

KSENIA ALEKSANDROVA

LENI RIEFENSTHAL'S OLYMPIA



MESMERIZING CINEMA, A TOOL OF NAZI PROPAGANDA

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INTRODUCTION. CINEMA AS A PSYCHO-PHYSICAL MACHINE OF PERSUASION IN OLYMPIA BY LENI RIEFENSTAHL

Cinema is a mesmerizing machine of our culture. It substitutes the concepts and the time frames, putting the viewer into the conscious daily production trance. While the theory of «animal magnetism» [1] provoked in the nineteenth century the medical hypnotic practices in curing mental diseases by erasing the traumatic memory and replacing it with another one, cinema in the beginning of the twentieth century becomes the most powerful hypnotic apparatus ruled by political movements.

In Germany, after the fall of the Weimar Republic and the establishment of Nazi regime in 1933, all cultural and artistic spheres of life were nationalized and ruled by the Reichskulturkammer (Reich Culture Chamber), with Joseph Goebbels in charge. The German Expressionism cinema and the mountain films of the Weimar Republic were replaced by propaganda films produced by the UFA, as well as documentaries about Hitler, Party Rallies and Third Reich, the most famous of which is Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph des Willens* (Triumph of the Will) of 1935.

According to John W. Meaney «Hitler's idea of propaganda is 'to control' by a 'systematic modification of the ideas and feelings'» [2] In this case, voice and image, the same as in hypnosis, become the most effective way to alter the psychological character of individual. If hypnosis and propaganda follow the same methodology to affect the human brain, then propaganda tools such as radio, television, print become the techniques of mesmerizing and controlling the consciousness of the masses. Even if the Nazi regime didn't believe in hypnosis in the traditional sense, we might wonder if it is only by chance, that the process they used to construct their propaganda seems to follow all the stages of hypnotic process: induction, suggestion and susceptibility. Furthermore, this essay questions if Riefenstahl's film propaganda is an

[1] Animal magnetism is a term, that was given by German doctor Franz Mesmer in the 18th century to an invisible force of nature that rules all living things. «He studies in his dissertation the influence of planets on human bodies. Mesmer made much use of animal magnetism in the

treatment of diseases. He cured at first by contact, but believed later that different objects of wood, glass, iron, and so forth, were also capable of receiving the magnetism» (Alber Moll, *Hypnotism*, 1901, p.7).

[2] John W. Meaney, *Propaganda as Psychical Coer-*

cion, *Journal The Review of Politics*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (Jan., 1951), p. 67.

embodiment of the huge wave of hypnosis that became pervasive in numerous social and cultural circles since the Weimar Republic?

My concern is to set up the mesmerizing abilities of the cinema of Nazi cultural propaganda as demonstrated in the film *Olympia*, directed by Leni Riefenstahl and released on screen in 1938. It was presented as a documentary film about the Berlin Olympic Games of 1936, but the political situation and the relationships between the Nazi Party, Hitler, Leni Riefenstahl and *Olympia* influenced the way the film was produced and what ideology it conveyed.

My choice of *Olympia*, as a propaganda film, is explained by its complicity and dissimilarity to other films by Nazi regime. According to Rainer Rother «The Party Rallies — and the films dedicated to them — contain a definition of the rejected enemy. The Olympic Games, along with the cinematic *Olympia* — conceal the policy of exclusion.»^[3] If such movies as *Triumph des Willens* is an example of Nazi ideology with open demonstration of power and privilege of the Aryan nation, then *Olympia* convinces the audience in the fake image of internationality and friendly environment few years before the WWII. Despite the fact that *Olympia* was ordered and sponsored by the government, the film director Leni Riefenstahl got the full freedom of expressing her artistic talent like never before^[4]. She was chosen for this role not only for her skills as a filmmaker for Nazi Party, that she proved previously in *Triumph des Willens*, but also as a representative of the New Woman, who was described in the Weimar Republic as woman with a supernatural power of controlling people's minds.

Taking into a consideration the researches about *Olympia*, such as the book «The Seduction of Genius» by Rainer Rother (2002) and the article «Fascinating

[3] Rainer Rother, Leni Riefenstahl. *The Seduction of Genius*, Continuum, London and New York, 2002, p 77.

[4] Joseph Goebbels appreciated the work of Leni Riefenstahl on the film *Triumph des Willens* by words: «It is the great cinematic vision of the Führer, seen here for the first

time with a forcefulness that has not been revealed before.» (*Die Verkündung der Buch-Filmpreise 1934/5'*, *Derneue Weg*, 15 May 1935, p, 255).

Fascism» by Susan Sontag (1975), which mostly concentrate on Nazi propaganda and Nazi aesthetics of the movie, my perspective on this film will be the usage of cinema as a hypnotic apparatus of propaganda persuasion created by Leni Riefenstahl. My interest lies in cinema as a device which simulates feelings, changing our behavior and perception through images. The technology of a montage, camera angle, recording, lighting and projection itself becomes the opportunities to put the audience into a cinematically constructed perceptual statement in which they consciously found themselves only after being manipulated[5]. In this instance, a film director can be associated with a medium who, using the cinematic techniques, controls the human perceptual structures.

In my thesis, I analyze the scenes of *Olympia* according to hypnosis methodology: induction, suggestion and susceptibility. This serves to reveal the hidden purposes of film *Olympia*, created by Riefenstahl to display the Nazi propaganda to the masses. The focus is on Riefenstahl's way of arranging and organizing the images to put the spectator into a cinematic trance. I also concentrate on the technological devices engineered during the production of the film to increase the emotional reaction and to convince the German people and the international community in the image of the affable New Germany, created by the Nazi government to make them fall asleep.

[5] Ute Holl, *Kino, Trance und Kybernetik*, Brinkmann & Bose, Berlin, 2002, p. 23.

HYPNOTIC SPELL OF THE NEW WOMAN: LENI RIEFENSTAHL, OLYMPIA

The period of the Weimar Republic was full of occult and hypnotic practices. While German medical society debated the benefits and risks of treatment by hypnotic suggestion, the criminal telepathy^[6] and crimes under the influence of hypnotic suggestion appeared to be a frequent phenomenon. It started with the Czynski case, when Ceslav Lubicz-Cynski, a Polish teacher, hypnotist, and magnetizer, was accused of seducing Hedwig von Zedlitz by using hypnosis. Since then, the hypnotic crimes were a popular subject, also reflected in German movies. For instance, in the Fritz Lang's *Dr. Mabuse, der Spieler* (*Dr. Mabuse the Gambler*, 1922), Dr. Mabuse is a criminal head of the Berlin underworld with the powers of hypnosis and mind control. He mesmerizes people to serve his criminal interest. The hypnotic process is described in the scene, where Mabuse stands in the center, surrounded by a group of people, whose silhouettes gradually blur and leave only his figure on the black background. His head is gradually zooming in, hypnotizing not only the players at the card table, but also the viewer of the movie. In the end everything disappears, except for the bewitching gaze of the doctor. According the words of Siegfried Kracauer: «The film succeeds in making Mabuse an omnipresent threat which cannot be localized, and thus reflects society under a tyrannical regime — that kind of society in which one fears everybody because anybody may be the tyrant's ear or arm».^[7] The film not only described the atmosphere in Germany of those times but also predicted a terror that would come to Germany with the Nazi regime in 1933.

If in the early German films about hypnosis (*Hypnosis* by Richard Eichberg, 1920; *Dr. Mabuse, der Spieler* by Fritz Lang, 1922), the main figure is an evil man with hypnotizing abilities, then in later films, such as Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) and *The*

[6] Criminal telepathy (Kriminaltelepathie) — the practice of using a telepath or clairvoyant to solve the criminal cases.

[7] Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*, Princeton University Press, 2004, p.83.

Fig. 1 Hitler rehearsing his speech in front of the mirror, 1925, photo by Heinrich Hoffmann



Fig. 2 Poster for the film «The Thousand Eyes of Dr. Mabuse» (*Die 1000 Augen des Dr. Mabuse*), 1960



Holy Mountain (1926) by Arnold Fanck, women become the character with the supernatural powers of mesmerizing men. The reason for that is a cardinal change in the role of women in the Weimar Republic. By 1925, almost 35 percent of the German work force consisted of women. It was the time for women to fight for their rights and to demand a life similar to men's. The behavior of modern woman threatened the traditional family structure and caused the media to create a new image of women called the «New Woman».[8] While press and critics, such as Otto Flake, blamed her for a lack of attractiveness and described her as «smoker with an athletic build and a masculine hairstyle»[9], many artistic works portrayed her in oversexualized manner, such as the whores in the paintings by Otto Dix. However, despite the arguments about the phenomena of the New Woman, both the popular press and

[8] Originally this term comes from the article by Irish writer Sarah Grand, who in 1894 used it to describe an independent women seeking for a radical change.

[9] Matthew Biro, *The Dada Cyborg: Visions of the New Human in Weimar Berlin*, Minneapolis: University of

Minnesota Press, 2009.

scientific community related women's ambitious status to the occult and hypnosis. Women were seen to have magical powers to solve the problems (for example criminal telepathy). This idea also found place in the analyses of the expressive dance performances which were staged at popular at that time cabarets and nightclubs.

The expressive dancers were seen as the representatives of the New Woman, who hypnotized and manipulated the male's consciousness by sexuality and mesmerizing movements. Ernst Schur, for instance, in his article «Is there Hypnotic Dance?» (*Gibt es hypnotischen Tanz?*) says that «trance dance was brought about by a deep erotic trance that in turn became an occult expression».[10] Mary Wigman became the first popular expressive dancer, whose movements were able to transmit the supernatural energy to the viewer's gaze. Rudolf Lämmel, the German author, said that Wigman's solo demonic dance *Hexentanz* (1914) had an ability to mesmerize the audience with its wild energy: «Without music, full of a wild passion for movement, Wigman in a fluttering gray cloak, hair flying, Wildly pounding jumps.»[11] Even though an expressive dance was considered to be produced by a natural force, in reality it had a mathematically rational structure of lines and curves.

In the film *Unheimliche Geschichten* (Weird tales, 1919) by Richard Oswald, the female character, played by dancer Anita Berber[12], also famous as the model for Otto Dix's art works, hypnotizes her male admirers by dancing which causes their death. The hypnotic power of expressive dance was explained by modern critics as «hypnosis through fascination».[13] The same episode of demonic female dance is seen in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927). The devil clone of the main character Maria through exotic ritual expression dancing mesmerizes the men to follow her lead. But,

[10] Ernst Schertel, *Gibt es hypnotischen Tanz?*, Magazine *Die Umschau* (Jan. 9, 1926), p. 33.

[11] qtd. in Manning 107.

[12] Anita Berber (1899–1928) was a German dancer of the Weimar Republic, actress, and writer. She appeared in twenty-five films in period

between 1918–1925, for instance, in the films by Richard Oswald. She was famous for her nude dancing, which had names such as «Cocaine» and «Morphium» that broke boundaries and challenged social taboos with androgyny and total nudity.

[13] Werner Lucas, *Der Hypnotismus in seinen Beziehungen zum deutschen Strafrecht und Strafprozess*, Berlin: Dümmler, 1930, p. 15.

*Fig. 3 A satirical photo with the caption
«New Woman — Wash Day», 1901*



Fig. 4 *Atelier Madame d'Ora* : Die leicht bekleidete Anita Berber in Tanzpose, mit Kopfschmuck, 1922. Schwarz-Weiß-Glasplatte Negativ / A lightly dressed Anita Berber in dance pose, with headdress, 1922. Black and white glass plate negative

compared to *Weird tales* by Oswald, the montage of *Metropolis* gives an idea that Maria, being an object of the male gaze, hypnotizes not only the men in the movie but also the male audience watching the film[14]. Film *Metropolis* brought to Fritz Lang an offer from Josef Goebbels to be the head of Germany's national filmmaking program: «... he told me that, many years before, he and the Führer had seen my picture *Metropolis* in a small town, and Hitler had said at that time that he wanted me to make the Nazi pictures».[15] But right after this offer Lang left Germany for good.

As F. Lang didn't accept the offer, the Nazi cinematograph had to find another talent and found it in Leni Riefenstahl, whose career in cinema started from the mountain film by Arnold Fanck *Der heilige Berg* (The Holy Mountain, 1926). Here, Riefenstahl played the main role of a woman with the powers of hypnotizing



[14] Andreas Huyssen, *The Vamp and The Machine: Technology and Sexuality in Fritz Lang's Metropolis*, in *After The Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*, Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986, p. 75.

[15] Fritz Lang, *New York World*

Telegram, June 11, 1941.

