

# Belazikkal's Speer-ography

I've been meaning to write this for quite some time and now I finally got round to, so I hope you rather enjoy it. The source books will be listed at the bottom of this lengthy essay of sorts.

I also want to enter a disclaimer and say that I no way sympathize with the National Socialist (Nazi) credo/ideology, if you can call it that. I am in fact a fervent Anti-Nazi.

I'm saying this, because it might seem that I defend the stance of said political view in this essay, as it after all deals with one of the most powerful men in the Third Reich. I may also even state things that are deeply offensive to some people, for which I apologize in advance.

I also foreswear myself of any German spelling mistakes, as it is not a language I master. I understand it to a certain degree, but I can barely speak it.

Also, if there are any factual incorrectness in this text, please feel free to remark upon it. I will then attempt to incorporate any corrections in an updated text. Please add sources that support your correction in that case.

Comments and potential corrections should be sent to [belazikkal@yahoo.se](mailto:belazikkal@yahoo.se)

## ***It all began innocently enough...***

Albert Speer was born, the second son of three to a wealthy German architect active in the Mannheim area and his even wealthier wife, on March 19<sup>th</sup>, 1905. The family Speer lived in Mannheim until mid-World War 1, when they moved to a large house old Herr Speer owned in Heidelberg, a city a few miles south of Mannheim. Heidelberg is, as many might already know, a university city as opposed to the industrialised Mannheim. In fact, you can more or less consider the entire town of Heidelberg as campus.

Being the middle one of three brothers, Albert did not really get the attention he deserved or needed. His older brother Hermann was the favorite of his mother, and thus became very spoiled, whilst his younger brother Ernst (who as a grown man died in at the Russian front in 1942-43, but more on that later) was the apple of his father's eye. There was, in short no love, nor attention left for Albert. The whole thing was made worse by that his brothers ganged up on him and bullied him, which became so frequent that Albert developed a kind of "escape technique": fainting spells. Thus, whenever Albert was feeling sad by his parents' indifference or oppressed by his brothers he felt "firstly very hot, then very cool and then... Bang!", he fainted. These fainting spells of course unsettled his parents. They brought a physician who examined the boy and concluded he suffered from bad circulation of the blood. A modern psychologist would probably say the fainting spells were psychosomatically induced. These seemed to ease, when the family moved out of Mannheim and into Heidelberg.

During the time in Mannheim, Albert had had a few real friends. The first was the concierge's daughter and the second had been a rowdy boy by the name of Quenser, who attended the same high school as Albert. However, Quenser came from a poor family, so Albert was not allowed to take him home to play.

This whole thing with friends and acquaintances not being of the "right class" or "stock" according to his mother was something Albert would continue to be deeply resentful of his entire life. He came to loathe opulent luxury, something which would later show in how he lived his life at Berghof. He hated the stiff, starch smelling dinner parties his mother threw and almost demonstratively engaged in activities that she considered to be below someone of their social standing, most notably the canoeing, which he got so engaged in his school grades started to suffer. His mother clearly informed him of the fact that canoeing was for the worker class; the upper middle-class and above, played tennis.

This was in no way made better with that Albert at the age of seventeen, by chance, crossed pathways quite literally, with the girl that was going to be his future wife: Margarete (aka Margret and Gretel) Weber. Margret's family was in no way poor, they were not even worker class. They were known as a successful, sturdy Heidelbergian carpenters' family. The Weber family was warm and welcomed young Albert into it with open arms. So maybe it was more the family than the girl the young Albert Speer fell in love with.

Maybe it should be important to note that these two were both, in a very peculiar way, shy of each other. Margret was completely taken in by the fact that this handsome and intelligent young man had any interest in her at all and so said very little about herself, and Albert had already begun hiding his true emotions away from the world, something I will discuss further down. So, long story short, this couple simply did not have sex, not before marriage at least. Something that seems quite unbelievable to people of today's oversexed society.

After passing his *Abitur* exam with some of the highest marks in his school and being marked out as the school's best mathematician, it seemed pretty clear to young Speer that his future was in Mathematics, and more specifically statistics and probability analysis. However, his father, who had showed little interest in the boy when little (as would seem the practice in this social class at the time) said no. He wanted Albert to become an architect, like himself. After some thought, Albert relented. In his memoirs, Albert Speer remembers the day very well, but rationalises his decision to kill his life dream with something along the lines of "I would not have been a true mathematician abiding to the laws of logic if I had not agreed to my father's wish." This, seemingly innocuous, decision would, together with one made barely seven years later, shape his entire life.

## **Enter, stage right: NSDAP**

Throughout his entire life, Albert Speer would claim to have been totally uninterested in politics. Even his joining the Nazi party (I will get to that) was apparently made on apolitical grounds, again something that seems very wrong in the ears of modern people. Today, everything in society is more or less satiated in politics (if not that, then it is sex). We can only imagine that it must have been the same in 1920s Germany, and Germany on the brink, and some would say beyond the brink, of economical and social collapse.

Could it have been so, that young Speer was so into his architectural studies that he just plain missed what was going on? I doubt that, as he was reportedly a fairly lazy student. He spent his first semester at Karlsruhe University, on economical grounds (Karlsruhe is in the same "Bundesstaat" as Heidelberg: Baden) but later moved to Munich Technological High School. Speer was glad to be out of Karlsruhe, but he did not stay long in Munich either, only two semesters after which he moved to Berlin Technische Hochschule. The reasons for these moves were many, but the main reason behind the move from Karlsruhe had been that there was no one there to help Speer with his one major drawback as an architectural student: he could not draw very well. In the beginning he solved this by letting poorer students do his sketches for him in exchange for money, but when he moved to Munich, he finally started to learn how to draw properly.

It should also be noted that it was at this point, as a student, that Speer's resent and dismissal of his parents', in particular his mother's, flamboyant lifestyle came to its full, although we would consider it mild. Speer would attend class uncombed, sometimes unshaven, hair long from neglect, shirt unpressed and of an indiscernible colour, necktie, if present at all, badly tied and trousers with horizontal instead of vertical pressmarks. It is hard to imagine a man who would later become known not only for his fantastic sense of organisation and self-control but also for his impeccable sense of dress as so uninterested in his own appearance.

That being said, Traudl Junge, one of Hitler's secretaries, remarked in her memoirs (Until the Final Hour) that Speer always appeared a bit long haired at Berghof and that his wife had to tell him to get a haircut, as he apparently did not keep track of that himself. Or maybe he just did not care.

Something that could have added to this increase in animosity, of sorts, towards his parents, was that he had, in 1925, engaged himself with Margret and they planned on marrying as soon as Speer passed his architect's exam. Speer's mother refused to accept Margret or even invite her round to the Speer family house, on the grounds of that she was not of the "right stock", something that must have irked Albert incessantly.

Speer passed his exam in 1928, in Berlin, and a few months later, he married Margret. It would be another seven years before she was invited into the Speer residence in Heidelberg. Their honeymoon was spent camping outside of Berlin, as the economy was still suffering. Speer was later lucky to get a job as his Professor's, Heinrich Tessenow, assistant. This in a time when unemployment was sky high and the Wall Street crash in the USA was just around the corner.

Now, those who have a certain knowledge about European history, and German in particular, know that it was about this time that the NSDAP (*National Sozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter Partei, aka the Nazis*) started to get serious again. Hitler was out of his imprisonment in Landsberg prison and was hard at work on his plans together with his old *Parteigenossen*. With the help of the NSDAP section leader of Berlin, Joseph Goebbels, Hitler started off with making his propaganda aimed, not only at the worker class, but at the entire German people as a whole. The stage is set up for Hitler to make an appearance in Speer's quiet life as a professor's assistant at the Berlin THS.

