

# THE 14 STEPS TOWARDS A WONDERFUL FAILURE

 **JUAN LUIS TOBOSO**

Escola Superior Artística do Porto  
CEAA | Centro de Estudos Arnaldo Araújo  
juanluis.toboso@gmail.com

## ABSTRACT

"Uffff! So what are we going to do?" ... this is how this film/essay begins. It starts with a conversation between three (maybe more) people in the kitchen of an apartment. The situation seems to be tense, but at the same time, with some charge of emotion. In the upper right edge of the image, we can find an image with the Palestinian flag. Today is November 12, 2023, the armed conflict that began in the city of Gaza a few weeks ago and slowly destroys the city and inhabitants, is still active. This methodology, which is intended to be decidedly anachronistic, in its sense of current against linear narrative time, acts interdependently with the content of each embrace. The unexpected form in which this audiovisual essay manifests itself is entirely related to the form of the project and the content of its non-narrative.

Keywords: Moving images; Manifesto; Queer; Ecology; Failure

"Uffff! So what are we going to do?" ...This is the conversation that situates the starting point, but that could be at the same time a midpoint and even the end and return point of this audiovisual essay entitled *A mani-pedi-anti-counter-FESTO for queer screen production* (Black, Kelly, Munro & Taylor 2022). An audiovisual essay of almost fourteen minutes and divided into 14 statements, which transversally and from audiovisual fragments created by each of the authors, go through different aspects connected to the creation of an intersectional queer imaginary, creating a collaborative work methodology based on kinship relationships. Understanding this kinship as something that goes beyond personal relationships in the sense that it rethinks its own meaning of this word, sometimes too much linked to a union exclusively of blood ties, to bring it to the field of "learning from each other" and based on a queer care thinking as a sharing experience. But equally towards an ecology of relationships that expands our forms of research and, why not our ways of life, with the risks involved in assuming a position of interdependence between humans and non-humans (Haraway, 2016). Kinship relations that are not always comfortable and that imply accepting the conflict and the different tensions that appear from these relations as an ontological way of constructing new radical imaginaries (Castoriadis, 1997).

### **1. THE POSSIBILITY OF FAILURE**

All possible forms of failure appear when we contemplate with uneasiness the vertigo of new forms of life in dissidence of the hegemonic forms of image production. Our bodies become aware of the limit of their condition of creators of visual narratives to exercise the experimentation of this fierce inclination vertigo. We are obsessive about failure to investigate questions related to a kind of threat: that of stability as opposed to the fragility of the tightrope. Failure, disappointment, collapse...are these ideas not a constant presence in a body of work with a vocation for success? The expectation of failure is equally proportional to the possibility of successful failure.

### **2. DISRUPTION OF THE EVER-FORWARD MOMENTUM**

"We are sick of positivity". But what kind of positivity? .... that one of useless desire, that one of the influences of inertia, that one of the lack of experimentation in the sexuality of life. This happiness makes impossible to think of failure as a starting point towards revolt and not as frustration (Pál Pelbart, 2017).

### **3. A COLLAPSE OF PAST PRESENT AND FUTURE**

"We should be afraid of the future because we've already been there". (Bond, 2003)

#### 4. SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES

How can we think a different model of knowledge creation under the form of an articulated sustainability between production and destruction? Is this binomial a form of sustainable practices, or will we have to include other transversal thoughts? In the audiovisual essay *A mani-pedi-anti-counter-FESTO for queer screen production* (Black, Kelly, Munro & Taylor 2022), we not only perceive the form of content creation from different audiovisual fragments in a collaborative challenge, but also a logic of editing and screen production in which the relations between these images, the producers of these images and the relations with audiences point towards forms of ethical post-production.

#### 5. EMBRACE THE POSSIBILITY OF AN ALTERNATIVE TO HEGEMONIC FORMS

On the abundance of this neoliberal happiness and the possibility of creating new imaginaries of production of moving images (but still on its unexpected rupture under the economic collapse and the neurosis of an empty landscape of expectations and strategies of resistance and subjectivation of the subject) we can approach the intellectual production of authors of post-Marxist influence as Franco Berardi or Sarah Sara Ahmed whose thought delves into the various evolutions of a conception of happiness from this recognition of our common possibilities. And those possibilities may be a form of anti-capitalist self-affirmation (Berardi, 2019) and combining the exercise of philosophy and feminist cultural studies (Ahmed 2010).

