

Screenwriting as Editing, Editing as Editing: *Hard Core Logo* from Page to Screen

The adaptation of a book into a screenplay is a delicate balancing act. Stick too close to the source material and the result may lack visual interest and dramatic momentum; stray too far, and the film will bear little resemblance to its supposed inspiration. Examples of the latter within the past few years include *Constantine*, based on the comic book series *Hellblazer*, which rendered its title character all but unrecognizable; and *I, Robot*, which resembled Isaac Asimov's novel in name only, and was in fact modified from an original screenplay with no prior connection to its purported source. Falling somewhere in the middle of this continuum is *Hard Core Logo*, a little-known Canadian film released in 1996. *Hard Core Logo* is a rare example of an adaptation that strikes the appropriate balance between originality and fidelity.

Though the terms are similar, the differences between textual and film editing are vast. A textual editor strives to remain as true as possible to the work of the original author, a task which allows limited room for personal creativity; in contrast, the job of the film editor is almost entirely creative, and can substantially alter the narrative of the film. Noel S. Baker, the screenwriter responsible for transforming Michael Turner's book into a movie script, is neither, and yet his work on *Hard Core Logo* incorporates significant aspects of both. As well, in the book *Hard Core Roadshow*, his diary of the writing and filming of the script, he highlights the importance of film editing to the presentation of the final product.

The book *Hard Core Logo*, written by Michael Turner, is an unusual choice for a film adaptation. It is not a typical prose narrative; rather, it is told in snapshots, with song lyrics and fragments of conversation, interviews, press releases, and answering machine messages.

It tells the story of a defunct Canadian punk band, the titular Hard Core Logo—lead singer Joe Dick, guitarist Billy Tallent, bass player John Oxenberger, drummer Pipefitter—reuniting to perform at a benefit concert, then embarking on a five-city tour. The book opens with a letter from the organizer of the benefit concert to Joe; it ends with a classified ad placed by “Joe Mulgrew,” who “used to go by the name / of Joe Dick,”¹ in an attempt to form a new band after his hopes for a permanent reunion of the old band have been dashed.

Director Bruce McDonald acquired the film rights to the book, then selected Baker to write the screenplay. Despite Baker’s initial uncertainty about how to adapt the material—“it’s just a whisper of a movie idea, maybe too lean and spare”—he was, at first, determined to stay as close as possible to Turner’s original text. For his first treatment, he writes that he “Found a few linking devices, and otherwise just transcribed the book as is into a workable cinematic form.” He adds, “Must thank Turner for writing so little yet suggesting so much. Adapting novels to the screen is usually a process of subtraction. In this case it’s not and I’ve had a great time filling in the blanks.”²

Baker’s story of writing the screenplay is, in many ways, the story of his shift from the mindset of a textual editor to that of a film editor. On October 4, 1994, while working on the first draft, he writes:

I love this material and hope I can bring the book’s sensibility straight to the screen without having to get too much in the way. This is nothing to do with laziness, but a desire to see the best aspects of the book reach the screen as the author intended.³

Less than a month later, however, he is beginning to have doubts about this approach:

I’ve taken Turner’s book and transcribed it, and I now see that it reads like a book in script form and has yet to take on a life of its own as a movie script. Have to figure out how to make these characters work for film.⁴

¹ Turner 197

² Baker 12–14

³ *ibid.* 24

⁴ *ibid.* 31

With each rewrite of the script, Baker struggles with his misgivings about deviating too far from the source. When he meets Turner for the first time, he is “still feeling odd, maybe even guilty, about my position as adapter of his work,” adding, “The guy sold his film rights, we can do what we want with the story. Yet my need for the author’s approval or friendship remains.”⁵ Soon after, he and McDonald begin to discuss the prospect of killing off one of the main characters, a significant departure from the events of the book. By February 10, 1995, “Page upon page of great words, many from Turner’s book, are being excised in the interest of economy and pace. Such is screenwriting. You kill your own. You eat your young. Or, in the case of adaptations, somebody else’s.”⁶ On May 16 of the same year, he writes:

The earlier drafts are products of a stubborn fidelity to the source book. These days I’m thinking less and less about Michael Turner’s literary intentions and more about my own intention to write the best rock ‘n’ roll movie ever made.⁷