The appearance comes in December 1930. Speer, largely uninterested in the comings and goings of the world outside the University, is persuaded to come along to a student meeting arranged by the NSDAP on which Hitler will hold a speech. Young Speer has of course heard of this Hitler person and is not impressed. Speer has seen the posters, he is not blind; he actually finds this peculiar little man as an amusing but ruckus causing Philistine. But, he decides to humour his students.

However, at the meeting, the Hitler Speer is confronted with is far from the brown-shirted street fighter with the strident, rabble rising voice. What he meets is a muted Hitler, who speaks softly and is dressed in a dark blue suit of Italian cut. Whatever Hitler said at that gathering must have struck a chord within the young Albert Speer, who takes a long walk in the forest outside of Berlin afterwards but he does not join the party, not yet. So, the same students drag their teacher along to another mass meeting, where Goebbels were to be the speaker. Speer is less than impressed by Goebbels, but afterwards, when walking to his car through the street, he sees how peaceful meeting participants are suddenly attacked and beaten down brutally by the police.

His mind is set. The next day, the 1<sup>st</sup> March, 1931, Speer joins the NSDAP as member 474 481.

## **Discovery and Rise to Power**

At first, Speer performed rather menial tasks for the NSDAP. Due to his driver's license, and the fact that he owned a car, he became part of the NSKK (The motorised carpool of the NSDAP, which would later become part of the Transportkorps Speer, ironically). It is during one of his early missions as chauffeur for a NSDAP car column, that he is confronted in close to a more repellent side of Hitler, but Speer shrugs the feeling of unease off, something he would learn to do many times in the future.

It is actually by chance that he is discovered and put to use in the Nazi-party for his actual profession. Through a fairly complicated series of occurrences, Speer finds himself in charge of refurbishing Goebbels'

office in the autumn 1932 and later the Propaganda Ministry, both in Berlin. Speer does it, not only to Goebbels' liking, but also on time. Karl Hanke, the man who "discovered" the young architect but also a friend of Speer, is now a subordinate of Goebbels. He suggests that Speer should have a go at the design for the upcoming *Parteitag* in Nuremberg. So Speer has a go at it. After having seen what another architect had in store for it, Speer knows exactly what to do to outshine his rival.

A few weeks later, Speer is walking up the steps to the NSDAP headquarters in Munich. Under his arm he is carrying his simple yet striking, and slightly megalomaniac, plan. He shows it to Hitler's deputy, Rudolf Hess, who simply concludes that the decision for the decorations of the *Parteitag* is beyond his jurisdiction and sends Speer into Hitler's office after a quick phone call.

When Speer walks into Hitler's office, he sees the party leader sitting at his desk, cleaning a gun out. Speer is overawed at the fact that this man even wants to glance at his plans, that he barely manages a "Guten tag". Speer walks up to the desk, more than a bit unsettled by the pistol, and when Hitler has cleared his desk enough, rolls the plans out. Hitler looks at them briefly, knowingly and simply nods and says "I like this. Go with it." He then rolls the plans up, hands them back to Speer and continues in cleaning his gun. Speer's first ever audience with Hitler is over.

The *Parteitage* are considered the best so far in Nazi history, a lot owing to the design, but the architect is just interviewed briefly on the radio, sounding quite nervous about it all.

This might all have petered out into nothing, if the Nazis had not come to power in 1933. As the HQ of the Nazis move from Munich to Berlin, Speer is once again consulted, this time to rebuild the old Reichkanzlei. It is at this time, that Hitler for the first time himself actively seeks out Speer. Interested in architecture as the newly made Führer is, he finds a particular interest in the young, handsome man, that he for some strange reason recognises. Hitler walks up to the young man and invites him to lunch. At the lunch, which is also attended by Göring and Goebbels, Hitler has it made clear to him who the young architect was that handed him the plans for the 1933 *Parteitag*. Speer would later describe his feelings during this lunch as being "dizzy with excitement". And perhaps it was mutual for Hitler, for this would be the start of a very peculiar friendship between the two.

## **Germania Megalomania**

I am going to make a little time skip here, as I feel that both the new Reichschancellery and Speer's so called Light Dome/Cathedral of Light have been dissected and discussed *in absurdum*. The same goes for the mastodon project that Speer himself called "*Welthauptstadt Germania*", a title of debatable veracity in the sense that it was not mentioned until Speer published his autobiography *Inside the Third Reich*. Quite a lot of literature is available on the architectural creations of Albert Speer and they are supplied with photos of both buildings and models that help understanding the sheer scale of it all. Matter of fact, there are actually a few videos of computer animations of what Germania could have looked like available for view over at YouTube.

However, what is interesting under these circumstances is that Speer, to be able to carry out the re-shaping of Berlin into Germania, was elected Generalbauinspektor (GBI) over Berlin, by Hitler in early 1937. By this election, he got a very prominent position indeed. At the tender age of 32. What is even more pertinent to the purpose of this little essay is that the elevation to GBI, in my eyes, started Speer's descent into the abyss that is loss of morals and ethics and he began to get entwined with the Nazi crimes against humanity in general and against the Jews in particular.

Germania was, in every possible respect of the word, megalomaniac. It meant a major rebuilding of the entire city core of Berlin, which even back then had millions of inhabitants. So of course, houses and apartments would have to be torn down to make room for the new buildings that made up Germania. The people who lived in these buildings were promised new homes by the GBI, which in this context refers not only to Speer himself, but to the whole organisation which he now ran. Now, a modern day human might immediately think that the best way to supply these people with new homes is to build new ones in the outskirts of Berlin, like our modern suburbs. Logic holds that they should have done so too back in 1930s Berlin, but they did not. Instead of even voicing this suggestion, as if it never occurred to them (and with *them*, I hold Speer as responsible for the final decision in this matter, as well as Hitler and Fritz Todt), it was suggested that all "Aryan" families that were going to lose their homes were to be supplied with new ones, taken from Jews in other parts of Berlin.

A lot of Aryan homes were affected by the rebuilding, so a lot of apartments were needed to fill the demand. The GBI officials started out searching through archives to weed out every single Jewish apartment they could find in the list. The list of Jewish families that were in possession of apartments that could be used by Aryans instead is available on waferthin paper. It is as thick as a Bible, if not even more so. After completing this list with usual German efficiency, the officials set out on what I refer to as the Scouring. Thousands of Jewish families were ousted from their homes and "relocated". To a modern day human, it is easy to understand what this meant, as we sit with all the answers. But imagine what a Berliner might have thought when asking what would happen to his Jewish neighbours and was given that answer? Maybe they would have had an inkling of a feeling of that something bad was brewing, but nothing solid. It does not sound totally preposterous, does it?

What does sound preposterous is Speer's claim that he had no idea of the fate of the Jews that his GBI had just ousted from their homes to build his Germania. True, he admitted that he knew the Jews were being treated badly in Nazi-Germany, but not to what extent. This strange ability, to only see what he could cope with, no doubt cultivated earlier on in his career, could be what spawned a rather peculiar paragraph in his

autobiography. In this he describes how he was driving to work one day, when he passed Berlin Central Station (BCS). This was after his appointment to the GBI and the start of the construction of Germania. For some reason, he got a very awkward feeling when he passed BCS. There was something about the amount of people that unsettled him. But as was his skill, he shook the feeling off and concentrated on the work at hand.

