*TRIUMPH OF THE WILL* (1935)

*Triumph des Willens* (*Triumph of the Will*) is a black and white propaganda film made by German filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl. The film documents the 1934 Nazi Party Congress in Nuremberg, including speeches by Adolf Hitler, Rudolf Hess, Joseph Goebbels and other Nazi leaders. The film eschews the newsreel-style documentary realism popular at the time and instead relies on innovations in cinematography, editing and music to communicate that Hitler is the saviour of the German people. Betraying a modernist fascination with visual spectacle, Riefenstahl documented the pageantry of the occasion from manifold angles with a pioneering use of mounted moving cameras. In order to emphasize Hitler’s dominance, Riefenstahl repeatedly shot him from a low angle, making him appear to tower above the vast crowds attending the rally, who appear small and compressed because of the use of long focus telephoto lenses. Rhythmic editing intercutting historic German architecture with Nazi party symbols works to present the party as the natural fulfillment of Germany’s mythic past. That aim is also achieved through Herbert Windt’s score, which combines Wagnerian symphonies with folk songs, military marches and Nazi hymns. Derided for its message, yet praised for its technical brilliance, *Triumph of the Will* remains extremely polarizing amongst critics.

References and further reading:

Hinton, D. (1975) ‘Triumph of the Will’: Document or Artifice?, *Cinema Journal* 15 (1): 48 – 57.

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Sontag, S. (1974) ‘Fascinating Fascism’, *Under the Sign of Saturn*, London: Writers and Readers. 73-105.

Welch, D. (2001) *Propaganda and the German Cinema 1933-1945*, London:

I. B. Tauris Publishers.

Zox-Weaver, A. (2011) *Women Modernists and Fascism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Paratextual Material:

- The original poster for the film is available at The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum:

<http://www.ushmm.org/propaganda/archive/poster-triumph-will/>

- The BFI archive contains numerous stills from the film: <http://explore.bfi.org.uk/4ce2b69ff14fb>

The film is available to stream at Internet Archive: <https://archive.org/details/TriumphOfTheWillgermanTriumphDesWillens>

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