

## **The perpetrator in focus: Turn of the century Holocaust remembrance in *The Specialist***

**Frances Guerin**

I was right to focus on the perpetrator. Because he's talking from inside the system, Eichmann's testimony is a hundred times more powerful than any survivor's.

Eyal Sivan

### **Introduction**

In his controversial 1998 film, *The Specialist*, Israeli director Eyal Sivan casts the Holocaust in a new light when he represents it through the eyes of the Nazi perpetrator. Sivan and his scriptwriter, human rights activist Rony Brauman, re-assemble and manipulate footage originally filmed by Leo Hurwitz for Capital Cities Broadcasting of Adolf Eichmann's trial by an Israeli court in Jerusalem in 1961.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, Sivan recycles the video footage of the trial into a 16mm film that critiques, not the heinous nature of Eichmann's crimes, nor the depravity of the man who committed them, but the system of regulation that constructed and judged Eichmann. While the video footage was originally filmed as a document of the trial, Sivan radically redeploys the same images in a narrative that exposes the manipulations of the court, its representations and the continued injustice of such institutions and representations today, 45 years later. According to *The Specialist*,

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Eichmann's actions are not on trial; they are a foregone conclusion. To prove Eichmann's guilt or innocence was not the point of the trial in the first place, and it is certainly not the goal of *The Specialist*. Through its careful weaving of fragments of the proceedings, over the course of its narrative, *The Specialist* reveals the relationship of otherness — the differences and identicalities — between Adolf Eichmann, the 'deportation specialist' and Attorney General Gideon Hausner for the prosecution. Simultaneously, the film considers the relationship between Eichmann and the crimes of the National Socialist Party as they were forged by the Israeli court.

There is an open-endedness to the film that allows it to be read in a number of ways. Therefore, my interpretations are potential rather than absolute. What is more concrete is that *The Specialist* does not reiterate the well-rehearsed flaws of the trial. Rather, through a number of self-conscious strategies, the film becomes an analytical reflection on why this trial is relevant to our continued memory of the Holocaust and how it is represented. *The Specialist* clearly announces itself as an aesthetic articulation of the Holocaust, an aesthetic articulation of the legal proceedings which, in turn, are shown as a performance. Of course, Sivan is not the first to announce the legal process in general, or the Eichmann trial in particular, as closer to a theatrical performance than a legal trial. However, *The Specialist* is radical for its challenge to the court room's aestheticisation of evidence via exposure of its own cinematic manipulations. Thus, the film places itself at a conceptual distance from both the trial and its own representation of the trial. As such, I prefer to think of *The Specialist* not as a documentary of the trial of Adolf Eichmann, but rather, as a representation that belongs to the current wave of Holocaust historiographical enquiry. *The Specialist* documents and critiques the way that the Holocaust is constructed for us. And, in order to make this vitally obvious, the film sees from an unexpected, and uncomfortable perspective: through the eyes of the perpetrator, Adolf Eichmann.

Critics have tended to read *The Specialist* as a cinematic version of Hannah Arendt's book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (Arendt 1994, Raz 2005, Mitchell 2000, Robinson 2003). Although, as the credits indicate,

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the book inspired Sivan. Therefore, to accept *The Specialist* as a film version of the book is to ignore its significant and unique contribution to ongoing debates regarding representations of the Holocaust and its memorial in the 21st century. Above all, the historical moment of 1998 is very different from 1961 when Arendt's report on the trial appeared in *The New Yorker*. In 1998, the Israel-Palestine conflict reached new levels of violence and aggression as the seizure of land continued and Palestinians were forced into increasingly confined settlements through methods of brutal repression. The Eichmann trial took place in a very different Israel, six years prior to the 1967 War, at a time when diplomatic relations between Israel and the Arab world were still buffered by the United Nations. Lastly, to understand *The Specialist* as a straightforward translation of Arendt's book into images, irresponsibly overlooks the film's sophisticated analysis on the nature of visual, in particular, documentary representation of such significant historical events.

*The Specialist's* formal uniqueness must be acknowledged because this is critical to its perspective of the Holocaust. As a found footage film, it recycles footage from the archive to construct a narrative that is a long way from the meaning inherent to the images in their original narrative.<sup>2</sup> Sivan reedits and remasters the video evidence, images of Eichmann defending his case, the prosecution's cross-examination, and the judges' continual interruptions of accused, lawyers and witnesses alike in order to lay bare the manipulations of the historical trial and its video documentation.<sup>3</sup> For example, he chooses not to include images of the audience —with the exception of one scene when a man is removed — but rather, to enhance the reflection of their faces on the glass box in which Eichmann sits. Thus, unlike so many Holocaust representations, *The Specialist* is not concerned to demonstrate the impact of historical events on the court room audience, thus the responsibility of this same audience. Similarly, while witness testimony has figured centrally in remembrance of the Holocaust, *The Specialist* presents testimony that is never shown in its entirety, and from survivors who, at times, remain anonymous. As Gal Raz has carefully demonstrated, *The Specialist* even reorganises the narrative episodes

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of the trial to fit its own unique narrative (Raz 2005). Thus, while *The Specialist* exposes the judicial stage for its theatricality, it also consciously manipulates both the trial as historical event and the original video footage as supposed evidence of history. Nevertheless, what is most disturbing is not the exposure of the constructed, performative nature of the trial, but rather, the fact that the exposure of the system is realised through the eyes of the perpetrator. And that this vision entices us to empathise and identify with Eichmann. Sivan might be 'right to focus on the perpetrator' because he wants to reveal the mechanisms of the systems in play. However, when the film is over, we are left caught between the film's provocation to see the Holocaust from a different perspective and our sense that it is not 'right' to strategically sacrifice the 'power' of the survivor's testimony in the interests of valuing Eichmann's.<sup>4</sup>

