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NAZIS OR FAIRY TALES: THE CAREER OF LENI RIEFENSTAHL

by

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ABSTRACT

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by
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Riefenstahl’s career is examined through criticism which only allows two images: Riefenstahl as a Nazi film propagandist or Riefenstahl as a pure artist. My research shows that Riefenstahl is a complex person; therefore, it is impossible to place her into categories. Through her memoirs, Die Macht der Bilder, Das Blaue Licht, Triumph des Willens, Olympia, Tiefland, her Nuba material, and her underwater work it becomes clear that her career must be examined within the context of its time. Her films and photographs are considered for their artistic qualities as well as for their innovative elements.
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The Controversy

Berta Helene Amalia Riefenstahl was born on August 22, 1902. Today the film world knows her better as Leni Riefenstahl and some even know her better as Nazi film propagandist. Leni Riefenstahl is no ordinary person or filmmaker. She has an unusual background as well as an incredible drive to succeed at whatever she chooses to do. Her problems arising from her film Triumph des Willens, she claims, come from being so good.¹ Her interest in filmmaking fell into the unfortunate time of 1933 to 1945. Had she not entered the directing world until after 1945 she most likely would still be making great films today.

There is much criticism and discussion about Riefenstahl’s careers and life, which is unusual considering her fame for directing only lasted from around 1933 when she finished Das Blaue Licht to about 1945 when she finished filming Tiefland at the end of the war. Her total of four major films brought about great controversy that still persists today. This is incredible if one considers that she was not able to complete another feature since she finished editing Tiefland in 1954. Her career as a filmmaker has been obliterated by criticism.

¹Elliot Stein and Gabe Wardell, pressbook. The Wonderful Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl (New York: Kino International Corporation, 1993) 10. In an excerpt from an upcoming issue of Cineaste, Ray Müller is interviewed. He states that Riefenstahl has always claimed that Triumph des Willens’ problem was being so good.
Why is she still the subject of such ardent discussion? Is it her artistic talent, her association with the Nazis ideology and its result, the fact that she was a woman director who had a very unusual position during the Nazi era, or simply her visual passion that is transmitted even in her post-war enterprise. It is most likely a combination of all of these aspects, or at least some of them depending on who is making the criticism and what their motives are.

As with most artistic production there is a great amount of conflicting opinion in relation to Riefenstahl’s films and their subject matter. In her case this is obviously expected, but an unusual element of extraneous circumstance has been added to her life. Instead of focusing on her creativity as a filmmaker some critics believe that importance lies only in whether or not she followed Nazi ideology or whether she did or did not continue fascist aesthetics. Of course this kind of information did have an effect on her film career, but when one only focuses on this aspect of Riefenstahl’s life, her films, which made her a consequential figure in the film world in the first place, tend to loose their importance.

Although there is much negative criticism, positive criticism also exists, and both can be found regarding all of Riefenstahl’s films. More criticism is naturally based on her *Triumph des Willens* and *Olympia*, but it also exists on *Das Blaue Licht*, *Tiefland*, and her Nuba material.
Das Blaue Licht

Riefenstahl's first experience as a director was in her film Das Blaue Licht. It premiered in the spring of 1932 and won the Silver Medallion at the 1932 Biennial in Venice. She fell into directing after acting in several of Dr. Arnold Fanck's mountain genre films. Although she was an actress, Riefenstahl continuously kept her eyes open and absorbed everything involved in filmmaking. She learned about lenses, filters, film, and angles from observing Fanck's directing and filming style. She eventually made her first film because of an artistic difference that she had with Fanck's films; she thought that artistic films with fantasy settings should also have artistic plots.

Das Blaue Licht is the romantic story of the mountain girl Junta who is ostracized by the community because of her ability to reach the top of Monte Cristallo while young men in the village continuously fall to their deaths. The villagers do not understand why only she reaches the top and, therefore, think of her as a witch. The Viennese painter, Vigo, arrives at the village and befriends Junta. Until Vigo, Junta has only the friendship of nature, animals and the sheepherder with whom she lives. Although Vigo appears to love Junta, he clearly does not understand her. He follows her one night up to the top of the mountain where he discovers Junta

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3 Ray Müller, dir. The Wonderful Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl, Omega Films GmbH; Nomad Films S.P.R.I., 1995. This film is a documentary of Riefenstahl's life and works and is made up of several discussions between Müller and Riefenstahl. "Müller" will refer to this film throughout the thesis.
surrounded by gleaming, blue crystals. Because he does care for her, Vigo believes that if he tells the villagers of Monte Cristallo's worth everyone will accept Junta. What he is not aware of is Junta's need for nature, and once nature is destroyed she too will die. This indeed does happen: upon discovering the mined crystal grotto Junta hasn't the strength to live any longer. Her fingers slip while climbing down and she falls to her death.

In *Das Blaue Licht*, Riefenstahl worked with Béla Balázs, a Jewish, communist filmmaker. He made a name for himself as a critic, essayist, poet, and playwright as well as working in other areas before leaving the Hungarian Proletarian Republic in 1919. After moving to Vienna, Balázs began making news and documentary films and several of his scripts became films. Despite Riefenstahl's claim that "art and politics are two different things and one has nothing to do with the other," John Ralmon writes that while working on *Das Blaue Licht*, Riefenstahl and Balázs' "casual acquaintance" developed into an "intimate creative relationship." Ralmon claims that Riefenstahl had liberal views and implies that they were the result of Balázs' own strong Marxist theories. He goes on to say that only after reading *Mein Kampf* did she change her political positions.

Although the plot of *Das Blaue Licht* appears to be simple, many have transformed it into a blueprint for *Triumph des Willens*.

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5 Ralmon 13.
6 Müller.
7 Ralmon 17.
8 Ralmon 17-18.
Some associate the qualities of Fanck's mountain genre film with pre-Nazi ideology.

Dr. Arnold Fanck did not begin working as a filmmaker until 1919. He was a geologist who spent much of his free time skiing, mountain climbing, and photographing. His films reflect his love for nature and sports.

Among those who find Nazi ideology embodied in Fanck's genre are Siegfried Kracauer and Susan Sontag. They claim that Fanck's films promoted heroism and exalted nature. Kracauer implies that the cult-like rites of mountain climbing that appear in the films are similar to those of the Nazi Party. Although he feels that some of the heroism depicted in the mountain films is too "eclectic" for Nazi ideology, it does embody a similar spirit. He asserts that these are the sort of antirational ideas that were perfectly suited for Nazi ideology. Sontag agrees, and states that in retrospect these films seem to be "an anthology of proto-Nazi sentiments."

Some critics hold a different view of Fanck's newly created genre. For example, Taylor Downing believes that the mountain genre might contain some Nazi ideology, but feels that it functions

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9 Hinton 1.--Fanck made his first film, Das Wunder des Schneeschuhs, in 1919.
11 Siegfried Kracauer, From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of The German Film (USA: Princeton University Press, 1947) 112.
12 Kracauer 111-12.
13 Kracauer 112.
14 Kracauer 112.
more as escapism during a time of social unrest in an evil world.\textsuperscript{16} David Hinton calls it "one of the earliest realist movements in cinema history."\textsuperscript{17} He focuses more on the reality of Fanck's ability to capture the beauty of nature on film than on the possibility of his work containing pre-Nazi tendencies. "He wanted his films to be realistic, and if he couldn't capture what he wanted shooting in nature, he wouldn't try to fool his audiences through artificial means."\textsuperscript{18} Riefenstahl recalls that the film crew was often in danger because of Fanck's continuous desire to keep everything real--during the filming of a scene in \textit{Die Weiße Hölle vom Piz Palü} --Fanck had Riefenstahl tied up and allowed an avalanche to fall upon her.\textsuperscript{19} Although Fanck was a fanatic and not always sensible regarding the well-being of his crew, Hinton feels that this shows his desire to stay true to the beauty of nature through his films.\textsuperscript{20}

Because Hinton sees Fanck's approach to filming as natural rather than symbolizing political ideology, he also feels that Riefenstahl's \textit{Das Blaue Licht} follows the same natural nature vein. Hinton lists several reasons to support his claim that Fanck's films and \textit{Das Blaue Licht} do not have any purely fascist elements. He explains the German Romantic movement as "revering the mountains as symbols of beauty and purity that were free from the corruption of man" and he likens the cinematography of \textit{Das Blaue Licht} to

\textsuperscript{17}Hinton 2.
\textsuperscript{18}Hinton 2.
\textsuperscript{19}Riefenstahl, \textit{The Sieve of Time} 71.
\textsuperscript{20}Hinton 2.
Casper David Friedrich's romantic landscapes. Hinton acknowledges the fact that Nazi ideology might have acquired some Romantic components, but because Nazi ideology was a "hybrid and wholly unoriginal [...] that borrowed from everywhere," one cannot assert that Romantic aesthetics were a clear part of Nazi ideology. Hinton also stresses that the mountain genre itself, simply because of its mountains, clearly goes against Nazi thought. The mountains that Fanck, Riefenstahl, and Luis Trenker chose to film are not necessarily German mountains; Fanck filmed the glaciers and mountains in Greenland, Riefenstahl filmed the Italian Dolomites, and Trenker, an actor in many of Fanck's films, filmed in the Austrian Tyrol. Hinton states that the mountains throughout the genre are presented as a unifying force that transcend national boundaries, which is directly against Nazi nationalism.

Linda Schulte-Sasse asserts that Riefenstahl's Das Blaue Licht belongs to the "suspicious 'mountain' film genre," "suspicious" in the sense of Susan Sontag's opinion of this genre. Schulte-Sasse compares herself to Sontag by declaring the idea that Riefenstahl is "an apolitical artist merely in search of pristine beauty ludicrous." Though Schulte-Sasse is critical of Riefenstahl's motives, she is still unable to place Das Blaue Licht into the category of Nazi films. She claims that though Das Blaue Licht might contain some Nazi ideology.

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21 Hinton 22.
22 Hinton 23.
24 Schulte-Sasse 143.
(romantic qualities), these motifs are not exclusively Nazi.\textsuperscript{25} Schulte-Sasse defines a modern, romantic narrative as an "instrumental, modern reality and something that is Other [... ] and by a nostalgic longing for that Other as a space of reconciliation, a space of redemption lost to modernity."\textsuperscript{26} It is true that the film has a romantic style, but Schulte-Sasse points out that "Junta remains an inaccessible Other ultimately lost to Vigo and to the spectator, [and that] therefore, the film exemplifies a modern and not a fascist structure."\textsuperscript{27}

Riefenstahl's \textit{Das Blaue Licht} and her performance of the dance on the sea while an actress in \textit{Der Heilige Berg} caught the attention of Hitler, and her association with him led to the making of the film that initiated Riefenstahl's great success as well as her downfall.\textsuperscript{28} \textit{Triumph des Willens} is her most widely and well known film. It is because of this film that she no longer has a career today. It is because of this film that she has been labeled a Nazi or at least a maker of Nazi film propaganda.

