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Speaking the unspeakable: the portrayal of the Wannsee Conference in the film *Conspiracy*

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the filmic representation of the infamous Wannsee Conference, when fifteen senior German officials met at a villa on the shore of a Berlin lake to discuss and co-ordinate the implementation of the so-called final solution to the Jewish question. The understanding reached during the course of the ninety-minute meeting cleared the way for the Europe-wide killing of six million Jews. The article sets out to answer the principal challenge facing anyone attempting to recreate the Wannsee Conference on film: what was the atmosphere of this conference and the attitude of the participants? Moreover, it discusses various ethical aspects related to the portrayal of evil, not in actions but in words, using the medium of film. In doing so, it focuses on the BBC/HBO television film *Conspiracy* (2001), directed by Frank Pierson, probing its historical accuracy and discussing its artistic credibility.

KEYWORDS

Nazi Germany; Wannsee conference; Jewish question; Holocaust; film

Witness, a record of this type cannot reproduce the atmosphere of this conference, the basic attitude of all the participants. Could you say something about this?¹

These words were spoken by Dr Robert Servatius on 26 June 1961 at the trial before an Israeli court in Jerusalem of Adolf Eichmann. Servatius was Eichmann's defense lawyer, and it was his client whom he was addressing. The subject at hand was the transcript of the notorious Wannsee Conference.

On 20 January 1942, fifteen senior German officials met at a villa on the shore of Berlin's Lake Wannsee to discuss and co-ordinate the implementation of what was termed the 'final solution to the Jewish question.' The understanding reached during the course of the ninety-minute meeting, called and chaired by the chief of the Reich Security Main Office, SS-Obergruppenführer Reinhard Heydrich, cleared the way for the Europe-wide killing of six million Jews. As a prime example of the chilling matter-of-factness and cold-blooded precision of Nazi planning for mass murder, the Wannsee Conference, as it came to be known, is now universally and justifiably infamous.

Dr Servatius's words, quoted above, touch upon the principal challenge facing anyone attempting to recreate the Wannsee Conference on film: what was the atmosphere of this conference and the attitude of the participants? Moreover, is it possible to portray evil, not in

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actions but in words, using the medium of film? This feat was attempted in the BBC/HBO television production *Conspiracy* (2001), directed by Frank Pierson. Where *Conspiracy* can rely on existing documentation, this article examines the historical accuracy of the portrayal, and where *Conspiracy* is forced to fill in what is missing from the historical record, it considers the film's authenticity and credibility. The author's approach thus differs from previous treatments of the subject, such as that by Simone Gigliotti, who is concerned with 'how [the screenwriter Loring] Mandel uses language as an agent of reclamation and witness to create an alternative "Wannsee Protocol," a visual text of historical and biographical probabilities.'²

The meeting's minutes and the film's screenplay

The minutes of the conference, which have come to be known as the Wannsee Protocol, constitute not a verbatim account of what was said there but rather both a recap (by Heydrich) of German anti-Jewish policy between 1933 and the end of 1941 and a summary of the results of the conference itself.³ The 15-page Wannsee Protocol was drafted sometime after the conference by one of its participants, SS-Obersturmbannführer Adolf Eichmann, on the basis of notes taken by a male stenographer and subsequently edited three or four times by Heydrich.⁴ At his trial, Eichmann expressly stated that the stenographer had been male.⁵ In terms of gender, the portrayal of the stenographer (played by Simon Markey) in the film is, therefore, accurate. It has nevertheless been claimed that the stenographer was a 'female secretary' (*Sekretärin*).⁶ This assumption appears to be based on the assertion made by Eichmann's secretary, Ingeborg Wagner, in Frankfurt in 1962 that it was she who had prepared the stenographic record of the conference.⁷

At the end of February 1942, the Protocol was distributed among the conference participants.⁸ The focus on the original Protocol as the foundation for *Conspiracy's* screenplay results in the renunciation of pathos of any kind. No attempt is made to film a tearjerker. *Conspiracy* is not a melodrama. Indeed, it does not even have a score, aside, that is, from the very end of the film, when all the guests have departed and Eichmann puts on a record (Franz Schubert's String Quintet in C Major, D.956 'Adagio'), which he refers to as 'Schubert's sentimental Viennese shit.' This music then continues to play during the closing narrative and the short biographies of the conference participants. Thus, diegetic music becomes non-diegetic music.⁹ This minimalistic approach by the filmmakers adds considerably to the film's credibility.

Having said that, as American historian Alan E. Steinweis has remarked, for the purposes of making a film the Protocol provides a plot summary but not a script.¹⁰ The makers of *Conspiracy* were, therefore, confronted with the dilemma of having to fill in the gaps and literally put words in the mouths of the attendees. By examining other existing documentation, however, it is possible to come to conclusions regarding what was discussed and not discussed at the conference, the expectations of Heydrich, and the attitudes of individual participants. For those aspects of the conference about which we know nothing, such as the order in which the participants arrived and departed or the seating arrangements, improvisation on the part of the filmmakers was absolutely essential.