By June 21, he is “now past the proverbial point where the adapting screenwriter chucks the source material to focus on ‘the movie that has to be made. Always hated this pompous phrase.... Yet here I am using it and meaning it,’”⁸ and outlines the major changes made to the script. He has scrapped the book’s idea of the benefit concert and reunion shows all being acoustic, as electric would “play better on film”⁹; the benefit concert, originally sponsored by an environmental group called the Green World Coalition, works “in the book, but it’s too soft and visually obvious for the film,” and has been changed to “an anti-gun rally called Rock Against Guns”¹⁰; he has developed a new narrative structure for the film, where McDonald himself takes part in the story as a documentary filmmaker shooting

⁵ Baker 42–43

⁶ *ibid.* 57–58

⁷ *ibid.* 78

⁸ *ibid.* 89

⁹ *ibid.* 74

¹⁰ *ibid.* 89–90

Hard Core Logo's reunion tour; an interlude in the book, in which aging punk star Bucky Haight tells stories about the music business, has been made more relevant by having Haight be a victim of gun violence, and making the rally for his benefit. Though the digression his presence provides functions well in book form, it would be too disconnected for film, which demands a certain level of narrative coherency, without bringing him into the story early on. As well, Baker has fundamentally altered one of the characters, bass player John Oxenberger, "from the know-it-all bookish arty one, into a schizophrenic who loses his lithium prescription during the tour."¹¹ Later, Baker muses somewhat bitterly on the differences between text and film as storytelling media:

The inadequacy of pictures as a primary vehicle for telling stories.... Screenwriting is a blighted ghetto, a literary no-man's-land. Screenwriting serves as a medium which does not prize language, poetry, wordplay, or conversation. While there's usually a need to write dialogue... talk is considered a mere footnote to image. Pictures have all the power.... Wrote a new scene for John where he burns his diary after Pipe reads it aloud. He faces the camera as it burns, telling Bruce with no small amount of irony and bitterness that "words come and go, but pictures never die."¹²

Gradually, the script becomes a singular beast, largely retaining the spirit of Turner's work even as it evolves into an entirely new story—or, perhaps, the same story told by a more objective eye. Turner's book is full of subtle, understated contradiction. Joe Dick claims the band's split "was a friendly ending, / but we played up the dissent thing / 'cause that's what people wanted."¹³ Later, John thinks to himself, "*I guess it was the way we ended it.... Nobody was speaking to anyone anymore, even though we all flew back to Vancouver on the same flight. It just didn't end right.*"¹⁴

¹¹ Baker 90

¹² *ibid.* 109–110

¹³ Turner 14

¹⁴ *ibid.* 22

Baker's final script plays up this disconnect between reality and Joe's self-serving self-delusion. Instead of a portrait of the band as a whole, it becomes something like a love story between Joe and guitarist Billy Tallent. The benefit for Bucky Haight turns out to be fake; Joe invented the story of Haight's shooting as an excuse to lure Billy back to the band, and uses the proceeds from the rally to fund McDonald's documentary of the subsequent reunion tour. Once Billy comes back, Joe believes he can convince him to rejoin the band permanently. As in Turner's book, Billy eventually grows disenchanted with Joe once again and leaves to join a more promising musical group, a move Joe sees as selling out.

The most drastic change to the story, however, comes not from Baker's script, but from Hugh Dillon, the actor playing Joe Dick. Unlike many screenwriters, Baker stayed on set during the filming, sharing a hotel suite with McDonald; as a result, he is present when Dillon

...comes up to our suite with a little suggestion about the ending:

"I wanna die at the end of the picture."

Hmmm. Don't know about this. We tried killing both John and Billy in earlier drafts, and it never seemed to work. Somehow, we never thought of killing Joe. He's the Energizer Bunny of the bunch, the one most likely to just keep going and going and . . . it just didn't seem to be in the cards. Hugh persists. His Joe Dick is an all-or-nothing guy, true enough. Might work. We kick it around and start to see the logic of it, start talking ourselves into it. I draw the usual blank stare when I offer, "A bullet in the head would furnish an appropriate thematic closure to the film, the perfect culmination of the rock 'n' roll myth."

