

PRESSE-DOSSIER OF 2000
(updated 2011)

Pantera Film presents

THE HIMMLER PROJECT

(DAS HIMMLER-PROJEKT)

Manfred Zapatka and Heinrich Himmler's speech
at the SS Group Leader's conference
in Poznan on October 4th, 1943

A film by Romuald Karmakar

Germany 2000, Digi-Beta, 182 minutes

World Premiere

Int'l Film Festival Berlin 2000 (Forum)

International Premiere

Int'l Film Festival Locarno 2000 (Video-Competition)

Awards

3sat Dokumentarfilm-Preis (2000)

Adolf Grimme Preis Spezial (2002)

Museum of Modern Art, New York

Selected 2008 as »one of 250 important works of art that have been acquired by
the Museum, since 1980«

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Synopsis

Heinrich Himmler's three-and-a-half-hour-long "Posen Speech" to ninety-two SS generals in the Golden Hall of Posen Castle (Poland) on the occasion of the SS Group Leader's conference on the fourth of October, 1943 is "one of the most terrifying documents of German language". On the other, it is one of the most important documents of National Socialism.

Actor Manfred Zapatka reads the entire speech, employing the authentic text which was reconstructed from the original sound recording.

The film was shot in one day, using four cameras in a studio.

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Romuald Karmakar about his film

I.

On the one hand, Heinrich Himmler's three-and-a-half-hour-long speech to ninety-two SS generals in the Golden Hall of Posen Castle (Poland) on the occasion of the SS Group Leader's conference on the fourth of October, 1943 is "one of the most terrifying documents of German language" (Joachim C. Fest). On the other, it is one of the most important Nazi documents. The 'Posen speech' is one of 133 documented and one of 75 complete transcripts or recordings of speeches that Himmler gave primarily to select audiences, that is, in secret.

From late 1942 onwards, Himmler had his speeches recorded on two grammophone machines, typed up by one of his staff - omitting the most glaring grammatical errors where necessary - and presented for correction. This was then used to produce a new, typewritten version for filing in the SS archives. In all likelihood this 'final version' was used as evidence at the Nuremberg Trials. Since 1947, it has been in the public domain as an appendix to the protocols of the International Military Tribunal and is, to the best of my knowledge, the source of the most quotes in the relevant history books.

Using a copy of one of the sound recordings, mistakes in the sentence structures have been re-inserted, omitted verbs left out, changing tempi kept, Himmler's pronunciation of names, towns and foreign words noted and the post hoc correction of words reversed. Thus he now says 'tiger' instead of 'animal' (Tier), 'Order of Lenin' instead of 'Order of Stalin', 'February' instead of 'spring' (Frühling), etc. In contrast to the official transcripts, therefore, the film not only presents Himmler's speeches in his ownwords but also includes the reactions and comments of the generals in the audience.

II.

The following can be said about the development of postwar research into the history of Nationalsocialism: The more time passes and the more we know, the greater the wealth of history at our disposal. And the more accurately, appropriately and fittingly the events can be analysed, the harder and more laborious is the digestion of them. And as our view becomes more and more precise, so the history of Nazism in general and the Holocaust in particular becomes all the more incomprehensible.

The arrival of a new generation of historians (in Germany) in the 1990's gave research into the Nationalsocialist policy of extermination a massive boost. In addition to detailed studies of the occupied areas of eastern Europe, research has focussed more closely on the perpetrators, their attitudes and behavioural patterns, and the development of the Nazi persecution and extermination policies, also towards non-German and non-Jewish peoples and minorities. Ninety to ninety-five percent of those murdered by the Nazis were not German, most of them were not killed in Germany, nor all in concentration camps.

These new developments in the historical research are to be applauded since research into anti-Semitism and the perpetrators themselves are tasks that Germany must undertake. Even so, it's important to note that historical research is developing at a rate inversely proportional to the level among the general public. So while the number of people talking about Nazism is growing, the same cannot be said of those who are grappling with the new-found knowledge and understanding.

"The challenge facing research into the history of the Holocaust lies principally in the fact that it cannot be explained in terms of simple formulae or tidy, straightforward expressions or theories. And because there is no 'Holocaust theory', no liberating, snappy solution, the desire to explain what happened can in effect only be satisfied by considering what took place." (Ulrich Herbert, Prof. of New and Newest History in Freiburg/Br.)

