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AN ECLIPSE OF THE SCREEN

Jorge Semprún's Scripts for Alain Resnais

Marcus Coelen*

The film script is a challenging entity for criticism. Its destiny is to disappear, its function to contribute to the production of a screen of image, music, and voice, behind which it dissolves and is forgotten. Film scripts are in principle not meant to be read — except by those in their 'realization' as movies. Nor are they meant to be inscribed directly into our archives and libraries. They are transient and 'functional', and no matter what their 'literary value' might be, the ticket with which they travel into the spaces of so-called 'cultural memory' has oblivion written onto it. Or to use a more cinematographic albeit inverted metaphor, scripts are eclipsed by the light they help to produce.

Film scripts nevertheless often become objects of literary criticism. And when they do, they can remind critics of their own peculiar place in what can be called the 'economy' of forgetting and remembering, of memory and the vanishing of the past, of images present and visions to come. Now a presence against the intent of its function, the movie script captured by the operations of criticism reveals what in these operations is more on the side of 'construction' than on the side of 'interpretation', to take up a distinction put forth by Sigmund Freud, though obviously in a totally different context. Freud's distinction might nevertheless be helpful, for its scope is history in the most general sense. 'Construction' is understood by Freud as an attention directed to that in the past which almost necessarily had to be forgotten; it is neither remembering nor pure invention but rather an attempt at grasping 'historical truth',¹ which reveals at once a truth about history itself. The peculiar historicity of this truth, neither reducible to positivistic facticity nor to the semantic operations necessary to abstract or distil a his-

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A first, very different and much shorter version of this text has appeared as Marcus Coelen, 'Travelling *arrière et circulaire*: Jorge Semprún's Script Writing', *Yale French Studies*, 129 (2016), pp. 114–27. I would like to thank Liran Razinsky, editor of the special issue devoted to Semprún, for having drawn my attention to his work as script writer.

torical meaning from the traces of the past, contains its own attraction towards being forgotten, the attempts and effects of its being suppressed, or simply the transient nature of events. It is only a specific type of construction that can come close to both the forgotten truth and the truth that forgetting is part of history. We are thus reminded that revisionisms and rewritings are by no means accidental to a history that could in principle exist without them; on the contrary, they are essential to it. Therefore, a ‘historical construction’ in the Freudian sense does not rescue or recuperate what has been eclipsed; rather, it is the figure of the eclipse itself, the tracing and tracking of a moment of historicity.

A reader of Jorge Semprún might be reminded here of one of his most quoted statements, uttered in *L'écriture ou la vie* and concerning the possibility of testifying to the experience of Nazi concentration camps: ‘Only the artifice of a masterly narrative (*‘récit maîtrisé’*) will prove capable of conveying (*‘transmettre’*) some of the truth of this testimony.’² This idea underlies all of Semprún’s writing, and we can assume that the distinction between artifice (which is literary) and truth (which is historical) was the basis of Semprún’s entire endeavour to inscribe his productions into the texture of historicity. Literary artifice was for him the privileged vehicle or even sole form of manifestation for historical truth.³

A similar dichotomy is presented at the beginning of Alain Resnais’s 1974 movie *Stavisky*, for which Semprún composed the script.⁴ After the parade of credits that show the names of the main actors, the director, and the screenwriter himself — which are presented in a modernist typeset that is similar to that seen toward the end of the movie in the staircase of the main character’s luxurious office building shortly before his downfall — a few short lines of text fill the screen, informing us that the ‘events’ of the movie have been rendered as ‘exact’ but are nevertheless supplemented and altered in such a way that ‘imagination’ can play its part in historical apperception. Although ‘authors’ are mentioned, it is unclear to whom we should attribute this statement — to Semprún? To Resnais? Or to some more anonymous collective arising out of the production of the film?

A screen text like this one constitutes an intriguing conundrum. The words might be seen as already part of the overall montage of moving images that are framed and delimited by cuts as well as by the inextricable suspension of immediacy that comes with cinematographic pro-

jection, especially in the case of a filmmaker like Resnais, for whom the photography of letters plays an important role in creating graphic decorum. Anonymity and opacity notwithstanding, however, the words at the beginning of *Stavisky* bear a resemblance to Semprún's writing and are thus in proximity to the plainest statement concerning the relation of 'truth and fiction' quoted above.⁵ At the very moment that we might keenly perceive, in the whole of the experience of this movie, the most direct desire for authorial voice and for producing writing in a certain literal sense — we actually *read* the statement rather than merely hear the words as we do in most of the rest of the movie, words being said to disappear in the stream of time or rendered to the mercy of memory trying to keep them by metabolizing them into a story — it is the idea of construction or artifice, in guise of 'imagination', that shapes the moving object in the making.⁶

In this context, the film scripts attached to Semprún can be seen as the drawing together of various strands of the problems of historical and critical construction, or as examples of sheets of memory that have images or lines of language written onto them. In fact, these scripts constitute the focus point for a multiple *mise en abyme*: Semprún's historical 'constructivism' and 'fictionalism', which we can assume to be general to his work, is intensified by the artificial, almost 'virtual', nature of the film script in relation to the movie being shot and projected, which itself can be seen as a reflection of criticism's undertaking in general, in other words, not only to analyse or comment on what is 'given' but to construct the conditions of appearance of that to which it relates — to invent more than to remember. One could draw the following analogy or fictitious example in order to render the complexity of the object. Imagine a movie, beyond the confusing and complex layers of which an artwork would have to be virtually constructed, that is somehow 'about' the very movie production not as an effort of giving to *see* images but as the tendency to make the spectator *think* and *invent* that which cannot be seen in it: all the extases of time lost in the 'present' images; the unheard words spoken in an indefinite *off* by characters and those contributing to the coming about of the movie alike; the gestures, techniques, and machines falling away from the visible on the screen being their condition of possibility nevertheless; the appearance 'in' the cut not of that which is edited and assembled together in montage but of what is being cut out, i.e. an entire, not totalizable and virtual world or non-world, by far more complex and undetermined

than the indeterminacy and complexity of the picture that is given — this could perhaps be an image for what can be appreciated in ‘Jorge Semprún’s screenwriting’.

But isn’t this comparison already an exaggeration of theoretical artifice? Yet is it not the case, on the other hand, that movies like the one just imagined do indeed exist, one of which being certainly *L’année dernière à Marienbad* by Alain Resnais and another perhaps his *Stavisky*? Yet are we not with this type of memory ‘in the productive negative’, as it were, very far from Jorge Semprún, the author of recollection, of the possibility, however complicated and painful, of recuperation, conservation, and just appreciation of the historical and personal past as well as the social promises of a political future based on memory? All these questions have to be answered affirmatively. One of the attracting elements in Semprún’s work and personality for Alain Resnais might just have been their opting for positive — psychological, cultural, and linguistic — memory, their tendency toward preservation and rendering the past present. This tendency was manifested already by *Le grand voyage* and would be manifested time and again, in *L’écriture ou la vie* as well as in many conferences and papers. Resnais’ own work, on the contrary, was devoted to research into the anti-psychological, either a-personal or multi-personal time and memory of the movies, not seen as being *about* history but rather as *part of* history’s open horizon.