### Setting the stage

As others have noted, *The Specialist* underlines the trial as a dramatic performance.<sup>5</sup> From the very opening moments of *The Specialist* we are alerted to the fact that we are spectators to a performance of justice in the court as a theatrical stage.<sup>6</sup> It is a theatre like any other, including an orchestra and gallery, proscenium and stage, with side doors for the actors' entrances and exits. When Sivan digitally remasters the original images, he distorts the sound, slows down the image, and embellishes the otherwise faint reflections of the audience on the much discussed glass booth which 'caged' Eichmann during the trial. Similarly, Sivan digitally reworks the lighting and bleaches the image to renew the contrast between black and white, a contrast which had faded due to the age and original quality of the very early video footage. Sometimes, the deterioration is enhanced through extreme slow motion, further blurring and deliberate distressing of the images. Perhaps most radically, Sivan's version of the footage reworks the very slight camera movements to create a new 'perspective' of the events. In the relevant scenes, the camera moves from Eichmann in his box on the left, through the lawyers' bench in the middle, to the witness stand on the right of

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both court room and film screen. The movement allows a representation of the relations between the characters, the spatial relations and their various roles in the film's version of events. Thus, Sivan's post-production manipulation of the image contributes to the description of the trial and his film as no more than an image.

Unlike Arendt's book, *The Specialist* belongs for an American, even international, audience within the context of a 'post-O.J. Simpson world'. Through its manipulation of archival images, *The Specialist* casts the historical footage as something akin to Court TV. This is not to say that we view the footage as something like Court TV. Rather, in *The Specialist* the repetitive footage of Eichmann's trial is a reiteration and, through this reiteration, a critique of the form and substance of Court TV. Like the infamous footage seen day after day of the O.J. Simpson trial in Los Angeles in 1994–95, the primary players in the Eichmann trial are 'reconstructed' as characters, the court room turned into a stage on which the entertainment will be played out (Thaler 1994). It is also a drama carefully shaped by its highly influential director, David Ben-Gurion. Similarly, like the images captured by cameras in a contemporary court room, *The Specialist* presents the footage of the trial with a realist eye. Sivan's aesthetic recaptures the vacuity of Court TV images through a strategic replication and departure from that which it references. In the same way that Eichmann is posited as other to Hausner, the aesthetic of *The Specialist* is other to that of Court TV. Unlike Court TV, the repetition of certain images, statements, movements, the endless poring over official documents, gives the footage its claim to authenticity, the impression of documentary transparency.<sup>7</sup> But the film is also self-conscious, and itself eschews all pretence to authenticity. It is a film steeped in the discourse of representation: the trial as representation, the video documentation as representation and its own status as representation not unmediated evidence of historical events. *The Specialist* as representation is a triple-dramatisation of Eichmann's trial: first, at the level of the pro-filmic; second, at that of the video that documents it, and third, through the surface of film, the visual medium that reworks and re-presents both to a turn of the millennium audience.

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In what might be argued as the most profound departure from Court TV, *The Specialist*'s self-conscious manipulation of the archival footage refuses its viewer a version of the trial that can be easily consumed. To be sure, this film is difficult on a number of levels. As spectators to the trial of *The Specialist* our task can be arduous: we have difficulty reading the expressions on Eichmann's face, the significance of some discussions, the motivations of some witnesses. In addition, all of our cultural, historical, political and ethical beliefs are forcefully challenged by a representation of a Nazi perpetrator as, not necessarily a good person, but certainly not an evil one. Here lies what Yann Beauvais would call the 'democratic didacticism' of the found footage film, the space in which the audience is pushed to form its own opinion on the material at hand.<sup>8</sup> Through the ambiguity of its images, their idiosyncratic juxtaposition, and confrontational status, *The Specialist* challenges the ease of our viewing activities and the comfort of our vision of history. We sit through repetitions, silences, seemingly endless back and forth conversations, black screens, and uneventful minutiae of court room proceedings. Thus, we must work to make sense and draw our own conclusions of this ambiguous material. This difficulty, at least in part, further underlines the chilling critique of Court TV, the historical trial and the attempt to document it. Lastly, through its challenges to our viewing process, the film creates the tensions and gaps that demand we actively interpret what we see. In these spaces opened up for interpretation, we are offered the choice of accepting or rejecting the claims of *The Specialist*. Are we prepared to follow this particular perpetrator's perspective, all for an insight into the system that groomed him and the one that convicted him? Are we prepared to accept the farcical nature of the trial, or is the stability of history dependent on a belief in the trial's honourable intentions? Whichever way we answer these questions, its openness is the film's greatest strength. It is what separates it from other versions of Eichmann's story — including those which also reuse Hurwitz' footage — and other versions of the Holocaust.<sup>9</sup> We are left, perhaps challenged, to rethink our vision of this trial, its representations, and their roles in history.