Hugh: "Whatever. I just think I should fuckin die at the end."¹⁵

It is telling that Baker is not at all worried that Dillon's proposed ending would deviate so sharply from Turner's book. Rather, he is more concerned with whether it would make sense for the character. Also telling is that this, as well as other, less significant changes, arises not from the screenwriter but from the actor—not merely because it was the actor who suggested it, but also because it only works for the character as Dillon plays him. On paper,

¹⁵ Baker 193

“Joe Dick is a cockroach, a survivor. He’ll fuck people over in order to get what he wants, to keep on going. It simply doesn’t make sense... for him to blow his brains out in the final frame.”¹⁶ Yet Joe Dick as portrayed by Hugh Dillon is far more complex; Dillon brings to the role Joe’s intense, single-minded focus on Billy Tallent, more so than was called for in the script, and “what he wants” always involves Billy in some way. In this context, it makes perfect sense that after being rejected by Billy for the last time, Joe kills himself. The inherent “fuck you” of the act is directed at Billy and no one else.

Baker’s new attitude toward adaptation is highlighted in his entry on October 24, 1995, when he presents Turner with a copy of the final script:

He turns page after page, intrigued, curious to see what has become of his characters and his story. The smile fades as he starts turning pages furiously:
Hey, I don’t see *any* of my writing in here, he says.
I shrug, give my now standard line about film being a hyperbolic medium, about writing the film that had to be made, etc.
Wait a minute, Turner says, here’s something: “Fuck you.”¹⁷

Adaptation of a book into a screenplay is an intrinsically editorial undertaking, though not in the sense traditionally meant by textual editing. It bears a slight resemblance in that the ideal goal of adaptation is to remain true, to a certain extent, to the author’s original intentions; yet, as Baker discovers, what works in text form does not necessarily translate well to a visual medium, and the process is more akin to film editing. Like a film editor, Baker is rearranging the available material, and adding new material as well, in order to present the story in an ideal form. After shooting is complete and the actual work of editing is about to begin, Baker makes this comparison explicit:

Just before I leave this place for the last time Reg [editor Reginald Harkema] tells me, as if by way of warning, that any drastic cuts made to the film, to my favorite material, should not be taken personally.... I suppose screenwriters and film editors, who sort of bookend the director, always come to this point. The next “draft” of the film takes shape in the cutting room, and it will inevitably

¹⁶ Baker 194

¹⁷ *ibid.* 145

differ in some ways from the script. The script is no longer the raw material, the printed film is. What worked on paper doesn't always work on film and things change during production. You just have to trust that the director and editor will assemble the best movie they can from the available footage.¹⁸

Here, the roles have shifted; Baker is now in Turner's position, handing over his source material to the McDonald and Harkema, whose work will render the film one step further removed from the book. "What worked on paper doesn't always work on film" applies just as well in this situation as it did when Baker was writing the script. Entire scripted sequences will be cut from the final product, including a music video filmed for one of Hard Core Logo's songs, and a scene where the band encounters a group of skinheads while on the road. Throughout the book, Baker also makes mention of how the editing process contributes to a kind of manufactured reality. The same location doubles as two concert venues in two separate cities; the same porch appears in one scene set in Vancouver and another in Edmonton. When the crew films footage of the benefit concert, actual punk bands play first, garnering a far larger crowd than Hard Core Logo's lip-synching performance. In response, "Bruce says it's no big deal, we'll just cut DOA's more frenzied crowd shots into the HCL performance footage. We'll boost crowd noise on the soundtrack. In the cutting room Reg will reconstruct a far more fabulous reality than there ever was here."¹⁹ As Baker scripts the reality of *Hard Core Logo*, so the Harkema will bring it to life.