Now, there is something very wrong with this picture. BCS is the most major railway station in Berlin. In the late 1930s, it should be packed with people, reasonably speaking. Especially in the morning, when commuters are coming in. Now, if Speer truly had known nothing of the fate that awaited the Jews, he would not have felt awkward when passing the station, even less so because it was packed with people, unless he knew who they were and where they were going.

So, despite this minor hiccup, Speer's life as GBI continued fairly uninterrupted. Even when the war broke out 1<sup>st</sup> September 1939, his role was only slightly changed to incorporate his war time duties, still as GBI and head of what should and should not be built in Germany (final say was, of course, with Hitler). His most notable public appearance was no doubt on the photos taken of Hitler when he made his lightning visit to Paris in early morning. Speer can be seen walking by the Führer's side in most of the shots, showing how highly Hitler valued his architect. Just how highly Hitler thought of him would become evident two years later, in the middle of the war.

## ***Herr Reichsminister Speer***

In the early morning of February 8<sup>th</sup>, 1942, Professor Fritz Todt was to fly from Rastenburg, Hitler's East front Wolf's Den (Wolfschanze), back to Germany. Todt was Hitler's minister of armaments and also the "inventor" of the Autobahn. To add to it all, he was a dedicated and respected National Socialist. However, he had a tendency to speak his mind, even when the opinion he voiced did not tune well with Hitler's. It had been decided earlier that Speer, who was on his way back to Berlin after a visit to Dnepropetrovsk in Ukraine, was to fly together with Todt. This had to be called off when Hitler had asked if Speer could show some of his latest plans for Germania and this meeting had lasted into the small hours, as was almost custom when Hitler was concerned.

Todt flew without Speer that morning. It would be the last thing Fritz Todt ever did. Shortly after take off, the aircraft exploded, spreading both Todt and his pilot over the Russian snow-covered plains together with the aircraft debris.

Even to this day, no one knows for certain what really happened that day. Conspiracy theories abound, as it was no secret Todt was in ill favour with Hitler and the fact that Goering was strangely quick to telephone Hitler about being able to succeed Todt (the plane after all belonged to the Luftwaffe, of which Goering was the, theoretical, head). Also, some more wicked tongues say that Speer was himself a very ambitious man who was more than willing to walk over corpses to achieve his goals. However, as Todt's death in itself is a subject worth of essay length study, I shall not go into it here. The results of his death were clear enough. The morning after, Hitler summoned Speer to himself and told the by now 36-years-old architect to succeed Todt. Not only work as replacement, but as Todt's successor. Professor (in Architecture) Albert Speer had suddenly, in a few seconds, become Reichminister Albert Speer, an astounding responsibility and chance to prove himself.

Speer had earlier on, during his architectural assignments proven his ability of organisation and getting things done on time. Perhaps this is what lay behind Hitler's words "Besides, I know of no one else." when Speer asked why he was elected Todt's successor. So Speer set about doing what he did best, organising things. He more or less reorganised the entirety of the German industrial machine to mobilize it properly and make it even more effective. It is worth noting, that before Speer assumed his role as minister, that is during Todt's "reign", the German industry was still producing large amounts of peace time luxury wares. A lot of peace time construction work was also taking place. All this ceased when Speer assumed the mantle. Just how efficient he was can be seen in statistics from this time in just how many tonnes of shells and tanks that were produced. Considering tanks, there was a trebling of the numbers between 1942 and 1944. When Nazi-Germany was on the retreat and being bombed asunder by both RAF, USAF and Red Army Air Force!

Yet, one begs the question, how was this miraculous increase achieved? True, Speer mobilized every single worker he could in Germany, but as the war trudged on, many of them were called into military service and the Wehrmacht was getting irked by the new minister's complaints about them snatching his workers. They told Speer to find workers elsewhere, they were only trying to put the weapons he produced into the hands of soldier so they could be used.

At first Speer threw a glance at the Brits and the Americans and saw that they were using women in the industry, when the men went to war. There were in other words millions of workers just waiting to be of service to the German industrial machine, so Speer started to employ women in the heavy industry of making tanks and guns. He immediately ran into trouble in the shape of the party ideologists, amongst other Bormann and Ley, who said that it was inconsistent with Nazi ideology to employ women in the war industry. Their role was to give birth to healthy new German soldiers. Speer argued that there were more pressing matters at hand than the role of women in the Third Reich according to peace time ideologies. Eventually, the whole business ended up on Hitler's desk. Much to Speer's surprise, Hitler sided with Bormann and told Speer off for even suggesting to use German womanhood as a potential source of labour. Hitler told Speer to consult Gauleiter Fritz Sauckel to supply him with foreign workers to fill his ranks. At a pinch, even Himmler would probably help him out.

This is, in my opinion, when Speer's inclusion in the Nazi war crimes was complete. But there was even

more and darker days to come, as Himmler was quite busy himself, with what we today know as the Holocaust, and had been, for quite some time. This is also when things start to get, shall we say, a fair bit complicated in the "Speer case-files".

## ***There are slaves and there are slaves***

In short, Sauckel was more than happy to oblige. He was, like most Gauleiters, positively starving for attention from Hitler and if this attention could be achieved by supplying foreign workers to Hitler's favorite architect now made minister, that would have to do.

Speer willingly accepted these extra workers. Anything to fill his ranks that were depleted by the enrollment of German men into the Wehrmacht. Later on in life, and at the Nuremberg trials (more on that later) Speer would claim that he was under the belief, or delusion, that these foreign workers for the most part came to Germany willingly and not by force. As shall be seen, it was far from the case that most workers came willingly, at least in the latter stages of the war.

It has, however, been proven beyond doubt that Speer used forced labour. What is altogether more interesting is what Himmler was up to and just how much Speer knew of this. This is also when hard historical facts start to leave us and more is left to speculation based on one's personal opinion of Nazis in general and Speer in particular.

One of the few people who knew Speer well, liked him as a person but yet remained fairly objective about him (how objective one now can get considering Nazis) was, and is, Gitta Sereny. She interviewed Speer many times, for weeks on end, during the last years of his life. She also spent years researching and interviewing old associates after his death. She adopted a psychologist's approach when trying to dissect this very complex man. Her conclusion was that Speer was an arrogant and authoritarian intrigue maker, who tried to fight his own nature. He was charming, yet could not love people in any complete sense of the word. Yet for all this he had a strong sense of morals and ethics. Which for some reason did not function during his years in Hitler's "thrall". According to Sereny, the return of Speer's conscience began in November 1943, during the Posen conference.

Anyone with at least some interest in World War 2-history and the Third Reich or with some knowledge of the Holocaust now the importance of the date October 6<sup>th</sup>, 1943. It was at this conference that Himmler revealed to all the Gauleiters and other Nazi leaders present just what he and his SS had been up to on the Eastern Front and in some very "special" camps. You could say that Himmler took everybody present aboard the Holocaust-train, as a fail-safe that none of them would claim ignorance of this, if it all came to the worst. Now, what has all this to do with Speer? See, this is when it begins to get real complicated where this man is concerned. It is known from the protocols that Speer was present and even held a speech on the morning of the Posen conference. This is also the picture given in *Inside the Third Reich*. After mentioning his speech, in which Speer more or less threatens the Gauleiters with concentration camp imprisonment if they do not conform to his demands and shut down production and consumption of luxury goods in their districts, Speer only relates of what happened in the evening, when many of the Gauleiters got themselves blind drunk and Speer decided to have a little chat with Hitler on the overconsumption of alcohol amongst his subordinates.