III.

Everyone has heard of Himmler, very few people have heard him speak for three hours. Several excerpts of this speech are well-known and frequently quoted, viz. "Remaining decent has made us tough. It is a glorious achievement that has never and will never be mentioned," "I don't give a damn how the Russians and the Czechs are doing," or "It doesn't interest me to hear that ten thousand Russian women collapsed from exhaustion while digging an anti-tank ditch, unless that anti-tank ditch is finished for Germany."

In what context were these utterances made? Why do we associate the 'Posen speech' with the extermination of the Jewish people, even though Himmler devoted only one or two minutes of his three-and-a-half hour speech to the issue? Why hasn't this speech become more ingrained in our minds as an example and constant reminder of the persecution, exploitation and extermination of the Slavic and Russian peoples, despite the fact that Himmler referred to these ethnic groups time and again?

IV.

Himmler and the attendant generals in the Golden Hall were people with behavioural patterns, an internal logic and legitimising structures. They were aware of what they were doing and they wanted to do it.

V.

In retrospect, the 'Posen speech' is one of the most important documents of National Socialism. It justifies crimes already committed. The extermination camps of 'Aktion Reinhardt' (Belzec, Sobibór, Treblinka) had already been dissolved in 1943, the Jewish uprising in the Warsaw ghetto brutally put down, the residential area completely destroyed and Russian prisoners of war left to die by the hundreds of thousands.

To Himmler, (the defeat at) "Stalingrad" was "a necessary sacrifice", "Communists and the entire criminal subclass of the German people" ought to be locked up in concentration camps, while "ten Poles should be shot dead for trivialities so that we needn't shoot tens of thousand later." Those were the words of the man who was Reichsführer-SS from 1929, the Chief of German police from 1936 and both Reichskommissar for Consolidation of the German People and Reich Interior Minister from 1943.

Himmler also used the speech to elaborate on his plans for the future SS's claim to be a ruling class for all of Europe, the guarantor of the borders of the 'Greater Germanic Empire' stretching all the way to the Urals "and eventually far beyond." He appealed to his subordinates, and afterwards the generals returned to their units, front lines, offices and ministries where they continued their work until May 1945.

Those who survived the war – and we must include some fifty generals not in attendance who were sent copies of the speech and required to confirm having received it – did not disappear into the jungles of South America. They all remained in Germany. One became the mayor of Prien on Lake Chiem, another a lawyer in Munich, another a company director in Bonn and yet another chairman of a neo-Nazi party. Most of them were members of the upper class, to which they belonged again after the Second World War. How then does the continued existence of the Nazi elite tally with and reflect upon the 'success-story' of the Federal Republic of Germany?

Romuald Karmakar, January 2000

ROMUALD KARMAKAR – BIO/FILMOGRAPHY

Born in Wiesbaden, Germany, in 1965, of French-Iranian origin. In 1994 he founded his production company Pantera Film for his first feature *DER TOTMACHER* (1995) which was awarded the „Coppa Volpi“–Prize for Best Actor (Götz George) at the Venice Film Festival. His last work *VILLALOBOS*, a documentary on Chilean DJ Ricardo Villalobos, was premiered in 2009 at the Venice Film Festival. Karmakar is member of the Berlin Academy of the Arts and lives in Berlin.