#### 6. FILMMAKING AS KINSHIP-MAKING

Would there be any better way than to relate to each other in all fields of knowledge, establishing relationships of kinship and affectivity among all forms of life that inhabit our contemporaneity times? This question has, in this audiofilm essay a very clear answer on these 14 statements when they utilise mobile devices and technology used to record our everyday life and intimacy, as a form of "autoethnography" (Holman Jones, 2005), sharing empathetic ties between the filmmakers and the us. But who are us?

#### 7. EMBRACE INTERSPECIES RELATIONS

The filmmakers propose to create links of empathy between multiple subjectivities. The practice of producing moving images by creating empathy between political coalitions, such as race, gender and/or languages with other species can create an ecosystem of audiovisual production (and knowledge) that overcomes the barriers of individualism, nations notions, and corporations' engagement (Seymour, 2013, p. 28) as the only places of identity relations.

## 8. EMBRACE INFLATABLE POOL ANIMALS

Are inflatable pool animals considered as a companion species? Does their ridiculous and tender shape make us feel an affection or eroticism for them? Where do such funny shapes come from? Erotic and self-criticism take shape in this chapter of the audiovisual essay presented by the authors. But my main question is: where and under what labor and material conditions have they been manufactured and transported to our pools? Its answer could bring us problems of consumer ethics and sustainability.

## 9. EMBRACE THE RICHNESS OF EMBARRASSMENT

Embracing the embarrassment, our own and that of others, implies the ability to be moved by feelings and empower ourselves from our failures collectively. In the well-known book, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed tells us about a series of "affective economies" where these emotions do not reside in the subjects or objects, but rather this affection is produced as an effect of the circulation. Ahmed argues that "emotions move through the movement or circulation of objects, which become "sticky," or saturated with affect, as sites of richness in personal and social tension" (Sara Ahmed 2004, p. 35).

## 10. EMBRACE QUEER SHAME

Perhaps the answer to some of the above questions can be found in these two statements. Shame as an exercise of self-criticism. Ridicule as a performative state of emancipation in an intoxicated world. Sausages, inflatable pool animals, old-fashioned dresses and uncontrolled erections ...all those contradictory things that make us happy together.

## 11. EMBRACE MORE FAILURE

More failure please! give me more and more failure, please!... To affirm failure as a form of creation of subjectivity in the exile of capitalist productivity, is to configure a new form of joy different from that happiness of "yes we can!". To restore the spheres of insurrection (Rolnik, 2019) in the face of the imposition of a mutilated future.

## 12. EMBRACE DELINQUENCY AND ETERNAL ADOLESCENCE

When I was 12 years old, I decided one day to offer a Christmas tree full of ornaments to my neighbors: my friend Remedios and her family with few economic resources. All the items, including the Christmas tree, were stolen from a big supermarket corporation. My mother was furious with me when she learned the truth. I continue to feel a very proud happiness about it.

### 13. EMBRACE THE IMPERFECT IMAGE

All images are possible, all images are welcome, all images are true, all images are false... All images are possible even if there is no intellectual intentionality behind them. They are images of a failure, and in them we trust.

### 14. EMBRACE QUEER SPACE

To accept the discontent of having failed can be of vital importance to understand, how much it is worth for us to make of this failure a space of celebration.

And that is where we are together, a place where we establish a series of relationships that establish revolutions of bodies full of desire, leaving germinate a wild and utopian way of life different from the hetero-normative and neoliberal disease.

Under certain circumstances failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world. (Halberstam 2011, p. 2).

### REFERENCES

- Ahmed, S. (2004). *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Routledge.
- Ahmed, S. (2010). *The Promise of Happiness*. Duke University Press.
- Berardi, F. (2019). *Breathing - Chaos and Poetry*. Semiotext(e).
- Black, A., Kelly, P., Munro, K., & Taylor, S. (2022, July 10). *A mani-pedi-anti-counter-FESTO for queer screen production* [Video]. Vimeo. <https://vimeo.com/728501119>
- Bond, E. (2003) *La Trame cachée*. L'Arche.
- Castoriadis, C. (1997). Radical Imagination and the Social Instituting Imaginary. In D. Curtis (Ed.), *The Castoriadis Reader* (pp. 319-337). Blackwell publishers.
- Halberstam, J. (2011). *The Queer Art of Failure*. Duke University Press.
- Haraway D. (2016). *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke University Press.