Although the 'restrained and euphemistic language' used in the Protocol has sometimes been emphasized,¹¹ in actual fact it takes little reading between the lines to recognize the murderous intentions of the conference participants. For example, at the bottom of page 7 and the top of page 8, the Protocol states:

Under appropriate leadership, the Jews should now in the course of the final solution be deployed for work in the East in a fitting way. In large labor columns, divided by gender, those Jews fit for work will be led into these territories constructing roads, whereby the bulk of them will be eliminated by natural causes.

As it will doubtlessly consist of the most resistant elements, any final remnant that might survive will have to be dealt with accordingly, for they, representing a natural elite, are to be regarded in the event of being spared as the germ cell of a new Jewish revival.¹²

When questioned in Nuremberg after the war, Staatssekretär Dr Wilhelm Stuckart, who had attended the conference, acknowledged without further ado that this meant the annihilation of the deported Jews by work, but claimed – in contradiction of the Protocol – that this had not in fact been mentioned at the conference.¹³ The penultimate paragraph of the Protocol, furthermore, begins as follows: ‘Finally, the various types of possible solutions were discussed [...]’.¹⁴ Eichmann indeed confirmed at his trial that ‘possible solutions’ referred to ‘the various possibilities for killing’ and that there had been ‘talk about killing and eliminating and exterminating,’ talk which Eichmann was instructed – by Heydrich – not to include in the official record of the proceedings.¹⁵

These references to killing both in the Protocol itself and by Eichmann during his trial provide the makers of *Conspiracy* with the justification for having their characters talk explicitly about mass murder, and the filmmakers do a skillful job of incorporating this into the film. One example is an interjection by SS-Sturmbannführer Dr Rudolf Lange (played by Barnaby Kay), one of the two ‘practitioners’¹⁶ of mass murder from the German-occupied territories in attendance, the other being SS-Oberführer Dr Eberhard Schöngarth (played by Peter Sullivan). Reasonably early on in the meeting, Lange rises from the table in response to Heydrich’s (played by Kenneth Branagh) repeated use of the euphemism ‘evacuation’:

I have the real feeling I evacuated 30,000 Jews already by shooting them, at Riga. Is what I did evacuation? When they fell, were they evacuated? There are another 20,000 at least waiting for similar evacuation. I just think it is helpful to know what words mean.¹⁷

Lange’s comments set the tone for the rest of the film by bringing the actual meaning of the camouflaged phrases out into the open. If they had not done so previously, the conference participants – and, crucially, the television viewers – now certainly know exactly what they are discussing. With clarity thus established about the precise nature of the subject matter, the viewers might now feel that they have been let in on the secret. Camerawork and framing likewise contribute to making *Conspiracy* an intimate film. The camera moves around the diners so that one can ‘almost insert oneself into the proceedings and try to imagine how it might have felt to be there.’¹⁸

Later in the meeting, the participants actually address the methods to be used for murdering Europe’s Jews, with Eichmann providing detailed information on the planned extermination camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau (and other ‘permanent gas chambers’ at Bełżec, Sobibór, and Treblinka),¹⁹ which would have the capacity to gas and cremate the corpses of 2,500 people per hour or 60,000 each day.²⁰ At the same time, however, the film cleverly provides an explanation for such talk not appearing in the Protocol: Eichmann (played by Stanley Tucci) gestures to the stenographer to stop typing. This tactic is used on three separate occasions in *Conspiracy*. The first is at the time of Lange’s aforementioned interjection; the second is during a speech by Stuckart (played by Colin

Firth), in which he refers to ‘secret killings’; while the third is also in response to something said by Stuckart, namely: ‘I am pointing out the difficulty of casting every Jew and non-Jew into the sausage machine.’ If the director and screenwriter improvise here to great effect in order to incorporate something that was not in the Protocol but very definitely a crucial topic of conversation during the conference itself, director of photography Stephen Goldblatt provides competent assistance with his intense, no-frills use of eye-level camera viewpoint throughout the film.

Wilhelm Kritzinger as dissenting voice

One of the central roles in *Conspiracy* is that of Ministerialdirektor Wilhelm Kritzinger (played by David Threlfall) of the Reich Chancellery. Kritzinger is ‘the film’s moral dissenter,’²¹ someone who insists that he has received assurances from Hitler himself that no undertaking has been made to systematically annihilate all the Jews of Europe and repeatedly stresses the need for ‘livable conditions’ for the deported Jews. There is little or no evidence, however, to support this version of events. According to the Protocol, dissent of one sort or another was voiced by SS-Gruppenführer Otto Hofmann, Staatssekretär Dr Stuckart (see below), and Staatssekretär Erich Neumann,²² but not by Kritzinger. In fact, there is no mention of Kritzinger in the Protocol at all aside from the confirmation of his attendance at the meeting. Thus, as far as we are able to ascertain, Kritzinger remained silent or at least did not say anything of sufficient consequence to warrant it being reproduced in the Protocol.²³ Why, then, is Kritzinger portrayed in *Conspiracy* as a moral dissenter?