One might object here that the gravity of the historical events Semprún refers to when he speaks of the ‘double task’ to ‘master the past in a critical manner’ and to build ‘principles for a ... future that allows us to avoid the mistakes of the past’⁷ is to be seen on an entirely different level than the film script as writing vanishing in the production of a visual that itself disappears in a virtual image of which no one can claim to be the master. But that would mean not to take seriously the author Semprún, who quotes Maurice Blanchot at the beginning of *L’écriture ou la vie*: ‘Whoever wishes to remember must trust to oblivion, to the risk entailed in forgetting absolutely, and to this wonderful accident that memory then becomes.’ (‘Qui veut se souvenir doit se confier à l’oubli, à ce risque qu’est l’oubli absolu et à ce beau hasard que devient alors le souvenir.’) Yet this threatening dimension of writing is juxtaposed to a region of the absolute and diametrically opposed to a portrait of the author as *homme d’action* associated with André Malraux, who is quoted as follows: ‘I seek the crucial region of the soul

where absolute Evil and fraternity clash.’ (‘Je cherche la région cruciale de l’âme où le Mal absolu s’oppose à la fraternité.’)⁸ And it would mean not to take seriously the writer who knows that questions that for others might appear as merely technical problems — or even as frivolous aestheticism — can become in fact existential in nature. Poetic choices are linked for the poet to the question of life and death. Semprún, in the preface to a posthumous collection of poems by Primo Levi, did not shy away from confronting the late Levi, the witness in prose and poet who had seen ‘obscurity’ in Paul Celan’s verses and in it a ‘readiness-to-die, ... a not wanting-to-be, ... a flight-from-the world of which chosen death had been the crowning’, with his own suicide juxtaposed to his claim for transparency in writing.⁹ At the very least, Semprún acknowledged the gravity of poetic choices: ‘It seems to me that the question is still an open one and that it will remain open. *Dichtung* and *Lichtung*: poetry and truth of shadow; poetry and truth of light.’¹⁰ And for one of his voices, a certain style had to be chosen in order to protect life from writing. For the ‘I’ of Semprún’s *L’écriture ou la vie*, for example, writing must be sacrificed to a certain extent so that life may be lived. In order to illuminate ‘la réalité par la fiction’, as Malraux is said to have done, as Semprún himself wished to do, just writing is not enough; one has to ‘have both an oeuvre and a biography’ (‘avoir une oeuvre et avoir une biographie’). Writing is even understood to threaten life: ‘Professional writers, whose lives are bounded and consumed by writing itself, who have no other biography than that of their texts, would be incapable of bringing it off.’ (‘Les professionnels de l’écriture, dont la vie se résume et se consume dans l’écriture même, qui n’a d’autre vie que celle de leurs textes, en seraient incapables.’)¹¹ Choosing only ‘poetic’ choices would thus be choosing death.

Following Semprún’s logic, then, screenwriting, one of the most ‘professional’ ways of writing, must be far removed from ‘life’ and ‘oeuvre’ — a type of writing that is like no other determined by the impersonal mechanisms and constraints of cultural production. Indeed, screenwriting must have had a particular and complicated status for the author Semprún, who defended life and work against the dangers of a typewriter eating up its operator when that person activates the keyboard too professionally. Perhaps the film script, anyhow bound to disappear, had to disappear in a particular manner, lest life disappear with it. The theme of the double life (which is taken seriously in *La guerre est finie*, frivolously in *Stavisky*), the topic of violent interruption of life

and its painful projection into an entirely altered environment for a 'second life' (as depicted in *L'Aveu*), and the literary attraction of a mere letter indicating living itself (as the Greek 'z' meaning also 'he is alive' is represented in the movie *Z*) — all these 'motifs' draw, onto the screen on which the movies homonymous to them are projected, virtual figures that indicate the peculiar destiny of their disappearance.

The movie *Stavisky*, screened first in 1974, does give a peculiar twist to the question of the reanimation of the past. Gilles Deleuze spoke about 'the strangeness of *Stavisky*', pointing out its peculiar, image-linked spatiality that is not easily reducible to the 'space' in which stories can be narrated: 'The image no longer has movement as its primary characteristics but topology and time.'¹² Even if one does not agree with this interpretation, one can easily understand where it is coming from. One would not, however, understand, not to mention accept, as easily a similar interpretation of Semprún's *Le grand voyage*, a work in which the fragmentation of temporal linearity and spatial homogeneity always leads to a complexification of memory and narrative representation, but never to an interrogation or imagination of time itself, never to a comprehension of the topological space of images. Whereas Resnais to a certain extent revolutionized cinematographic creation and showed how cinema can genuinely question the possibilities of truth, Semprún skilfully yet restrictively deployed the modernist techniques of the novel in order to represent what was true to him in history and biographical experience. From this perspective, the stress falls on '*maîtrisé*' and '*transmettre*', to return to the famous statement quoted above: 'Seul l'artifice d'un récit maîtrisé parviendra à transmettre partiellement la vérité du témoignage'. Semprún could not be plainer on this question: 'Our first goal is always the attempt to transmit and tell what has really happened.'¹³ And it is again *mastery* that determines the task of attaining this goal: this transmission is 'a work of mourning which will allow to master critically the past'.¹⁴

A conflict or discrepancy must thus be hypothesized at the heart of the collaboration between Resnais and Semprún, and it is one of the most important elements of any critical appreciation of the latter's work as screenwriter. The divergence can be detected, for instance, in a conversation in 1966 between Jorge Semprún and the film critic Jean-Louis Pays about *La guerre est finie*, in which Semprún talks at length about his work as screenwriter for Resnais's movie.¹⁵ The discrepancy is also apparent in the book published in 1974 under the title *Resnais's*

'*Stavisky*'¹⁶ and in the print publication of *La guerre est finie*, which followed the movie in 1966.¹⁷ In particular, *Stavisky* — which can be seen as a movie-script configuration — allows us to reflect on the constitutive distance and disappearance at heart of the encounter between the picture and what is written for it. These hybrids, as well as a series of Semprún's remarks and observations, reveal some of the ways in which the negative nature of script-writing, its destiny in disappearance, to a large extent marked, perhaps inadvertently, Semprún's work.¹⁸

In the interview with Pays, given for the magazine *Positif*, the question of the role of the screenwriter was relegated to a critical or aesthetic judgment of a very general nature. Semprún stated, 'I don't know of any good movie that would be based on a bad script' ('Je ne connais pas de bons films sur un mauvais scénario.') This framing is significant, not only because it affirms Semprún's own importance in the making of *Stavisky*. It also renders very complex the concept of the script: either this judgement excludes from the category of 'good movies' any production based on improvisation or on-going script revision during shooting (which would include many New Wave films from Europe and elsewhere from 1945 onwards, notably those by Jacques Rivette and John Cassavetes, or even more 'experimentally', by Stan Brakhage and Hans Richter); or else 'scénario' must mean something different to Semprún. In any case, for Semprún, film seemed to be an art form essentially linked to the representation of narrative, of narrative written by a screenwriter, thus a form or extension of the classical novel or other genres of prose fiction. But only that? In light of these statements, would the screenwriter have simply pushed away the aesthetic impulse and independent art of the moving image — in particular Dziga Vertov's *The Man with the Camera* — which so fundamentally influenced Alain Resnais?