Holman J. S. (2005) Autoethnography: Making the Personal Political. In Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 76-91). Sage.

Pelbart. P. (2017) *O avesso do niilismo. Cartografias do esgotamento*. n-1 edições.

Rolnik, S. (2019). *Esferas da Insurreição: Notas para uma vida não cafetinada*. n-1 edições.

Seymour, N. (2013). *Strange Natures: Futurity, Empathy, and the Queer Ecological Imagination*. University of Illinois Press.

Audiovisual essay received on 15/11/2023 and accepted on 24/11/2023.

[Creative Commons Attribution License](#) | This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY). The use, distribution or reproduction in other forums is permitted, provided the original author(s) and the copyright owner(s) are credited and that the original publication in this journal is cited, in accordance with accepted academic practice. No use, distribution or reproduction is permitted which does not comply with these terms.

# NARRATIVE STRUCTURE IN *PULP FICTION*

 **ERNESTO TABORDA-  
HERNÁNDEZ**

King Juan Carlos University  
ernesto.taborda@urjc.es

## ABSTRACT

In this audiovisual essay, the narrative structure of the film *Pulp Fiction* (Tarantino, 1994) has been analyzed, locating the essential structural vicissitudes of the film in its original montage and linear story, seeking to investigate the reasons that prompted the director to choose such a particular narrative proposal. This audiovisual essay places the two narrative proposals in the same image. The linear story appears on a large screen and the original story is presented on a panel on the right side of the image. The chronological order of the stories has been listed and arranged as counted. The proposed essay shows us that the two stories work, but that perhaps the original story is a more dynamic and innovative exercise in style than the linear story, and that in some moments the vicissitudes and structures of the two narrative proposals coincide. Also that the original story is the story of Jules and his redemption, and the linear one is the story of Butch.

Keywords: Narrative; Dramatic structure; Audiovisual essay; Pulp Fiction; Quentin Tarantino.

Re-watching this modern classic raises the question of why Tarantino chose to tell it the way it was told in the end and what aspects of the linear story bothered him. It is clear that the way it is told requires extra effort in terms of narrative, structure and the fit of plot twists and turns to make the story flow as deftly as it does.

It has also been proven that both ways the story works. It is probably a question of style, but what is certain is that the two, both the linear structure and the final one, are two different stories where the same thing happens. That is a great virtue.

*Pulp Fiction* is a fusion of three stories that play in time and space (Velázquez, 2016). The first is that of Vincent Vega and the wife of Marsellus Wallace. The second is the story of the gold watch and the boxer Butch Coolidge. The third is the story of Jules, Vincent, Jimmy and Mr. Wolf. The temporal order of each story is recomposed in the montage, by the hand of Sally Menke, under the director's premise. Told in a fragmented manner under Tarantino's apparent stylistic whimsy (Howley, 2004).

The film has been analyzed, locating its essential structural vicissitudes: the detonate, the two turning points, the midpoint, the anticlimax and the climax, of the original story that we will call the film, as well as of the chronological story that we will call the story. We have compared the location in time and space by superimposing the images. The story appears on the big screen and the film is presented in a vignette on the right side of the image. The chronological order has been listed and arranged as it is told and the episodic organization of the film has been recomposed as an harmonizing element. Although in the story these episodes are not important, in fact they seem to be created to frame the fragmentation of the film and achieve some narrative eloquence. The linear story follows the adventures of two hitmen employed by Marsellus Wallaces, who during a seemingly easy job make a small mistake and end up accidentally killing an informant they were carrying in their car. From this moment on, a story unfolds that takes place over two days and revolves around Mr. Wallaces, his employees (two assassins and a boxer) and his wife.

### **THE BONNIE SITUATION**

1. Jules and Vincent recover a stolen briefcase. Vincent accidentally shoots Marvin.

2. They go to Jules' friend Jimmy's house. They call a problem-solving expert called Mr. Lobo who meets them at Jimmy's house. When they solve the problem they go to have breakfast in a coffee shop where they meet some inexperienced robbers, Pumpkin and Honey Bunny, they confront Jules' experience with the good luck that he is in a reflective attitude that day and lets them go without giving them a life lecture.



3. Jules lets them go. Flashback: the golden watch.

### **THE GOLDEN WATCH**

4. Butch negotiates with Marsellus for his last fight. Flashback: Captain Koons gives young Butch a golden watch that he and his father kept in their respective asses so the Vietnamese wouldn't take it. Butch wins the fight. Marsellus sends Vincent after him.

