For Jorge Semprún, acknowledging the miseries of history with its pain and suffering—events of the magnitude of the concentration camp, political repression, or the disillusionment with communist societies—does not mean, on the other hand, blindly accepting these insufficiencies. The narrative he develops both in his literary oeuvre and in his screenplays does not yield to a conceptualization of history as an impending force of destiny or as an unavoidable scheme driven by natural powers. This is to say, his works struggle to outline just how important it is to disassociate the shortcomings of history from any type of unavoidable doom. The political is historical and history is uncompromisingly political.

In the screenplays he wrote for Alain Resnais’s *La guerre est finie* (1966) and Costa-Gavras’s *Z* (1968) and *L’aveu* (1970), studied in this chapter, Semprún chooses a voice that addresses political ailments as manifestations of concrete historical configurations. History is not made up of inexplicable forces; it is the result of power and its entanglements, in need of clarity if these circumstances are to be appeased or eradicated. Violence, in the form of Nazism, the Francoist genocide, or the sometimes very questionable democratic practices in liberal and communist societies, obeys a rationale that is political and contingent. For the author, then, acknowledging the true nature of history requires a moral/ethical and political initiative, one that guides us through the past with a pedagogical purpose.

This chapter focuses on the venues through which these films outline this ethical and political relation with the horrors of the past. From the films one concludes that, more than a series of unquestionable facts, history is the milieu that grounds the activism of those who struggle for a better configuration of their societies. If these films have a political edge it is because their screenplays aim to satisfy the victims’ claims for recognition and reparation. Those persecuted by political violence are rescued from an incomprehensible and distorted past and invested with a clear voice. Hence, silence and forgetting are supplanted by images, speeches, and words within the proliferation of cinematic discourses. In these films, victims are no longer
phantoms in history; instead they are the foundational cornerstones for projects for the future hopefully removed from the monstrosities of the past. 

The Politics of Dissidence

In *La guerre est finie*, an anti-Franco militant residing in France—Semprún’s alter ego—does not remain paralyzed by the disasters of World War II or by his condition of Spanish refugee. He involves himself in anti-Franco resistance through undercover practices. However, he has become doubtful of the analysis and goals of the Spanish Communist Party, in which he is an activist, and of its Stalinist leaders. In *Z*, thugs associated and protected by the Greek police force kill a political leader, senator, and pacifist. Despite the successful efforts to bring the guilty to justice, the assassins will be released from prison when a coup d’état gives way to the so-called Regime of the Colonels, therefore pointing to how the safeguards of a liberal democratic society are no guarantee against fraudulent political means directed toward the suppression of the opponent. *L’aveu*, on the other hand, deals with the life of a prisoner in an eastern European country who is forced to confess crimes he has not committed through the use of torture. If the group of younger people willing to resort to violence to advance their agenda in *La guerre* announces the reemergence of terrorism to produce real change after the failure of May 1968, this third film could be seen as a response to the ethics and impracticality of both the communist utopias of the East and the radical leftist movements of Western Europe in their push for a restructuring of society.

At the time they were written, Semprún’s screenplays underscored a critical position that rubbed against the grain of mainstream political conventions both in communist and Western societies. In this sense, in the 1960s and 1970s his writing with images challenges what French sociologist Paul Virilio will call years later “the industrialization of the non-gaze” (*The Art* 65), that is, the production and reproduction of one-dimensional visions (the nongaze) that are detached from real experience and that employ the language of mass media. The consequence will be a “sightless vision,” “an intense blindness,” that will “deliver us from ‘the act of seeing’” (*The Art* 65), from the act of understanding what a true interaction with any moment of history entails. Dissidence, or the attempt to uncover the obscured, is what encourages Semprún and viewers alike to explore alternative analyses of any given circumstance, to seek explanations that reject normalized perceptions, and to reject those informational technologies engaged in the single visions they favor and that favor them. Most importantly this probing will give us the ability to see, feel, and imagine something worth contemplating outside of what Virilio perceives as the homogenous, unidirectional, flat, or “industrialized gaze,” no matter how powerful the interests of political parties or of the always overreaching state apparatuses of information.

Some find Semprún’s critical stance suspect, running too close to disloyalty, given his years of militancy and leadership in the Spanish Communist Party (PCE); others would even consider his dissidence treason. It is quite the opposite. In Semprún’s thinking, the dissident is only disloyal to the orthodoxy of the single party, group, or state ideology. His making conspicuous the schemas upon which these structures set their doctrines reveals a trust and optimism in our individual and collective