As Baker was not directly involved in the actual editing of the film, he does not have much insight to offer in that regard. He does, however, check in at several points during the process, which illuminates just how much of the story can be altered after the fact. On January 9, 1996, the film is just starting to come together; at the beginning, McDonald tells Baker, there is "a lack of clarity about who HCL are, and why this 'documentary' is being

¹⁸ Baker 223

¹⁹ *ibid.* 166

made about them at all. He suggests I write some kind of new setup, maybe even using a narrator to set the scene.” McDonald speaks in terms of what the film “wants to be,” and how he and Harkema are struggling to bring that to the screen.²⁰

Baker later views a “fine cut” of the film, which he again likens to a “first draft,” trimmed to about 100 minutes from the rough cut’s 115. It is evident that McDonald and Harkema are still struggling with the material:

It begins well, funny and punchy.... But within minutes the film starts going flat.... The scenes I wrote are happening more or less as I wrote them, but they don’t grip me, I don’t feel connected to them. Some of the biggest story points, like the revelation that Bucky has healthy legs after all, fail to register.... I am gratified when the audience chuckles here and there at some obvious jokes and several of Hugh’s ad-libs, disappointed when I gird myself for explosions of laughter at my funniest bits, only to get no reaction.... I am gripped by the feeling that the whole film is a stranger to itself, that it doesn’t know what it wants or where it’s going, that it is crying out for signposts and maps to tell us not only where the band are headed, but where the story is headed. I begin to wonder whether the weaknesses are due to the poverty of the writing or the way the film has been cut together. The structure is sort of there, but so many moments play flat. The actors’ performances are terrific, but the way they are put to use fails to do them justice.²¹

Subsequently, McDonald and Harkema make further cuts, and Baker writes some explanatory dialogue to be dubbed over the film. Small additions, such as bumper shots and several seconds of mock-archival footage, are made; still more is cut, so that the final runtime of the film is 92 minutes. Baker says that “Lots of little things have been tweaked, tightened, and boosted over the last month,” yet those little changes have a huge impact that is immediately evident in the second screening:

Right away I can see that this is a radical improvement over the fine cut. The pace is much faster at the beginning. Text flashes on screen, explaining who Hard Core Logo are, when they were formed, when they split up, what they’re doing here. It’s simple, clear and quick, a documentary device that shoehorns us into the movie right away. In fact, all the improvements seem to derive from documentary devices: voice tracks sourced out of one scene or interview now appear over visuals from other places, giving the film greater speed yet more depth, a more seamless blend of forward thrust and backstory. There are now shots of an animated map of Canada showing

²⁰ Baker 227–228

²¹ *ibid.* 228–229

where the band's tour is headed. Dates and times are now posted on the screen, giving a clearer sense of the relationship between time and distance on the tour. The stakes are better defined, there's much more logic and dramatic tension throughout, even though the film is about six minutes shorter than the fine cut was. Above all, it's funnier. The essence of comedy is timing, and Bruce and Reg have the timing down very nicely throughout.... The film has found its feet.²²

Baker's reaction to the first screening emphasizes an important fact of the film editing process: ultimately, it is not only the quality of the script that determines the quality of the film, but also how that scripted material is arranged. He wonders whether the poor presentation is the fault of his own writing, because the editing does not yet serve the story. *Hard Core Logo* represents a hugely collaborative effort. Turner wrote the book; Baker wrote the screenplay, with input from the director, the producers, and countless others, including his wife; the actors brought the characters to life, ad-libbed some of the best material, and, in the case of Dillon, inspired radical changes to the storyline; yet, in the end, it was the McDonald's and Harkema's responsibility to make everything work. Had they not done their job well, the gritty, tense *Hard Core Logo* could easily have been released as the dismal muddle Baker originally described.

From the information Baker provides, the difference between the two versions is staggering, based on only six minutes total of excised footage and some judicious rearranging of material. It is intriguing that Baker claims the documentary devices were what ultimately caused the film to cohere, as he and McDonald were uncertain throughout the script-writing process whether the documentary conceit was in fact the ideal format for the film. Unfortunately, the original fine cut is not available for viewing, so the exact nature of the changes cannot be determined. Some notes can be made, however, about what is particularly effective in the editing of the final product, and how it may differ from the fine cut.

²² Baker 231–232

The film opens with the names of the characters, not the actors, flashing on screen, maintaining the illusion of the documentary. Its designation as “an Ed Festus production” is a subtle joke without an immediate payoff; its humor only becomes apparent later in the film, as throughout, Joe blames Festus, the band’s former manager, for breaking them up in the first place.

