that make the video. There were no rules to follow.

AJ: This is a seminal British edited music video.

DS: Inventing a new kind of performance video.

AJ: A new language.

The discussion also turned to the notion of the 'fast MTV edit'. The editors were aware that this was a style of editing in Hollywood feature films that had been attributed to them. They were concerned to counter the idea that this was a uniform style of editing in British music video and drew attention to examples such as Radiohead's 'Street Spirit' (1995) which was edited by Rick Russell as works which were quite the contrary. Consistent with the description of editing in Walter Murch's In the Blink of Eye (2001)*, the editors were keen to emphasise the importance of emotion in judging whether or not a cut worked and the difficulties of articulating that emotion in a set of rational principles. They were also keen to point out the difficulties of having assumptions about audience impatience and the necessity of fast cuts to keep viewers interested imposed on them.*

AJ: The editing was landmark in Jonathan Glazer's video for 'Street Spirit' - for the ramping. John McManus and one of my partners, Neil. It was his assistant. And they would do their own tables about how, you know on graph paper, on how to ramp the footage. And it hadn't been done before. … You wouldn't have been able to do that if it weren't for the non-linear technology.

TK: I was watching the other day, and it was, aside from the ramping, it's just the presentation of the, the atmosphere it evokes, it's so fresh and strong. And it's not cutting fast, it's, each edit is precisely placed to get to the next stage of the … what you're being shown. And it was really radical because it was actually laid back in terms of the cutting but it's all precise. And also it was just a breath of fresh air, excuse the cliché, but… obviously that was Jonathan Glazer's genius, was to go 'right this is how we're doing this'. And it's just so, like I was saying, I was watching it and it was like I was seeing it for the first time, then. ….

TL: There's definitely a period, like with the internet, where stuff got longer. And when YouTube got high quality and suddenly everyone had an intro, an outro, and a break in the middle… yeah sound, they became like little movies. Whilst prior to that you had to fight to get anything other than just the track. It was hard to get anything else. … I mean there's the big technological changes with film, the two machines, and Avid. I guess the internet as well.

DK: Picking up on your point about YouTube, people watching it online having an impact on how things are edited. It's worth remembering that the MTV style was really talking about editing in many ways. Sort of in the late '80s, or mid to late '80s when people went, popular culture picked up, and there was fast cutting style was described as an 'MTV style of editing'… Music video itself introduced a new way of editing. And that in itself is kind of like the starting point really.

TK: I got a phone call from somebody from MTV saying they had this video that they had got from America. They wanted to me have a look at it, to see about re-cutting it for MTV. They literally said 'It's for the kids, man... It's really slow'. It needs to be jazzed up, there needs to be more editing in it.

DK: The whole thing about attention span...

TK: But there was a presumption that the audience had attention deficiency disorder. I watched the video. I rang the woman back and I said 'I'm not doing it. It's a really good video, it doesn't need jazzing up, it's lovely. And it's going to be a hit. I tell you, it's just going to be a hit'. It was Nelly Furtado's 'Like A Bird'. And she was really really shocked. And bemused by me saying this. But I wouldn't do it, because I didn't, I felt it didn't… it was actually a really good video. And it was actually really well cut.

AJ: The way I like to cut music videos was to over cut it. As I got tired of being asked can you make it faster. So I could take it out so which was simpler. So if you had three shots, just take one out so you had two. Slow it down as opposed to spending more time trying to make it faster. And that was something that evolved from commissioners.

DS: I do think it's gone a little bit in the other direction now, in that I find that there's quite a lot of craft gone out of editing and maybe it's because there's so many videos being made and being made by so many people. And everyone is an editor. Everyone is a director. And everything is being shot at 60fps. And cut really slowly.

JS: Is it the case that innovation in music video editing can be associated with particular music genres and the advent of particular music genres? Or is that a kind of naive question?

AJ: I don't think so. The ramping thing that we talked about in the 'Street Spirit' isn't that it could have only happened for Radiohead. I think it's just certain factors just fall into place.

TK: Also, if you're cutting to music, the music has got a certain tempo and rhythm, then the visuals will work with that. That's a precision cut to the sound, to the music. It does mirror…

DS: I was teaching at a college and the students were using either a channel or an app to edit. It's just a thing where you send all your footage to it and it just cuts it for you. Apparently it doesn't really work very well, but …

DK: Bring back the humans.

DS: It won't be long.

…..

TK: I think what I used to be critical of was when people made videos and gave everything away in the first thirty seconds. In the old days that was a requirement from some record companies, they said 'we want all the best shots in the first minute'.

DS: Well you still hear that now. You hear it more now with the internet and people clicking off.

AJ: When Tim Nash was at Atlantic I remember he came in and said Atlantic have done a study and they know most people turn off at 52 seconds. And if they haven't by then they will watch it all. So you have to do something within the first 52 seconds that will make, will keep them watching…. I dunno what that was.

In the UK, directors have tended to involve themselves more in the offline edit than in the USA where directors are more likely to be absent from the suite and attend only for comments and approvals on the cut at different stages. This may have arisen because of the adoption of workflow systems from commercials; in the USA many agencies hired offline editors on separate contracts to the director. Thus the director in short form commercial work in the USA is more likely to regard him or herself as the creative director only on the casting and principal photography, not the post production. In addition, many British directors have also chosen edit their own work: Chris Cunningham, Sophie Muller, Richard Heslop, and Dawn Shadforth, are a few examples. The group discussed this.

AJ: I remember the story of Tony Kearns meeting David Slade and goes, 'you know you cut your own video', David said 'yeah' and Tony went 'don't'.

