



Article

Endless Exile—Alain Resnais's *The War Is Over*

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Abstract: This paper aims to analyze the movie *The War Is Over* (*La guerre est finie*—France/Sweden, 1966, directed by Alain Resnais and a screenplay by Jorge Semprún). The idea is to point out a possible sociological discussion on exile, mobilizing the notion of mental images. The methodological approach is an internal analysis of the film to allow for the elaboration of sociological considerations along with the expressive elements of the film construction. To do so, we shall focus on the “leaps” within the movie’s narrative order, in which a main character (Diego) anticipates, through imagination, a series of sequences and events that might or might not have occurred. To discuss the notion of mental images and their relationship with the imaginary, the theoretical reference will be Cornelius Castoriadis’ book *The Imaginary Institution of Society*. This article will benefit from the discussions in the presentations about the film both at meetings in Brazil and at the last ISA Congress 2023 (International Sociological Association—Research Committee 37—Sociology of Arts). This text is one of the results of research supported by the São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP).

Keywords: sociology; arts; film analysis; mental images; exile; film *The War is Over*

1. Introduction

About *The War is Over*¹, a film directed by Alain Resnais and written by Jorge Semprún, James Monaco said that it was the most “accessible” movie of Resnais and “reached a larger and more popular audience than any of [his] others [films]” (Monaco 1979, p. 96). Conversely, Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier sees *The War is Over* as the most accomplished of his films (Ropars-Wuilleumier 1970, p. 206). Finally, Gaston Bounoure writes that the film surprised movie critics as a “classic” work of “logical action” and “tragic composition,” different from the director’s previous works—*Hiroshima mon amour*, *Last Year at Marienbad*, and *Muriel* (Bounoure 1974, pp. 34–35). More recently, Hunter Vaughan said that the movie is “an often underappreciated jewel of Resnais’ early period” (Vaughan 2013, p. 156), “integrating his experimental formalism into a concrete and topical story that, for all intents and purposes, actually has a legible plot” (Vaughan 2013, p. 157).

The plot of the film is clearly identified in chronological time, circumscribed between the entry of Diego Mora (Yves Montand) in France (on the early Sunday morning of 18 April 1965, crossing the country border towards Hendaye and using the name René Sallanches) and his new departure to Spain (on the late Tuesday afternoon of April 20, by the name of Chauvin). The movie follows the footsteps of the character, someone involved in constructing the “revolution” since the exile—the reason for the various names he uses (Rafael, Carlos, Domingos), his to and from in Paris, love affairs, friendships in and outside the political circle in which he operates, the discussions on planning the political action in Spain from France, etc. It is noteworthy the way he establishes his relationship with the present time, characterized by the tension expressed in his face, his calculated and restrained gestures, the directions detailed on maps, the addresses he memorized, and his constant attentive gazes at who and what is happening around him.

The way Diego’s character is built and the broader social and historical background of the plot—the Spanish Civil War and the struggle since the exile against an enemy for the last 30 years—attract the attention of researchers interested in the relationships between



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cinema and society from the perspective of exile. Spain is spoken about, debated, and referred to as a “home country” by the voice of an unseen narrator. It is a Spain that is never shown—although the narrator announces it as being located besides the hills of Elizondo when the border police stop the character and his traveling companion at the very beginning of the movie. Vicente Sánchez-Biosca pointed out that the film starts with an ellipse (Diego Mora returns from a season in Spain) and an off-screen shot (Spain). Given this, the author says the country is not a “fait” (fact) in *The War is Over* but a “specter” on which some base their “certainties,” others their “uncertainties,” the “parties establish their strategies,” and “the Franco dictatorship its pragmatism” (see Sánchez-Biosca 2011, p. 30). As the author said, “Spain in *The War is Over* is a ghost: it is not represented but is always at the heart of the discourses; it is on the other side of the border, but always off-screen (Sánchez-Biosca 2011, p. 31).

