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## Provoking Intimacies: Staging *Las relaciones de Clara* in Havana

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Damp, crumpled tickets in their hands, the spectators to Carlos Díaz's production of *Las relaciones de Clara* must first wait in a small group outside the Casona de Línea, an imposing colonial style home on the curve of Havana's Vedado neighborhood's busiest street. They talk quietly and move uncomfortably, waiting for the doors to open to the home. The play is scheduled to begin at 8 p.m., but it is already 8:15, although the group is patient outside the mansion-cum-theater, as people shift their weight, smoke cigarettes, and talk with friends. Finally the grand double doors to the home are opened, tickets are marked with a small tear, and the audience jumbles together in one third of the stately parlor room at the front of the home. The room is decorated as a living room, with a couch, several chairs, and a small table on the left, near where the audience huddles. All of the actors, save one, are already there before the audience, languidly sitting on the sofa and chairs. The stage lights are already lit and once the doors to the street are closed, the heat quickly rises to a suffocating level. The actors sit motionless and silent, and the spectators are invited to look at them. The audience is on its feet with a focused gaze, and the actors are seated, some draped over the furniture, their gazes fixed. In between the actors and the audience are many inflated yellow happy-face balls that spread across the parlor room floor, creating a bubbly pattern that connects the actors and the audience with a fragile, bouncy, and nervous mockery of happiness.

Everyone waits, and stagehands emerge to push the audience closer together, essentially creating an amorphous blob that takes up less and less space, as strangers' bodies are pressed against one another. The audience has become one entity. The collapsing of personal space thrusts the audience members' bodies into unexpected physical proximities that, throughout the course of the performance, morph into intimacies. What begins with just

physical closeness transforms into an interrelatedness that is founded upon the shared, physical experience of seeing and — to some degree — participating in *Las relaciones de Clara*, a work that is organized around sexual tensions. What makes these theatrical intimacies relevant in a contemporary Cuban context is how they resist the state's persistent attempts to fabricate its own version of a unified society. Leo Bersani, co-author, with Adam Phillips, of a series of philosophical essays titled *Intimacies* (2008), proposes a way to examine these tensions — in the context I am examining between personal and state intimacies — by showing how interrelatedness emerges out of proximity with others that is characterized by the possibility of sex. In my view, these intimacies create dynamic spaces that upset the state's organized, harmonious view of its populace. I argue that by watching *Las relaciones de Clara* and by participating in the work, if only through sheer proximity to it, Cuban audiences become complicit actors in intimacies that directly disrupt the unified image that the state holds for itself and its citizens.

As the action of the play commences, the “house” lights dim and a character jolts the audience alert with an enthusiastic yelp, entering from just behind the audience mob. He proceeds to present an advertisement for *Buena elección* irons. With the actor's gaze focused as if toward a camera, the audience has the sensation that they are watching a television commercial. His presentation begins straightforwardly enough — his facial expressions are exaggerated and his enthusiasm for the product, while excessive, is not entirely out of place in the context of advertisements. This is a typical scene in any capitalist environment, and still fairly common — if less formal and less prevalent — in non-capitalist environments such as Cuba. In his physical performance, the character is giving the *Buena elección* iron what is known as a “hard sell” by appealing to his viewers' sense of vanity as well as the iron's utter perfection, but before long the content of his advertisement script begins to shift. First he begins by naming what should not be ironed — jeans and t-shirts, for example — so one does not appear to be an eccentric perfectionist. Eroding the strength of his claims that ironing with *Buena elección* is simple and easy — even relaxing — he notes it should also be avoided in order to prevent chronic muscle pain and inflammation that results from the monotonous movement of ironing. He goes on to undermine not only his product but ironing in general when he states that “Planchar roba tiempo, es enervante y bastamente inútil” and that everyone should just turn in their irons and demand a refund from *Buena elección* (1.4). The instigation of the desire for the commodity begins traditionally enough, but it is frustrated by

the lies that are needed to glamorize a utilitarian tool that is neither sexy nor inspirational, nor perhaps even useful, and can even be harmful.

The connection between *Buena elección* and the rest of the play is made clear when we learn that the protagonist, Clara, has just lost her job as a writer of users' manuals for home appliances. These utilitarian texts written by the companies that sell the products serve as instructions for operation as well as a means to reinforce the purchase of the product. In *Las relaciones de Clara*, however, the commodification of the banal requires a dedication to the product that Clara has given up on. The rest of the play centers on her struggle to find work, and her need to commodify what is significant to her as a way to find meaning in her life. For Clara, after losing her job and unable to secure a bank loan, her search for meaningfulness is focused on the body and its usefulness in the market economy as a desired commodity. Her self-commodification is motivated by financial need, but also her need to feel like a useful person. The unfortunate job market, however, pushes Clara toward using her body for medical experimentation as one of her only viable options for earning money. In her own words, her only hope is to become a "farmaputa."

