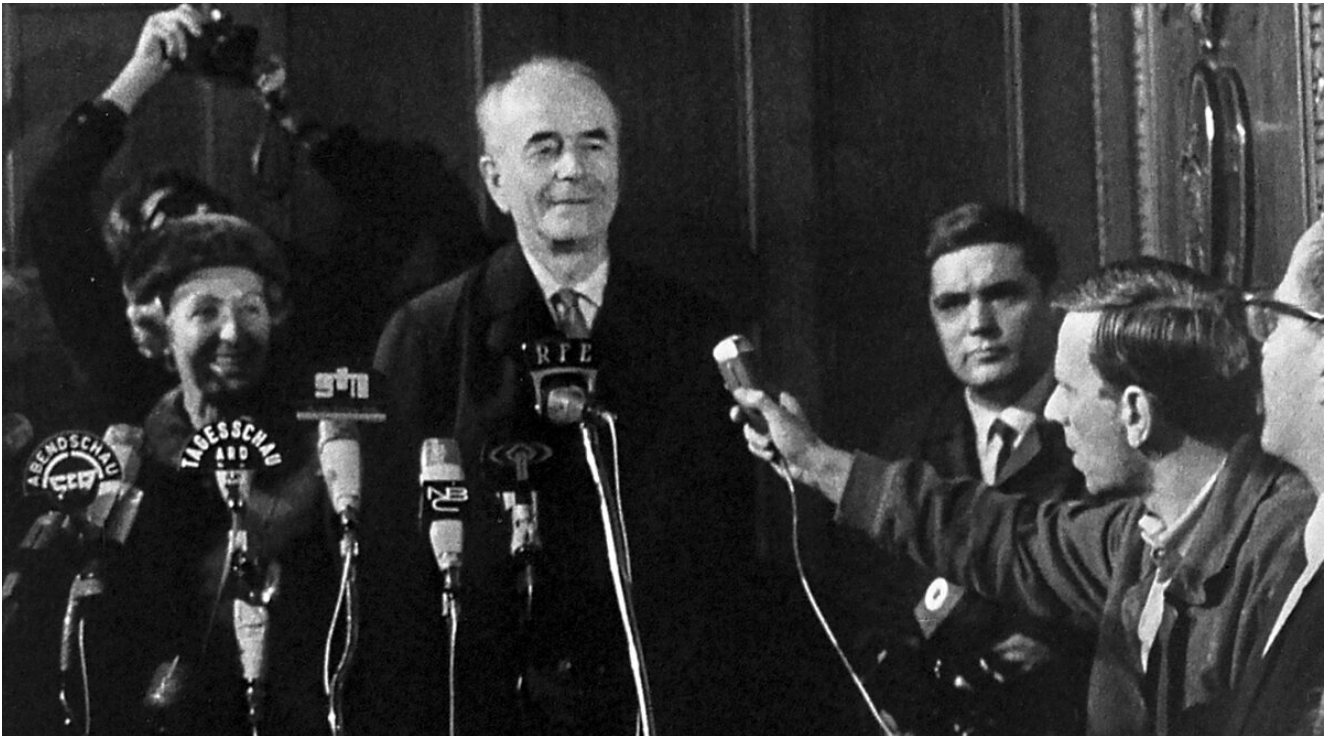


A Nazi mass murderer goes to Hollywood



Close friends accuse me of possessing an uncanny radar-like ability to find Holocaust films whenever I sit down to livestream. No matter if I'm in hot pursuit of a Broadway musical or an Israeli film—there I soon am, watching yet another version of the Churban.

I don't particularly like these films. I am not a Holocaust expert. 'Tis not a sacred subject for me. I do not worship dead Jews, I find nothing redemptive or universally redemptive about Jewish suffering.

In this case, I plead innocence. I did not come upon this film on my own. One of the film's three publicists, Sasha Berman of Shotwell, kindly sent it my way. Titled [*Speer Goes to Hollywood*](#)—it is a chilling, brilliant film about a mass murderer, a monster, an elegant, and eloquent monster.

Ted Bundy, another serial killer charmer, “only” murdered

about one hundred women; Albert Speer enabled and participated in the murder of 6 million Jews and 59 million other civilians and soldiers in [World War Two](#).

