The Discourse of the Absent Body

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WITHOUT *HABEAS CORPUS*: THE DISCOURSE OF THE ABSENT BODY

As the Twin Towers collapsed into a cloud of dust covering Lower Manhattan on September 11, 2001, the corporal remains of several thousand people evaporated with them - cremated and scattered in a matter of seconds. Bodies vanished, nameless, and families were denied closure, a place to grieve. This event, unique in the history of the United States precipitated an equally unprecedented period of national mourning, unprecedented in its lack of finality. At memorial services throughout the nation, obviously dead victims were described as "missing" for lack of a better term. This tragedy recalls the lack of closure suffered by families of the "disappeared persons" of Chile and Argentina, who likewise have experienced an aborted grief process.(1)

As Chilean human rights activist Marjorie Agosín has stated in Andrew Johnson's documentary film, *Threads of Hope*, the presence of the body in the grieving process is essential. *Habeas corpus* fosters not only legal recourse, but closure as well. Recent examinations of the grief process have underscored this assertion; there is a place of importance for cemeteries, memorials, and the like "in the recognition of the reality of a loss and the finality of death (Bradbury 224).(2)" In the realm of narrative cinema, like in life, a depiction, however brief, of the body, has been deemed necessary to a viewer's acceptance of the death of a character. One might say that a graphic depiction of the remains of a victim is more often than not *de rigueur*.

Alan Resnais' 1959 film *Hiroshima, mon amour* most eloquently articulates this need. In this film, images of unspeakable anguish and devastation are linked to an outcry against war and inhumanity. The protagonist, a French actress who has travelled to the Peace City to make a film, appropriately on peace, evokes the pictures and film reconstructions she has viewed to assert the importance of memory in social transformation. "I want to have an inconsolable memory," she implores, lest recollection of the past fade and atrocities repeat themselves. Her reactions are visceral, and the mediated images seem as tangible as the actual events, fostering a memory of an atrocity not personally witnessed. Resnais' film reminds us that the presence of the body has been traditionally linked to both the perpetuation of memory and by extension the construction of a more pacific society.

In *Latin American Women and the Search for Social Justice*, Francesca Miller decries the Argentine government's practice of "disappearing" the bodies of the dissidents it slaughtered during the so-called "Dirty War" of the military dictatorship following the 1976 coup. As Miller asserts, the ensuing struggle of such family members as the Madres de Plaza de Mayo to seek closure and justice threatened the very bulwark of the regime. "Death, which is also the space of immortality, communal memory, connection between the generations, was not to be a form of continuity, but an extirpation. That is the full meaning of the disappeared. In Argentina the struggle to retrieve the dead, to give them back their names and identities, became an indictment of the military regime" (10). Miller cites a 1977 *New York Times* article by Argentine writer Ariel Dorfman which states: "Habeas corpus can be rejected, because there is quite plainly, no corpus. No cuerpo. No body. By getting rid of the victim they hope to be rid of the crime" (Miller 9-10).

With regard to the transformative potential of film, is the presence of the body really essential? How can the absence of *habeas corpus* be turned back upon itself? Can one speak of a powerful, evocative absence of the dead or ravaged body in film, in contrast to the hackneyed discourse of the graphic? Three films come to mind which respond in unique and distinct ways to these questions: Seiji Arihara's (1994) *On a Paper Crane: Tomoko's Adventure* (*Tsuru ni notti*), an animated film intended to introduce children to the atrocity of Hiroshima and the need for peace and disarmament, was conceived in France as part of an international peace anime project. Secondly, Norman René's 1990 *Longtime Companion*, an assessment of the first decade of the AIDS epidemic in the United States, recurs to a visual discourse distinct both from other films on AIDS and that of mainstream American film. Finally, Luis Puenzo's 1985 *The Official Story* (*La historia oficial*), an examination of the social impact of the disappearances in Argentina, removes altogether the body as signifier.