The *Positif* interview also reveals that as conceived by Semprún, the function of authorship in relation to filmmaking and to movie production is a peculiar one: 'Even if Resnais does indeed not write a single word or put a single colon in the text, one still has to underline that there is no colon in the script either that would have been put in without a discussion preceding it.' ('Si effectivement Resnais n'écrit pas un mot, ne pose pas une virgule, dans le texte, il faut bien souligner qu'il n'y a pas non plus une seule virgule dans le scénario qui n'ait été posée sans une discussion préalable.') This makes it seem as if Semprún was

a scribe of sorts, a mere scrivener of a text that emerged from multiple voices — ‘discussion’, and even if he himself was the most dominant personality in the process, the scriptwriting appears as the product of a certain impersonality. This impersonality is then simply called *cinema*: ‘In this precise instance, with Alain, I tried to write directly in terms of cinema.’ (‘Dans ce cas précis, avec Alain, j’ai essayé d’écrire directement en fonction du cinéma.’)²¹

Between Alain Resnais and Jorge Semprún a peculiar limit was implicitly traced, not only between the *cinéaste* and the *scénariste* but also between two ways of dis-appropriating language. The linguistic work done by Semprún for Resnais was not given as such to the latter but rather provided to him in its negativity, in its materiality to be worked through so that it could vanish into the whole of the cinematographic image. To the extent that Semprún was, in a strong sense, the author of anything in *La guerre est finie*, he would thus predominantly have authorized the surrendering of his words to the authorship of the filmmaker, who in turn only used them as a supplement to the mechanisms, the framing, turning, and travelling of the camera, or as material for the *bande de son* (still an optical device of film in the times of non-digital filmmaking). Yet this ‘authorization’ is the unauthorized construction by a critic, an eclipse of author in which the filmmaker appears in silhouette, using the words as even more or less than a supplement: as the substance of diminishment, shrinking nerves of memory for the presence of forgetting in the guise of images on the screen.

The voiceover, a prominent feature of *La guerre est finie*, does not contradict this conclusion. On the contrary, the voiceover or language spoken from the *off* is, as in other films by Resnais, important for what is not said in it, or rather for what can in principle never be said in it — where it not so much diverges from any particular image but functions as the negative reminder of the diverging itself, of movements and turns, as well as objects and apparatuses of shifts, transpositions, and separations. For example, there is a sequence during which the main character, Diego, is on his way to a secret meeting of the clandestine committee of the Spanish communist party in the outskirts of Paris, and the voice from the *off* names the places and metro stations that Diego must pass or stop at, addressing Diego as well as us, the spectators, in the informal second-person singular ‘*tu*’: ‘You know these outskirts ... You know this landscape with your eyes closed.’ The images first show places loosely related to those names — metro entrances,

steps, street corners, Diego meeting someone in front of a building, etc. — as if illustrating the repetitive nature of the clandestine encounters. The rapid succession and superposition of extra-short shots of Diego passing by various types of posters, graffiti, billboards on no longer localized Parisian walls, however, project these images out of the narrative time of repetition into an undetermined dimension of the film image itself: in frames not mastered by writing but frames exposing printed letters in their relative impossibility to be read. For the rapid cuts only allow us to see that *there is* writing on the wall in these *affiches* behind the passing character; there is not enough time to actually read them, though we might just be quick enough to perceive that one of them invites us to ‘learn how to dance’ (*Apprenez à danser*).²²

In this flash of cinematographic apperception, the movie no longer shows its illustrative function in relation to the language we hear and the story we imagine to unfold; it rather allows us to see and imagine its own independence, the disconnectedness of the movie images jump away from their novelistic domestication. The published *scénario* does not mention this scenery, focusing on Diego and his comrade: ‘They perform gestures, movements of their arms, hands, void of meaning.’²³ Yet the text of the script contains the resources for the dynamics by which it veers away from itself while the images follow their own path. Their encounter is twisted and seems to turn into a commentary on this very independence. Diego, still in the same sequence, on his way to one of the meetings and accompanied by his comrade, briefly turns around at the moment when the voice from the *off* mentions his ‘return’ from his homeland in Spain to exile in France, and his gaze follows a group of school children walking in the opposite direction, as if attracted by the weakly motivated *staffage* and voiceless or murmuring decorum of the moving image. These divergences can be seen as only ironic commentary, given by the visible to the story and prescribed by the script in the form of voiceover, and this would be in line with the more direct understanding of the aesthetic judgment on the art of filmmaking that Semprún adheres to, at least explicitly and occasionally. But on the other hand, it is difficult not to perceive the detaching force of the cinematographic elements in *La guerre est finie*, the independent choreography of the tracking shots (called ‘travelling’ in the anglophile French idiom of cinematology), cuts and crystal-like clusters of fragmented flashes of diverse temporal *extases*, difficult to categorize with stale terms like ‘flashback’, ‘flashforward’, and the whole drifting away from

the prescriptive dimension of the textual, which then retrospectively and belatedly become rather an invitation to be declared if not *finished* so at least to be *severed from*.

The constellation formed by screen and script together projects the disjunction of writing and image onto an almost allegorical level of representation. The movie shows, as it were, its own severance from the realm of words and letters, which is given to it by the literality of the script bearing the same name. A sequence at the beginning of the story, when Diego tries to find the meeting place of his clandestine group in one of the housing projects in the Parisian outskirts, makes this dimension very explicit. We see Diego approaching the buildings, and the *scénario* then provides an approximate description of what follows: ‘He walks toward the block of buildings closest to him. In a dark coloured relief the letter “E” is set apart from grey concrete in the entrance hall. ... There is the letter “D” in the entrance hall of the first tower and this is not yet where it is. ... The second tower shows the letter “G” and here he enters. ... He stops in front of the door 107 and rings the bell.’²⁴ After an unknown woman opens the door and denies that the person Diego asks for lives there, he repeats from memory: ‘Building G, tenth floor, door 107.’²⁵ The stranger confirms and eventually, after an exchange of smiles, closes the door. ‘He sees, at the door, the three numbers that do not mean anything anymore: 107.’²⁶ The sequence is a remarkable condensation of a micro-narrative dynamic or movement through space and time that is organized by an alphabetic mini-series with a cipher attached, to which a fractured section of the plot telling the disappearance of comrades over the span of a year is added. The two levels together not only form and illustrate the character’s experience of loss of continuity in the network of memories and experiences called life but also hint at the break with party communism and the hope for a proletarian revolution. When the door is shut, a biographical and historical dynamic is closed down, and ‘107’ does not mean anything anymore. The war is over. The story is told. And yet the succession of images has occurred, and their ‘space’ and ‘time’ — or in psychological terms, the ‘memory’ they form in the viewer; in more philosophical terms, the ‘thought’ they become — seem to belong to a different order as well. It is precisely the visual insistence on the literal inscription of those ciphers — ‘E’, ‘D’, ‘G’, ‘107’ — and the simultaneous denial of any different meaning or any precise sense that make the ciphers hard to ignore or forget. It is as if they have been thrown