5. Vincent and Mia. The overdose. Vincent goes to his dealer to buy drugs. He takes Mia, his boss's wife, out to dinner. They go to a 50s/60s diner and win a twist contest. They return home and Mia inadvertently snorts heroin thinking it's cocaine. She overdoses. Vincent takes her to his dealer and injects her with adrenaline to revive her. After the scare they both agree not to say anything.

6. Butch and Marsellus. Butch realises that Fabienne has forgotten her father's watch in his old flat. He must go and look for it. At home he finds the watch and realises that Vincent is in the bathroom thanks to the machine gun resting on the counter. He kills Vincent when he comes out of the bathroom. On his way out he meets Marsellus in the street and tries to run him over. In an escape they take refuge in a pawn shop where they are caught and sodomised. Butch manages to untie himself but on the run he regrets it and returns to help Marsellus armed with a catana. Marsellus forgives him for the fight and thanks him for saving his life.

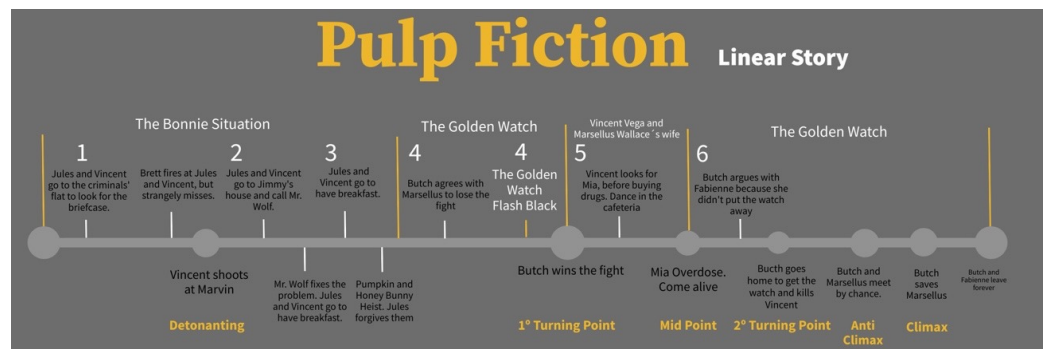


Figure 1. *Pulp Fiction's* linear story. © Author

The story is slower between the detonating and the first turning point, but from the midpoint to the end everything happens very fast in terms of actions.

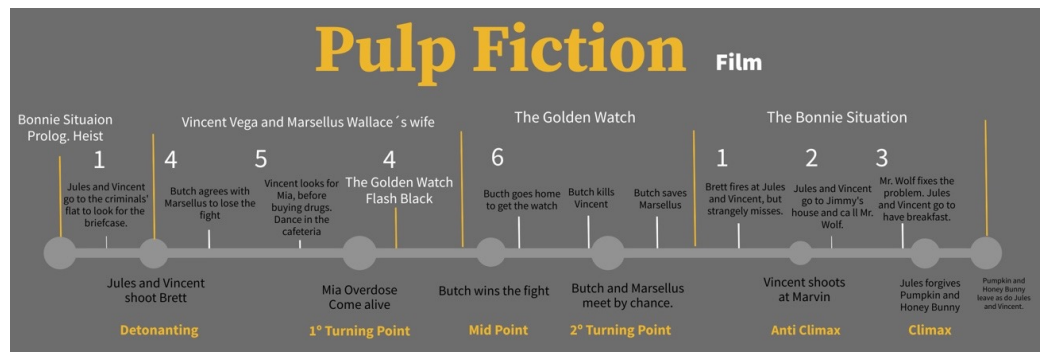


Figure 2. *Pulp Fiction's* film. © Author

The film seems to have more balance and dynamism between actions if we look at the two illustrations in their graphical representation. We will see that there are six major action nodes plus the structural vicissitudes and a flashback. The episodes are necessary (or not) in the film as they function as guiding labels.

*The Bonnie Situation* occupies nodes 1, 2 and 3. *The Golden Watch* has 4 and 6. Finally, Vincent Vega and the wife of Marsellus Wallaces represent 5. When we look at the film we see that in order to make the structure fit together, some nodes have been partially modified, dividing them to improve the narrative coherence.