The number is simply too large to comprehend.

Speer is handsome, charming, cultured, sophisticated, multi-lingual, well-spoken—a real smoothie. AND a very smooth liar.

I thought that Nazis were hot-tempered sadists, degenerates, predators, envious and greedy riff-raff, with cold, cold hearts, maimed perhaps, by cruel, authoritarian parents, a la Alice Miller. Hitler was a Rasputin-like madman, not a son of wealth and culture as Speer was.

I've taught Abnormal Psychology and no diagnostic category can convey the level of Speer's self-regard and amorality. Sociopathic serial killer will not do. Dangerous Freak of Nature, while not a diagnostic category, is more like it.

Speer was the highest-ranking Nazi and one of Hitler's closest confidantes. Of his meeting with Hitler he says: "It was love at first sight."

And yet, Speer insists that he was "not guilty." In fact, he likened himself to Oedipus. "I did not know what crimes I have committed."

Although he had 12 million slave laborers working to turn out armaments, munitions, for the German army, he had *no* idea that, under his command, they were starving and that 35% of them died cruel deaths. Although he admits that his (slave) laborers may have been obtained illegally, he insists that he was not responsible. The laborers were sent to him. It was all "administrative business." He insists that he "cannot be held responsible for foreign laborers." He does not admit that he was overseeing "extermination through work."

Although he visited a concentration camp or two (or three), he

again had *no* idea that people, especially Jews, were being murdered there. In Speer's view, "I thought that camps were necessary (because) prison was too small to keep Hitler's opponents." Although he passed by the Kristallnacht pogrom, he himself did not really see what was happening. Actually, come to think of it, he had been in Italy at that very time.

At the Nuremberg trial, Speer tells the Prosecutor: "I knew Jews were being evacuated from Germany. But I did not do it...but you can't keep the Jews in the middle of Germany...Jews were making more money, this was known in medieval times, (they) were Polish Jews who illegally entered Germany and prospered quickly."

Upon being challenged, Speer says that "I will not allow you to drag Germany into the mud (shmutz).

In the film, he remembers only his own "anguish at his trial."

His anguish?

He was the most important Nazi to have been spared the death sentence. He served (only) twenty years.

While in Spandau Prison, Speer, aided by admiring and sympathetic jailers, secretly wrote a book *Inside the Third Reich*, which was translated into 14 languages and which sold more than one million copies in a few years, three million over time.

People, readers, are fascinated by evil. One must really wonder why.

I also wonder whether Speer would have been spared had he been tried in Israel. I think not—but this film fully indicts him. I am pleased that an Israeli filmmaker, Vanessa Lapa, and co-producer Tomer Eliav, produced and directed this work.

Speer Goes to Hollywood, has, deservedly, won prizes at film festivals in Belgrade, Berlin, Holland, Italy, Jerusalem,

Moscow, Sevastapol, and the United States. In Israel, it won "Best Documentary" at the Israeli Academy Awards in 2021.

Here's how this film was made.

After the success of his book, Speer wanted to present the villain that he was as an innocent hero. His arrogance, vanity, and self-esteem knew no bounds. He wanted to be a Hollywood star.

In 1971, a New York lawyer, Stanley Cohen, bought the film rights to the book and interested Paramount Pictures in the project. Paramount sent a young British writer, Andrew Birkin, to interview Speer. Wisely, intuitively, Birkin tape recorded forty hours worth of interviews which took place over several months. Birkin was relaxed; Speer was even more relaxed, very much at his ease. Their conversations would have been the basis for a screenplay. Paramount declined to produce it.

This unpublished audio narrative is supplemented by rare footage that filmmaker Vanessa Lapa found. It accompanies the audio soundtrack, an intimate record of Speer's self-regard and ability to charm, manipulate, and revise history.

How could he have evaded a death sentence at Nuremberg? How could he have been admired and supported? What does this tell us about human nature and its adoration of and/or ability to be fooled by the most diabolical and malicious freaks of nature?

Speer describes his work at the Krupp factory with munitions and armaments as "just good fun."

And, he tells Birkin: "I still look good after 20 years."

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