In Sánchez-Biosca’s reading—as he says, that of a culture historian—several elements off-screen haunt Semprún’s script. The most incisive clue is in the speech/outburst of the character when he characterizes what he calls the Spain of Lorca, the Spain from the left’s mythology. Diego Mora’s outburst, before some friends in Marianne’s apartment, where he lives when in Paris (Marianne—Ingrid Thulin—is his lover), inserts in the plot the contradiction, hopelessness, and criticism regarding political action in 1965—his own, that of the comrades, and the party. Also, it is against what Spain had become. He says:

“Poor, unhappy Spain. Heroic, gallant Spain. I’m sick of it! Spain has become the lyrical rallying point of the left: a myth for veterans of past wars. Meanwhile, 14 million tourists vacation in Spain every year. Spain is nothing but a tourist’s dream or a civil-war myth. All bundled up with Lorca’s plays, and I’m fed up with Lorca’s plays. Sterile women and peasant dramas! And you can have the legend too! I was not at Verdun, or Teruel, or at the front at Ebro. And the people now doing what counts in Spain weren’t either. Twenty-year-olds inspired not by our past but by their future. Spain is no longer the dream of 1936 but the truth of 1965, however disconcerting. Thirty years have gone by, and veterans give me a pain in the ass!”²

As the excerpt above shows, there is a remarkable distinction between his conceptions and those of his companions about Spain. However, says Sánchez-Biosca, it is as if this discontinuity of Diego’s historical, political, and social context concerning his friends is, in a way, matched by the discontinuities promoted by Resnais in aesthetics using anticipations. In our words, in the movie, the mental images that Diego Mora has of Spain (after his last six-month stay in the country) are configured aesthetically by some leaps throughout the film. Such images differ from their comrades’ conceptions about Spain (who, from France, planned the general strike) or those who sympathize with fighting for the mythological cause of the left.

“What characterizes the form of *The War is Over* is its discontinuous use of time. It is not only about the flash-forward but also about interpolations of thought, the superposition or fractures in developing the action, that underline the ‘imaginary side of everyday life,’ banal and even anachronistic”. (Sánchez-Biosca 2011, p. 32)³

2. The Problem

This aspect is noteworthy. What is at stake is not precisely the flash-forward itself but the interpolations and the fractures in the development of the action. If we visit the theoretical and critical film dictionary, we will see that the term flash-forward—defined as “a narrative figure”—appears in the flashback entry. As the authors Jacques Aumont and Michel Marie explain, “The English word flashback connotes the suddenness of this ‘turn’ in time,” when they refer to the insertion, in narrative films, of scenes reporting “previous events,” as if there was a “turn back” in time. Likewise, “a sequence reporting subsequent events” to those surrounding it may also be inserted: “If this insertion is brief, we will talk about flash-forward, a sudden leap forward” (Aumont and Marie 2007, p. 131). According

to Aumont and Marie, this would not be new to cinema, which learned to deal with the narrative figure from an early age.

The authors' note helps us to position the problem, given that Alain Resnais's use of flash-forward is quite particular—either due to those not being events that will happen or to the value that the procedure has for the construction, specifically, of the character of Diego Mora, a “professional” revolutionary who lives under the motto “patience and irony” (“the chief virtues of a Bolshevik,” says Mora while he lists the “expenses” he had on his last trip). In this sense, such insertions do not refer to an event later in the plot. It is a series of *Sequenza immaginaria*, to use the title of the movie's soundtrack, composed by Giovanni Fusco in three parts. In other words, they are mental images as projections, anticipations, recognitions, or even of what could have happened, imagined by a man who owes life, freedom, and survival to the discipline with which he deals with time and the care with which he explores the places to which he goes. By encouraging discontinuity, this specific type of flash-forward could thus—according to Biosca—shed light on another discontinuity: the perceptions between the revolutionary who returns from Madrid and those who await him in Paris. For our part, however—and we will try to highlight it—it sheds light on how the film works with thought images, bringing to the screen the movement of thought in the daily life of an exile, a professional revolutionary always trying to anticipate the facts, the steps, and the events to maybe deal with problems (such as police traps) in a better way or get away from them altogether.

