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FILM REVIEW

War Criminal in a Glass Box: Eichmann Trial 40 Years Later

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By ELVIS MITCHELL

A new documentary, "The Specialist," comes at an interesting time in the culture. The producer and director, Eyal Sivan, has compiled and assembled black-and-white footage of the trial of the SS officer and war criminal Adolf Eichmann, and his film is the grimmest possible precursor to the occasionally frivolous "Court TV," which plays on the current fascination with watching the judicial process grind exceedingly slow, and exceedingly fine.

This year brings the 40th anniversary of Eichmann's capture; the trial opened in Jerusalem a year later, in 1961. "The Specialist" is an amazing document, if only for the spectacle of watching Eichmann, seated in a glass box with two armed guards, take in the trial. The box exaggerates Eichmann's own natural remove, and as he primly cleans his eyeglasses, it is hard to separate his demeanor from his appearance: the sharp features, the thin, almost lipless mouth that suggests the horrifying stereotype of dispassionate cruelty.



Kino International

Adolf Eichmann, chief architect of Hitler's "final solution," on trial in Jerusalem in 1961.

Mr. Sivan and his co-writer, Rony Brauman, have sifted through 350 hours of tape shot by the American documentary filmmaker Leo T. Hurwitz, who was commissioned to film the trial, and found the most dramatic footage. A scene in which the courtroom is darkened and film evidence of atrocities is projected is both low-key and unsettling. Reflections of those atrocities play across Eichmann's box, and he stares ahead in detachment, peering through the shadows, as the images are described by the prosecutor: "A dead man on an electrified fence."

Eichmann emerges as a different kind of "Specialist": the title

refers to his self-proclaimed "expertise" at "emigration." His attempts to explain his position -- he calls himself "weak and powerless" and actually utters the line "I'll simply obey orders," which might seem worthy of a laugh if it weren't so repugnant -- are delivered in the same deadpan he uses throughout.

Mr. Sivan's editor, Audrey Maurion, must deserve some credit as well. The "Specialist" filmmaking team shows the prosecutors, led by the cool Israeli attorney general, Gideon Hausner, whose expression is bemused contempt whenever Eichmann speaks, make their case with a startling lack of courtroom theatrics. As the horrors pile up, their dignity in the face of Eichmann's cold lies seems admirable, even as roiling stereo effects thunder on the soundtrack to create an aural current of discord. There is enough drama here that "The Specialist" doesn't require any extra emphasis. (Another minor quibble: the subtitles are sometimes hard to see against the black-and-white background.)

When Hausner, addressing the judges, says that Eichmann "was born human but lived like a beast in the jungle" and proves this truth, point by point, the movie succeeds on much quieter -- and more frightening -- terms.

THE SPECIALIST

Produced and directed by Eyal Sivan; written (in English, Hebrew, German and French, with English subtitles) by Rony Brauman and Mrcq. Sivan; archival footage by Leo T. Hurwitz; edited by Audrey Maurion; music by Yves Robert, Krishna Levy, Beatrice Thiriet and Jean-Michel Levy, and "Russian Dance" by Tom Waits; released by Kino International. At the Film Forum, 209 West Houston Street, South Village. Running time: 128 minutes. This film is not rated.

WITH: Adolf Eichmann, Moshe Landau, Benjamin Halevy, Gideon Hausner and Robert Servatius.

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Eichmann testified from behind a glass booth in order to protect him from possible assassination. He asserted that he had not dictated policy, but only carried it out—that he was “merely a little cog in the machinery” of destruction. In his last day of testimony, he admitted that while he was guilty of arranging the transport of millions of Jews to their deaths, he did not feel guilty of the consequences. Verdict and Sentence. Eichmann followed the common plea of Nazi perpetrators that he was only following the orders of others. Beyond the verdict, what was the impact of the Eichmann Trial? Why are Nazi war criminals still pursued and tried so many years after the Holocaust? Feedback. Thank you for supporting our work. German war criminal Adolf Eichmann found guilty at court in Jerusalem. British Pathé. Eichmann Takes The Stand (1961). Eichmann in box taking oath. Eichmann's attorney Doctor Robert Servatius. British Pathé. Eichmann Trial (1961). The Nazi Adolf Eichmann on trial for his role in the Holocaust. British Pathé. Trial Of Adolf Eichmann (1961). Nazi Adolf Eichmann on trial for war crimes. Jerusalem, Israel. British Pathé. After a 15-year manhunt by Jewish survivors of Nazi concentration camps, the capture of Adolf Eichmann, 53, - accused of supervising for Hitler the extermination of six million Jews - was announced to a startled Israeli Parliament by Premier David Rengurion, May 23. Reuters. Israel: Lydda Airport: Eichmann's Lawyer Arrives On Second Visit. (1960). Please try your request again later. OK. Criminal Case 40/61, the Trial of Adolf Eichmann: An Eyewitness Account (Personal Takes) by Harry Mulisch (2005-04-26) Hardcover. 4.3 out of 5 stars 4 ratings. An eyewitness historical account of the genocidal trail of Adolf Eichmann by a reporter who was there at the trial. Read moreRead less. Previous page. Part travelogue, part trial reporting, part philosophical exploration of the Holocaust but historical at the same time, "Criminal Case 40/61," rivals but does not compete with the more well known, more famous reporting of Hannah Arendt. His portraits of the prosecutor, Gideon Hausner, Eichmann's defense counsel, Robert Servatius, and the three judges are colorful, at times questioning. Throughout his trial, he sits in a glass box, surrounded by neat piles of documents that he ceaselessly notes, re-reads and leafs through. An expert on emigration and specialist in the "Jewish issue", responsible for the transportation of "racial deportees" to the Nazis camps between 1941 and 1945, he describes his work with suffocating bureaucratic precision. Nine years later, in 1941, he was promoted to the rank of SS lieutenant colonel. Former head of the IV-B-4 bureau handling inner security of the Third Reich, he was in charge of the mass deportation of Jews, Poles, Slovenes and gypsies in Europe to the concentration and death camps. Deliberately designed as a spectacle, the Eichmann hearings are the only example of a Nazi criminal's trial filmed in its entirety.