The theme of commodification is rather unusual to see in Cuban drama, but since *Las relaciones de Clara* is a contemporary German work, published by Dea Loher (1964) in 1999 and first staged in Berlin in 2000, its presence is less baffling since it is associated with the largely capitalist economic structure of contemporary western society. Furthermore, Carlos Díaz (1955), the Cuban director of this production in Havana, almost exclusively directs works by foreign dramatists, and always pushes the dramatic boundaries of the works he directs. Since he founded his theatre troupe — Teatro El Público — in 1990, audiences in Havana have come to expect him to test their expectations about classic works, since he often destabilizes traditional roles and perspectives with inversions of gender, S&M costumes, nudity, and overt homosexuality. In early January 2007, when these two performances of *Las relaciones* were seen, Díaz had already been an avant-garde theatrical institution for close to a decade. Díaz's deft selection of foreign texts that can be manipulated to represent Cubanness, together with his incredible directorial talents, have made — uniquely and somewhat paradoxically — for Cuban theatre that has both political and theatrical staying power. Currently he is one of the most established and prolific directors working in Havana, and at times, such as during the *Las relaciones* run, he even has a second play underway in another theater.<sup>1</sup> His work is daring, provocative, and Cuban,

but rarely authored by Cubans, which seems to allow him a certain level of flexibility regarding his particular focus as a director. In terms of the contemporary Cuban context for *Las relaciones de Clara*, the commodification of the body is well known in informal and illegal contexts, such as prostitution, but little known in medical and legal ones. And, generally speaking, body commodification has never been officially condoned as an integral part of what the Cuban state perceives to be its utopian socialist project. Although prostitution has been overlooked in especially difficult economic times, such as the post-Soviet era economic crisis in the 1990s, euphemistically called the Special Period, the selling (or desiring) of any commodity has always constituted suspicious behavior in post-revolutionary Cuba.

Medical commodification, like any type of commodification of the body, tends to exploit the mind-body Cartesian dualism. As anthropologist Lesley Sharp notes in an article on bio-medical commodification, this dualism, “so rampant in medical practice, facilitates the depersonalization — and thus, dehumanization — of persons-as-bodies, a process that ultimately allows for the commodification of the body and its parts” (290). Clara already feels ostracized by society since she is unable to successfully overestimate the “use value” of the iron and then because she has lost her job and is not an economically contributing member of society. In a sense, her inability to commodify the *Buena elección* iron leads her, albeit reluctantly, to self-commodification and to the dehumanizing process of body fragmentation. Body integrity may be challenged by Clara’s need to sell some of its parts, but her psychological well-being is also at stake. If she cannot earn enough money to support herself, she also risks her total survival, so body wholeness is risked in order to save the entity. In fact, the decision to split (oneself) into parts can be viewed as an act that is resistant to societal norms concerning what constitutes bodily integrity and identity. Clara’s choice is one that is far from popular, although it may be logical and resourceful. Ultimately she does not sell her body to be used for medical testing, but she does sleep with the doctor at the testing clinic in exchange for his renting her a room. Her body integrity may remain intact, but Clara’s decision to exploit — that is, to commodify — an intimate relationship raises questions about the connections between intimacies and economic strategies.

### **Selling Your Heart Out**

Adam Phillips, quoted by Leo Bersani in their co-authored study *Intimacies*, states that “Psychoanalysis is about what two people can say to

each other if they agree not to have sex” (1). According to Phillips’ theory, eliminating sex as a necessary element of intimacy can lead to other relational modes that are equally productive, and perhaps equally intimate. The relationship of the psychoanalyst and the analysand has other restrictions that compromise the relationship, most obviously, that the analysand pays the analyst for his or her time and expertise, and also because the analyst occupies a privileged position as “the one who knows,” while the analysand is marked by this lack of knowledge about his analyst (3). There is an imbalance to the relationship, although it is quite possible that this inequality, this distance between, is a necessary concession in the analysand’s quest for self-knowledge. Simply put, the relationship of analyst/analysand can only really lead to an intimacy of self, and not the types of shared, intertwined, mutual and unlimited intimacies that Bersani outlines. He writes that the lopsided dynamic of knowledge inherent in psychoanalysis creates a context of superiority that Phillips hopes can be overcome, and that Bersani is wary of. Therefore, in Bersani’s exploration of the theory he only considers “psychoanalysis as an inspiration for modes of exchange that can only take place outside of psychoanalysis” (4).

