



TO: Go folk  
FROM: John August  
DATE: 7/7/98  
RE: Screening on 7/6/98

After yesterday's screening we began a good conversation about how to proceed to the next cut. I have a lot of very specific notes, but want to talk more generally about the issues we need to address.

#### **OVERALL NOTES:**

##### **Structure**

It's not by accident that we talk about the movie as "Part One, Part Two..." That's its inherent structure.

I'm glad we experimented with removing the chapter headings, but they're crucial. We need to teach the audience the structure of our movie. If the title cards as written remind us too much of *Pulp Fiction*, then let's explore freeze-frames as another way to break the movie into pieces. Regardless, a chapter-based approach is essential. Without it, we're left wandering through the movie.

##### **Pacing**

Most first cuts are flabby, but here we've cut far too close to the bone. The entire movie feels like it's playing on fast-forward. By rushing through the opening, we're not giving the audience a chance to meet (and like) Ronna, or figure out the nature of the world we're creating.

Many jokes and smaller moments are indecipherable because of the break-neck pace we've set. Beats with really good energy don't stand out like they should, because everything around them has been cut with the same breathless rush.

## **Christmas**

There is almost no sign that it's Christmas in the movie. That's not necessarily a problem, and if we get pushed to 1999, may actually be a benefit. But let's acknowledge it. If we want a Christmas feel back, it will need to be done through music and sound.

## **Opening Titles**

Opening titles have the ability to set mood, but random shots of anything are going to be hard to place in context of our three disconnect moments that open the movie. There are many options here, including putting them all at the end of the picture. I would propose forgetting about them until we get the first act working.

## **Music**

We seem to be headed in the right direction, but let's look at continuity of source music (especially at the rave and Gaines' apartment).

## **PART ONE: RONNA**

### **Reestablishing Script Sequence**

The opening of the movie is meant to show Ronna, a clerk who's been on duty 14+ hours, trying to pull off a drug deal in order to avoid being evicted. In re-sequencing, we've lost this information: it's day, it's night, we don't know where the hell we are.

### **Stringy-haired Woman**

This scene needs to establish the mood and energy of an empty supermarket at 5 a.m. Quick cutting isn't going to do this. Let the scene play out in full. Let us see how tired Ronna is, how much the baby is wiggling, how long the orange juice can spin. It's the start of a movie, and no one needs to be rushed.

Then, when Ronna finally says, "Look how far it got you," there's a sting. We talked about a freeze-frame here, and it's worth exploring. Regardless, the weight we put on this scene should establish Ronna as the center of the story.

### **Dead Celebrity**

Considerable tweaking needed here; it's not clear what they're doing. Looping may help. The scene is supposed to show that Ronna is the leader of her pack, but her pack isn't always willing to follow her. It really falls apart on Switterman's entrance.

### **Adam and Zack**

The first time we see Adam and Zack needs to be a bigger deal. Here's cute little Scott Wolf coming down Ronna's lane, and they're flirting a bit. We need to understand that they're trying to buy drugs, and a moment of Ronna not rising to their bait.

Also, we shouldn't have seen them on the TV break room. It's too confusing.

### **Beast in parking lot**

There's a good energy here, because we're moving into night. It will play even better if the scenes before it haven't been cut with the same frenetic pace.

### **Gaines**

Close to working, but I missed close-ups. Also, the music on the stereo should start low, get loud, then get low again, but it never stop altogether. We need to plan for one song that can play through the entire approach-to-door and through.

Do we have a shot where Ronna can be more startled by Gaines coming out from behind her? Do we have a shot where the beheaded stripper girlfriend doesn't just suddenly appear and disappear?

### **Mannie in the car**

Tweaks. Mannie's psychotic look over at Ronna comes out of nowhere. He looks evil, not trippy. We need the "I have an idea."

### **Tango**

The dance number was originally meant to open up the movie, and provide a moment of Christmas surrealism. It doesn't. Maybe the sequence was rough this time, but based on the footage I've seen, I can't see how this will ever work: the extras' performance is weak, Switterman thunders in and disappears, and Ronna is off-screen way too long.

Let's cut the dance number altogether. On entering the store, Ronna and Mannie split up. Stay on Mannie as he does a shorter version of the register scene — this can be funny, although it isn't yet. To show that he's tripping, let's use the same jump-cutting we use with the cat later on. Then move quickly to Ronna grabbing the pills. Boom, we're in the car driving.

### **Kids in the Van**

Liking this sequence, but panning back and forth didn't completely work. We'll need to pop between a few shots. Also, I recall Ronna doing a better take on the "smoke a lot of pot" line.

### **In the rave**

Overall, it looks good. Claire's performance with Ronna and the cups plays nicely; we need to see more moments like this.

Gaines entrance needs a cut — Gaines would have seen Mannie, who was looking right at him. Remember, Mannie was in his apartment.

### **Chase**

As we discussed, let's not see Gaines moving through the alleys — or if so, show that he's lost and looking. This sequence should be about Ronna trying to run with Mannie, who's too out of it to help.

### **Miata**

This sequence needs a lot of attention, both here and in part three. The stunt doesn't look believable, especially when the Miata backs up, the rams forward to send her off. Ronna should go into the ditch after the first hit. And we need a longer beat on Gaines when he tries to decide what the fuck to do.