into a cinematographic existence in which they move from writing to image, and on into scribbling, together with the geometries of indifferent edges and corners, shifting frames, and gyrating shots — the contingencies out of which history is made and that matter differently when shown than when only being told.²⁷

From here on, the historical and biographical conflict in the movie's plot — the war is over, party communism is over, this idea of the past has to be left behind, a man is changing his life — turns into just one of the elements in a struggle of images and words, of perception, memories, and thought, which cannot be reduced to aesthetic or formalistic questions. For what is at stake is the nature of historical existence itself, instantiated not only *in* but *as* cinematography. And the published script takes this stake very seriously, affirming right from the first line, as if feeling its existence threatened and having to stand its ground in a battle with the moving image: 'From the first image on, perhaps even a split second before the first image shoots forth, the Voice of the Narrator makes itself heard.'²⁸

In the *scénario* published afterwards, the direct, second-person singular address of the narrator — '*You* came to see Juan, a year ago. Building G, tenth floor, door 107, at Mrs. Lopez's. *You* think *you* remember. But there is no Juan anymore, no more Mrs. Lopez. It was perhaps elsewhere, a different building G, a different tenth floor'²⁹ — is synthesized into the clearly constructed entity of the main character. This is done by means of being aligned with the third-person narrative in those large elements of the text that are neither dialogue nor 'Voice of the Narrator' but form the even more transcendental voice of the omniscient literary, novelistic narrator, who is at the same time a distant and summarizing observer of the movie images: 'He looks around, disconcerted.... He sees the three numbers on the door.'³⁰ Yet faced with the movie, 'he' does not see, at least, on the screen, his seeing is not visible. On the screen, an image is projected and reflected to eyes the ears of which are equally addressed by the '*you*', an image undetermined in its belonging. Hypotheses are being formed, subjective shots or point-of-view shots just being one of them. 'He' does not see alone — a He is seen, a door is seen, a number is being read or rendered visible, etc. And the whole is a movie being thought. These juxtaposed images, which are not bound to a consistent topo-chronology or to the psycho-motric schematism of an acting subject, are classified and narrativized by the *scénario* as 'mental images'³¹ belonging to the character

in the script, in an effort to grasp the whole movie as a sequence of psycho-graphical snippets of memories, dreams, perceptions, imaginations, etc. This gesture of fervent re-appropriation of cinema's a-personal and anti-psychological movement, of the image drifting away from the mental and into thought and history at the same time and with a generosity not always accounted for by itself, releases what is written in the script from the realm of the novel into what it cannot master as creation on the screen.

Pays, Semprún's *Positif* interviewer, underlined in relation to the main character of *La guerre est finie* his more than representational belonging to the world of cinematography: 'Trains, suitcases, borders, travels, as well as all by which he is haunted, the fear of the telephoto lens, dodging, false contacts, etc. make up his true milieu.' ('Son milieu véritable, ce sont les trains, les valises, les frontières, les voyages et toutes ses hantises, la peur du téléobjectif, des filatures, des faux contacts, etc.')32 To this affirmation Semprún agreed and thus conceded to the eye of the film critic, who sees in a movie first of all its cinematographic essence, which depends on the way in which its elementary technology of moves, frames, shots, angles, contacts, and cuts is laid out for temporal and spatial apperception. Not that the language of a script does not play a role in it, but it does so only in as much as it enters the essential techno-graphics of the movie. The script of a film, one can thus extrapolate, is 'cinematographic', at least in the sense given to this term by the exigencies of an appreciation of 'essential cinematography'; it eschews the temptation of persisting in the concept of referential independence that might be seen in a novel or a poem. Semprún's *scénario* is subjected to this logic in its own particular way.

In the case of *La guerre est finie* at least, the logic of separation and dis-appropriation detectable in screenwriting leads to a clear segregation of concrete labour and presence on the production site: 'Alain had asked me, once the film was written, to disappear out of sight; here a different enterprise began, his own, and he wished for me not to be there. This, I perfectly understood and agreed to.' ('Alain m'avait demandé qu'une fois le film écrit je disparaisse de la circulation, c'était une autre entreprise qui commençait, une autre aventure, la sienne, et il souhaitait que je n'y assiste pas. Ce que j'ai d'ailleurs parfaitement compris et accepté.')33 It is only when the production work again resembles writing, i.e. during editing, that the literary author emerges once again on the stage of filmmaking: 'On the contrary, from the beginning of the

cutting process we had to be together again in case some things had to be rewritten.’ (‘Par contre, à partir du premier montage, nous devons être de nouveau ensemble, pour éventuellement réécrire certaines choses.’)³⁴

The notion of writing-for-vanishment is apparent in the context of film aesthetics when Semprún alluded during his interview to the opposition between (cinematic) action and (theatrical) drama in order to underline the particular nature of the movie *La guerre est finie*: ‘It was necessary to show action itself and not the dramatic consequences it could entail.’ (‘Il fallait montrer l’action elle-même et non les conséquences dramatiques qu’elle pouvait entraîner.’)³⁵ What relation does exist, then, between the partial yet functional disappearance of the literary writer in moviemaking and this privileging of action that is severed from dramatic consequences? Is the vanishing of text and author a prerequisite for the emergence of this type of action on the screen?

One might furthermore speculate about the interpretational effects of drawing this notion of non-dramatic action close to Semprún’s definition of politics, which was given in the same interview: ‘I am under the impression of never being able to write anything that would not result in one way or another in something political, i.e. in a conception of the world.’ (‘J’ai l’impression que je ne pourrai jamais rien écrire qui, d’une façon ou d’une autre, ne débouche pas sur la politique, c’est-à-dire, en effet, sur une conception du monde.’)³⁶ As general as it seems, a certain ‘conception of the world’, as a definition of ‘political’, is at least in the case of *La guerre est finie* linked to the showing of pure action, or rather the showing of pure action is the condition under which *conceiving* a world — thus politics in which this writing is supposed to end up — would be possible. The vanishing of telling and the disappearance of the script in the image were, at the moment when *La guerre est finie* was produced, the very movement of conceiving a world of pure action. Semprún described the film as having an ‘experimental nature’,³⁷ and this was perhaps due to the double experiment in which the writer disappears and telling recedes behind showing, which in turn withdraws into something that would always have to be constructed.