The exclusion of psychoanalysis from an understanding of possible human intimacies attempts to eliminate the imbalanced expectations about relational modes that are inherent parts of the analyst/analysand relationship. Stepping outside of the psychoanalytic relational mode makes sense also because the interconnectedness that stems from sexual relationships — or at least relationships that could become sexual — is more common and relatable than the psychoanalytic one, and it is not bounded as strictly by an economic dynamic where the analysand must pay the analyst. Sex — and especially the possibility of sex — is technically free and available to all. But what does sex say about our intimate relationships and how can it increase cultural connectedness among different groups, regardless of any actual sexual connectedness between individuals? Bersani explores the feeling of interconnectedness — beyond those that are actually sexually connected — that comes from the possibility of the sexual. Unlike Phillips’s theory about psychoanalysis that specifically removes the importance of the body’s sexual role from the equation of intimacy, Bersani gives it primary importance.

Bersani further elaborates that “the deliberate and unqualified elimination of a sexual goal from human encounters seems more likely to deaden than to renew or reinvigorate the relational field” (5). The new relational modes that are suggested by Bersani via this psychoanalytic inspiration, but

including the sexual, allow him the flexibility to eliminate psychoanalysis from the equation, so that he may envision new “relational innovations” (4). If the formulaic, one-sided, but open-ended structure of psychoanalysis can lead to relational intimacies for Phillips, Bersani’s approach is fueled by opportunities to engage with excessiveness, thus embracing intimacy via the possibility of unlimited sexual encounters. He states that “Difference is one thing that we cannot bear,” but intimacy is a way to bridge this gap, however falsely, partially, or incompletely (viii). Intimacy, or — better yet — an accumulation of intimacies, can be a way for individuals to approximate a coherent closeness with others that is otherwise unattainable. Bersani’s suggestion of the possibility of limitless intimacies — but not their fruition — is useful because it can help to articulate how different cultural groups relate to one another and what can be gained and risked from this sexual hopefulness. This theory of intimacy is a way to overcome our collective societal failure(s) to account for difference, and it provides a strategy for achieving cultural accord between different and often maligned groups, although cultural differences can be made vulnerable to invisibility or even extinction in the name of general cultural accord generated through various forms of intimacies.

The smoothing over of differences has been one of the guiding principles of the ideology of the Cuban revolution, at least in terms of the state’s treatment of its on-island population. The revolution has sought to make Cuba a unified whole, both for its material and its philosophical production, founded upon a need for sameness on the island while underscoring the nation’s difference from its northern neighbor, the United States. The physical proximity to and ideological distance from the United States have added to the drama of the state’s highly orchestrated attempts to eliminate difference within the island while heightening any difference with the United States. The juxtaposition of the United States, relative to the goals of the revolution, has always been a critical element in the state’s ideological structuring of its revolution. The presence and proximity of its ideological enemy has played an important antagonistic role in strengthening the state’s nationalist rhetoric.

As the early years of the revolution passed, however, the state had to dig deeper in order to locate new narratives for national unification. Although the important distinctions between Cuba and its ideological enemies still existed, it was also necessary for the state to find more personal ways of including or excluding its own populations in order to perpetuate a renewed energy in the revolution’s ideologies. By seeking out new enemies to the state’s ideologies, the state could refresh interest in political and cultural theories

that were outdated and unpopular. Over time the state outlined — at times directly, but often much less so — what would not be tolerated as part of the revolutionary movement. Various modes of expression — including written and oral, but also modes of dress — religions, and sexual preferences were excluded from revolutionary status. The state took it upon itself to control the population as more citizens became dissatisfied with the direction of the revolution, and in so doing it succeeded in strictly controlling almost all aspects of cultural production, from the public to the very private. Creating and seeing difference — here counter-revolutionary difference — within the Cuban population is a strategy that publicly pits Cubans not against their colossal neighbor to the north, but against their neighbors in the *solar* across the hall.

