

The Times Change

She is called Nadine Sallanches but her actual name is Geneviève Bujold. She is Canadian. Twenty years old, five feet, five inches, ninety-nine pounds. Stubborn, ironic, falsely adult, egoist by her own admission, realistic, captivating, Geneviève-Nadine exists. She is a distant cousin of that Monique Zimmer signed Jean-Luc Godard, her obverse (or lucky side, if one prefers), she is like fifteen students one knows on the university lecture-room benches, irritating sometimes, often, but alive and not without charm. One evening, on the stairs, she meets Diego, the "regular" who makes use of her father's passport to cross the Spanish frontier. That very morning, she has made it possible for him to escape the police. Diego is the messenger of adventure. Worn out from his journey, victim of coincidences, he is unattached.

Nadine offers herself to him. Naked, the light slaps on her flanks, making us rediscover cinema in black and white; her fingers, anxiously clenched, unfold and slowly; her thighs open; and the screen sends back to us, very simply, the image of physical love.

If I have kept myself speaking only of Geneviève Bujold, that was not by chance. I have my reasons: a) she is very beautiful; b) others have taken it upon themselves to talk about the rest; c) *La Guerre est finie* is a political film, and what better way is there to approach politics? d) in the end, we realize it, there is something changed in Alain Resnais—or at least in the vision that henceforth we will have of his work—and that is our subject.

When Diego makes love with Nadine, the sequence in fact does not fail to astonish us. Not so much because of the frankness of the images (although the final shot is unusually honest), but rather because the surface realism shown here is without precedent in the body of work that we had believed passed through the finest sieve of analysis.

The surprise is the same with respect to the relationship between Diego and Marianne — to limit ourselves to the problems of the couple, which, contrary to generally accepted opinion, are not the least in the world foreign to those of politics. For once, everything indicates to us, three days on end, the perceptible weight of reality. The fact is sufficiently unusual to be mentioned. Of course Resnais does not fall into the trap of wanting to show in its entirety the protagonists' use of time, but no break in continuity, no ellipsis, asserts itself conspicuously. The actual length

of the film gives its own measure to the movement and to the rhythm. *La Guerre est finie* exists wholly between two privileged instants which are themselves neither beginning nor end. All the rest is arbitrary, mind's view, cinema, one should say, as one says literature.

Now, as Fellini persists in showing from film to film, realism does not confuse itself with naturalism. Nothing more normal, then, if the mental representations of the hero, Yves Montand, burst into the midst of very concrete events, and that with an infinitesimal displacement that allows one ultimately to distinguish the lived from the imaginary. As Resnais himself made explicit to us: "Imagination is not always fantastic. It is indeed very exceptionally of fantastic inspiration; most often its representations are rigorously banal, routine.

In this instance, it is no longer the time of Proustian remembrances, it is no longer the immense edifice of memory that weighs upon man, trammeling his decisions, but, in a way, the contrary, the necessary stream of consciousness that precedes the passage to actions. The flashback yields in favor of the flash-forward, the idea precedes the realization, making it possible, in assuring it, in a way, the indispensable kindling. Diego is a dreamer then. So be it, but his dream is necessary, and justifies what one could have taken for a figure of style without any relation to the body of the film.

On the other hand, then, the real world, given, exterior: politics the couple (or the couples); on the other, the idea of the world: the future, possibility, the end to attain. So it is not by chance that Diego's mental representations, numerous at the start of the film, little by little yield place to reality, but quite simply because action mixes itself indistinguishably into the desire for action. Which means, in other words, that the war continues or begins again, and that that alone matters, even if its outcome is uncertain. So *La Guerre est finie* is the placing of a necessary bet on the future, and in that sense reiterates a theme dear to John Huston and to the new nations. Contrary to *Muriel*, which dispelled all the protagonists little by little with a centrifugal movement, *La Guerre est finie* delineates a center of attraction about which the characters describe several revolutions before being carried along in a vast movement of the whole.

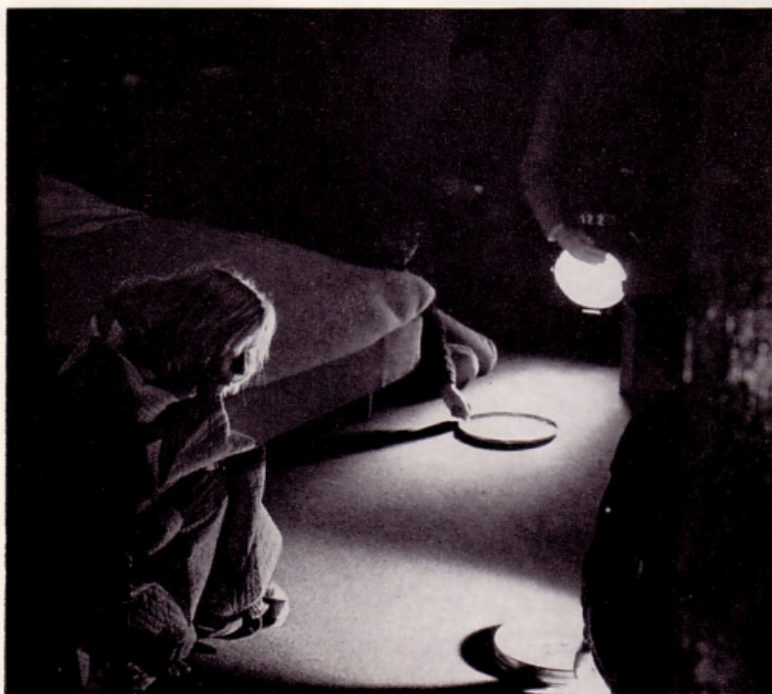
It is no longer the straight line of *Muriel*, broken little by little, bent in