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The historical background of the archival footage is also key to *The Specialist's* departure from the footage. Because as Liebman also points out, the manipulations are born as much of the necessity to restore the footage as they are to reinterpret it (Liebman 2002: 41). The Israeli government was aware of the trial's international fascination and wanted it documented for the world to see. A visual record of the trial in its entirety would enable and encourage the public to be 'brought into direct contact with the difficulty of the survivors' testimony'.<sup>10</sup> For Israeli officials — in particular those working to further Ben-Gurion's program of justice — of utmost importance to this trial was the horror of the Holocaust, the burden carried by the survivors throughout their lives. Thus the narrative response to spectators via the documentary footage would be one of unquestioned empathy with the trauma of the victims, a trauma caused by Eichmann the cold blooded murderer. Therefore, the video footage was to serve as a form of memory building that is directly opposed through the developing narrative of *The Specialist*. Because there were still no television companies in Israel, the government approached Capital Cities Broadcasting Corporation — a subsidiary of ABC — to produce the uninterrupted visual record of the trial. Four fixed cameras were hidden in the court room behind partition walls so filming and proceedings would not interfere with each other.<sup>11</sup> The Eichmann trial was one of the first major international events to be videotaped, and the first trial to be televised. While it was not broadcast live as has become the practice with Court TV, a single 65 minute videotape of selected highlights was disseminated in Israel and sent to New York at the conclusion of each day's proceedings.<sup>12</sup> This dissemination of excerpts of the trial ensured its status as a media spectacle. The violence, murder, obscenity, and ethnic conflict of Eichmann's trial became absorbed into an entertainment industry as a product that was sold to millions of viewers. Similarly, through its original dissemination, the Eichmann trial as political event became transformed into a cultural happening that would intentionally shape public perception of the Nazis, the Holocaust and Adolf Eichmann for years to come. *The Specialist* goes some way to exposing the disingenuity of the footage as memorial, and to challenge us to forge new memories of the trial.

### **Eichmann, Hausner and the system that judges**

At the centre of my interpretation of *The Specialist* lies the intriguing relationship of Eichmann as other to Hausner, and by extension, the Israeli court. On every level of communication Hausner speaks a different language from Eichmann: Hausner speaks in Hebrew, while Eichmann speaks in a bureaucratic German. Eichmann's testimonies are rational, matter-of-fact, and self-assured, while Hausner is often passionate, motivated by frustration, looking for vengeance. Hausner struggles to understand and listen to Eichmann's defence, his plea for innocence. There is no place in the logic of Hausner's prosecution for Eichmann's insistence upon obedience to his superior's orders.<sup>13</sup> Following the setting of the stage, the introduction of the characters, and the entrance of the diegetic audience, the film cuts to reveal the glass booth that Eichmann, the protagonist, will occupy for the entirety of this drama. The broken voices of vengeance can be heard on the soundtrack and reflections of court room guards appear on the protagonist's glass booth. Like stage hands, the guards prepare the stage and auditorium for the drama to come. Once the exposition sequence proper is over and all the actors are settled, Hausner passionately delivers his opening soliloquy, his opening remarks of what the judge identifies as the seventh session of the trial.

Your Honor, here stands before you the destroyer of a people, an enemy of mankind. He was born human but he lived like a beast in the jungle. He committed atrocities so unspeakable that he who is guilty of such crimes no longer deserves being called human. His crimes go beyond what we consider human, they go beyond what separates man from beast. I ask the Court to consider that he acted with enthusiasm out of his own free will and with passion. Right to the end! ... I therefore ask you to sentence this man to death.

Hausner's remarks are no routine, objective speech and the film tells us as much. When he first looks up to the judges, he begins slowly and sensibly to articulate his words. But as he asks the court to consider the horrendous crimes of the accused, the drum of Sivan's film rolls. In a series of subtle montages, Hausner shakes his hands, he gesticulates



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animatedly, points his finger accusingly, and the voice of reason becomes agitated, muffled by the confusion of the soundtrack. Thus, the theatricality of Hausner's monologue is underlined by the affectations and artificiality of Sivan's film. The harder Hausner works to have his remarks heard, the more Sivan's film undercuts his voice through a blurring of the soundtrack, and an acceleration of the montage on the image track. The soundtrack manipulates Hausner's voice and infects his gesticulations so that we see them as histrionic. Neither Hausner, nor the film's representation of him would have us believe that his is the voice of reason. A silence interrupted only by the vaguest of atmospheric noises takes command of the court room, and then, as Hausner resumes his seat, the minimalist musical score crescendos until its climax accompanies the image of the film's title against a black background. The title sequence cuts to black, and then, to Eichmann silently cleaning a spare pair of glasses, with no distraction from a post-dubbed soundtrack or a distress of the image. He is shown in a characteristic full-frontal medium close-up, in crisp black and white images as he performs this innocuous task, apparently unmoved by the Attorney General's histrionics.

The discrepancy between the languages — both actual and visual — of the court and of Eichmann are found everywhere throughout *The Specialist*. Like all stars of gripping film narratives, Eichmann is given a prominence not afforded the other characters in the film. Eichmann is one of the few characters in this drama who is repeatedly given his own frame within which he is usually centred in a frontal medium close-up against the blank background of the court room wall. There is nothing within the frame that might tempt our eyes to wander from his image: in these sequences he shares the *mise-en-scène* with only his papers, books and the reflection on his glass booth of the person who is speaking elsewhere in the court room: Judge Moshe Landau, Hausner, various legal representatives, witnesses or the audience. The compositions used to depict him remain balanced, and within the conventions of filmmaking, 'naturalised'.<sup>14</sup> Nothing in the *mise-en-scène*, camerawork or framing draws our attention away from Eichmann's image. In addition, unlike the other characters in *The*

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*Specialist*, Eichmann is afforded the privilege of a reaction shot. For example, the film cuts to watch his reaction to survivors such as Mr Gordon who, speaking English, tells the story of a mass execution and burial at which both he and Eichmann were present. In contrast to the conventions of Holocaust representation, it is not the poignant testimony of the witness that is visually privileged, but Eichmann the perpetrator's response to the survivor's. Eichmann's face is always calm, he raises an eyebrow, twists the sides of his mouth, moves his eyes — but never his head — right or left. Again, his expression might be ice-cold, but it is never overlaid with narrational commentary that might persuade us that he is evil and inhuman — a strategy common to 40 years of Holocaust representation.