This insight into screenwriting adds another layer of complexity to the already complicated issue of autobiography in *La guerre est finie*. For not only does the party-sanctioned activist, whose decisions and manoeuvres are accounted for by the organ of dramatic consequences called dialectical materialism, recede from the stage of history — this is

true for Semprún as well as for Diego — but the writer also recedes from the scene of production. The dichotomy embodied by *L'écriture ou la vie* is compounded — probably unintentionally, likely even *against* the author's intention — by the peculiar life of cinematographic writing, which does not concede easily to either aspect of the film, nor to their dialectic or supplementary relation. The journey of Semprún the screenwriter, which started with *La guerre est finie*, leads to a space-time in which writing does not stop ending and life begins reanimating death as image. We know the dramatic terms in which Semprún cast the relationship between writing and death, between memory and life, and we must all the more consider the ways in which cinema has from its conception been involved with the art of apparition, ghosts, and spectres.

A hint can be heard (or read, after reconstruction) at the end of what can be called the second stop of the journey of the screenwriter Semprún. During the penultimate frame of *Stavisky*, the other movie on which Semprún and Resnais collaborated, a character states, 'There are no dead, only drowned people.' ('Il n'y a pas des morts mais uniquement des noyés.')

³⁸ These are the words of a ghost in the play *Intermezzo* by Jean Giraudoux, and they are repeated here by the baron Raoul, a friend of the late Stavisky and paterfamilias of the one who called himself Alexandre the Great. Alexandre, played by Jean-Paul Belmondo, is the owner of the theatre *l'Empire* but also the scriptwriter, actor, and director of a fraudulent plot involving the French *monde*. He plays the role of a rich entrepreneur to cover up his former life as a minor impostor under the name Stavisky. Earlier in the movie, Stavisky/Alexandre/Belmondo reads aloud on a stage the lines that are re-quoted at the end of the film. This con artist/impresario/actor in life/swindler/owner of a theatre is replacing a 'real' actor in order to help a young actress, an exiled Jewish-German who alludes to Shakespeare via *The Merchant of Venice* in her self-presentation, not in performing but in showing to be able to perform in an audition. The resulting entanglement of quotes, borrowed voices, staged images, and plays-within-plays is nearly infinite,³⁹ yet at the end of the film, it is condensed in a short moment when the talking head, baron Raoul, recites the quote again, followed by a cut to the image of Jean-Paul Belmondo's body in the makeup of Stavisky, who is disfigured by a bullet in the head. The camera moves backward in a circular tracking shot. In short, this is a hypertextual and mnemo-technical mirrored hall with a swirl, truly

worthy of Alain Resnais — and with the name of Jorge Semprún attached to it. We are being drowned in a sea of cinematography, to be sure. But what about the dead? What about writing?

A ‘scénario’ of *Stavisky* comes to us in two very different reconstructions — both of which are not the script used in the production of the movie. One is due to the équipe of the heroic journal *L'avant-scène*, which since 1961 has published monthly *découpages*, scene by scene, of entire movies, together with transcriptions from the screen of an editing table (before the advent of computers and DVDs).⁴⁰ In March 1975, *L'avant-scène* published an issue on *Stavisky*, a few months after the publisher Gallimard released a monograph by Semprún under the ambiguous title *Le ‘Stavisky’ d’Alain Resnais*. Whereas *L'avant-scène* clearly stated its referent (the movie, as seen and meticulously analysed),⁴¹ a reader of Semprún’s book enters a strange fictional world of slightly Borgesian tonality. The author Semprún, whose name appears onscreen under the heading ‘Scénario et dialogues’, published a book on Resnais’s movie — the possessive construction of the title *Le ‘Stavisky’ d’Alain Resnais* makes clear that *Stavisky* is a property of sorts of the filmmaker — as if the book were either *about* the film or a (literary) version of it. Moreover, a peculiar subtitle or indication of genre is added: ‘scénario’ is placed on the cover of the book and on the inner title page, where one would usually find ‘roman’, ‘récit’, or the like. As with *La guerre est finie* in 1966,⁴² *Le ‘Stavisky’ d’Alain Resnais* is part of the famous *Collection Blanche* of the Nouvelle Revue française (NRF), a prime site for French and World writing, mostly literary criticism.

Any explanation of the exact relation between the text in this volume and the words spoken, the images framed, the shots taken, or the decorum chosen in Resnais’s *Stavisky* is carefully avoided. The book rather employs a rhetoric of allusive notoriety: the movie had just come out with great commercial success, and the signifier ‘Stavisky’ was moreover known by nearly everyone even before the movie. The dust jacket, unusual for Gallimard at the time, camouflaged the prestigious NRF label under a variety of different typesets, including the one used for the movie credits, as well as a film still showing Belmondo caressing the headlight of an expensive limousine (as if foreshadowing his own future as a VCR and DVD cover figurine), even claims that there is the possibility that our own ‘époque’ has begun with the name ‘Stavisky’. Moreover, a few unattributed lines of text on the back of the book aver

that *death* is at stake: ‘Death of an époque, thus, in the two senses of the word. One époque dies and another one begins: the one of death, of a death generalized, rendered banal. Yet have we ever left it?’⁴³ Here, on the cover of the book, Stavisky, the name attached to a political and economic scandal that brought down the government and triggered a fascist uprising in Paris, is a well-known token for history that stretches into the now. And history also frames the dialogue and screen directions from the other side as well, albeit void of any technical terms pertaining to cinematography. The ‘Introduction’ mentions the ‘irony of history’ when concluding the exposition of the surprising *trouvailles* that allows for the interweaving of Trotsky’s exile in and expulsion from France with the Stavisky affair, with the help of policemen and agents linked to both events. This tightly-knit irony of history is superimposed on the irony that follows in the monograph: a masterfully controlled artifice transmitting something that never literarily was: Semprún’s *Stavisky*.