\textit{Triumph des Willens}

\textit{Triumph des Willens} is a film documenting the Nazi Party Rally in Nuremberg which took place in September 1934. Again, criticism ranges from the belief that Riefenstahl was a member of the Nazi

\textsuperscript{25}Schulte-Sasse 140.
\textsuperscript{26}Schulte-Sasse 146.
\textsuperscript{27}Schulte-Sasse 146.
\textsuperscript{28}Riefenstahl, \textit{The Sieve of Time} 105. Hitler's adjutant, Wilhelm Brückner, explained to Riefenstahl that Hitler had called her dance "The most beautiful thing I have ever seen in a film [... ]." 105.
party who's specialty was film propaganda to those who believe that she simply filmed a documentary under the order of Hitler.

One of the major difficulties surrounding Riefenstahl's *Triumph* is whether or not it has the qualities of a real documentary. Linda Deutschmann writes that *Triumph* does have a "documentary style," but she explains that "unlike most documentaries, (which take a critical stand on social realities) *Triumph des Willens* was uncritically devoted to presentation of the events as their enthusiastic participants saw them, and as Hitler wished them to be seen."29 Ken Kelman holds a similar view; he relates *Triumph* to Eisenstein's "semi-documentary approach--sticking as close to fact as possible, using history rather than story, minimizing the role of actors (particularly actors of famous personages) so there is no sense of the creation of the illusion [...]"30 Both critics feel that *Triumph* is a documentary only in the sense that Riefenstahl filmed the Party rally of 1934, and that this event is the subject of *Triumph des Willens*. Other elements employed in the film exclude it from the "pure" documentary. Deutschmann feels that it is not "pure" because Riefenstahl was blind and Kelman, along with many others, believe that it is because of her filming techniques that turn *Triumph* into propaganda. Riefenstahl's filming techniques are better addressed in a later section of this thesis and a discussion of the documentary aspect of the film will continue.

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Kracauer explains the principles of Nazi filmmaking, which he later relates to Triumph. The Nazi's wanted to avoid truth at all costs in order to create their own "reality" which they used as propaganda. They used newsreel footage, but manipulated it first through editing in order to show their version of "reality" to the masses. Kracauer maintains that the reason for using newsreel footage rather than creating new, fake footage is that news material records actual events. When the public saw the films they were assured of their authenticity because they appeared to be made up of reality.\textsuperscript{31}

Kracauer asserts that Riefenstahl employs the same Nazi propaganda principles as the Nazi filmmakers.

Aspects open here as confusing as the series of reflected images in a mirror maze: from the real life of the people was built up a faked reality that was passed off as the genuine one; but this bastard reality, instead of being an end in itself, merely served as the set dressing for a film that was then to assume the character of an authentic documentary.\textsuperscript{32}

He implies that she herself is a Nazi as well as a maker of Nazi propaganda.

Several critics are not willing to call Triumph a documentary because Riefenstahl moved segments of the Rally out of order and re-filmed certain segments fouled by broken cameras or misjudgments on the amount of film needed. Deutschmann and Hinton present a complete account of the filming involved in the creation of Triumph and they note that though the film is not

\textsuperscript{31}Kracauer 297-8.
\textsuperscript{32}Kracauer 301.
sequenced chronologically, it appears to follow a linear pattern.\textsuperscript{33} The question of the indoor speeches which mark the opening of the Party Congress is addressed by both Deutschmann and Hinton. Hinton believes Riefenstahl’s claim that she only refilmed a short bit of Julius Streicher’s speech because the film had run out.\textsuperscript{34} However, Albert Speer, who had a major role in planning the rally, wrote in his memoirs that the speeches of Streicher, Rudolf Hess, and Alfred Rosenberg were also reshoot.\textsuperscript{35} Hinton explains this as a misunderstanding on Speer’s part, and supports this with other witnesses and photos.\textsuperscript{36} Deutschmann maintains that, although many have wondered if this entire segment was set and filmed in a studio, there is no solid proof that this was the case \textsuperscript{37} and she does not make a guess as to what Riefenstahl actually did refilm; As a matter of fact she states that Riefenstahl did not intentionally recreate history because every speech did occur during the Rally and the words can be found in the official records\textsuperscript{38}

While Hinton sees nothing wrong with switching the order,\textsuperscript{39} Richard Barsam believes that the film's lack of chronology, as well as the film's inability to “capture what, historically, we have come to see as the central experience of Nazism in 1934,” do not allow the film to be labeled a documentary, but he does admit that her work has a

\textsuperscript{33}Deutschmann 47 and Hinton 36.
\textsuperscript{34}Hinton 45.
\textsuperscript{35}Hinton 45.
\textsuperscript{36}Hinton 46.
\textsuperscript{37}Deutschmann 46.
\textsuperscript{38}Deutschmann 52.
\textsuperscript{39}Deutschmann does not appear to be bothered either, but she does say Triumph has only a documentary style.
certain sense of reality: "Her film is true to the reality of Nuremberg, however dishonest and misleading that convention may have been."\(^{40}\) On the other hand, Susan Sontag claims that \textit{Triumph} cannot be called a documentary for other reasons. Since the architect Speer created the "set" for the film, she feels that the film's "reality" was staged.\(^{41}\) Hinton believes this to be an absurd conclusion because Speer's architectural spirit and concepts were designed to last for centuries while Riefenstahl only filmed one Party rally in its entirety.\(^{42}\) Speer himself said "the raison d'être of Nazi architecture existed quite independent of its cinematic possibilities."\(^{43}\)

Because of the Nazi period's tragic consequences and because \textit{Triumph des Willens} was about Hitler, no one can separate the film and the fascist period—even those who see Riefenstahl as an apolitical artist. Hinton writes:

\begin{quote}
Whether one accepts Riefenstahl's contention that the film is a documentary recording of an historic event, or, as some critics have charged, that it is a deliberately conceived instrument of political propaganda, it is impossible to divorce the film from the historical events that occur in it.\(^{44}\)
\end{quote}

This statement leads one to question: why did Leni Riefenstahl create \textit{Triumph des Willens}? In his film, \textit{The Wonderful Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl}, the director Ray Müller asks her about the editing practice and selections of the political speeches she includes in the

\(^{41}\)Sontag 83.
\(^{42}\)Hinton 56.
\(^{43}\)Hinton 56.
\(^{44}\)Hinton 32.
film.\textsuperscript{45} She gives a simple answer; she explains that an editor must cut a speech so that it has a beginning, middle, and end. Riefenstahl says that it is uncomplicated: the middle must contain what the people find important—the core of the speech—which is simple to extract because normally a speech has only one theme.\textsuperscript{46} It is clear through Müller's questions that he wants to address the questions raised in the criticisms concerning this “propaganda” film and is probing for reasons in order to understand what she had in mind. Her answers, at least on the surface, are straightforward and correspond to Hitler's message at the time. While filming \textit{Triumph} Riefenstahl says that she never considered a particular rally message, but while she reviewed the material, she found two messages: peace and work. Riefenstahl discovered a message of work in the creation of jobs depicted in the “labor-service scheme” and a message of peace in Hess' speech in which he calls Hitler the guarantor of peace.\textsuperscript{47}

Stefan Kanfer is unable to see Riefenstahl as an apolitical artist overtaken by events.\textsuperscript{48} It is inexplicable to him why, when her friends who were married to Jews were loosing their possessions, she was unable to conclude what the result of such injustice would be.\textsuperscript{49} He cynically remarks that she seemed more concerned with her "anguish [of] Goebbels' grabbing [Riefenstahl's] ankles" and her

\textsuperscript{45}The original German title is \textit{Leni Riefenstahl: Die Macht der Bilder.}
\textsuperscript{46}Müller.
\textsuperscript{47}Müller.
\textsuperscript{49}Kanfer 49.
"martyrdom [of] long hours in the editing room."\textsuperscript{50} Such statements imply that she either fakes complete ignorance, or as a Nazi, was completely aware of what she was doing. Kanfer assumes the latter.

Cameraman Henry Jaworsky, who worked for Riefenstahl on \textit{Das Blaue Licht} and \textit{Olympia}, disagrees with Kanfer even though he does believe that Riefenstahl was connected with the Nazi Party. In an interview with Gordon Hitchens, Kirk Bond, and John Hanhardt, Jaworsky answers a question explaining why he worked on \textit{Olympia} but not \textit{Triumph}:

Leni asked me to join her Triumph crew, but I said sorry[...]. I told her from the beginning when she got interested in the Hitler movement, in the Nazis, I said—Look this is where we don’t agree[...]. And Leni respected that. And she would not take any revenge. As a matter of fact when I was in trouble she tried to help\textsuperscript{51}

The “trouble” refers to his time in the \textit{Wehrmacht} when he was demoted from Lieutenant to Private 2nd Class because he was partly Jewish. He recalls asking Riefenstahl for help. She did try to help although nothing came of it and Jaworsky remained a Private. He claims that had she been “a convinced Nazi and anti-Semite, she would have said to hell with you.”\textsuperscript{52}

Bond asks Jaworsky if the term “fellow traveler” is applicable for Riefenstahl in light of her connection with the Nazis.

\textsuperscript{50}Kanfer 49.
\textsuperscript{52}Jaworsky 49-50.
Jaworsky: Well, what do you do, what do you do? [... ]
She was a fanatic movie-movie maker, and if Stalin
would have taken over Germany she would have done it
for Stalin, and if Roosevelt would have made Germany
the 49th state at that time she would still have made her
movies [... ] if you want to blame me to be a coward
chicken, I admit it. If I didn’t like the system, I should
have killed myself. But I tried to survive and that is my
personal crime.53

Although Jaworsky was against the Nazi Party, he respects
Riefenstahl’s decision to film Triumph, viewing it more as a result of
the time rather than a result of Riefenstahl’s political beliefs.

While Kracauer, Sontag, and Kanfer have been some of the
leading critics against Riefenstahl, strongly faulting her for being
involved in Nazi film making, others such as Herbert Luft even
suggest that her “filmic work accelerated mass murder.”54 Peter
Nellhaus writes, “from the evidence in letters to the ‘Denver Post,’ the
person who filmed Triumph of the Will had personally sent the six
million Jews to death camps.”55 Others again, like Hitchens, are
convinced that “she was not very political but was very romantic and
idealistic and mystical [. . . ]”56 and Barsam agrees that Riefenstahl,
like her own character Junta, “was destroyed by her naïve disregard
of the world around her, the world she set out to avoid.”57 Janet
Maslin is stuck in the middle; she does not know what to believe.

53Jaworsky 134.
54Herbert G. Luft, “The Screen as a Propaganda Weapon,” The Journal
55Peter Nellhaus, “Tsimmes at Telluride,” Film Comment 10.6 (1974):
38. Letters appeared because of Riefenstahl’s participation at the Telluride
Film festival in 1974. Her attendance there “awoke dormant emotions in
Denver’s small Jewish community.” 38.
56Jaworsky 161.
57Barsam 32.
While she feels that Riefenstahl is by no means naive, she states that her "glaringly impolitic tone actually corroborates her most controversial claim. Her own voice makes it plausible that even while exalting Nazi ideals with breathtaking skill [...] this pioneering film maker was able to live and work in a self-created vacuum."\textsuperscript{58}

Critics also enjoy discussing whether or not Riefenstahl was involved in the planning of the Nuremberg rally. The answer to this question supposedly answers another question: was she a Nazi propagandist? Naturally, there are many varying opinions.