Similarly, Eichmann's words are never interrupted by the film. When he is cross-examined, for example, we see Eichmann listen carefully through his headphones to translations of the questions asked him. We also see him pause to consider the question, then stand to deliver his response. In keeping with the respect afforded his image, Eichmann's words are neither distorted nor cut short by the soundtrack. Nevertheless, however pivotal his character is to the meaning of the film, contrary to the portrayal of a protagonist, the film offers no psychological insights into Eichmann. Eichmann remains opaque to the camera and the court alike. No matter how concentrated the investigation of his face, his hands, his comportment, the camera remains blind to his thoughts and feelings. At various moments, the camera moves down to his hands, we see him press his forefingers and thumbs together in what could be a habitual gesture. It is difficult to interpret the gesture as an expression of anxiety, fear or foreboding as it is always prefaced or followed by the same impenetrable, stoic facial expression. Of course, the inability to penetrate Eichmann's exterior 'poise' is just the point: rather than attributing to him a complicity in the most heinous of crimes we are left to read these gestures for their oppositionality to those of Gideon Hausner. And when faced with the juxtaposition of the histrionics of the persecution, we are potentially sympathetic to the unflappable Eichmann.

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When Eichmann is placed next to Hausner, his performance begins to make takes on a different meaning.<sup>15</sup> Hausner is the only other character to whom *The Specialist* affords focused attention. Hausner is also often given his own frame. The blank wall of the court is also placed behind him to ensure the minimisation of spectator distraction from his significance. Nevertheless, Hausner is not given the frontal, medium close-ups through which Eichmann is represented. On the contrary, Hausner is presented most often in profile, in medium- to long-shot from the waist up. At times, he is shot in a long-shot head and shoulders image. Similarly, Sivan deliberately chooses footage of Hausner that is at a more advanced stage of deterioration than that which depicts Eichmann. On many occasions, Hausner must share the frame with, for example, the heads of the assistant attorneys, or Eichmann's lawyer, Servatius. For example, on the occasions that Hausner stands to cross-examine the witnesses or the accused, he is always shot in a high angle, full-shot.<sup>16</sup> In these moments, unlike Eichmann, Hausner is depicted as a representative of the court. In the ultimate disrespect for Hausner's importance and integrity as a character, we see the guards nonchalantly walk in front of him and obstruct our view of him. Thus, while Eichmann is isolated in his glass booth, severed from the larger juridical system as an individual on trial, Hausner is juxtaposed with Eichmann as an individual lead character, who simultaneously belongs to a whole apparatus of which he is only a small part. *The Specialist* thus skilfully redeploys specific fragments to reiterate Hausner as Eichmann's other. Where Eichmann is the stoic individual waging a lone defence, Hausner is an emotionally charged individual shown as one element in the larger justice system.

In what might be interpreted as an elaboration of this juxtaposition of otherness, Landau and the assistant judges are almost entirely stripped of their individuality through their depiction as representatives of the court in *The Specialist*. In all but a handful of shots, Landau is shown either through the glass walls of Eichmann's cage — through Eichmann's eyes, in long-shot. Alternatively, Landau and the other judges are shown in a high-angle, long-shot from behind the prosecution, seen through a camera placed high above the heads of the

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audience, in the upper galleries of the court room. Landau therefore usually shares the frame with the other two judges. Similarly, it is not uncommon for Landau's image to be absent from the frame altogether. As Eichmann, a witness, or Hausner talk, Landau will interject with a question, a clarification, an attempted reorientation of the testimonies. Rather than inserting or cutting away to an image of the judge, Sivan simply overlays his voice on an image track which depicts someone else, usually the person whom Landau interrupts. As the figure who, within the structures of the legal system, has the ultimate power, in *The Specialist* the presiding judge is robbed of his control, authority and individuality. He is visually reduced to an incidental figure in a drama that centres on someone else's predicament. Landau is represented through his off-screen voice as a cog in the wheel of a production. It is a production into which Eichmann as individual cannot be integrated. Eichmann's chosen language, and the visual language through which he is represented, ensure his continued exclusion from the representational field of the court. From this position as an other outside of narrativisation, Eichmann as individual most successfully disrupts the trial proceedings.

There are many sequences in *The Specialist* that distinguish in this way between Eichmann and the other actors to illustrate the differences in their respective identities. For example, at one point during the cross-examination of the accused, Hausner asks Eichmann for details of the evacuation of Jews from Eastern Europe. With his usual attention to detail, Eichmann obligingly explains his job as orchestrator of the systematic deportations to the court. Eichmann answers the question posed of him. But Hausner is dissatisfied with the answer: he wants Eichmann to admit he was the primary executioner of the hundreds of thousands of people whose transportation from the East was his responsibility. Putting the answer in Eichmann's mouth, Hausner asks him: 'The transportations from the East were destined for extermination, weren't they?' With his usual coolness, Eichmann assertively stands up, moves towards the microphone and claims, 'No, that is incorrect.' Hausner exasperatedly turns his back on the accused, while Eichmann continues: 'Whether they were for extermination or not, I cannot judge

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because nobody knew whether the transports were destined for extermination or not. The bureau in charge of the timetabling knew nothing about this.' And before Eichmann has time to sit down again, the camera still focused on him, an angry voice adamantly proclaims in Hebrew: 'No! No, I repeat No, I will not allow this and I don't want to repeat it.' The film cuts to Landau organising his papers and immediately we are confused as to who has uttered the denial? Is it Landau, or is it Hausner? Or perhaps it is a lone voice from the audience? The film then cuts to Hausner swinging around on his chair to face the audience, an image accompanied by a voice that — given the content of the statement — must belong to Landau: 'If necessary I will have the public removed.' There is no distinction between the voices of Hausner, Landau and audience members. It is only their function within the system of regulation that distinguishes their words. Similarly there is no telling what is being denied — is it Eichmann's lies? Is it the offence of the audience? In this instance, the anger of Landau and Hausner becomes merged with the outrage of the diegetic audience at Eichmann's response. In such a moment, Hausner, Landau and a member of the audience all lose their identities as individuals: as disembodied voices that protest Eichmann's construal of his responsibility, they represent a representational system. While Eichmann adequately answers the questions posed of him according to his oath, the other participants in the trial want a different answer: a confession of deeds for which he refuses responsibility. Eichmann responds according to his oath, whereas the prosecution is driven by larger questions of implication. Because the two parties speak on two mutually exclusive registers, at cross purposes, the legal system has no hope of identifying the full extent of Eichmann's role in the Holocaust, thus proving Eichmann's 'guilt'. We know that Eichmann was fully aware of the trains' destination, however, this is not the film's point. Rather, *The Specialist* demonstrates this discrepancy between the court and the accused to heighten the representational nature of the system, and the distortions of its convictions. Eichmann, the composed, yet disaffected, individual is in conflict with the excited accusers, the Israeli authorities.