What is called ‘*scénario*’ here is neither the script of the movie insofar it can be established from the screen (after the fact and as more or less published by *L’avant-scène*) nor the script as it must have been for the purposes of making the movie (a script in the sense of an aesthetics of production). The temporal relation of the published text to the movie is a secret of this creation: we will never know for sure which parts were written before or even *for* the movie, which parts during, and by whom exactly, which parts afterwards (by Semprún, ‘watching’ the finished movie). However, the ‘Introduction’, written in a style reminiscent of the modestly poeticized memory in *L’écriture ou la vie*, does tell us that the producer, Gérard Lebovici, had proposed to Semprún ‘to write for Jean-Paul Belmondo a movie concerning the Stavisky character’. And the effect of this proposal is framed in cinematographic metaphoricality: ‘With the insidious force of evidence, images burst forth, on the screen of my memory.’⁴⁴ From this personal memory, we are left to assume, the writing of the script took off, the introduction mentioning the author’s memories of the 1930s and events related to Trotsky, Stavisky, and the political turmoil of the day. Yet in a somewhat sly gesture towards Resnais and moviemaking, an unwritten text is mentioned as having been left behind in the history of this creation. The ‘Introduction’ commences with an anecdote about Resnais’s trip to the US to conduct research for his movie on Lovecraft and his letter to Semprún promising photographs of such nature ‘that it will be really easy for you

to write the best text of your life'.⁴⁵ While the project of writing a text based on images shot by the filmmaker may have been unrealized, the writing of a script based on images from the 'screen' of personal memory and on the conviction of the existence of an 'uncertain, mysterious, and troubling truth' of Stavisky's 'adventures and the historical consequences they had' seems to have been accomplished.

With this accomplishment, Semprún's writing not only circles back into something that wishes to figure itself as the hand of an author; it also loses the hermeneutic grip on the book it produces. For one thing is certain, the 'Stavisky' of *The 'Stavisky' of Alain Resnais* is not Alain Resnais's *Stavisky*. If it is anybody's at all, it is Jorge Semprún's reader's, and the '*scénario*', while loosely reminding cultural memory or contemporaries of the publication of his professional role as screenwriter in a movie production, provides the script for a type of construction of the imagination that does not have a proper name. Thus the *mise en abyme* reflecting screen, script, and critical construction is fully 'inverted' and implodes in the eclipse through which it appears. The effect is reminiscent of Borges's short story 'Pierre Ménard, the Author of Don Quixote', which Semprún himself referenced.⁴⁶ It is a less extreme and not overtly stated version of the identical yet totally different and thus peculiarly imaginary text: this *scénario* has everything it has to have in order to be the script of an existing movie while nevertheless being the script of a work that does not exist. And in both cases, it is only the appearance as repetition that shows the very work to be eclipsed — or rather, shows it to be the eclipse. Yet whereas both cases tell us something of literary history, or the literary nature of 'history', they vary in what is eclipsed in it: all literature besides Borges's own writing and Resnais's cinematography respectively.

Who then is the Jorge Semprún whose name is on the cover of the *scénario*, in relation to the Jorge Semprún who is author of the script? The text itself hints at the question by conjuring up the dead as laughing spectres. Baron Raoul addresses us in the final words of *Stavisky*: 'Ah, I imagine his laughter if he reappeared among us.'⁴⁷ But still a living image, 'Stavisky' was deprived of his laughter on the screen animating him: where the one Stavisky laughs — 'he laughs crazily' in the bookish version of the scene in which his plot crumbles⁴⁸ — the other Stavisky does not laugh at all. As played by Belmondo, he becomes the correlate of an elaborate and conspicuous movement of the camera — in the screen version of the same scene, there is a circular shot around

the character's angry face. And this disjunction is repeated, a *fou rire* replacing or being replaced by cinematic gyration: a second time Semprún's '*scénario*' presents Alexandre 'laughing with his crazy laugh',⁴⁹ while Resnais's camera performs a diagonal pan shot in which Belmondo does not even smile. This divergence, between a literary laughter not seen and a cinematographic move not written down, opens up the flimsy script for critical gestures. Minute and insignificant as this genre-less *écarts* may be, Semprún left the 'script' inscribing them when he got close to the movies and, in particular, close to the trickster Stavisky — with whom he shared a surprisingly likeness. And he left a certainly not entirely voluntary legacy to memory — all the more generous in being projected outside his desire for mastery and authorial voice —, i.e. a thought of history in the uncanny displacements between the *grand voyage* and uncountable *travellings*. In Semprún's desire to eclipse cinematography — that what the script is written *for* — the eclipse of screen is projected forth.

NOTES

- 1 Sigmund Freud, 'Konstruktionen in der Analyse' (1937), in *Gesammelte Werke* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1950), xvi, pp. 41–56 (p. 54).
- 2 Jorge Semprún, *L'écriture ou la vie* (1994), in *Le fer rouge de la mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 2012), p. 741; Jorge Semprún, *Literature or Life*, trans. by Linda Coverdale (London: Penguin, 1998), pp. 13–14.
- 3 In fact, the quote continues and opens the particular case of *this* literary artifice and *this* testimony to two dimensions of greater generality, i.e. historical experience and language: 'But there's nothing exceptional about this: it's the same with all great historical experiences / In short, you can always say everything. The "ineffable" you hear so much about is only an alibi. Or a sign of laziness. You can always say everything: language contains everything.' ('Mais ceci n'a rien d'exceptionnel: il en arrive ainsi de toutes les grandes expériences historiques. / On peut toujours tout dire, en somme. L'ineffable dont on nous rebattra les oreilles n'est qu'alibi. Ou signe de paresse. On peut toujours tout dire, le langage contient tout.') The literary artifice is thus just one of the ways by means of which saying is possible. It is noteworthy, however, that this statement is enunciated itself as part of an 'inner indirect polylogue', thus part of a literary artifice, mastered as it were by itself and yet called 'un récit illimité' ('boundless ... account'), 'interminable' ('never-ending'), 'à l'infini' ('going on for ever'). Ibid, p. 742 [Coverdale trans., p. 13–14]. The passage is a construction of (the possibility, even the task of) memory, containing oblivion in the figure of the interminable and undetermined repetition without limit, necessarily exceeding the capturing of anyone's mnemonic faculty.

