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About the business of docs, infomags and lifestyle programming

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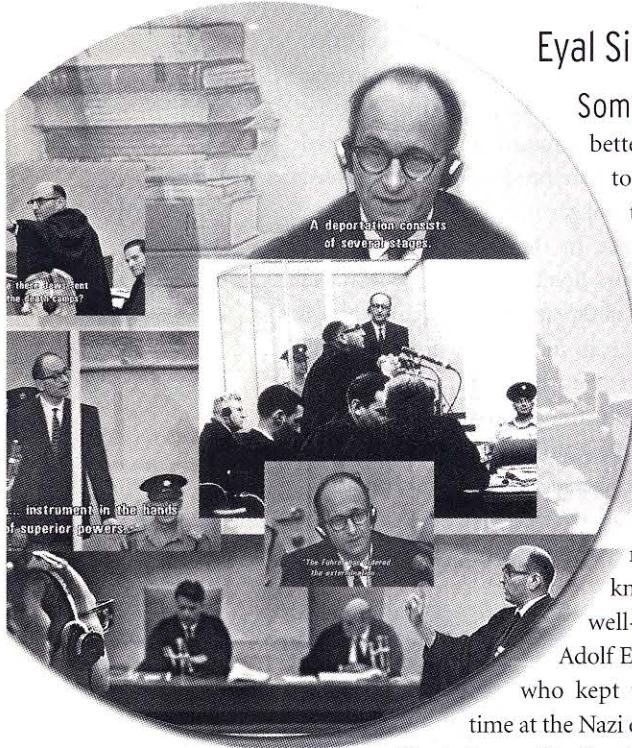
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# WDR revisits *The Specialist*

Eyal Sivan's doc about the Eichmann trial proves timeless



**Above:** Various scenes from Eyal Sivan's *The Specialist*, a documentary that chronicles the 1961 trial of Adolf Eichmann (courtesy Momento)

Sometimes bigger is better – but the project has to be worth it. That's the lesson learned by Werner Duetsch of Cologne, Germany pubcaster ARD/WDR. He's commissioning editor for the strand 'Dokumentarfilm' and helped spearhead *The Specialist*. The documentary is a refashioning of the well-known and, as it happens, well-recorded 1961 trial of Adolf Eichmann, the SS colonel who kept the trains arriving on time at the Nazi death camps.

Duetsch says *The Specialist* was an exceptional project for several reasons, not least of which was the level of international collaboration. Twenty sources contributed the €2 million (US\$1.9 million) needed to make the 128-minute documentary, executive produced by Paris-based Eyal Sivan's Momento. Production partners hailed from six countries: France (Momento and France 2 Cinéma); Israel (Amythos and Noga Communications – Channel 8); Austria (Lotus Film); Germany (Bremer Institut Film and Westdeutscher Rundfunk or WDR) and Belgium (Image Création and pubcaster RTBF). It took more than four years to make. "If everybody works on it with enough energy, it's possible to make even very expensive movies," says Duetsch.

*The Specialist* premiered on 'Dokumentarfilm' in 1999. It was then released in theaters in 10 countries – achieving commercial success in France and Japan, according to Sivan – and was rebroadcast on some of WDR's other programs. Duetsch is so pleased with the program he will air it again in 2003 in a retrospective of stand-out German productions (and coproductions) from the past 20 years.

WDR's financial input was small – about €100,000 to €120,000 – yet Sivan maintains that Duetsch's early support got the picture off the ground. "Before we knew we were able to do it technically, he said: 'Let's go for it.'"

Sivan, who was born in Israel but lives in France, struck upon the concept of "challenging the idea of the truth in archive by digital means" after hearing of the existence of the tapes of the Eichmann trial in the early '90s. The nine-month trial, in which Eichmann was found guilty (he was hanged), was filmed from start to finish for the Israeli government. Confusion about copyright, however, destined most of the footage to an archival black hole for 30 years, including storage for a time in an unused toilet.

When Sivan finally won access to the 350 hours of raw NTSC videotape, the first challenge was indexing and restoring. "It was an endless process," Duetsch notes. Using new digital techniques, Sivan breathed life into the black and white film by creating camera movements, re-lighting the scene, and pumping up noises from the court audience that were hardly audible on the original sound track. He constructed the story as a stylized adaptation of Hanna Arendt's book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report On The Banality Of Evil*, which offered an analysis of the trial.

"Basically," says Sivan, "I was interested in the subject – which is the question of obedience/disobedience to authority through the figure of Eichmann – and [in making] a free-formed work on archive material, which uses not just normal editing, but special effects and reconstruction." Sivan credits the European system for allowing filmmakers the leeway required to steer projects as they see fit. No size-of-investment-equals-amount-of-control turf war broke out among the many producers, he says.

His next doc project is a road movie that explores "the mental borders, physical borders, geographical borders and historical borders" separating Palestinians and Israelis. Taping alongside Palestinian filmmaker Michel Khleifi starts in July, with delivery planned for November. The working title of the film is *181... La Route Du Partage*.

Duetsch holds up Sivan's *The Specialist* as an example of the kind of eclectic programming that airs on 'Dokumentarfilm', which splits its budget roughly equally between acquisitions and copros. Recent acquisitions include the agrarian-focused *Profils Paysans: L'Approche*, from France-based prodco Palmeraie et Désert, and copro *Der Boxprinze*, about disgraced German boxer Norbert Grupe, by Berlin-based Realistfilm. ■