However, this singularity of Alain Resnais's insertions in the chronological order of the film's narrative, in which Diego's character imagines (or anticipates by imagining) sequences or events that could occur, continues to interest us. Such insertions help to put into perspective Resnais's preference for the term imaginary, a word that, according to him, would be the most appropriate to think about his films (and not the term memory, with which his work had been associated). As Vaughan ponders, “What is shown in these sequences cannot necessarily be considered ‘memory’ or ‘foreshadowing’, since its denotative certainty is often nullified” (Vaughan 2013, p. 152)⁴. Moreover, the procedure can also allow for a sociological discussion about the terms in question, not only to relate memory and the imaginary but also to problematize the time dimensions present in the film and the relationship they establish with the exiled revolutionary. Thus, if we put the uniqueness of the use of these insertions in the foreground and do not lose sight of the exile of the character being quite particular—that of a professional revolutionary—we can explore, in the film, the imagination of those who face this situation (that of exile), peculiarly, he struggles to prepare the return of his compatriots—spread throughout Paris—and, under a myriad of documents, names, addresses, directions, passwords, and counter-passwords, goes to his home country regularly and clandestinely. After all, he is a Spanish exile in France who lives part of the year in Spain, sometimes as a Frenchman. As the narrator's voice refers to him, he goes to his native country and, with each return, finds his place of exile. The film shows, therefore, an exile who always returns to his country of exile and must always make the journey back; if he does not, it is due to having been arrested or killed.

Notably, it is worth making distinctions around the term exile, given how it appears in the film. The word appears at around 65 min and 67 min; perhaps we can characterize it as how the character refers to himself. It is not the same case at 92 min, when, asked to present the papers to a police officer who approached the vehicle he was driving (for driving with his headlights out, a glaring mistake for a reputable revolutionary), he clearly calls himself a “refugee”. It also differs from the terms expatriate and stateless (*apatricié*), which is how the resident of a flat—whom he approaches by mistake while searching for Madame Lopez—refers to her neighbors coming from Algeria.

Considering the distinctions suggested by Edward Said—between exiles, refugees, expatriates, and émigrés—the author says that “exile originated in the age-old practice of banishment. Once banished, the exile lives an anomalous and miserable life, with the stigma of being an outsider (. . .); [and] carries with it, I think, a touch of solitude and

spirituality"; this is distinct from "refugees," "a creation of the twentieth-century state," and a word that "has become a political one, suggesting large herds of innocent and bewildered people requiring urgent international assistance" (Said 2000, p. 181). In this record, it is as if the protagonist of *The War is Over* carries both attributes. The difference between them is perspective: exile is how he perceives himself (suffering from missing Spain); refugee is how he exists in official documents. The film, however, has another word that relates from afar to exiled, repatriated, refugee, and kinship, hinted at by moving between borders: the tourist. According to Said, if nationalism and exile are "opposites informing and constituting each other" (Said 2000, p. 176), the tourist or tourism is news of what became of the homeland in the person's absence: a product, merchandise, industry, or a visit point for those who have no connection with it. Looked at from the perspective of exile, tourism in the film is not a tangential point in the plot but one of the names to describe Spain before and after the tourists, as when he says, "Meanwhile, 14 million tourists vacation in Spain every year," "Spain is nothing but a tourist's dream or a civil-war myth," and Spain "whose absence would be unbearable," as he says elsewhere. And somehow, although this is mentioned but not explicitly in the film, this passage of large contingents across the border is what made entering and leaving France for Spain and vice versa more effortless (including for Diego Mora).

As we will know by the voice of the invisible narrator, it is in France, in exile, that lives "the camaraderie of comrades," which has its own small world ("uncertain and full of traps") formed by small groups connected and disconnected by missions and deaths by the police, people with whom he shares joys, sufferings, political discussions, coffee, wine, and the "opaque reality" in which "actions lead to undefined progress." These people are scattered throughout certain neighborhoods of Paris, Irvy, Porte de Lillas, Rue D'Aubervilliers, and Quatre Chemins, places he knows like "the palm of his hand," and suffer for the fallen and the dream of victory (which never comes).

3. Analytical Discussion

Let us focus on two moments of the movie. Not on the sequences of the adventures and mishaps of the thriller, with chase and tense scenes, but on those that break the rhythm. Not those of the action and reaction of the character but on the filmed thought, which appears in interpolations, jumps, recognitions, and anticipations. Let us then recover the mental images inserted within the chronological order of the film's narrative to put into perspective the imagination of an exile—not his memory. Let us force this distinction for analysis purposes. It is not an exile visited by memories shown in the flashback, but someone stuck to the present, anticipating possible (but indeterminate) futures. In the first sequence, Diego imagines Nadine (before he meets her), and the second shows Ramón's burial. But before we risk a small excursion through these two moments, let us create a brief typology of these imaginary sequences.