This hoped for national connectedness rooted in revolutionary ideology and reinforced by the periodic fleshing out of new strategies and the expulsion of those opposed to them has succeeded in keeping Cubans, and especially Cuban artists, unsure about what can be said about the Cuban state. The state aims to have a consistent, unified population that is devoid of discord. Part of this equation necessarily includes the state-mandated elimination of certain types of difference. In Bersani's examination of Guillaume Dustan's semi-autobiographical novel *Dans ma chambre*, he notes that in the main character/author's exuberant pursuit of lovers he is able to find "[a] universal relatedness grounded in the absence of relations, in the felicitous erasure of people as persons" (38). When no one exists as individuals, there is room for all. While Bersani focuses on sexual interrelatedness as a means for achieving intimacy, I believe that the Cuban state has tried to create an environment that encourages a similar feeling of connectedness, albeit one that has often been much less felicitous. Given that intimacy necessarily includes the human body as part of its definition, mainly that there is some implication of physical closeness, it is less surprising that the Cuban state has used this as an organizing tactic. The importance of recognizing revolutionary behavior in the population, and gathering together the bodies that display it, has long been performed by the state in the form of mandated local neighborhood meetings and in Castro's highly performative speeches in front of thousands of Cubans. This grouping of bodies by the state to represent allegiance to the state has had the effect of creating intimacies in the minds and bodies of Cubans. Some of these intimacies create a welcomed feeling of shared experience, but often one shared experience is achieved at the expense of other types of possible intimacies. Furthermore, when they are created in

a top-down fashion and not from organic, populist movements, suspicions about fabricated closeness will arise.

This performance of group connectedness is repeated (and parodied) in both the text and in Carlos Díaz's staging of *Las relaciones de Clara*. However, for the audience members I would argue that the end result is not a perpetuated (but fabricated) intimacy, but a distinction *from* others (actors and audience members alike) that instigates the spectator to critique his or her own performance within the play/audience. This is especially true over the two-hour duration of the play performance. It is physically uncomfortable to stay attached as a mob in the warm spaces — although the actors' movements and the stagehands encourage the group to retain the unified formation — and audience members seek out their own spaces from which to privilege their own viewing of the play over the desired artistic organization and the logistic practicality of maintaining the audience as one. The audience's desire to be comfortable and to have visual access to the play is in constant tension with the small spaces, the actors' movements, and the direction from the stagehands to keep the spectators as a continuous, but controlled group. Although the characters in the play and the audience members may experience or bear witness to "unlimited intimacies" both in the characters' behavior and amongst audience members via proximity, the audience members do their best to avoid this physical imposition upon their bodies. For the audience member, the prioritized performance of intimacy is what the actors do on purpose, and only what the audience member performs unwittingly.

As indicated above, the characters seek out intimate connectedness with others, even if their search for it is never completely satisfied. After the first scene of *Las relaciones de Clara*, when the economic troubles of the characters are articulated, these economic and amorous searches take on palpable, and for the audience, often confrontational tones. The transition from the first theatrical space involves first actors and then audience moving into the next room off of the salon of the first two scenes. As the audience files into the next space — a church — they find themselves doubly as audience. The spectators watch the play, of course, but they are also positioned as spectators within the church, behind the pews, while Clara's boyfriend Tomás and his lover, Isabel, alternately talk, kiss passionately, and engage in oral sex on the altar. As their conversation and groping become more graphic, the audience's viewing becomes voyeuristic since the audience's position in the church space is in the audience/pews of the church — there is no clear demarcation of theatrical space/audience space — and also be-



cause in this part of the scene the spotlight on the actors further protects the voyeur/audience in darkness. The lighting here alleviates the potentially uncomfortable voyeuristic aspect of watching others engage in oral sex by keeping them hidden, while the set design directly implicates the audience in the watching, as part of a church audience. The audience is protected by the darkness, but the continuous theatrical space of a church — a place where churchgoers are spectators but also participants — automatically includes the audience in the scene. However unexpected or unwanted it may be, the audience's participation in the scene is founded upon a physical proximity to the intimacy of others. Because the church/theatrical space extends up to and beyond the audience, wrapping around behind them in the darkness, it progresses the feeling of intimacy between only audience members — established in the first scene in the mob/audience formation — to now include the actors, audience and the entire play itself. If the intimacies demonstrated by the characters spill over into the audience, it must also be allowed that new intimacies are created between the audience and the actors, thus creating a fluid and unpredictable scenario for both, not to mention an environment that is dangerously ambiguous for the state and its agenda.

