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REFLECTIONS ON DOCUMENTARY AND THE HOLOCAUST
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REFLECTIONS ON DOCUMENTARY AND THE HOLOCAUST

by Gordon Hitchens

The Berlin International Film Festival, Part Two

Editor's Note: Since I began editing the magazine, back in October 1996, and even before, Contributing Editor **Gordon Hitchens** has been generously offering the magazine his valuable reportage from the many festivals he attends, including those for which he acts as U.S. assistant (Yamagata every other year, and Berlin each February). My friendship with Gordon goes back more than 30 years, when he published an article of mine in an issue of *Film Culture* that he was guest editing. Twenty years my senior, he can be an irascible character at times, but no one can doubt the invaluable service he offers through his writing.

Following this year's Berlin festival, Gordon asked me if he could break tradition and offer two articles on films screened: one, a traditional review of the festival highlights; but another, on the emerging thematic pre-occupation for the documentary with the Holocaust. Perhaps it was the cruel irony of documentaries on the Holocaust being screened in today's Germany; or maybe it was Gordon's own personal legacy with the Holocaust and Nazi Germany — whatever it was that moved him to make this suggestion, I readily agreed, figuring that whatever Gordon had to say was something the rest of us should hear; I also hoped that his constant quibbles with my editorial decisions might cease, at least for a while, if I gave in to his offer.

What follows here is at times an intensely personal memoir, not simply of one person's reactions to some documentaries, but moreover a critic's revelation of his own values, what he stands for, what he—in Gordon's case—"professes." It is indeed one of the magnificent factors of the documentary that it invites objectivity and personal expression to stand together.

Of twenty-two films screened during the eighth New York Jewish Film Festival (*I.D.*, May 1999), four concerned the Holocaust. And from the Berlin International Film Festival (*I.D.*, June 1999), there were twelve Holocaust films. Fifty-five years after the end of WW II, new films documenting that period continue to be produced, probing different aspects of those terrible war years, often exploring causation, or trying to. Through the films we ask ourselves—What was lost? How did we survive? Why do these recurrent and universal nightmares occur? How does this particular Holocaust—singular, capital H, the decade of 1935 to 1945 in Europe, fixed in time and place, the Nazi attempt to exterminate the Jews—how does this Holocaust relate to all those other holocausts—plural, small h? Are holocausts a permanent aspect of human life? What do all these ever-ongoing genocidal holocausts tell us about ourselves?

Hitler, who made jokes about the near-total extermination of the Armenians by the Turks, killed almost all Gypsies during WW II, although his main target was European Jews, a sizable minority of whom escaped before and during the war. Hitler slaughtered also many resistance fighters, many Communists, of all European nationalities and faiths; the KZ camps and mass burial pits were full of anti-Nazi Germans, lying in death beside the Jews. Many Jews, especially children, were hidden by Catholic sisters and priests. It is estimated that 10,000 Jews were protected privately in Berlin alone, for the entire length of the war, six years. Think of that: Allied bombing raids, housing destroyed, tightly rationed food, little winter heat—yet, in one city 10,000 Jews were hidden for six or more years, and hidden by whom?—German gentiles. Discovery would have meant death for their courageous German hosts. Every nation in Europe had an anti-Nazi underground resistance. Just as holocausts are ecumenical, worldwide, so also must be our opposition, our resistance.

It is fitting and proper that we documentarians should continue to film and tape, to educate ourselves and others about these recurrent holocausts—that is among our other tasks. We must probe into dark forbidden corners of our history, into the darkness of our individual and collective psyche, where hate grows, and envy festers. We should educate ourselves to recognize and resist the fascinations of killing others—that strange satisfaction, to create death—when charismatic leaders exhort us to single out certain neighbors for elimination, as happened in Ruanda just a few years ago: 800,000 hacked to pieces, one on one, by machete-killers, within three months, while we whites stood by. A mini-holocaust to be sure, far fewer dead though than our white Christian holocaust, lasting two centuries, against many tribes, now collectively called Native Americans, formerly Indians, a gigantic land-grab that netted us half a continent, a colossal theft.

Let's agree on our terms: if a holocaust is defined as the wholesale slaughter of a people, the destruction of their language and culture, the eradication of their spiritual faith, the robbery of their land, the erasure of their identity—then we Americans and Europeans perpetrated the most horrendous holocaust in recorded history against the indigenous populations of the Western Hemisphere. While we were busy exterminating the Native-Americans, we imported Africans, regarded as sub-human savages, but more docile, we hoped, kidnapped for servitude on the white man's plantations, transported to the New World, not in box-cars but in slave-ships—that is also a holocaust, a double-holocaust—Indians out, Africans in. Who can doubt that holocausts, plural, are commonplace and frequent within our violent family of nations?

Is it possible to empathize with and ally ourselves with other holocaust victims?—including those of different colors and races and languages and religions? Who are they?—one million Tibetans murdered since the Chinese invasion. Elsewhere, three ruthless governments agree on one thing: suppress or kill the Kurds. The Guatemalan Indians?—just under one million dead, as two Administrations supplied and schooled the killers. And ethnic cleansing within the former Yugoslavia, an estimated two million dead. Even if these victims are across the seas, can't we feel their suffering? Surely they are our sisters and brothers. And those who have survived holocausts, as we did, perhaps we can help them. Perhaps through solidarity some remedial action may be found, some formula for peace.

Meanwhile, the endless cries continue to assault our ears—warning us: danger ahead, holocausts at work, killers waiting. There are strange dangerous people, a ruthless minority, among us and within us. Be wary—they enjoy holocaust-killing once it starts, they're just waiting for the signal. Any pretext will suffice. It's a heady sport, especially as there are no retributions when one's own government blesses your machetes and guns and gas-chambers and helicopter-gunships and napalm.

Homo Sapiens 1900 (Peter Cohen; Sweden/Russia/Germany, 1998, 90 min.). "The image of man betrays that which distinguishes him from all other beings—his ability to observe himself. It is man's fate that he not only rejoices in what he sees, but is displeased by his faults, physical and mental." Thus begins Peter Cohen's exploration of *eugenics*, the science—if it has earned that label—of creating and improving the human species by selective breeding. Eugenics at the turn of the century was widespread with-



Homo Sapiens 1900

in the so-called civilized nations of the world, e.g., the U.S. and Europe, and especially among the educated classes, and making inroads among those who felt that civilization, certainly Christian civilization, was in peril from the dark-skinned races and other plainly inferior peoples.

Eugenics was visionary and utopian and, some say, dangerous. As a rationale for the extermination of the unfit, with potentially enormous social and political application, eugenics had equally its proponents and opponents.

"Man's urge to civilize compels him to strive for improvement not only in his material condition, but of himself as well, to improve and to cultivate. The image of man bears witness to this condition." The physical image of man, the aesthetic conception of how he should look and appear, was an important factor in eugenics. When pictured, the image was of a tall, fair-haired, fair-skinned male.

"It is in madhouses and asylums that the advocates of racial hygiene will find evidence for their struggle against ugliness and decay." We see terrible cripples, all gnarled up, in an early photo. "The repugnance and loathing conjured up by the defective human body provide arguments for the proponents of racial hygiene." We see grotesque dwarves, helpless idiots.

The National Socialists are the first party to place racial hygiene at the center of their program. Hitler is the first politician with real influence to have understood the central significance of race hygiene and is willing to fight for it.