Fig. 5 Maria dance, film *Metropolis*



the men and controlling the forces of nature. For Riefenstahl, it was her first experience in the film industry. According to her words, she always saw herself only as a dancer, but, charmed by Fanck's movie *Berg des Schicksals* (*Mountain of Destiny*, 1924), she immediately wanted to be introduced to him and she was. Arnold Fanck, enchanted by Leni Riefenstahl personality[16] after their first meeting, not only offered her the role of Diotima, but wrote the movie script specifically for her. According to the plot of the story, Diotima, despite the magnetic power of attracting men, as it was shown in *Weird tales* and *Metropolis*, has an ability to control the forces of nature by her dancing. In «Dance to the sea» she goes into a trance by raising her hands and has her face full of supernatural ecstasy. Using her telepathic powers, she moves the waves of the sea. Fanck gives many close-up shots of Diotima's face mesmerizing men. The

[16] «In 1925 she got her 8 by 10 glossy into the hands of director Arnold Fanck. Mesmerized by the portrait, he became her first motion picture mentor» (Thomas Doherty, *Hollywood and Hitler 1933–1939*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2013, p. 329).

Fig. 6 Leni Riefenstahl as Diotima in «The Holly Mountain», 1926

Fig. 7 Shot from the film «The Holly Mountain» (time 1:18:20)



result of her hypnotic spell is death for both men. Besides the expression dancing, produced by Riefenstahl, the montage of the film is built to show her hypnotic gaze to the film audience. As Albert Hellwig[17] wrote in *Hypnotismus und Kinematograph*: «the hypnotic power of the cinema itself can cause members of the audience to become anxious».[18] Fanck tries not only to show the hypnotic power of women but also to put the viewer into a trance by using the ecstatic gaze and movements of Riefenstahl. His personal impression from Riefenstahl evoked him to create the character, whose

[17] Albert Hellwig (1880–1950) was German lawyer, criminologist and publicist. Hellwig's major area of expertise was the protection of children and adolescents from the harmful influences of the media. As part of the cinema reform movement, he was critical of the medium,

which was still new at the time, but was one of the first to deal scientifically with the effects of film. Many of the current statements on the effects of media violence such as the suggestion thesis, habituation thesis or the social-cognitive learning theory can already be found

in his remarks.

[18] qtd. in Hales 542.

abilities to control the men can lead to their death. What happens if the woman of such power becomes the most famous film director of the Third Reich?

Leni Riefenstahl was born in a strict patriarchal family, but even her father admitted that she had qualities of a man: «Too bad you were not the boy, and your brother the girl».[19] Despite the patriarchal environment she grew up in, Riefenstahl, as the New Woman, used her femininity to seduce men to help her archive her professional goals: «She manipulated a narrative of femininity and innocence to deflect moral and ethical accountability, especially in defending her complicity with the Nazi regime».[20] The mask of femininity and strength of will helped her to become a woman filmmaker who financed and produced her first film, *The Blue Light*, on her own. Such qualities couldn't have gone unnoticed by National Socialism. She was introduced to Hitler, and after proving her abilities in propaganda films such as *The Party Rally films* and *Triumph of the Will* for the Nazi government, filmmaker Riefenstahl got an order to film a documentary about the Berlin Olympic Games of 1936. In her diary she writes: «I don't know another woman, he (Hitler) went on, who works as single-mindedly as you do and is so obsessed with her mission. I am just as devoted to my mission».[21] Once again, Hitler gave her all the financial and technical means to film a new masterpiece: hundreds of workers at her disposal; an immense budget (the two films about the Olympic Games, *Fest der Völker* (Festival of Nations) and *Fest der Schönheit* (Festival of Beauty), was more than 1,500,000 Reichsmarks). The project was secretly sponsored by Nazi government, who helped Riefenstahl to establish her own company The Olympic Film Company to conceal the government control of the film production to the international community. She was so committed to the

[19] Leni Riefenstahl, *A Memoir*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1993, p. 11.

[20] Bell Hooks, *The Feminazi Mystique*, Magazine Transition No. 73, Indiana University Press on behalf of the Hutchins Center for African and African American Research at Harvard

University, 1997, p. 160.

[21] Leni Riefenstahl, *A Memoir*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1993, p. 227.

Fig. 8 Walter Frenz has a trial run on the special camera truck. Work on the film «Olympia», 1936.



Nazi regime, that she received unlimited funding, artistic freedom and support: «Fri. Riefenstahl alone is responsible for the artistic form and the organizational management of the Olympic film».[22] Indeed, Hitler has found his filmic voice: Riefenstahl, with her obsession with work[23] and artistic talent, used all the resources she had to create a new cinematic language of propaganda persuasion via images. Through the induction into the fake legend of German heroic past, following the suggestion of feelings and behaviors desired by Nazi regime, Riefenstahl puts the audience of the movie into a cinematic trance to project to the world the image of the New Germany, an organic friendly community, a few years before the war.

[22] An agreement dated October 15, 1935 by Nazi government.

[23] In the interview for Der Spiegel magazine Leni Riefenstahl said: «...when I start something new that fascinates me, it usually hits me so badly that I devote myself to it with skin and

hair». Also, describing her work on the film Olympia in her diary she writes: «In order to work effectively, you have to remain as secluded as possible from the outside world and my stuff kept all distractions away from me. No telephone call, however important, was put

through to me. I was out of reach even for my parents and friends. I lived in utter isolation. It was necessary to concentrate entirely on editing.» (Leni Riefenstahl, A Memoir, p. 205).

INDUCTION PHASE: FAKE LEGEND ABOUT THE GERMAN HEROIC PAST

1.1 The immersion in the atmosphere of Hellenistic Greece in the film *Olympia* in support of a fake myth by Nazi ideology about the Nordic origin of the Greeks

In the nineteenth century Scottish surgeon James Braid saw the access to the hypnotic induction in the fixation of the eyes on the bright object. If the cinematic screen is a source of light in the dark cinema space, then cinema for propaganda purposes becomes a powerful tool of putting the subject into a trance by concentrating his attention and isolating him from the outside world. In this case, the screen is a physical embodiment of the propaganda hypnotist, whose aim is to involve in suggestion every person from the audience. Thus, this scene can be described as a hypnotist mesmerizing a crowd. From this perspective, a film director becomes a figure who activates and deactivates the hypnotic state of the crowd and through images creates the conditions for this state, which traditionally includes the stages of induction, suggestion and susceptibility.

In *Olympia*, the phase of hypnotic induction starts from the prologue of the first part called *Fest der Völker* (Festival of Nations). It was filmed by Willy Zielke[24], whom Riefenstahl considered the best for this role: «Of all the cinematographers I had worked with, he was the most brilliant and also the best for these sequences.»[25] His abilities as a professional photographer were very useful for the prologue. During the first few minutes of the movie the camera guides the spectator through the clouds in the sky to the ruins of the Greek Acropolis. Then, the camera moves through the ruins and stops in a static wide shot of the Pantheon. According to Riefenstahl, the prologue had no plot, she «had to forestall any possibility of boredom by increasing the effect from one take to the next».[26] On the contrary, the slow monotonous movement of the camera and lack of any sort of actions in the movie can create REM (rapid eye movement) sleep which refers to the trance state, according to the sleep

[24] Wilhelm Otto Zielke (1902–1989) — German photographer, filmmaker, cameraman, representative of the «new materiality». From 1922 to 1926 Zielke studied at the Bavarian State Institute of Photography, where he worked as a teacher from 1927 to 1934.

In 1931 he began working in cinema as a screenwriter, director and cameraman all in one. His avant-garde film *Iron Beast* (1935) was banned by National Socialist censors.

[25] Leni Riefenstahl, *A Memoir*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1993, p. 185.

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 205.

*Fig. 9 Ruins of the Pantheon
(time from 02:05 till 02:16)*



studies by French neuroscientist Michel Jouvet. Even though Sigmund Freud considered fixation of the eyes and listening to a monotonous sound as indirect methods of induction in contrast to «the direct methods of influence by way of staring or stroking» [27], both methods had the same result of the person's unconscious concentration on the hypnotist.

[27] Sigmund Freud, *Civilization, Society and Religion* (PFL 12), p. 158–9.

In the sequence of ruins, she tries to show the rhythm of moving constructions using the montage effect of multiplying layers, where every next frame fades in, smoothly changing each other. Similar to the hypnotic seance, the spectator is enthralled by the illusion of non-stop movement. The slow-motion technique of moving the architectural elements is used, in this case, to produce a special kind of trance in which the spectator is put for the duration of a screening, abstracted from his routine and reality, relaxed and following his consciousness.

The ruins of Ancient Greece are slowly passing in front of the eyes of the viewer leading to a series of close-ups of Greek statues: Medusa, Aphrodite, Apollo, Paris, Achilles. Finally, the camera reaches the main symbol figure of the scene — the statue of Myron discus-thrower. Filming the statue's transformation into a figure of a man from a low-angle, Riefenstahl shows the birth of a German athlete from the sculpture of the Classical period of Ancient Greece. It gives an idea of Greek-German kinship, which becomes the main theme of the prologue. The importance of the connection between ancient Greek civilization and modern Germany is explained by the history of the German nation.

The interest in antiquity in Europe started from «History of the Art of Antiquity» by Johann Joachim Winckelmann, published in 1764. An archaeologist and librarian, Winckelmann was invited to Rome by Cardinal Alessandro Albani to make a catalog of his collection of antique art. The catalog had great success in Europe and presented the aesthetics of the strong, harmoniously proportioned, athletic bodies of Greek and Rome sculptures. It brought to the eighteenth and nineteenth Europe the aesthetic ideals and the way of forming the human body. If Winckelmann's writ-

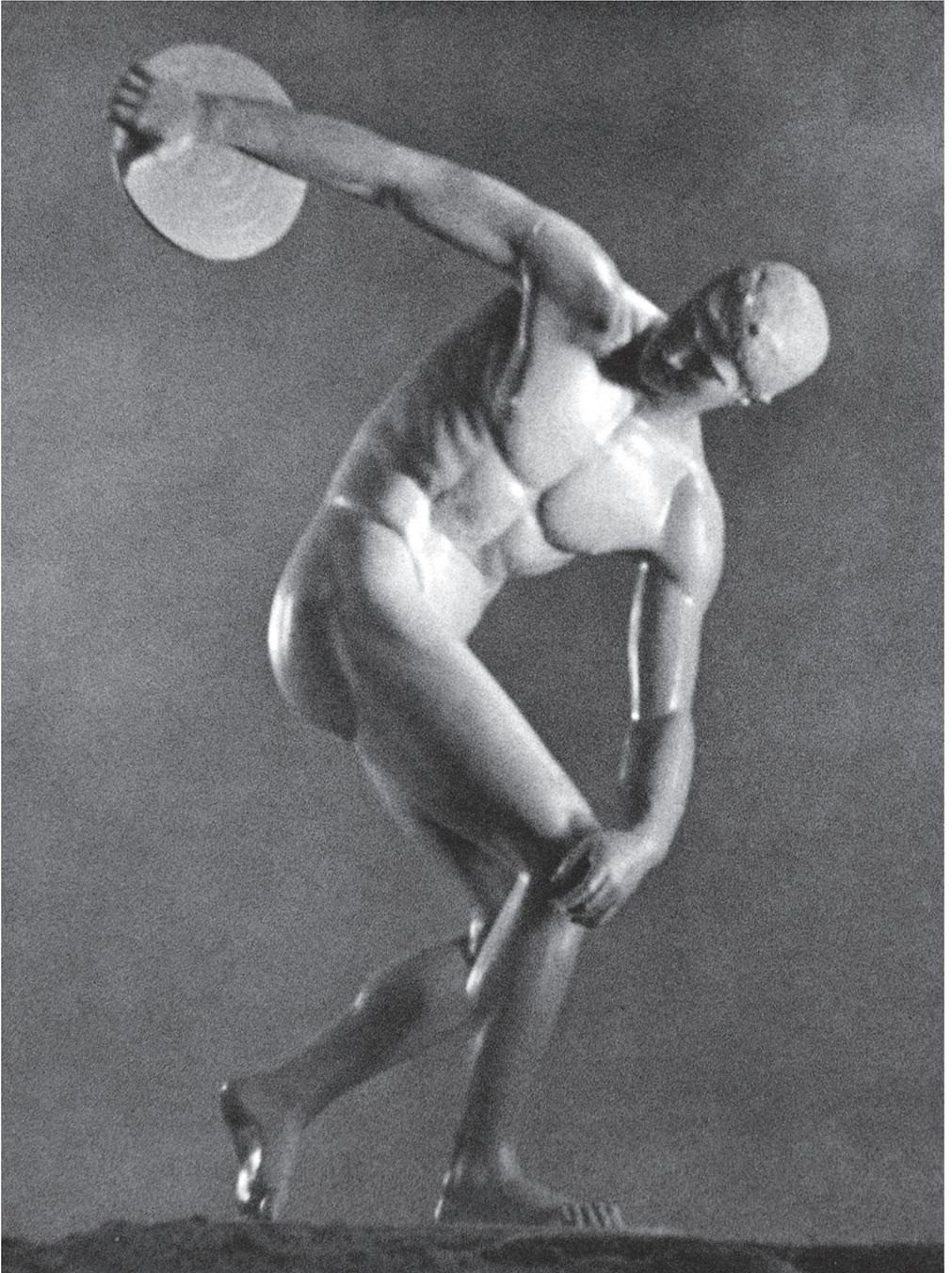
ings inspired the French revolutionaries and artists, for Germany, the writings by J.F.C. Guts Muth and Friedrich Ludwig Jahn «Die Deutsche Turnkunst» («German gymnastics»), published in 1816, became an example of ancient wisdom of body aesthetics. It claimed the connection between the perfection of the body and the beauty of the mind.

