

H-France Review Vol. 7 (March 2007), No. 22

Jean-Pierre Bertin-Maghit, Sylvie Lindeperg, and Olivier Wiewiorka, Eds., *Images de guerre 1940-1945* (Academic Edition). Box 1. DVD-ROM Mac/PC. INA and Nouveau Monde Éditions, 2005.

Editor's Note: Information regarding licensing agreements for the complete *Images de guerre 1940-1946* collection occurs following the review.

Review by Lynne Taylor, University of Waterloo.

It is not often that one is given an opportunity to review a multimedia product for a list intended for historians. Nor is it often that I, being somewhat of a Luddite when it comes to technology in the classroom, am so thoroughly impressed. *Images de guerre* is everything that its promotional material purports it to be.

This DVD-ROM collection, which will run on both Mac and PC platforms, contains all the newsreels issued in France during the period of the occupation and beyond. For the period 7 August 1940 to 14 August 1942, the newsreels were produced by Pathé and Gaumont, under the title of *Les Actualités mondiales* (box one). Pathé and Gaumont then disappeared and from 21 August 1942 to August 1944, a new organisation, a Franco-German enterprise, produced *France Actualités* (box two). As of September 1944 and until December of the same year, the newsreels were produced by a cooperative of a number of Resistance committees under the title, *France Libre Actualités*. Finally, beginning in January 1945, it became *Les Actualités Françaises*. These are contained in box three. This DVD collection has compiled all these newsreels (over eighty-five hours of video in total—28h 8mn in box one; 26h 22mn in box two; and 30h 24 mn in box three) in one comprehensive, searchable and flexible database, as well as a number of maps. The result is an extraordinary resource, a valuable and comprehensive compendium of visual imagery from the period. (Please note that there will be three reviews of this impressive collection, one for each box.)

Box one opens with the appropriately cautionary note that these newsreels were propaganda and must be taken as such. They were, after all, produced by Vichy and the Nazi occupiers. It is an important caveat to bear in mind. That said, the images still evoke the flavour of the period in a very powerful way, and the DVD could be a very useful teaching tool. There are two primary means of accessing the collection: *Parcours Méthodologiques* and *La Médiathèque*. In the first box's *Parcours Méthodologiques*, there are four essays dealing primarily with the challenges of working with propaganda. These are essentially Powerpoint presentations—text and video intertwined to illustrate the points being made. In *Les corpus d'actualités: un objet de recherche*, Sylvie Lindeperg discusses the problems and possibilities in the use of propaganda film as a research tool. In *Chronique des actualités cinématographiques*, Jean-Pierre Bertin-Maghit explains the evolution of the propaganda production houses. In *Les techniques de propagande*, again by Bertin-Maghit, the technical aspects of production are explored. Finally, as an object lesson in the challenges and opportunities of working with this kind of material, this section of box one ends with a fascinating juxtapositioning of two versions of the sinking of the French fleet at Mers el-Kébir. It is a useful primer on the use of propaganda as both a research and teaching tool. These “essays” are an important addition to this collection.

The second option for access, *La Médiathèque*, is what truly won over this technophobe. The material is accessible in a variety of ways, through a sophisticated search engine. It will allow searches by type of media (maps, films), by production company, by preset subject headings (*antisémitisme et antimaçonnisme*,

armement et vie militaire, arts et spectacles, cérémonies et commémorations, collaboration, économie, empire, expositions, jeunesse et éducation, mode, opérations militaires, politique intérieure française, politique intérieure Allemagne et alliés, prisonniers, relations internationales, sciences et techniques, société et vie quotidienne, sports et loisirs, travail en Allemagne), or through a simple or advanced search using your own keywords. The results appear as a set of thumbnail images from which you can select those you are interested in by simply clicking on the image. You can also review the material chronologically, by title, and by date of production. Each clip also comes with two sets of text. The first provides a resume of the clip; the second gives a transcript of the journalist's voice-over, both in French only.

However, it is not just the ease of searching this database that makes this so impressive. Through *La Médiathèque*, it is possible to create your own package of images, by cutting and pasting together newsreel footage, images, and maps into your own customized presentation that is similar in feel to a Powerpoint presentation. This is done through a function called *bloc-notes*. It is possible to save particular newsreels to your own personalized *bloc-notes* and then to edit them. Thus, you can select a short segment from a longer newsreel and insert only that segment in your own presentation. From there, it is possible to add maps and other images from the collection, as well as your own text, combining and re-combining various elements into a customized presentation. In one instance, I was able to select several 30-second-long segments from a 5-minute newsreel, intersperse text I had written, as well as other images among the segments, and create my own study of daily life during the occupation. It is an astonishingly versatile and powerful system.