To illustrate our strange longings for a Superman, or to become one, Cohen cuts in a scene from the ever-popular *Frankenstein*, part of our collective psyche, as the good doctor cobbles together a creature and imbues it with life. As we recall, this creature became a monster and had to be destroyed, because by accident a criminal's brain was implanted in his head. But what if a normal brain had been implanted, as the good doctor had intended, or the brain of a great creative thinker, then the original dramatic premise could have been tested. Intervening in the processes of nature has always been man's dream.

Man himself is his most tantalizing object for study. The contemplation of man is unending, seen in the paintings of Michelangelo, and Greek sculpture, the classical image of man, striving for beauty and harmony. We admire these works, yet feel despair, made aware of our own inadequacies.

Intercut with Cohen's careful narration, intoned engagingly by Steven Rappaport in this English version of the film, are turn-of-the-century stills of comfortable bourgeois families, genteel outdoor scenes, male university students poised and posing for the camera.

Eugenics, the idea of racial hygiene, would become the new century's scientific credo. The message is dramatic, the biologically potential man, versus the man that defective civilization has created so far, with hereditary decay, degeneration and doom. In this dilemma, two means of escape presented themselves: to turn the clock back, to retreat; or, to prevent imminent catastrophe with the aid of science, i.e., eugenics. Science continually opens doors, but man hesitates, fearing the risk. Some longed for the past, which had certain securities, the known; while others were eager to press ahead, leaving behind the discredited values of the preceding turbulent nineteenth century.

Eugenics is the dream of the limited, measurable man, critics complained, the ideal norm, thus unnatural. It came to be the chief philosophical underpinning of Nazism, as it advocated race hygiene, directed toward the perfection, and dominance, of the Germanic peoples. It was an exclusive dogma. In Nazi hands, eugenics became aristocratic, elitist and totalitarian.

Meanwhile, starting about 1930, eugenics became a potent social philosophy, with political clout, in the U.S.S.R., a tool for molding youth for service to the state, to give the child a better future, and society better citizens. Theories abounded that a working-class child of the slums,

who becomes educated and trained, thereafter superior to his former status, would subsequently pass on these acquired characteristics to his offspring. Education could thus be distributed among the masses from one generation to the next. Scenes are intercut of Soviet workers rhythmically hammering in unison, their feet in chalkmarks on the floor, per a bureaucrat's decision of the best stance for the job. We see newsreels of healthy-baby contests. Each person has an appropriate duty, to increase productivity, to harmonize man into his social mission. The laws of eugenics were felt to provide the long-term solution to the problems of the nation. Basic to this policy is the faith that each generation acquires new skills and aptitudes and talents, to be passed along to the sons, who in turn have sons, and so on.

Findings in the study of poultry and cattle-breeding can be applied to people, the eugenics advocates postulate. But then things began to change, with the claim that procreation must be distinguished from love, which is a private matter, while procreation is the responsibility of society, i.e., the state. Progress requires healthy gifted children, so we see many scenes of mothers nursing babies, nurses rushing around with armloads of babies, baby-factories. Logically, artificial insemination will expedite the process of eugenics. By this means, a gifted man can father perhaps ten thousand babies. One genetics scientist told Stalin that even Lenin could have been replicated in this fashion, and Stalin, too, as many a future mother will be glad to mingle her germ-plasm with that of a Lenin, or a Stalin. We don't know if Stalin laughed, but a satirical cartoon in *Izvestia* stated: "This ideal worker of the future is afflicted with blisters, in his zeal to produce sperm for the eugenicist's immense project." In time, eugenics fever abated, and finally became an unwanted policy, and ultimately a fatal policy, as the chief proponents faced prison or death by firing-squad. Stalin declared eugenics a fascist concept, narrow, monolithic, excluding not including: Stalin ruled a nation, a union of fifteen republics with many different races, languages, cultures, histories; the union was to include everybody, not exclude by means of a geneticist hierarchy. The era of the scientific avant-garde was over, as was the arts. (Although the Soviets made great early strides in space travel and weaponry.)

But in Nazi Germany, 1933-1945, eugenics was valued insofar as it provided cover, also ideas adaptable for Nazi purposes. Race hygiene gains popularity. In sculpture, for example, the magnificent male bodies are impressive, but strangely un-human and sterile, lacking in individualizing characteristics. The bodies don't look lived in. Perfection is unnatural, and boring, there's no place to take it.

In Nazi Germany, wild rumors and fantasies flourished about breeding farms run by the SS, as the new Nazi state sought to create the New German Man. But the concept of such impersonal breeding challenged the conventional German morality, bringing the party into direct conflict with one of the pillars of Nazi ideology, the institution of the family. Also



The Port of Last Resort

The Port of Last Resort (Joan Grossman, Paul Rosdy; Austria, 1998, 80 min.) deals with a little known aspect of the Holocaust: the escape from the Nazis of 20,000 German and Austrian Jews during the late 1930s/early 1940s—an escape that took them halfway around the world to Shanghai. Most of them languished there for ten years; not until well after the

romantic love, the staple of German literature, music, theater—that was love, not breeding. The government outlawed abortions, as precious Aryan blood was being lost that way. Though the single individual is mortal, the nation must remain immortal, so each generation of Germans must reproduce itself, eternally.

Supplementing the Nazi use of positive eugenics, aimed at perfection, are negative eugenics, intent on elimination of the unfit. A quarter-million forced sterilizations among the incorrigibles: the compulsory sterilization laws were retained on the German law books for thirty years after the war. Negative eugenics led logically to round-ups of people who did not fit the profile of the perfect Nordic—gypsies, Jews, Slovenes, others. Eugenics led to horror.

Homo Sapiens 1900 is a valuable film that engages the mind, starting with its title, as we rush to dictionaries to discover that “sapiens” means wise, discerning, while “homo sapiens” means recent, as a species. Indeed, man’s wisdom is only recent on our evolutionary calendar, recent and partial. Cohen has unease finding precisely apt visuals for his musings and abstractions, but that’s a quibble, as his text is so challenging, and enlarging. That’s rare in film. His concluding thoughts follow:

“Man’s dream of improving himself by biological means has accompanied him for thousands of years. He has transformed this idea into science. . . . For man’s talent, there is no decipherable code. Intelligence is the basic prerequisite for our civilization. But about the biology of the thinking process, and man’s ability, we know very little. The individual man sometimes reveals despair in the face of this reality. The image of man fills us, at times, with compassion.”

Herzl (Amnon Rubinshtein; Israel, 1998, 135 min.) is a three-part bio-pic about the founder of Zionism and spiritual father of the modern state of Israel. A superb organizer, Herzl from an early age traveled Europe, meeting resident Jews and building awareness of the possibility of a new nation for Jews, a return to their natural homeland. From the World Zionist Congress in Basel, which Herzl spearheaded, came a new awareness among Jews, a mass movement. As often in world history, a single person and a small group of ardent comrades can cause major historical change. One thinks, for example, of the small band of determined men who argued, compromised and created the American republic.

Herzl uses rare archival footage, personal letters, excerpts from Herzl’s diaries, and photographs. Also, departing from documentary purity (?), the film uses actors to impersonate friends who met with and came to support Herzl.

Born in Budapest, Herzl had an unhappy marriage, one son, and died aged forty-four. The film was created by the Israel Information Center and the Israel Film Service to mark the centennial of the World Zionist Congress, about half a century after the formal emergence of Israel as a nation.

war were they able to acquire the necessary documents for resettlement in Australia, the U.S. and Israel.