Generally, we have identified four types of imaginary sequences in the film where the character's mental images seem most important to us. The first type of mental image relates to the protagonist living normally and his adventures in and out of France, his daily life as a "professional revolutionary" sought by the police of Spain and France. The second refers to his concern with surveillance, which, supposedly, by his experience, is internalized, expressed in his tense face, calculated acts, and self-control, suggesting his "social make-up", an expression dear to Norbert Elias (1991, pp. 180–82). The third is the anticipation (mental images) about what he either is unaware of, did not see, or does not know but imagines. The fourth type relates to mental images that arise when the character is confronted with hypotheses different from those he believes about the events experienced.

To be more explicit, the first type is basically characterized by the arrivals and departures of trains, the suggested repetition of meetings he has with Roberto and the other comrades, and the wanderings through the flats where their comrades live. We note that addresses, not recorded on paper, challenge his memory, forcing him to use social references (the "spatial framework", as Maurice Halbwachs (1968) might say). Among these

references, the general disposition of people in places (such as the group of comrades in the room of a flat, which appears several times to Diego) and those places in larger architectural sets (such as residential blocks, the ups and downs of stairs, the number on the doors of the apartment, etc.) stand out in the film. The second type would include those that, in the movie, appear when Diego is in Paris, identifying possible plain-clothed police officers in various pursuits. The city seems thus scanned, and Diego's action is continuous: he anticipates his action, as if he were always one step ahead of others, as if he could observe pursuers and pursued from a point outside the security system and the control. The third case refers to what he does not know but imagines from his information, such as the surroundings of the arrondissement where Sallanches lives and the details he knows of Nadine. The fourth type of mental image arises from conversations with comrades, who offer counter-analyses to the assessments he brings from Spain, or in the discussion with the students—faced with the possibility that he was the one attracting the attention of the police to the students; the mental image that appears is that of a shot in which a police officer would have filmed him, still while in Spain, with a camera.

Of these four cases, the third type is particularly interesting for this study's purposes. It is a specific type of mental image in which the character—using known references and information—anticipates his visit to Nadine (Geneviève Bujold), whom he does not know. He imagines someone he knows—since he has a lot of information about her, like her age, schooling, the languages she speaks, her hair and eye color, etc. However, he does not know her since he has never seen her. In the other cases of mental images, he imagines what it will be like to meet someone or something he already knows (the comrades, the neighborhoods of Paris) or imagines police officers in investigative, arrest, and surveillance activities. For this reason, we will highlight the sequence in which Diego imagines Nadine and, in the end, those of Ramón's burial. The first takes place in the train's restaurant car, taking Diego back to Paris. The second is closer to the end of the film.

Nadine first appears as a voice on the phone, talking to Diego at the customs post. We do not see her; he does not know her. Then, Nadine is pictured when Diego is at the bookstore in Hendaye (11 min 5 s–11 min 20 s) when we watch a series of overlapping shots that show young women walking. It shows a lot of girls. They are filmed from behind (only in the final shot, one of them emerges from the front, talking on a pay phone), with long and short hair, dark and light, tied and loose⁵. At the mention of Sallanches's house, the shot that appears bears the sign Rue de L'Estrapade, with the Pantheon in the background and a gate with the number 7. One detail repeats in all the overlapping shots that bring these young women into this mental image: they carry books.

A new flow of quick shots appears a few minutes later inside the train that takes him to Paris, again showing young women with books. This flow begins with the mention of the name Lucienne, who seems to be someone Nadine's age from the discussion of the couple in front of him. Lucienne is nobody but triggers the new sequence of mental images: a name. The name is only mentioned in the couple's discussion—a couple with no other role in the plot than this name reference. The camera following Diego's point of view (he is out of the frame) and facing the couple makes a brief move to the right, where a young woman sits on a table nearby. The close-up shot suggests she is alone. When she brings a snack to her mouth, the shot changes (we notice a shift in the dress's tone and a movement in the background). The camera moves away, and the girl from the restaurant wagon is now at a bar (coffee shop). From this move, a series of shots follow, most of them showing young women (taken from the front and the back) going down or up stairs with short or long hair, light and dark, following the sidewalk and crossing the street, all heading (so it seems) to the gate with the number 7. In the next shot, we return to the restaurant wagon. The camera makes a reverse movement to the left and fixes itself on the train window. This occurs between 16 min 50 s and 17 min 16 s, or, if we prefer, up to 17 min 32 s, when the conversation of the couple who had mentioned the name Lucienne ends.