If you then consider the contents of Himmler's Posen speech, held after lunch, you could probably figure out why the Gauleiters drank so unstintingly.

When Speer later found out about the little gap in his book, he immediately set out to claim, and prove, that he was not present at Posen in the afternoon. That he had left right after his own speech to have a lightning meeting with Hitler. To me it matters little; the fact that he missed out Himmler's speech, unforgettable as its contents are, is damnable enough. Trouble is, you do not know what to make of that glaring gap. Did Speer miss it out on purpose, not daring to go there? Or did he really not remember it, meaning that he had not been there? The reaction Gitta Sereny observed in Speer when this part of his life came up for discussion, seemed to indicate Speer could not possibly remember what he had been doing at all at the time, as if his memory of all events that afternoon had been erased. Which seems a very peculiar thing to happen. Speer was in no way an absentminded man, even under stress. If anything, he had a close to perfect photographic memory, which is well illustrated by his own books in which he gives very detailed and exact descriptions of his surroundings, people and events. *Inside the Third Reich* is perhaps the best example, but *Secret Diaries of Spandau* has some really interesting "reminiscent" parts as well. In this example I have taken into account the fact that Speer wrote down what he remembered on whatever paper he got his hands on during the Spandau incarceration and later used this material in edited form as the basis of his to autobiographical works.

Problem remains, there are no hard historical facts that connect Speer with being present at Posen during Himmler's afternoon speech, even if Himmler mentions Speer in his speech, it is still not hard proof of someone being present. I actually have a hard time believing Sereny's claim that Speer subconsciously wiped the Posen conference from his memory, as he showed such amazing ability to remember things otherwise, almost like a so-called "idiot savant". It does not hold up to me, that something such as a speech can be so traumatic that you wipe a set number of hours from your memory. Furthermore, memory pockets are often more than one. Concerning Speer, there are no more instances when he simply claimed to be "unable to remember them happening". A further reason I find it hard to believe is because I myself suffer from memory pockets. I got these during my time in High School. But they are random pockets in an otherwise perfectly fine memory. And I remember most of my High School time as being fairly unpleasant altogether. True, maybe not as traumatic as

being involved in the Holocaust, but the principle remains the same. Memory pockets induced from psychic trauma are either random or they occur under longer periods of time, not just an afternoon.

However, Speer being present at Posen or not is of no major issue when considering his position. He was bound to have found out sooner or later, if not second hand, maybe third or fourth. So, let us assume that Speer, in some way, has begun to find out bits of what is going on in the East, and his ever active mind is putting two and two together so fast that he no longer can shut his eyes and ears to it like in the past. How to stop his mind from awaking his conscience? By numbing it with hard work.

By numbing his mind with work and thus pushing his body to the limits of what is physically possible, Speer thought he could effectively put off ever having to confront his conscience and conclude that the man he served and adored, Adolf Hitler, was insane and the closest thing humanity has ever come to the concept of total evil. However, this strategy only worked if Speer was not personally confronted with what was going on in his own, and Hitler's, name.

Later in 1943, Speer was called to an inspection of a newly constructed underground factory for the V1s and V2s in the Harz mountains, called Dora-Mittelbau. Dora had been constructed with the help of slave labour, supplied to the Organisation Todt, of which Speer was leader, courtesy of Himmler's SS labour and concentration camps. More than 60,000 slave labourers were used in the construction of Dora. Roundabout half of them died. It goes without saying that they worked under appalling conditions, for little to no sustenance and many were flogged to death for not working hard enough.

It was here that Speer was first hand confronted with what his, and others', draconian orders had led to. In my opinion, it is at Dora that Speer's conscience broke free and no longer would be denied. Characteristic of him, Speer fled again, this time physically. He spent the Christmas of 1943 in Finnish Lapland. Yet his conscience did not give in that easily. To use metaphysical terms, you could say that his conscience joined forces with his body and what little was left of his soul. Metaphysics or not, there is no denying that sleeping "rough" in the Laponian cold activated an old knee wound, which in no way was made better by Speer's intense schedule and his rock-bottom mood.

In early 1944, Speer more or less collapsed from physical and mental exhaustion. He was not even 39 years old, but he was one of the world's most powerful men, with very powerful rivals and he was very ill.

### ***"It's only nerves, I tell you!"***

I have already written about Speer's medical difficulties as a child, when he would faint under stress or when he was picked on by his brothers. Then it was diagnosed as a "weakness of the vascular nerves", but today we would rather call it a blatant psychosomatic response to emotional stress. These troubles went away for a while, when Speer studied at University and when he worked as Tessenow's assistant. However, they came back after Speer had been appointed Hitler's chief architect after the death of Professor Paul Ludwig Troost. Speer himself described it as a kind of panic attack, possibly claustrophobia, because the attacks often came when he was on a train or in a tunnel. It might sound strange, but it is most likely that it was Hitler's praise of Speer, calling him an architectural genius and one of the greatest architects to ever have lived, that triggered Speer's panic attacks. Because Speer knew, in his heart of hearts, that he was no genius. His fear of being rumbled, exposed and consequently left by his powerful patron was manifested as panic attacks, attacks that got so frequent they worried Speer's wife Margret and his co-workers at Baustab Speer. Speer himself lived in perpetual fear of them, in addition to the stress that induced the attacks in the first place. The attacks "mysteriously" ceased when Speer spent less time with architectural tasks and more with organisational.

The reason for this background is that it was, as stated above, probably a psychosomatic cause behind Speer's collapse in early 1944 that was induced by an old knee wound.

Speer is taken to the SS hospital Hohenlychen outside Berlin. There he is put under the care of SS doctor Gebhardt. Gebhardt fixes Speer's knee in plaster and orders Speer to lie still for a few weeks. Speer, however, cannot rest. He sets up a sort of "portable office" in his hospital room and proxy-controls his ministerium from there. There are many reasons that Speer does not want to let go of his work. One of them is, to use his own words, "that the vultures were gathering". The second was of course that as soon as he stopped working, he started to think of what he had seen at Dora. Yet still, despite Speer's best efforts, his mind was obviously working with this information nonetheless, albeit to a lesser degree than it would have been if he had not occupied himself with work.

After two weeks Speer's leg was released from its plastercast prison and he was allowed to stand without support. Just a few hours after standing up, Speer felt a violent pain in his back and chest and spat blood. Doctor Gebhardt said it was symptoms of muscular rheumatism and got Speer back to bed. Yet anyone with a little bit of medicinal knowledge would recognise this as typical symptoms of a pulmonary embolism.

Two days later, Gebhardt got Speer back up on his legs and as could be expected, Speer had a second attack, yet Gebhardt maintained that it was muscular rheumatism. This time around however, Speer nearly dies and his wife, naturally very concerned over her husband's rapidly deteriorating state, got into contact with Dr. Brandt, who in his turn got into contact with a Dr. Koch, who was one of Germany's leading physicians at the time. Koch got a room next to Speer's and watched over the, by now, very ill Armaments Minister. Speer's condition got so critical at a point, that Koch took Margret Speer off to one side and said that she should be prepared for the worst, as he could not promise anything even remotely hopeful.

Yet, just as sudden as Speer's first attack had been, just as suddenly he got better and returned to the

world of the "living". Later in life, Speer would maintain that he died that evening, in a hospital bed in a SS hospital in Hohenlychen, and returned to life. He was also firmly convinced that Gebhardt mistreated him purposefully, with lethal intentions in mind. Now, why would anyone in the Third Reich want to kill the man who almost single-handedly kept the war machine fed with ammunition and armour?