The popularity of an antique inspired the nineteenth-century Germans to look for their origins in ancient cultures. According to the words of the French historian Ernest Renan: «A heroic past, great men, glory (by which I mean genuine glory), this is the social capital upon which one bases a national idea.»^[28] Thus, the National Socialists created a myth of a Nordic origin of the Greek civilization to honor modern Germans by their glorified past. The Nazis took the idea of Greek statuary, turned stone into flesh and created the image of the ideal Aryan body, the beauty of which was the reflection of its superiority. They explained that the statues of Ancient Greece represent the Nordic type of face and body: «That the Greeks were of Nordic origin is abundantly clear from their sculptures. The figures of the gods that they carved out of stone show, in the body, the shape of the skull, the expressions on their faces, all the traits of their Nordic descent. It is hard to distinguish them from contemporary representatives of the Nordic race. The same is true of the Romans.»^[29] Besides the comparison of Greeks and Germans in sculpture and literature, such as in «Homers Wettkampf» by Nietzsche and in «Griechische Kulturgeschichte» by Jacob Burckhardt, a lot of events were organized to prove the in reality non-similarities between two civilizations and to convince the world in Greek-German kinship.

By Hitler's order, in 1934, German excavations in Olympia, Greece began. The

^[28] Ernest Renan, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?* (What Is a Nation?), trans. Martin Thom, in *Becoming National: A Reader*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 52.

^[29] qtd. in Chapoutot 158–159.





Fake legend about the German heroic past

23

Leni Riefenstahl's Olympia:



Mesmerizing cinema, a tool of Nazi propaganda

Induction phase:

Page 22 — Fig. 10 *The Discobolus of Myron*

Page 23 — Fig. 11 *Living statue*

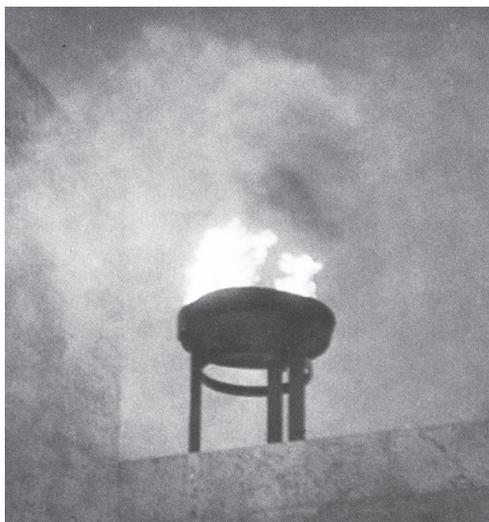
Page 24 — Fig. 12 *Statue transformation into a man*
(time from 07:16 till 07:37)

photos of the archeological digging were published in the *Journal of the German Archaeological Institute* in Athens and were widespread in the German press. The Olympic games of 1936 were an ideal opportunity to deceive the audience about the fake Greek-German racial kinship, to show the modern Germans and the world the greatness of the German nation, the descendant of Greek civilization. The Nazi newspaper *Völkischer Beobachter* one by one published articles about the relations of Greece and Germany. The edition of 2d August 1936 contained the article «Wegbereiter der Wiedergeburt: Winkelmann, Curtius, und Dörpfeld, Pioniere des olympischen Gedankens» (The precursors to the renaissance of the games: Winkelmann, Curtius, and Dörpfeld, pioneers of the Olympic idea), which emphasized the racial foundation of culture. The two exhibitions *Die deutschen Leibesübungen des Mittelalters in Buch und Bild* (Medieval German physical education in words and images) and *Sport der Hellenen* (Sport of the Greeks) were organized and promoted during the Olympic Games to provide the similarity between German and Greek sport practices.

The Berlin games were also the first games where the Torch Ceremony of relaying the Olympic flame from Olympia, Greece, to the city of an Olympic Games was held. It was created by Carl Dim, the Secretary General of the Organizing Committee of the Berlin Olympic Games, who was inspired by an ancient Greek ritual race in running with burning torches during which the runners passed the torch to each other. It was made to show respect to the tradition of Ancient Greece and emphasize the Greek origins of the German nation, which certainly found place in the film *Olympia* by Leni Riefenstahl. Despite the fact that the real Torch Ceremony took place in Athens, for the movie it was filmed in Delphi. Leni Riefenstahl explains in her diary: «I

Fig. 13 The torch is lit
Fig. 14 The Flame from Greece

Fig. 15 –acclaimed–
Fig. 16 The Olympic Fire



realized that this was no way to get useful footage. What we were shooting was pure newsreel: we had to try to film our own torch race, beyond these roads; shoot subjects consistent with the character of my Olympic prologue.»[30] Leni Riefenstahl didn't try to make a documentary film about the Olympic Games but she looked to find the best conditions for her scenes to convey the ideology she supported.

As the Olympic flame travelling through the map of Europe reaches Germany, the flag of Swastika fills the screen and a tremendous stadium as the Rome Coliseum brings us to the Olympic games in modern Germany of 1936. To capture a bird's eye view of the stadium, Leni Riefenstahl's team invented a way to attach the small hand camera to a balloon. Every morning, a balloon with a small camera was sent up. The team got the camera back every time by advertising in the newspaper *Berliner Zeitung am Mittag*, promising a reward to the finder. Riefenstahl has already used aerial photography[31] as a technique in her film *Triumph of the Will*. It is obvious that this sequence shows the achievements of the Third Reich and the image of the New Germany but, as a matter of fact, the Swastika flag was shown in the film two times only, in the prologue and during the Opening Ceremony along with the flags of other countries, which much differ *Olympia* from the other movies, created in Nazi Germany such as *Triumph of the Will*, where flags and Nazi symbols are always in a frame. It proves again that Nazi government tried to hide the propaganda purpose of *Olympia* in order to fool the international community.

The prologue of the film not only demonstrates the common visual identity of Greek and German nation but also uses the memory function of the human brain in order to change the story in people's minds due to the Nazi rewriting of history. It was

[30] Leni Riefenstahl, *A Memoir*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1993, p. 188.

[31] Aerial photography (airborne imagery) is the way of taking photographs from an aircraft or other flying object.

Fig. 17 Olympia stadium, 1936



Fig. 18 Maket of Berlin Olympic stadium with camera spots, exhibition in Deutsche Kinemathek 2021



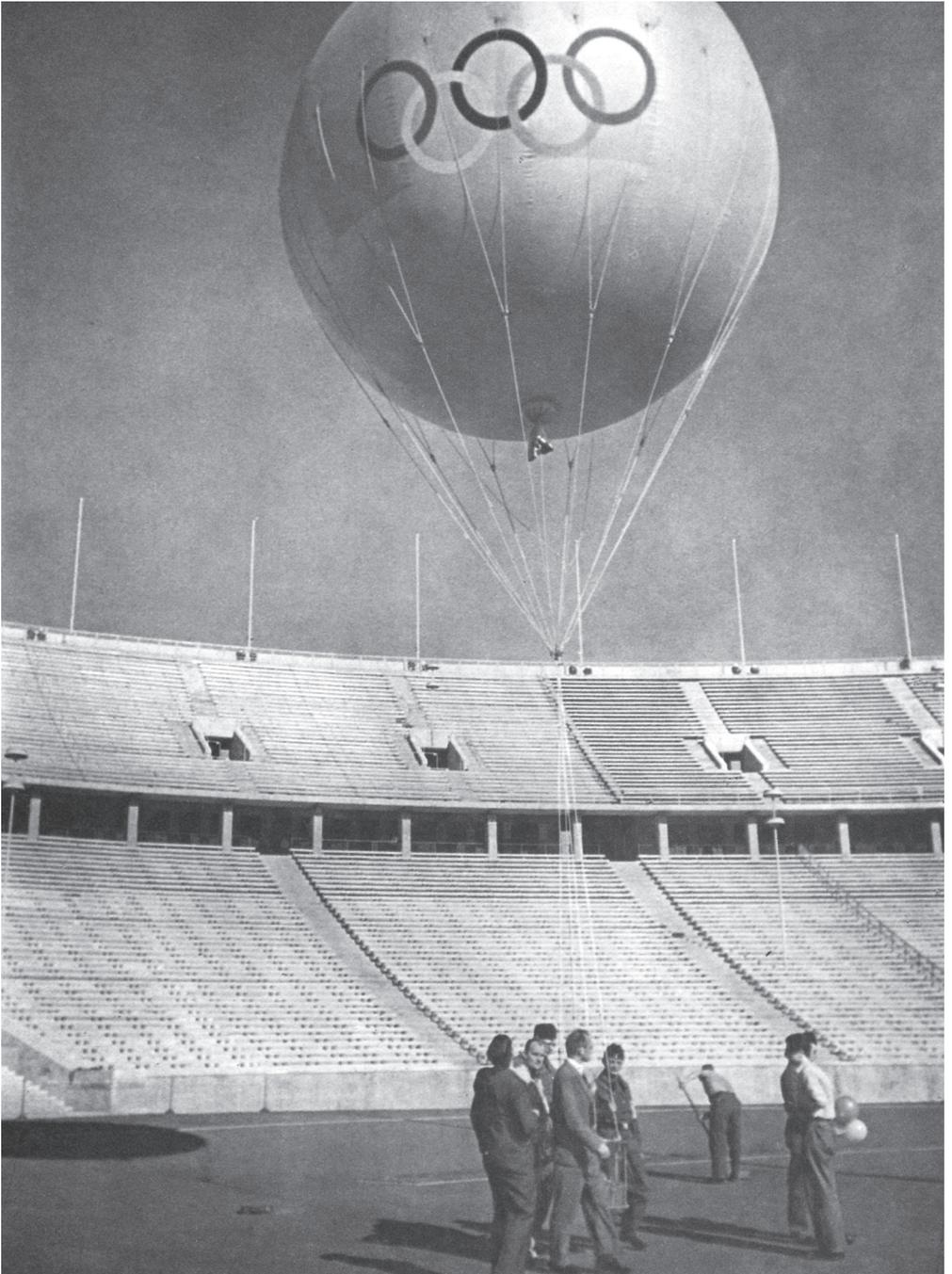
necessary to create and project the images from the screen in a way that the audience would have accepted as an unquestionable historical fact according to the physiology of the human brain. The studies on the memory ability of the brain, for instance, were made in the 1900s by Pierre Janet.

In the end of the nineteenth century, French psychologist and physician Pierre Janet made an experiment in curing patients with personality disorders by using hypnotizing techniques. During one session of his therapy, he tried to erase the traumatic memory of his patient by replacing it with another one. This situation of unconscious behavior he called «l'automatisme physiologique». Sigmund Freud, on the contrary, in his article «Screen memories», supposed that the memory cannot be erased but it is possible to transform the bad memories through implying new ones. For Janet, the image was understood as the form under which past sensations are reproduced in the memory[32]. In his practices he worked as «film director, or editor, who created new scenarios by decomposing scenes from the past into separate elements and by substituting these with other previous memory images, or with completely new and fabricated ones.»[33]

Analyzing both researches, I can assume that Leni Riefenstahl in the prologue of *Olympia* creates the reality by producing new pasts in support of Nazi ideology. The cinematic images become the mechanism for erasing the historical facts and inserting in a memory something that never happened. Leni Riefenstahl, using the method of hypnotic induction, creates and translates the means to convince the audience that there is no doubt in the Nazi legend about their heroic past as a Greek and Aryan nation.

[32] Pierre Janet, *L'Automatisme psychologique*, Paris : F. Alcan, 1889, pp. 95–96.

[33] Pasi Väliäho, *Cinema's Memoropolitics: Hypnotic Images, Contingent Pasts, Forgetting*, Discourse.