- 4 The film critic Emma Wilson has summarized the film as follows: ‘*Stavisky* represents the life of Serge Alexandre, or Stavisky, between 24 July 1933 and his suicide, or murder, on 8 January. The film also flashes forward to the Commission of Enquiry held at the Palais Bourbon in April 1934. Serge Alexandre was a French-Jewish financier of Russian origin [...] Resnais’s film pays particular attention to Stavisky’s last fraudulent venture, the selling of the fake ‘bons de Bayonne’ (false cash vouchers produced by the Crédit Municipal of Bayonne). The uncovering of his fraud led directly to Stavisky’s death; the two in turn had an extraordinary impact on the French state. [...] The film also attempts a broader perspective on Stavisky’s era through the inclusion of a parallel narrative of Trotsky’s political exile in France.’ See Emma Wilson, *Alain Resnais* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), pp. 123–24. On the Stavisky Affair itself and the political context, see the excellent book by historian Paul F. Jankowski, *Stavisky: A Confidence Man in the Republic of Virtue* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).
- 5 In the *scénario* that was published after the release of the movie, the dichotomy seems to be based not on the notion of ‘imagination’ but on a more literary understanding of ‘fiction’: ‘Le *Stavisky* écrit pour Alain Resnais est une fiction qui établit avec la réalité historique des rapports particuliers, à la fois précis et fabuleux (je veux dire: ayant trait à la fable, genre éminemment moral).’ (‘The *Stavisky* written for Alain Resnais is a fiction that establishes relations to historical reality, relations that are particular and both precise and fabulous (here, I mean: belonging to the eminently moral genre of the fable).’) Jorge Semprún, *Le ‘Stavisky’ d’Alain Resnais* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), p. 17, my translation. Whereas the fictional side of the dichotomy is relegated to morals, the side of history and reality is informed by a notion of precision, not without a stench of morals or ethics either: ‘Articuler cette fiction sur le reel n’est pas facile. Les témoins, les journalistes et même les historiens ont raconté sur l’affaire Stavisky beaucoup d’inexactitudes. Quand ce ne sont pas des mensonges purs et simples.’ (‘It is not easy to align this fiction with the real. Witnesses, journalists, and even historians told many things that were inexact about the Stavisky affair. When they were not plain and simple lies.’) Ibid. Semprún then proceeded to an elaborate critique of some of these witnesses and historians, these critical rectifications having been preceded by an account of memories that link him to the events of 1934. ‘Critical memory’ would thus be the trope holding together the construction of truth and reality in the writing of *Stavisky*. In contrast to this or at least on a different level, Alain Resnais, when asked why there is so much white in the movie (snow, ermines, white carnations, roses, lilies, feathers, satins, furs), is reported to have replied laconically: ‘I don’t know... I approach a movie exclusively in a sensual manner.’ See Wilson, *Alain Resnais*, p. 126.
- 6 It is a conventional cinematic device to provide text like that at the beginning of *Stavisky*; it is only in the context of a critical construction that it might gain greater significance. A similar, more obvious use of this device is made by Semprún and/or the movie director (who is Costa-Gavras in this case) at the beginning of

- Z (1969), where the ‘resemblances’ of the fictional characters and events told in the movie to those in history are said to be ‘intentional’ — which is even more ironic, given that the more conventional and apologetic version of this reference to ‘living people’ is to be read in the text preceding *Stavisky*.
- 7 Jorge Semprún, ‘Ni héroes ni víctimas. Weimar-Buchenwald’ (1995), in *Le fer rouge de la mémoire*, p. 939. This text is the written version of a speech given in the *Nationaltheater* at Weimar on the day of the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of the concentration camp. One could attribute the speech and its style to the politician and statesman Semprún, but he had presented himself as ‘former prisoner 44904’ (*ibid.*, p. 937) and engaged at length in the work of the historical witness. His words are thus not to be taken as ‘empty rhetoric’ or political decorum, despite their generality; they have to be attributed to the *author* Semprún as well and thus demand to be honoured by critical attention. Or, to say it more polemically, it is ‘empty rhetoric’ and ‘political decorum’ that have to be attributed to the ‘*writer*’ Semprún.
 - 8 Semprún, *L’écriture ou la vie*, p. 732 [Coverdale trans., p. 6].
 - 9 Famously, Semprún stated that he conceived of *L’écriture ou la vie* on 11 April 1987, the day he learned about Levi’s suicide, which was also the anniversary of the liberation of Buchenwald in 1945.
 - 10 Semprún, Jorge, ‘À une heure incertaine, Primo Levi’ (1997), in *Le fer rouge de la mémoire*, p. 962.
 - 11 Semprún, *L’écriture ou la vie*, p. 766 [Coverdale trans., p. 52].
 - 12 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1989), p. 125.
 - 13 Semprún, ‘Ni héroes ni víctimas’, p. 939.
 - 14 *Ibid.*, p. 945.
 - 15 Jean-Louis Pays, “‘Un film expérimental’”, entretien avec Jorge Semprún (1966), in *Positif*, revue de cinéma, *Alain Resnais*, ed. by Stéphane Goudet (Paris: Gallimard, 2002), pp. 187–206.
 - 16 Semprún, *Le ‘Stavisky’ d’Alain Resnais*.
 - 17 Jorge Semprún, *La Guerre est finie: scénario du film d’Alain Resnais* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966).
 - 18 A more systematic appraisal of what can be positivistically perceived and analysed in the work of the screenwriter Semprún would not allow to get closer to this dimension of eclipsing in his scriptwriting. Yet there is no need for such a presentation here either. Recent publications have very well documented the work of Semprún the screenwriter as well as laid out their topics and some framework for their hermeneutic appreciation so that anything in this genre would be a repetition; one can easily resort to these works. See the issue *Cinéma et engagement: Jorge Semprún scénariste*, ed. by Jaime Céspedes, *CinémAction*, 140 (2011); as well as Esteve Riambau, ‘The Clandestine Militant Who Would be Minister: Semprún and Cinema’, in *A Critical Companion to Jorge Semprún: Buchenwald, Before and After*, ed. by Ofelia Ferrán and Gina Herrmann (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 71–88; and Txetxu Aguada, ‘Dissidence,

Citizenry, and Witnessing: Three Screenplays by Jorge Semprún', in *A Critical Companion to Jorge Semprún*, pp. 187–201. See also the editors' 'Introduction' to that volume, pp. 1–37. The *CinémAction* issue offers an extensive bibliography as well as a synopsis of Semprún's work as screenwriter, collaborator, and director. The focus of all the articles, however, is thematic or biographic, at times even anecdotal; it seems difficult or not desirable for most critics to write about Semprún's cinematography — a tendency that may be rooted in both the work itself and in a general perception of the author, as if affirming in both, work and reception, the effort to save the accountable and narration from the dense thickets of projected images.

- 19 In Pays, "Un film expérimental", entretien avec Jorge Semprún', p. 205. We can dare a construction with the equally general statement by Deleuze referring to Resnais's art of cinematography: 'The tracking shots of Resnais ... carry out a temporalization of the image or form a direct time-image, which realizes the principle: the cinematographic image is in the present only in bad films.' Deleuze, *Time-Image*, p. 39. We will return to the issue of tracking shots later.
- 20 Pays, "Un film expérimental", entretien avec Jorge Semprún', p. 188.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 In the monograph presenting the *scénario du film d'Alain Resnais*, a still of one of these shots is printed, showing Diego/Montand with a comrade in profile in front of a political poster calling for the participation in a demonstration; underneath, the voice of the narrator is quoted: 'You find again the landscape of exile, those dreary, tireless, weary men, your comrades.' Semprún, *La guerre est finie*, insert without pagination at the beginning of the volume.
- 23 Ibid., p. 108. (The italics are chosen in this volume to indicate the passages that are neither parts of dialogues by the characters nor voiceover, nor commentary by the author Semprún, but have to be attributed to some narrator of the plot; they correspond to extended stage directions.)
- 24 Ibid., pp. 45–46.
- 25 Ibid., p. 47.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Resnais's early *court métrage* from 1956, a documentary about the *Bibliothèque Nationale* in Paris called *Toute la mémoire du monde*, provides an astonishing insistence on the separation between the materiality of the letter and its support on the one hand and cinematography on the other. The whole twenty minutes are filled with shots by a never steady camera: an entire repertoire of craning, panning, tilting, tracking, and gyrating is obstinately performed. It would appear arbitrary and aestheticist, if it were not precisely that: arbitrary, exhilarating in unmotivated moves of the camera, liberated from what it shows (letters, books, and words) because it uses them for its 'happiness' — the word from the *off* that ends the movie. These shots are thus not *representing* movement at all but rather evoking the time and space of separation and frivolousness. It can perhaps be said that '*Stavisky* is not just one film among others in Resnais's work: even if it is not the most important, it contains the secret of the others, a bit like Henry