Kracauer believes that instead of the film recording the Party rally the rally was staged for the film.\textsuperscript{59} He refers to Riefenstahl's own book on the making of \textit{Triumph} to support this contention: "The preparations for the Party Convention were made in concert with the preparations for the camera work."\textsuperscript{60} This implies that she worked alongside of Albert Speer and Hitler in order to plan the rally for the filming months in advance. Barsam partially concurs by stating that "this annual event was not staged for Riefenstahl's cameras, but all evidence indicates that an extraordinary degree of cooperation existed between those who planned it and those filmed"--Hitler and Riefenstahl's film crew.\textsuperscript{61}

Hinton stands at the opposite extreme of Kracauer's view. He starts by explaining that the quote Kracauer uses is taken from a


\textsuperscript{59}Kracauer 300.

\textsuperscript{60}Kracauer 301. Kracauer cites the book \textit{Hinter den Kulissen des Reichsparteitag Films}, Franz Eher, München, 1935.

\textsuperscript{61}Barsam 34.
photo caption, and furthermore, he asserts that *Hinter den Kulissen des Reichsparteitag Films* was not even written by Riefenstahl, but ghostwritten by Ernst Jäger on commission by Ufa—the film's production company. Hinton also mentions the trouble that Riefenstahl had with the actual rally planner and architect Speer. He states that Speer, in an interview with Hinton himself, said that only slight changes were allowed for filming purposes because Speer was afraid that too many alterations would be disruptive to his architecture or the spirit of the rally. As in Müller's film, this aspect of *Triumph* is left unanswered.

Another major controversy around *Triumph des Willens* is Riefenstahl's filming techniques and the effects they produce. Many critics feel that Riefenstahl manipulates her film in order to control viewer thought and perception. Ken Kelman believes that *Triumph* seems straightforward, but everything is not what it appears to be because of the techniques she employs. He claims Riefenstahl achieves "disorientation" and "animation" by means of camera angles; he states that the figures in the film have nothing to stand on because only the upper halves of bodies are depicted and thus the aura of the rally is "spiritualized." Kracauer states that this technique displaces people and objects from their own environment.

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62 Hinton 55.--Hinton cites "Interview mit Leni Riefenstahl." *Filmkritik*, August 1972, p.400. Riefenstahl denies writing *Hinter den Kulissen des Reichsparteitag Films* and claims that Jäger wrote it. He also cites a receipt, which can be found in the Bundesarchiv in Koblenz, showing that Riefenstahl paid Jäger for writing the book. The Publicity Director of Ufa has also sworn in an affidavit that Jäger was indeed the author.

63 Hinton 56.

64 Kelman 162.

65 Kelman 163-4.
into a "strange and unknown space"—that space in this sense remains undefined.\textsuperscript{66}

Animation, Kelman continues, is created by close-ups; the viewer is suddenly surrounded by Nazi flags without any hint of human form.\textsuperscript{67} Kelman also affirms that Riefenstahl's camera motion creates a "sense of being caught up in the Movement, the dynamic of the Cause."\textsuperscript{68} He feels that Riefenstahl's constant camera motion "constitutes a quasi-hypnotic disorientation of the spectator from the stable world where 'objective fact' holds still to be examined."\textsuperscript{69} Movement, for Kracauer, is a method by which the viewers are "uprooted" and "herded like cattle [. . .] overwhelm[ing]" them and not allowing them to think.\textsuperscript{70}

Mass patterns made out of people occur often in Triumph and are considered by Sontag and Kracauer a component of fascist aesthetics. Sontag describes the fascist qualities of mass patterns as "the rendering of movement in grandiose and rigid patterns [. . .] for such choreography rehearses the very unity of the polity. The masses are made to take form, by design."\textsuperscript{71} Kracauer asserts that mass ornamentation is employed in order to capture the viewer, and aesthetic qualities to trick the spectators into believing the Nazis and their world.\textsuperscript{72} Deutschmann, however, reminds her readers that such massive patterns consisting of bodies was not something that the

\textsuperscript{66}Kracauer 302.
\textsuperscript{67}Kelman 164.
\textsuperscript{68}Kelman 164.
\textsuperscript{69}Kelman 164.
\textsuperscript{70}Kracauer 301-2.
\textsuperscript{71}Sontag 91-2.
\textsuperscript{72}Kracauer 38.
Nazis had created; such formations were used in political, religious, and sports groups long before the Nazis came about.\textsuperscript{73}

The use of symbols in \textit{Triumph} is also a concern for critics. Kelman views Riefenstahl's use of symbolism as a technique through which she relates the masses to the symbolic objects, transforming them into "reality"--swastikas, eagles, banners and even movement.\textsuperscript{74} He discerns that symbols such as mist, smoke, and night create a "quasi-religious" aura, thereby making another reality.\textsuperscript{75} Barsam also believes that the use of symbols "alter[s] reality." He writes, "\textit{Triumph} transforms the reality of 1934 Party disunity and chaos into a massive spectacle of regimentation, unity, and fidelity under the Führer."\textsuperscript{76}

The Hitler sequences are perhaps the most discussed because some believe that Riefenstahl displays Hitler almost as a cult figure. Hitler is mostly filmed from behind and below, which Deutschmann says, gives him a larger than life aura.\textsuperscript{77} The opening scene seems to leave a powerful impression on critics. While Deutschmann claims that Hitler's absence during the first several minutes builds up viewer anticipation, the viewer knows that he is up there in the clouds although he or she cannot see him, which gives Hitler a god-like or spiritual essence.\textsuperscript{78} Similarly, Kelman writes:

\textsuperscript{73}Deutschmann 73.
\textsuperscript{74}Kelman 165.
\textsuperscript{75}Kelman 164.
\textsuperscript{76}Barsam 34.
\textsuperscript{77}Deutschmann 37.
\textsuperscript{78}Deutschmann 31.
the endless processions of clouds suggest both an eternal realm of the spirit and the primeval chaos out of which worlds are created. Soon the earth does emerge, born from the clouds [...] Hitler, the genius of the German renaissance, now nears the earth. The shadow or spirit of his airplane travels over the streets, touching the city, possessing it [...] Borne out of the heavens, Hitler now emerges, through the dark opening of his vessel, in the flesh.\textsuperscript{79}

Kelman interprets the image of Hitler as a god or a savior in his description of his decent to the people.

Hinton, again, does not agree that Riefenstahl deliberately employed these techniques in order to portray Hitler as a god. He claims that Kracauer, and many others who maintain that the "emphasis on cloud conglomerations indicates the ultimate fusion of the mountain-and Hitler-cult," have given the sequence too much symbolism.\textsuperscript{80} He states that Riefenstahl was supposed to make an artistic film, and that for this reason she utilized the same cloud shot technique which she had already used in Das Blaue Licht and which she had learned from working in mountain films with Dr. Fanck. Though she discusses Kracauer's views in general, Deutschmann argues that many of his interpretations "take on full meaning only with the benefit of hindsight;" yet she does agree that clouds represent the "clean cut" values of the mountains, the power of nature, and the mystical worlds of ancient gods.\textsuperscript{81}

\textsuperscript{79}\textsuperscript{Kelman 166.}
\textsuperscript{80}\textsuperscript{Hinton 40. He cites the captions of two photographs in Kracauer's From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film Photos 59 and 60.}
\textsuperscript{81}\textsuperscript{Deutschmann 207.
It is surprising to read critiques that fault Riefenstahl’s *Triumph* based on its artistic quality because she is generally considered a great, innovative artist. Even most critics who attack Riefenstahl with full force see great artistic ability and imagination in her films—*Triumph* included. But Sontag claims that *Triumph* is not important as a particular artistic success and she believes that anyone with plenty of money and a large staff could have accomplished the same thing.82 Brian Winston thinks that anyone with so many cameramen (he claims 49) and such a big spectacle to work with could create something impressive, in fact, he does not even consider the film very impressive.83 He feels the film shows “typical fascist gigantism, a lack of proportion, a failure to know when to stop;” he also claims that the film is often out of focus and the camera is yanked about.84 The film’s “good” sequences are only good because “such massiveness impresses itself automatically on us.”85 Jonathan Sanders writes that it is possible to appreciate Riefenstahl’s work without taking on Nazi ideology. He cites her use of angle and light to successfully execute propagandist effects, an effectiveness which Winston denies.86

*Olympia*

82 Sontag 95-6.
84 Winston 102-103.
85 Winston 103.
86 Jonathan Sanders, letter, *Sight and Sound* 50.3 (1981): 213. Sanders’ letter is a response to Winston’s article in *Sight and Sound*.
Olympia, Fest der Völker--part one, and Fest der Schönheit--part two is the film of the 1936 Summer Olympics that took place in Berlin. It premiered almost two years after the initial filming on April 20, 1938. Olympia received an Olympic Gold medal during an IOC meeting on June 8, 1939 and it also won the gold medal at the Biennial in Venice in 1938 for world’s best film.\textsuperscript{87} Riefenstahl was not the first to film an Olympic event as many might believe, nor was it Fanck who made a film of the 1928 winter Olympics, though they were certainly among the first.\textsuperscript{88} The first feature length film on the Olympic games already had been shot during the games of 1924.\textsuperscript{89}

The film Olympia comes up against much of the same critique that Triumph receives. Critics question who commissioned the film, they ask themselves if it really is a documentary for the same reasons they question Triumph's validity as a documentary, and many are wary of the possibility of a fascist aesthetic. More support Riefenstahl for this film than they support her for Triumph, but still many consider Olympia to be Riefenstahl's fourth film made for the Nazi Party, because of its content and their belief that the film was commissioned by the Party.\textsuperscript{90}

Hilton states that the film came about through a meeting between Professor Carl Diehm, the "secretary general of the


\textsuperscript{88}Downing 14.

\textsuperscript{89}Downing 13.

\textsuperscript{90}Riefenstahl made Sieg des Glaubens, a short film of the Nazi Party rally of 1933 along with Tag der Freiheit; Unsere Wehrmacht, another short film made during the Party rally of 1935.
organization committee of the Eleventh Olympic Games,”91 and Riefenstahl. Diehm, who watched Riefenstahl training one day at the Berlin Stadium, had seen Triumph and thought she could create a great film out of the Olympic games as well. Diehm spoke to Otto Maier, who was Chairman of the International Olympics Committee, and proposed the film. She then was commissioned by IOC to make the film. Riefenstahl received funds from the TOBIS film production company, and the summer Olympics of 1936 were filmed.92

Hans Barkhausen refutes Riefenstahl's assertion that Olympia was commissioned by the International Olympic Committee and maintains that it was funded through her own company.93 He asserts that Goebbels, not the IOC, initiated the filming of the 1936 Olympics and claims that her company was really a "dummy" film company through which the Reich was able to fund Olympia without appearing to have any involvement.94 Riefenstahl was given plenty of money for filming, frivolous expenses, and cameramen who normally worked with the news shows.95 TOBIS was involved, but only as a film distributor.96 Riefenstahl’s Olympia Film Company was

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91Riefenstahl, The Sieve of Time 168.
92Hinton 62.
93Hans Barkhausen, "Footnote to the History of Riefenstahl's Olympia," Film Quarterly 28.1 (1974): 8. As proof, Barkhausen claims that all his information comes from documentary material of the former Ministry of Propaganda and Public Enlightenment and the materials of the former Reich Ministry of Finance, which can be found in the Federal Archives in Koblenz—the central depository of the federal Republic of Germany. 8.
94Barkhausen 8.
95Barkhausen 8-10.
96Barkhausen 11.
liquidated on February 1, 1943 and the total gain was RM 114,066.45 for the Reich.97

The story of financing is rather confusing. In her memoirs, Riefenstahl claims that she signed a contract with TOBIS in order to receive financing.98 Funding was available for producers and distributors with low interest rates from the Ministry of Propaganda. When it came time to receive the actual money from TOBIS Riefenstahl decided that it would be better to have the money given to a company rather than herself because of the Ministry of Propaganda’s involvement. Therefore, she created Olympia Film Company, so the money would not be directly given to her. Riefenstahl states that her company was formed in order to have complete freedom over her film, because she was responsible for the money loaned to her.99

Because of the time, the problem of funding is rather difficult to decipher, but one main aspect of the film makes it difficult to believe that Hitler and other Party officials would care for Riefenstahl to make such an objective film. This problem deals with race. The African American, Jesse Owens, is the star of the first half—he wins all races in which he competes. Owens’ appearances do not stop at the finish line. Riefenstahl depicts Owens smiling happily, after he has won his races, more than just once. Although Hitler did come to the games to cheer Germany on, he did tell Riefenstahl that

97 Barkhausen 12.
98 Riefenstahl, The Sieve of Time 176.
99 Riefenstahl, The Sieve of Time 177.
he did not wish to view non-Aryan athletes win, therefore, it would be difficult to conceive of Hitler, who hated other races so intensely and openly, promoting such a film.