The fact that anyone was given this role is clearly for dramatic purposes; a conference free of friction or disagreement would hardly have made for such an absorbing film. That Kritzinger was chosen for this role is probably a consequence of him being the only participant to express feelings of shame during his post-war interrogation.²⁴ Furthermore, British historian Mark Roseman describes Kritzinger as probably the least committed to the genocidal project among the attendees and the person who came to the conference table with the most reservations,²⁵ while German historian Dieter Rebentisch perceives an ‘inner distance’ to the Nazi regime on Kritzinger’s part.²⁶ In assigning Kritzinger the role of moral dissenter and, in doing so, diverging from the facts, the filmmakers are using the artistic license available to them to employ more creative characterization and narrative strategies, in order to compel viewers to take another, more thoughtful look at the events being portrayed.²⁷ It could even be argued that the invention of Kritzinger as dissenting voice is indeed *necessary* in order to provide viewers with someone to identify with. Without a strong figure of identification, *Conspiracy* might perhaps otherwise have been neither so engrossing nor so morally compelling.

Throughout the film, Kritzinger is addressed with the doctor title. In fact, unlike the other characters also addressed in this manner (Stuckart, Gauleiter Dr Alfred Meyer, SS-Oberführer Dr Gerhard Klopfer, and Staatssekretär Dr Roland Freisler; furthermore Reichsamtsleiter Dr Georg Leibbrandt and Staatssekretär Dr Josef Bühler in the closing short biographies), the addition of this title to Kritzinger’s name is erroneous.²⁸ This is not an uncommon mistake, however, as the revised version of the permanent exhibition at the memorial and educational site House of the Wannsee Conference (*Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz*), opened in January 2006, demonstrates.²⁹ Of the

fifteen conference participants, a total of eight men held the doctorate: those mentioned above bar Kritzinger, plus Lange and Schöngarth. Of these eight, six held a doctorate in, of all subjects, law.³⁰ At one point in *Conspiracy*, Klopfer (played by Ian McNeice) asks how many lawyers are in the room. A show of hands reveals that nine of the fifteen were in some way trained in the law: those six holding a doctorate in the subject, i.e. Stuckart, Freisler, Bühler, Lange, Schöngarth, and Klopfer himself, plus Neumann, Unterstaatssekretär Martin Luther, and Kritzinger. While Neumann and Kritzinger did indeed study law at university, Luther, on the contrary, did not even obtain his school-leaving certificate in real life.³¹

In the view of novelist Robert Harris, the scene in which the lawyers present raise their hands is ‘one of the most telling scenes in the brilliant dramatic reconstruction of Wannsee.’³² Clearly, the participants’ knowledge of the law did not prevent them from coldly planning mass murder. On the contrary: it may have been conducive to such criminal energy, as their attachment to legal principles evidently went hand in hand here with a *detachment* from human emotions such as empathy and compassion. This is surely not lost on the viewer. The filmmakers are playing here with the common perception of lawyers as cold and narrow-minded. The gravity of the subject matter, however, allows them to go one step further: the lawyers’ traditional role as upholders of the law is now inverted; they become criminals on a mass scale. Although the lawyers present at the Wannsee Conference were doing the bidding of the regime, there was no law in Nazi Germany that dictated that all Jewish people should meet the fate allotted to them at the meeting. Though it is not mentioned in *Conspiracy*, the irony of this reversal in Nazi Germany of the traditional function of lawyers and other figures responsible for upholding the law is summed up in Heydrich’s position as president of Interpol at the time of the meeting.

The equivocal role of Wilhelm Stuckart

Aside from Kritzinger, the character in *Conspiracy* who voices most in the way of dissent is the aforementioned Dr Wilhelm Stuckart, Staatssekretär in the Reich Ministry of the Interior. This accords with Mark Roseman’s assessment of Stuckart as, after Kritzinger, ‘probably the person who came to the Wannsee table with the most reservations, above all because of his department’s attempts to protect half-Jews and Jews in mixed marriages.’³³ Having reservations prior to the conference is, of course, not the same as voicing them during the conference, but there were certainly a couple of points on which we know Stuckart *did* voice his dissatisfaction. According to the Protocol, he declared that the practical implementation of the measures proposed by Heydrich for dealing with mixed marriages and those people with mixed parentage (so-called *Mischlinge*) would mean ‘endless administrative work,’ and proposed instead across-the-board forced divorce and forced sterilization, respectively. From Stuckart’s point of view, sterilizing those of mixed parentage would ‘make allowance for the biological facts,’ i.e. the loss of their ‘German blood’ in the event of deportation and murder.³⁴ German historian Christian Gerlach concludes that a clear verdict on Stuckart’s disputed role is ‘not possible,’ as it is difficult to disprove that Stuckart suggested forced sterilization instead of deportation in the knowledge that the former was technically unfeasible (as he indeed claimed in Nuremberg after the war).³⁵

Thus, there was without doubt a certain degree of leeway for the makers of *Conspiracy* in their portrayal of Stuckart. When watching the film, however, one almost gets the impression that Stuckart not only objects to the disregard shown for the Nuremberg Race Laws of 1935, of which he was co-author,³⁶ but to the mass murder of Jews per se. This was certainly not the case, however, neither immediately prior to nor during the conference itself. On 19 December 1941, one month before the Wannsee Conference, Stuckart told Dr Bernhard Lösener, head of the sub-department on race within the Ministry of the Interior: ‘The treatment of the evacuated Jews is based on a decision from the highest authority. You will have to come to terms with that!’³⁷ That this was not something Stuckart had also been disinclined to ‘come to terms with’ is demonstrated by a subsequent statement he made to Lösener:

Keep in mind that the Jews are to blame for every German death, for it is the Jews we have to thank for having to wage this war. Jewry forced it upon us. If we strike back with severity, one must acknowledge the world historical necessity of this severity and cannot squeamishly ask whether precisely this or that particular deported Jew is personally guilty of the fate that overtakes him.³⁸

According to Eichmann, Heydrich had expected ‘difficulties’ above all from Stuckart, but, continued Eichmann, the biggest surprise at the conference proved to be the attitude of ‘Stuckart, who was always cautious and hesitant, but who suddenly behaved there with unaccustomed enthusiasm.’³⁹ Heydrich, therefore, had good reason to be very satisfied with the outcome of the conference, as he subsequently informed Unterstaatssekretär Luther.⁴⁰

The apparent unwillingness on Stuckart’s part to accept SS control over Nazi anti-Jewish policy is one prominent aspect of his depiction in *Conspiracy*. This is historically inaccurate. When Heydrich informs Stuckart during a brief walk on the terrace that the realization of the so-called final solution to the Jewish question ‘will be an SS operation,’ he is stating something that Stuckart at this point in time in fact already knew. On 24 November 1941, Heydrich’s superior, Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler, had personally met with (SS-Brigadeführer)⁴¹ Stuckart to discuss the ‘Jewish Question.’ Following the discussion, Himmler was able to write in his diary: ‘Jewish question belong [*sic*] to me.’⁴² Although it is unclear, as Christian Gerlach has pointed out, whether Himmler’s annotation reflected merely his own claim to jurisdiction or whether Stuckart also acknowledged Himmler’s authority,⁴³ comments made by Stuckart to Dr Lösener three-and-a-half weeks later suggest it was the latter:

You are not dynamic enough. [...] As a result of this, leadership in the Jewish question has slipped away from us. Had you not behaved in this way, many things could be different. Not that I am particularly unhappy about it, because in this way I no longer have much to do with these things.⁴⁴

For these reasons, it is very doubtful that Stuckart voiced (or indeed held) reservations at the conference to the extent that *Conspiracy* would have the viewer believe.

In *Conspiracy*, Stuckart’s opposition is at times so vehement that he becomes the most vocal threat to the unanimity of the conference. His protestations are not based on moral concerns, however, as they are in the case of Kritzinger, but rather on a single-minded devotion to the supremacy of the law. This conflict provides the film with some of its most dramatic high points, as Stuckart argues with Heydrich and Klopfer. The situation

threatens to explode when Klopfer menacingly tells Stuckart ‘I’ll remember you.’ Stuckart replies ‘You should, I’m very well known,’ before Heydrich diffuses the tension by suggesting that the attendees take a lunch break.

Eichmann and the absence of ideology

Of the fifteen conference participants, the man we see both first and last in the film is Adolf Eichmann. As Heydrich informs the other attendees regarding future communication: ‘He is your focal point.’ Interestingly, in their depiction of Eichmann, the filmmakers appear to have followed an image of him that corresponds to the widespread misconception that Hannah Arendt portrayed Eichmann as a dutiful and obedient functionary, bereft of motives beyond personal advancement in her 1963 book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. What Arendt did do, however, is attest Eichmann’s ‘sheer thoughtlessness’ in the sense of his inability to think for himself or see the world beyond his own Nazi clichés.⁴⁵

Commenting on Adolf Eichmann’s actions, Arendt apparently declared in a 1964 interview, three years after the trial: ‘I don’t believe that ideology played much of a role. To me that appears to be decisive.’⁴⁶ There is good reason to believe that Arendt, in concluding that Eichmann was ‘banal,’ may have been fooled, at least in part, by Eichmann’s performance in court in Jerusalem in 1961.⁴⁷ The prosecutor in the Eichmann trial, Gideon Hausner, was keen for the transcripts of the interviews Eichmann had given the Dutch journalist and former SS officer Willem Sassen from 1956 to 1960 to be admitted to evidence, ‘since they included remarks revealing of Eichmann’s own sense of self-importance and his anti-Semitism in contrast to his carefully crafted statements to the contrary in court.’⁴⁸ This combination of a sense of self-importance and anti-Semitism, egotism and ideology, appears decisive for explaining the mindset of many Holocaust perpetrators.⁴⁹

In following the image of Eichmann as a dutiful soldier and as merely a cog in the Nazi machinery, i.e. in following the crux of Eichmann’s own defense strategy, his ideological zealotry is entirely absent in his depiction in *Conspiracy*, in complete contrast to the likes of Klopfer, Schöngarth, Freisler, and others. *Conspiracy*’s Eichmann is conceited and emotionally detached throughout the film and cynical on at least one occasion, when telling Klopfer about the rabbi who had given him Hebrew tuition: ‘Didn’t he know that I would’ve protected him. At least until my lessons were complete.’