The film focuses on four young Jews, three boys and one girl, in age from eleven to eighteen. One came alone, one came with one parent, two came with both parents. Three children came by ship; one via railroad. It was a long lonely journey to the unknown, also dangerous, as war was raging in Asia as well as in Europe.

When Ernst came to Shanghai with his mother, he said goodbye to his father and sister on the train platform in Germany, 1939, as the war began. Remembering, Ernst said: “I knew in my heart that I would never see them again.” The Nazis allowed him to withdraw 10 marks, about \$8. In Shanghai, he found work in a toystore and a bookshop.

Illo arrived from Europe with her mother via the trans-Siberian railway, crossing the vast U.S.S.R., joining the father, who had come earlier. As young people will, Illo sought companionship in Shanghai’s dance halls, there to meet Ernst. Years later, as the war was ending yet at its most ferocious, and as Shanghai was being bombed by the Americans, Illo and Ernst married.

Fred had come alone at eighteen from Berlin. A Social Democrat, Fred’s mother remained behind, convinced that danger from the Nazis was manageable, because the civilized German people would rise up soon to depose Hitler. Letters from her to Fred in Shanghai increasingly revealed the heightened persecution of the Jews by the Nazis. She begged her son to bring her safely to China. Too late. Travel is impossible, the war is at its height. Her letters cease. During his long confinement in Shanghai, Fred came to enjoy the city’s cultural scene and wrote for the *Shanghai Jewish Chronicle*.

Siegmar was eleven, arriving in Shanghai in 1939 with his parents, for what he thought was to be a holiday. Like many other Jews without money, the family was forced to live in over-crowded refugee homes. At 14, Siegmar worked at low-paid jobs beside the Chinese. The daily wage was enough for only one meal.

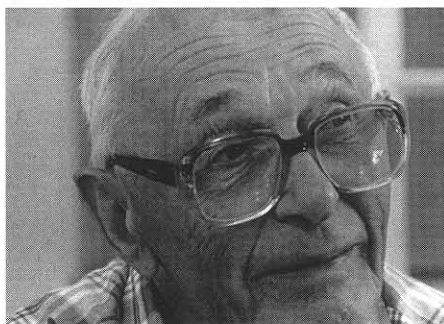
Traditionally a protected city, by treaty with the British, Shanghai was given relative autonomy by the Chinese, thus encouraging its reputation for exotic pleasures. Dancing, dining, theater, gambling, prostitution, plus all the arts and amusements, were part of city life. But the Japanese, in occupation of much of eastern China, soon cracked down. With Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the Japanese dispossessed even wealthy foreigners, forcing all to live in a wretched ghetto, Hongkew, crowded in with low-paid Chinese. A Japanese gauleiter and self-styled “King of the Jews,” named Ghoya, was exceptionally cruel. Siegmar and several other Jewish boys resolved to murder him. As the war ended, the boys seized their moment and captured Ghoya, took him to a bombed-out area and beat him. Siegmar remembers: “He would fall down and get up again, come to attention and look you straight in the eye without any expression whatsoever on his face. And when you face a person like that, even though he may be your worst enemy, the type of person you just want to kill, you can’t. I can’t. We wouldn’t.”

Closed Country (Kaspar Kasics; Switzerland, 1999, 85 min.) traces the career of Dr. Heinrich Rothmund, who in 1929 was appointed head of the entire Swiss border police force. He is neither seen nor heard in this film, of which he is the star. "Tall, broadshouldered, dynamic, charming, idolized by women, loaded with charisma, humor, keen perception, a dynamic stickler for the law," Rothmund assumed the duty of protecting Switzerland from "alienization," at a time when Europe was still in turmoil after World War I, with roving dispossessed persons, criminals, speculators, agitators, anarchists, rogues and other unwelcome types clamoring to enter Switzerland, lured by the nation's reputation for peace, stability, fair dealings and discreet bank accounting. Specifically, Rothmund at age 31 was put in charge of the Swiss Aliens Police, charged with preventing the "alienization" of Switzerland. With a force of 500, he was ordered to "clean out" real or imaginary inappropriate non-citizens, "foreigners alien to Swiss nature."

Shortly after, 1933, Hitler took power in Germany, war tensions began: the 1938 Anschluss in Austria, the 1938 Sudetenland crisis in Czechoslovakia, and the 1939 Nazi attack on Poland. If ever Switzerland needed a strong border guard to keep out the riffraff, this was it. Using the motto "Fight Against 'Alienization'" and determined to maintain long-term population safeguards, Rothmund's department soon was tested by hordes of incoming political refugees fleeing the Nazis, among them many Jews.

Since 1938, German passports issued under Hitler to German Jews were to be stamped "Jew"—at the instigation of the Swiss. This disgusting tactic became known only in the 1950s—a black moment, among others, in Swiss history. Rothmund became known as the inventor of the "Jew stamp." His position became untenable, he retired in 1954, the Government issued a White Paper, he died alone after a long severe illness in 1961.

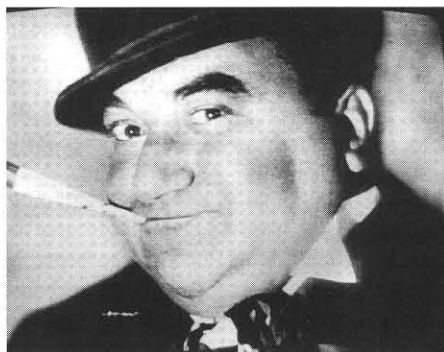
So much for Rothmund. *Closed Country* deals with him, above, but also with now elderly Jews who as children, with their parents, were rounded-up in Switzerland during the war and escorted to and over the border, into the waiting arms of the Nazis. For the film, the now elderly child-survivors return to Switzerland to confront those who had thus contributed to the deaths of their parents, and indeed many other Jews. Among those who obediently surrendered hidden Jewish children to their fates: nuns and superiors within the Catholic Church.



Closed Country



To the Sea — Inner and Outer Landscapes



Kurt Gerron's Karussell



Kurt Gerron and Marlene Dietrich in The Blue Angel

We close with Rothmund's self-described "refined and restrained" Swiss brand of anti-Semitism, his statement in 1944, when the war was most fierce: "Even though we must continue to ward off 'Jewification' and ensure that all refugees, the whole lot of them, will leave our country again, we are going to do it decently, with much patience, and we will not behave in an undignified manner."

To the Sea — Inner and Outer Landscapes (Annik Leroy; Belgium, 1999, 87 min.) is an epic poem that flows by like the Danube, its subject. We travel from the Black Forest, where the river begins, through six nations to the Black Sea. The changing landscapes gliding by, the regional music, the lyrical mood—all that provides a charming effect. Yet we cannot forget the horrors that once raged ashore. Historically, great nations fought great battles along the Danube. It's not blue, it's closer to the color of blood.

Among locations shoreside, visited by the camera, is the concentration camp at Mauthausen. Its prisoners included many Loyalist Spaniards, who fought to save the republic and were defeated by Generalissimo Franco, thereafter dictator of Spain for forty years. Mauthausen's infamous "stairs of death" is still there, a long stone staircase, going nowhere, on which the Spaniards worked and died. It's covered with snow now. The image is of a cold and empty landscape in mid-winter—how the prisoners must have suffered here. Visitors are equipped with tape-recorder devices, explaining where the prisoners' huts had been, the layout of buildings within the camp.

Director Annik Leroy, born in 1952, studied at the National School of Architecture and Visual Arts, Brussels, and has been working in cinema and photography since 1973, aged 21. She presently teaches documentary and experimental film.