What type of film is *Olympia*? Is it a documentary because it records a real event; can it be called fiction, or "semi-documentary" as Deutschmann names it? These questions are raised again because Riefenstahl did film some events while the athletes practiced, and she even has the athletes perform their sport again, because rules or circumstances did not allow her to film during the actual event. Her goal was to include every activity. Riefenstahl states matter-of-factly that she filmed certain events like the swimming, boating, and marathon, while the athletes practiced, in order not to interfere with the actual competition. The question of *Olympia*’s validity as a documentary appears often among critics, but most seem to consider it a minor concern worth mentioning.

Andrew Sarris and Dick Schaap discussed *Olympia* on National Educational Television in 1968. They talked about the possibility that all the segments might not have been filmed during the actual Olympics but rather before or after the real thing. Sarris and Schaap do not state an opinion, which leads a reader to believe that they are just curious and indifferent toward either answer. Hinton has a stronger opinion of Riefenstahl’s choice in editing and focus. He claims that depicting the participants and their emotions in *Olympia*

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100 Riefenstahl, *The Sieve of Time* 179.
101 Müller.
102 Andrew Sarris and Dick Schaap, "Olympiad 1936,—Andrew Sarris and Dick Schaap Discuss Riefenstahl Film," *Film Culture* 56/57 (1973): 185.
is most important to Riefenstahl. Hinton believes it unacceptable for something that is defined and known as the news (newsreels) to refilm events, but since *Olympia* is "both an aesthetic study of the performance of the human body and a psychological study of the emotions of the participants" it is not so important that the sports segments refilmed are not the actual event. Schaap believes that Riefenstahl is successful in portraying what Hinton decrees as important, insofar as "*Olympia* shows the strain and endurance and strength so well." Although seemingly not negatively critical, Barsam says that Riefenstahl recreates and manipulates to produce nonchronological documents; "Through her vision, the very organic nature and rhythm of reality are re-ordered into a new entity, classical in form, romantic in spirit."

Although the question of the film's validity as a documentary is discussed occasionally, this aspect of *Olympia* obviously does not hold the same critical importance it holds for *Triumph*. Perhaps this is because *Triumph* has visible political ties or perhaps critics feel that there are concerns more pressing than *Olympia*'s authenticity. Most would rather question what *Olympia* with its beautiful bodies stands for.

Many claim that *Olympia* is Nazi propaganda. Schaap and Sarris believe that Riefenstahl was not fair to all nations because Germany won most Olympic medals and that this constitutes

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103 Hinton 72.
104 Hinton 72.
105 Sarris and Schaap 177.
106 Barsam 34.
"subliminal propaganda." Kanfer calls *Olympia* a "ceremony über alles" where Germany prevails and Hitler is shown in only the best of light. He feels that Riefenstahl showers Hitler with even more glory when she releases the film on his 49th birthday. Hinton disagrees and states that Riefenstahl tries to show not so much national spirit, but rather the international spirit of the Olympics. "Her concern is with the athletes as individuals, and there is no touting of the Germans as members of a 'master race,' as would be expected if the film were Nazi propaganda." It is the Olympic flag that prevails, not the Nazi flag. In Müller’s film the voice-over explains that Riefenstahl refuses to become involved in a political discussion on *Olympia*; she says all that mattered were the aesthetics.

Hitler does appear in the original version of the film. Later, in 1958, certain scenes were cut by Riefenstahl as part of her attempt to break with the past. His presence undoubtedly gives some an uneasy feeling and remind many of *Triumph*. Sontag feels that *Olympia* is just another *Triumph des Willens* which takes place under the eyes of Hitler as "the benign Super-Spectator," whose gaze approves of what Sontag feels is a fascist aesthetic. Unlike Sontag, however, Hinton believes that Hitler is not placed in the best of light. He asserts that any other head of State whose country was hosting

\[107\] Sarris and Schaap 177.---It is interesting to note that immediately after this statement Sarris and Schaap praise Riefenstahl for showing so much of Jesse Owens in the first part of the film--"because these were the Jesse Owens Olympics." 177.
\[108\] Kanfer 50.
\[109\] Hinton 81.
\[110\] Müller.
\[111\] Downing 9.
\[112\] Sontag 87.
the Olympics would have been filmed for the same amount of time as Hitler is, and not less. Because Riefenstahl does film Hitler and others as they react to wins and losses, the viewer observes their emotions, which they were not always able to control. Hinton perceives this lack of personal control as a negative depiction of the Nazis.\textsuperscript{113}

Schaap and Sarris often mention the heroic element in \textit{Olympia}. They call the low angle shot the “heroic angle” through which Riefenstahl portrays athletes as supermen and women; they believe that this is a part of the “subliminal ideology” mentioned earlier.\textsuperscript{114} One gets the feeling that the spectators are not observing real people involved in athletics when viewing \textit{Olympia}-- instead one sees gods.\textsuperscript{115} Sarris believes that Riefenstahl’s vision of \textit{Olympia} is, “in a very subtle way [...] consistent with a certain spirit of nationalism, a certain spirit of the hero in history, the heroic figure.”\textsuperscript{116}

Sontag does not condemn \textit{Olympia} as strongly as she does \textit{Triumph} and later the Nuba photographs. What praise she does allow Riefenstahl is expressed in a cynical tone, implying that this is an exception to the rule and does not really count. Sontag defines fascist art as “displaying a utopian aesthetics--that of physical perfection;” she states that Riefenstahl cannot be compared to other witless Nazi art and that she manages to “show some effort and

\textsuperscript{113}Hinton 80.  
\textsuperscript{114}Sarris and Schaap 178.  
\textsuperscript{115}Sarris and Schaap 182.  
\textsuperscript{116}Sarris and Schaap 181.
strain, with its attendant imperfections, as well as stylized, seemingly effortless exertions" in *Olympia*.117

Although many critics claim that *Olympia* exudes Nazi values, none of these critics consider this is the case regarding race. Sontag states that "she appreciates a range of bodily types--in matters of beauty she is not racist"118 Schaap and Sarris believe that the film is fair and objective especially considering the anti-Negro feeling that was prevalent at the 1936 Olympics.119 As Schaap and Sarris discuss the marathon scene and the Japanese man who won the Gold medal, they confirm that the heroic aspect of the athletes is upheld throughout the film even when focusing on the non-Aryan athletes.120 Hinton maintains the hero of the Olympic games of 1936 is not Hitler, but Jesse Owens, the black American athlete, who shines during the first part of *Olympia*.121

*Tiefland*

*Tiefland* is Leni Riefenstahl’s last feature film and is an adaptation of Eugen D’Albert’s opera. She began filming the project in 1940 and did not complete the film until 1954 because of setbacks due to the war. *Tiefland* did not receive as much praise or negative response as Riefenstahl’s first three major films, but nevertheless plenty of questions were raised in regard to its filming

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117 Sontag 92-3.
118 Sontag 93.
119 Sarris and Schaap 178.
120 Sarris and Schaap 182.
121 Hinton 81.
Tiefland is the story of the struggle between the poor and the those in power: a world existing between pure and innocent nature and the greed of men. The peasants of a Spanish village are having a difficult time subsisting because the evil Marquis Don Sebastián is redirecting the water supply to his cattle. Martha, the Gypsy dancer, arrives in the village. She soon captures the heart of everyone including that of Sebastián and Pedro, the naive sheepherder.

Sebastián takes Martha as his mistress. She appears to be content until she realizes that he is taking water away from the people and still expects them to pay their rent. Martha becomes upset and tries to help one of the villagers by giving the Miller and his wife her necklace. They return the necklace, not willing to accept charity, and Sebastián, for the first time, becomes violent with his mistress. She will not endure such treatment and runs away up into the Hochland where Pedro finds her.

Meanwhile Sebastián, who is actually without money, must marry the banker's daughter Amelia in order not to loose everything he calls his own. Sebastián intends to marry Martha to an "idiot" (Pedro) in order for him to keep her as his mistress--Pedro is not supposed to notice because he is the "idiot."

Sebastián's men find Martha, and Pedro is ordered to marry the woman he is already in love with. Martha is not happy with this turn of events and believes that Pedro is in on the scheming. She does not realize that he really loves her.

Because some loudmouth villagers choose to tell Pedro he is being made a fool, Pedro, and then Martha finally realize Sebastián
has formed this evil plan and they forgive each other. Sebastián comes to collect his mistress on their wedding night (Pedro and Martha's and Sebastián and Amelia's) and Pedro strangles him to death the same way he kills a dangerous wolf in the opening scene. It begins to rain after Sebastián's death and the happy couple retreats into the mountains.

Schulte-Sasse believes that *Tiefland* has qualities similar to *Das Blaue Licht*. *Tiefland*, however, follows an enlightenment literature with its "valorization of 'virtue,' its happy ending, and its triumph of heart over social class," whereas *Das Blaue Licht* follows a romantic literature.\(^{122}\) She maintains that this film also represents a modern narrative rather than a fascist one:

> since the fulfillment offered by the text is a displacement into the imaginary and since the fulfillment offered by the text is a tension between social modernity (inside and outside the text, i.e., including the viewer's modernity) and the mountain sanctuary to which the lovers flee\(^{123}\)

Although *Tiefland* would probably fit into Kracauer's or Sontag's interpretation of the mountain genre film, it is never really discussed as such.