The answer to that question is strangely enough that there were quite a few who wanted to see Speer dead. Speer was, quite contrary to what one might think, not so very popular with the other "Top Nazis", least of all with Martin Bormann and Heinrich Himmler, Reichsführer SS. With Bormann, who had become Hitler's deputy after Rudolf Hess flew to England in 1940, Speer had had trouble from the start. The two were each other's opposites, not only in personalities but also in manners and ways of living, not to mention their respective social class.

Himmler had begun being a problem for Speer the moment Speer became Armaments Minister. As an architect, Speer was in no way a rival of Himmler for power, albeit being one of Hitler's favorite associates. But as a minister, and a popular and efficient one at that, not to mention independent as well, Speer became a serious trouble for Himmler, who had his sights set on ambitions that Speer could barely fathom later in life, and certainly not at the time.

These are just the two most powerful of Speer's rivals at the time. Himmler and Bormann were the two who were prepared to stoop to murder to get Speer out of the way, but there were many others that certainly gloated at his illness and that Speer might have to resign as a consequence. Their hopes must have been increased considerably when Hitler himself came and visited Hohenlychen several weeks after Speer's most critical phase of illness.

Speer had, as noted before, certain psychosomatic troubles, related to emotional stress, and you could certainly say he had been under emotional stress the last few months. However, being away from the literal "centre of power", Hitler, for so long, had had a curious effect on Speer. He started to see Hitler in what can only be called a more objective light. This manifested itself as a physical revulsion over Hitler's features. Speer silently concluded, when he saw the Führer for the first time for months, that the man he served was indeed quite ugly to look at. Why on Earth had he not noticed that before? The moment was over as soon as it had begun and the two "found" each other again, the informal meeting ending with Speer more or less assuring Hitler of his loyalty once more. Yet Hitler must have noticed the brief moment of doubt in Speer, because he remarked, after leaving Speer's room, "*Speer wird nicht mehr.*" This is a tricky phrase to translate, as it is pretty ambiguous even in German. However, Speer's rivals seemed to translate it as if Speer was out of the game for more or less good; that his health would not recover even under good conditions. Though it is more likely that Hitler referred to Speer's flutter of doubt and translated it as that he could not count on Speer's total support from here on. For being Hitler, that was strangely insightful, because Speer's relationship with Hitler was from this point on changed forever.

Yet outside the war rolled on, worse than ever.

## **Operation: Valkurie**

Speer's doubt in his "leader" was in no way lessened when the Invasion of Normandy, Operation: Overlord, was executed June 6<sup>th</sup> 1944. The German defensive in France was more or less only kept together by Field Marshal Erwin Rommel. Yet Rommel, along with many other military, that is Wehrmacht, leaders were by now seriously disillusioned of Hitler's alleged ability as a military commander and some were even calling Hitler the derogatory "the Bohemian Corporal" when they were certain no Gestapo was listening, of course.

Amongst these disillusioned officers was a young colonel named Claus Schenk von Stauffenberg. Stauffenberg had once been an avid Hitler supporter, much like Speer, but his service on the eastern front and later in the Africa Corps, where Stauffenberg lost his left eye, his right hand and two fingers on his left, had left his ideals shattered. Speer admitted in his autobiography that he met Stauffenberg, after the colonel "returned" from his Africa service, and that he warmed to the man for many reasons. Speer said it was because the man retained his boyish charm and enthusiasm despite his war wounds, but it could as well have been that Stauffenberg reminded Speer in some peculiar manner of his, presumably, dead younger brother. Speer was not blind to Stauffenberg's mounting dislike of the Wehrmacht General Staff, and most of all Hitler, but he still thought the man as loyal to the Reich. It was therefore a great surprise for Speer to hear that Stauffenberg had been the one responsible for placing the bomb in Hitler's *Wolfsschanze* on July 20<sup>th</sup>, 1944. It was an even greater surprise, not to say shock, for Speer to find his name on the list for the new government that the "rebellious" officers wanted to set up.

When Operation: Valkyrie was set in motion, Speer was in Berlin. He was at Goebbels "palace" when the government list appeared as well. However, before that, he had heard, through Goebbels, that the most likely suspects originally had been workers for Organisation Todt, of which Speer was head. "Just what I needed," was Speer's immediate thought. But he decided to stay with Goebbels. Where should he go? And when the "government list" was later passed around, Speer is recorded to have laughed heartily at the sight of his own name on the list, according to Goebbels diaries.

Yet Speer's name on the list, on the position as Armaments Minister, was compromising for him. Speer had still not regained his original favour with Hitler and this was in no way going to help his cause. When Speer a few days later went to Obersalzberg, people's attitude towards him on Berghof had visibly changed. Some even left the room when he came in and Schaub, Hitler's civilian adjutant, is reported to have hissed under his

breath as he left, "well, now we know who was behind the assassination attempt." Despite this open hostility in this most inner of inner circles of Hitler's, Speer's head remained firmly where it was. Perchance because even the most die-hard Nazi-ideologist had to conclude he was indispensable for the war effort (possible excuses Bormann and Himmler, but they had already tried and failed) or maybe it was the small question mark next to his name on the "government list", marked in pencil, as if to suggest "if possible", that saved Speer's neck this time. Who knows? We will most likely never know the truth.

But Speer's clashes with his rivals were not over yet; far from. He was actually fast coming up to face his own personal Nemesis: Adolf Hitler himself.

## **Führerdämmerung**

As the war rolled on, Speer did his best to supply the Wehrmacht, the Luftwaffe and the, by now, superfluous Kriegsmarine with weapons and armaments, despite increasing Allied bombings, now led by the singularly efficient and determined "Bomber" Harris. Speer claimed later that he knew the war was definitely lost as early as the winter 1942/43, yet he kept on going, increasing the production of the German factories a good deal into 1944, when the Allied invasion put an abrupt end to any potential increase when they had gained a foothold on the European continent.

Be it as it may with when Speer knew the war was lost for Germany's part. He still kept doing his job, and doing it damn well. So well, some historians claim he prolonged the war with two whole years. But any active opposition on Speer's behalf was not obvious until the autumn 1944. It was in the autumn of '44 that Speer got the first of two orders of the "scorched earth" from Hitler. The meaning of these orders were that all buildings and constructions relating to infrastructure were to be torn down or blown up. The first order concerned the "colonies", such as France, Poland and Czechoslovakia. Speer was appalled at the nihilism of this order and did his best to prevent the destruction of railroads and bridges as the German army retreated, at least on the Western Front. Yet still, the destruction was great and the Allied bombing raids did not help the least. As the Allied bombing raids increased in intensity, Speer's reports of production to Hitler changed in tone from optimism to despair, claiming that the war was more or less over for the Germans by late 1944 if nothing was done about the bombing raids. Hitler dismissed Speer's pessimism, which was nigh on defeatism, in favour for his rival Otto Saur's fantastic production figures, which were based on predictions and goals and not the actual results.

With the start of the Ardenne offensive, more commonly known as the Battle of the Bulge, Speer's doubts were for a brief period brushed away, but as the operation ground to a halt because of lack of gasoline, just as predicted by Speer himself, his doubts returned and so did his will to oppose his master.

