



## Miradas

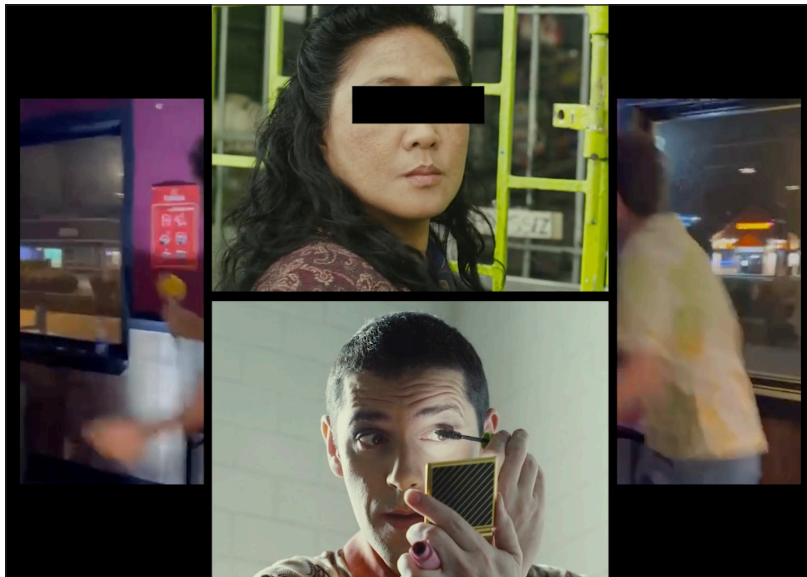
Pablo Serrano Torres, Romance Languages, University of Oregon, United States, [pablos@uoregon.edu](mailto:pablos@uoregon.edu)

---

A queer exploration of the role of the stare in forging queer identities through an informal discussion about the film *Laurence Anyways* (Xavier Dolan, 2012) and the videoessayist's personal history of attachment to that film. Final project produced for the videographic workshop "Embodying the Videoessay," Bowdoin College, 2023.

---





### Creator's Statement

“Miradas” is a work born out of a desire to make the creative process a central, visible part of the product of videographic criticism and to shorten the distances between theory and practice by introducing the body of the researcher into the videographic work. It is as much an essay about the use of the stare in the film *Laurence Anyways* (Xavier Dolan, 2012) as it is about the ways in which queer cinema can play an important role in bringing queer subjects together through the scopophilic joy of recognition that occurs when the screen returns its gaze back at the viewer. It looks at queer authorship by making an analogy between the filmmaker, the author of the film that the video essay is about, and the video-essayist, whose body and voice are embedded into the videographic work and intertwined with the images that constantly dialogue with the voice-over and the music.

This videoessay was made during the workshop “Embodying the Video Essay,”<sup>1</sup> a one-week retreat in Bowdoin College where a group of scholars, artists and video-essayists of diverse backgrounds and academic levels participated in a non-hierarchical community of practice with the intent to explore different forms of embodiment in our videographic endeavors. In living in community with them, being inspired and inspiring each other through diverse exercises that challenged our ways of thinking

---

<sup>1</sup> Created and organized by Dr. Joel Burges (University of Rochester), Dr. Allison Cooper (Bowdoin College), Dr. Lucy Fife Donaldson (University of St Andrews), Dr. Colleen Laird (University of British Columbia), Dr. Dayna McLeod (Performance and Media Artist-Scholar), and Dr. Alison Peirse (University of Leeds).

of ourselves, and the physicality of ourselves, in relation to our works, I found it inevitable, as many of my peers did, to move from a solitary, introspective approach to my creative process, to a more collaborative way of understanding my work. One of such exercises was the “on-screen cameo” that appears referenced in this piece, which consisted of shooting some footage that included our bodies or parts of our bodies, and introducing such footage into the media sources that we were working with. The exercise’s instructions demanded that the videoessayist considered a series of questions, such as “Who are you? How do you situate yourself in relation to your media object, its production, audiences, and any implicated communities it might represent? [...] How does your cameo change/enhance/alter the reality of your media object?” It was after screening this exercise and receiving feedback from my peers that my perspective on my project shifted and I decided to make a collaborative piece about queer recognition with the videoessayist and scholar May Santiago, who I had become close friends with throughout the workshop.