On the other hand, the issue of the Gypsies used in *Tiefland* is discussed quite often. Riefenstahl says openly that she did use Gypsies from a camp for filming. Kanfer quotes Riefenstahl as explaining that the camp from which the Gypsies were chosen was not yet a concentration camp.\(^ {124} \) He agrees with Riefenstahl when

\(^{122}\)Schulte-Sasse 151.
\(^{123}\)Schulte-Sasse 151.
\(^{124}\)Kanfer 50.
she claims that the "systematic persecution of the Gypsies did not begin until March 1943: the Tiefland shooting had taken place earlier [...]" 125. Riefenstahl writes, "the truth is that the camp from where our gypsies were selected by Dr. Reinl and Hugo Lehner, one of my production managers, was not a concentration camp at that time [...] the gypsies, both adults and children, were our favourites, and we saw nearly all of them again after the war." 126 Although he says that Riefenstahl is technically correct, he has found that even before the war, Nazi authorities exchanged notes regarding the extermination of Gypsies. 127 This statement makes it clear that Kanfer does not consider the points that Riefenstahl makes as an adequate excuse for using these people in her film. Several other critics mention this fact, but as Kanfer does, they choose to let the meaning of the word "camp" in reference to the thirties in Germany work for itself rather than condemning her outright.

It is obvious that one of the reasons for the prolonged production of Tiefland was the war itself. Schulte-Sasse states that the initial planning of the film started in 1933, but because of demands on her by the Nazis (presumably Triumph), illness, and the war, the film was not ready until 1954. 128 Another setback was Goebbels, who took over Riefenstahl's paid studio to complete his own project. 129

125 Kanfer 51.
126 Riefenstahl, The Sieve of Time 167.
127 Kanfer 51.
128 Schulte-Sasse 142.
129 Hinton 85.
Although many of the setbacks were unavoidable, some believe that Riefenstahl used *Tiefland* in order to stay away from the Nazis and war. Hinton explains that Riefenstahl was "delighted" when she was called away to begin preparation for the film in April of 1934, because she was able to leave *Triumph* with Walter Ruttmann. As cameraman Jaworsky discusses methods of keeping himself involved with filming project in order not to become involved directly in the war, he mentions that he believes Riefenstahl acted similarly and that this is one of the reasons *Tiefland* took so long to complete. He says "that she managed to stretch it for years and years, so she had nothing to do with Party Propaganda any more during the war."^131

The Nuba

After *Tiefland* was released in 1954, all of Riefenstahl's further attempts at making another film failed. Though there was much interest in her ideas for new films, companies were afraid to fund her because of her past. Meanwhile, she developed a strong desire to go to Africa after reading Hemingway's *The Green Hills of Africa*. As she was gathering information, she read an article about the ongoing slave trade, which developed into a film subject. She did manage to get funding for a film called *Schwarze Fracht*, a film about the modern-day slave trade. Though there were many problems with the filming in Africa and film processing, Riefenstahl was not

^130^Hinton 83-4. Walter Ruttmann was the person that Riefenstahl originally suggested make *Triumph* because she had no interest. All that remains from his work on *Triumph* are the titles at the opening of the film.
^131^Jaworsky 150.
hindered from reaching her goal of spending time among various tribes, mainly the Nuba, to record their beauty on film. Because her motion picture plans did not develop as planned, she worked with still photographs instead. Riefenstahl published three books from her work done in Africa: *Die Nuba, Die Nuba von Kau*, and *Mein Afrika*.

Though Nazi Germany certainly seems a long way off from Africa in the 1960's, many critics believe that Riefenstahl simply uses a different continent as the setting for the continuation of fascist aesthetics, which they believe began in her *Olympia* and *Triumph* films. On the other end of the spectrum, others believe that her work in Africa proves the fact that she was not a Nazi and that she never believed in any of the negative things they promoted—especially racism.

Susan Sontag is probably the prime believer in Riefenstahl's continued use of a fascist aesthetic in her Nuba pictures. She feels that Riefenstahl's tribal photographs are the final step in trying to prove that she is really just a "nature freak" rather than a Nazi, but with a closer look at the photos and the text one will come to realize that she is continuing with her Nazi aesthetics. Sontag defines fascist aesthetics as follows:

> It includes [...] celebration of the primitive [...] they flow from (and justify) a preoccupation with situations of control, submissive behavior, extravagant effort, and the endurance of pain; they endorse two seemingly opposite

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133 Sontag 85-86.
states, egomania and servitude [...] Fascist art glorifies surrender, it exalts mindlessness, it glamorizes death.\textsuperscript{134}

Every detail of Sontag’s description of fascist aesthetics has an example taken from the Nuba books in order to prove her point. The beauty of the “primitive” and “mindlessness” is depicted through the Nuba’s wrestling as one of the bonds that hold the tribe together.\textsuperscript{135} Wrestling plays a major role in confirming “control,” “extravagant effort,” and “endurance of pain” for Sontag. She believes that Riefenstahl continues her Nazi ideology while glorifying the physicality of the matches.\textsuperscript{136} While “submissive behavior” and “egomania and servitude” relate to wrestling, they also refer to what Sontag calls the Nuba’s degradation of woman. She says they are not able to reach the same level as the men (she is referring to the importance of the wrestlers); they are only considered breeders.\textsuperscript{137} The glamorization of death can be found again in wrestling because of the white ash that the men smear on their bodies during a match.\textsuperscript{138} Exultation of death is also present in large funeral ceremonies; Sontag quotes Riefenstahl as she explains the Nubas attitude towards death; they “look upon death as simply a matter of fate—which they do not resist or struggle against.”\textsuperscript{139} With this quote Sontag hopes to confirm the filmmaker’s unchanged ideology of the heroic glorification of fascist fetishism--this time transferred to a primitive tribe.

\textsuperscript{134}Sontag 91.
\textsuperscript{135}Sontag 89.
\textsuperscript{136}Sontag 89.
\textsuperscript{137}Sontag 90.
\textsuperscript{138}Sontag 88.
\textsuperscript{139}Sontag 90.
Lisa Gates sides with Sontag in her assertion that the Nuba photographs resemble *Olympia* athletes, though she does feel that Sontag's definition of fascist athletics applied to Riefenstahl's photographs to be "exaggerated prose."\(^{140}\) Like Sontag, she believes the wrestling matches (Gates refers to the *Messerkampf* that the Nuba from Kau engage in) that take place have fascist qualities. "The fights are arduous and very, very bloody. And for Riefenstahl, they are exciting [...] Certainly this description seems more fitting for Nazi Germany than for post-colonial Africa."\(^{141}\) Gates also implies that Riefenstahl is simply moving her previous work in Nazi Germany to Africa:

> This dreamworld of Africa becomes a place of refuge from post-colonial struggles and post-war politics, a place where Riefenstahl's artistic and cultural imagination still has free reign, and where the construction of native culture and the resurrection of a deeply problematic notion of cultural nationalism go unquestioned.\(^{142}\)

Some feel that Riefenstahl's involvement with Africa confirms just the opposite of what Gates and Sontag believe. In the interview with Jaworsky, Jaworsky says:

> if she had been a convinced Nazi, that includes racism, right? A true Nazi was believing in the superiority of the Germanic white race [...] but where does she live? Most of her time now she lives among primitive natives in East Africa, and she loves them and adores them.\(^{143}\)


\(^{141}\)Gates 4-5.

\(^{142}\)Gates 10.

\(^{143}\)Jaworsky 135.
Hinton writes, "she wants to create something new, a testament reflecting the interests of this quarter of her life." This implies that Hinton also does not find a strong connection between the Nuba photographs and what she did in earlier film work.

144 Hinton 135.
The Self-Image

Leni Riefenstahl has a clear, unwavering image of herself. Despite the immense amount of negative and often brutal comments directed towards her and her work, Riefenstahl still maintains that she is an artist and nothing more. Her self-image is most clear in her memoirs written in 1987 and through Ray Müller’s documentary film: The Wonderful Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl. Although she does not have total control in Müller’s film, she does take advantage of this opportunity to give her side of her life’s story.

As a child, Riefenstahl was fascinated by theater and playing dress up, but she states that her favorite activity was reading fairy tales. Fairy tales were not her only interest, but stories along with the beauty of nature (initially the mountains) have remained with Riefenstahl her entire life. She first discovered the beauty of the mountains in Frank’s Berg des Schicksals where mountains were "alive, mysterious, and more entrancingly beautiful than [she] had ever dreamed mountains could be." After viewing this film, Riefenstahl was determined to star in such a mountain film and from that point on the mountains drew her to nature again and again. She explains her love for mountain climbing as an experience which gave her freedom. While climbing mountains one forgot all worries and

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146 Riefenstahl, The Sieve of Time 42.
problems; one only had to worry about not falling down. Mountain climbing provided her with a feeling of extreme closeness to nature, which was the source of great joy.\textsuperscript{147}

Riefenstahl's desire to be in the mountains came true, and purely because of her determination, she acted in several films directed and co-directed by Fanck before she attempted to make her own film. In her memoirs, she writes that Fanck taught her everything about filming, but G. W. Pabst, the co-director of \textit{Die Weiße Hölle vom Piz Palü}, recognized her talent for directing.\textsuperscript{148}

‘Leni, look to the left.’ But I looked to the right, and I did it several times until Pabst figured out the reason […] 'You're an actress now, not a director.' […] 'You look at everything as if you were peering through the camera. The directions are reversed, left is right, and right is left.' Pabst was correct. Dr. Fanck had accustomed me to looking at scenes through a viewfinder.\textsuperscript{149}

After Pabst made her aware of her ability with the camera, Riefenstahl acted in one other film before she seriously thought of directing.\textsuperscript{150} She felt as if there were something missing from her experience with the performance aspect of film. She writes, “I was an actress and I didn’t want to be side-tracked, but now I couldn’t help seeing everything with a film-maker's eyes. I translated every room, every face, into images and movements. I longed more and more to create something of my own.”\textsuperscript{151} She did indeed begin to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{147}Müller.
\item \textsuperscript{148}Riefenstahl, \textit{The Sieve of Time} 69.
\item \textsuperscript{149}Riefenstahl, \textit{The Sieve of Time} 70.
\item \textsuperscript{150}Riefenstahl, \textit{The Sieve of Time} 88.
\item \textsuperscript{151}Riefenstahl, \textit{The Sieve of Time} 89.
\end{itemize}
create and the result was the story of Junta in the film Das Blaue Licht.

The character of Junta, the naive, asexual nature child, was played by Riefenstahl herself.\textsuperscript{152} Her goal was "stylistic unity" which she believes occurs "only when the theme and the visual creation express one and the same thing."\textsuperscript{153} This is where she disagrees with her mentor Fanck.

All of Fanck's subjects were realistic, but not his photography; the sun always had to be shining and the shots had to be primarily 'beautiful', even if this didn't suit the scene. This often bothered me, for I considered it a defect in his style. But since I too liked 'beautiful' shots, I decided on a story that required visually marvelous photography because of the subject matter, whether as a fairy tale, a legend or poem.\textsuperscript{154}

Junta is mysterious, beautiful and Riefenstahl places her in a beautiful, mysterious landscape.