After these fake credits, interview clips of Joe Dick and a mostly-silent John Oxenberger are interspersed with title cards explaining the band and the setup of the story. The interview clips serve more to give the audience a sense of Joe’s character than to provide any actual information, though there is one part where he and John argue over whether Bucky Haight was shot in one or both legs, foreshadowing the discovery that he was in fact never shot at all; the true purpose of this sequence is to provide a backdrop for the title cards without sacrificing an immediate sense of forward momentum. In this manner, the viewer learns that “Hard Core Logo was formed in 1978,” that “they made 7 records and played over 1,000 shows,” that they “broke up in 1991,” and that “in October 1995, Joe Dick organized a benefit concert for punk legend Bucky Haight,” all within the first minute or so of the film. Here also is where McDonald’s “archival footage” of actor Julian Richings as Haight is used, only a few seconds of film that serve a dual purpose for the story: making Haight immediately recognizable when his character finally appears over an hour into the film, and also providing a sharp contrast between his frenzied, near-manic onstage persona and his later world-weary, beaten-down depiction. The entire opening sequence is underscored by rapid, constant drumming which maintains the quick pace, an evident panacea against Baker’s earlier fear that the introductory sequence moved too slowly. It is a simple yet effective device, obvious when the viewer is aware of the reasons for it, otherwise unobtrusive.

Also part of the opening is a sequence where Joe is riding in the back of a truck, presumably on his way to the benefit concert, with audio from another interview dubbed over. This is possibly one of the changes Baker mentioned between the fine and final cuts. The interviewer (McDonald) asks Joe about the other members of the band, thereby introducing the audience to them as well. This scene is cut with video of the others. John Oxenberger and Pipefitter are shown in motion, both with their respective girlfriends, while Billy Tallent is introduced in a series of black-and-white freeze frames, arriving via the Vancouver airport, emphasizing his distance from the other three. In a well-edited moment, when the dubbed Joe stops talking about Billy, the Joe onscreen closes his eyes and looks away, hinting at the primacy and complexity of this relationship both to Joe and to the film as a whole.

The drumming continues until the performances at the benefit concert begin; these are shown in speeded-up clips of the other bands playing, set to snippets of their music. These are quick cuts, as before, refusing to let the viewer's attention flag before the true heart of the story begins. Some of these fast cuts threaten to belie the documentary conceit, such as a close-up of one character immediately followed by a long shot of the same character from the other side, with no time lapse between.

Once Hard Core Logo takes the stage, they launch into their first song, and then halfway through the film abruptly cuts to McDonald interviewing Billy in the dressing room backstage. Here we get Billy's story for the first time, where he talks about playing with superstar rock group Jenifur in Los Angeles, where he intends to return immediately after the concert. "Just waiting for papers," he tells the camera. "Green card. And then I'm gone." Another small but particularly effective bit of editing shows a clip of Joe onstage, silently yelling into the camera as Billy talks about Jenifur; Joe doesn't want Billy playing with

anybody but him. The film then cuts directly back to Hard Core Logo still playing their first song. This technique, establishing Billy's back story within an interlude during a single song, condenses the apparent time lapsed and, as before, propels this part of the film mercilessly forward, as the editing will continue to do until the band hits the road. All of this introduction is necessary, but it is not the focus of the story, and in order to prevent the film from "going flat" at this point, as it did in the fine cut, it must move through these scenes as quickly as possible.

After the show, Joe and Billy are drinking in a cocktail lounge as Joe tries to convince Billy to do the five-city tour. While writing the script, Baker mused on the importance of this scene, and the difficulty in making it fit easily into the documentary framework:

I've been rewriting it for days. It's a critical moment in the story. Billy can't just up and go; there must be some resistance.... The main problem is that the scene contains information needed for the story, but isn't the kind of thing you'd see done "naturally" in a documentary. Yet we have to have this information, or there'll be a huge hole in the film.²³

The scene was originally meant to be set in the kitchen at Joe's house. McDonald decides to move it to the Tiki Room at the Waldorf Hotel in Vancouver, of which Baker says, "It's as if this hotel, which has been here since the 50s, has been waiting all this time for the 90s cocktail music scene to arrive." He is concerned that "The setting and the mood cut hard against anything else in the film.... Problem is, it really doesn't make documentary sense for the camera to be here during a private moment between two old friends."²⁴ Yet Baker soon comes to a realization:

Bruce is totally right to set the scene in the most artificial environment he could find to flaunt the fact that *HCL* is not real. If the scene was going to look obvious and forced in our documentary style, why not go hard in the other direction and turn Joe and Billy's private world into a candy-colored la-la land.²⁵

²³ Baker 200

²⁴ *ibid.* 201

²⁵ *ibid.* 202

The sense in this scene of undercutting the documentary aspect—and elsewhere, in more subtle ways, as mentioned above with the fast cuts to different physical locations in a single scene—cuts the otherwise over-the-top hyperreality of the film with just the right amount of slick packaging. Many viewers, seeing the film for the first time, believe either that it is a real documentary, or that it was based on a true story; in fact, one thread recently posted on the Internet Movie Database web page for the film asks, “Was Hard Core Logo a real band???”²⁶ This is a credit to everyone involved in the production, but it is necessary to temper this aspect in light of the final scene. A genuine documentary, ending as *Hard Core Logo* does with the on-camera suicide of the lead singer, would be difficult for an audience to accept. The sense of documentary is maintained throughout, but every so often it is subtly undermined, perhaps in preparation for this final moment.

In the Tiki Room scene, an additional level of unreality is supplied by the editing. Joe and Billy play an old game where one stops moving and the other pretends he has disappeared; when first Billy, then Joe, both play the part of the “time-traveler,” all background noise and conversation cuts out from the soundtrack as well. As Baker suggested above, it is as though the camera is truly getting a glimpse of “Joe and Billy’s private world,” and when one disappears, the entire world stops. Depending on how closely the viewer is paying attention to the scene, the cessation of sound may be jarring, or it may fail to register altogether.

Baker mentions new “dates and times... posted on the screen” in the final cut, one example of which may include the following scene, in which it is used to significant effect. Joe’s voice, ordering the rest of the band to be ready to leave at “six a.m.” the next morning, is dubbed over shots of John and Pipefitter waiting for the tour van to arrive until, as a

²⁶ <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0116488/>

rapidly changing time stamp informs the audience, sometime after eleven a.m. Aside from the humor inherent in the contradiction, this scene further illuminates Joe's character and foreshadows the doomed tour. Joe promises Billy that the reunion won't be like "the old days," and is insistent that the band get an early start on the trip, yet it is Joe himself who shows up late; despite his protestations, he has not actually changed.

The start of the road trip is the beginning of the main story; everything before has merely been prologue. As if to emphasize this shift, the previous rapid cuts give way to a long shot of a cracked statue of the Virgin Mary on the dashboard of the van. Having achieved the true thrust of the story, the film seems to take a deep breath, relaxing for the first time, allowing more leisurely shots of the scenery and the band's surroundings. Here, as well, the documentary conceit continues to be undermined in several small ways. One continuous sequence, an argument in the van, is filmed from at least four different camera angles, again with no time lapse between cuts and without any cameras being revealed in any of the shots. A subsequent scene shows Pipefitter staring through a plastic dome in the roof of the van, filmed from outside the dome as the van is being driven, causing the viewer to wonder how the camera got there in the first place. The same question is raised by a shot of the van approaching on the highway, and another, later long-distance shot of the van being driven, filmed from across a field of haystacks.

The music is used to great effect throughout, emphasizing the progression of the story arc. At the first stop in the tour, in Regina, Saskatchewan, John loses his medication and Billy learns he has been cut from the band Jenifur, signaling the start of the band's downward spiral; this scene is filmed masterfully, with John being interviewed in his hotel room, while in the background Billy stands on the balcony, listening to the telephone. After John first realizes that his pills are missing, Billy hurls the phone off the balcony, and then

the message on his answering machine, informing him of the cut, is dubbed over a freeze frame of the shot. Immediately after, the band is shown onstage, playing the ominously-named song “Something’s Gonna Die Tonight.” This is the first song played on their tour (not taking the benefit concert into account), and it will also be the last, before Joe attacks Billy onstage at the end of the film.