The potential spilling over of space and relationships and intimacies is partially mitigated in this scene by the enigmatic presence of a character listed in the didascalia as “un chino sin nombre de edad indeterminada.” Surprising both the characters (in flagrante delicto) and the audience members — who are watching the enthusiastic oral sex being given to Isabel — the appearance of “el chino” coincides with raised lights that include and implicate the voyeuristic behavior of the audience. El chino becomes a stand-in for the audience, and his presence creates a spatial and conceptual bridge between the spectator and the theatrical roles. El chino momentarily lets the audience off the hook by stepping in for the audience's voyeurism, which he also shares, but his disruption of the publicly displayed sex act also underscores the dangerousness of the intimate relationship in general. Here, in the seemingly empty church, we are watching. There is no private intimacy, only the possibility of more intimacies that are increasingly more daring and more public. Furthermore, the concept of marriage as an institution that is defined by a couple's intimacy with one another (and only with each other) here begins to degenerate. The church as place for sanctifying the vows of exclusive intimacy are violated by the proliferation of intimacies occurring outside of the bounds of marriage, and also by the types of “non-productive” (i.e. non reproductive) intimacies that are performed. As the play continues,

more and more adulteries are committed, as the characters renounce their marital bonds for homosexual encounters and relationships. Interestingly, the heterosexual relationships in the play — marital or adulterous — are all frustrated, and only limitless homosexual intimacies seem destined to succeed.

The presence of voyeurs within a context of potentially limitless intimacies indicates an ideological separation between the one who watches and the one(s) watched. This division destroys the illusion that there is a continuum of intimacies, because in fact, there is not. In *Las relaciones de Clara* the audience is implicated in the watching of the sex act and in the intimacy that is created within the audience by means of bodies pressed against one another, but intimacy across the spectator/actor void is never fully realized. Instead it is frustrated by interruption, and demarcated by lighting differences. By exposing the voyeuristic quality that is inherently a part of being in an audience, Carlos Díaz's direction in this production of *Las relaciones de Clara* might also suggest inconsistencies with other audiences that are encouraged outside of the theater. Is there a way to fully join the watcher and the watched (spectator/actor or citizen/leader) in a shared (non-sexual) intimacy that highlights fluidity and de-emphasizes power structures? Based upon the theatrical scenarios that Díaz presents, one would have to answer no. The illusion of a continuum of intimacies (inspired by the sexual), is only an illusion, and is not able to be realized. This myth of intimacies, then, is necessarily controlled by the director of the play, and the audience must necessarily recognize that they are being manipulated in their desire for the continuum. Here Díaz shows that difference cannot be completely dissolved.

In *Las relaciones de Clara*, sexual interconnectedness arrives at a level that, at least compared to Bersani's reading of Dustan's novel, approaches a similar level of limitlessness. It is worth noting, however, that even with the variety of sexual combinations that occur in the play rarely do they have any of the fun or frivolity of Dustan's character's perpetual search for the next sexual encounter. Although Clara and the other characters in the play seek each other out for connectedness and throw aside societal conventions of propriety, they do so heavily, seemingly oppressed by their sexual desires. They act cagily, to avoid being discovered by their husbands, wives, boyfriends and girlfriends, but it often appears as though their sexual encounters are fraught with the guilt of cheating, perhaps, but mostly of not knowing if they are with the right person or if it is even possible to find that person (or people). Unlike Dustan's novel, the characters in *Las relaciones*

*de Clara* seem burdened by the limitlessness of possible sexual encounters because it partly means that their searches may never end.

This sense of disillusion with the search for intimacies signals a strong dissatisfaction and I argue that the play shows a resistance toward false or fabricated intimacies that the state has constructed over the course of the revolution, and that now fall flat, at least on a nationalist scale. *Las relaciones de Clara* highlights individual intimacies to show how the larger, official one has failed. In a time of severe disillusion, such as the Special Period and its aftermath, the falsity of the state's collective sense of connectedness became unbearable, and, perhaps ironically, the population did become more interconnected through a relationality that was founded upon the body, its needs and desires. The body in this context is at the crux of the problem. It is hungry and needing to be fed, and it is also a solution — it can be used as a commodity, as *jineteros*, and to power *bicitaxis*, too. This dynamic — of problem and solution bound in one body — was a difficult one for the state to overcome, since it had worked hard to identify a Cuban “body,” its population, as a unified, fabricated, intimate whole. The tension of body as both problem and solution has frustrated the state's desire to organize and contain its citizens. The body is needed for fabricating the state's intimacies, but it also brings forth the deficiencies in the state's larger goals for the same body. The body as source for unlimited intimacies can easily signal which goals are meant to pacify instead of inspire. This body, and the state's need to control it, illuminates the falsity of the state's constructed societal intimacy and the state's desperate need to perpetuate it.