Absent Ravage: *On a Paper Crane*

Arihara's film is a 27-minute work which in the West has been most successfully deployed as a pedagogical tool among primary school children. It relates a simple story appropriate for the classroom and for which numerous follow-up activities have been developed. Tomoko, a Japanese schoolgirl, travels to Hiroshima on her own, on a private field trip, intending to have "her own adventure." Visiting the Peace Museum, young Tomoko is visibly disturbed by the experience and phones her father wanting to return home at once. She is encouraged to stay and finish her adventure. Tomoko leaves the Museum and heads through Hiroshima's adjacent Peace Park. There she pauses beneath the statue of Sadako, the young Japanese girl who took ill with leukemia a number of years following the atomic blast.

Tomoko recalls the story of how Sadako believed that she would survive the disease if she folded a thousand paper cranes. Near the base of the statue are placed paper cranes from school children around the world. Folding a paper crane herself and letting the wind blow it over to the statue of Sadako, Tomoko receives a strange surprise; the paper crane awakens the statue, which comes to life. The two girls play and race, as Sadako relates her life prior to becoming a statue in Peace Park. As the girls reach the shell of a domed building, which had stood near ground zero and which has been left in ruins as a reminder of the tragedy, Sadako goes back into time and allows Tomoko to witness the horrific event that caused the leukemia. The two girls subsequently fly around the world on a paper crane to promote peace and disarmament. The film closes as Sadako reassumes her role as a statue and Tomoko returns home.

Intended as a work for children, Arihara's film intentionally attempts to eschew any traumatic impact from its viewing. Of particular challenge to both directors and other members of the Peace Anime Project which conceptualized *On a Paper Crane* was to create a work which would foreground the reality of August 6, 1945 without being needlessly disturbing in its depiction. Essential to the project was that young viewers gain an appreciation of the human toll of the atomic attack and its effects on the body. How then could this be accomplished *sans* venturing forth with the graphic representation so common in commercial cinema, and specifically in Japanese cinema?

Arihara opts for a play on memory, but a play on memory considerably distinct from that of *Hiroshima, mon amour*. As Tomoko wanders through the Peace Museum, she is initially horrified by a display which shows people making their way through flames and destruction. The bodily effects of the bomb on the individuals depicted are not shown, yet their emotional anguish and fear are evident. She then gazes at relics from the atrocity - a child's tricycle, two sets of tattered clothing, a shadow on a concrete block where a woman once sat. In a manner similar to the statue's miraculous conversion into the real Sadako, the relics briefly return to their state immediately prior to the blast. We see a young boy on a tricycle who smiles at Tomoko and waves. We then witness a blinding light, and he disappears, the tricycle left a distorted mass of metal. An old woman looks up from her seat, once again smiles at Tomoko, and then disappears in a flash of light, with only a dark spot remaining on the concrete. The two suits of clothing are revealed to belong to young adolescents, who shyly reach for each other's hand and giggle as they too disappear with the blast. Rather than depicting the corporal ravages of the bomb, Arihara does quite the opposite; in lieu of an "inconsolable memory" of the ravages of atrocity, he creates pleasant memories, vignettes from that August sixth morning which never would be reprised. Tomoko greets these moments and then witnesses their eradication. Human experience does not become a desecrated body, but rather it *disappears*. The ravage of Hiroshima is suggested by twisted or shredded *material* relic. In a like manner, when Sadako returns from adolescence to her early childhood, the dramatization of the events witnessed by Tomoko are frightening, but never graphic. Even Sadako's death from leukemia is understated as we simply see her tire in a race. The girl then explains to Tomoko about her final hospital stay.