Kurt Gerron's Karussell (Ilona Ziok; Germany / Netherlands / Czech Republic, 1999, 65 min.). We all remember Kurt Gerron as the fat, sleazy impresario and second-rate magician in von Sternberg's *The Blue Angel* (Germany, 1929), the film that made a star of Marlene Dietrich, and gave her entry to Hollywood.

That film was one of seventy in which Gerron performed, but he was also a prominent stage actor and director. In addition, he had directed eighteen films, mostly popular optimistic comedies for UFA. Among his accomplishments: he was the first to sing "Moritat" ("Mack the Knife") from *Die Dreigroschenoper* by Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht.

Gerron was particularly renowned for his production of *cabaret*, a type of live-theater little known in the U.S.—a series of satiric songs and sketches, often mercilessly libeling the powerful and the famous, including the government.

By 1933, Hitler took power in Germany, and Jews were increasingly marginalized in cinema and theater, then excluded altogether. People in the arts were fleeing Germany. Gerron moved to Paris, worked there, also in Austria and the Netherlands, apparently making no effort to leave the continent. When the war began, he was trapped. Arrested in Amsterdam, he was sent to the so-called VIP concentration camp at Terezin, near Prague. There many celebrities in theater and the arts were held, awaiting their fate.

Terezin had been a garrison town, with buildings surrounding a huge square, barracks and facilities once housing Czech officers and their families. It was adjacent to a stone-walled citadel, enclosed within a dry moat. There the troublesome prisoners were held, tortured for information, often executed—resistance fighters in the Czech underground, sometimes non-conformist Catholic priests, British commandos who'd been parachuted in for special jobs, others. There was a gallows, and nearby the swimming pool for the commandant's daughter to practice her diving.

In Terezin, Gerron found himself in company with many fellow-prisoners who, like himself, had a background in the performing arts. In time, Gerron organized others to produce their own "Karussell" cabaret, encouraged by the Nazi camp commandant. For this film, director Ziok obtained the services of a half-dozen prominent performers, re-creating the songs and pater of Gerron's original "Karussell." In Terezin, increasingly crowded with additional Jewish prisoners, there were appreciative audiences who hungered for the jovial songs and ribald humor of the "Karussell." Meanwhile, the Nazis periodically selected prisoners to be packed into box-cars for the long trip to the furnaces of Auschwitz. Part of the strength of Ziok's film is the clash of mood—the affirmation of life in the cabaret "Karussell" versus the impending doom that awaits them all. (Note: Similarly, Terezin saw a staging of a children's opera, with SS officers seated in the balcony; a Czech film, produced by Czech film scholar Adolf Hoffmeister, preserves fragments of these performances. Of 15,000 Czech-Jewish children seized by the Nazis, only 150 survived the war.)

Soon the propaganda superbrains in Berlin had an idea: why not compel Gerron to produce a persuasive film for general viewing in Europe, depicting the happy life of the Jewish prisoners in Terezin, although they were temporarily absent from their usual homes and jobs. The film would convince the Red Cross that all goes well in Terezin, no atrocities or hardships for our guests. The film would dispel outrageous rumors in Europe that Jews are being mistreated, even killed, in the camps.

Gerron takes on the job of directing *Der Führer schenkt den Juden eine Stadt* (*Hitler Gives a City to the Jews*). Scenes include healthy, attractive Jewish maidens in lederhosen hoeing cabbages in Terezin's nonexistent garden, happily waving at the camera; also, cherubic children have fun on the swings, at a non-existent playground; and, well-dressed Jewish couples enjoy coffee and *kuchen* at a non-existent outdoor café, as a string orchestra provides music.

(Note: Gerron's film in altered form was sometimes known as *So schön war es in Terezin* (*That's How beautiful It Was in Terezin*, 1964/1965). More than two decades after Gerron died in Auschwitz in November, 1944, a German producer used portions of Gerron's film, intercut with commentary by survivors and others, demonstrating the hoax—in effect, a film containing within it another film. For example, the music conductor in the outdoor café scene, who survived to become conductor of the Prague Symphony

Orchestra, also Gerron's three gentle cameramen, and others, they all describe how the hoax was set up and shot, under the direction of Gerron. Hitchens saw this "film about a film" at the Mannheim festival, which he assisted. German producers offered this film to the late Leo Dratfield of Contemporary Films, New York, for distribution in the U.S. So, Dratfield asked Hitchens, then a film professor, to evaluate the film and to estimate its utility for school instruction. Hitchens replied: "The film is an extraordinary document of a little known aspect of the war; it illustrates the insidious dangers of persuasive propaganda cinema, especially for audiences untrained to recognize deceit; professors, even film professors, have limited time and smallish budgets for film instruction, and probably they will prefer to utilize their limited class time and budget for the familiar WW II classics that portray the pivotal aspects of the war, e.g., D-Day or Stalingrad. As the Gerron story is an esoteric footnote to history, although extraordinary, only a few film teachers, hard-core communications specialists, may find the film useful for students; but never mind, keep the print, don't return it, steal it, preserve it safely as a major historical document." But Dratfield returned the print.)

One theme of Ziok's film, her "tribute and memorial," is that Gerron's art and reputation have been erased. Ziok says: "This man has been killed twice, as everybody remembers him only as the director of a propaganda film. . . . His destiny is a scorn because the Nazis killed him, not only as a human being, but as an artist. In contrast to other Jewish artists, Gerron is completely forgotten. My film is about reviving the reputation of an artist who was savagely misused by the Nazis, also the other Jewish artists who were victims of the Nazis."

Sara (Syd Atlas and Uwe Lauterkorn; Germany, 1999, 71 min.) is a profile of a woman, aged seventy, a survivor of the Holocaust, whom the filmmakers encountered casually on the street in Berlin. Accordingly, we see those new construction sites, the streets, shoppers, traffic, the usual, but among the pedestrians is this extraordinary woman, Sara, whose special claim on our attention is slowly revealed. From the newly renovated Synagogue on Oranienburger Strasse, we move to Sara's small flat. She moves about, reads, eats. A young singer drops by, Karsten, who sings Yiddish songs that she taught him. Later, she tells the two young filmmakers, Syd and Uwe, how it was. The Holocaust.

She explains why it is impossible to forget. For one thing, the "third generation," those Germans today in their late teens and early twenties, have not had explanations about the war. Sara once took an informal poll: how many of you young people have had a serious talk with your grandfathers about what they did during the war. Zero. The grandfathers say forget it, the kids are discouraged—don't ask. Of course, the grandmothers are similarly distant. The grandfathers are "burdened with a double guilt—first, their crimes against humanity, and then a crime against their own children, and their grandchildren, that they never really explained things to them." People tell Sara to forget the



Sara

Holocaust, don't get on people's nerves with all that suffering. But Sara replies—they should know, and they should remember.

Sara describes her childhood in Poland as the Poles were defeated in 1939 and how the repression of Jews began and increased, seeing her father lying in the street, being kicked and beaten by Germans for failing to take off his hat as they approached, the sudden bang on the door, everybody out, into the trucks, into the box-cars, into the crematoria: "Dante's hell was really humane, a child's game, compared to what we humans went through—such a hell should not be ignored . . . to deny it is to show contempt for a human being."