Fake legend about the German heroic past

Leni Riefenstahl's Olympia:

SUGGESTION PHASE: BODY METAPHOR BY NATIONAL SOCIALISM

2.1 Leni Riefenstahl's detailed demonstration of a healthy athletic body in the film Olympia as a reflection of the Nazi aesthetics

The next stage of hypnosis that Leni Riefenstahl uses as a methodology in the film *Olympia* is suggestion. This phase in the traditional hypnotic practices happens in a trance state in which the person is put after the induction phase. Through verbal and emotional structures, a hypnotist makes a psychological impact on the human consciousness, in which he or she accepts new beliefs and attitudes. Suggestion is a process by which one person guides the thoughts, feelings, or behavior of another person. Leni Riefenstahl and members of her team, such as Kurt Neubert[34], Walter Frenz[35], Hans Ertl[36], created new technological devices (an underwater camera, a mechanism for moving camera on rails, cunning soundproof hoods for the cameras, etc.) to translate the emotions and behaviors from the screen to the viewer, changing his perception: «They (crew) were thrilled with the project and devoted their creativity to making possible the often impossible.»[37]

Filming the Olympic games was never an interest of filmmakers. «The fixed camera angles, the lack of camera movement, the predominant use of wide-angle lenses were all characteristic of the newsreel cameraman and no lessons were learnt from the great classics of the silent cinema that by the 1920s was in its heyday.»[38] But early films about the Olympic games never had a big budget and were mostly made for historical records. For instance, even the film by Arnold Fanck about the St. Moritz Winter Olympic Games of 1928, which was produced by UFA, had a small budget, two cameramen and seventeen days of editing. When Leni Riefenstahl discussed the *Olympia* project with Fanck, he said: «If my film on the winter Olympics was a flop, then one about the summer games would be even bigger failure. After all, the contests in the winter landscape are a lot more appealing than anything happening in the

[34] Kurt Neubert (1900–1970) was a German cameraman, a specialist in snow, avalanche, climbing, skiing and flying scenes. He made his debut in Wilhelm Prager's documentary film «Paths to Strength and Beauty» and was camera assistant in the mountain film «Der Heilige

Berg» by Arnold Fanck in 1925–1926.
[35] Walter Frenz (1907–2004) was a German cameraman, film producer and photographer, who worked for Nazi propaganda films. From 1939 to 1945 worked for Leni Riefenstahl and filmed the activities of higher

echelons of leaders of Nazi Germany.
[36] Hans Ertl (1908–2000) was a German mountaineer and Nazi propagandist, most known for being the father of Monika Ertl, the Communist guerrilla who assassinated Roberto Quintanilla Pereira (the man responsible for

stadium or in the gyms.» [39] He didn't know that ambitious Riefenstahl would make a movie remarkable not only for the history of Olympic games, but also for the future of cinematography.

After the Opening Ceremony, the first sport event shown in the film is the men's discus. It makes a connection to the Myron discus-thrower from the prologue. Leni Riefenstahl provides us with different camera angles in filming the sportsmen. First, we see the close-ups of faces and muscular bodies of the men, the movements of their arms throwing the disc. Leni Riefenstahl uses the shots in slow motion made by Kurt Neubert, the best slow-motion expert, to show the great power of the human body.

For the first time, slow motion editing was used in the film to catch the throw of the Polish sportsmen Wajsowna, after — the final throw of German competitor Mauermayer who under the crowd's cheering won the gold medal for Germany. Leni Riefenstahl knew Kurt Neubert from the mountain films of Arnold Fanck and desiring his professional skills booked him almost one year in advance for the *Olympia* shooting. Neubert used enormous *DeBrie* cameras, which ran the film through the camera up to 96 frames per seconds, four times faster than real-time shooting. The slow motion was also used in all kinds of jumping competitions to create an impression that athletes stayed in the air for an incredibly long time.

The muscular male nude body, in this case, becomes the best image to represent the political and ideological intentions of National Socialism, which is to show the domination of Aryan nation. Art under the Nazi regime became a powerful demonstration of power, social union and racial ideology of a Nordic nation. «Beauty» in Nazi art is the presentation of healthy strong classical Hellenistic body which is

chopping off Che Guevara's hands). In the beginning of his career he invented an underwater camera and a ski-mountable camera, both of which transformed the way films were shot. During the World War II, he was accompanying General Rommel, which earned him

a reputation as «Rommel's photographer».

[37] Leni Riefenstahl, *A Memoir*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1993, p. 185.

[38] Taylor Downing, *Olympia*, British Film Institute, London, 1992, p. 13.

[39] Leni Riefenstahl, *A Memoir*, St. Martin's Press, New York,

1993, p. 170.



supposed to reflect visually the purity of the soul, on the contrary, modernism vision of beauty was not dealing so much in being visually seductive according to classical canon, but in touching and affecting the audience in the deepest way. Riefenstahl, herself, denying continuously, and despite proven facts, any relation to the Nazi Party or Nazi ideology after WWII, said in an interview to *Cahiers du Cinéma* in 1965: «I can simply say that I feel spontaneously attracted by everything that is beautiful. Yes: beauty, harmony. And perhaps this care for composition, this aspiration to form is in effect something very German. But I don't know these things myself, exactly. It comes from the unconscious and not from my knowledge... What do you want me to add? Whatever is purely realistic, slice-of-life, what is average, quotidian, doesn't interest me... I am fascinated by what is beautiful, strong, healthy, what is living. I seek harmony. When harmony is produced I am happy.»[40]

There is plenty evidence of Leni Riefenstahl's vision to be subjected to the Nazi ideology and, of course, it is potent in her definition of beauty that coins with the canon of Nazi aesthetics, but all her life, she presents her work and artistic process as apolitical and only concerned by the muscular human body, as if aesthetic and politics did not meet. In fact, it's noticeable that Riefenstahl doesn't blindly follow the Nazi artistic rules. She, as an artist, experiments with techniques and montage to increase the power of propaganda.

According to her diary, she was astonished by Sergei Eisenstein's *The Battleship Potemkin* (Броненосец «Потёмкин», 1925)[41] and avant-garde cinema. Indeed, the main cinematic aim of Eisenstein's films, which is «setting» on the awakening of feelings that is associated with an orientation toward achieving «a purely physi-

[40] Leni Riefenstahl, Interview in Journal *Cahiers du Cinéma*, September 1965, No. 170. 1993, p 66).

[41] «The effect was tremendous, its cast and the photography quite revolutionary. For the first time I realized that a film could be a work of art» (Leni Riefenstahl, *A Memoir*, St. Martin's Press, New York,

ological effect — from a purely optical to an emotional one» [42], is clearly seen in *Olympia*. In fact, Joseph Goebbels, highly estimating *The Battleship Potemkin*, gave it as an example for German filmmakers at the meeting on March 28, 1933: «Anyone with no firm political conviction could become a Bolshevik after seeing this film. It shows very clearly that a work of art can be tendentious, and even the worst kind ideals can be propagated if it is done through the medium of an outstanding work of art». There are many articles and books that give a comparison of Eisenstein and Riefenstahl work. For instance, in the book «Film Propaganda: Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany» by Richard Taylor, he compares the scene from *The Battleship Potemkin* with the scene from Riefenstahl's *Triumph des Willens*, saying: «The scene is thus set, the tension created (in the same way that Eisenstein created tension before Lenin's arrival at the Finland Station in October [1927]) — and Hitler appears as saviour, descending quite literally from the clouds.» [43] On contrary, Rainer Rother says that propaganda movies by soviet filmmakers is much differ from Riefenstahl's films because «Their early films did not aim to engender approval for what they were presenting, or to achieve illusionist acceptance of the way they presented it. In a formal sense, they aimed to provoke. Leni Riefenstahl's reputation has not suffered any such 'tragic' decline, and nor does her work display the slightest hint of formal provocation.» [44] Despite the debates on this topic, Riefenstahl's cinematic language is complex in how she combines the techniques of modern cinema with Nazi aesthetics.

To capture the emotions on the faces of sportsmen in action, Leni Riefenstahl hires Hans Scheib [45] to shoot the Berlin Games with 600 mm lenses, the longest telephoto lenses available at the time. The camera was placed far away from the sportsmen not

[42] Sergei Eisenstein, *The Dramaturgy of Cinema Form*, Moscow: Museum of Cinema, 2000, p. 532.

[43] Richard Taylor, *Film Propaganda: Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany*, I.B.Tauris Publishers, London and New York, 1998, p. 164.

[44] Rainer Rother, *Leni Riefen-*

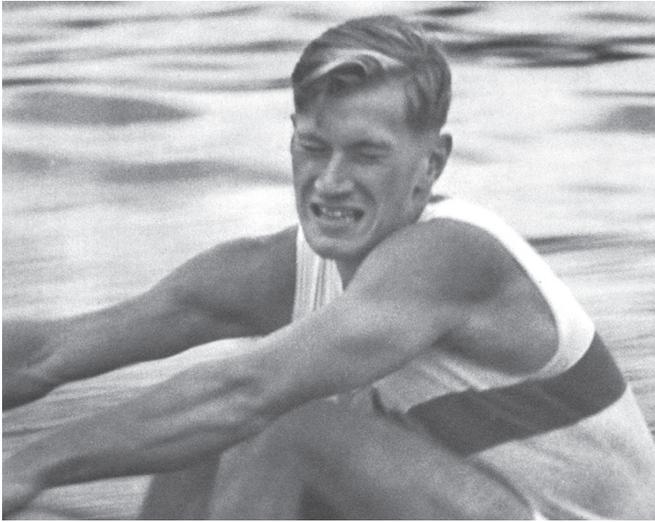
stahl. The Seduction of Genius, Continuum, London and New York, 2002, p. 181.

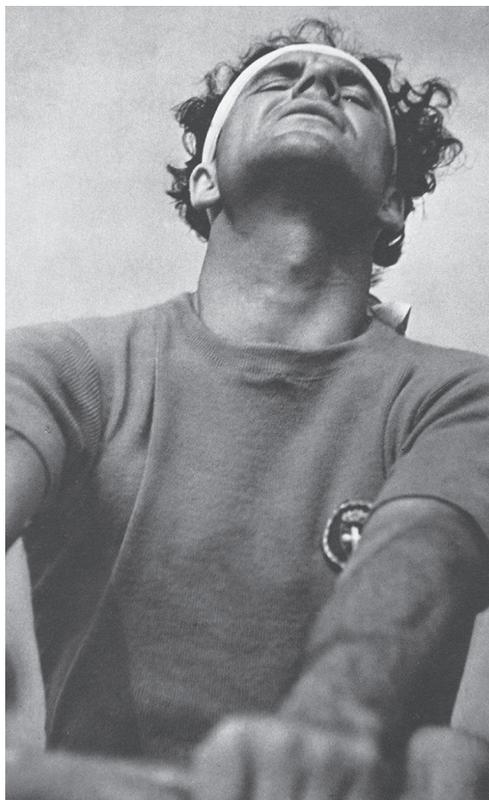
[45] Hans Scheib (1905–1957) was a German cinematographer, mainly worked with domestic and Spanish films. Scheib made his film debut in 1922 and received his practical vocational training

at Arpad Viragh. Already a year later he was allowed to work at Viragh's side with the costume material «Nanon-E von Hanns Schwarz» for the first time as a cameraman. He was always famous for his work in the Marlene Dietrich film *The Woman One Longs For*, 1929.



Fig. 22 Hannemann, Nr. 7 in the German Eight
Fig. 23 Interval





[46] Susan Sontag, Fascinating Fascism, In *The Nazification of Art. Art, Design, Music, Architecture and Film in The Third Reich*, Brandon Taylor and Wilfried van der Will, The Winchester Press, Hampshire, 1990, p. 210.

to bother them during the performance but still capture the struggle, suffering, pain and sweating on their faces ruled by the desire of victory under the gaze of the main spectator, Hitler. According to Susan Sontag: «In *Olympia*, the richest visually of all her films, (it uses both the verticals of the mountain films and the horizontal movements characteristic of *Triumph of the Will*), one straining, scantily clad figure after another seeks the ecstasy of victory, cheered on by ranks of compatriots in the stands, all under the still gaze of the benign Super-Spectator, Hitler, whose presence in the stadium consecrates this effort.» [46] The idea of domination, turning people into objects, massing the group of people, ruled by one lead was one of the key principle of Nazi propaganda.

Interestingly, after men's competition follows the same event for the women. It is noticeable that Leni Riefenstahl films

Fig. 25 Gustav Schäfer, winner of the single-sculls

Fig. 26 Trebisonda Valla, Hurdles' winner

the women the way she films the men of this kind of sport, giving a slow motion of a sport action and their faces after the result of the action. At first sight, it can give an impression of gender equality in sport. According to the official Olympic records, there were 3.632 men sportsmen and only 331 women. But Leni Riefenstahl arranges the shots of appearing men and women in the same frequency: almost every male competition is followed by a female competition. It was made not to give an idea of the equality of genders, but to proclaim that if many men can represent the one ideal Arian body of the Nazi ideology then the women can have the same role.

Though the presentation of women in Nazi art differs from Leni Riefenstahl's view. The theory of racial body types and standards of the ideal beauty by Nazi ideology were precisely described in «Nordic Beauty» (Nordische Schön-



*Fig. 27 Discus throw, man
(time 28:37 till 28:42)*



*Fig. 28 Discus throw, woman
(time 32:08 till 32:12)*



From left to right:

Fig. 29 Hans Woellke, Olympic winner

Fig. 30 Gisela Mauermayer, Germany

Fig. 31 Marja Kwasniewska, Bronze medal



heit) by Paul Schultze-Naumburg, published in 1937. His idea was based on the concept that «body is a reflection of the soul». For him, the ideal Nordic type of male and female bodies are «tall, slim, fine-limbed, and have narrow hips and narrow faces.»^[47] After the Hitler's speech at Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung in the House of German Art in 1937 «clarity»^[48] became the main characteristic of the Nordic people, which implied the transformation of the woman body into a man type of form. Even the issue that a woman's body has softer curves than a man's body is ex-

[47] Brandon Taylor and Wilfried van der Will, *The Nazification of Art. Art, Design, Music, Architecture and Film in The Third Reich*, The Winchester Press, Hampshire, 1990, p. 66.