We notice from the start that such mental images do not necessarily arise to fill the time when Diego is alone or in a waiting situation. They are also not due to the explicit mention

of Nadine's or Sallanches' names since the flow of shots in the restaurant is not brought about by the reference to the names but by a specific name, probably that of someone of the same age (as perceived in the discussion of the couple), and by the random presence of the girl highlighted by the camera.

Besides, a lot of girls show up. Blondes and brunettes—although he knows that Nadine has dark hair. They all carry books, and most are walking, entering bars and cafes, but with a detail indicating that they are students. We do not know who the girls are. They are indeterminate figures, with some features suggesting Nadine, whom Diego, like us, does not know. However, they have several faces, and this variety of jovial and juvenile features is what seemingly does not allow us to anticipate Nadine's image since this image that Diego's character has of her lacks precisely what is specific to her, the face—at least if we follow Elias, for whom the face plays a central role in the “identity as this particular person,” the center of “I-identity”, whether for the person or others (see [Elias 1991](#), p. 189), given its “ductile facial musculature that can take on a different imprint according to individual experience” ([Elias 1991](#), p. 192).

Unlike the mental images in which appear the face of the friend in probable danger (Juan), that of Carmen (who will learn of the fall of her partner Andrés), and that of comrades and compatriots whom he knows well, Nadine's is unknown to him. Unlike the mental images that show the frowning faces of police officers (who, like Nadine's, he does not know), the profusion of anticipatory shots of who would be the girl are associated with youth, lightness, and movement (given that it is always a young woman going up or down stairs, walking or crossing the street, entering bars or gate number 7). Diego's information about the Sallanches family supposedly allows him to recognize them, updating their images, location, and environment: the Pantheon and the academic universe, the proximity to the Sainte-Généviève Library, the Faculty of Law of the Sorbonne, etc. However, the various shots, faces, and models walking down Rue de L'Estrapade or arriving at gate number 7—in other words, the large flow of shots with these images—may also suggest the indeterminate factor that prevents the projection of Nadine's appearance in his mind.

Following a lead given by Alain Resnais, we put aside our concern with memory to turn our attention to mental images. Deleuze would say that Resnais was interested in the issues of brain circuits as a brain filmmaker, but that will help us just a little⁶. Let us take advantage of the opening given by the filmmaker, the attempt to film the imaginary and the mental images, to try to point out how the movement of the thought is presented to us. We will do this by taking a conception of the imaginary, which, in our reading, seems appropriate to the dialogue opened by the movie's perspective.

In the book *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, Cornelis Castoriadis writes:

The imaginary does not come from the image in the mirror or from the gaze of the other. Instead, the ‘mirror’ itself and its possibility, and the other as mirror, are the works of the imaginary, which is creation *ex nihilo*. Those who speak of ‘imaginary,’ understanding by this the ‘specular,’ the reflection of the ‘fictive,’ do no more than repeat, usually without realizing it, the affirmation which has for all time chained them to the underground of the famous cave: it is necessary that this world be an image *of* something. The imaginary of which I am speaking is not an image *of*. It is the unceasing and essentially *undetermined* (social-historical and psychological) creation of figures/forms/images, on the basis of which alone there can ever be a question *of* ‘something’. What we call ‘reality’ and ‘rationality’ are its works” ([Castoriadis 1987](#), p. 3—italics by the author)

In this sense, Diego's mental images (described above) are not presented as images of Nadine but as a flow of images. Indeed, the scenes that show the comrades and the meetings of the party could be said to be updates from previous experiences since the situation must have been experienced countless times during his almost 30 years of exile. In the specific case of what is unknown to him, however, the images in flux, in a profusion of shots of figures and indeterminate shapes that flow to the entrance of the building of Sallanches's flat, are stronger or more important than his recognition of the place from

similar previous experiences. It is not Nadine's image but a stream of imagined Nadines in Diego's thought, which creates incessantly, but indeterminately, shapes, figures, shots, and movements that have, as background, both space and time instituted socially and historically—as Castoriadis pointed out (the references he has of the street since he has traveled them many times)—regarding the current news in the desire to find her. Diego Mora's imagination is not determined by the revolution by Spain but by details, a name, a wish, the indeterminate ones that make us think, exist, and desire, including a revolution. Note that the character does not always produce the same shapes as the image of the girl in the restaurant wagon. He creates them incessantly. Nadine is an immediate future that one imagines, and, in Resnais's film, there are multiple open mental images since constructing them through information is impossible.