Already with her first film, she was extremely organized, precise, and experimental. Riefenstahl enthusiastically explains her technique to Müller. A description of each scene was drawn out on paper and included time of day, lens, and aperture. Every segment was tested in advance in order to achieve perfection. She experimented using a red filter with a green filter (a step that her cameraman Schneeberger claimed would never work because it would result in a black picture) which allowed them to film night scenes during the day.\textsuperscript{155}

\textsuperscript{152}Müller.
\textsuperscript{153}Riefenstahl, The Sieve of Time 92.
\textsuperscript{154}Riefenstahl, The Sieve of Time 92.
\textsuperscript{155}Riefenstahl, The Sieve of Time 92.
As *Das Blaue Licht* was Riefenstahl’s initiation into directing, it also started a spark that led her to the world of the Third Reich. Riefenstahl states that the crystals in the *Das Blaue Licht* are a symbol for the ideal that everyone dreams of but nobody ever manages to reach.\textsuperscript{156} *Das Blaue Licht* foreshadows Riefenstahl’s life; she herself compares her fate to that of Junta. She believes that like Junta she is both loved and hated, and as Junta lost her ideals when the crystals are destroyed so does Riefenstahl at the end of the war.\textsuperscript{157}

Riefenstahl claims that she knew nothing of Hitler or Nazis while she was filming *Das Blaue Licht*.\textsuperscript{158} Her first experience with Hitler came about at a friend’s urging. Hans Jäger encouraged her to listen to a speech of Hitler’s telling her that he thought it would change her life; she continues in a conceeding tone, that it in fact did change her life.\textsuperscript{159} She had several reactions to Hitler. “I sensed that the audience were in bondage to this man [...]. No doubt about it, I was deeply affected. New and unexpected thoughts shot through my mind. Would this man play a role in Germany’s history, and would the results be good or bad?”\textsuperscript{160}

Riefenstahl has never denied the fact that she admired Hitler. She maintains that it is important for her to tell the truth whether or not the results be positive or negative; she adds that many people after the war, who had believed in Hitler, claimed that they never

\textsuperscript{156}Riefenstahl, *The Sieve of Time* 92.
\textsuperscript{157}Müller.
\textsuperscript{158}Müller.
\textsuperscript{159}Müller.
\textsuperscript{160}Riefenstahl, *The Sieve of Time* 101.
really had believed in him, but were unable to do anything against him.\textsuperscript{161} Riefenstahl describes Hitler, after some of their first meetings, as “radiat[ing] something powerful,” but he also had a “hypnotic effect,” which worried her because she was not willing to give up any of her freedom.\textsuperscript{162} She agrees that the positive image of Hitler was broken much too late when he was no longer visiting the bombed cities and as he began to employ children and old people in the war.\textsuperscript{163} In her memoirs and Müller’s film, Riefenstahl gives several accounts of her meetings with Hitler and his chameleon-like personality; sometimes he would be friendly and cordiale and sometimes he would hold a monologue becoming extremely distant. She recalls an occasion, soon after Hitler had declared war on Poland, in which Hitler orders: “[a]s long as women and children are in the city I want no shooting [. . .] It is madness to be shooting at women and children.”\textsuperscript{164} Riefenstahl concedes that she herself would not believe this if someone else had told her; she writes, “[t]o the descendants of the millions of Hitler’s victims, these words must sound like mockery, yet perhaps this episode may contribute to an awareness of his schizophrenic ways.”\textsuperscript{165}

Riefenstahl is most defensive about her film \textit{Triumph des Willens} and the other two shorter films that she made about the Nazis’ various rallies. She consistently refutes all assertions that

\textsuperscript{161}Leni Riefenstahl, “Leni Riefenstahl Interviewed October 11th, 1971,” \textit{Film Culture} by Gordon Hitchens 56/57 (1973) : 120.
\textsuperscript{162}Müller.
\textsuperscript{163}Müller.
\textsuperscript{164}Riefenstahl, \textit{The Sieve of Time} 260.
\textsuperscript{165}Riefenstahl, \textit{The Sieve of Time} 260.
label her a Nazi filmmaker and explains that from the beginning she had absolutely no desire to make a party film; she wanted to continue to act. She views her three films that involved the Third Reich only as a job, and one that she could not turn down.\textsuperscript{166} When Hitler first approached her to film the 1933 Party rally, which eventually became \textit{Sieg des Glaubens}, she told him that she could not accept the offer since she had no experience making documentaries.\textsuperscript{167} Hitler persuaded her to make the film; she asserts that this film was to have been the first and the last.\textsuperscript{168}

Riefenstahl was and is still not pleased with \textit{Sieg des Glaubens}. It was not a proper film, she maintains, because she did not have enough material to work with--it was only a bunch of shots put together.\textsuperscript{169} She describes \textit{Sieg des Glaubens} as an "imperfect fragment, not a motion picture" and writes, "I have to smile whenever I read in the press that this film was made with a 'colossal' technical expertise."\textsuperscript{170} Riefenstahl also had difficulty making \textit{Sieg des Glaubens}; she concludes that the problems arose because of the Nazi Party itself. Because the Party did not want her making the film, she was forced to find her own cameramen and borrow money from her father in order to make the film.\textsuperscript{171}

Riefenstahl believes her disastrous experience with \textit{Sieg des Glaubens} resulted in Hitler's determination to have an even greater

\textsuperscript{166}Müller.
\textsuperscript{167}Riefenstahl, \textit{The Sieve of Time} 144.
\textsuperscript{168}Müller.
\textsuperscript{169}Müller.
\textsuperscript{170}Riefenstahl, \textit{The Sieve of Time} 150.
\textsuperscript{171}Riefenstahl, \textit{The Sieve of Time} 145.
film made of the 1934 Party rally. After Hitler was made aware of the problems that transpired during the first film he became furious and stated that she would make another film and he would see that she had absolutely no difficulties.\textsuperscript{172} Again Riefenstahl protested but "Hitler became insistent [. . .] You can and you will do this project.’ It sounded almost like an order."\textsuperscript{173}

After making Hitler promise that he would never ask her to do another Party film, she went about making the film contemplating ways to make it more interesting than the normal, static newsreels.\textsuperscript{174}

I had to work out how to raise the film above a newsreel level and it wasn’t easy to transform speeches, pageants and so many almost identical events into a motion picture that would not bore the spectators [. . .] The only solution I hit upon was to shoot the documentary events in as versatile a manner as possible, with the emphasis on dynamic rather than static tasks [. . .] documentaries did not employ such mobile photography. I wanted to try it [. . .].\textsuperscript{175}

Many years after \textit{Triumph}, Riefenstahl discusses with Müller the techniques she used in \textit{Triumph} and what she aimed to achieve through them. One must have a feeling for links between the different images, she states, and the climax must come at the correct moment in order to have a continuous build up, which is part of what makes the film interesting.\textsuperscript{176}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{172}Müller.
\textsuperscript{173}Riefenstahl, \textit{The Sieve of Time} 158.
\textsuperscript{174}Müller.
\textsuperscript{175}Riefenstahl, \textit{The Sieve of Time} 159.
\textsuperscript{176}Müller.
\end{flushright}
She experimented with several new methods of filming within *Triumph*, especially methods involving movement; Riefenstahl set up cameras on tracks, cameramen on roller-skates, and a camera on an elevator. Experimentation and new effects appearing in *Triumph* for the first time have lead many to believe that she had taken part in the planning of the rally itself. Riefenstahl refutes all of these allegations; "the idea that I would have anything to do with it is absurd."  

By the time she had totally committed to the film, she writes, she had barely two weeks to prepare. She also remembers having difficulty receiving permission for allowances such as tracks and an elevator. Although Riefenstahl was not given permission for everything, the experiments that she was able to carry out did create something different: movement and fresh angles.  

Müller calls Riefenstahl's juxtaposition of the masses and Hitler an "interesting contrast" and asks her if she was aware of this. She states that this is all there was--Hitler and the people--and claims that such mass crowds can be found everywhere--in Moscow, Peking, Korea, and even bigger than they are in *Triumph*.  

Riefenstahl maintains if Stalin had ordered a documentary she would have made a documentary; "[I would have] filmed it to the best of my ability and shaped it into a film it didn't matter if it were about fruit." She explains that most artists think about work and not so much

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177 Müller.  
178 Riefenstahl, *The Sieve of Time* 159.  
179 Riefenstahl, *The Sieve of Time* 159-60 and Müller.  
180 Müller.  
182 Müller.
about politics.\textsuperscript{183} Nevertheless, \textit{Triumph} was not about politics; it was about an event.\textsuperscript{184} She claims that her documentary was in tune with the time; if it appears to be political, she says it is because 90 percent of the people at the time \textit{Triumph} was filmed were for Hitler.\textsuperscript{185}

Riefenstahl fervently argues that it was not her intention to create a propaganda film. It could be used as propaganda, she explains in an interview with Gordon Hitchens, but propaganda is meditated. She states that commentary is often used in propaganda to “show significance and value of the occasion,”\textsuperscript{186} and adds that \textit{Triumph} did not use commentary; she claims that her film is simply an artistic newsreel.\textsuperscript{187}

The question of whether or not an artist has any political responsibility is one that Riefenstahl responds to strongly. She asks Müller “who are [artists] responsible to? Who can assure us the right kind of future?” She believes an artist who totally dedicates herself to her work cannot think politically. Riefenstahl assumes that most artists do not have a feel for politics and says even if one did, she could not predict the future.\textsuperscript{188}

Riefenstahl explains if she had been interested in politics she would have joined the Party. She states that she never joined the Party, she never went to meetings, and she turned down other

\textsuperscript{183} Riefenstahl, \textit{Riefenstahl Interviewed} 101.
\textsuperscript{184} Müller.
\textsuperscript{185} Müller.
\textsuperscript{186} Müller.
\textsuperscript{187} Riefenstahl, \textit{Riefenstahl Interviewed} 102.
\textsuperscript{188} Müller.
political film offers-- she simply was never interested in politics. Today a media artist might have to be more aware of and interested in politics she claims, but during Triumph's time one would not need to be, because almost everyone was for Hitler.  

Riefenstahl's knowledge and attitude of the time were rather believing. "I thought that people were good. I don't know at this time if then I was maybe naive" she claims, though she does not believe that making Triumph was naive. Since Triumph was a documentary, there was no reason not to make the film, says Riefenstahl. She has always affirmed that she was in favor of Hitler; she thought he would bring peace and work to Germany. Although she says that she was against his racist ideas and eventually began to listen to Hitler's speeches more carefully, she admits that she was never an opponent.