Herr Zwilling und Frau Zuckermann (Volker Koepp; Germany, 1999, 126 min.) is a sweetly sad bouquet, a tribute, to two old folks in the Ukraine, near Rumania, who meet daily for years to chat about old times, departed families, politics, literature. They talk in a language not their own, German, although Germany is the nation that murdered their families and nearly destroyed the Jewish community of the area. Frau Zuckermann, now aged ninety, lost her entire family in four weeks, she's entirely alone. Very few Jews survived. Historically, their small city, Czernowitz, once the center of a thriving Jewish presence, had many masters: Russians, Ukrainians, Rumanians, Poles, Austro-Hungarians. Oddly, a certain stability and continuity survive, side by side with transient and conflicting authority.

Director Koepp states: "Of course, a culture has been lost, but not entirely. People live here. You can't say that they are lost. They are there." Koepp was born late in WW II and raised in the German Democratic Republic. He attended the elite Hochschule in Babelsberg, studying cinema, and for twenty years, 1970/1990, was a director of documentary for DEFA.

One of Us (Susan Korda; U.S., 1999, 48 min.) is a family profile about deformity; the first images are of a photo album with pictures of the family, they look ordinary enough, but when we go beneath the flat surface, it's all deformity, although the fashionable word is "dys-functional."

The older brother suffers from terrible stomach pains, alleviated only by beating Susan, his little sister. Another sister is in a state institution, with Downs Syndrome. The parents are attractive and passionate, European Jews who suffered and lost relatives during the Holocaust, deformed by their memories and failed plans. He's a "deadbeat Dad," so Susan as teenager drifts around, for a time has a furnished room away from home, two abortions in one year. Once into film, she goes to Europe and makes *Vienna is Different: 50 Years After the Anschluss*, screened at the Berlin Film Festival in 1990. On a grant, she then shoots in Berlin, stating in her narration, "I like Germany—it's so easy to make fun of, and you can blame Germany for almost everything." She makes mini-portraits of three German women, tales about a cruel abortionist, a sadistic mistress, ugly tales. Obsessed with Germany's history of cruelty, she confesses she's used Germany as a scapegoat—the real villains are her family. She begins an affair with a violent oaf who bangs her around, she's covered with bruises. The mother has died, Dad takes another woman. Meanwhile, having become an accomplished editor with impressive credits, and a film teacher at NYU, Susan gains a certain calm, self-confidence and professional pride. Final

scene shows Susan's Downs Syndrome sister in a happy new home environment, companion with a girl also with Downs Syndrome. They swim, have a party, smile at Susan's camera. The plague of deformity has lifted.

Nein! Witnesses of the Resistance in Munich, 1933/1945 (Katrin Seybold; Germany, 1998, 54 min.). "Many of these dissidents knew, right from the start, that events would lead to a bloodbath. They were the first in the world to know that combating the Nazi dictatorship was a matter of life and death. The Third Reich waged a merciless war against them. Because of a huge and efficient police force, because of torture and the guillotine, their dead remained a secret." The voice of a woman, the narrator, backed by a solemn drum. Many faces, young and old—students and teachers, nuns and priests, couples holding hands, a family group, informal shots of students on campuses, and workers who turn in surprise and smile, children, young mothers holding their babies up for the camera, blurred glimpses of young men in railway stations, passport pictures, Gestapo photos with printed spaces for hand-writing, full-face and profile, many faces.

"They were sent to prison and to concentration camps to be executed. The courage of many of these Munich citizens has never been made public. Most of them are unknown." Still photos of early opponents of the Hitler regime—many Communists, already working clandestinely even before Hitler took power in 1933. Reichstag Fire, February 1933, called arson by the Nazis and blamed on Communists, a pretext to abolish human rights guaranteed by the Weimar Constitution. Georgi Dmitrov, Bulgarian Communist, with others, tried for arson and acquitted. An old lady on camera describes sheltering them, fixing passports and railway

tickets. Stills: Nazis had taken power in Munich with only eight of fifty seats in the City Council. SA Brown Shirts seize City Hall. Communists are publicly humiliated, then shipped to Dachau. Nazis seize union halls and destroy print shops for unauthorized material. An old lady on camera describes helping to distribute forbidden pamphlets, sixty or more years ago. Anti-Nazi materials are smuggled in from abroad, and out. An old man describes his arrest and interrogation as a teenager. Police spies, some are known, betray hundreds of resistance fighters. Fearing arrest, many anti-Nazis went into the underground early, while others protested against the

Nazis with legitimate political and legal means, hoping to remove the Nazis at the polls. At the election of 1934: A poster, a skeleton pulls open a curtain to reveal lettering: "Der Dritte Reich? NEIN!" hence the name of this film. The Nazis win overwhelmingly. The resistance intensifies but is desperate. Illegal newspapers are rolled up and wedged into the frames of bicycles, for distribution to contacts around Munich. A fat old gentleman smiles remembering how he had to wrap forbidden pamphlets in heavy protective paper, for hiding against his body, under his clothing, because he sweats so much. Groups meet to explore ways to hide and transport illegal newspapers. Some go into fruit boxes and soap cartons. An old lady recalls her schoolbag with a false bottom. "We were idealists, we did it for our ideals, hoping that we could terminate the Third Reich." Many are devout Christian pacifists. Juveniles, in groups of two, to provide courage, write resistance slogans with chalk on



Herr Zwilling und Frau Zuckermann

walls and sidewalks. The old lady says, "We wrote wherever we found blank space." Resistance stickers plaster the city. Resistance literature looks innocent because the covers of sports and movie-star magazines afford disguise. The Gestapo arrests most of the kids; they are tried and sentenced to concentration camps. Females were segregated from the males.

"In the Hands of the Nazi Hell-Hounds of Dachau" is a booklet by prisoners about torture, printed in several languages and distributed to anti-Nazi networks abroad. Some men escape to Switzerland, then Spain and go into Communist units, the International Brigade, fighting the fascist rebellion led by Franco, 1936-1939. A Catholic priest-publisher prints a caricature of Hitler on the front page; he is executed.

The resistance opposed also the Nazi disposal of mental and physical defectives, gypsies, homosexuals and Jews. An old man looks back: as a half-Jewish student, he is half-protected by a teacher who tells the class that there is a nameless student among us who is different and who does good schoolwork. The boy watches his father being beaten by Nazi goons, his front teeth knocked out. The mother rushes to his defense, unable to stop the beating, but giving him courage to resist. Jewish shops are razed, merchandise strewn in the streets. An old woman, formerly of the White Rose underground group at Munich University, many of whom were hanged, says, "I couldn't imagine that humans could treat other humans like that."

Nazi lorries drive away with full loads of rounded-up detainees for questioning. Many Christians refuse to disband their peace groups or join the Hitler Jugend, rejecting simplistic Nazi slogans: you're with us or against us, you join us or you're the enemy. 150 Christian anti-Nazi conservatives, and monarchists, are betrayed and seized. Jehovah's Witnesses are a special target, refusing to accept military service and rejecting the Führer concept. An accused Christian group on trial stands up as the judge enters, but will not return the Hitler salute; they each get three months.

Old women tearfully describe the interrogations they endured more than a half-century earlier, ceaseless questioning to wear down your resistance—"They want names, names! If we had betrayed our brethren, it would have been evil. Yet it was difficult to resist." Another old lady says she was physically tortured with blows to her head and body, "constantly asking me questions, one could go crazy. But I would not cooperate," she is very agitated as she relives the interrogations. "I prayed to God to help me."

Almost all Jehovah's Witnesses were able to remain uncooperative with the Nazis, despite mental and physical torture, and imprisonment. Jesuit priest Rupert Mayer, anti-Nazi since the early 1930s, went to Sachsenhausen, near Berlin, and died there shortly before the Allied liberation in 1945. Two photos show first a handsome smiling man, then an unshaven shambles twelve years later; the eyes are still sensitive and alert.