In March 1945, on Speer's 40<sup>th</sup> birthday, Speer received an order from Hitler which marked the definitive breaking point of loyalty between the two. It was the second order of scorched earth policy, this time applying to the entire of Germany and anything that could be of worth for the invading armies, Russian or Western Allied. Speer openly, although not to Hitler's face of course, refused to obey this order. It went fly in the face of his own values and most of all was, in Speer's eyes, a grave betrayal of the trust the German people had placed in its Führer. Speer no longer considered Germany and Hitler unbreakably entwined with each other. To Speer, it was now, more than ever, clear that one could survive without the other, and it would most certainly not be Germany that would have to go under. There were of course zealous Gauleiters who tried to follow through with these plans of destruction, but Speer had the "keys to the munitions cabinet", as he put it himself, and he was not going to open it to anyone but the army.

Nazi Germany was falling apart, but instead of giving in, it continued to fight like a wounded tiger. Throughout all this, Speer did his best to make sure that as much of German industrial capacity was spared for after the war. It would be nice to say his motives for this were purely moral, but I doubt they were. There was always a pragmatic side of Speer, always a practical reason behind his actions and compromises. In this case, it is most likely he wanted to spare Germany for later as he still had a lot of life in front of himself; he was only 40 years old and had a dream of returning to his true profession, architecture, when the war was over. This would not be if Germany was utterly destroyed. Even with a lot to build, which would be heaven for an architect, there are still many other components in house and factory construction that have to be present. The Scorched Earth order would have reduced Germany to a pre-industrial state. In this, there would be no career for someone such as Speer.

Speer's actions during the last few weeks of the Third Reich are captured well enough in the German movie *Der Untergang* (The Downfall), which I recommend seeing. His actions during these last weeks are also recorded elsewhere, and just as his architecture has been discussed *ad nauseam*, the same can be said about his actions the last few weeks. It is worth noting that he did one last favour to his hometown Heidelberg before going to Berlin. The American army was fast approaching and Speer convinced the chief officer of Heidelberg to declare the city "open", as a hospital city, which would give up without a shot fired. He also took himself time to visit his parents; this turned out to be the last time he ever saw them alive.

Speer was part of Admiral Doenitz' post-war Nazi government, but as this was in practice defunct, he spent most of his time up in Flensburg, where the Doenitz Cabinet was housed, wondering when he would be able to return to his profession as architect. It was therefore a great surprise to him when he was more or less hauled out of his bath and arrested by the British Army, accused for war-crimes and crimes against humanity.

In September 1945, Speer returned to Nuremberg, the city where he had his early successes, but now as a

prisoner and one accused of crimes that humankind had not known until then.

## ***Collective Responsibility***

In Nuremberg, during the trials, it became clear very soon, that this was meant to be the swansong of Nazism. Goering, who had been put on a diet and cleared from his drug addiction well enough to participate in the trials, declared that the trials were nothing but a sham. There was no justice in Nuremberg, according to him. When it came to the Soviets, he was probably right, but considering that the Soviets had lost nearly 25 million people to the war, it was hardly surprising that they voted for the death penalty of all the accused later on.

Speer was Goering's complete opposite in opinion about the validity of the trials. He said that the trials were necessary and that a collective responsibility existed even in an authoritarian government. Speer supported this view by saying that they would all have wanted a share of the glory if they had been victorious, would they not? It is noteworthy that Speer maintained this view throughout the entirety of the trials, even after having seen the documents of accusation against himself and the documents and movies relating to the Holocaust/Final Solution. Yet he maintained that he had been in the dark as to the extent of the crimes performed in the concentration and extermination camps, especially those in the extermination camps. This would have been seen as a blatant lie, much similar to those of the others, such as Goering and Seyss-Inquart, but Speer was smarter, or perchance more honest; he claimed he had of course known that the Jews and other minorities were treated badly in Nazi-Germany, but not to what extent, and certainly not to that extent.

Speer impressed most people around him; he was educated, intelligent, spoke several languages (he even corrected some of the translators when they did not get the words right) and seemed honest about most things. However, Speer had trouble living up to his own high ideals. He was fast to admit collective responsibility, even over such things as the SS-controlled concentration camps, but as soon as details about individual crimes were pulled up, he shirked back and defended himself with tooth and claw. Speer's defense attorney, Hans Flächsner, told Speer expressively that he should not admit guilt or responsibility for things of which he had no control. One of these things was of course the concentration camps.

The Allied prosecution, especially the psychologists such as G.M Gilbert, recognised the potential in Speer's admittance of responsibility. He worked as an excellent opposite of Goering and the psychologists did their best to build Speer up, so that he could rally others of the accused under his banner of penitence.

During the trials, the psychologists, and Gilbert in particular, did their best to keep Speer's mood up, as he was prone to spouts of doubt and fits of pensiveness. The whole plan almost went belly-up when Speer claimed he was not sure he could go through with his high ideal. Gilbert knew why this was. He had, correctly, asserted that Speer's self-confidence was linked to his vanity quite intimately. This fits in rather snugly with the aforementioned state of when Speer got too much praise, he got panic-attacks and angst over not being able to live up to the demands. So when Speer found out that his cross-examination was not going to be held by Justice Robert Jackson himself but rather a minor American prosecutor, he started to feel left behind. Gilbert arranged so that Jackson would cross-examine Speer, which was rather easy to get done as Jackson had been utterly run over by Goering in the former Reich Field Marshal's cross-examination and needed an "easy win" to regain face. What is amazing in hindsight is Jackson's relatively mild treatment of Speer in the cross-examination. Jackson was actually known to be quite hardline and this surprised many. Some historians have interpreted this as that Speer and Jackson had come to an arrangement of sorts, in which a mild cross-examination and lighter punishment was to be expected. However, no documents or letters of such an arrangement exist. It is more likely to think that Jackson went easy on Speer for the simple reason that he knew the man he was facing was intelligent, just as Goering was and that he could not afford to lose face one more time. In other words; Jackson went easy on Albert Speer to save his own face and not Speer's neck.

Speer was, peculiarly enough, considered one of the uncertain cases in Nuremberg. If we count out the Soviets, who wanted to hang the lot, opinions amongst the judges varied wildly over Speer's guilt. The French wanted to free him and the Americans tended for the same, or maybe a mild prison service. But the British chief judge opted for the death penalty, as they had already sentenced Fritz Sauckel to death and Speer had been Sauckel's immediate superior, more or less. He wanted them to be consequent. There was also a compromising photograph of Speer when he had visited the concentration camp Mauthausen, yet he had maintained that he had only been shown a VIP tour of the camp and never actually seen anything "bad", with which he meant anything that could be connected with the Holocaust. The prisoners he had seen, Speer said, had seemed well-nourished. He said nothing of his visit to Dora-Mittelbau. However, after a few days, the British judge had a change of heart.

The result of this change of heart turned into a compromise. So on September 1<sup>st</sup> 1946, after his final statement, Speer received his sentence: 20 years imprisonment. Speer's immediate reaction to this sentence is recorded to history as a deep sigh. Out of relief or defeat is impossible to know.

## ***Personal Guilt***

Speer served his time in prison to the minute. And he made good use of it. The best and more or less only source of his time in Spandau prison is his own book, "*Spandau Tagebücher*". The book shows how a man changes through the years, if he uses his time wisely, and Speer did. He organised every single level of living in a pedantic and obsessive manner, so that he could survive the ordeal mentally. And the first few years, he

keeps his chin up and walks proud despite being a prisoner. He does not, as the others, complain about his prison life and intends to make as much out of the twenty years as he can. One of these things is a project of soul-searching and quest for his own spirituality, at first under the guidance of the prison priest of Spandau, George Casalis. However, Casalis leaves after a few years and Speer is devastated. At the same time his mother dies and with her all hope of Albert ever experiencing mother's love. In 1954, his one friend amongst the other prisoners, the diplomat von Neurath, is released due to ill health. Speer walks more than 40 km in one day, in the prison garden, to "calm himself down". His ever so fragile knee gives in and Speer becomes bedbound, with his depression and emotional stress.

