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EL SOPAR

Pace Mao, the revolution is, in fact, a dinner party, and the Catalan director Pere Portabella organized and filmed it in 1974. He gathered, at a rural villa, four men and a woman who had served jail terms, as political prisoners under the Franco regime, ranging from three to twenty-four years. The venue and the participants were unnamed, due to ongoing repression (the dinner took place the night of another political prisoner's execution), which lends the clandestine meeting an intrinsic edge of drama. The evening begins with their review of a previously recorded debate about communes (which they endorse with a hedged, humane realism), but soon moves to the heart of the matter: table talk about incarceration and the forms of resistance it invokes. Portabella, a master of dark irony, catches the sombre activists reflecting on the efficacy of a hunger strike in fighting "the enemy" (they're utterly aware that its sole value is the scandal that outside supporters can make of it). Then the conversation turns searingly intimate, as the eldest participant affirms that prison "annuls a person's personality" and a younger man describes the ideal delights he found in jail. Despite the serious talk, the festive setting is the point: the intended revolution is joyful, even hedonistic, and, though the evening closes on a terrible moment of silence, the end credits—added after Franco's death, in 1975—reveal the guests' identities and give them the last laugh. In Spanish and Catalan.—*R.B.* (Film Society of Lincoln Center; May 8 and May 10.)