Stanley Tucci, the lone American in *Conspiracy* among a fine British cast, won a Golden Globe for ‘his goosebump-provoking portrayal of Adolf Eichmann.’⁵⁰ As one might expect from the man who drafted the conference minutes, Tucci’s Eichmann is a ruthless bureaucrat through and through (‘Well, I have figures’). He is also vain, measured in his words and actions, and severe in his treatment of subordinates, scolding a waiter for dropping plates (‘Itemize the cost, he pays. Make it a separate report to me. And keep him where I don’t see him’) and slapping a soldier across the face for throwing a snowball (‘Not in uniform, nothing ever “just happens”’).

The portrayal of other participants

At the center of events, both at the Wannsee Conference itself and in its depiction in *Conspiracy*, is Reinhard Heydrich. Heydrich called the conference in order to ensure and co-

ordinate the participation of the ministerial bureaucracy in the extermination program and to assert his own jurisdiction regarding Germany's anti-Jewish policy.⁵¹ These twin aims are conveyed very effectively by Kenneth Branagh's Emmy Award-winning portrayal,⁵² here charismatic and cajoling ('With you at my side, so much is possible'), there ruthless and insistent ('Death is the most reliable form of sterilization'). For Branagh, portraying Heydrich was extremely challenging and he suffered sleepless nights as a result of the material: 'I just felt this underlying revulsion at what happened and at the man himself. I didn't want to say the lines. It was the most disturbing experience of my 20-year acting career.'⁵³ In *Conspiracy*, Heydrich seeks – and obtains – the support of the attendees to the agreement reached at the conference and to the overall authority of the SS in the matter: 'In all cases, the SS will be the determining agency.' This successful obtaining of the agreement of the participants, which is explicit in the film and achieved by going 'once around the table,' explains Heydrich's aforementioned satisfaction with the outcome of the conference.

In accordance with the Protocol, two of the film's characters, Staatssekretär Dr Bühler (played by Ben Daniels) and Gauleiter Dr Meyer (played by Brian Pettifer), request that the implementation of the 'final solution' begin in their own domains, the General Government of Poland and the occupied Soviet territories, respectively. Bühler also voluntarily and explicitly acknowledges the jurisdiction of Heydrich in this matter and promises the support of the authorities in the General Government, which again corresponds to the Protocol.⁵⁴

Chief of the Gestapo SS-Gruppenführer Heinrich Müller, as portrayed by Brendan Coyle, is appropriately dry and sparing in his use of words throughout the conference itself,⁵⁵ not engaging in lengthy speeches and in fact never saying more than three or four sentences at any one time. The scene following the conference in which Heydrich, Müller, and Eichmann withdraw to another room bears a close resemblance to the account given by Eichmann at his trial, which might therefore have served as a source for the film script:

[...] [A]fterwards, when the guests had left, Heydrich and Müller stayed behind. I was also allowed to be present at this informal get-together; I had received permission, and that was when Heydrich briefly expressed his opinion about the conference, and, as I have already said, his satisfaction was quite obvious.⁵⁶

Less historically accurate, however, is the portrayal of Erich Neumann (played by Jonathan Coy) – Staatssekretär in the Office of the Four-Year Plan and thus Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring's representative at the conference – as insignificant and poorly informed. For example, when Stuckart greets him by name upon their simultaneous arrival, Neumann responds: 'I'm always surprised and flattered, Dr Stuckart, that you recognize me.' It would have been astonishing had Stuckart not recognized Neumann, as the two of them had been working together as (two of only twelve) members of the General Council for the Four-Year Plan since 1939.⁵⁷ Neumann is treated condescendingly by several participants, none more so than SS-Oberführer Dr Klopfer, although Neumann was no newcomer to such high-level meetings.⁵⁸ Furthermore, it was Neumann's boss, Göring, who had authorized Heydrich to 'make all necessary preparations with regard to organizational, technical and material matters for a complete solution of the Jewish Question in the German sphere of influence in Europe' with his commission

of 31 July 1941.⁵⁹ Each and every invitee was aware of this because Heydrich had attached a copy of the document to his original invitations and also referred to it in his introductory speech at the conference itself.⁶⁰ Of course, in the context of the film, Neumann's portrayal as irrelevant is motivated by the quest for dramatic effect: he provides the other characters with a target for their haughty behavior.

Concluding remarks

Given what we know about what took place during the Wannsee Conference and what we can only speculate on, it is true that, in most respects at least, *Conspiracy* does not stray very far from what is factually plausible.⁶¹ Its exaggeration of Stuckart's dissatisfaction and Kritzinger's dissent are to be explained – though not entirely excused – by the filmmakers' pursuit of dramatic effect. In their defense, however, the filmmakers do cover themselves by inserting the following caption in the closing credits: 'This film is based on a true story, with some scenes, events and characters created or changed for dramatic purposes.' Returning to the quote that opened this article and addressed the atmosphere of the conference, one can conclude that *Conspiracy* does a very effective job of bringing the Protocol and, therefore, the conference itself to life. It provides a credible demonstration of the way in which the participants may have discussed the macabre subject at hand. For these reasons, *Conspiracy* deserves to be recommended viewing alongside *Idi i smotri* (USSR, 1985), *Au revoir les enfants* (France/West Germany, 1987), *Schindler's List* (USA, 1993), and *Defiance* (USA, 2008), to mention just a few, on any list of feature films for students of the Holocaust.