The illness progresses just as ten years earlier and eventually develops into a pulmonary embolism, but unlike ten years earlier, Speer is this time in good hands and survives without repercussions except for a minor incident when he is returned to his cell and loses his temper with the psychologist that has come to see him. A most unusual reaction for a man who was noteworthy for his strong self-control.

In these early years, Speer also writes quite a lot about his family and he thinks much about his responsibility and also personal guilt in the Nazi war-crimes. He sadly concludes that his children do not feel so much the same responsibility as him, as that he is a source of embarrassment and shame to them. Yet despite that he tries to proxy-govern his family through his secret pipelines to the outside world, through the help of empathic guards and medics.

The latter part of the book shows a man who questions himself, but in a different way. He also talks less of his family, and the sadness he at first felt over his alienation from them. The latter half shows, in other words, a quite self-centered man, but what else is to expect when you are physically isolated from the outside world?

When Speer was let out of the prison, he had changed. Not only physically, but also mentally and in his soul. His old secretary, Annemarie Kempf remarked that she thought she saw a new depth in his eyes, that she quite could not remember from before. Speer goes on to write his memoirs, something he more or less set out to do in already in prison. The result of this book is that most of his acquaintances from the Third Reich days no longer want to even greet him in the street, as it were. They are very "disappointed" with Speer, in that he did not defend them as they had thought he would. Instead Speer tried to explain what it was like to live in the Third Reich, his memoirs no doubt coloured by his own disillusionment of Hitler and disgust over the Holocaust. This last remark is something I will discuss in detail further down as it is quite focal when dealing with Speer.

After *Erinnerungen* (Inside the Third Reich), Speer wrote two more books; the aforementioned Spandau Tagebücher (Secret Diaries of Spandau) and *Der Sklavenstaat*, which was semi-finished when released for reasons that can be read in Gitta Sereny's excellent "Albert Speer and His Battle with Truth".

Speer had a few more embolisms after his release from Spandau. The last one caused a massive stroke and Albert Speer died on September 1<sup>st</sup> 1981, on a release trip to London, Great Britain, to promote his last book. It was exactly 42 years after the start of the Second World War.

## ***A discussion of sorts***

To think the controversy surrounding this man died with him is naïve. Speer causes more controversy now that he is dead, than he did alive. Especially since documents have been discovered after his death that gives him a direct connection with the death camp Auschwitz. This document, coming from Speer's own Organisation Todt, permits the expansion of said camp and is, compromisingly, apparently signed by Speer himself. I say apparently; some of Speer's associates claim that there was a facsimile rubber stamp of Speer's signature, which was used to sign documents of lesser importance. However, the document is full of Speer's own jostled down notes in the margin, as ever in his spidery hand. This means that Speer must have read it and known what it was about. Yet one can argue, one document amongst hundreds, maybe thousands, how can one man remember it, despite its, to us, important contents? To Speer, at the time, it was most likely just another document of request from the SS. He could have gone through it on routine, which he was good at, jostled the notes down to keep costs down, and then had paid it no further notice when that certain case was concluded. A journalist, whom I cannot remember the name of, once said that Speer loved machines more than humans, and Speer, later in life, said the it was most certainly true of his younger self. Between the lines you can read that Speer meant that he would of course appreciate machines more than humans, as he himself resembled one. A computer-like human, sorting data, making a vast machinery of war production run as smoothly as possible; what significance has one document to him, even if it carries a header including both the words "concentration camp" and "Auschwitz"? The knowledge of the document most likely left his head as the deal was settled.

Nonetheless, if Speer was aware of this document, then that means he would have known about the Holocaust, or at least to some extent the exterminations, in May 1943. At the latest.

It is around this, Speer's involvement in the Holocaust and how much he admitted about it, that all the controversy of him is centered. Yet I doubt that he would have exposed himself to the constant questions that he, just by walking as a free man again, stirred up in people, if his will to understand himself and his acceptance of responsibility and guilt had not been genuine. Doenitz, as an example, did not want to speak a word about his time in Spandau after his release. Speer was more than willing to talk about his prison time and he did it with a hint of serenity in his voice. Doenitz would only discuss his role as an admiral in the Kriegsmarine, whilst Speer practically did not care about his role as architect and focused solely on his role as

minister and his (un-)involvement in the Holocaust.

To constantly, for fifteen years, confront yourself, willingly, with something you denied having knowledge of but you took responsibility for, is not the actions of a man who planned a callous strategy in Nuremberg to survive, not in my book. That would require a psychopath, and although some claim Speer had psychopathic tendencies, a psychopath would most certainly not drag it up again and again in his interviews. A psychopath would try to avoid the subject of his well-planned, but false, strategy at all costs, not confront himself with it and potentially reveal his entire defence as one big lie.

Which brings us snugly round to Gitta Sereny again. Sereny is the one person who probably got closer to the truth of Albert Speer than anyone. During three years of interviews and living with the old Speer couple, she got to know Speer, and his wife, better than they probably knew themselves. Sereny concludes, in her huge *Albert Speer and His Battle with Truth*, that Speer most certainly knew of the extermination of the Jewish people after the Posen conference in 1943, perchance not what methods were employed. But he knew about it. The problem was that Speer himself claimed that he for his life could not remember being present at Himmler's speech in the afternoon. Sereny explains this as a complicated case of lifelong conceit, in which Speer was not even aware of the conceit taking place, but he knew something was wrong. In other words, Speer knew there was a lie, a big one, somewhere in his life, in his defence, but he could not figure out where and suffered all the tortures of Hell because of this. He wanted to know the truth, he thought he did, but knew deep down he did not.

It is as if another aspect of Albert Speer, another persona, has erased this important piece of information, and the new Speer can not find it no matter how hard he searches.

I personally have no answer to this. I am bound to agree with Sereny: Speer knew, yet he did not. It sounds rather ambivalent and fuzzy, and yes, it is. It is just as fuzzy and hard to pin down in one place as Albert Speer himself. Yet Speer's case has reverberations into the modern world, reverberations that I will go into later, if you can wait just a little while longer.

But before we go into Speer's guilt relative to today's postmodern society, I want to discuss Speer's relationship with Hitler. This is a part which many people, who are very critical of Speer's actions and claims and who can blame them, but this is the part where many of them fail, in my opinion. True, I have not read even half of what I would have liked to have read about Speer, but I try to piece things together as well as I can.

The famous psychologist Alexander Mitscherlich once described Speer's relationship with Hitler as having been *homoerotic*. Note that. Not sexual, but erotic. Speer himself remarked on this as being the closest to the truth anyone ever got concerning his relationship with the Fuehrer. That he did not elaborate on the whole thing himself was no doubt in part to his own inability to think in metaphysical and emotional terms.

There is a lot that points towards Mitscherlich's observation being quite correct, most of all the way which Speer and Hitler reacted towards each other. Although both men were seriously hampered in the emotional lives, matter of fact they both shunned overtly emotional reactions and people with them, it was very clear in how they worked together that they both enjoyed each other's company, in a platonic sense of the words.