Later, the cancellation of the band’s concert in Winnipeg and John’s subsequent screaming fit in the van lead to a visit to Bucky Haight, who lives on a nearby farm. Baker mentioned that in the fine cut, the fact that Haight is uninjured “fails to register.” Here, it is still not immediately obvious, taking a few seconds to sink in; the first shot of Haight shows him standing on his porch, his legs hidden by the railing. Then he turns and walks away, while off-camera conversation emphasizes the point: somebody says, “Hey Joe, Bucky’s still got—” and Joe snarls, “Shut up.” It is difficult to tell whether or not this dialogue is one of the lines Baker wrote “to be looped over various scenes to clarify the story.”²⁷

At this point, Joe confesses to McDonald and the other filmmakers that he lied about Haight’s injuries in order to lure Billy back to the band. The off-camera crew, angered by the deception, then become part of the story arc, later precipitating the final confrontation between Joe and Billy when McDonald tells Joe that Billy intends to leave after all. Still at Haight’s farm, they are also made part of the story when Haight gives them (as well as the band members) acid tabs, and the cast and crew combined decide to make a movie while under the influence. While viewing the fine cut, Baker was disappointed by the execution of this scene:

...the acid movie sequence at Bucky’s has been shoved through a digital imaging grinder to create a pointless interlude of glossy, surreal, high-tech images that look like some techno band’s video instead of the fucked-up low-tech “art film” I wrote....²⁸

²⁷ Baker 230

²⁸ *ibid.* 229

He makes no mention of this sequence when discussing the final cut, so it is difficult to determine the differences between the two. The new version of this sequence lacks the digital glossiness he described, so perhaps that was one of the changes. It is a dizzying succession of disturbing images, and another level of unreality is added at this point when Joe appears to be hit in the chest with a shotgun blast; it was simple for the filmmakers to fake this scene, but how could the characters onscreen have done so? The editors also spliced in a quick shot from Joe's suicide at the end. Foreshadowing such as this occurs throughout, in more or less subtle ways. At one point, while the band are in the van late at night and Joe is falling asleep at the wheel, a ticking clock and a handgun are superimposed over a shot of the artificially looping yellow lines on the highway. Joe delivers a speech at the beginning of the film, unfortunately mangled by the actor, wherein he suggests that Haight was robbed by being "merely" shot and not actually killed, unlike other rock legends, the implication being that Joe himself would prefer to die in that manner. (The version of the speech that made it to film includes Joe's assertion that Haight was "fucking robbed," but Dillon left out the part where he explains *why* he feels Haight was robbed—because he didn't die.) During the band's final show in Edmonton, in the middle of one of the songs (not "Something's Gonna Die Tonight," but a different one), after he has already learned of Billy's impending departure, Joe points a finger at his head as though holding a gun and mimes pulling the trigger.

One odd moment of editing occurs during the show in Saskatoon, directly after the visit to Haight, when Haight told Joe never to come back. Joe says to the audience that Haight "died last night in New York City," and then the band starts playing one of Haight's songs, "Blue Tattoo," yet the scene is edited so that they start with the second verse of the

song, entirely skipping the first. It is true that the lyrics in this verse are more thematically applicable to recent events in the film—

You had no time for corruption
You felt that the world
Was an unsafe place
You worked towards a solution
But the best you could do
Was to send me away²⁹

but throughout the film, the editors are atypically conscientious about not playing with the structure of the songs in this manner, and this is a disappointing lapse.

The final sequence of the film is worth considering in depth. It is one of the few scenes that survives the transition from book to film relatively intact; in the book, during the last stage, Joe tells the audience:

This is a very special night tonight.
Not only is it the last night
of our hugely successful reunion tour,
but it's also the last night
of Billy Tallent's life.³⁰

This same dialogue is used in the film, only with added profanity, possibly an ad-lib by Dillon. In the book, the lyrics to “Something’s Gonna Die Tonight” appear following this announcement, while in the film the song is performed first. As Turner writes it, after the show, Billy goes straight from the stage to the airport without waiting to get paid. In Joe’s last direct dialogue with the reader, entitled JOE TO HIMSELF TO BILLY, Joe says, “This is it, isn’t it, Billy? / It’s really over now, isn’t it, / Billy?”³¹ The book ends with him placing his ad in the paper.