Riefenstahl maintains that she had distressed relationships with most of the other Party members except perhaps for architect Albert Speer. After shooting Sieg des Glaubens, she was visited by Rudolf Diels, the chief of the Secret State Police, who said that she would be needing protection. When Riefenstahl asked why Diels responds:

'because the Führer greatly respects you as an artist--which many Party members can't understand--and has honoured you with the task of making a film about the

189Müller  
190Riefenstahl, Riefenstahl Interviewed 102.  
191Riefenstahl, Riefenstahl Interviewed 102.  
192Müller.  
193Riefenstahl, The Sieve of Time 145.
national Party rally. This has caused bad blood among the Party people, who have been waiting for such signs of favour for years—it is a slap in the face for them.'\textsuperscript{194}

She considered Goebbels an enemy after complaining to Hitler about the lack of support during the filming of \textit{Sieg des Glaubens}; he threatened: "[i]f you weren't a woman, I'd throw you down the stairs. How dare you tell Hitler such stories about my staff. I am the boss. You are to report to me."\textsuperscript{195}

Riefenstahl admits that she was unable to include every rally event in \textit{Triumph des Willens}. The military maneuvers and the Congress of Women were among some of the events that she omitted.\textsuperscript{196} Hitler had suggested to her that she consider including the \textit{Wehrmacht} in \textit{Triumph} because of complaints from General von Reichenau who was not happy with the \textit{Wehrmacht}'s exclusion. In turn, Riefenstahl was not pleased with Hitler's proposal to change her opening scene in order to appease all important Party members. She became upset because she had been promised total freedom, so she offered to do a short film about the \textit{Wehrmacht} the next year, which became \textit{Tag der Freiheit--Unsere Wehrmacht}.\textsuperscript{197} Although not a major film, everyone involved was satisfied with \textit{Tag der Freiheit}.\textsuperscript{198}

As Riefenstahl has said many times before, she was not interested in films involving the Nazis, but when she was first approached to film the 1936 Summer Olympics she immediately

\textsuperscript{194}Riefenstahl, \textit{The Sieve of Time} 148-9.
\textsuperscript{195}Müller and Riefenstahl, \textit{The Sieve of Time} 147.
\textsuperscript{196}Riefenstahl, \textit{The Sieve of Time} 166.
\textsuperscript{197}Riefenstahl, \textit{The Sieve of Time} 163-4.
\textsuperscript{198}Riefenstahl, \textit{The Sieve of Time} 176.
turned down the offer. She relayed to Diem all of the difficulties she had with the Ministry of Propaganda making the documentary *Triumph*. Although some of her first words regarding Professor Carl Diem’s proposal were, “I can’t imagine turning all those events into a film. Secondly, I swore to myself that I would never make another documentary under any circumstances,” she slowly began to consider the idea. Images of ancient Greece, the original Olympic site, and its sculptures dissolving into athletes made of flesh were the first to appear and inspire her; she began to realize the dramatic possibilities that this segment could have. After experiencing these images, she agreed to make *Olympia*.

She was discouraged by several different parties regarding her involvement in making an Olympic film. Both Fanck and Goebbels thought she was crazy to expect the public to have interest in a film a year and a half to two years after the actual event took place. Goebbels claimed that "the crucial thing here is speed, not quality." UFA thought the film would be successful only if it had a plot and suggested that a love story be added. Despite all the negative feedback she received, which gave her some doubts, she stood by her idea and made a two part documentary film. Riefenstahl decided this film could be successful only if they were able to "select, omit, accentuate, show the essentials and leave out

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201 Riefenstahl, *The Sieve of Time* 170 and 172.
the non-essentials [. . . ] everything would have to be shot and from
every conceivable angle." 204

In Müller’s film, Riefenstahl, along with two former Olympia
cameramen, discuss the making of Olympia. Once again, she
enthusiastically speaks about the arduous work involved. Several
months before the Olympics were to take place, Riefenstahl and
cameramen practiced filming other sports, sometimes without film,
just to become aquatinted with the correct angles needed for filming
such events. Balloons with cameras, cameras on tracks, cameras in
pits, cameras under water, and cameras on boats were all
experimented with in order to create interesting footage. Riefenstahl
and her cameramen recall the long, late meetings that took place
every evening when she gave detailed assignments. They all agree
that it was strenuous, but Riefenstahl insists that all 136 events had
to be filmed. 205

Riefenstahl believes that her involvement in the Olympic film
brought about feelings ranging from disinterest to anger within the
Nazi party. Though Hitler did not like the idea of the Olympics,
Riefenstahl maintains that Goebbels was much more active in his
dislike for her and her involvement in the Olympic film. In addition
to initially not appearing pleased with her decision to make the
film, 206 Goebbels and the officials of his Ministry boycotted
Riefenstahl and her work on Olympia. She states that many of the
cameramen with particular experience in documentary filming were

204 Riefenstahl, The Sieve of Time 173.
205 Müller.
206 Riefenstahl, The Sieve of Time 173.
taken away from her to work on Goebbels's Olympic projects. SS-men attempted to remove the only sound camera from her sound recordist and cameramen just before the opening ceremonies. She says that she herself was refused admittance to the stadium by Goebbels on the fifth day of the Games. Cameramen Hans Ertl and assistant Bertl Höcht, she claims, were forced by the S.S. to discontinue filming certain scenes for *Olympia*. In addition to all the harassment, Goebbels also wanted her to cut out scenes that included the "victorious Negro athletes."

Riefenstahl maintains that her problems involving the Nazi Party during the filming of *Olympia* prove that the film was neither related to, nor supported by the Party. The fact that *Olympia* won several awards--Olympic gold medal in 1939, French gold medal in 1937, as well as the gold at the Biennale in Venice in 1938 for world best film--and much praise from other countries, she asserts, support her declaration that *Olympia* was not a propaganda film.

The film offer for *Tiefland* was so quickly accepted, Riefenstahl writes, because "[she] wanted to escape any further involvement with Hitler's projects." She received the offer for *Tiefland* after she made *Sieg des Glaubens*. But after much planning and hunting for locations, the film stock and crew did not arrive and Riefenstahl suffered a circulatory collapse, after which she considered *Tiefland* done for.

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After making *Triumph* and *Olympia*, Riefenstahl organized a film crew to do reporting in Poland at the outbreak of the war.\textsuperscript{211} Riefenstahl and her crew witnessed brutal actions of the German army on the morning after she had arrived. This caused Riefenstahl and her cameramen Gustav Knuth to return to Berlin as soon as possible.\textsuperscript{212} She returned to Germany and resumed filming *Tiefland*; she once again states: "I wanted to keep my head down and avoid making war films;" she decided to continue with *Tiefland* because she had money from *Olympia*, and its theme was neutral.\textsuperscript{213}

Although *Tiefland* appeared to be "neutral," the involvement of Gypsies from camps caused Riefenstahl many problems after the war and did not help support her contention that she was not a Nazi. In her book, she explains that the camp from which the Gypsies were taken was not a concentration camp at that time, and that she and her crew have seen many of the Gypsies since the war.\textsuperscript{214} As stated earlier, Riefenstahl was involved in several lawsuits because of allegations that she used Gypsies as slave laborers and left them to die in concentration camps. She won most of her lawsuits because the witnesses committed perjury and the facts simply did not add up. She did lose a lawsuit in which she attempted to prevent the showing of filmmaker Frau Gladitz's film, which included untrue facts about herself and the Gypsies.\textsuperscript{215} In her memoirs, she includes a Viennese newspaper statement, that she claims came about after she

\textsuperscript{211}Riefenstahl, *The Sieve of Time* 257.
\textsuperscript{212}Riefenstahl, *The Sieve of Time* 259.
\textsuperscript{213}Müller.
\textsuperscript{214}Riefenstahl, *The Sieve of Time* 267.
\textsuperscript{215}Riefenstahl, *The Sieve of Time* 357-64.
was able to present the facts to the Concentration Camp Association in 1954 just after the première of *Tiefland*:

As announced by the board of directors of the Association of Survivors of Concentration Camps: during a visit to the Association, Frau Riefenstahl presented documentary statements and decisions by various government agencies and courts of law to demonstrate that the accusations that she used Gypsies from a concentration camp in her motion picture *Tiefland* were inconsistent with the facts [. . .] The Association is still of the opinion that it would be more expedient not to screen the film in question at the present time; but it has decided to refrain from any further action against showings of the film.\(^{216}\)

Although Müller does mention the use of Gypsies in his film, Riefenstahl is never thoroughly questioned.

When *Tiefland* premièred in 1954, more than twenty years had past since Riefenstahl had started work on the film. She became nervous during the beginning of *Tiefland*’s première; she writes, "as the film ran on, my doubts increased, for the theme and the style seemed long out of date [. . .] when I saw myself on the screen, however, I felt quite sick. I was obviously miscast. How could I have been so mistaken?"\(^{217}\) Although she was not satisfied with the entire film, she found that the black-and-white shots had a graphic quality and were highly expressive.\(^{218}\) Riefenstahl explains to Müller that she focused on the visual in *Tiefland*, because she wanted to demonstrate that black-and-white photography had the capability of producing effects that color could not and she did not want this

\(^{216}\)Riefenstahl, *The Sieve of Time* 398.

\(^{217}\)Riefenstahl, *The Sieve of Time* 397.

\(^{218}\)Riefenstahl, *The Sieve of Time* 397.
type of art to disappear. She states her goal was to create picturesque effects that had an airy feeling to them which she believes has been accomplished in *Tiefland*.

Riefenstahl first love was the mountains and she later began to find the same kind of peace in Africa. After reading Hemingway's *The Green Hills of Africa* she asked herself, "[w]as the thrilling atmosphere he described merely the vision of a poet? Could one really breathe more freely and more happily in Africa?"\(^{219}\) She decided to visit Africa "with or without a film project."\(^{220}\) As she recalls her experiences and the primitive conditions in which she lived, she tells Müller, "strangely enough I was happy."\(^{221}\)

Although she attempted to make a film and eventually took photographs, Riefenstahl claims that getting to know the people of Africa was the most important thing for her. She was interested in the lifestyles, movement, rituals, and facial types of her African friends. She admired the Nuba of Kordofan for their wrestling matches, whose strong, athletic bodies first attracted her.\(^{222}\) The Kau Nuba were not as peaceful as the Mesakin Nuba, but she admired them for their great artistic ability to paint masks. She explains her fascination with these people claiming that she is more attracted to the beautiful than she is to the ugly, and that she cannot be creative with a negative subject because she needs her subject to stimulate enthusiasm.\(^{223}\)

\(^{219}\)Riefenstahl, *The Sieve of Time* 407.
\(^{220}\)Riefenstahl, *The Sieve of Time* 407.
\(^{221}\)Müller.
\(^{222}\)Riefenstahl saw George Rodger's photograph in an old issue of *Stern*.
\(^{223}\)Müller.
Müller reminds Riefenstahl of critics who assert that she is continuing a fascist aesthetic. She claims if there is a fascist aesthetic she does not know what it would look like. Riefenstahl maintains that she photographed the Nuba as they lived and without requesting them to pose; she tried to go about unnoticed with a camera. She asks Müller how one could possibly call that fascist. "I didn't change these people; this is the way they look: healthy, beautiful, the old stay inside. I didn't create them, God did." 224

Riefenstahl made her first trip to Africa in 1956 and returned several times. During her first trip with her colleague Horst Kettner, who worked as cameraman in Africa as well as in her underwater endeavors, in 1968 and her fourth Christmas with her Nuba friends, she began to notice the influence of civilization on the Nuba. They now wore dirty, tattered rags and had to lock their homes. 225 She writes, "[m]oney produces greed and envy and was at the bottom of this profound change." 226 But in 1971, at the end of one of her several trips to Africa, Riefenstahl and Kettner first experienced another world through snorkeling in the Indian Ocean.

I was enchanted by the mysterious underwater world [. . .] We were delighted by the many colourful fish that circled round quite unconcerned by our presence and we just couldn't get enough of this seascape. The subtle hues and fantastic ornaments were breathtaking as was the splendour of the corals. 227

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224 Müller.
225 Riefenstahl, The Sieve of Time 557.
226 Riefenstahl, The Sieve of Time 558.
227 Riefenstahl, The Sieve of Time 570.
Two years later, in Kenya, seventy-two year old Riefenstahl passed her diving test and with this began another era of her life.228

Riefenstahl published a book in 1978 called Coral Gardens, which is made up of her underwater photography. Müller leaves her at the age of ninety-two still diving and enthusiastically reviewing the material that she and Kettner have just filmed. She hopes to eventually make a film out of her sea material.