[48] «'Clarity' is found in Hitler's opening speech for the first Grosse Deutsche Kunstaus-

tellung in the House of German Art in 1937: 'Deutsch sein heisst klar sein' (To be German is to be clear). In this context it means that clarity of vision is a racial characteristic of the Germans, especially since they have become 'hardened' by recent political events which

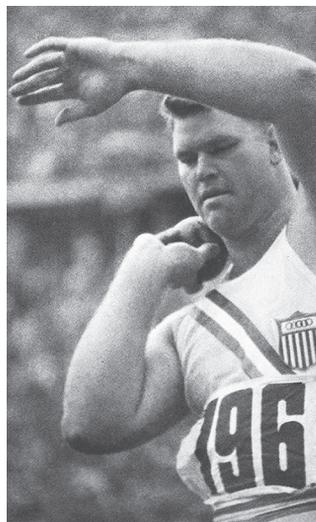
have 'opened their eyes' to their own decline. Now clear-eyed, they can see who was responsible. Their clarity of vision can find expression in art once again, now that the unnatural and confused sloganizing of the Jewish reign of culture is over. Now art requires only

From left to right:

Fig. 32 Kitei, the winner

Fig. 33 Sau-King Yeung, China's swimmer

Fig. 34 Jack Torrance, world's record holder USA



plained by Schultze-Naumburg as the dominance of the racial strength above the gender physiques, which means that nationality has much stronger influence on the physique than gender. In this situation, a Nordic woman is more like a Nordic man[49] than the women of other nationalities, she has small breasts, flat stomach and long legs. The woman becomes «the image of the heroic man in its feminine form.»[50]

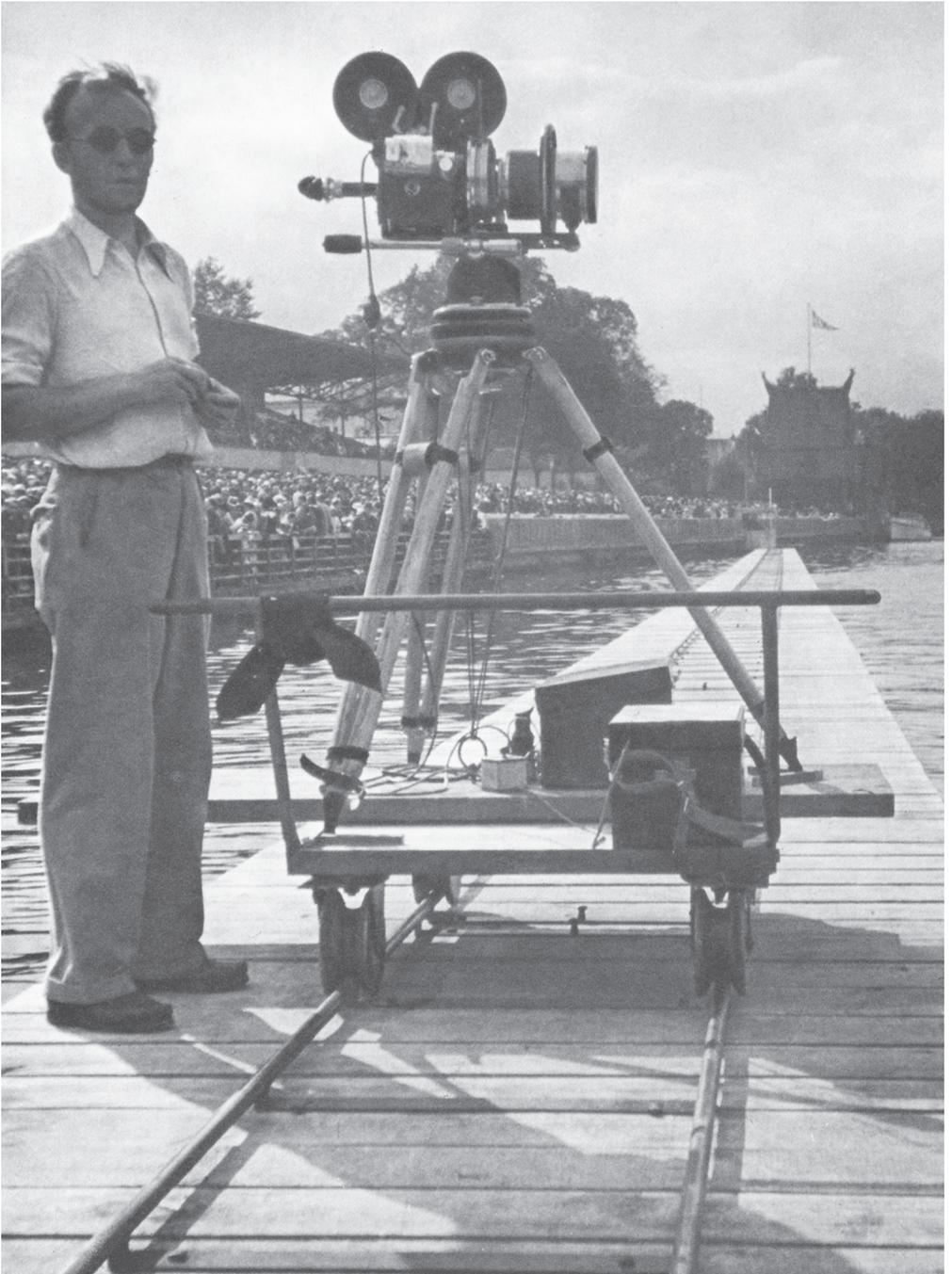
It is not obvious if Leni Riefenstahl shows in her film the variety of human bodies, which doesn't go along with the classical representation of Aryan body in Nazi ide-

normal, 'instinctive' reactions. Art must also therefore be 'clear' in the sense of essay to understand» (Brandon Taylor and Wilfried van der Will, *The Nazification of Art. Art, Design, Music, Architecture and Film in The Third Reich*, 1990, p. 64).

[49] According to Paul Schul-

tze-Naumburg's photo-book "Nordic Beauty" (*Nordische Schönheit*, 1937), Nordic man is tall, slim, fine-limbed, with narrow hips and narrow face.

[50] qtd. in Taylor and Will 66.



Mesmerizing cinema, a tool of Nazi propaganda

Suggestion phase:

Page 44 — Fig. 35 The pier upon which a cameraman could follow the rowers in Grünau during their finishing spurt

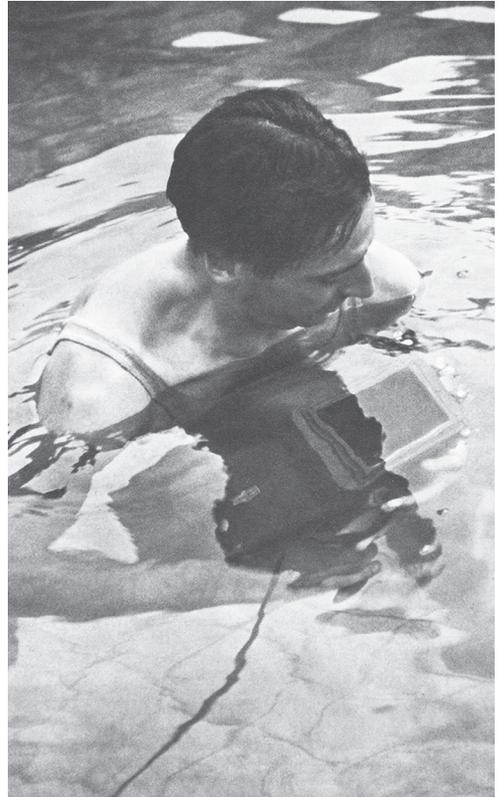
Fig. 36 In order not to disturb the athletes close-ups were taken from special pits

Fig. 37 Guzzi Lantschner has made his camera sound-proof in order that its noise shall not disturb the competitors



ology, to express her idea of beauty or she does it to convince the audience in the image of open-minded Germany that appreciates the individuality of other nations, which, no doubt, is more attractive for the spectator.

If cinema is a machine that produces and transmits the concrete emotions to the viewer, then it should contain scenes of maximum emotional tension to be able to impose the feelings and behavior desired by a film director. Riefenstahl uses the suggestion method to display an internationally friendly atmosphere to the public. To reach the maximum level of dramatism she and her team engineered new devices for filming. For the finale rowing races at Grünau[51], they built a 100-meter track and laid the rails, so that the camera attached to the trolley could catch the last impetuous dash for the boats at the finish line. It was a prototype of a modern camera dolly[52], which



[51] Grünau is the quarter of Berlin which is surrounded by the Berliner Stadtforst and traversed by the river Dahme in the southern shore.

[52] A camera dolly is a wheeled cart that is used in filmmaking and television production to create smooth horizontal camera movements.

Fig. 39 Underwater camera

Fig. 40 Underwater shot

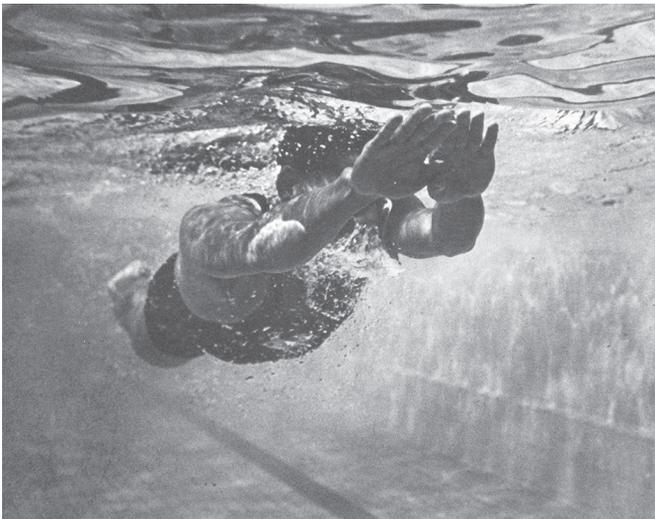
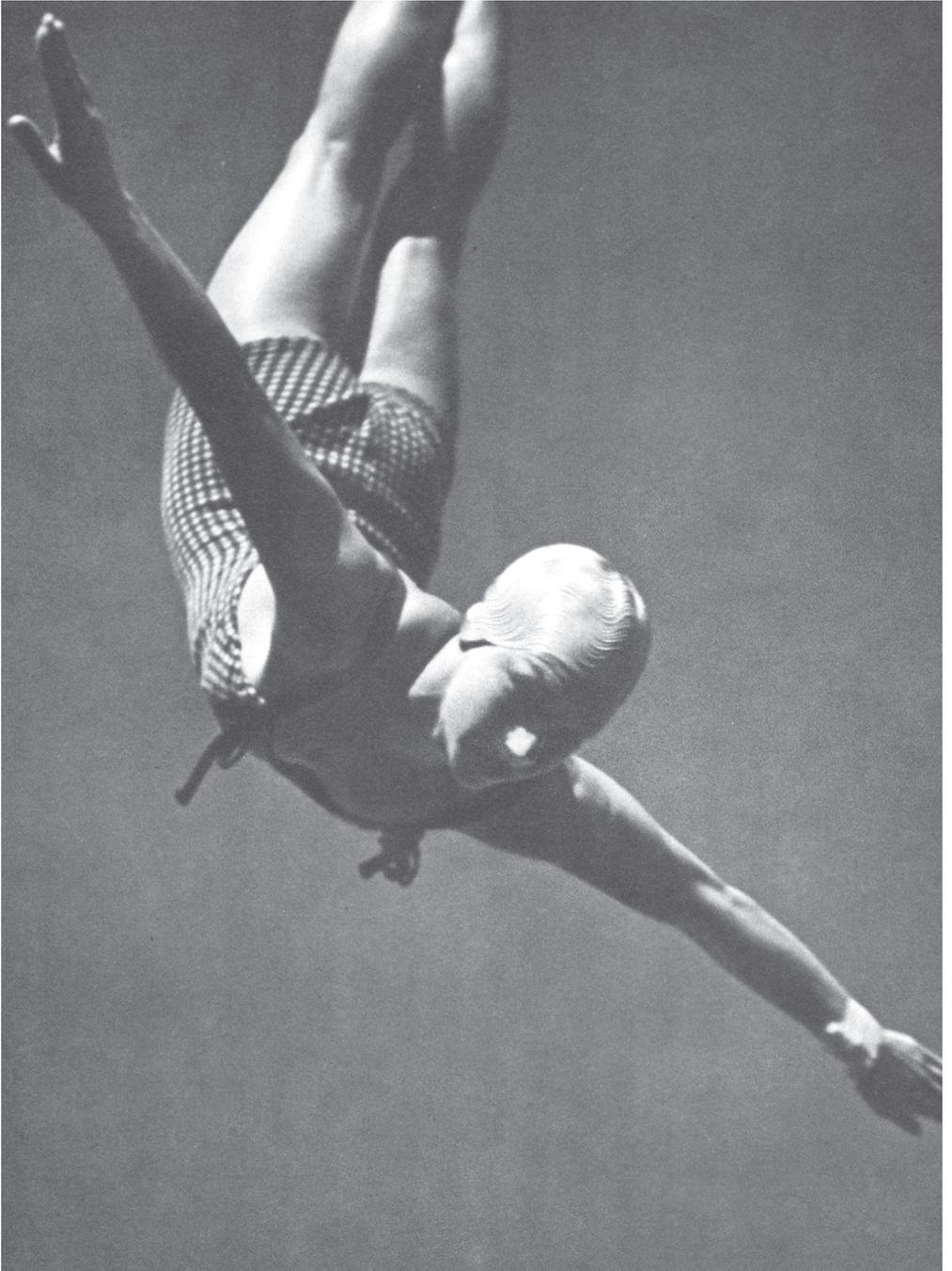


Fig. 41 Filming the diving from the 10-metres-tower
Fig. 42 Hans Ertl takes close-ups from the rubber boat
Page 49 — Fig. 43 The winning high-diver Dorothy
Poynton-Hill-USA

didn't exist before *Olympia*. For the athletes participating in equestrian competitions, the team tied the small cameras to the saddles of the horses, filled with a film stock only five meters long, which gave a special effect, despite the fact that most of the frames appeared to be blurry.