Nowhere is this clearer than with the protagonist, Clara. She is, if not resistant or even careful, apathetic about her intimacies. In scene 9.3 of the play, Clara has a reluctant ménage à trois with her ex-boyfriend, Tomás, and her current — and married — lover, Jorge. It is not difficult to imagine why she might feel reticent about the threesome since she has lost interest in her ex-boyfriend (who was cheating on her) and she is primarily involved with Jorge for money (and he won't leave his wife). Clara is everyone's second choice. Even when Jorge proposes the threesome he is more interested in Tomás than in the novelty of the arrangement. Clara is suspicious of Tomás's motives for the ménage, and she asks him if he is just there to watch:

CLARA. Tú qué eres, un mirón.

JORGE. Un sibarita.

CLARA. De ninguna manera.

JORGE. No seas tonta, Clara.  
 Tú deseas tener vivencias.  
 Una oportunidad como esa quizás  
 no se vuelve a dar nunca.

CLARA. Por qué no te buscas dos extraños.

JORGE. Porque busco la familiaridad  
 y lo desconocido en ella.  
 Es como ir de expedición.  
 Con un mapa trazado por otros alguna vez.  
 Ahí hay un camino.  
 Pero no puedes estar seguro.  
 De que aún exista y lo que te espera  
 Y cuán cambiado uno regrese. (9.3.52)

Clara's mistrust about Jorge's reasons for wanting the threesome are valid on their own, but more importantly, they illuminate Jorge's need to seek out intimacy within the familiar, and the unfamiliar within the intimate. This inside out answer that flips upon itself seems only clever, but it is an important statement within this play in which the characters accumulate a rather staggering number of sexual relationships because the search for intimacy is at the core of all of them.

The audience is also familiar with the characters' apparently unending sexual desires, so neither Jorge's proposal nor Clara's acquiescence comes as much of a surprise. What does change in this scene, as opposed to the earlier episode in the church, is the audience's sheer proximity to the characters' sexual act. In the center of the dark red room is a bed with black satin sheets. This scene is lit from above with a single bulb, which gives off little light, but in the small, extremely hot space, is enough to light both actors and audience. Now we are all in Clara's bed together. Not only is the audience much closer to the actors in this scene, they are standing up while the actors are on the bed, and are thus afforded an overhead view of the goings on. As Tomás and Jorge enter Clara's bed — all three wearing only underwear — she puts her hands inside their shorts and begins to caress them as she recites her monologue, the only speaking part in the entire scene.

Although this is not the last scene of the play, it is the last theatrical space used in the house, and the play has now led the audience up the sweeping staircase to the back of a long, dark hall where the (bed) room is located — directly above the room of the first scene. For those audience members who hurry and jostle in order to find a better spot for viewing, they

may now find themselves in a potentially uncomfortable position: watching Clara masturbate Jorge and Tomás from just inches away. What might have been an advantageous position for other scenes in other spaces now becomes a potential liability. Regardless of one's actual proximity to the bed, the room's smallness makes it hard to escape the potentially embarrassing act of watching the (simulated) sex act. The scene seems to shock some of the audience members, and surely it is a scene to jolt one awake (if it is possible to fall asleep while standing up!). The male characters seem to be enjoying themselves, all three of the actors are very attractive, and the audience cannot turn away from this moment of pleasure — at least for the male characters — and of rendition for Clara. Meanwhile, for the audience there is no escaping the obvious voyeurism of watching Clara masturbate the two men: the audience members watch the actors, they watch other audience members on the opposite side of the room/bed, and they are watched by the actors. The gaze of the spectator includes actors and audience, and the two groups are simultaneously captured in the look across the theatrical space, even as the looker is looked at by another audience member in a web of looking and looking away from the intimate bedroom scene.

The watching in this scene is further heightened by the absence of the “chino” to distract the audience's gaze or to share in the voyeurism. Simply put, the audience is as alone in this threesome as Clara is. Both are mostly uncomfortable and/or reluctant participants with nowhere else to look or to be. This is the case for the audience as well, quite literally, in fact, since darkness predominates inside the rest of the house. Outside the home from this exposed room on the upper floor of the Casona are lights blinking and car horns honking on busy Línea avenue, but the way out of the room — except through the open windows that lead to the street — is not at all clear. Leaving the bedroom scene would require a retracing of movement back through, back down and into the darkness. I believe that the heat in the room — hotter and stuffier than the others —, the length of the play, which is more than two hours, and the uncomfortableness of watching the highly sexual scene, all encourage the audience to consider how to leave the space.