The other passage we would like to highlight is the news of Ramón's funeral, around 107 min–110 min. Ramón never knew Spain, the land of his parents and grandparents. He worked for the movement, but he never left France⁷. Diego must travel immediately to Barcelona to replace him; after all, "the work goes on, and no single death can interrupt it". The news is given to him at 11 a.m. on Tuesday, after the conversation with Leninist students. This conversation takes place against the backdrop of a cemetery and is about a suitcase containing a bomb. All we know is that he should attend this meeting, take his luggage for the journey, have lunch with his companions, and leave. In other words, we do not know if he attended the funeral or if this is a new interpolation, i.e., a new mental image.

From this passage, we highlight the voice of the unseen narrator, who, after informing us that Ramón had never seen Spain, says: "You will see the trees of Gerona, and the vineyards along the road with Ramon's eyes" and "You will feel the delight Ramon would have felt." Later, in that same scene of the burial, the voiceover will repeat, "You'll see it all with Ramon's eyes," reinforcing the idea that the joy of Ramón, who for the first time would enter Spain, would be felt by Diego: Ramon's happiness will be yours as if it were your first trip, and the battle had just started.

The connection between looking and feeling is interesting to us because of the two ideas it updates: that of sadness—due to the "shadow of death" that enters the life of the protagonist—and that of joy expressed in the possibility of looking at the land of Ramón's parents and grandparents. What draws our attention is this kind of first-time look that the voiceover attributes to the desperate Diego, who does not believe a strike will occur on April 30.

4. Final Considerations

Now, why go through these two sequences? What is their relationship with the discussion about exile? The first answer has to do with the method: to search the film in terms of its mode of internal organization (in its images, sounds, noises, framings) and how the character of the exiled Diego Mora is built, whose peculiarity lies in the fact that he is someone who always leaves the homeland for exile—someone involved in the present, without time for nostalgia for the lost land, even if the suggested possibility of Spain's absence causes him pain.

Edward Said borrowed the idea of contrapuntal motion from music to highlight this aspect of exile, in which "habits of life, expression or activity in the new environment inevitably occur against the memory of these things in another environment. Thus both the new and the old environments are vivid, actual, occurring together contrapuntally" (Said 2000, p. 186). In Diego Mora's case, he is surrounded by the lyrical image of a Spain whose absence tears him apart and a past that is beset by the image of a transforming Spain, which exasperates him, contradicted by the decisions and directions taken by the party companions, uncompromising with those who are willing to help him, tied to carefulness to stay alive, which binds him to the present, one step away from losing sight of the meaning of what Spain and the struggle mean. In other words, even though he is prevented from living the memory of the motherland and is experiencing a particular exile, he anticipates mental

images of indeterminate, imagined futures as a force that never ceases to operate. The stream of images that anticipated Nadine, imagined images of an indeterminate someone, seems to work as a force contrary to disillusionment. The exile of *The War is Over*, the one who constantly returns to exile and is, therefore, trapped in the present with a past about to be erased, brings with him what saves him: the indeterminate.

The particularity of exile in *The War is Over*, a film that revolves around the protagonist, an exile who feels the pain of absence but acts underground as a “professional revolutionary,” is the possibility he has of fighting against those who inhabit his home(land), who expelled him from there (as well as the parents and grandparents of his friends, who were born in exile, like Ramón), an enemy that bans, expels, and prohibits, on top of erasing, an image from memory. As the character said in his outburst, “Twenty-year-olds, inspired not by our past, but by their future. Spain is no longer the dream of 1936 but the truth of 1965, however disconcerting.” The truth of 1965 is that Spain sells itself to the world as a sunny, cheerful, and happy place for the consumption of its 14 million tourists, an opaque reality and a commodity/image.

In Diego’s singular exile—the exile of one who always returns to the place of exile (where one is a refugee)—even though the character is shrouded in hopelessness (since one no longer knows what one is fighting for), there is, in Resnais’ film, an attempt to film the imaginary, the indeterminate aspects of thought, which pulls the character towards the future. Without this indeterminacy and openness, the character could not look at Spain again through Ramón’s eyes, a first-time look that would allow him to feel the joy of a struggle that seems to be starting today.