Another great invention was made by Ertl for shooting diving events. He built a camera encased in a box that could film above and below the water, which was absolutely new in those days and created the shots which afterwards became very famous. Leni Riefenstahl herself tried to put small hand cameras whenever it was possible. Walter Frenz even created a wire cage for those cameras to hang around the neck of the marathon runners during training so that the athletes could turn on the camera by themselves. It was made to create a feeling that the viewer of the movie becomes the person on the screen. What were supposed to be the





spectator's emotions, in reality were the emotions inserted in his brain through the cinema screen. *Olympia* had to be an immersive cinema to show the achievements and strength of the Aryan nation and, at the same time, to fool the world with the new image of Germany.

A lot of footage of the film was made during training of the sportsmen and edited with the ones who took place in the Olympic Stadium. For example, the shots of the yachting events were taken by Walter Frenz from the boats themselves during training. Also, the close-ups of the swimmers were filmed from a rubber dinghy during the training. But not only did the sportsmen have to train for the Olympic games, the whole camera team was preparing a long time in advance before the Games started. It was needed to practice the angles for each kind of sport, so scenes had the highest emotional tension. The operators had to train, sometimes without a film in the apparatus, in order to learn how to catch the fast movements of the athletes. Without this training, the good shots would not have been possible. Then, *Olympia* would have been the same as previous films about the Olympic Games, a historical record of sport events, that couldn't have expressed the greatness of the Aryan nation and spread the Nazi ideology into the masses.

2.2 Women's group synchronous gymnastics as a pattern of modern Germany

Despite the focus on filming individual human bodies, the concept of grouping people in one unit by Nazi ideology is also shown in the second part of the film *Olympia*. The scene, that I called «Gymnastic on the grass», which lasts from minute 19:40 till 20:57, demonstrates a choreography of the female gymnasts moving in unison. The synchronized dance was very popular in the Weimar Germany in the 1920s. According to Siegfried Kracauer, the concept of Girl-culture comes from the performances by Tiller Girls «the products of American distraction factories» who «are no longer individual girls, but indissoluble girl clusters whose movements are demonstrations of mathematics.»^[53] People, in this case become important only as parts of the mass, not as individuals. According to Alexandra Midal: «The Girl as a symbol of modernity and metropolitan life reflects the changes in German society and culture: the focus lay not so much on improving the working conditions of factory laborers — the Taylorist project was not yet rejected by the German proletariat — as on offering a blueprint for social stability bolstered by rationalization, in line with the American model.»^[54] It means that the dancers as a symbol of mechanization demonstrated the advantages of the machine industry in simplifying the fabric work. In Nazi Germany an ornamentation, i. e. forming the figures by many human bodies, and desexualisation of masses, i. e. deleting the gender characteristics of individuals, were the illustration of identical body machines ruled by one leader. «While the Nazi Party favored representations codified by the classical canons of Antiquity, the geometric patterns formed by the Girls' bodies merged into a virtuoso abstract geometric composition that could be functionalized as an allegory of the Third Reich.»^[55]

In *Olympia*, the scene «Gymnastic on the grass» is an example of mass orna-

[53] Kracauer Siegfried, The mass ornament. Weimar Essays, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England, 1995, p. 76.

[54] Alexandra Midal, Girls, the Troopers of Dance. Aesthetization of Politics and Manipulation of Entertain-

ment. Revue Faire No. 29, (February 2021), p. 8.

[55] Ibid., p. 20.

Fig. 44 Fraser spiral

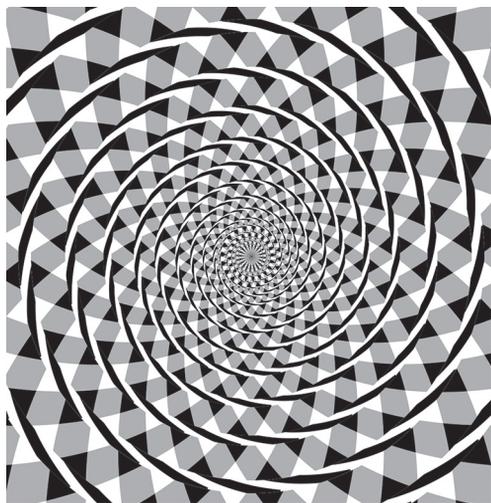
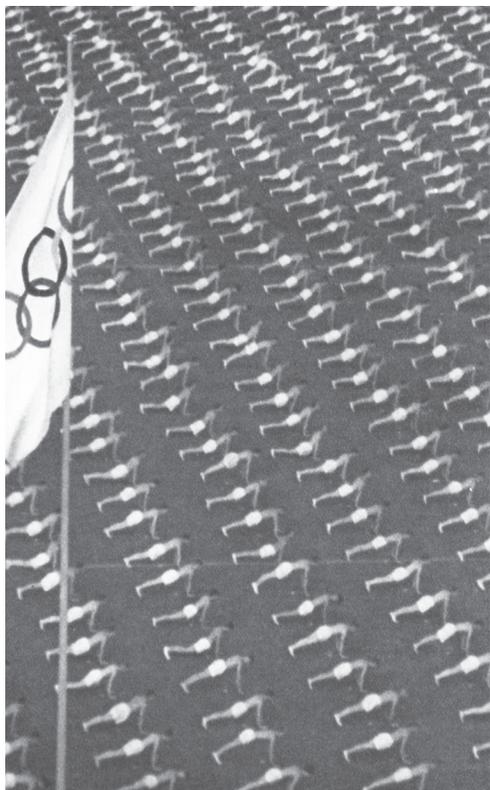


Fig. 45 Gymnastic on the grass
(time 20:27)



mentation by Nazi ideology. It starts from the close-ups of the movement trajectory produced by one female gymnast and continues with zooming out the camera to give the wide angle of 10.000 women in long straight lines waving and moving together. During the last few seconds, shot from a bird's eye view, the whole field is filled with the moving ornament of the masses, where it is impossible to distinguish a person or a subject. In this sequence Riefenstahl repeats the same circular hand movements of the gymnasts fifteen times, not only constructing a rhythm but also providing the



mesmerizing effect as a Fraser spiral illusion, created by the British psychologist Sir James Fraser in 1908. Fraser was working with mathematical shapes to deceive the human brain through the optical illusions. Fraser spiral gives an impression of a moving spiral but, in reality, the «spiral» is just a construction of a series of circles, built by black and white units, twisted on «chequer-work background»[56]. In medical hypnotic practices spirals were believed to have a relaxing effect: «The spiral technique lends structure as well as flexibility to hypnotic induction», which «is compared with progressive relaxation.»[57]

By the words of Kracauer, the girls' pattern «consists of lines and circles like those found in textbooks on Euclidean geometry, and also incorporates the elementary components of physics, such as waves and spirals»[58]. So, if the circular movements of gymnasts' hands create a

[56] Fraser James, *A New Visual Illusion of Direction*, 1908, p. 318.

[57] Jonathan Venn, *The Spiral Technique of Hypnotic Induction*, *The International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis*, Vol. XXII, No. 3, 1984, p. 289.

[58] Kracauer Siegfried, *The*

mass ornament. Weimar Essays, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England, 1995, p. 78.

moving spiral, it concentrates attention of the audience and provokes a form of relaxation, in which the New Germany is described as a harmonized community without social inequality and ideological disunity that most of the Germans were seeking for.

2.3 The illusion of the unity of nations in Olympic Berlin to deceive an international community

The Olympic games in Berlin were a project of great importance for Germany. Hitler ordered Dr. Carl Diem, the secretary of the German government's Commission for Sports, to provide the best conditions and technical solutions for holding the Olympic games. It was the first Olympic games that were broadcasted on television^[59] and translated on the radio in 41 countries. The closing ceremony was the first one, where light projectors were used as a part of the performance. Nobody knew at that time that those lights would be used by the Nazis during WWII to search for enemy planes in the sky. Also, Diem organized the advertising campaign, including design of the medals, award certificates, promotional posters, and sculptures all over Berlin. But his major duty was to build the Olympic Village to please the international sportsmen. He provided the Finns with a sauna, the Japanese with the sleeping mats so they could follow their habits, the Americans with American mattresses and Swiss with feathered comforters.

The visualization of the Olympic Village is seen in the prologue of the second part of *Olympia — Fest der Schönheit* (Festival of Beauty). It starts from the misty nature

[59] Berlin Olympic Games were translated from the Fernsehsender «Paul Nipkow» (TV Station Paul Nipkow), which was the first television station in the world, lunched on 22 March 1935 in Berlin and named after Paul Gottlieb Nipkow, the inventor of the Nipkow disk.

Fig. 47 Morning in the Olympic village
(time from 03:19 till 03:24)



shots of the pond, dripping water, the movement of the leaves from the wind, light reflecting on the surface of a pond, then close-ups of spiders, bugs, birds and finally the camera moves along the pond and leads us to the houses of the Olympic Village. It is morning. The lawn sprinkler is spraying water, reflecting the sun which switches to a shot of sunlight filtering through the trees and the sunlight, like the projectors from the Olympic stadium, illuminates the athletes' morning run. It refers us to the Torch Ceremony from the first part of the movie and finishes with the scene of naked sportsmen running through the pond right to the sauna.

The sequence of naked sportsmen (from 3:15 till 3:29 minutes) as an illustration of the nudist naturalism movement symbolizes the ideology of organic community so beloved by the Nazi regime. The ideas of both bourgeois (Left) and proletarian (Right) nudist movements existing before National Socialism were integrated into Nazi ideology[60]. The main principles of ideal beauty and healthy life style were taken by Nazi government and considered as the demonstration of Nordic racial body types. By 1938 the *Bund für Leibesucht* (Federation for Body Discipline) began to

[60] In contrast to the bourgeois nudist movement, which tried to revive the sexual purity through the ideal of ancient Greek beauty, by the proletarians «the nudity was understood as a strengthening of the individual's potential for opposition» (The Nazification of art.

The Nazification of Art. Art, Design, Music, Architecture and Film in The Third Reich, Brandon Taylor and Wilfried van der Will, 1990, p. 31).

hold open-air summer camps again. A nudist film *Natürliche Leibesucht* (Natural Body Discipline) was accepted by officials and shown as «educative for the people». In fact, it is noticeable that Riefenstahl uses the principles of nude modern photography of the 1920s. «The photographers, no matter whether they were operating in a left-liberal or in a right-wing environment, attempted to capture this spirit by concentrating on moments which showed exuberant movement and the enjoyment of the open air. The naked round dance of women became a trade image of utopian bliss, both on the left and the right.» [61] The photos of bourgeois nudists were published in a book by Hans Suren *Der Mensch und die Sonne* (Men, Women and the Sun, 1924), and the proletarian ones were published in *Körperbildung-Nacktkultur, Blätter freier Menschen* (Journal of the Worker Nudist Culture). The similarities of a composition, an organization of light and shadows of the nudist photography of the 1920s and images in *Olympia* by Riefenstahl, prove that she integrates the methods of modern photography to increase the visual power of Nazi ideology, which, on the contrary, considered modern art movements degenerative [62].

The illustration of the nudism concept can also be found in the prologue of the first film from 9.00 till 11.25 minutes, where the motion of arms, produced by naked female dancers, creates the trance statement for the viewer. The same choreography is used in expressive dance that was popular in German dance schools of 1920s, which aim was to show the graceful motion of the naked bodies [63]. According to the studies by Joe Griffin, Irish psychologist of modern times, the deepest trance develops during the sleep from the rapid eye movement (REM). It means that the best way to reach the trance by hypnosis is to use the rhythmic movement to generate trance, for instance,

[61] Brandon Taylor and Wilfried van der Will, *The Nazification of Art. Art, Design, Music, Architecture and Film in The Third Reich*, The Winchester Press, Hampshire, 1990, p.34.

[62] On February 24, 1920 Adolf Hitler announced the

program of the National Socialist German Labor Party (NSDAP): «We demand the legal fight against a tendency in art and literature which exerts a subversive influence on the life of our people.»