Formally, it is a multiscreen video essay in which the gazes of the two protagonists of the film, Laurence Alia and Fred Belair, are contrasted with the stares of other characters in the film whose eyes show a wide range of affective responses: sometimes condemnatory, sometimes empathetic, sometimes admiring, sometimes indifferent. Black censoring bars are used to occult some of the gazes that carry the most judgmental expressions in the film, producing a shift in the power dynamics of vigilance and surveillance, and offering the queer viewer the possibility of paying no mind to the scrutiny of those others who claim to be normal. The verticality of the multiscreen, along with the choice of certain visual and thematic motives (the snow and the raining of clothes, the two instances of mother and son solidarity, the fashionable ball and the karaoke amateur recording, etc.) produce a sense of constant transference between the multiple images being displayed simultaneously. The soundtrack, accompanied by a slightly shorter edit of the song “8 Ball” by Underworld, contributes to create a queer aesthetic by introducing elements of rave culture intertwined with homoerotic images such as “Today / I met a man / Who threw his arms around me.” The at times sweet, at times rough lyrics of the song lead slowly to a climax where the main singing voice shamelessly announces, “That white stuff / makes me feel / happy,” as the voice over of the videoessay concludes that queer cinema played an important part in accepting himself for who he was during the formative years of adolescence. The snow turns into colorful clothes raining from the sky, and the two protagonists hold each other in an embrace that is slowed down as if to make it last forever.

The videoessay opens with a quote taken from Jack Halberstam’s marvelously defiant book *The Queer Art of Failure*: “Being taken seriously means missing out on the

chance to be frivolous, promiscuous, and irrelevant. The desire to be taken seriously is precisely what compels people to follow the tried and true paths of knowledge production around which I would like to map a few detours.”<sup>2</sup> This quote sets the theoretical framework from within which the video essay operates: a refusal to partake in serious, formal academic discourse as an ethics to showcase queer kinship, solidarity, and joy. The use of informal, at times imprecise, speech as the voiceover narration of the entire piece further highlights this aspect of the video. Although the narration uses expository speech to make the argument of the piece explicit, it refuses to assume an authoritative place by talking about it as a work in progress, distributing the role of making the argument come across evenly between the video-essayist, his interlocutor, the source materials, and the dialogue in between all of them. The process is the product.

## References

Garwood, Ian (2016). “The Place of Voiceover in Academic Audiovisual Film and Television Criticism.” *NECSUS: European Journal of Media Studies*, 5(2), 271–275.

Rodríguez, J. M. (2011). “Queer Sociality and Other Sexual Fantasies.” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 17(2), 331–348.

## Biography

Pablo Torres is a PhD student at the University of Oregon who works on queer contemporary Spanish and Latin American cinema. Having cultivated an interest in videographic criticism since entering graduate school in 2018, he ventured into the world of video essay production in the summer of 2022 when he attended the “Scholarship in Sound & Image” workshop organized by Middlebury College, where he learned basic editing skills and creative ways to conceptualize and express his ideas through the audiovisual medium of the video essay. He has since participated in a videographic panel in the annual conference of the Asociación de Estudios de Género y Sexualidad (AEGS) in Valparaíso, Chile and has attended the workshop “Videographic Methods and Practices: Embodying the Video Essay” at Bowdoin College (July 2023). His academic interests revolve around the ideas of queer agency in cinema and queer history in Spain and Latin America. He is currently working on his dissertation, tentatively titled “Raros: Claiming Queer Agency in Spanish and Latin American Contemporary Cinema.”

---

<sup>2</sup> Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*. Duke University Press, 2011: 6.