Of course, *Conspiracy* is a very different type of film to the others cited. It eschews the physicality of *Schindler's List* or *Defiance*, lacks the autobiographical element of *Au revoir les enfants*, and is completely devoid of *Idi i smotri*'s 'startling mixture of lyrical poeticism and expressionist nightmare.'⁶² The biggest part of this intimate film takes place in the smoke-filled conference room (reconstructed at Shepperton Studios outside London).⁶³ At the beginning of this article I posed the question as to whether it is possible to portray evil, not in actions but in words, using the medium of film. In *Conspiracy*, the unspeakable is indeed spoken. To speak the unspeakable was the undeniable purpose and inescapable reality of the real-life gathering in January 1942. The filmic account succeeds in recreating the chilling atmosphere of the historical conference. Director Frank Pierson's preferred strategy is to allow the words of the participants themselves to provoke the revulsion he seeks in the audience. He is 'positively clinical in permitting as little subjective emotion as possible to show through.'⁶⁴ The dialogue and the way in which it is delivered suffice to achieve the director's purpose. This recreation of an event of unquestionable evil does indeed represent evil in words. It is moreover these words that constitute the vital ingredient of the dramatization.

Notes

1. *The Trial of Adolf Eichmann*, 1423.
2. Gigliotti, "Commissioning Mass Murder," 128.
3. For the minutes see PA AA, Inland II g, Nr. 177, R 100857, "Besprechungsprotokoll," 16th of 30 copies, undated, fols. 166–80; reproduced in: *Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen Politik*, vol. 1, 267–75, "Undatiertes Protokoll der Wannsee-Konferenz" (doc. 150); reproduced in

English translation in: Roseman, *The Villa, the Lake, the Meeting*, 108–18. The original in the PA AA is used here throughout.

4. *The Trial of Adolf Eichmann*, vol. 4, 1422.
5. *Ibid.*, 1826.
6. Pätzold and Schwarz, *Tagesordnung: Judenmord*, 16; Klein, “Die Wannsee-Konferenz,” 103. The stenographer in the West German television film *Die Wannseekonferenz* from 1984 is female. Her primary purpose in the film is apparently to give Heydrich someone to flirt with.
7. See Mentel, “Das Protokoll der Wannsee-Konferenz,” 119. See also the discussion in Stangneth, “Eichmanns Erzählungen,” 147.
8. PA AA, Inland II g, Nr. 177, R 100857, cover letter from SS-Obergruppenführer Heydrich to Unterstaatssekretär Luther, 26 February 1942, fol. 165.
9. See Hagen, *Scoring for Films*; Richards, “Diegetic Music, Non-Diegetic Music.”
10. Steinweis, review of *Conspiracy*, 674.
11. See, for example, Gigliotti, “Commissioning Mass Murder,” 122.
12. PA AA, Inland II g, Nr. 177, R 100857, “Besprechungsprotokoll,” fols. 172–3: ‘*Unter entscheidender Leitung sollen nun im Zuge der Endlösung die Juden in geeigneter Weise im Osten zum Arbeitseinsatz kommen. In großen Arbeitskolonnen, unter Trennung der Geschlechter, werden die arbeitsfähigen Juden straßenbauend in diese Gebiete geführt, wobei zweifellos ein Großteil durch natürliche Verminderung ausfallen wird. Der allfällig endlich verbleibende Restbestand wird, da es sich bei diesem zweifellos um den widerstandsfähigsten Teil handelt, entsprechend behandelt werden müssen, da dieser, eine natürliche Auslese darstellend, bei Freilassung als Keimzelle eines neuen jüdischen Aufbaues anzusprechen ist.*’
13. See the text of the interrogation of Stuckart in Nuremberg in 1948, excerpts reproduced in: Pätzold and Schwarz, *Tagesordnung: Judenmord*, 156–60, doc. 56, here 159. A *Staatssekretär* (plural: *Staatssekretäre*) was the deputy of the Reich Minister and thereby equivalent to the grade of permanent secretary in the British civil service or undersecretary in the American civil service. *Unterstaatssekretär* was one grade lower and *Ministerialdirektor* one grade lower still.
14. PA AA, Inland II g, Nr. 177, R 100857, “Besprechungsprotokoll,” fol. 180: ‘*Abschließend wurden die verschiedenen Arten der Lösungsmöglichkeiten besprochen [...].*’
15. *The Trial of Adolf Eichmann*, vol. 4, 1810 and 1826–7. On Eichmann’s testimony in Jerusalem, see Gerlach, “The Eichmann Interrogations”; and Browning, “Perpetrator Testimony.” On Eichmann’s various memoirs, see Wojak, *Eichmanns Memoiren*. On Eichmann in general, see Cesarani, *Eichmann*; Stangneth, *Eichmann vor Jerusalem*.
16. Gerlach, “Die Wannsee-Konferenz,” 96, fn. 57. Gerlach’s article constitutes the extended version of his original article of the same name, which appeared in *WerkstattGeschichte*.
17. Lange is referring here to the killing of 27,800 Jews in November and December 1941; see Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution*, 396. The more exact figure given in this note is also cited by Lange at a subsequent point in the film itself.
18. Flett, “The Art of Darkness.”
19. For an introduction on these – the so-called *Aktion Reinhardt* – death camps, see Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 253–76. For more detail see the recent Lehnstaedt, *Der Kern des Holocaust*.
20. When asked at his trial whether there was talk of killing by gas, Eichmann’s response was muddled: ‘No, not by gas. [...] About gas I did not know anything. I cannot remember. [...] Today I no longer remember, but I am sure that this matter was discussed. Where it says [in the Protocol], “on the spot, without alarming the population,” I cannot imagine the intention being anything other than such installations, which I had seen shortly before that time [in the Lublin district]’; see *The Trial of Adolf Eichmann*, vol. 4, 1827.
21. Gigliotti, “Commissioning Mass Murder,” 129 (see also 128: ‘moral conscience’). He is portrayed in a similar way in the West German television film *Die Wannseekonferenz*, though he is characterized there as considerably feebler.
22. See PA AA, Inland II g, Nr. 177, R 100857, “Besprechungsprotokoll,” fols. 178–9.
23. Rebentisch, “Friedrich Wilhelm Kritzingen,” 447; Gerlach, “Die Wannsee-Konferenz,” 131.