One can argue that the body in essence "disappears" in *On a Paper Crane.* Yet this disappearance is considerably distinct from that of Latin America or more recent events in the United States. In all actuality, many ravaged bodies at Hiroshima were found and buried. The young boy was originally buried in his family's garden on his tricycle so that he could play with it in the next world. Many years later, the body was exhumed and buried in a cemetery, and the tricycle was placed on permanent display in the Peace Museum. Arihara thus passes from presence to absence, life to absence of life without depicting the intervening corporal effects. In other words, *On a Paper Crane* shuns the exact experience that the female

protagonist of *Hiroshima, mon amour* so relentlessly desires to live through, if only mediated by the visual image. A question remains: Is the effect of the film strong enough without graphic depiction to convey its message, or does the elimination of bodily wreckage soften its impact? Debates regarding the film's potential to disturb surround its use in American classrooms and suggest that its viewing can be a most powerful experience indeed.

Effacing the Wasted Body: *Longtime Companion*

The discourse of the body in *Longtime Companion* is doubtless the most problematical of the three. The film is a hybrid work inasmuch as it intersects a depiction of corporal deterioration with an effacement of the same. To heighten the impact of AIDS, it draws upon gay cultural iconography, in this case the essentialized, idealized male body as celebrated by the gay male look. Following a group of gay men throughout the course of the first eight years of the AIDS epidemic, the film inscribes deformity into a dynamics of performance and observation. In its depiction of the convergence of homosexuality and deformity, it foregrounds dual marginality. *Longtime Companion*'s ample cast of characters comprises the actors, writers, and viewers of a tv soap opera, appropriately entitled *Other People*. The embedded drama, of which we only see brief segments, mirrors the manner in which the characters of René's film must confront the horror of AIDS as marker of difference. Over the course of a one-year period, the television drama reveals a popular character (played by a gay actor) to be homosexual, and its viewers are confronted with the startling "otherness" of a male/male kiss. In turn, the protagonists of René's film must confront the otherness of AIDS as it touches (and deforms) those they love.

Longtime Companion positions its viewer as a gay male within the dynamics of the look. And this process is especially evident in its opening title sequence, which initially gives the illusion of depicting *habitual* or *typical* events: a young man strips off his running shorts on a Fire Island beach and dives into the water nude; the same man later cruises another man while jogging; a young woman catches a glimpse of her handsome gay neighbour in his jockey briefs as both reach for the morning paper; the neighbour and his lover have breakfast in their underwear. Yet these events are not only typical, but rather are historicized to the very day on which the notion of normality changed forever in the gay community.

The film is preceded by a caption which establishes that the opening sequences take place on July 3, 1981, the date the New York Times first published an obscure article alluding to a strange form of cancer affecting male homosexuals. Although the events initially recall the *iterative*, a discursive mode reflecting description, habitual action, and the imperfect tense in literature,[(3)] the film's title sequence quickly debunks this illusory realm of the everyday as one-by-one the characters read the *New York Times* article which will irrevocably transform their lives. Relationships among the men and women become clear as they telephone or visit each other to read and discuss the article. As the reading of the article passes from voice to voice, the spectator apprehends that the film depicts the impact of the epidemic upon a collectivity, upon the trendy gay communities of New York City and Fire Island and their friends.

In both the title sequence and the scenes that immediately follow, the camera's gaze reflects the dynamics of male cruising as it contemplates the buns and baskets of the Fire Island Adoni. A middle-aged gay couple relaxes on the beach, drinking wine and listening to Bellini's *Norma* as they observe the bodies on display. Willy and Fuzzy (the young men who cruised each other while jogging) meet during the pre-Fourth-of-July festivities and initiate a relationship which will last throughout the diegetic time of the film. Their longtime companionship - the only one of the diverse relationships depicted to survive the first eight years of the epidemic - is ironically born with the arrival of the film's *unwanted* longtime companion, AIDS itself.

The optimistic Fire Island holiday foregrounds a context in which gayness and the celebration of the male body are the norm. Yet a feeling of otherness not unlike that with which homosexuality is perceived by the viewing public of *Other People* penetrates the members of the looks-conscious community as they must gaze upon their own companions who waste away or are deformed by Karposi's sarcoma. As Willy's best friend John lies dying of pneumonia in a New York City hospital, a shot from above reveals him helpless and feverish, attached to a respirator and monitoring devices. The contrast with the fun-loving, campy persona who struts his boyish physique on the Fire Island beach in the opening sequences is evident, yet it fails to distress as intensely as later images. We are only privy to the *initial* stages of the youth's illness and see neither his further deterioration nor eventual death. As *Longtime Companion* progresses, however, it

becomes increasing more relentless in its depiction of the ravaging corporeal effect of AIDS.