- James's "The Figure in the Carpet".' (Deleuze, *Time-Image*, p. 132). It can equally be said that *Toute la mémoire du monde* constitutes the 'carpet'.
- 28 Semprún, *La guerre est finie*, p. 11. In the phrase 'la Voix du Narrateur', both terms are indeed capitalized, even in the following paragraphs: 'It (she, the Voice) makes itself heard...' (*Elle se fait entendre...*).
- 29 Ibid., p. 48.
- 30 Ibid., p. 47.
- 31 Ibid., p. 38, et passim.
- 32 Pays, "Un film expérimental", entretien avec Jorge Semprún', p. 198.
- 33 Ibid., p. 189.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Ibid., p. 191.
- 36 Ibid., p. 204.
- 37 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 193: 'We made, as Alain Resnais says, an experimental movie with *La guerre est finie*, and we would today certainly be better prepared to redo it; we have made some experience as regards the limits, the possibilities, the difficulties of a movie of this type.' ('Avec *La guerre est finie*, nous avons fait, comme dit Alain Resnais, un film expérimental, certainement qu'aujourd'hui nous serions mieux préparés pour le refaire, nous avons fait un certain nombre d'expériences quant aux limites, aux possibilités, aux difficultés, d'un film de cet ordre.')
- 38 Semprún, *Le 'Stavisky' d'Alain Resnais*, p. 190.
- 39 The main characters of the film are attending a performance of *Coriolanus* at the *Comédie française* when they receive the note of the main plot being uncovered. Moreover, Erna Wolfgang, the German-Jewish actress, is said to have played a 'classical repertoire (Shakespeare, Schiller, Goethe ...)' on her 'biographical note' — called '*fiche signalétique*' by the filmmaker — that Resnais used to create for the imaginary life of his characters. See the publication *L'avant-scène* (on which, see further note below), March 1975, pp. 8–9. 'The play's the thing', we might say — and the movie's 'thing' is perhaps to lift the topoi and clichés to the highest level of intelligence as well as to the dignity of surfaces so that they may come back to it in form of criticism: 'The many alternative facets Stavisky presents make him a quintessentially cinematographic figure'. See Wilson, *Alain Resnais*, p. 126. Wilson apocryphally attributes this estimation to Deleuze, *Time-Image* (p. 183), but the quote she refers to does not deal with Resnais — which further plays the whole thing back into the realm of literature, fiction, and staged textuality.
- 40 The publication was founded in 1949 but was preceded by *La petite illustration*, which existed from 1899 to 1939 and had similarly published full dramatic texts of most contemporary productions. In *Stavisky*, the character of the young Jewish actress from Germany who has her audition in 1934 on the stage of the *Théâtre de l'Empire*, carries with her the issue of *La petite illustration* in which Giraudoux's *Intermezzo* was printed. The name of the journal is clearly visible in close-up before Erna hands it to Serge Alexandre/Stavisky so that he can read to

her the counterpart of the ghost. This *Petite illustration* is part of the historicist set on which Resnais shot *Stavisky*, and it is explicitly mentioned in *L'avant-scène cinéma*, 156 (March 1975), p. 22 — the journal thus got a chance to stage the spectre of its own past. See also Semprún, *Le 'Stavisky' d'Alain Resnais*, pp. 74–75: 'Erna is holding a copy of *La Petite Illustration* with the text of the play by Giraudoux in her hand. ... Erna is sitting on a bench, Alexandre standing behind her, with *La Petite illustration* in his hand. He starts reading.' ('Erna tient en main un exemplaire de *La Petite Illustration* avec le texte de la pièce de Giraudoux. ... Erna est assise sur la banquette, Alexandre, debout derrière elle, *La Petite illustration* à la main. Il commence à lire.') This description diverges from what is visible on the screen and insists more on the name of the magazine, a small illustration, than on the play itself: the frame prevails over the image. The movie takes note of this in its own fashion: the close-up of *La petite illustration* is inserted into the succession of images like many other *intermezzi* in Resnais's movie: inscriptions on buildings, billboards, road signs, etc., reminiscent of the silent past of moving images.

- 41 The 'Avertissement' of *L'avant-scène* states that 'the *découpage* has been established, as always, at a viewer (*visionneuse*) shot by shot' (p. 11). The editors also referred to the publication of 'a script in literary form' by Semprún, as well as to the 'original script (one of the scripts)' provided to them by Resnais. The latter had advised them, however, 'not to be too inspired by it, this text being ... voluntarily covered with notes and annexed details meant to contribute (or not to contribute) to the production state in the strict sense' (*ibid.*). A more detailed reconstruction of the encounter between script(s) and movie would thus have to descend into the Resnais archive that is currently being established at the *Institut national d'audiovisuel (INA)*, as well as into the archives of Semprún.
- 42 The play of title and subtitle in the case of *La guerre est finie* is less unusual and more and explanatory, *La Guerre est finie* being followed by '*scénario du film d'Alain Resnais*'.
- 43 Semprún, *Le 'Stavisky' d'Alain Resnais*, dust jacket, cover text on the back ('quatrième de couverture').
- 44 *Ibid.*, p. 12.
- 45 *Ibid.*, p. 10.
- 46 See Jorge Semprún, 'Mal et modernité' (1990), in *Le fer rouge de la mémoire*, p. 696.
- 47 Semprún, *Le 'Stavisky' d'Alain Resnais*, p. 190. Again, the script based on the movie presents a variant: 'Can you image his laughter ...?' See *L'avant-scène*, March 1975, p. 51.
- 48 Semprún, *Le 'Stavisky' d'Alain Resnais*, p. 170.
- 49 *Ibid.*, p. 172.

Marcus Coelen, 'An Eclipse of the Screen: Jorge Semprún's Scripts for Alain Resnais', in *De/Constituting Wholes: Towards Partiality Without Parts*, ed. by Christoph F. E. Holzhey and Manuele Gragnolati, *Cultural Inquiry*, 11 (Vienna: Turia + Kant, 2017), pp. 215–37 <https://doi.org/10.37050/ci-11_10>

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