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Critics routinely draw attention to the extraordinary moment in *The Specialist* when Eichmann and Hausner stand side by side as Eichmann indicates the route of the transportations on a map of World War II Europe. Seen from behind in long shot, through a highly-textured, pixellated image in which the tracking is lost, the two balding heads of the two men almost identically dressed and of identical height makes them difficult to distinguish. This moment is striking because in it *The Specialist* overtly articulates what it proclaims by inversion in the rest of the film: that Eichmann and Hausner are indeed twinned through their otherness. If throughout the rest of the film Eichman and Hausner are juxtaposed to underline their differences, this image is the linchpin that binds them together.

The film further reinforces this intimate relationship through the juxtaposition of Eichmann and Hausner's performance. Hausner passionately expresses his anger, frustration and abhorrence towards Eichmann. When placed side by side with the disaffected, inert Eichmann, the highly emotional Hausner begins to appear irrational. While it is usual that the court and prosecution speak the language of rationality such that, for example, the jury can determine right from wrong, *The Specialist* gives the voice of rationality to the accused. Eichmann is shown here cool, phlegmatic and composed at all times. Never once during the trial does he raise his voice. In contrast, Hausner yells at Eichmann out of frustration, waves papers at him, slaps his hand on the bench in front of him, makes fun of him, and has no qualms assassinating his character. Following the aforementioned sequence in which Mr Gordon is on the witness stand, Hausner loses his composure and challenges Eichmann in a dramatic fashion. Eichmann rises and states his lack of involvement with the *Einsatzgruppen* — the mobile killing units of the S.S. — in Poland for the usual reason that he did not have the authority to give such orders. As Eichmann explains his job as head of transport and all the time Hausner fidgets and looks around his podium as though distracted by having lost something. His response begins smugly and sarcastically: 'This task of yours, was it accomplished in the end?' his hands in his pockets, leaning in towards the microphone as though fed up with Eichmann's obstinacy. And when

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Eichmann repeats yet again that there were various stages to the procedure, all of which were carried out by different offices, at different levels, Hausner turns to his right, towards no one in particular and, tapping his hand on the podium in front of him, cries elatedly, 'There we have it!' For the audience of *The Specialist*, nothing at all has been resolved. Rather, we are given an image of the prosecution's theatrical performance in direct contrast with the composure of the accused. *The Specialist* never allows us to sympathise with the Holocaust survivor-witnesses to Eichmann's crimes. And when it solicits an emotional response, it is more likely in the form of a frustration with Hausner because he is so unrelenting in his repetition of questions that Eichmann has already answered. This annoyance at Hausner comes as a daring challenge to our comfortable, unquestioned belief that the Nazi perpetrator is reprehensible and his inquisitor, duly justified. To reiterate, *The Specialist* does not claim Eichmann is innocent, but it does force our discomfort and open up the question of our all-too-easy attachment to history as one-dimensional. The film can be interpreted to claim that in a multi-dimensional history guilt and innocence, perpetrator and victim are not so cut and dry, and that retribution might come with its own forms of injustice. To be sure, such a challenge would be unthinkable and unethical without 40 years of discussion of the private and public trauma caused by the Jewish Holocaust. It is a challenge only just palatable to a turn of the millennium audience.

### **Eichmann and the system he worked for**

The fissures between Eichmann and the system that judged him are never more evident than in those sections of *The Specialist* when the court attempts to draw a confession from Eichmann for his killing of 6 million Jews in the Holocaust. To prove his responsibility, the prosecution must tie the mass slaughter to Eichmann's role as head of deportation within the Nazi system. Arendt argues that from a legal perspective, even though Eichmann unquestionably gave over his ethical principles and powers of reasoning to the Nazi regime, even though he internalised all of the dictates that made the Nazis so

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frighteningly powerful, he could not, as the court tried to do, be equated with that regime. As Arendt posits, the atrocities could not have taken place without the intricate systems of organisation, the hundreds of Nazi soldiers and collaborators, the complexities of history (Arendt 1994: 9). This is an example of how *The Specialist* might agree with Arendt in principle, but its method of demonstrating the point is singularly different.

Landau announces that discussion for the morning's hearing will focus on the Nazi document number T/476. The said document is a special order from Lieutenant-Colonel Eichmann to send the transports east to Cholm. A written transcript of this sequence only begins to approach Hausner's and Landau's frustration with Eichmann for his stubborn refusal to admit he was the author of this and other transportations to the death camp. Nevertheless, *The Specialist* manipulates the exchange to be circular and confusing. The confusion is designed to emphasise the court's inability to pin Eichmann down.

Hausner: Where were they headed?

Eichmann: It says here: to Cholm.

H: In other words to Sobibor.

E: As far as I know, it's not the same place as Sobibor.

H: But it's the station from where you sent these people, to Sobibor, to Treblinka, to Majdanek.