It is at this thematic and physical juncture within the play and in the house that the importance of the body in creating intimacies — or escaping from them — is most apparent. It is where the bodies and shared bodily intimacies of audience, space, text, and actor are fused and are either teased apart or accepted as unified by the spectator. Clara is selling her body to Jorge the doctor for rent and petty cash (and the possibility of her body to

Godofredo for a loan), but she is most distant in this most intimate scene of the play. Clara has separated herself emotionally from her body, and in so doing she calls into question the efficacy of intimacies to create unification. As close as the audience is to Clara (physically, emotionally) in the climax of the play, the closeness is too much, and the (physical, emotional) separation from her and the shared predicament — the body as a fragile and ultimately poor conduit for maintaining intimacies — breaks with the illusion that it is possible or desirable to have unlimited intimacies at all. At the end of the scene, Clara leaves the two men alone in her bed. She enters the darkness and they continue with the limitlessness of sexual connectedness expressed in *Las relaciones de Clara*, this time by having sex with each other. Clara has become a means to engage in other intimacies even as she becomes more reluctant about them herself.

If anything, it is the play as a whole that most approaches Bersani's reading of Dustan's novel, as opposed to any one character in particular. There are differences between the book and the play in that Dustan's character is entirely focused on other gay men while the characters in Loher's play are gay, straight and bisexual — not to mention highly adulterous —, but both works are organized around communities that are open to the possibility of connectedness. I would argue that in Díaz's direction of *Las relaciones de Clara* the community is based upon an idea of a diverse Cuba — black, white, young, old, gay, straight, married, single — that is encapsulated in the space of the mansion, its interior spaces further demarcating clinic, home, bedroom and street. Díaz does not ask the audience to imagine the street (or clinic, etc.) on the stage, but rather he puts the audience in the spaces within the Casona that are then closed, sealed even, after each night's 30 spectators have entered, a theatrical action that reiterates the insularity of the nation and the state. Before the play begins there is anticipation outside of the Casona de Línea because — unlike the other theaters in Havana — this one is unknown to its audience as a theater, and so it is less clear what will be experienced on the inside. Inside, the spaces allow for a new interpretation of Cuban inter-relatedness. The house is transformed into the city and the island, and the spectators become actors themselves by means of their watching and bearing witness to the intimate and even their involvement in — via sheer proximity — provocative acts of intimacy.

This transformative power of house and of spectators is critical because it can subvert the expected and it can reinscribe meaning where it was lost, manipulated, or otherwise fabricated or simulated. Going beyond the

spaces of the home and the role of the spectator in theatre, Clara's behavior in the threesome scene suggests that the meaning of "intimacies" has also shifted. In this scene, as mentioned above, the only person who speaks is Clara in a monologue that only the audience can hear. Her voice is disconnected from her body's actions — she continues masturbating Jorge and Tomás throughout the scene — and in this most intimate and sexual moment of the work, she is finally able to step outside of her own body to gain perspective on her life, and to make a decision about whether or not to carry out the threesome. The decision to fully engage in the threesome — this representation of "unlimited intimacy" — is for Clara "Algo que nunca he hecho. Y es como un destino casual. Es decir, sucede así y podría ser una intención. Es decir, no tendría que hacerlo, lo podría evitar. Depende de mí. ¿Depende de mí?" (11.57). Unlike Dustan, whose whole community centers around the possibility of endless intimacy, Clara is actually looking to extricate herself from the intimacy by carrying out the intimate act. She is detached and beyond the bedroom and her relationships, instead contemplating how this experience will bring an end to her involvement with the two men, even while it causes them to love one another: "Tomás amará a Jorge y lo idolatrará por lo que tienen en común [...]. Después de esta noche también Jorge dejará de amarme y para Tomás habré caído definitivamente en los abismos del pasado..." (11.57). For Clara the limitlessly intimate marks a finite end.

If the limitlessness is an end that Clara feels trapped by and struggles to escape from, Díaz's interpretation of Clara's options is decidedly bleak. At the end of the play Clara finally receives the loan/gift from Godofredo, her sister's ex-husband, her plan being that she will use the money to get away from her troubles in the city, and perhaps that he will join her wherever she might go. Instead, she seals the money in an envelope addressed to the "chino sin nombre," writes a suicide note, ingests some pills and dies.<sup>2</sup> In a scene leading up to the end of the play, Clara explains her desire for the threesome — to become pregnant and to raise a son with two fathers. However, she later indicates in a feverish rambling that the fetus has died, and her potential son will become another one of the Natural History Museum's freakish "abortos de la naturaleza" that are preserved silent and immobile in glass jars of formaldehyde. This preservation of the anomalous invites the curiosity of onlookers even while it also reflects for Clara her inability to reproduce. As her thoughts become more delirious, the "chino" approaches her and escorts her home. While they walk — Clara delusional — he describes how he used

to be a gravedigger, but that now it is a sad profession because of the way in which we treat the bodies after they die:

Sepulturero se ha vuelto una profesión triste.  
 Ya no honramos a los muertos,  
 Ya no, dándoles aquello  
 Que llevaban en el corazón.  
 Un anillo, un amuleto, una imagen, una muñeca, una jarra.  
 Sino que los destripamos  
 Y les arrancamos lo que los mantenía con vida;  
 La máquina cardíaca tiene que  
 Ser extraída de ellos,  
 Para que el aparato de incineración  
 No corra peligro. (13.64)

Clara, for her part, responds that she would like to be cremated herself, and she imagines herself reconnected to her unborn (and perhaps never conceived) child through the remnants of herself. The body's central role in creating interconnectedness is shown here to continue beyond life and the body. Clara states that after her body is incinerated:

Formarán pequeñas bolas  
 Con mi ceniza.  
 Pequeñas bolas  
 De forma y tamaño no totalmente regular.  
 Que emitan destellos de color verde.  
 Verde como las aguas poco profundas,  
 Verde como la masa de los cactus,  
 Verde como el aire  
 Visto a través del vidrio de una botella.  
 Con eso se hará una cadena,  
 Y el niño que nunca he tenido  
 La llevará. (13.64)

Although the remnants of Clara's body form something that is only a description — an ephemeral color of gas in a wavy loop around the neck of someone who will never exist — there is permanence in the eternal nature of Clara's dream for her nonexistent son, but it is also tethered to her death drive. As with Bersani's concept of intimacies, Loher's play and Díaz's direction highlight the dangerous aspects of desiring cultural connectedness that is — at times paradoxically — motivated by a fear of marginalization and



of death. To not have this fear present, however, would signify complicity with fabricated intimacies.

Ultimately, Díaz's direction of *Las relaciones de Clara* tries to de-emphasize the need for connectedness. I see this as a strategy that resists the ways in which the state exerts pressure on Cuban bodies in order to control them more effectively. Initially, the proliferation of bodies and intimacies in *Las relaciones* diffuses any concentrated attention on a particular type of body or relationship (gay, prostitute, or otherwise). However, apart from the appearance of many intimacies in the play text, Díaz underscores the limitlessness of intimacies (and their impossibility) through the new intimacies created each night of the performance, with different audiences. Indeed, as theatre theorist Anne Ubersfeld notes, "Theatrical practice is 'materialist': it states that there is no thought without the body. Theatre is body, and the body is primary, demanding the right to live" (190). Díaz's decision to stage *Las relaciones* in the Casona highlights the social relatedness of audience-actors-city because he has removed the play from the official, formal theatre space (the theater, and his usual place of Teatro Trianón, down the street), and because he forces all types of bodies to co-mingle in the small spaces. By proliferating the types of bodies in (and watching) *Las relaciones*, and by mixing them, the role of intimacy and the body is made less important because it is less easily directed at specific bodies. In this way, it becomes less apparent how to control a particular body since ambiguity is necessarily difficult to control. For the Cuban state, control of those bodies, and the fabrication of false intimacies via bodies that do not threaten the state's ideology mean that the body has continued to incorporate a liminal space that is both necessary and dangerous to the state's utopian socialist project. At this point in time, the state has sought to create unification through shared experience for long enough that private intimacies show themselves as deflated and hopeless. Dustan's limitless intimacy — "There is room for all" — can't ring true when "all" and "room" are so narrowly defined by the state in order to perpetuate a closing off instead of an opening up of people and ideas. "There is room for all" becomes "all are the same" and so this fabricated, state-composed intimacy is an erasing, and the unlimited sexual intimacies proposed in *Las relaciones* are like a sorry cry at the end, instead of the felicitous union that they could be. What *Las relaciones* does do is recuperate the broken down intimacies via the performance itself. The nightly reiteration of the city's (failed) intimacies — experienced intimately by an audience of the city — allows for the possibility of intimacies to be productive, but only in their search

for a limitless proliferation of Cuban identities. Pushed together, experiencing each other, the audience and the performers experience and create a new, true intimacy that is fleeting, but hopeful.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The other play, *Art* (1994) by the French playwright Yasmina Reza, was being staged in Teatro Trianón down the street from La Casona.

<sup>2</sup> However, this is not exactly how the play was written. Instead, in the play text Clara is saved by “el chino sin nombre”: “*El chino aguza el oído y toca [...] Aguza nuevamente el oído, abre la puerta, despierta a Clara. El corazón en la pared empieza a centellear tímidamente. FIN*” (68). While there might be room for Díaz’s interpretation of this final scene, it is also indicative of his bleak outlook regarding the possibility for Clara to escape her predicament.

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