24. See the text of the interrogation of Kritzinger in Nuremberg in 1947, excerpt reproduced in: Pätzold and Schwarz, *Tagesordnung: Judenmord*, 139–40, doc. 48, here 140. See also Roseman, *The Villa, the Lake, the Meeting*, 73.
25. Roseman, *The Villa, the Lake, the Meeting*, 93–4.
26. Rebutisch, “Friedrich Wilhelm Kritzinger,” 447.
27. See the discussion in Baron, *Projecting the Holocaust*, chapter 1.
28. See the biographies of the conference participants in Pätzold and Schwarz, *Tagesordnung: Judenmord*, 201–45 (for Kritzinger see 221–3); Rebutisch, “Friedrich Wilhelm Kritzinger,” 445–8.
29. See Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz, ed., *Die Wannsee-Konferenz*, 108. The doctor title was incorrectly conferred on Kritzinger both on the organizational diagram in Room 9 of the exhibition itself and on the corresponding page in the accompanying catalogue. The error was subsequently corrected in the exhibition. See also Mommsen, “Aufgabenkreis.”
30. See Pätzold and Schwarz, *Tagesordnung: Judenmord*, 212–42; Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz, ed., *Die Wannsee-Konferenz*, 104–7.
31. See Pätzold and Schwarz, *Tagesordnung: Judenmord*, 221, 227 and 236; Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz, ed., *Die Wannsee-Konferenz*, 105–7.
32. Harris, “We’re Still Digesting That Most Murderous Lunch.”
33. Roseman, *The Villa, the Lake, the Meeting*, 93–4.
34. PA AA, Inland II g, Nr. 177, R 100857, “Besprechungsprotokoll,” fol. 179. See also “Geheim-schreiben des Staatssekretärs im Reichsministerium des Innern Wilhelm Stuckart an Teilnehmer der Wannsee-Konferenz vom 16. März 1942 betr.: ‘Endlösung der Judenfrage,’” reproduced in: Pätzold and Schwarz, *Tagesordnung: Judenmord*, 121–3, doc. 35. Stuckart’s letter was addressed to Klopfer, Heydrich, Neumann, Freisler, Luther, Meyer, and Hofmann, in that order. The letter confirms the accuracy of the Protocol with regard to the comments Stuckart made on the subject at the conference.
35. Gerlach, “Die Wannsee-Konferenz,” 129, fn. 179; the text of the interrogation of Stuckart in Nuremberg in 1948, excerpts reproduced in: Pätzold and Schwarz, *Tagesordnung: Judenmord*, 156–60, doc. 56, here 159–60.
36. Stuckart’s co-authorship is also mentioned in the film. His co-authors were Staatssekretär Hans Pfundtner and Dr Bernhard Lösener, both of the Reich Ministry of the Interior; see Lösener, “Als Rassereferent,” 273–5.
37. Lenz, ed., “Die Handakten von Bernhard Lösener,” 696: ‘Das Verfahren gegen die evakuierten Juden beruht auf einer Entscheidung von höchster Stelle. Damit werden Sie sich abfinden müssen!’
38. Ibid., 698: ‘Denken Sie daran, daß an jedem deutschen Toten die Juden schuldig sind, denn nur den Juden haben wir es zu verdanken, daß wir diesen Krieg führen müssen. Das Judentum hat ihn uns aufgezwungen. Wenn wir da mit Härte zurückschlagen, so muß man die weltgeschichtliche Notwendigkeit dieser Härte einsehen und darf nicht ängstlich fragen, ob denn gerade dieser oder jener bestimmte evakuierte Jude, den sein Schicksal ereilt, persönlich davon schuldig ist.’
39. *The Trial of Adolf Eichmann*, vol. 4, 1423.
40. For Heydrich’s satisfaction see PA AA, Inland II g, Nr. 177, R 100857, cover letter from SS-Obergruppenführer Heydrich to Unterstaatssekretär Luther, 26 February 1942, fol. 165; *The Trial of Adolf Eichmann*, vol. 4, 1423; Eichmann’s “Persönliche Betrachtungen anlässlich der Überreichung der Anklageschrift am 1. März 1961” from 7 March 1961, excerpt reproduced in: Pätzold and Schwarz, *Tagesordnung: Judenmord*, 184, doc. 64.
41. In the West German television film *Die Wannseekonferenz*, Stuckart even wears his SS uniform to the conference.
42. Witte et al., eds., *Der Dienstkalender Heinrich Himmlers*, 273–4, entry for 24 November 1941: ‘Judenfrage gehören [sic] zu mir’ (274).
43. Gerlach, “Die Wannsee-Konferenz,” 108.
44. Lenz, ed., “Die Handakten von Bernhard Lösener,” 697: ‘Sie sind nicht dynamisch genug. [...] Dadurch ist uns die Führung in der Judenfrage entglitten. Hätten Sie sich nicht so verhalten, könnte vieles anders sein. Nicht, daß ich darüber besonders unglücklich wäre, denn so habe ich nun mit diesen Sachen nicht mehr viel zu tun.’