Georg Elser long plotted the death of Hitler. He constructed a time-bomb, hid it in a Munich beer-hall, above the lectern where Hitler was to deliver a speech. But Hitler left thirteen minutes early, and the bomb did great damage. Elser, too, goes to Sachsenhausen and is executed at the end of the war.

For their clandestine meetings, friends arrange family picnics, to confer on strategy. As a safety code for meeting with strangers, a newspaper page is torn in half, if the halves match, it's safe to talk. Some men have frequent narrow escapes from the Gestapo, but they persist: "We are working for mankind." Tricks are learned, how to sabotage a train-engine. Chains of people somehow smuggle food parcels into concentration camps. There are mass executions of Soviet POW's in Dachau.

A survivor remembers a scene: a gypsy mother, with her ten-year-old daughter; accused of some infraction, the mother is about to be led away for execution; the girl pleads with the Nazi officer—"I want to die with my mother, please! I want to die with my mother, please!" The officer screams to her—"Return to your barracks!" The girl continues to beg, "I want to die with my mother, please!" repeatedly. The officer kicks the girl with his boot, the mother is led out, the girl continues screaming.

A wife and daughter are permitted to visit the father in Dachau; they wait hours, then are told, "You'll be allowed to view his corpse. Here's the address where he'll be cremated." There, the mother and daughter find the coffin, but it seems too light, is the father's body inside? The coffin-man pries open the casket lid: inside, his skin and bones, death by disease and starvation. We see his photo, a husky serious man.

Munich Jesuits get secret documentation from Dachau of 2,000 deaths, they make copies and send with their protest to the Bishops Conference taking place at the Vatican. There is no reply. An old nun describes her visit to Dachau by special permission. In a photo, she was once young and pretty. The line-up of living skeletons with shaved heads, wearing rags and wooden clogs, horrifies the nun. She is allowed to see briefly a priest for whom she brought a little typhoid medicine. He asks her—"Are you prepared to smuggle letters out? Remember, it's a capital offense, women are executed for that." The old nun continues: "Every time I took a batch of letters out, we stuck stamps on and posted them late at night. The world learned of these concentration camps through letters sent abroad. I'd always wanted to take a swipe at the SS and the Nazis—it was all so terrible that I wanted to do my bit." Munich nuns organized typhoid medications for her to bring in, with letters out. Prisoners said—it's wonderful, we're not totally forgotten.

At Munich University, many students were arrested; it became a capital offense for students to ask clemency for other imprisoned students. But passive students became activists. SS beatings became worse after July 20, 1944, date of the failed assassination of Hitler. There was terror among the students, so many executions, an old woman recalls, "There was no one left to distribute resistance pamphlets. So the older people sat down to compose flyers, to distribute, to inform the public, and the soldiers, how senselessly they all went off to their deaths. Our motto—"The Spirit Lives On!" Our lives were in danger, it wouldn't be just a prison sentence. I think I became incapable of any feeling. That's perhaps a kind of self-protection—I was totally unable to react. Some arrested students don't defend themselves at trials, they're fatalistic, they simply give up and accept death—but one student said to me, 'Tell them that I alone did all these crimes you're accused of, I did this and that, not you, blame me, save yourself.' His mother was arrested and killed herself. He was executed January 29, 1945, as the war was ending." The old lady hesitates, then states, "I was saved in this way, he took the blame to exonerate me, and I didn't object. And in time the will to live came back." She was sentenced to twelve years.

The screen begins a series of faces, of dead resistance boys and girls, men and women. Then the old lady resumes: "For years I screamed at night in my sleep, bathed in perspiration. I must always sleep alone, no one could help me. We never thought of ourselves as heroes and martyrs. It was simply human decency." The half-Jewish boy, now an old man, describes finding sources of strength to survive torture and imprisonment: "For me it was help by my faith in our Protestant beliefs. And others found other sources of strength. But millions did not, and were killed, but I survived. I was privileged." The old nun, who had smuggled letters

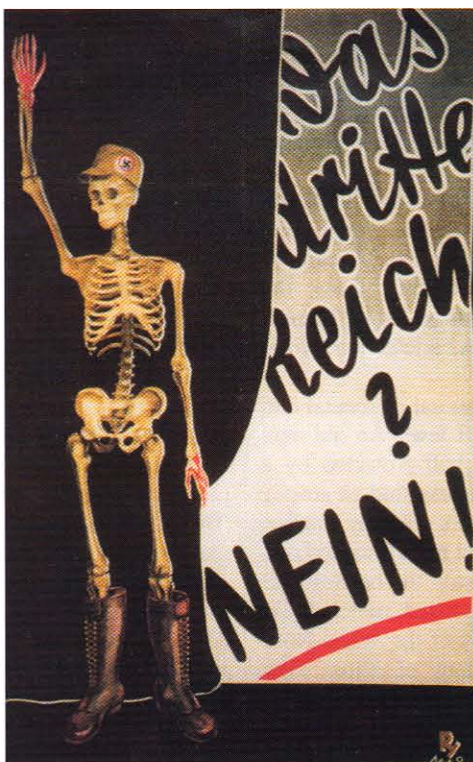
out of Dachau: "If I had said no, I won't help, and if I had been afraid, I can certainly say that I wouldn't want to live anymore. I'm grateful to God, and to my two sisters and our parents, that He allowed me to do this work. I wouldn't like to continue living with the knowledge that. . ." Cut to another old lady, seen earlier, who completes the thought: ". . . that there are people who retain their decency under adverse circumstances. That's what we wanted to prove." *Nein! Witnesses of the Resistance in Munich, 1933-1945* ends with photos and prison mug-shots of many dead women and men, young and old, who took part in the Resistance.

The Last Days (James Moll, U.S., 1998, 87 min.). Winner of prizes at the Berlinale and, of course, the Oscar® for best feature documentary, *The Last Days* has been featured in *International Documentary* and in other periodicals, including the rave review by Stephen Holden in *The New York Times* on February 5. Holden commends the film for its evocation of events long ago, in 1944 and 1945, as the war was ending and as the Holocaust was intensifying. The Germans diverted troops, trucks, railroading and great effort in their attempt to complete the Holocaust, to let no Jew escape—it was to be total Holocaust. As the Soviet armies drove westward, shipments of Jews to the gas chambers became more frenzied and disorganized. Hysteria everywhere. It was a nightmare. This is, Holden states, "human nature at its worst."

But also perhaps human nature at its best, sacrificing for others, as there were moving instances in the film of sharing, protecting other inmates, especially children. Heroism for a crust of bread.

For all the suffering, Holden writes, "*The Last Days* could almost be described as a warmhearted film. The hatred and cruelty visited upon its subjects is not reciprocated," which may not quite be true, as a scene in the film indicates that on liberation many prisoners tore their jailers limb from limb. The five people who form the center of this memoir-film—three women, two men, each a teenager at the time—these five today "have built valuable, creative lives." So the film is not a downer, but ends on the upbeat, as the five are seen in comfortable circumstances, with careers and new families, one with seventeen grandchildren.