In the film *The Bonnie Situation* 1 is a prologue where Pumpkin and Honey Bonnie are encouraged to start the heist followed by the credits. Much more effective than starting with Jules and Vincent's conversation about burgers in Amsterdam. Although it is part of the same episodic block. *The Bonnie Situation* (1, 2 and 3) is the end of the film. Then, the episode of *Vincent Vega and Marsellus Wallaces' Wife* is not only 5 but also part of 4 and the flashback of *the Golden Watch*. In the film, node 4 functions as a small prologue which is the negotiation of the fight rigging. This continues with what is really the content of the episode which is Vincent and Mia's dinner outing, that ends with the overdose and his recovery as the 1st turning point. But that sets it up to end the episode with the flashback to the Golden Watch when Captain Koons tells a Butch boy about the provenance of the watch and the sentimental value it acquires. This will move the story forward in the next episode. Actually, the episode of *The Golden Watch* is the one that takes up the most footage, being 4 and especially where the most relevant action nodes occur.

In the film, *The Bonnie Situation* prologue and *Vincent Vega and Marsellus Wallace`s Wife* are the first act and the beginning of the second act (1,4,5,4). Almost reaching the midpoint begins *The Golden Watch* which ends with the departure of Butch and the accounts settled with Marsellus at the beginning of the third act (6). Finally, *The Bonnie Situation* which covers almost the whole of the third act (1,2,3).

In the story the first act is very long (1,2,3,4). The second (5 and 6) and third act (6) are shorter and almost of the same dimensions, where everything happens very fast.

The structural events change between the story and the film, which reflects the dramatic intensity of almost all the actions that can be interspersed and supplanted without affecting too much the progress of the story and its dramatic intensity. The drama of the script requires the construction of four structural events that coincide with the four action nodes of the plot (Sanchez-Escalonilla, 2014, p. 191).

The following are six events in the two structures proposed in this essay.

## **DETONATING**

*Story:* Vincent shoots Marvin by mistake.

*Film:* Jules and Vincent shoot Brett and retrieve the briefcase.

The events coincide in time and space in a very curious way. The shots occur at the same instant in both settings.

## **1ST TURNING POINT**

*Story:* Butch wins the fight he had agreed to lose.

*Film:* Mia overdoses and is revived.

This event in the film is more intense than in the story, but does not interfere with the intensity of both settings.

## **MIDPOINT**

*Story:* Mia overdoses and resuscitation.

*Film:* Butch wins the fight he had agreed to lose.

## **2ND TURNING POINT**

*Story:* Butch returns home to get his watch and accidentally kills Vincent.

*Film:* Butch and Marsellus meet by chance in the street.

In the audiovisual essay, in the action at the midpoint of the story - when Vincent sticks him with the syringe and Mia revives, coincides with the end of the second act when Butch kills Vincent - both actions are synchronized. This denotes a lot of coincidental timing or millimetric calculation.

## **ANTICLIMAX**

*Story:* Butch and Marsellus meet by chance in the street.

*Film:* Vincent shoots Marvin by mistake.

## **CLIMAX**

*Story:* Butch saves Marsellus from the sadomasochists and they make up.

*Film:* Jules forgives Pumpkin and Honey Bonnie and lets them go.

We can see that the stories go in reverse mode, except for the prologue at the beginning which serves as an introductory frame to the film the director wants to tell.

What is most noticeable about the setting of the story and the film is that the first is the story of Butch and his golden watch with parodic touches of the characters who were supposed to be his captors, and the second is the story of Jules and his reflection on his profession and life. The structure of the film seems more in keeping with Tarantino's stylistic intentions, but it seems that both worked equally well.

## REFERENCES

Howley, K. (2004). Breaking, Making, and Killing Time in Pulp Fiction. *Scope. An Online Journal of Film & TV Studies* 6(2).

<https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/scope/documents/2004/may-2004/howley.pdf>

Sánchez-Escalonilla, A. (2014). *Estrategias de guion cinematográfico: el proceso de creación de una historia*. Grupo Planeta (GBS).

Velásquez, M. (2016). Analysis of the literary screenplay of *Pulp Fiction*: an exercise of the interpreted. *Fuera de Campo Vol. 1*(1), pp. 76-93.

Audiovisual essay received on 24/10/2023 and accepted on 27/11/2023.

[Creative Commons Attribution License](#) | This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY). The use, distribution or reproduction in other forums is permitted, provided the original author(s) and the copyright owner(s) are credited and that the original publication in this journal is cited, in accordance with accepted academic practice. No use, distribution or reproduction is permitted which does not comply with these terms.