## **PART TWO: SIMON**

### **Restore the parking lot scene**

This scene re-introduces us to Simon, and tells us we're going to Vegas. If we're using the freeze-frame concept, we could stop after "blowjob." Then we cut to Simon in the trunk.

I understand what was being attempted with the "is it the same day or not?" argument, but that's not part of our movie. Confusion is the enemy of comedy.

### **Tiny's story**

Partly because we've heard the story so many times in auditions, we know this scene can be funny if it's told right. Let's cut Marcus's stray lines down here, and throughout the movie.

### **Restaurant**

We're losing Simon here. We need more shots of him. Also, we need to see the shrimp more clearly.

### **Front desk**

By trimming out the desk girl, we've lost an important character moment for Simon, establishing his ask-a-hundred-girls philosophy.

### **Hotel room**

Marcus whacking Singh gives a weird and unwelcome sexual aspect, and we shouldn't shy away from seeing Simon talk on the phone. He's interesting to look at, and he's the star of this story.

Can we cut out after "raping small children?" The mother's performance is wretched.

### **Elevator with Simon and Marcus**

The joke as shot doesn't make sense. Looping a different o.s. line for Marcus may help, but I'm not convinced. If we cut this scene, we may also be able to ignore the yellow-jacket issue at the valet: the guy hands him the keys because he's black.

### **Banging the Beckys**

As we discussed, some type of crossfade needed here to show the passage of time between first and second sessions. "Tantra, baby" isn't working yet.

### **Ferrari tantra talk & gun stuff**

Snappier, less Marcus, more Simon. Despite Taye's performance, we should be able to build a better rapport between them. For instance, the scene at the Crazy Horse parking lot plays well.

### **Cut Tiny on the toilet**

We don't need it.

### **Elevator with the Vics**

This scene would play better if we let the Vics get on with the couple, then cut to Simon and Marcus getting to the room, then back in the elevator.

### **Out of the room / Down the stairs**

This scene wasn't finished, but clearly has potential.

### **Parking garage and Strip**

Fun. I didn't buy that the ramp they went up led to the strip. Instead, could we cut after the Riviera smashes through the bar to EXT. RAMP, wait a beat, then see the Riviera come up and charge?

### **Alley and Such**

We're stuck sideways too long without the Ram Charger, which we've already seen coming in. We discussed several options, including (a) shortening how long we're stuck there, (b) delaying the Ram Charger entrance into the alley. We might also want to consider restoring the broken-off mirror, if we're going to let the tension flag a bit.

After the smash, I don't understand how the Ram Charger ended up flipping over. We may need to lose the Tiny out-the-window beat too, which didn't seem motivated.

### **Restore the Vics at the phone**

It's no wonder the Vics feel less threatening: we've cut out their menace at the end of this act. This it's-over-no-it's-not spin helps propel us into Part 3.

### **PART III: ADAM AND ZACK**

#### **Break room**

Again, I would argue that this is the first time we should see on them on TV. If we're going to use the freeze frame, let's try it after the push-in, push-in, just a black TV screen.

#### **Falafel Hut**

Doesn't quite work yet, but I back away from my suggestion of intercutting it with another scene. Let's revisit after other stuff works better.

#### **Approaching Ronna's checkstand**

We may be missing a shot, but when Adam says he's not here, we only cut to a single on Ronna — he's not surveying the store. We should also play more of the scene up close at the register (duplicating Part 1), maybe up through, "there's an opera about him. I took music appreciation twice."

#### **Venice house**

We're forgetting the infidelity tension between Adam and Zack. The "with your girlfriend" argument should help remind us.

#### **Burke's house**

Adam with the plates is a helpful gay character beat. Also, Irene at the phone is loaded with tension -- let's put that back in. Without it, she just seems crazy.

#### **Liquor store**

We cut, "you will freak out and..." lines. They help establish the length of relationship between Adam and Zack.

#### **Miata**

Same problems as part one.

#### **Parked at gas station**

The long two-shot doesn't feel right. Do we have singles?

#### **Adam at the phone**

We may need to do more jumpcutting here. As it is, we can't see him make the decision to call, then hang up.

#### **Zack in the ditch**

This doesn't feel finished – too often we're using shots where Adam is decapitated by the top of the screen.

### **Leaving Ronna on the hood (without Adam and Zack)**

We've always struggled with a way to deal with the end of Adam and Zack, but in the new scene we've managed to “save the arm while killing the patient.” What's going to tell us that the Adam and Zack story is over? A title card or freeze frame that says...

## **PART IV: CLAIRE**

### **In the rave**

As she wanders around, looking for Ronna. Freeze frame on her.

### **Javaman**

This scene then clearly becomes about, “Where the hell are Ronna and Mannie?” Let this scene open up and breathe. Katie is bewitching here, even in small looks between them when no one is talking.

### **At the stairs**

Like the sex and the cat. We may need to loop a Vic Sr. line, “You must be Todd Gaines.”

### **Gaines Apartment / Simon's Apartment**

The answering machine message was a good experiment, but it doesn't work — it spoils both the tension of the fight and the conclusion Simon is supposed to have reached. This is Claire's section. Let's keep the focus on her, including her finally blowing off Gaines.

### **Restore Hospital Awakening**

### **Return to Market**

### **Finding Mannie**

The question of this section is, “Where are Ronna and Mannie?” Let's show the answer.