(Antoine), Roger Pelletier (The sport-loving inspector), Jean-François Remy (Juan), Antoine Bourseiller, R. J. Chauffard, Antoine Vietz, Marie Mergé. Director of production: Alain Queffelec. Producer: Sofracima (Paris), Europe Film (Stockholm), 1966. Distributor: Cocinor. Length: 2 hrs.



Alain Resnais: *La Guerre est finie*, Yves Montand among the terrorists.



In production: *La Guerre est finie*, Ingrid Thulin.

a multitude of curves, but on the contrary the indecisive pendular movement (here the itinerary France — Spain — France finds a new meaning) that transforms itself imperceptibly into a rectilinear trajectory.

However, the film does not end on a victory beyond appeal. All the questions that have formulated themselves in three days remain, become yet more acute. Will Diego warn Juan? Will the general strike be a success? Will Marianne rejoin Diego?

Resnais and Semprun do not answer these questions, and that is only through honesty; for I find most suspect, the analyses that want to recognize there a conclusion without clouds. Certainly Marianne enters the organization in her turn (indeed someone was needed to warn Diego); certainly Diego is, for a time, reconciled with his own contradictions. What will happen after that, is not for the film to infer. The Spanish regular fixes his eyes on Marianne and twice repeats with agonized obstinacy "*Ca va marcher*," "It will work." What counts in fact is that two trajectories catch up with each other at last, that the same movement carries along Diego and Marianne and mixes



Alain Resnais: *La Guerre est finie*, Yves Montand and Ingrid Thulin.

them with each other in the most beautiful dissolve that there is. Open ending, point of departure therefore, active and concrete optimism. There is something to displease conservatives of both parties, not counting those who admit quite well the word "revolution" but absolutely not that of "communist."

Very curiously, moreover, *La Guerre est finie* has annoyed an entire section of Resnaisians of the first hour, those who no doubt admired him for wrong reasons. The lovers of Hiroshima exchanged in bed not very probable litanies; those of Marienbad lost their way in a Borgesian labyrinth; while a monstrous reality led the characters of *Muriel* to nothingness. Each time, reality was sublimated or warped. That was necessary, a kind of justification of the *auteur* facing his environment. It was a way, too (intelligent and elegant), of taking his distance, of showing — by this esthetic option alone — a rare lucidity.

Since everyone today knows Resnais' passion for comic strips, as well to make it explicit immediately: *Marienbad* was Falk plus Raymond, and *Muriel*, Chester Gould. Today the times change; it is no longer enough to be

lucid and to show it. So *La Guerre est finie* is an open work, but on the only possible road — action, persistence, and no doubt *allégresse*, joyous liveliness, in the sense in which Johann Sebastian Bach would understand it.

European cinema, and especially French cinema, apparently lacks the hero. Even more than the hero, it is the sense of tragedy that we lack.

Politics is the tragedy of our period. It is that too of *La Guerre est finie*. The heroes are no longer called Mandrake, Dick Tracy or Flash Gordon; Diego just wears the raincoat of Red Barry. The heroes have become tired men, aged, sometimes irritable. Their skulls are balding; they talk for hours around a checkered oilcloth; they journey from HLM to HLM; they catch a little sleep in a DS between Madrid and Irun. They have naive passwords; the sun that rises on Benidorm is their magic key; they are the working mechanisms of an organization; but they exist and no doubt the word happiness has a meaning for them.

Their world is that of underground action; they prefer twilight to terrorist blazes. They die of a heart attack between dog and wolf at the hour when

one passes a frontier and when the lights are lighted in Paris whose apartment buildings all look alike. Classic film though it is, *La Guerre est finie* disconcerts at first viewing, shows only rectilinear surfaces without faults, fit to discourage analysis.

How not to be moved to tears by *La Guerre est finie*? There is a miracle there that I do not try to understand. For the first time with so much precision and exactness, cinema, in one and the same movement, establishes the contact between the human being and the surrounding reality. Without this persistence in wanting oneself ceaselessly at the stature of man (a weakness according to some people), would it be so poignant, that extraordinary dissolve in which the face of Ingrid Thulin rises little by little, rejoins that of Montand, giving their entire meaning to the words *enchainé* and *ensemble* — which, too, are themselves passwords, evoking irresistibly the very rhythm of Joyce:— "and first I put my arms around him yes and drew him down to me so he could feel my breasts all perfume yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will Yes."

—Michel CAEN