E: Here it says Cholm, it must be Cholm.

H: It says *via* Cholm.

E: People were sent from Cholm.

H: When you gave orders to transport people to Cholm, what was their final destination? The death camps. Will you finally tell us? You say you don't want to evade anything so tell us openly!

E: To Cholm. In my statement, I said that my superiors sent me there, and that I had seen how the Jews were gassed, and had written a report on it.

H: No, you were talking about Kulmhof, Chelmno.

E: It's the same place.

H: No, it's not the same place.

Landau: Kulm is Chelmno.



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H: Kulm is the Polish name for Chelm.

L: No, there's a Kulm in the Warthegau.

H: Yes yes.

L: And Kulmhof is the same place.

H: Yes, but its not Cholm.

L: Agreed.

L: I say that in Polish, Kolm, Kulm, Kulmhof, is Chelmno.

H: No, there's a Chelmno and Chelm. They're different places.

L: Yes, I agree, but what is the Polish name for Kulm or Kulmhof?

H: For Kulmhof? Chelmno.

L: But that's what I said. But it's not Cholm. Kulm and Kulmhof are close. It's the same place.

H: That's what I think.

Raveh: I'm sorry, I still don't understand a thing.

L: The Kolm in his telegram, Kolm.

R: Cholm ... It isn't in the Warthegau.

L: No, it's in the General Government.

H: It's the famous Chelm.

L: Does the accused know that?

E: It says, "General Government."

H: Ask him!

R: He was talking about the Warthegau. I ask the accused, It's not Kulm or Kulmhof in the Warthegau?

E: Yes, it says "General Government." I thought that Cholm was the same as Kulm or Kulmhof. But I'm not trying to avoid the question as the Attorney General is implying. In my statement, I said that I had been there. But when I read *Cholm*, I was sure that was Kulm in the Warthegau.

H: From there they were sent to their deaths weren't they?

E: I have never been to Cholm, but it's entirely possible and I'm not denying it that it was also a death camp. But I don't know. (Murmur from the diegetic audience)

Cut to black.

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This ludicrous conversation which has no reality beyond *The Specialist* demonstrates the court's ineffectual attempt to tie Eichmann to the murder of 6 million Jews. Hausner, Landau and Raveh struggle to agree with each other on the relationship between and the whereabouts of Cholm, Kulm, Kulmhof and Chelmno. Their collective uncertainty about this obviously pivotal location becomes farcical as they interrupt, disagree with, contradict and clarify each other. Eichmann's responsibility for the death trains is sidelined while the judges and prosecution attempt to clarify the destination of the transports. The incompetence of the court demonstrated in the dialogue is underlined by the tone and volume of the various actors' voices, and the film's image track. Hausner is so frustrated that, throughout the cross-examination, he yells at Eichmann. In fact, Hausner is so incensed by Eichmann's responses that he not only raises his voice, but shakes his finger accusingly and gesticulates wildly at the intractable Eichmann. And then, as Eichmann calmly explains that he is not evading the question, his voice unperturbed, the image track cuts to the judge who, totally disregarding Eichmann's testimony, is puzzling over how and where to move the lectern on the bench. As *The Specialist* represents it, the judge is not so interested in the defence of a man he has already decided is lying. And as the Attorney General resorts to accusations, he tries to construe the information into what he wants to hear. However, they still have a task to perform: they must demonstrate that Eichmann is responsible for all the heinous crimes committed by the Nazis. Thus, *The Specialist* represents the court's farcical exchanges as an unsuccessful attempt to marry Eichmann to the crimes of the death camps. Hausner might be confident that Eichmann is the driving force behind the genocide at Auschwitz. However, in *The Specialist*, he is unable to persuade us, the film's viewers, of his convictions. All he and the judges achieve through this exchange is to confirm their lack of authority. Their slow spiral into irritating banter casts them as fools in a theatrical farce.

One of the most ambiguous moments of the trial as it is here represented comes in the screening of a compilation film. *The Specialist* represents Hausner's films as a beam of light shining parallel to the

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face of the film screen we watch. The images are recognisable as images because they reflect on Eichmann's glass box, reflections that fill the right hand side of his black jacket. However, the images are blurred and indistinct, offering us no way of determining their content. The obscurity of the content of these images is not the only characteristic that raises questions. The film within the film is also ambiguous because, according to *The Specialist*, it has no apparent relevance to the proceedings of the trial. However, Sivan redeploys various fragments of the film screening as further evidence of the prosecution's vain attempt to attribute the crimes of the Nazis onto Eichmann, the individual figure.<sup>17</sup> If Sivan is the director of the found footage that comprises *The Specialist*, Hausner is the director of the films shown in the court room. As he admits (but not in *The Specialist*), he reshapes existing footage as fodder to further his argument. Hausner explains that one of the excerpts shown came from *In the Steps of the Hangman*, a film made just prior to the trial for West German television. Hausner says:

It is a film which we do not propose showing to the Court in its entirety, because it adopts a moralizing tone in order to arrive at certain conclusions, and clearly it would not be proper for us to ask the Court to view all of it. But it contains sections on the operations of the Einsatzgruppen, which were apparently filmed at the time they were taking place, and these, too, will be verified by witnesses. We shall extract this portion only and show it to the Court (*Trial of Adolf Eichmann* 1992–95: 991).