The DVD is designed to be purchased by an institution, not an individual, so it is possible to have a number of users setting up personal *bloc-notes*. Each individual user's "file" can hold up to twenty *bloc-notes* at a time. More significantly, neither the video nor the *bloc-notes* can be downloaded to another medium, such as Powerpoint. The material must be accessed through the *Images de guerre* DVD directly. This is, according to the publisher, due to legal and ethical issues. The ease of use and the ability to insert your own text, thus creating the equivalent of a Powerpoint presentation within *Images de guerre*, should address this potential concern.

The content of the DVD collection is incredibly rich, within the obvious constraint of its provenance. The search mechanisms, both simple and advanced, are quite sophisticated. There are, unsurprisingly, some holes. While I am uncertain what the results would be for the second and third volumes, which deal with the period in which the resistance is much more visible and better organized, it is revealing that Charles de Gaulle gets only five "hits", while Maréchal Pétain gets eighty-five, a reflection of the nature of the source. Entering the keyword *résistance* results in numerous clips largely focused on the Germans' war abroad and the various countries' resistance against the invading German forces. A perusal of the footage dealing with the war on the eastern front yields largely clips extolling the strength of the German forces, although by January and February 1942, the praise is as much about the Germans' perseverance in the face of enormous obstacles, both climatic and Soviet, as it is to their strength of arms.

On the homefront, the newsreels downplayed the miseries of everyday life and focused on the ingenuity and imagination of the French and their ability to adapt to the challenges facing them. Thus, there are clips of bicycle-taxis in Paris, the *cyclo-laitiers* of Périgord (young men who collected milk from farms by bicycle and delivered it to whoever needed it), and of the *maison calorifugée*, in a clip called "Camping chez soi." Apparently, one innovative way to keep warm when there was little fuel to heat your apartment (and the fur coat of the lady of the house proved insufficient to keep her comfortable) was to construct a miniature house in your living room, complete with peaked roof, windows and door. I gather it was heated by capturing body heat, and certainly the happy homeowners were very comfortable, snuggled up in their little "camp." Typing in *marché noir* produced just one hit...to a fashion clip. The *marché noir* was a new, large, red leather handbag. It was large enough to carry your shopping, yet still quite chic and apparently *de rigueur* for the fashionable housewives of France in March 1941. The

French, it seems, had not yet lost their sense of humour. *Chômage*, in turn, led to several clips of French workers leaving to work in Germany. Even newsreels showing the flood of returning refugees focussed on the soup kitchens and other assistance provided for them, not on their misery.

Thus, the footage could be considered to have its limitations. Nonetheless, just as the propaganda film *Triumph of the Will* tells us much about Nazi Germany, these newsreels tell us much about the Vichy regime and its vision for France. Footage dealing with youth, the National Socialist model, intellectuals and artists, daily life, the war, and more are revealing. It is important to note, too, that this collection is not just of interest to those who teach about Vichy. It will be of interest to Europeanists in general. Much of the footage could easily be used in any course that deals with World War II in Europe. The *actualités*, whatever the production company, were not just interested in events within France, but also events across Europe and beyond. Much of what was experienced in France on a daily basis was not so different from elsewhere, at least in Western Europe. This is important to recognize if institutions are to be persuaded to purchase the collection.

In conclusion, *Images de guerre* is a robust, versatile and rich resource that would make an excellent addition to the electronic resources of any teaching library, both for use in the lecture hall and, perhaps, by students interested in preparing multimedia presentations as projects for a class. Finally, for all the versatility (and thus complexity) of the database's search and management system, it is remarkably straightforward to use. I was up and running in an afternoon (and then playing with it for days!). Believe me, if I can use it, anyone can.

Lynne Taylor University of Waterloo ltaylor@uwaterloo.ca

Images de guerre 1940-1946 (Academic Edition). Jean-Pierre Bertin-Maghit, Sylvie Lindeperg, Olivier Wieviorka (eds.). INA and Nouveau Monde Éditions, 2005-2006.

3 boxes of 15 DVD-ROMs:

Box 1 (1940-1942, 6 DVD-ROMs) Available Box 2 (1942-1944, 6 DVD-ROMs) Spring 2007 Box 3 (1944-1946, 3 DVD-ROMs) Summer 2007

Full price for a campus network license is \$4,800.00 per box (or 3,800 Euros).

A limited license (for consultation on *one computer only*) is also available : \$3,200 per box (or 2,600 Euros)

A 15 percent discount is applicable for early subscribers who order the complete collection before publication of box two.

For more information, contact: Yannick Dehée at ydehee@nouveau-monde.net

Copyright © 2007 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and its location on the H-France website. No republication or distribution by print media will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France.

H-France Review Vol. 7 (March 2007), No. 22

ISSN 1553-9172