In a brief sequence set in 1983, the film introduces its second person with AIDS, and the impact is considerably more disturbing. Willy, Fuzzy, and their friends enjoy an outdoor brunch, reminiscent of the merry atmosphere of the opening sequences. A medium close-up of Willy foregrounds intense emotion and concern as he catches sight of something off-camera. A countershot reveals a young man, badly deformed by Karposi's sarcoma, passing by in the distance who pauses and greets Willy. The entire party is troubled by the frightening spectacle; Fuzzy's sister Lisa nervously inquires, "Who's that?," and this highly audible comment is followed by general expressions of discomfort. Although Willy's returned gaze displays warmth and concern, *no one invites the youth to join the party.* Photographed in a medium-long shot, the young man deigns not to approach the group. In the privileged space of Fire Island in which the otherness of male homosexuality has always been the norm, the person with AIDS is separated from his attractive companions by virtue of his deformative otherness. In an obvious attempt to disavow the disturbing sight, young men in the party pontificate on how fewer men appear to be contracting AIDS and how the epidemic appears to be running its course. After all, it affects only those who combine exaggerated promiscuity with frequent drug use. As Kaja Silverman (1996) has asserted, discomfort is an immediate reaction when one is confronted with a body quite different from the social ideal. The PWA in this scene remains separate and fails to transit from the realm of otherness.

Longtime Companion forces the viewer to confront the epidemic even more directly in a lengthy sequence set in 1986 which depicts the death of the soap opera writer. The film's protagonists no longer gaze at deformity from the security of a terrace brunch. Rather, they must touch, clean, and diaper the wasted body of the man who had once been their companion in the seemingly eternal Fire Island summer festivities. When it becomes necessary to choose clothing for the cremation, Willy, together with Lisa. enters an enormous closet and beholds a garish red gown, a souvenir of their late friend's occasional flirtations with drag. The recalled spectacle of drag and its discourse of resistance provokes a brief moment of jubilation which is aborted by the jarring spectacle of the undertakers who zip Sean's dissipated body, now clad in a conventional dark suit, into a plastic bag.

Despite the protagonists' direct confrontation with the deformative ravages of AIDS, the corporeal realities of the disease fail to transcend the realm of otherness. The film's final sequence, set on July 19, 1989, marks a glaring break from the rest of the work. It initially begins as do so many other sequences of the film; Willy, Fuzzy, and Lisa walk along the beach and discuss a demonstration at the New York City Department of Health to be held the following day. They joke about egg throwing at the mayor and possible strip searches. The tone of the opening sequence is imbued with camp dynamics and sexual innuendo. Fuzzy inquires as to whether gay men would go back to sleeping around if a cure were to be found, to which Willy replies that he hates the moralizing discourse which so often surrounds AIDS. As Willy states that he hope to be there when a cure is found, there is an abrupt rupture in the filmic discourse. The scene becomes Brechtian; we are unsure if the characters address each other or the extra-diegetic audience. Recalling at once choral theatre productions celebrating homosexuality in the area of AIDS or more distant radical breakthroughs such as *cinema nôvo*, the sequence constitutes a virtual coda with a minimum of narrative contextualization and seems somewhat unmotivated. In the distance, the three friends catch sight of a crowd of men descending across a footbridge and onto the beach and recognize their departed friends, whose bodies have now been miraculously restored to their prime. In this fantastically hypothetical coda, the friends embrace as the memory of AIDS is effaced. Zane Campbell's song, "The Post-Mortem Bar" is superimposed over this hypothetical reunion and its lyrics speak of the reunion of friends after death and of the "catching up" they will do after years of separation. Just as abruptly, the restored bodies disappear, and the three friends walk intently towards the footbridge.