To be blunt about it, you could say that Hitler enjoyed Speer's company, because he saw in Speer the architect that he could have been, had Hitler been allowed to become one. If you want to be nasty, you could say that Hitler lived his life's dream through Speer. Speer became the tool through which Hitler could realise his childhood dreams as a great planner of buildings and cities.

To Speer, the love-deprived middle-child, Hitler's undivided attention for his, in Speer's own opinion, rather mediocre architecture which in Hitler's eyes was the most fantastic he had ever seen, this attention to him and his work was a godsend. Speer wallowed in the emotional reactions he felt within himself, emotions he at first had not thought himself capable of. Here he got the attention he had sought since childhood and it was from one of the most powerful men in the world. Despite the emotional strain this put on Speer, his fear of being "revealed as a fraud" and consequently abandoned by his patron, he no doubt loved every minute of it all.

The change then in their relationship, as Speer became minister and thus a member of government in 1942, must have been slightly traumatic to both of them. Now they could no longer meet under the cordial conditions they had in the past and Speer got, if anything, even busier than he had ever been before. Their personal meetings were reduced to a minimum as both Fuehrer and Armaments Minister had pressed schedules. What meetings they did have were those scheduled official ones which exist between any leader of country and his/her ministers.

It could be said that it was now that Speer's freeing of himself from Hitler's "leash" began. The less he was exposed to the man himself and the more he saw the consequences of his politics, the more objective Speer got to his own relationship with Hitler.

Yet for all this, Speer was happy beyond words when Hitler paid him a personal visit during his illness. It meant he had not been forgotten, after all. Yet, as mentioned, Hitler must have noticed a shift to the cooler in their relations upon that visit. And most correctly, Speer had changed. His rational mind told him that the man he was serving was mad and his ambitions evil, but Speer's heart could not, would not, let go of the deep, sincere emotions that the "madman" provoked in him. He wanted to think back on their days of planning in the 1930s, he wanted it to be like it had been before the war.

Speer's subsequent failure morally has its roots in that he failed to emotionally distance himself from Hitler. He had to indulge in the emotions that were served him; he could not resist them. If you read *Inside the Third*

Reich, you sometimes get the feeling that it has been written by a betrayed lover; the way Speer racks down on the system and its cogs, despite the fact that he was very much a part of it and one of its chief driving forces from 1942 to 1945. It is easy to think that by 1970, he still had not gotten over what he no doubt considered a betrayal of trust on Hitler's behalf against Germany. Make no mistake, Speer was, like most people of the era, a nationalist. To modern day people it is hard to understand, because to us the word nationalism is many times intimately connected with the extreme right-wing, in part thanks to people like Speer and Hitler and the other Nazis. A good example of modern-day "nationalism" could be the patriotism we feel for our countries in the World Cup or during the Olympic Games, but with an altogether more political twang to it.

To make a long story short, Speer never got free of the "leash" of affection that Hitler had put on him. And maybe he did not want to be free?

Speer's failure lies in that he allowed himself indulge in an emotion he had been seriously deprived of in his youth. A very human response, in my opinion.

Which brings us to the final part of this long essay. I really have not attempted to find any kind of verdict to Speer. I myself have a fairly positive outlook on him, because considering what other old Nazis said and did after the war, Speer never resorted to the cheap escape "I was only following orders" nor did he ever shirk from that he had been involved. He never could accept personal guilt in details, but he took a collective responsibility for the actions performed in the name of national socialism. Because of this behaviour, so uncommon in his lot, Speer earned himself to rather unflattering monickers: "The Good Nazi" and "The Nazi Who Said 'Sorry'". The latter is peculiar in face of the fact that Speer never did say "sorry". He took upon himself the responsibility of the actions performed and in his last years admitted his own, personal guilt in the Holocaust, but he never said; "Sorry, the Holocaust was one big cock-up on Germany's behalf." That would have been pouring salt into wide-open wounds.

The former monicker, "The Good Nazi", is a bit of a *non sequitur*. Why? Because there were no good Nazis. And maybe that is where the humour of the remark lies, what do I know?

But Speer really deserves a monicker like that, because he stood out from the other Nazis, and always had. His position of power rested almost solely on that Hitler gave him his undiluted attention in many matters, especially building. This explains his rather sudden rise to power, once discovered by the Fuehrer and Speer's reactions to this sudden attention are very human. They are so human, I cannot honestly say that I would not have reacted otherwise if it had happened to me. Put yourself in those shoes: there you are, a mediocre artist, in your own opinion, but suddenly you have the unreserved attention of one of the most powerful men in the world. And you are not even thirty years old. How many can honestly say they would not be "dizzy with anticipation" at what the future then would hold for you?

I think Speer should have the monicker "The Human Nazi". Why? Because it describes what he was.

This brings us up to how Speer's "problem" with his conscience is related to our modern society. The reason I bring this up in an essay like this is that I want to force people to stop and think about what they are doing. Something Speer eventually did. When he realised the implications of what he was doing, when it all dawned on him what he had helped achieve, he suffered what can only be called a nervous breakdown.

Western society of today employs slaves to a much greater extent than the Nazis ever did. Just like them, we make our slaves sew clothing, amongst other things. And just like the Nazis, we have out-sourced the slaves to countries far away from us. Out of sight, out of mind, right?

But it is not that easy. Just like Speer, and the whole world found out, just because you reduce people to cogs in a huge machinery, they do not stop being people. Speer suffered, truly suffered for allowing himself to become what he had become and he later tried to make what amends he could. Not to buy himself back into society, he lost many friends from the Nazi era in the process of accepting his guilt, but so that he could understand and live with himself. He always came back to the same thing though: I could have known, should have known, but I did not. And it is the same for us today. With modern technology, it is relatively easy to find the information about the conditions for the workers employed in the factories of the companies that make our clothes, shoes and cars. And if we can not find the information, we can demand them, as customers, from the companies, which is far more than Speer could ever have done with the SS. If Speer had nosed around in their business too much, I have little to no doubt that he would have been given a very physical demonstration of how an extermination camp really works. Either him, or his family. Or both.

But we of the modern Western world do not risk this. We can freely ask of this information from companies. And if they cannot supply it, most of them will no doubt find a way to give it to you, if demand is high enough. If they bluntly refuse, you can be pretty certain something fishy is going on. On which the easiest method of stopping it, is to stop buying that brand, and inform others of it and convince them to do the same. I admit my own hypocrisy, because I'm writing this on a Mac, and Apple computer, which according to Greenpeace is an environmental catastrophe. Yet I happen to like Macs over PCs. And now that I have bought it, done is done.

This is what many of Speer's friends, as well as family, tried to tell him. Done is done, Albert. You cannot change the past. Now try to live in the present and look to the future. To this, Speer would only shake his head. His own family could not understand why he clung to the past so. But he had to, it was all he had, all he could do, to understand himself.

As I said before, it is all about information. This essay is not meant to justify Speer's actions, even though it might seem like it. I have merely tried to understand them, and by explaining to others helping myself in this process. As I have said before, I have an inclination to view Albert Speer in a positive light, because I want to

believe there is good in all people, even people like him. Strange, yes. But not as strangely overlooked these following words, from his own memoirs, are. They are in my opinion more revealing than anything he ever wrote afterwards and shows his feelings of guilt between the lines:

*"Whether I knew or did not know, or how much or how little I knew, is totally unimportant when I consider what horrors I **ought** to have known about and what conclusions **would** have been the natural ones to draw from the little I did know. Those who ask me are fundamentally expecting me to offer justifications. But I have none. No apologies are possible."*

(Cited from Inside the Third Reich, chapter 8, page 113; essay author's italicization and emboldment)