45. Berkowitz, “Misreading ‘Eichmann in Jerusalem’”; Berkowitz, “Did Eichmann Think?”
46. Cited in Wolin, “Thoughtlessness Revisited.”
47. See especially Stangneth, *Eichmann vor Jerusalem*.
48. Browning, “Perpetrator Testimony,” 6–7, here 7. Browning describes Eichmann’s claim that he was not an anti-Semite as a ‘monstrous falsehood’ (see *ibid.*, 9). On the Sassen interviews see Wojak, *Eichmanns Memoiren*, 48–66. For the dates of the interviews see *ibid.*, 24.
49. See now Kay, *The Making of an SS Killer*, esp. 122–6.
50. Flett, “The Art of Darkness.” Tucci won the 2002 award for Best Performance by an Actor in a Supporting Role in a Series, Limited Series or Motion Picture Made for Television.
51. Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution*, 407 and 540, n. 113 (citing Eichmann). A new biography of Reinhard Heydrich is now available: Gerwarth, *Hitler’s Hangman*.
52. See Rampton, “Staying In.” Branagh won the 2001 award for Outstanding Lead Actor in a Miniseries or a Movie.
53. Pfefferman, “Planning the Holocaust.”
54. PA AA, Inland II g, Nr. 177, R 100857, “Besprechungsprotokoll,” fols. 179–80.
55. See Seeger, *Gestapo-Müller*, 22 and 24.
56. *The Trial of Adolf Eichmann*, vol. 4, 1423. One peculiarity in the film is that Staatssekretär Dr Freisler (played by Owen Teale) is still in the villa when Heydrich, Müller, and Eichmann partake of their informal get-together. This is evidently because he is waiting for Müller, with whom he had shared a car during the journey to the villa. Less clear is why SS-Oberführer Dr Klopfer is also still in the villa and does not in fact leave until after Müller, Freisler, and Heydrich have departed.
57. Kay, *Exploitation, Resettlement, Mass Murder*, 16–7.
58. See, for example, BArch Berlin, R 94/9, “Niederschrift über die Sitzung des Wirtschaftsführungsstabes Ost vom 31. Juli 1941.”
59. PA AA, Inland II g, Nr. 177, R 100857, letter from Reichsmarschall Göring to SS-Gruppenführer Heydrich, [31] July 1941, fol. 190 (simultaneously Nuremberg document 710-PS, “Auftrag Görings an Heydrich vom Juli 1941 zur Vorbereitung einer Gesamtlösung der Judenfrage im deutschen Einflussgebiet in Europa,” [31] July 1941, reproduced in: International Military Tribunal, ed., *Der Prozess gegen die Hauptkriegsverbrecher*, vol. 26, 266–7): ‘[...] alle erforderlichen Vorbereitungen in organisatorischer, sachlicher und materieller Hinsicht zu treffen für eine Gesamtlösung der Judenfrage im deutschen Einflußgebiet in Europa.’
60. PA AA, Inland II g, Nr. 177, R 100857, letter from SS-Obergruppenführer Heydrich to Unterstaatssekretär Luther, 29 November 1941, fols. 188–9, here fol. 188; PA AA, Inland II g, Nr. 177, R 100857, letter from Reichsmarschall Göring to SS-Gruppenführer Heydrich, [31] July 1941, fol. 190; PA AA, Inland II g, Nr. 177, R 100857, “Besprechungsprotokoll,” fol. 167.
61. Steinweis, review of *Conspiracy*, 675.
62. Stein, “Come and See.”
63. Niemi, *Inspired by True Events*, 149.
64. Totten and Bartrott, *Dictionary of Genocide, Volume 1: A – L*, 87.

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