Such erasure, even momentary and phantasmagorical, of both the disease and its effects destabilizes the depiction of the ravaged body. The discourse of resistance implied by the protagonists' increased activism seeks to restore a world now gone. Although deformity, in *Longtime Companion*, is presented in its most human terms. It remains, nonetheless, perpetually at odds with the physical beauty celebrated in the gay male visual realm. While the protagonists attain what Kaja Silverman terms the "active gift of love" as they assemble at Sean's deathbed, the film reopens a discourse of essentialism by effacing (even hypothetically) the very deformity whose acceptance it has advocated. Such a device is subversive, and serves to interrogate

the ravages depicted earlier in the film.

The Absent Body: *The Official Story*

Luis Puenzo's *The Official Story* is predicated upon a series of structuring absences, the most fundamental of which is the absence of the body. Its protagonist, Alicia, a high school teacher of Argentine history, perpetuates the official version of her country's history.(4) Absent in her discourse is any recognition of the unofficial accounts, both of Argentina's struggles for liberation and of the more recent atrocities of the *Proceso* which occurred immediately prior to the film's diegetic context. Alicia and her husband have a young daughter, Gaby, whom they adopted at infancy. Alicia has never questioned Gaby's origins. Through her both growing friendship with a dissident literature teacher and her renewed relationship with a high school friend who has spent seven years in exile, Alicia comes to learn of the disappearances during the military government and of said government's "distribution" of the children of the disappeared to couples friendly to its cause and to big business.

Metaphorically, *The Official Story* speaks to the absence of the body. Throughout Puenzo's film, Gaby sings a children's song, which recontextualized in light of the disappearances, becomes progressively more ominous. It tells of a land of "I don't remember" in which one takes three steps and loses oneself. Such song is mirrored by a story told to young Gaby by Alicia's friend, Ana, about a magical paint which makes things disappear. Ana, who had been the lover of a dissident, had been kidnapped and tortured by the military. Yet for Alicia and her other bourgeois friends, Ana's disappearance appeared the most benign of absences. In a somewhat disconcerting role reversal, Alicia begins to come to grips with the realities of recent Argentine history while Ana would best like to forget it, attempting instead to forge a new life at home as her country returns to democracy.

The film's only reference to torture is verbal. Ana and Alicia rekindle their friendship as they recount what has transpired in their lives over the course of the past seven years. Ana begins by describing a poster of Gardel which had hung near the door of her apartment in Buenos Aires' trendy Laprida Street. She and Alicia laugh as she describes how the intruders ripped the poster to threads. It is only gradually that Alicia comes to understand the serious nature of the discussion and realizes that Ana was subjected to extensive torture by electric prodding, submersion under water, and eventual rape. When Ana was initially taken into the detention centre, the leader told his colleagues to save her for him; for this reason, she was initially spared rape. The fact that we only hear of Ana's plight through her own words underscores Alicia's self-imposed distance from historical reality. We imagine the torture to which Ana is subjected, yet we fail to see it. The tortured body becomes in Puenzo's film a structuring absence; it structures our growing apprehension of historical reality as we experience with protagonist Alicia the "unofficial story." As Alicia pursues her search for truth, Ana perturbingly disappears from the narrative. Rather than affecting a deepened bond between the two women, Alicia's investigations succeed in separating them. Ana's absence mirrors for the spectator the countless other absences which structure the film.

At other key moments in the film, the interplay between corporal absence and presence becomes key to diegetic development. Convinced that Gaby may well be the daughter of a disappeared person, Alicia initiates an extensive investigation at the hospital where the child was born. It is there that she meets mothers actively looking for the offspring of their disappeared children.