[63] Based on the Rudolf von Laban's ideas about *Bewegungstanz* (rhythmic

movement dance) the New dance schools appeared in Hamburg, Berlin, Leipzig and Cologne, the main direction of which was *Ausdruckstanz* (expressive dance).

Fig. 48 Temple dancer



Fig. 49 Illustration from Der Mensch und die Sonne, 1924

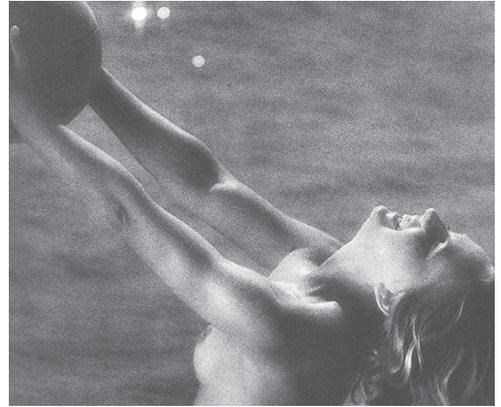


Fig. 50 Temple dancer with ball

Fig. 51 Dance

making repetitive hand movements or getting people to stare at spinning optical illusions. Leni Riefenstahl, organizing the montage, repeats the hand movements of the temple dancers to put the audience into a trance state.

The prologue of the second part of the movie was made to show Germany as a harmonized community. Leni Riefenstahl constructs the international connections through showing sportsmen from Olympic Village training and living together in a peaceful and friendly environment. According to Glenn B. Infield[64], Hitler did everything he could to convince foreign guests and the audience of Riefenstahl's movie of the image of a peace-loving Germany. In particular, it affected the questions of Jewish people in sport. By 1936, according to the policy of Hitler, the restrictions against Jews in sports were strict. A sign in a Bavarian ski resort said: «Jews, your entry is



[64] Glenn B. Infield, Leni Riefenstahl. *The Fallen Film Goddess*, Thomas Y. Crowell Company, New York, 1976, p. 124.

forbidden!» American Olympic officials voted on removing the Olympic Games from Berlin due to the discrimination against German Jewish sportsmen. In the end, Hitler and Dr. Theodor Lewand, the president of the German Olympic Committee, announced that all limitations concerning Jewish athletes were canceled.

Probably, for the same reasons, in the film *Olympia* we see the sportsmen of color equal to the other sportsmen. After winning four gold medals and setting two world records, Jesse Owens became a phenomenon of the Berlin Olympic Games. Leni Riefenstahl, attracted by the physical beauty of a young athlete, couldn't cut this achievement from her movie. On the contrary, Owens is presented unbeatable. According to the words of Riefenstahl, she did it against the will of Hitler and Joseph Goebbels, the minister of propaganda in Nazi Germany, which is obviously a lie. In the opinion of Rainer Rother[65] such a cinematic decision was made to emphasize the contest between nations. According to him, «constructing the link between athletes and their compatriots among the spectators supported by shouts of encouragement in the relevant language»[66] served to indicate the national groups. Susan Sontag, on the contrary, explains this phenomenon as Leni Riefenstahl's obsession of the strong «beautiful» bodies and that «in matters of beauty she is not racist»[67]. Sontag considers that till the end of Riefenstahl's life, she was fascinated by people of color that can be seen in one of her last works, the photographic book «The Last of the Nuba». From the words of Sontag, «the contrast between the clean and the impure, the incorruptible and the defiled, the physical and the mental» is one of the features of Nazi ideology.

Despite the debates about the presentation of people of color in the film, *Olym-*

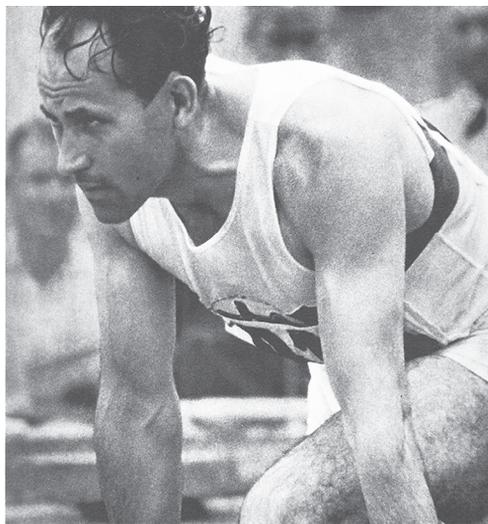
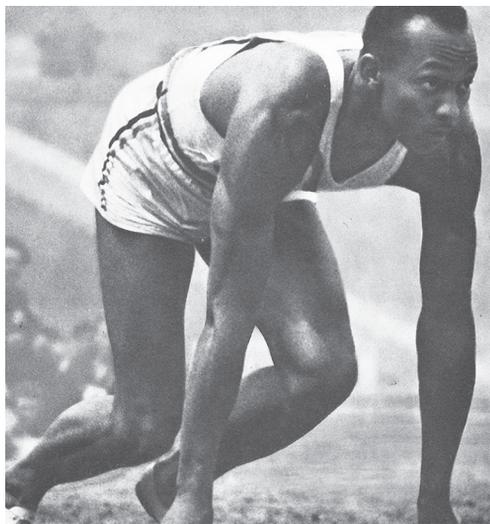
[65] Rainer Rother — German media scientist. 1991–2006 he was director of the cinemathèque of the German Historical Museum (Berlin) and exhibition curator. He oversaw various exhibitions, such as «Das deutsche Bilderimperium. Ufa 1917–1945 and The Last Days of Mankind.

Pictures of the First World War». Rother's publications are mostly dedicated to film history. Since 2006 — artistic director of the Deutsche Kinemathek and head of the Berlinale retrospective.
[66] Rainer Rother, Leni Riefenstahl. The Seduction of Genius, Continuum, London

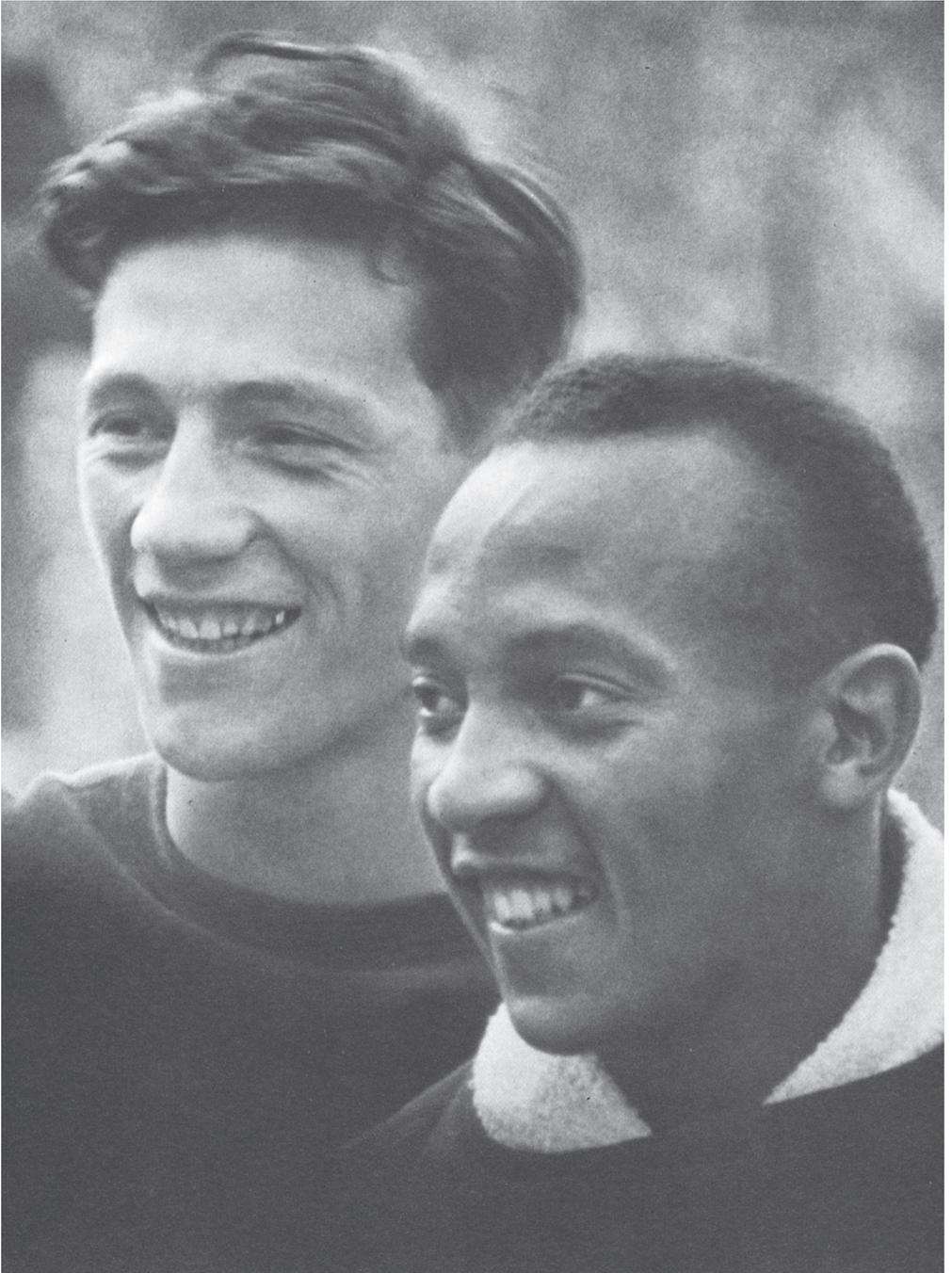
and New York, 2002, p. 86.
[67] Susan Sontag, Fascinating Fascism, In The Nazification of Art. The Nazification of Art. Art, Design, Music, Architecture and Film in The Third Reich, Brandon Taylor and Wilfried van der Will, The Winchester Press, Hampshire, 1990, p. 212.

Fig. 52 Jesse Owens

Fig. 53 The German sprinter Borchmeyer
Page 61 — Fig. 54 Athletes watching the Games



pia, with no doubt, gives the spectator an impression that Nazi Germany doesn't discriminate against neither nationalities nor ethnic groups, which should have convinced the international society of the image of a peace-loving Germany a few years before WWII.



SUSCEPTIBILITY PHASE: PEACE-LOVING GERMANY

3.1 The European acceptance of the Nazi hypnosis created by Leni Riefenstahl in film Olympia

«Hypnotic susceptibility is an ability of responsiveness to suggestions for changes in subjective experience and for alterations in perception, sensation, emotion, thought, or behavior.»[68] According to medical studies by David Spiegel, Thurman Hunt and Harvey Dondershine, the patients with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and dissociative states have highest hypnotizability[69]. But, despite the different researches on hypnotizability, it is clear that people who are open to hypnosis and want to be hypnotized can be put in a trance more easily than the ones who resist it. The European community has chosen Berlin as a city of the Olympic Games 1936 to give Germany a chance to be a part of European membership again after WWI. They truly believed that it would help to regulate the political relations with Germany. The film *Olympia* proved that the international community was open to the lie offered by the Nazis through hypnosis, ingeniously created by Leni Riefenstahl and translated all over the world.

Olympia passed the German censorship board on April 14, 1938 with the rating: «Politically valuable, artistically valuable, culturally valuable, suitable for the education of the common people, educational film»[70] and was shown on 20 April at the Ufa-Palast am Zoo in Berlin, the day of Hitler's forty-ninth birthday. The second part of *Olympia* «Festival of beauty» premiered six weeks after the first part «Festival of Nations». The most honorable guests were invited to the premiere: the Party, the government, the military, the film industry, the International Olympic Committee and the entire diplomatic corps in Berlin. It was the first time when the premiere of the film was organized like this.

The review by Nazi journalist Erwin Goelz (pseudonym Frank Maraun) says:

[68] Journal Neuropsychiatr Dis Treat. 2017; 13: 1007–1012.

[69] David Spiegel, Thurman Hunt and Harvey Dondershine, Dissociation and hypnotizability in posttraumatic stress disorder, Am J Psychiatry 1988; 145:301–305.

[70] qtd. in Infield 147.