Hausner is a post-production editor who happily excises sections of film he deems to be 'prepared merely for education purposes after the War' (*Trial of Adolf Eichmann* 1992–95: 1196). We know from *The Specialist*'s conscious articulation of its own process of production that Hausner's film within the film is a manipulation of archival images: they are taken out of context and re-presented to create a meaning that challenges the images in their original context. Like Sivan, Hausner removes the soundtrack that accompanied the films at their Nuremberg screening, and provides his own narration of the images. However, unlike *The Specialist*, Hausner tells us that his recycled images are an

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authentic document of historical events, in this case, the atrocities committed against the Jews. Hausner introduces the films under the auspices of evidence, as documents that prove the events of the Jewish Holocaust. Hausner is not interested in the status of the film's reality, whether it be restaged, shot by the Allies upon or following liberation, or in the moment of its happening. His concern is that the film 'accurately reflect' that events did take place, as well as, that an event 'at a particular place and at a particular time *looked* as the film shows' (*Trial of Adolf Eichmann* 1992–95: 1196). The film does not have to substantiate its reality, merely to provide a credible imitation of that reality. *The Specialist* reminds us that this is a spurious project for the found footage film.

The presentation of Hausner's film as a light beam that results in a series of indistinct, ineffable reflections problematises the phenomenological intentionality of Hausner's use of the films as evidence. *The Specialist* underlines the questionable role of these films as evidence when it shows them being screened especially for Eichmann. They are screened on the wall opposite him, with Hausner behind the projector being the only other person who has a centred view of the screen in the court room. In keeping with the fact that they could therefore only be seen from the left side of the court room, *The Specialist* does not allow us to see the films within the film. Similarly, many in the court room audience could not see them clear of obstruction. The questions therefore abound: What exactly are these films evidence of? For whom are they screened? And of what do they convince? According to *The Specialist*, the visual substance of Hausner's films is irrelevant. All that matters is his commentary:

*Einsatzgruppen* executing women and men ... contents of the stores at Auschwitz: dentures, spectacles, personal belongings ... piles of corpses awaiting destruction ... barbed wire ... watchtowers ... electrified fences.

He tells us all we need to know of the images — the devastation that was Eichmann's doing. In addition, the effect of their screening on Eichmann is marked as important by *The Specialist*. Once again, the camera dwells on his absent response to the atrocities throughout their

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screening. As though it might be able to register his guilt in these events, the camera watches carefully for Eichmann's reaction to the atrocities. However, even as the film cuts from medium shot to close-up, we get no closer to his thoughts and feelings. All that is revealed in these detailed images is the flickering light of the images opposite as it is reflected on his glass booth. They are no more than ineffable images of events that may or may not correspond to Hausner's narration.

The placement of Hausner's film between the testimonies of two witnesses who relate their traumatic experiences in Auschwitz underlies the insincerity of its inclusion as evidence of Eichmann's connections to these events. Immediately prior to the screening, we hear and see the testimony of Mr Gordon who narrates the chilling story of 1500 naked people shot in ditches and buried alive at Auschwitz. Immediately following the films, there is a long pause in the proceedings, a familiar high angle, long-shot shows Hausner sit down, the guards remove the projector, Eichmann scratch his nose, and the camera pause to observe the reflection of the prosecution on Eichmann's booth. Cut to black. The film resumes with the testimony of an unnamed witness who uses a pointer to illustrate on a diagram of Auschwitz the separation of men and women, of those able and supposedly unable to work. Thus, again, for *The Specialist*, Hausner's films are not directly connected to the testimonies.<sup>18</sup> The logic and context of Sivan's editing gives the films their only meaning within the trial: they illustrate Eichmann's crimes as they are related through the witness testimonies. That is, Hausner's films illustrate Eichmann's responsibility for the murders of the Jews at Auschwitz. It is not Eichmann's role and responsibility within the system that is at stake in these accusations — whether the train stopped at Chelmno, Kulm, Kulmhof or somewhere else is not the point. What is significant, according to *The Specialist*, is that Eichmann is a symbol of the system itself. He is both the architect of the Jewish witness' transportation to this hell on earth, and their heartless executioner.

## Conclusion

Given this critique of the Israeli court, there is every possibility that *The Specialist* could strive to absolve Eichmann of his crimes. For nowhere does it represent him as the evil perpetrator. Nevertheless, we never mistake Eichmann for an upstanding, innocent victim of the accusations in Jerusalem. Because it is made in 1998, the film knows we know too much about Eichmann's pivotal role in the deportations, his authority at Wannsee, the nature of his 'specialisation' in Jewish affairs. *The Specialist* does not ask us to absolve Eichmann of his crimes. We may come away critical of Hausner, Landau and other actors in the drama, however, the film creates the conceptual spaces for us to accept or reject its critique of the trial as a Holocaust memorial and its role in the building of Jewish identity in Israel.

It is difficult to conceive of Sivan's film outside of a body of works that critique the historiography of the Holocaust.<sup>19</sup> Like other candidates in this growing field, *The Specialist* chooses to evade engagement with issues such as the Jews as Eichmann's victims, Eichmann the personification of evil, or the horror and magnitude of Eichmann's crimes. At moments, the film even encourages us to sympathise with Eichmann. In addition, *The Specialist* refuses to feed the moral stature of the Jews as martyrs, to focus on the Holocaust as undeniably beyond representation, or the Nazi perpetrator as the personification of evil (see Hilberg 1985). Perhaps the increase in production and publication of contemporary histories such as *The Specialist* signals an openness to the systems and organisations that stifle and stymie the breadth and complexity of Holocaust memory. Certainly, it can be speculated that critics such as Sivan who believe in Israel's opportunist wielding of its people's past maintain obfuscation of the real issues through the erection of a one-dimensional perspective of pathos for Holocaust victims.