Diego Mora, who is worried about staying alive, stuck in the present, and disbelieving in the idyllic image that his companions have of Spain (a lyrical and absent Spain), now has a new perspective. After all, going to Spain in the place of Ramón, who has never seen the land of his grandparents, places Diego in a position to face an open future, that of being able to see Spain after so long, with a first-time look.

He will have the eyes of someone who has never seen Spain before. In other words, it will be an opportunity to form new images about Spain, an imaginary country—the imaginary as an unceasing and essentially undetermined (social-historical and psychical) creation of figures/forms/images and not the imaginary in the sense of an image of something.

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Notes

- ¹ *The War is Over*, directed by Alain Resnais and written by Jorge Semprún. France/Sweden, 1966, B&W, 121 min. Original title: *La guerre est finie*.
- ² The version of the character’s speech was taken from the movie script, found on the Internet, https://www.scripts.com/script.php?id=the_war_is_over_21601&p=12. Accessed on 16 September 2023. Sánchez-Biosca recalls not only the commemoration of the 25 years of peace that took place in the year 1964, although repression continued its course (Sánchez-Biosca 2011, p. 32), but also the reference to the execution of Julián Grimau in the Andrés case on 20 April 1963 (Sánchez-Biosca 2011, p. 32), and a series of films that, in one way or another, dialogued with Jorge Semprún’s script. As Sánchez-Biosca highlights, in the first half

of the 1960s, the country went through several changes still under Franco, which were not captured by the exiles. From 1962, for example, with Minister Manuel Fraga Iribarne, who “orchestrates the media in an apology of the present,” Spain is seen as a modern country that maintains its traditions. In this modernized Spain of appliances and of impressive numbers of tourists (14 million a year, says the film), it is as if the resulting changes in Spanish society were insufficiently understood by those who fled fascism and, from afar, dreamed of the revolution. For all this information, see [Sánchez-Biosca \(2011\)](#).

³ The quote comes from Resnais’s interview about the film and is in *Positif* Magazine’s book about the artist, edited by Stéphane Goudet.

⁴ As for Resnais’ notion of the imaginary, Hunter Vaughan considers it “more as a mechanism that permits us to consider not the Lacanian process of human subject-formation but the construction of filmic subject- functions” ([Vaughan 2013](#), p. 152). It is from this perspective that Vaughan says that, in *The War Is Over*, “Diego’s mental images (. . .) capture particular moments and project possible others, breaking down temporal barriers and conflating the real and imaginary” ([Vaughan 2013](#), p. 160). Given that we propose to highlight Castoriadis’ notion of the imaginary, we deviate from the idea of “possible” and “conflating the real and imaginary” to highlight the idea of open futures.

⁵ In his book *Narration in the Fiction Film*, David Bordwell analyzes this sequence by relating the shots to the sound (of a non-diegetic piano) and a Diego assertion in order to show us how “Diego’s musing on what Nadine looks like—is reinforced by the musical cue, by his verbal declaration, and by a series of shots that reiterate ten alternatives” ([Bordwell 1985](#), p. 220) for Nadine’s appearance. Also on this sequence, Vaughan says that “the rapid succession of images represents how the unknown object, in its multiplicity of possibilities, can nonetheless be conjectured in the imaginary, even mastered to a degree by the subjective coherence provided through continuities within the images’ organization of subject-object relations” ([Vaughan 2013](#), pp. 154–55).

⁶ Opting for the sociological discussion on Cornelius Castoriadis’ notion of the imaginary, we will not explore the Deleuzian approach in which the author discusses mental images and the imaginary in Alain Resnais’ films (present, for example, in [Deleuze 1985](#), p. 136, 268–81, and *Pourparlers*, [Deleuze 2003](#), especially in the section “Doute sur l’imaginaire”).

⁷ Bordwell also highlights the sequences of Ramón’s funeral, which begins with a text on voice-over (“the most striking ambiguity surrounding the voice-over commentary occurs when we last hear it”). He does so to emphasize the ambiguity of the voice-over ([Bordwell 1985](#), p. 226) and talk about Diego’s renewed joy of returning to political action: “by envisioning Ramon’s funeral as an occasion for solidarity: ‘you are caught up again by the fraternity of long combats, by the stubborn joy of the action’” ([Bordwell 1985](#), p. 228). For our part, however, we emphasize in these sequences that Ramón’s funeral is an opportunity (for Diego) to see Spain again, but in a different way.

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