Despite their great suffering, as youngsters without parents, frightened, starving and alone in the death camps, the five emerge at war's end and pull themselves together. So, despite all, it's a kind of victory. The producers tell the Nazis—you didn't win, you didn't destroy us, we don't need pity. That's a natural thematic tactic for the film. The five chosen for the film "are a likable, articulate, youthful-looking group," notes



Nein! Witnesses of the Resistance in Munich, 1933-45

Holden. Thus no reference is made in the film to the many thousands who were broken utterly by their years of confinement and brutality in Auschwitz, Dachau, Buchenwald and the one-hundred-plus other Nazi citadels of horror. Many survivors lost their sanity and have suffered for decades, still are. Suicides are common. Some crippled hideously and continuously sick. They've never been able to pull together health, career, a new family. Although all that is true, the producers selected winners, not losers. Theme is everything.

Merely one complaint I have about *The Last Days*: it's almost a success story. Of course, in selecting the five witnesses, we don't want to shoot and edit for pity, that would be a downer, would perhaps alienate audiences; people have contempt for others whom they pity, although perhaps the losers and marginal losers are more truly typical of the many thousands of survivors. This film is not about the typicals.

Another complaint about the film is that only one person of the five expresses any awareness of, or sympathy for, the many other victims of persecutions in the past. Where is there any expression of solidarity with the millions of victims today, this minute, who are suffering variations of holocaust? It is an omission that leaves the four of the five centered on themselves, seemingly unaware of the outside world around them. The film fails to provide a broader and more contemporary context for the Holocaust, as if it is an isolated aberration. The five speak of a happy childhood in Hungary, with friendly neighbors, then suddenly it all ends, whole families are rounded-up, the neighbors and childhood school chums scream vile anti-Semitic filth at them, as they are packed into the box-car to Auschwitz. At the film's end, several return to their villages to shake hands and embrace these same neighbors. Thus we ask: What have the survivors learned? What have the neighbors learned about themselves? What have we in the audience learned about the human capacity for sly deceit, hypocrisy and the quick move to profit from the deportations of former friends?



The Last Days

Of course, we cannot know what was deleted in editing, as doubtlessly hours were taped with each of the five. We can relate to the film only in terms of what's on the screen. Only one of the five, Tom Lantos, an eight-term Democratic Congressman from California, expresses any recognition of the many millions of other victims in history's many holocausts. He was saved by the Raoul Wallenberg team, after a time with an underground resistance group, aged sixteen, and a forced-labor camp. He ends the film: "The Holocaust has to be taught as one chapter in the long history of man's inhumanity to

man. One cannot ignore the discrimination inflicted on many peoples because of race, color or creed, one cannot ignore slavery, one cannot ignore the burning of witches, one cannot ignore the killing of Christians during the Roman period. The Holocaust is perhaps of the kind of horror that can occur when man loses his integrity, his belief in the sanctity of life.”

The Specialist (Eyal Sivan; France/Israel/Germany/Belgium/Austria, 1998, 128 min.). Adolf Eichmann, SS Lieutenant Colonel, a specialist in the transportation of freight via railroad, was hanged in Israel on May 31, 1962, aged fifty-five. This film traces Eichmann’s life, ending with his trial in Jerusalem for crimes against humanity, and other offenses.

Eichmann was born in the Rhineland, 1906, and as a child moved with his family to Linz, Austria. From aged seventeen, he worked as a miner, trainee in electrical construction and salesman. At twenty-six, he joined the Nazi party and the SS. The next year, as Hitler took power, Eichmann returned to Germany, served in the army for a year, followed with special SS training. In 1934, he transferred to Berlin for duty within the SS Freemason Investigation Department. In 1935, Eichmann joined the SS Jewish Affairs Department, learned basic Yiddish and Hebrew. He married and would father four children. He was promoted to second lieutenant, 1936, and two years later, he was sent back to Austria, following the Anschluss that united Germany and Austria. He began organizing the forced emigration of Jews from Austria. In 1940, the year after the war began, he studied a plan for the mass deportation of Austrian Jews to the island of Madagascar, off the southeast coast of Africa, a plan never realized. In 1941, Eichmann was named head of IV-B-4, a department charged with “Jewish Affairs and Evacuations.” He held that position until 1945, with new rank of SS Lieutenant Colonel. In 1942, he attended the SS Wannsee Conference, near Berlin, to discuss “The Final Solution to The Jewish Problem.” The meeting was headed by Reinhard Heydrich, number-two after Heinrich Himmler, later assassinated by Czech commandos in Prague. 1945, the war ended, Eichmann was briefly a war prisoner, under a false name, and escaped, twice eluding capture. He spent the next four years in West Germany, during the Nuremberg Trials, until traveling in 1950 to Austria, Italy and Argentina; he lived there with his family, using the name “Ricardo Klement.” After ten years in Argentina, Eichmann was captured on May 11, 1960, by the Israeli Secret Service; two days later, David Ben Gurion announced that Eichmann was in Israel to face trial. The trial began April 11, 1961, guilty sentence was passed on December 15: “This court condemns Adolf Eichmann to death for his crimes committed against the Jewish people, for his crimes against humanity and for his war crimes.” Eichmann appealed, but sentence was confirmed on March 28, 1962. Eichmann petitioned the Head of State for a reprieve, asking for mercy, but it was refused on May 31, 1962. That midnight, Eichmann was hanged. His ashes were dropped into the Mediterranean, outside Israeli territorial waters.

Prosecutor of Eichmann, and by extension the whole Nazi movement, was Gideon Hausner, whose opening speech lasted three days, presenting himself as the voice of the six million Jews killed during the Holocaust. Eichmann’s attorney was Robert Servatius, from Cologne, formerly an assistant at the Nuremberg Trials. Hired by Eichmann, he was paid by the Israeli government. Seemingly overwhelmed by the evidence against Eichmann,

Servatius was ineffectual, thus Eichmann carried out his own defense. The three Israeli judges were of German origin. Chairman Moshe Landau strove for legal decorum—“clear answers to precise questions”—emphasizing Eichmann’s personal responsibility. Judge Benjamin Halevy often addressed Eichmann in German and, in effect, was his “confessor.” Judge Yitzhak Raveh also spoke German to the defendant. These two judges were able to elicit significant information from Eichmann about his role and methods. The trial covered eight months in 1961 and took place in the main auditorium of the House of the People, Jerusalem, transformed into a courtroom for this trial. In the trial, many survivors from Auschwitz and other camps testified emotionally as to what occurred.

The prosecution characterized Eichmann as a blood-thirsty pervert, a Machiavellian liar and serial killer, a quiet family man both comic and terrifying in his banality. Hausner rejected Eichmann’s defense that as a specialist he merely obeyed orders originated by his superiors. Hausner emphasized that Eichmann was the former head of the SS IV-B-4 bureau handling the inner security of the Third Reich, thus in charge of the mass deportation of Jews, Slovenes, Poles and Gypsies to the death camps.

Eichmann’s defense was that he was merely the executor of a criminal law that he disapproved of inwardly: he was guilty of his obedience. This is a defense heard often in courts today, worldwide, deflecting personal guilt, claiming to be a mere pawn in a fragmented decision-process that easily lends itself to the erasure of all notion of responsibility. These are “public service crimes,” e.g., by civil servants, technicians, scientists, employees, also those in the military committing atrocities—each is carrying out his/her tasks at their individual level, applying their routine procedure to solve practical problems, not moral problems. In Eichmann’s case, his assignment was to move cargo by railroad to its destination—pure logistics. The reality of these horrors is disguised or diminished by the euphemistic vocabulary used: evacuation, transfer, operations, special treatment, final solution. The technocrat’s moral crime, if disguised and thus repressed, hidden from awareness, allows the technocrat to function. The ordinary person, like Eichmann, is guilty of an extraordinary crime yet cannot recognize it, thus rejects claims of responsibility. Hannah Arendt points out of Eichmann—“his normality is much more terrifying than all atrocities together”—a theme she explores as “the banality of evil.” Thus Eichmann on trial insists on his powerlessness; he’s “a drop in the ocean, a tool in the hands of superior powers.” If he didn’t obey, others would replace him. But he confesses that he knew the contents of those box-cars, people rounded up “on account of their race,” he admits he supplied the death camps with “contingents for destruction.” At the Soviet front, he witnessed mass executions, Jews forced into a ditch and machine-gunned, some were mothers with children. He acknowledges a conflict of his professional duty versus his moral conscience, but no one can accuse him, he claims, of doing a bad job. “I did my job well.”