The specific facts regarding Gaby that Alicia inadvertently reveals to her companions-in-search betray her identity to Sara, an older woman from the interior of the Province, who has lost her daughter and son-in-law. The two meet in a café near the Plaza de Mayo where the Madres regularly demonstrate. Sara shows Alicia photos of the children from their days as childhood playmates, to adolescent sweethearts, and finally to young parents. She details the hardships they endured as they built brick-by-brick, wall-by-wall the future home from which they ultimately disappeared. As is the case with Ana's embedded narrative, we are deprived a flashback to the couple's life together. (In this case the film is considerably distinct from Costa Gavras' *Missing* in which flashbacks and home movies provide us with a sense of the humanity of a young American man who has gone missing in Pinochet's Chile.) Gaby's potential parents remain as abstract (and absent!) to the viewer as they do to Alicia. Their kidnapping, nonetheless is *suggested* by a counterpoint between sound and image. As Alicia and the viewer gaze at the photographs, the sound of children playing a shooting game in the café is superimposed over a close-up of the young couple. Their death is suggested by the fake

gunshots.

In the film's closing sequence, Alicia has taken Gaby to her in-laws so that she can confront Roberto with what she has learned. When her husband becomes frantic at his daughter's absence, Alicia cries out that now he knows how other people have felt - what it is like not to know where their children are. In a fit of rage, Roberto slams Alicia's hand through the glass window of a door. This act, disturbing inasmuch as, despite accusations that Roberto was actually the person who initially denounced Ana, we have heretofore perceived him as a selfish, opportunistic, but not necessarily violent man. As Alicia washes the blood from her hand, the phone rings. Gaby has now learned all of the words to her little song and wishes to sing it for her parents. As Alicia leaves her key in the apartment door and departs, Roberto's eyes well with tears as Gaby sings of disappearance and fear.

In Puenzo's film, not only is there a play of bodily absence, one which casts all corporal violence into the realm of the "twice-told" and precludes immediacy, but also an absence of the biological functioning of the body. The theme of motherhood is key to *The Official Story*, yet it is inscribed into the film's diegesis at a loss. Not only does it separate motherhood from biology (Alicia being not only the film's primary mother figure, but also an *adoptive* mother), thereby contesting the role of the procreative female, but moreover, Alicia and Gaby notwithstanding, it distances motherhood from the diegetic context; a cursory reference is made by Ana to her seventeen-year-old son who is never seen nor mentioned again, despite the character's intense revelation of other events of her life. Moreover, the inscription of the adoptive, non-biological mother is most significant in that it textualizes a unique deployment of the concept of motherhood by the repressive regime as it separated children from their biological context only to find them suitable homes. In this sense, the regime turned itself on a very institution which it traditionally had used to hold itself firmly in place.

Each of the three films analyzed responds differently to the notion of *habeas corpus* as applied to the discourse of the body in film. In *On a Paper Crane: Tomoko's Adventure*, there are depictions of the body immediately *prior* to the atomic blast. Rather than creating an "inconsolable memory" as does amour *Hiroshima, mon amour*, Arihara simply allows the body to disappear. Such disappearance, all the while softening the graphic potential of the film, conveys the ultimate effect of the explosion - death and loss. The smiles of a young boy on a tricycle, a tired old woman's greeting, and the coy flirtation of young sweethearts are rendered null. Likewise, Tomoko's new friend disappears in her own way and becomes once again a statue.

The process deployed by Norman René in *Longtime Companion* is considerably distinct. Here, the film contrasts the body wasted by AIDS with the essentialized body so germane to gay male visual pleasure. This contrast foregrounds the "otherness" which now ravages an already-marginalized community. As underscored by the title of the embedded soap opera, *Other People*, homosexual POWs are doubly removed from mainstream society. Yet René problematizes this process through the film's coda and the phantasmagorical return of the dead, their bodies intact and once again beautiful. For a brief moment, the tragedy of AIDS is effaced, and those who have wasted away and those who loved them to the end can once again find themselves within the dynamic of the gay male gaze. Recalling a near-death experience as detailed by Elizabeth Kuebler-Ross or other experts on death and dying, the sequence suggests an apotheosis of the departed. Although one can argue that the coda in essence negates the effects of the film's graphic depiction of the body consumed by AIDS, it serves to foreground the loss and separation the three survivors have experience by rendering *more immediate* the memory of their loved ones in their prime. The pathos of final shot of the three friends walking alone towards the footbridge is evidence of the visual potential of the momentary effacement of the disease.

