

Alain Resnais

La guerre est finie (1966)

The film projection of *La guerre est finie* (War is Over), marks the end of the section of the Collection framed by the decades constituting the post-war period. It was chosen because it is such a precise document, a portrait detailing the gradual disappearance of the ghosts of the war, and the birth of a new present, riddled with doubts.



The script by Jorge Semprún (1923), an exile in France and major Spanish Communist Party radical there, is the film's cornerstone. Alain Resnais (1922) contacted the writer after being impressed by his first novel *The Long Journey* (1963), an autobiographical work about his time at Buchenwald concentration camp. The director of such films as *Nuit et Brouillard* (1955) and *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959) – both set in the dystopia of the post-war world – must have been interested not only by the story but also by its particular literary style. This consists of cutting back and forth between reality, flashbacks and imagination, very much in keeping with the Frenchman's cinematographic style. Alain Resnais' modernity lies in suppressing the narrative as a continuous temporal line, and creating a subjective space, constructed by superimposing a number of layers of the past and future using his personal editing methods.

For this film, Semprún came up with a new autobiographical story. At the time of writing the script, the author had already been thrown out of the Communist Party, in which he had had the dangerous role of underground activist. The film's story is set in the days leading up to a general strike that is to take place in Spain, supposedly overthrowing Franco for good. Diego Mora, the film's main character and the writer's alter ego, presents a demythologizing image of the Communist Party and its subversive manoeuvres from abroad, although the party is never actually named in the film. It is actually as if the war has not finished for the exiles, ensconced in the resistance, dreaming of going back to a Spain free from dictatorship. However, the Diego/Semprún character questions the risks taken in undercover work, and is openly sceptical about the effectiveness of the struggle. Over a number of trips to Spain under assumed names, Mora begins to discover a new Spain that has nothing to do with the romantic image that they all

have of it in exile, "a myth for old soldiers [...] All Spain is now is a dream for tourists, or the legend of the Civil war, all mixed up with Lorca's plays," he says at one point. This is not the Spain of 1936 but of 1965, a country absolutely under Franco's rule, which has adapted to its current political situation. In this reality, only the new generation, the people who did not fight in the Civil War, who have grown up under the dictatorship, are prepared to change anything, as was shown later by the very limited part played by the exiled community in the transition to democracy. The frustration that comes from being on the outside and on the inside is a key point in the film and in Semprún's writing: outside yet inside the party, his native country, political activity. The character seems lost in an ideological maze, on top of which there is his midlife crisis. His second youth blooms for a moment in a brief fling with a young member of a Leninist terrorist splinter group based on armed struggle and the cult worship of this populariser of revolution, all of which is so removed from this character who has lost his faith in a doctrine incapable of self-criticism. Semprún's disappointment in the Communist Party in 1965 corresponds to the spirit of an age, illustrating the tension-filled setting for the riots of 1968 that took place all around the globe from China to Czechoslovakia, Mexico to Berkeley, reaching their peak in Paris in May. In the events of that month, the France of Charles De Gaulle witnessed a huge revolutionary uprising,

first among students and then among workers which actually threatened to bring down the established regime, in which the French Communist Party could not or would not participate. The value of an incipient new left-wing corresponded on a cultural level with the decisive moment in artistic and intellectual movements like the Situationist International, founded by Guy E. Debord (1931 – 1994), one of the landmarks on the journey through the collection. Situationist political theory had a great influence on how events developed in 1968. Debord saw the Communist Party as bureaucratic in both form and ideology, which is why he rejected the very idea of the party and the hierarchical organisation of activism. The revolution needed to come directly from the Working Class, organised into self-governing councils, and to be the result of the subjectivity of the proletariat, in which Debord included the alienated Middle Class, “the class of consciousness”. However, 1968 represented the success and high point of this political rhetoric as well as the beginning of its rapid decline, with the dissolution of the Situationist group and the swansong of the communist utopia.

La Guerre est finie is a representation of the international post-war historical fabric. What lay in store for the film, once distributed, is a chronicle of the scarce opposition to Franco demonstrated by foreign governments, in this case that of De Gaulle. The fact that the Spanish regime boycotted the official presentation of the film at Cannes shows that Franco was not that isolated in fact. Neighbouring countries such as France did not intervene in Spain’s political situation, not only because it was an internal matter, but also because the Cold War kept all the USA’s allies focused on communism, and they did not want to break off relations with Franco’s regime. So in 1965, the war was not over either for an international community, living under the shadow of the atomic bomb. In that context, the French revolution of May 1968 was seen as a failure, because it did not change the established order. But it did leave significant residue in society and should be seen as a turning point in that it laid the foundations for future social movements and for

a new intellectual left beyond the dictates of Moscow.

Alain Resnais’ cinematic style, more focused on analysing mental states and ways of representing time and consciousness than on setting down reality as a document, is the absolute relevance of this film. As Deleuze points out, in Resnais, the construction of various levels of the past no longer come down to one single person or group, but to non-connecting places that together build up a memoir of the world.

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