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Esther Hoffenberg, dir. *The Two Lives of Eva.* Brooklyn: Icarus Films, 2005. DVD. Color. 85 minutes.

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A Time for Reflection

The Two Lives of Eva is a documentary film that was released in 2005. It opens with with the voice of the director, Esther Hoffenberg, explaining that her mother, Eva, is in a panic in 1970 in France. This is the first of many such episodes, as she suffers a series of relapses over the years to come. Throughout the film, Eva explores the answer to the question, "Where did my life fork?" while Hoffenberg traces her mother's attempts to finally come to terms with her experiences during World War II after decades of silence.

In the late 1970s, Eva was eager to offer what she referred to as "too many words after too much silence." Hoffenberg accompanied Eva on a trip to Germany during which her mother began to reveal what she had been concealing for so long; during their upbringing and well into their adult life, Eva did not discuss her wartime past with her children. Between 1978 and 1980, Hoffenberg recorded her mother's memoirs on a small tape recorder. After her mother's death in 2001, Hoffenberg returned to Europe in order to further explore her mother's past. Consequently, *The Two Lives of Eva* is the result of decades of research.

On the eve of World War II, Eva described herself, her parents, and siblings as "Polish," but more specifically "Polish citizens of German nationality." Her family, the Lambrechts, were wealthy, Lutheran industrialists well-connected with other families of German descent in Sosnowiec, Poland. Eva enjoyed a childhood in which she was always the center of attention both at home–she was her father's favorite child–and among friends. After the German occupation in 1939, the Lambrechts received German citizenship and Eva was placed in a German high school where she experienced forced indoctrination of the principles of National Socialism. Throughout the war years, Eva remained largely isolated from the atrocities occurring around her. Her family cooperated with the Nazis and their factory continued to prosper. Unlike their Polish and Jewish neighbors, they did not suffer similar effects of the war because of their privileged classification as German. However, the Lambrechts did experience personal loss during the war with the death of a son at Stalingrad, and a daughter in a skiing accident.

Poland was liberated by the Russians in 1945, at which point Eva and her mother were sent away by her father to seek refuge in Germany with cousins. Here in the "wandering population" of postwar Europe, Eva met her future husband, Stas Hoffenberg, a Polish Jew who had survived the Warsaw ghetto. Shortly thereafter, the two left Berlin and married in Paris. They remained in France and eventually raised four children; director Esther was born in 1950. It was shortly after her marriage that Eva "agreed" to convert to Judaism. Despite her German Lutheran past, she made Jewish affairs "her issue," and this was certainly influenced by the fact that Stas started revealing things to her about his horrific experiences during the war. In fact, Eva's grandmother was Jewish–a relation only briefly referred to in the film–though Eva never considered herself to be Jewish. After the war, devoted to her new religion and family, Eva kept her Germanness and identity struggles hidden for decades. It was only later, wishing to shed her "cowardliness," that she began to discuss her past.

Hoffenberg refers to various sources over time to give the viewer a fuller picture of her mother's life story and how it relates to past and present family dynamics. She employs photos, recorded conversations, footage of Poland, and a range of documents–including sources from her family archives, and even notes from her mother's therapy sessions with her psychiatrist. Hoffenberg also interviews friends and relatives of the Lambrecht and Hoffenberg families, including a Polish Jewish acquaintance of Eva's before the war. Ironically, a close friendship had developed between Eva and the only Jewish girl at school because both were religious minorities in predominantly Catholic Poland. Though she ultimately survived the war, this friend was deported. Eva

only became aware of the atrocities the Jews had experienced at the hands of the Nazis later, through her husband. After learning of the suffering of the Jews, Eva silently struggled for years with her family's passive support of the Nazis and her own identification as a German.

The viewer comes to find out that the "two lives" refer to Eva's first life as a German Lutheran living in Poland before and during World War II, and her second life as a converted Jew and mother in postwar France. The tension in these identities is evident throughout the film, with Eva alternately describing herself as Polish, then German, then Jewish. This is as much a film about Eva as it is a work of self-discovery and reflection for the director, who in more than twenty years of experience in cinema, and production of approximately fifty documentaries, never had addressed her personal life. Through her mother's revelations, Esther finds out about the "German girl" Eva had been, and other details she never revealed to her children. *The Two Lives of Eva* is a unique example of how religious, racial, and ethnic diversity in wartime Europe shaped one woman's life, but also serves as a valuable portrayal of how the postwar generation has grappled with relating to their parents' past experiences. Both the answered and unanswered questions in this film provide ample fodder for further discussion not only of the Holocaust, but the matters of wartime complicity and postwar guilt.

The Two Lives of Eva is the rightful recipient of numerous awards, bestowed in 2005 at the Cinéma du Réel Festival, the International Film Festival of La Rochelle, the Jerusalem Film Festival, the Viennale, and the Leipzig Dokfest, and in 2006 at the Buenos Aires International Film Festival, the New York Jewish Film Festival, the Festival Documentaire Santiago, and the Filmer à Tout Prix.

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