Unlike both Arihara's and René's film, Puenzo's *The Official Story* refutes both graphic depiction of the corporal ravages of torture and any depiction of the missing, *even prior* to their disappearance. The sole discussion of kidnapping, torture, and rape is accomplished through a victim's verbal narration. The camera remains fixed on the narrator and her interlocutor, eschewing any flashback. As we learn of the life story of the young couple likely to have been Gaby's parents, a similar process unfolds. They are recalled exclusively by verbal narration and photographs, a device that accentuates the fact that Sara is left only with memories and photographs. We never hear their voices or are directly privy to their actions. The pervasive absence of the missing metaphorically stands in for the very nature of the disappearances. A Spanish term for an open-casket funeral, *de cuerpo presente*, suggests the importance of the body in the grieving process and

foregrounds the film's lack of closure.

Puenzo's film has been strongly critiqued by the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* for its failure to name names or indict the military government.(5) Yet such a stance ignores the very power of the film's ambiguity and its implicit indictment of the methods deployed by Argentina's military government, its lack of accusation mirroring the lack of *habeas corpus*. *Habeas corpus* by nature implies closure; it facilitates prosecution and allows the bereaved to grieve. Although Arisari, René, and Puenzo textualize the effacement of bodily ravage or the very absence of body ravaged by disease or human action in distinct and somewhat contradictory manners, all three foreground the lack of closure present in such atrocities.

The narrative structures of the films fight against closure and progress from the superficial containment of *Tomoko's Adventure: On a Paper Crane* to the open-ended discourse of *The Official Story*. Although Tomoko can return home having completing her private journey to Hiroshima, many questions remain. The friendship she enjoyed with Sadako vanishes as suddenly as the individuals who came to life in the Museum. Relics of the past are granted a momentary passage to life, yet return to the oblivion which has become their destiny. In the case of *Longtime Companion*, the complex narrative, whose diverse threads are drawn together by the theme of "otherness," by the soap opera *Other People*, is problematized by the return of the integral body, thereby accentuating the loss felt by the protagonists. The abrupt change in discourse and the Brechtian undercurrents of the final sequence are disturbing, and the viewer leaves the film examining the "what ifs" evoked by Willy.

In Puenzo's film, such a process is even more disturbing in that essentially nothing is resolved in the film. All players who might unravel for Alicia (and by extension, for the viewer) the film's unofficial story and sew together its divergent patches have disappeared long before the film's opening. The diegetic world of *The Official Story* is one of speculation, one whose wounds are perpetually open. A major player in this narrative and ideological aperture is the absent body, which refutes both containment and closure, failing to proffer the neat solutions of *habeas corpus*. By shunning the "inconsolable memory" desired by Alain Resnais' protagonist, the absent body fosters a memory equally inconsolable, one in which unanswered questions and unresolved grief continue to perturb.

Notes

1. See Marjorie Agosín, *Circles of Madness: Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo*. Fredonia: White Pine, 1992.

2. Together with Mary Bradbury's article, we can mention Doris Francis, Leonie Kellaher, and Georgina Neophytou's "The Cemetery: The Evidence of Continuing Bonds," also in Hockey, Katz, and Small.

3. For an extensive discussion of the iterative and the pseudo-iterative in narrative film, see Marsha Kinder, "The Subversive Potential of the Pseudo-Iterative." *Film Quarterly* 43.2 (Winter 1989-90), 2-16.

4. In Spanish, there is no distinction between "official history" and "official story." Hence, the title *La historia oficial* can refer both to the historical context and to Alicia's private situation.

5. See Bruce Williams, "De la Puerta de Ibsen a la Plaza de Mayo: La historización transtextual de lo femenino."

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