Oddly, perhaps appropriately given the fragmentary nature of the narrative, Turner never reveals exactly what Joe meant when he said the last show was also the last night of Billy’s life. This is one of the threads Baker picks up in his script, and one of the few

²⁹ Turner 144

³⁰ *ibid.* 180

³¹ *ibid.* 193

moments that feel not as though Baker added to the story, but rather that he filled in the blank with what was already there; Joe then punches Billy, as an unbalanced John begins a nonsensical chant and Pipefitter looks on in bemusement. Joe and Billy fight until members of the audience pull them apart, at which point Billy makes his exit as described in the book, walking off the stage and out of Joe's life. Directly after this is the final scene of the movie, in which Joe shoots himself, and the buildup to the act is intriguing from an editorial as well as thematic point of view.

Joe is first shown sitting on a stoop outside the club with a bottle of some unspecified liquor in his hand. After some time, he gets up and starts to walk away from the camera. For a few seconds, it seems as though he will simply continue walking, out of the shot and out of the film; this would be an adequate if unspectacular ending, and remain true to the spirit of Turner's book, in which Joe simply moves on to the next music-making opportunity. Perhaps this would be the lead-in to the scene Baker first wrote, before Dillon suggested his alternate ending. Instead, when Joe is some distance away, he stops and comes back toward the camera, saying, "We were good"—half-question, half-assertion. He asks if the crew has "everything you need," and looks satisfied when McDonald says yes. Joe then pours himself a drink and tells Bruce behind the camera, and by extension the viewer, "One last shot and *salut*," a line loaded with multiple meanings—one last shot of alcohol; one last shot at playing music with Billy; one last shot of the film; one last shot in the head, as after he drinks, he puts the gun to his head without fanfare and pulls the trigger. The filmmakers drop the camera, and the actual last shot is a freeze frame of Joe, lying on the ground, blurred by the camera's motion.

It is a breathtaking ending, one that takes the viewer by surprise even with ample foreshadowing. Perhaps it is too stark, a question Baker worried about while he and

McDonald debated the merits of the scene. The editors seem to think so, as, apparently reluctant to have this be the last image of the film, they show additional title cards interspersed with the final credits, telling what became of the four main characters: Joe's body was stolen from the cemetery a year after his death; Billy rejoined Jenifur and is engaged in a child custody battle, a callback to an earlier scene also similar to one in the book; John is fronting a country-western band and calls himself "The Ox," another callback to a scene in which he laments his inability to make a "cool punk handle" out of his name; and Pipefitter is working as a key grip on "Bruce McDonald's adaptation of *Anna Karenin*," a subtle jab at Pipefitter, who earlier in the film accused McDonald of making forgettable movies while Hard Core Logo still endured. These mini-narratives provide a much-needed dose of humor at the end, as well as forcing the viewer to recall earlier parts of the film instead of simply dwelling on the end.

The inclusion of Joe's suicide also marks a turning point in Baker's writing of the script. This is the point where he first adds a radical deviation from Turner's book, not just the minor alterations and fleshing out of material of before, more concerned now about serving the needs of the film than remaining true to the text. It was necessary for Baker to reach this point in order to write a successful script; more than that, however, it was also necessary that Baker not start at this point, but rather go through the process of achieving it. His progression from the mindset of textual editor, wanting to adhere to the author's original work, to that of film editor, willing to take existing pieces of the work and rearrange them in order to create something new, allowed him to first establish a framework for the script based on Turner's text, and then change and build upon that framework without stripping away the essential basis of the script. *Hard Core Logo* was Baker's first script that led to a completed film (all his previous efforts were halted somewhere during the production

process), and his first attempt at adapting a preexisting work; ironically, any future attempts at adaptation on his part are not likely to be as successful as *Hard Core Logo*, because he will have learned his lesson by then, and perhaps not begin writing with such a fidelity to the text.

Hard Core Logo works as an adaptation because the underlying source is clearly visible in the finished product, but it is unafraid to move beyond that source when necessary. Too many adaptations embody one aspect to the exclusion of the other, either simply transcribing the original work onto the screen and ignoring the vast gulf between text-based and image-based storytelling, or writing a script that conforms solely to visual conventions and is content merely to give minor nods to the text. Noel S. Baker's script for *Hard Core Logo* embodies the best of both worlds.

The film was nominated for a 1996 Genie Award in the categories of Best Achievement in Editing (Reginald Harkema) and Best Screenplay, Adapted (Baker), among several others, and won Best Canadian Screenplay for Baker at the Vancouver International Film Festival.