Fig. 55 Poster of the film *Olympia Part I Festival of Nations, 1938* (*Olympia, Fest der Völker*)

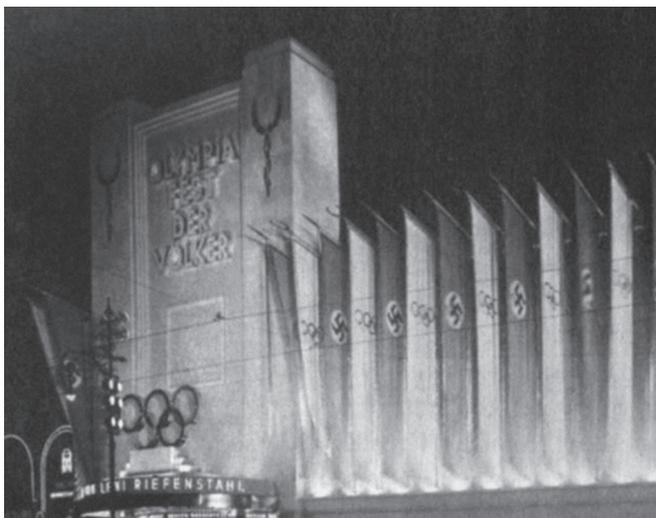


Fig. 56 Poster of the film *Olympia Part I Festival of Nations, 1938* (*Olympia, Fest der Völker*)



Fig. 57 Leni Riefenstahl with Adolf Hitler and Joseph Goebbels, April 29 1938

Fig. 58 Ufa Palace, decorated for the premiere of Olympia, 1938



«This is not only a creation of film, which illuminates and animates. It is a result of national Socialism, which is penetrating the total life of the nation with its ramifications, its directional force, and which makes us see reality and idea together. Only in the ideological structure of national Socialism could this great documentary film have come into being as an artistic achievement.»[71] In addition to the laudatory reviews from German critics, when *Olympia* received the State Prize for the best film of the year, Joseph Goebbels congratulated Riefenstahl with the words: «It is a particular pleasure for me that you were awarded the highest recognition in the area of filmmaking in the year 1938 for the towering achievement of the film *Olympia*, «Festival of Beauty» and «Festival of Nations». I extend to you in addition my heartiest and most sincere congratulations.»[72]

Financially supported by the Propaganda Ministry, Riefenstahl made a six-month tour around Europe promoting the film. In Paris, *Olympia* won the Grand Prize, in Sweden The Polar Prize. Despite the fact that film was nominated the prize Mussolini Cup in at the International Moving Picture Festival in Venice, an American delegate Harold Smith and a British delegate Neville Kerney protested the decision of the international committee by reason of *Olympia* being not a feature but a documentary[73]. But everywhere Leni Riefenstahl went, the film received enthusiastic reviews.

Le Figaro wrote: «... the Olympic flame rising into the atmosphere that has never been more favourable for peace on earth.»[74]

Another French newspaper *L'Ordre* published: «*Olympia* is more and better than a film or even a spectacle. It is a glowing poem of images, light and life; it is ageless and almost without nationality.»[75]

[71] Deutsche Film, No. 11, May 1938. 1993, p. 231.

[75] Ibid., p. 231.

[72] qtd. in Infield 149.

[73] Glenn B. Infield, Leni Riefenstahl. The Fallen Film Goddess, Thomas Y. Crowell Company, New York, 1976, p. 149.

[74] Leni Riefenstahl, A Memoir, St. Martin's Press, New York,

One of the Danish newspapers *Berlingske Tidende* noted: «It is difficult to write an objective article if one is profoundly moved by the subject matter, and we openly admit that the film on the Olympic Games had deeply moved us. It is a drama of very great stature, a film at the acme of art- a visual poem.»[76]

In Sweden the review was also remarkable, *Svenska Dagbladet* corresponded: «It would be regrettable if the spirit of international brotherhood represented by *Olympia* could not smash through the barriers of political antipathies.»[77]

According to the words of Leni Riefenstahl: «The unpolitical shape of the film conquered all prejudices.»[78] The hypnotic spell worked as it was planned and mesmerized people all over Europe in Germany as an internationally welcome community, but there were some countries that saw the features of political propaganda upon the artistic quality of the film.

3.2 The opposition to the film *Olympia* by Leni Riefenstahl in the countries with strong personal beliefs

The reaction to the film in the United States was very different to the one by the European public. The Anti-Nazi league in New York published in the press: «There is no place in Hollywood for Leni Riefenstahl».[79] They saw the film director as a representative of National Socialism and the film as a part of a propaganda campaign. Riefenstahl tried to convince the American studios that it was a false impression using her charisma and denying all the news about Nazi political actions: «Immediately upon my arrival in New York, I told the press that my trip was absolutely private and

[76] *Ibid.*, p. 232.

[77] *Ibid.*, p. 232.

[78] Leni Riefenstahl, *A Memoir*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1993, p. 231.

[79] *qtd.* in Doherty 341.

that I had no official mission to fulfill. Furthermore, I would like to state that I have never had an official position in Germany, and therefore I could not be head of the Nazi film industry. I am a free creative artist.»[80]

Despite the efforts of Leni Riefenstahl, many film studios refused to show the film. Walt Disney was the only studio who wanted to see the film, but even they were afraid to screen it. «American films are barred from Germany, so we have nothing to show Miss Riefenstahl that would interest her.»[81]

Finally, the film «Festival of nations» was shown in New York in 1940 at the 86th Street garden Theatre. The newspaper *New York Times* wrote: «... Americans will enjoy watching the numerous victories of our representatives in the track and field events. Assembled under the guidance of Leni Riefenstahl, the shots of the contestants from fifty-one countries and the reactions of the spectators in the huge stadium give the audience many vicarious thrills.»[82] Many critics agreed that apart from being a documentary film, *Olympia* was a brilliant propaganda of National Socialism. In the interview after the war Riefenstahl denied any possible aspects of propaganda in the movie: «... the kings of Norway, Denmark, Romania and Belgium and other high-ranking personalities showed by their presence at the premieres of the *Olympia* film that it was free of any National Socialistic propaganda.»[83]

But if America participated in the Olympic Games and, in the end, showed the movie to the public, the USSR refused to take part in the Berlin Games at all. One of the reasons was that the USSR didn't have an Olympic committee in the country until 1951 and the relations with the Weimar Republic were in a frozen state, and when Adolf Hitler came to power in 1933, Germany began to be perceived in the USSR as

[80] qtd. in Doherty 343.

[81] qtd. in Doherty 342.

[82] *New York Times*, March 9, 1940, p. 19.

[83] *Film culture*, Spring 1973, p. 174.

the most likely military enemy.

The Soviet Union, because of ideological reasons, refused any attempts to participate in any of European sport events. Instead, in the 1920s and 1930s, the USSR organized an alternative competition — the Spartakiad, named after the Roman leader of the slave uprising, Spartacus. Athletes from other countries, where there were socialist and workers' organizations, were also invited to these tournaments. As part of the ideological campaign «to combat sycophancy before the West,» the government even changed some sports terms into a Russian manner. For example, many of the names of punches in boxing were replaced — the uppercut was called exclusively «bottom blow», and the hook — «side blow», and in wrestling the French *souplésse* was renamed «deflection throw». Despite that, sport events in the USSR were also aimed to spread the communist ideology to other countries. But if the Olympic Games in Nazi Germany tried to show the privilege of Aryan nation under the fake mask of internationality, then Spartakiads were held under the communist slogan «Workers of the world, unite!» [84]

However, the USSR did not participate neither in the World and European Championships, nor in the Olympic Games, and was not a member of the relevant international sports organizations. There were several reasons for that, among which was the negative attitude towards the USSR not only from the capitalist states, but also from Western Social Democrats. Most of the leaders of international sports organizations, historians, theoreticians and sociologists of bourgeois countries stood on the position of isolation, the establishment of a «cordon sanitaire» against the Soviet state [85]. Soviet sports organizations, supervised by the Red Sports International,

[84] The communist slogan «Workers of all countries, unite!» was taken from The Communist Manifesto (1848) by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels and was placed on the coat of arms of the USSR. In 1923–1936 the slogan was presented in 6 languages

(according to the number of the main languages of the republics of USSR in 1922); with a change in the number of union republics in 1937–1940 it was given in 11 languages, in 1940–1956 — in 16, since 1956 — in 15 languages. [85] Голощапов Б. Р. История

физической культуры и спорта: Учеб. пособие для студ. высш. пед. учеб. заведений. — М.: Издательский центр «Академия», 2001.

also «reciprocated» bourgeois physical culture, including the international Olympic movement, which were considered contradictory ideas of the international communist movement. From the materials of the plenums of the Red Sports International of the 1920s and the 1930s, it is clear that they were aimed at «exposing the bourgeois *Olympiads*» of 1924, 1928, 1932 and 1936. At the same time, the peak of the negative attitude of Soviet sports organizations to the Olympic Games of that period was the holding of the 1936 Summer Olympics in Nazi Germany.

The leaders of Soviet sports have repeatedly rejected attempts by the national Olympic committees to establish sports contacts with Soviet organizations. It was believed that contacts with bourgeois sports would interfere with international proletarian policy in the interests of the proletariat. At the same time, sports were an important part of ideology in USSR, as it was in Nazi Germany. According to the Soviet government, strong and healthy workers, soldiers, and peasants were needed to build a new country, therefore, the state system taught citizens sports from an early age. Many posters were made to promote mass sports. The slogan «In healthy body — a healthy spirit» is still memorable in Russia. In fact, this slogan is very close to a Nazi belief that body is reflection of a soul.

Despite the ideological differences[86] of the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, for both countries a propaganda played a key role in forming new political regimes. «Propaganda was of immense significance to the Nazis, as it had been to the Bolsheviks before them, and for somewhat similar reasons. Both started as small minority groups and both wanted to gain a broader basis of support.»[87] And both saw cinema as the best form of mass manipulation. From the words of Lenin «Of all the arts,

[86] Soviet Union ideology was based on social classes on contrary to Nazi ideology, which was based on nationality. «Soviet socialism, under the slogan 'All power to the Soviets!', proclaimed the dictatorship of the proletariat and with it a faith founded on a class-based analysis of

the development of human society. German National Socialism centered on a faith in the virtues of organic nationhood under the slogan 'One people! One Reich! One Fuhrer! »(Richard Taylor, *Film Propaganda: Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany*, 1998, p. 152).

[87] Richard Taylor, *Film Propaganda: Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany*, I.B.Tauris Publishers, London, New York, 1998, p. 143.

for us cinema is the most important», Goebbels also characterized cinema as «one of the most modern and far-reaching media that there is for influencing the masses». But if Germany had access to the soviet avant-garde and propaganda films, such as Eisenstein's «The Battleship Potemkin» (1925), in USSR all films made by Nazi Germany were forbidden. Film *Olympia* was never shown in Soviet Russia and the name of Leni Riefenstahl was erased from all Soviet books about cinema. The Soviet public never experienced the hypnotic spell of Leni Riefenstahl.

CONCLUSION

After the war, Leni Riefenstahl was arrested on charges of a relation to the Nazi regime. Released in 1948, she tried her best to clean her name and to return to the film industry. She repeatedly proclaimed her political innocence and started to prepare her vision of events, which often differed remarkably from the records[88]. Once again, Riefenstahl tried to hide under the mask of femininity and continue her work as if only art mattered, and she never knew about the Nazis' political aims. «No man in Riefenstahl's position would be believed if he told the world that he used actors from concentration camps but knew nothing about Nazism or its atrocities.»[89] In 1960–1970s she had trips to Africa to photograph Masai Mara tribes and after publishing a book «The Last of the Nuba» in 1973, where she continued her obsession of the strong naked human bodies as it was in *Olympia*. In 1972 Riefenstahl once again appeared on the Olympic stadium, but this time as a photographer of Munich Olympic games for The Times. It proves that despite her absolute commitment to National Socialism, her artistic achievements are still valuable to the history of cinema and the technological inventions are used in modern cinema production, such as underwater cameras, camera dolly, aerial photography. *Olympia* is still discussed and from time to time becomes the part of exhibitions, for example, the permanent exhibition in Deutsche Kinemathek in Berlin (2021), which calls *Olympia* «a propagandistic exception of staged documentary».

My research started with the interest in cinema as a medium that changes our perception of everyday life and continued with identifying the mesmerizing abilities of the Nazi propaganda film *Olympia*. In order to reach this aim, it was important to analyze the cinema in its historical context. None of the achievements would be pos-

[88] Taylor Downing, *Olympia*, British Film Institute, London, 1992, p. 87.

[89] Bell Hooks, *The Feminazi Mystique*, Transition No. 73 (1997), p. 160.

sible if it wasn't a political movie by the Nazi regime, supported and created by Leni Riefenstahl, who skillfully combined the style of modern photography with Nazi aesthetics.

The process of creating a powerful propaganda movie demanded the inventions in the technology of filming to be able to reach the maximum emotional tension by the photographic quality of the image. Leni Riefenstahl, as the New Woman and a skillful manipulator, understood the main principle of constructing mesmerizing images through the stages of induction, suggestion and susceptibility. In this case, cinema is not a metaphor of hypnosis but a form of hypnosis which happens under the certain conditions of screening, where the concentration on one source of light puts the audience into a cinematic trance during the period of displaying. Cinema becomes not only the most effective type of art but a very powerful political tool of conscious manipulation of perception, which using the memory ability of the human brain, can create a new past in the memory. Nevertheless, we should accept the importance of propaganda cinema in the history of cinema and not underestimate the dark power of the image.

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Conclusion

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- Fig. 2 Poster for the film «The Thousand Eyes of Dr. Mabuse» (Die 1000 Augen des Dr. Mabuse), 1960 https://www.themoviedb.org/movie/19128-die-1000-augen-des-dr-mabuse/images/posters?image_language=de
- Fig. 3 A satirical photo from 1901, with the caption «New Woman—Wash Day» https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Woman
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