Filme

- 2009 *FRÜCHTE DES VERTRAUENS* v. Alexander Kluge (DVD-Projekt, 360')
Beitrag EIN MANN UNSERERS VERTRAUENS: RALF OTTERPOHL,
WASSERSPEZIALIST.
DVD-Release: November 2009, Suhrkamp Filmedition
- VILLALOBOS* (Video, 110', Dok.)
(WP: Venedig 2009, Orizzonti)
- DEUTSCHLAND 09* (WP: Berlinale 2009, Wettbewerb a. K.)
Beitrag RAMSES. Episodenfilm
- 2008 *24hBERLIN* (TV)
Beitrag DJ RICARDO VILLALOBOS. Gemeinschaftsprojekt
(TV-Ausstrahlung: 09/2009)
- 2006 *HAMBURGER LEKTIONEN* (Video; 134'; Dok.)
(WP: Berlinale 2006, Panorama; IP Vancouver Film Festival; 3sat-Dokumentarfilmpreis für den
Besten Deutschsprachigen Dokumentarfilm, 30. Duisburger Filmwoche 2006)
DVD-Release: 03/2009, Suhrkamp Filmedition
- 2005 *BETWEEN THE DEVIL AND THE WIDE BLUE SEA* (Video; 90'; Dok.)
(WP: Locarno Film Festival 2005, Video-Competition. „Mention Speciale“; arte-
Dokumentarfilmpreis, 29. Duisburger Filmwoche 2005)
- 2003 *LAND DER VERNICHTUNG* (Video, 140'; Dok.)
(WP: Berlinale 2004, Panorama)
- DIE NACHT SINGT IHRE LIEDER* (35mm; 95'; Spielfilm)
(WP: Berlinale 2004, Wettbewerb; Kinostart 19. Februar 2004)
- 2002 *DIE NACHT VON YOKOHAMA* (Video; 15'; Dok.)
(WP: Viennale 2003; DP: Duisburger Filmwoche 2003)
- 196 BPM* (Video; 62'; Dok.)
(WP: Berlinale 2003, Forum)
- 2000 *DAS HIMMLER-PROJEKT* (Video; 182'; Dok.)
(WP: Berlinale, Forum; IP: Locarno, Video-Wettbewerb;
3-sat Dokumentarfilm-Preis 2000; Grimme-Preis SPEZIAL 2002; aufgenommen ins Archiv des
Museum of Modern Art, New York)
- 1999 *MANILA* (35mm; 117'; Spielfilm)
(Bayerischer Filmpreis 2000, Bestes Drehbuch (zus. mit Bodo Kirchhoff);
IP: Locarno, Wettbewerb, Silberner Leopard 2000)

- 1997 *DAS FRANKFURTER KREUZ* (35mm; 60'; TV)
(WP: Berlinale, Panorama '98)
- 1995 *DER TOTMACHER* (35mm; 112'; Spielfilm)
(WP: Venedig, Wettbewerb. Bester-Darsteller-Preis für G. George;
Hess. Filmpreis; FELIX-Nominierung, jg. Film; Bayr. Filmpreis f. G. George;
'96: Bundesfilmpreis in Gold: Bester Film, Beste Regie, Bester Darsteller;
Dt. Beitrag für die Endauswahl zur Oscar-Nominierung '96)
- 1994 *INFIGHT* (Video; 47'; Dok.)
- DER TYRANN VON TURIN* (Video/S-8; 28'; Dok.)
- 1989-92 *WARHEADS* (16mm; 180'; Dok.)
(WP: Locarno; DP: Berlinale, Forum; Dt. Dok.-Beitrag f. FELIX-Nominierung)
DVD-Release: 01/2009, absolut medien
- 1991 *DEMONTAGE IX, UNTERNEHMEN STAHLGLOCKE* (16mm; 25'; Dok.)
(Preis bester dt. Kurzfilm in Oberhausen; Förderpreis der Stadt München)
- 1990 *SAM SHAW ON JOHN CASSAVETES* (Video; 25'; Dok.)
- 1989 *HUNDE AUS SAMT UND STAHL* (16mm; 57'; Dok.)
- 1988 *GALLODROME* (16mm; 12', Dok.)
- HELLMAN RIDER* (Co-Regie Ulrich von Berg; Video; 40'; Dok.)
- 1987 *COUP DE BOULE* (16mm; 8'; Dok.)
(WP: Berlinale, Panorama)
- 1985 *EINE FREUNDSCHAFT IN DEUTSCHLAND* (S-8; 70')

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»Manfred Zapatka and Heinrich Himmler's speech
at the SS Group Leader's conference in Poznan on October 4th, 1943«

A film by Romuald Karmakar

Germany 2000, Digi-Beta, 182 minutes

Shooting: November 27th, 1999 in a photostudio in Munich

Rehearsing and shooting-time: one day each

Shot with four Mini-DV cameras

World Premiere: Int. Film Festival Berlin 2000 (Forum)

International Premiere: Int. Film Festival Locarno 2000 (Video-Competition)

CREDITS

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