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Review

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show us the past “as it really was” but as it has been experienced by the participants and, most important, as they choose to tell it.

35 Up therefore lends itself to a discussion about the relationships between contingency and predetermined conditions. Postmodern thought has privileged meaning over structure in the understanding of society and culture, viewing the last two as self-validating and self-referential systems of meaning. The *7 Up* films do not give credence to this view. They seem instead a classic demonstration of Karl Marx’s famous dictum in *The Eighteenth Brumaire* (it seems appropriate to think of Marx, given the pervasive class structure of British society): “Men do make their own history, but they do not make it as they please, not under conditions of their own choosing, but rather under circumstances which they find before them, under given and imposed conditions.”

Alon Confino

University of Virginia

L’œil de Vichy. Produced by FIT Production, Institut National de l’Audiovisuel, TFI Films Production; directed by Claude Chabrol. 1992; black and white; 110 minutes. French with English subtitles. Distributor: CiBy Sales, 10 Stephen Mews, London W1P 1PP; tel. (071) 333–8877, fax 071–333–8878.

Vous avez la mémoire courte, “you have a short memory,” Marshal Philippe Pétain was fond of saying to his French auditors. He said this in the effort to remind French men and women of the awful condition that the country had fallen into *before* the war, a condition that led to their ignominious defeat at the hands of the German armies. Pétain wanted the French to make a great effort and turn the country around, to renew the true sources of French greatness and to assume their just place in the New Order being created by Hitler’s Germany. Only if the French could truly remember the past would they be willing to make the sacrifices necessary to build a healthy, vigorous future.

Political leaders often appeal to the memory of their subjects or citizens in the effort to rally them for one cause or another. Pétain was no exception in this regard. In addition to remembering the role of republican decadence in defeat, the French people were to rally round the new authoritarian government. Claude Chabrol’s film *The Eye of Vichy* is composed almost entirely of films made on behalf of the Vichy government and shown in French cinemas between August 6, 1940, and August 10, 1944. These short newsreels were meant to build support for the new regime and its German ally and to stimulate hatred for its enemies. Although some contextual information is provided in the course of the film by its writers Jean-Pierre Azema and Robert Paxton, *The Eye of Vichy* presents the face of Vichy as made up by the regime itself. This is not, as we are told early in the film, France as it really was but France as Vichy wanted to present it. In this year of the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of France’s liberation by the Allies, one is also struck by how this is *not* France as it wants to remember itself. For this and many other reasons, the film is a major achievement in historical representation and recovery, and it can be a significant addition to courses on the Vichy period and on historical filmmaking. Chabrol’s film shocks because it says little in addition to what it presents from films of the Vichy period. It almost lets Vichy speak for itself, and for this reason it was criticized in the French press for not condemning the past it brought back to the public’s attention.

One of the early tasks of the Vichy propagandists was to turn France toward Germany and against the English. The sinking of the fleet by the British at Mers el-Kébir and the heroic efforts of German firefighters in France and of the German Red Cross are juxtaposed as

France's new connection to the Reich is defined. Much effort was made to glorify Frenchmen who volunteered for work in Germany. Not only would their efforts reduce unemployment and make a contribution to the new Europe being forged by the Nazis, they would make it possible for more French prisoners of war to be sent home. The newsreels emphasized that French patriotism and German interests fit neatly together.

The Eye of Vichy takes us year by year through Vichy propaganda films. Pétain is the star, and he is shown surrounded by wildly enthusiastic French throngs or by the finest flowers of French youth. The shifts in the French government and the stages of collaboration are visible in the films as the years pass. The National Revolution of Pétain spreads through society. We see labor leaders and writers talking about the new Europe and the role of France in its grand unity. We see young people with their "purity and energy" going back to the soil, dancing, cheering. The fascist salute sweeps through the French crowds as they cheer their new leaders.

The Vichy films are particularly vicious in stimulating and tapping into anti-Semitic energies. The founding of the Institute for the Study of Jews is a sign that "the scientific study of the Jewish issue" formed an important part of the general project of collaboration. Jews are like rats, we are told by one of the films, dangerous to public hygiene, insidious. With the German invasion of the Soviet Union in the spring of 1941, anticommunism also became a prominent feature of the propaganda films. French volunteers against Bolshevism are shown leaving for the Eastern Front. Chabrol spends much time on the role these volunteers played as the militarist avant-garde of Vichy ideology.