Near the trial’s end, *The Specialist* shows Eichmann conceding that he thinks blind obedience to authority, theories of racial superiority, “nationalism carried to extremes,” all that can mislead people. “On human terms, I am guilty” and “In my conscience, I am guilty.” He states that he intends to write a book about all that, after the trial.

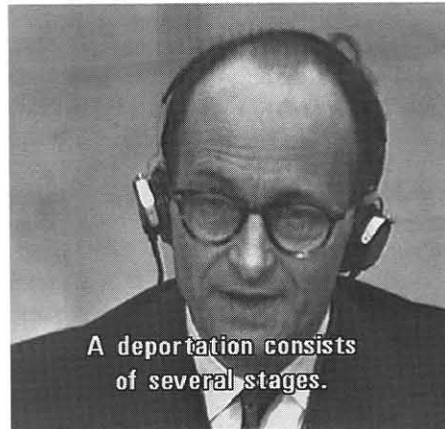




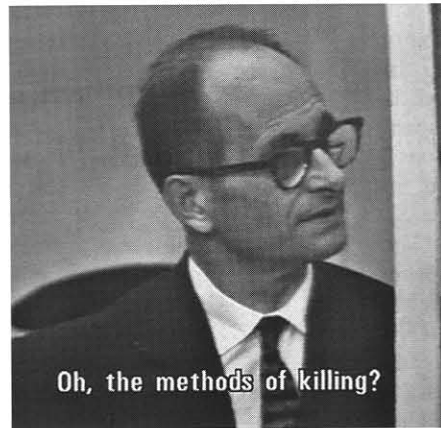
The Specialist: Portrait of a Modern Criminal

The Israeli government determined to preserve a visual record of the Eichmann trial and to film it in its entirety—unlike the Nuremberg Trials, where only chosen moments were filmed. Television was in its infancy, and this was to be the first TV production shot on actual location, the special Eichmann courtroom. Lacking experienced technicians and facilities, the Israelis turned to ABC-TV, Capitol Cities, and the American documentary director Leo Hurwitz, whose U.S. credits included *Strange Victory*, *Native Land* (with Paul Strand), editor of *The Spanish Earth*, narrated by Ernest Hemingway, cameraman of *The Plow that Broke the Plains*, by Pare Lorentz, later Director of Film Production, New York University. Hurwitz built four platforms within the courtroom, behind which cameras did their work. The four images went to a central control-room, where one of the four images was preserved for the film—thus presumably the other three images were erased, and—presumably—Hurwitz made these selections.

With great difficulty, producers of *The Specialist* got permission from the Israeli government to gain access to the surviving trial footage—then special pioneering video tapes. Housed badly for over a third of a century, much footage and sound material were defective; also records were un dependable; and they had difficulty finding technology today that could handle such old materials. In 1977, much of the tapes in the U.S. returned to the Steven Spielberg Jewish Film Archives at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Because of space problems there, the materials were stored in an unused washroom. “The Spielberg Archives immediately decided to extract a selection of seventy-two hours,” notes the press materials for *The Specialist*. “Of these seventy-two hours of film, recorded onto poor quality tape and presented not as copies but as originals, a few sequences were regularly sold.”



A deportation consists of several stages.



Oh, the methods of killing?



I was an... instrument in the hands of superior powers..

The footage provides a special insight into the Nazi death machine that no other war crimes trial had previously attained. Of five hundred hours of video shot, much was unusable. At the end of the trial, a ton and a half of tapes were shipped to New York and forgotten for fifteen years. Producers of *The Specialist* faced great obstacles—technical, financial and bureaucratic. From five hundred hours of picture, to three hundred fifty, to seventy, to twelve, to eight—the producers labored to find a form within a shapeless mass. Long, complicated, innovative processes were devised, for both sound (six hundred hours) and picture. At length, 35mm prints were struck, and the film was screened at the Berlin festival in February.

Director/producer Eyal Sivan is an Israeli dissident working in France since 1986 on the displacement of Palestinian populations and other topics. Within Israel, quoting press materials, “The omnipresent name Eichmann has special resonance and is used to cement national unity. The issue of total obedience to orders, the central object of discussions in Israel since the Lebanese war of 1982 and during the years of the Palestinian uprising, the Intifada, in the lands occupied by the Israeli Army, all that served to strengthen Sivan’s interest in the Eichmann material.”

Co-writer with Sivan, Rony Brauman has vast experience in relief work, e.g., the Ethiopian famine of 1985, the Ruanda genocide of 1994, and other abominations that feed on man’s destructive passions and engage his consent. He has published and lectured widely, and for twelve years was Chairman of the international relief organization, *Medicins sans Frontieres*.

GORDON HITCHENS is Contributing Editor to *International Documentary*. He was founding editor for *Film Comment*’s first seven years. As a stringer for *Variety*, he’s reviewed more than 200 films for the newspaper. A former faculty member at C.W. Post/Long Island University, he serves as consultant to numerous film festivals throughout the world, including Berlin and Yamagata.

from NIGHT AND FOG (Alain Resnais, France, 1955), narration by Jean Cayrol

"I am not responsible," says the Kapo.

"I am not responsible," says the officer:

"I am not responsible."

Then who is responsible?

At the moment I speak to you, the icy water of the ponds and ruins is filling up the hollows of the charnel house. A water as cold and murky as our own bad memories. War is napping, but with one eye always open.

The faithful grass has come up again on the Appelplatz, around the cell blocks. An abandoned village, but still full of peril.

The crematorium is no longer in use. The devices of the Nazis are out of date. Nine million dead haunt this landscape. Who is on the lookout from this strange tower to warn us of the coming of new executioners? Are their faces really different from our own? Somewhere among us, there are lucky Kapos, reinstated officers, and unknown informers. There are those who refuse to believe this, or believe it only from time to time. And there are those of us who sincerely look upon the ruins today, as if the old concentration camp monster were dead and buried beneath them. Those who pretend to take hope again as the image fades, as though there were a cure for the plague of these camps. Those of us who pretend to believe that all this happened only once, at a certain time and in a certain place, and those who refuse to see, who do not hear the cry to the end of time.

Contact Information for Films Discussed Here

Closed Country

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Kurt Geron's Karussell

EuroArts International
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Herr Zwilling und Frau Zuckermann

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Homo Sapiens 1900

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fax: 212-989-7649

The Last Days

Good Machine International, Inc.
417 Canal St.
New York, NY 10013
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tel: 212-343-9230
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Nein! Witnesses of the Resistance in Munich, 1933-45

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Schwere-Reiter Strasse 35
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tel: +49-89-3072-9430
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One of Us

One of Us Productions
Susan Korda
280 Mulberry St.
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tel: 212-966-4348
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The Port of Last Resort

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