Perhaps most disturbing to a contemporary audience are the implications of the film's positioning of Eichmann as other to Gideon Hausner. For this structural device points to the eventual depiction of Eichmann as rational and Hausner as irrational. It is likely plausible that *The Specialist* believes in a mode of memorialisation that itself

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critiques the exploitation of the Holocaust for altruistic ends. Similarly, in the present critical and political climate, we can accept the insistence on the necessity to see the Holocaust from different perspectives, including that of the perpetrator.<sup>20</sup> What is more troubling, however, is the film's call for us to assimilate its implicit connection between Eichmann's and Hausner's roles. The relationship is troubling because if, in *The Specialist*, Hausner as prosecution represents the Israeli government, and Eichmann represents the system he worked for, then the film, in turn, nods towards an equation between Nazism and Zionism in its systemic, present day manifestation. If this is the logical extension of the relationship between Eichmann and Hausner, then *The Specialist's* view of history is extremely disquieting.

In addition to the juxtaposition of Eichmann and Hausner as twinned, there is one last moment in the film that leads to reflection on these unsettling connections. As the credits roll, the guards exit the scene through digitally mastered dissolves and we are left with a single image of Eichmann in colour still sitting in the dock. Other critics have suggested that the colour image carves out a space for Eichmann the bland bureaucrat in today's political economy (Douglas 2004: 102).<sup>23</sup> More provocative, but equally as viable, is the possibility that Eichmann in colour, still sitting in the Jerusalem court room in 1998 demonstrates the centrality of figures such as Adolf Eichmann in the identity of contemporary Israel. Does the ghost of Adolf Eichmann remain in the Zionist consciousness as justification for its continued violence towards and displacement of its enemies?

## Notes

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- 1 Rony Brauman headed the human rights organisation, *Médecin sans Frontières* until he resigned in 1994.

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- 2 The first significant found footage film was Esther Shub's *The Fall of The Romanov Dynasty* (1927) in which she recast footage taken from the private 'home movies' of Nicholas II into a pro-Bolshevik documentary on the revolution (see Leyda 1964). On the provenance of the video footage, see the details from the German Press Release at <[www.votivkino.at/349spe-m.htm#kap3](http://www.votivkino.at/349spe-m.htm#kap3)>.
- 3 On documentary footage as a rhetorical form for the construction of an argument, see Winston 1996.
- 4 Stuart Liebman argues that the film unquestioningly privileges Eichmann's point of view, thus, is politically problematic. However, I believe that *The Specialist* is more open than Liebman claims (Liebman 2002).
- 5 Ibid. See also Robinson 2003.
- 6 The court room for the Eichmann trial was a theatre in the middle of Jerusalem that was turned into a 750-seat court room — the attraction of the converted theatre was the sheer number of seats that would accommodate its audience and journalists for a trial that had already attracted a lot of attention before it began on 11 April 1961. Tickets were also sold in advance of the 'show' and they were in much demand. See *The Trial of Adolf Eichmann* PBS Documentary, broadcast April 1997.
- 7 See Bruzzi 1994. Bruzzi argues that the drama of the televised trial is provided by the audience. We could add that the camera, the network and the various commentators actually shape the audience's version of the drama.
- 8 Yann Beauvais, after Benjamin Buchloh, argues that by definition found-footage film takes some form of propaganda as its basic material, and then deconstructs it (1992).
- 9 On other films made with the use of the same archival footage, see Douglas 2004.
- 10 German Press release. For the life of the footage after the trial, see also Liebman 2002.
- 11 The cameras were connected to a central control booth from which Hurwitz watched the four images on monitors and instructed the cameramen. Thus, they edited their footage in real time from the feeds (German Press Release).
- 12 Norman Finkelstein, for example, tells of how as a boy growing up in America, he would come home from school every day to see his survivor parents engrossed in the telecast of the Eichmann trial (2000).



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- 13 Eichmann and his lawyer adopted this line of defence as the same argument that had been marshalled by the Nazis' lawyers at Nuremberg, one of whom was Servatius. Servatius' persistent challenge to the legal basis of the trial is also excised by Sivan. On the history and logic of this argument, see Osiel 1999.
- 14 The other very common shot of Eichmann is a high angle, frontal, full-shot in which he is shown standing in his booth, with his headphones on. Again, the indistinguishable heads of the audience are reflected on his booth.
- 15 William Wees maintains that this bestowal of meaning through contextualisation is the defining feature of the found footage film (see Wees 1999–2000).
- 16 Sivan deliberately omits any footage of Servatius' potential efficacy. He is almost silent throughout the film.
- 17 Some of the same footage, as Hausner tells us and the court, was used in the Nuremberg trials as evidence of the atrocities, and thus, for the pronouncement of a legal judgment. However, as Lawrence Douglas explains, Robert Jackson very skilfully manipulated the footage to function as legal evidence of his argument (see Douglas 1995).

The screening of these films at Nuremberg was controversial because of the voiceover's claim for the absence of Jews from the images. The now well-known voice of the narrator of *Nazi Concentration Camps* informs us: 'The victims are mainly Poles and Russians with considerable numbers of French and other nationalities also included in the camp roster'. In this way, the film was indicative of Nuremberg as a whole — the Nazis were tried not for their crimes against the Jews, but for crimes committed on international territory against citizens of other countries, their 'crimes against humanity'. Quotation from *Trial of the Major War Criminals Before the International Military Tribunal 1947*: 467.

- 18 Hausner promises to make the link between Eichmann and the content of the films, although we never see it.
- 19 One of the most controversial works in this 'genre' of revisionism is Norman Finkelstein's vitiation of the so-called Holocaust industry in *Holocaust Industry*. However, there is an increasing number of such works. See, for example, the critique of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in works such as Liss 1998, Cole 1999. There has also been a growing number

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of examples of reflection on the perspective of the perpetrator. Notable here is the controversial exhibition of the Institute for Social Research in Hamburg of Wehrmacht photographs that began its life in Germany in 1995, Institut für Sozialforschung 1995.

- 20 This belief in the importance of the many perspectives (including that of the perpetrator) is articulated by leading Holocaust scholars (see, for example Hüppauf 1997, Zelizer 1998).

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