French volunteers against Jews were organized differently than their anticommunist counterparts. They were told that France had been *enjuiver* since 1936 and that Jews were responsible for the lack of preparedness and for "plunging" the nation into war in 1939. The real French had to learn how to detect the real Jews; to pick them out so they could be isolated, at least. Of course, if Jews had blue skin, there would be no need for them to wear the yellow star. But, the films insist, we must know who they are so that they can no longer lead France astray and destroy the possibilities for a French Renaissance within the heart of the new Europe. The propagandists and the country warmed to the anti-Semitic themes. With no prompting from the German authorities, anti-Jewish laws were promulgated and Jews were portrayed as bloodsuckers of the French people, living on the Côte d'Azur while the poor French suffered and sacrificed. Pure French boys and girls are shown working in the fields, while statutes against Jews are represented as an important part of the efforts at authentic French renewal.

In the summer of 1942, the French were urged to redouble their efforts to send schoolchildren to the countryside to have a truly healthy and inspiring holiday. The voice-over that Chabrol inserts tells us that at this time Jewish men, women, and children were being brought to the Vellodrome d'Hiver. As we watch smiling children boarding trains for their summer vacation, the voice-over tells us that Jewish children were separated after arrest from their parents. As we watch films explaining the creation of charcoal from lumber, we are told that Minister of State Laval would convince Hitler to deport even Jewish children and that those gathered in the summer of 1942 would be exterminated in Auschwitz. While we learn from the voice-over commentary about other arrests, we are shown films from the period about the ingenuity of French wartime recycling: discarded hair can be turned into slippers, sweaters, and gloves. The cheerful voice of the propagandist says, "you may be wearing the hair of your beloved."

The metaphor of recycling is an important thread in *The Eye of Vichy*, as it shows how one substance can continue to have an existence in another form. This is often how the persistence of the past works—transformed, the past continues to have effects. After a section on anti-Semitic propaganda films, Chabrol shows us movies made about wartime recycling, especially the recycling of old films into other products (such as nail and shoe polish). Old films can be recycled, says the newsreel, into useful products during the scarcity of wartime. Chabrol, of course, is also recycling old films in his *Eye of Vichy*. And his montage raises the question of how the vicious anti-Semitic attitudes this film has re-presented have been recycled in contemporary France.

As the war progressed, the short films on current events tried to find some good news about the Germans on the Eastern Front even as they underlined the impossibility of ever breaching the German defenses along the Atlantic coast. The British and Americans are portrayed as callous about sacrificing their own soldiers and as barbaric murderers of French civilians by bombardment. Fortress Europe required French solidarity and sacrifice to repel the English-speaking invaders. In Pétain's Christmas message of 1943, however, we can hear that the threats to French unity are also from within, as he warns against the dangers of civil war and communism. But he wants to conclude on a hopeful note that stresses essential French unity: "you will love each other again." And, into the spring of 1944, Pétain does seem to inspire unity and love; he is greeted by enormous, enthusiastic crowds in his travels across the country.

The Eye of Vichy shows us the France that Vichy wanted to project on the screen. It is a picture, of course, that the French wanted to forget as quickly as possible. The most ironic moment of the film comes near its final frames, when the newsreel shown is no longer in the service of the Vichy government. After watching the fascist, racist, and triumphalist films collected under the *Eye of Vichy*, after watching the seas of people cheering wildly for Pétain, his ministers and supporters, we see de Gaulle arrive in a liberated Paris to huge crowds of vigorous support. De Gaulle made use of much the same rhetoric as Pétain when he proclaimed that the capital liberated itself and that all of France, the real France, the eternal France, had struggled to liberate itself. De Gaulle wanted the French to love each other again.

He did not remind his people that they had a short memory.

Michael S. Roth

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Tango of Slaves. Produced and directed by Ilan Ziv. 1994 (U.S. release); color; 111 minutes. English, Hebrew, Yiddish, Polish, and German (with English subtitles). Video distributor: Tamuz Media (212) 864-7603.

Korczac. Produced by Regina Ziegler, Janusz Morgenstern, and Danielle Toscan DuPlantier; directed by Andrzej Wajda. 1990; black and white; 113 minutes. Polish with English subtitles. Distributor: New Yorker Films, 16 W. 61st St., New York, N.Y. 10023 (212) 247-6110.

Schindler's List. Produced by Steven Spielberg, Gerald R. Molen, and Branko Lustig; directed by Steven Spielberg. 1993; color and black & white; 185 minutes. Film distributor: Universal Studios (818) 777-1293; video distributor: MCA Home Entertainment (818) 777-4300.

The Holocaust and its representation have provided a parable of modern existence. Elie Wiesel keeps reminding us that the Holocaust cannot be represented, that only silence can convey the enormity of the event. Words—the world has been told by the master narrator—are simply insufficient to describe the uniqueness of the Holocaust. This question of uniqueness, and what precisely was unique about the Holocaust, has occupied the historical profession most intensely over the last decade. In Germany, the Historians' Debate (*Historikerstreit*) became an