### Review by Jaap Kooijman, University of Amsterdam

“Miradas” (which can be translated as “looks” or “glances”) by Pablo Torres opens with a quote from Jack Halberstam’s *The Queer Art of Failure*: “Being taken seriously means missing out on the chance to be frivolous, promiscuous, and irrelevant.” Torres takes this as an invitation to present an argument in a very playful and personal manner, not only in the way he uses the footage of his main source (the 2012 film *Laurence Anyways* by Xavier Dolan), but also how he explores his own practice of videographic criticism. The prominence of the Halberstam quote and the playful visual style (through use of moving multiscreen, slow-motion, and the inclusion of footage of Torres performing karaoke with fellow video essayist May Santiago with whom he converses in the voiceover) almost makes one forget that the audiovisual essay makes a convincing argument about the importance of looking in *Laurence Anyways*.

The footage shows different kind of gazes, both approving and inviting, as well as curious and disapproving ones—the latter are blocked by the essayist with black censor banners across the eyes. What makes the audiovisual essay stand out is its voiceover, a seemingly casual conversation between Torres and Santiago, in which he presents an argument about *Laurence Anyways*, and, perhaps most importantly, explains why the film was so important to him for his own queer identity making. This becomes affectively evident in the “on screen cameo” segment (02:15–02:25), which establishes an explicit connection between the film and the video essayist, as is also emphasized by the voiceover.

Such a focus on the playful and the personal allows for a less formal, but equally convincing analysis of the film, while simultaneously offering an insight in the process of essay making. For this, Torres dared to be vulnerable, which has resulted in a very moving and compelling interaction with the film. All in all, “Miradas” may indeed be frivolous and even promiscuous, but it is certainly not irrelevant.

### Review by Dayna McLeod, Concordia University

Pablo Torres’ video essay “Miradas” is an important work about queer subjectivity, representation, the look, being seen, pleasure, and intimacy. Torres uses queer sociality as an affective means of production and engagement in his analysis of *Laurence Anyways* (Xavier Dolan, 2012) through an intimate excavation of his process and thinking. Torres’ video essay embodies queer sociality as a “utopian space that both performs a critique of existing social relations of difference and enacts a commitment to the creative critical work of imagining collective possibilities” (Rodríguez 332). In both his statement and his video essay, he takes us through his careful considerations about this film and working with it, while attending to how he is implicated in the creation of his videographic analysis. His conversation with May Santiago, which acts as the soundtrack

for the essay over Underworld's song "8 Ball," shares with us an intimacy of friendship and experience that is vulnerable and smart. Torres' use of this conversation queers and interrupts traditional modes of gendered voice over that utilize scripted authoritative modes of production (Garwood). This considered conversation invites the viewer into a circle of queer sociality, which includes some (but not all) of the characters in the film. Capitalizing on how Dolan's characters look at each other, Torres inserts himself as part of Dolan's world, duck walking to the delight of the main character. This amplifies the "looking" and being-seen-ness that Torres so aptly discusses as this reconstructed scene appears onscreen—of being seen through seeing what's onscreen, and in turn, the screen activating a gaze back to Torres as though in recognition. This intervention underscores what looking and being seen means for (some) queer subjects: the feel of the look, recognition in another, familiarity, joy, and pleasure.

Emphasizing who looks and how, Torres marks other characters with black censor boxes over their eyes as they look at us through the camera, which disavows their judgmental scrutinizing gaze. As Torres states, this kind of look "forces you to take the position of the abject body, the trans body that is condemned, that is not understood." By literally blocking their view, this marking excludes (cisheteronormative) looking as judgement as it not only censors, but also marks these subjects for queer viewers as not to be minded or looked at, and to not interpolate the judgement and malice that these looks communicate. Torres also uses a vertically oriented multiscreen that at times, gently rolls through stacked scenes from *Laurence Anyways*, Torres' duck walking intervention, and an incredible karaoke performance by Torres and Santiago. Torres' collage editing here illustrates his discussion about looking, his coming out, a search for community, and shared queer experience. As these scenes touch each other onscreen, he focuses our gaze on the haptic. How these scenes are formally arranged to meet onscreen acts as a means for us to unite their content and understand the potential queer world making Torres is creating.

---