DS: I got to the point when I was cutting my own videos and realised that I shouldn't be. Tony's got a good point.

TK: It's a bit of worse for worse.

DS: There are some videos that I kind of ruined because I cut them myself.

TK: The videos you cut yourself were great … I think somebody who wasn't an editor wouldn't have done that, cut those edits. You were an editor, so that's different. But there's a certain way, as an editor, you work, there's things you wouldn't necessarily see as a director, you know, and that's why I don't think it's a good idea people cut their own stuff.

AJ: 'Song 2', Blur. My favourite performance video, ever. I love the edit.

EC: Sophie edited it herself.

TK: She cuts her own videos. I was trying for years to get her to cut something, and at first she was 'oh yeah I'll get you to do it' and then she was like, 'oh no, I do it myself now'.

AJ: She used me a few times. I'd come in the day and she would come in at night and recut it all.

TL: She's always so polite, oh yeah nice job. And then I'd see the edit, like a few days later and I'd be like 'Brilliant edit'!

DS: She used to ring me up and ask about editors. And I'd suggest people to work with and then she'll just do it herself...

AD: She's the best editor in the world, in music video, I think.

TK: She's brilliant. I remember when I was in VCR and had just finished the edit. And she'd done the online for 'Song 2' and she said, 'Tony will you have a look at this' and it was just like proper speakers, really loud and I was just like… I was literally up against the wall. I watched it and I was like … 'it's fine'. I've got a lot to learn, haven't I? It was an amazing experience.

Towards the end of the focus group, we looked at examples of recent music videos from YouTube. A discussion followed about whether the art of editing had gone because the craft had declined as editing software had become widely adopted on a domestic basis. The craft of editing had become synonymous with knowing how to use the software rather than how to bring a 'song' to life using techniques learned from previous generations of specialist music video editors.

DS: I just think in terms of edits, it's harder now to create a really good strong edit because the time constraints that are put on people. You have to kind of fight for that time to make, if you really know, I think a lot of people coming through now are kind of … Maybe our generation know that you've got to block that out and have the time and fight for it. But the new generation and commissioners can create an edit in like two, three days. You know, and I don't feel like that was the same when we were.

TL: It's quick times, as well. It's the fact that the edit gets shared to so many people. Whilst prior to that, they were all came to the room and discussed it. And the band would come and the management and they're all on the same page … Commissioning has changed and used to be more of a curation. It was more like a kind of creative director

and an agency. Now there's so many videos to make and there's so little money, so it's like, 'let's just get it done'.

TK: One thing I would like to say, very quickly, is that it's great to be seeing my colleagues here and have what I feel, if I may say, is a sense of continuity because I assisted David Yardley on a couple of these videos in the mid-80s and Colin Green and there's a lot of work that went through and then I learnt a huge amount from David Yardley. And I didn't know he cut 'Money', the first thing on the list, and I was watching it the other night and I said it's definitely, it's typical. What I learnt from him was how to use, to bring out and work with the music. And to get a shot just doesn't mean anything on its own. But when it's cut to a particular note or a particular musical thing you just suddenly, you just, it comes to life. And then it's great, and you know, obviously moved on and was editing myself and ... Worked with Adam and Tom. I feel like it's just great for me, it's an absolute pleasure and privilege to be here. To have this acknowledgement of our and my own contribution to … And we might all say this, at the time we didn't all know what we were doing in a sense. We were just working, we were just cutting, kind of reacting to what we were seeing. And what we were hearing. And obviously, this was years later, in my case like twenty years later. There's a sense of a body of work. But at the time, we were just doing it. Anybody would say that, we were just, it was exciting and it was a great sense of adventure. But also just doing something that you just kind of did. Rather than making a big deal, there was no theory, no sense of making the mark. You were just lucky to be in that position and to do it. Obviously it sounds, but in hindsight and looking back the work is given a sense of importance or its contribution. But at the time we were just … and having fun. And working really hard!

EC: I'd like to thank you all for giving up your time to come here today.

TK: My pleasure. It's great to have a sense of … thank you for organising it and it's great for the acknowledgement people's work.

EC: You know, I'm just hoping the mics worked. I might have to ask you to all come back again and say the same thing. All over again. Next week. I'm only joking.

Conclusion

These excerpts from the focus group only form a short part of the overall discussion that took place. But they are sufficient to challenge the view that, in the UK, an MTV 'fast edit' style dominated editing practice. It is illuminating to appreciate the role of technologies and software

on editing practices, but a fuller evaluation of the differences between editing in music video and editing for narrative feature films of the kind that Vernallis's analysis discussed in the opening of this piece, requires a much more detailed analysis of the videos cited here and others. That analysis will add to the still limited literature on the art and craft of editing available to students and researchers interested in this hugely important but under-researched dimension of film craft. For our present purposes, these comments really do demonstrate the extent to which the relationship of videos and their song tracks in British music video history were created not only during the shoot, nor during the initial period of conception of the idea for the video, but by an intricate, negotiating, and often quite experimental process of trial and error in post-production.

Glossary

Faders – video effects controls

Flame – a 3D digital visual effects software package

Grading – adjusting colour in online editing

K-scope – a real time graphics system for video effects

Offline editing – the logging and editing of rushes to create an EDL (edit decision list) for online editing

Online editing – the transformation of the EDL involving colour balancing, visual effects, audio tuning

Over glaze – added visual effects in U-matic editing

Ramping – altering frame-rate to affect film speed

RM 440 Controller – automatic editing controller for U-matic tape editing

Telecine – the transfer of film to video

VFX – visual effects

Vision mixing – mixing video sources to create special effects

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