Riefenstahl is extremely aware of the what people claim her to be; she cites numerous law suits that she has had regarding her position in the past. She asserts that the allegations are not true and adds that she has won most of them. She says that people call her blind, but she maintains that she never was a Nazi so she still cannot be one. She feels that it does not matter how she explains her experiences, because certain people will never believe her. Müller is of the opinion that many are waiting for an apology, but Riefenstahl states that to say sorry is much to inadequate for what happened during the Third Reich. She expresses the horror and sadness she felt when she learned about the millions of deaths in concentration camps while she was questioned by the Americans immediately after the war, but she does not believe that she played a role in any of it. "I can't regret living. An anti-Semitic word never crossed my lips, I didn't drop any bombs. I didn't denounce any one. Why am I

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228Riefenstahl, The Sieve of Time 585-6.
guilty?" Riefenstahl writes, "I am really a ghost, and will have peace only after my death."
Art Prevails

Did Leni Riefenstahl live a life centered around Nazi ideology, does she still continue it today with her underwater adventures, or does she simply live in a world of fairy tales? This is a complicated question and there is no concrete answer. Because of the era and because of her talent, many critics and fans avoid uncovering both sides of the two extremes, but it is all too simple to call Riefenstahl either a wonderful genius or a Nazi who made art for the purpose of death. Because of history, one cannot avoid the impression that the Nazis left upon her life, but one also cannot overlook what she accomplished in the film world especially as a women.

In examining Riefenstahl's life, one becomes overwhelmed with the immense amount of activities, ranging from dance to diving and filmmaking to mountain climbing, that she successfully participated in. Perhaps such accomplishments do not appear to be exceptional today, but one must remember that Riefenstahl spent a major part of her life in a society where women were given medals for staying home and having children:

Jaworsky: [...] she was very talented and a woman full of energy who really, within the film business, took the leadership as a woman./Hitchens: In a male-dominated society, and in a male profession, this is very unusual./Jaworsky: Which is very amazing especially under the Hitler kind of family
concept./Hitchens: I recall Goebbels's statement that the perfect German beauty is pregnant and obedient.231

Riefenstahl began proving her unwillingness to conform to a male-dominated society at an early age, when she insisted on taking dance classes against her father's strict orders. Oddly enough, she did have the strong support of her mother who Riefenstahl claims was her husband's "willing slave."232 Although today she does not defy any strict social rules, scuba diving at the age of ninety-two does go against the norm.

Riefenstahl is a very determined woman. Not only did she challenge the "norm" but she also confronted youth in relation to dance. Whereas almost all dancers begin ballet at six or seven, Riefenstahl did not start ballet until she was sixteen and was unable to seriously begin training until she became nineteen when her father finally gave in to her desire to dance.233 She claims that although dancing was one of her passions, it really started out as an experiment to see if she could succeed.234

Due to an injury, Riefenstahl began to act with the idea that she would eventually return to dance.235 Acting was another endeavor in which she had almost immediate success. She saw Berg des Schicksals and desired to appear in a mountain film.236 Riefenstahl sought out Luis Trenker, an actor in the film, and announced that she

231Jaworsky 142-3.
233Riefenstahl, The Sieve of Time 22-3.
234Müller.
235Riefenstahl, The Sieve of Time 55.
236Riefenstahl, The Sieve of Time 42.
was going to appear in their (Trenker and director Fanck's) next film. Fanck met with Riefenstahl and four days after their meeting he presented her with a manuscript written especially for her. This kind of passion, drive, and talent allowed Riefenstahl to pursue her ideas and desires, but these qualities have also aided in her downfall.

It is too simple to claim that hate and harsh criticism of Riefenstahl and her work is the result of her being too at what she does. She is certainly very talented, and it is clear that her talent and drive have brought about her fame, but one must also consider the possibility that her positive qualities might have made her less aware than she should have or could have been during the Nazi era. In Müller's film and in her memoirs, she often recounts how she closed herself off to the world when she had made a goal. While editing Triumph she writes, "I sealed myself off from the outside world and concentrated totally on my work in the editing room. I wouldn't talk to anyone, not even my mother." Riefenstahl's narrow focus on art is understandable, but clearly aided in making her less aware.

Although Riefenstahl's relation to the Nazis should be examined, it is necessary to explore her films because she initiated many new practices in the world of film, she succeeded with certain filming aspects where many had failed, and her films were good; after the war, Olympia was listed in America as one of the ten best

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237 Riefenstahl, The Sieve of Time 43.
238 Riefenstahl, The Sieve of Time 44-5.
239 Riefenstahl, The Sieve of Time 162.
films of the world.²⁴⁰ Her films are what have brought her to the world’s attention. Had she been a second rate filmmaker for Goebbels her name would not be known today. Though several problems do exist between Riefenstahl and her past, many critics have blown this past out of proportion. These critics, many of whom are discussed in the first chapter, appear unaware of the fact that viewing her work after the Nazi era, with hindsight, is bound to have an effect on one’s view. It is absolutely necessary to consider time when viewing Riefenstahl’s films.

Das Blaue Licht

In Das Blaue Licht, Riefenstahl is able to fulfill her wish of combining a mysterious, fairy tale-like plot with a similar setting.²⁴¹ Nature in itself is very real, but it is often portrayed as a mysterious entity. She makes this obvious in her story: the young men climb Monte Cristallo as if in a trance because they are drawn by a mysterious blue light. Nature is what grants Junta life. Though the role of nature in the lives of the villagers is clear, because of the viewers ability to follow a fairy tale and understand language, it is Riefenstahl’s use of visual techniques that make the significant role of nature prominent.

Nature is consequential in the lives of the villagers in a negative sense. It acts as an enemy because nature kills their young men. Nature plays a meaningful role in Junta’s life in a more positive

²⁴⁰Müller.
²⁴¹See page 40.
sense; it acts almost like her spirit because it gives her life. As the director, Riefenstahl depicts the different types of roles nature has with the Junta and the villagers through lighting. When the villagers are presented the lighting utilized portrays worn and stiff faces. It is true that she does employ peasants with these types of characteristics to play the villagers, but as she tells Müller, lighting can make a face look quite good or twenty years older. Junta’s aura is entirely different than that of the villagers. Her face literally radiates light. Junta’s face glows especially while looking at her precious crystals; it is as if she receives actual physical strength through the crystals (nature).

The lighting in Das Blaue Licht gives the viewer a sense of the roles that the characters have in the film. Junta’s brightness symbolizes her pureness and goodness. Although the villager are not placed in dark lighting, they are considerably darker than Junta at times, which makes the harshness of their faces more prominent and eerie. This juxtaposition of light and dark gives the viewer a sense of good and evil; this is eventually proven at the end of the film when the villagers cause Junta’s death.

Animals are also used in the film to depict Junta's bond with nature. While resting at the top of the mountain, after being chased by the villagers, Junta explains her experience to the shepherder. Close-ups of Junta are continuously interspersed with close-ups of animals. The animals are so calm that they appear to be smiling and

242 Riefenstahl, The Sieve of Time 93. Riefenstahl found these “actors” in Sarentino about eighteen miles from Bolzano, Italy.
243 Müller.
able to understand Junta's problem, which, again, depict the power of nature.

As discussed earlier, Kracauer and Sontag believe that such mountain genre films hold much Nazi ideology because of the importance placed on nature.\textsuperscript{244} Although it is true that the mountains did play a role in Hitler's life (most likely giving him feeling of power with his Berchtesgaden house tucked away in the mountains), the view claiming that Riefenstahl's nature exalts Nazi ideology is extremely narrow. One must look at the general feeling toward nature and mountains in Germany during the twenties, before the Nazis came to power, in order to understand why Dr. Fanck and Riefenstahl chose the mountains as a main subject of their films. During the twenties, automobiles and roads became more available to the public, which allowed them access to mountain destinations. City people began to make excursions to the mountain in order to escape city life and return to nature. In the mountains, nature remained untouched. The mountains were a challenge to many, and while not everyone had the ability to reach the peak, for those that could, nature acted as a sort of religious experience.

It is much too restrictive and unfair to assume that because Riefenstahl did make a film for the Nazi Party anything and everything thereafter will have some association to Nazi ideology. As mentioned previously, Hinton is of the opinion that Nazi ideology was "wholly unoriginal."\textsuperscript{245} With this in mind, one cannot claim that

\textsuperscript{244}See page 5.
\textsuperscript{245}See page 7.
because Hitler had a mountain home, everything that has a relation to nature during this period has a link with Nazi ideology. Clearly the trend of mountain climbing came before the prominence of the Nazis. It came about because of the progression of technology, and was the result of search for a place in which one could be challenged or at peace.

_Triumph des Willens_

_Triumph des Willens_ is the film that many consider the archetype of all Nazi propaganda film. Was Riefenstahl just doing a job for Hitler just as Michelangelo was commissioned by the Pope to paint the Sistine chapel (a job which he hated),\textsuperscript{246} or did she specifically do _Triumph_ because she wished to support the extermination of millions of Germans?

Riefenstahl maintains that _Triumph_ was a pure documentary film, and as the earlier criticism shows, this aspect of documentary film remains important to many. While watching the film, one receives a feeling of excitement and confusion. On the surface, the viewer is observing a festive and merry event. As Deutschmann states, Riefenstahl is not critical and adds that none of the negative happenings during the rally were ever shown--only the good.\textsuperscript{247} In this sense, Riefenstahl presents what she finds important, and what she wants the viewer to see, but one might pose the question as to whether or not any filmmaker could produce a purely objective

\textsuperscript{246} Jaworsky 134.
\textsuperscript{247} See page 9.
documentary film. Because it is almost certain that a director would have some type of interest or even a disinterest in the subject of his or her documentary film, he or she surely would have a proclivity towards the subject. Even though Müller, the director of The Wonderful, Horrible Life of L. R.--a film of the nineties, says, “I hate films which tell me what to think. So it was my purpose to put the facts on the table and let the audience come to its own conclusions,” the viewer can easily decipher his stand point.²⁴⁸ Because of the way he juxtaposes events in Riefenstahl’s life, and because of the manner in which the voice-over poses questions, one can feel Müller’s frequent skepticism of Riefenstahl. Although Triumph could be seen as manipulation and propaganda (and from a particular standpoint it certainly can be considered just that), one must consider the role that the documentary had in the nineteen thirties.

As with her Olympia film, Riefenstahl did not have much on which to model her sport documentary. Though she began her two documentaries after Robert Flaherty, one of the first documentary filmmakers, she was still among some of the first to create this type of film. Because he was the “inventor” of documentary, Flaherty had to develop his own ideas for forming a documentary in order to make a film from his experience in Northern Canada called Nanook of the North in 1922.²⁴⁹ He used feature films as a model. In feature film, a director has the power to film what she thinks important; she is able to add, delete, and edit freely. Both directors take liberty in

²⁴⁸ Stein and Wardell 9.
forming their films, because the feature film is their only model
during the twenties and thirties. Both Flaherty and Riefenstahl had
certain goals. Riefenstahl desired to make an artistic documentary of
both Triumph and Olympia, but Flaherty had a different idea:

Flaherty was less interested in recording what he
witnessed than in discovering a 'true spirit' of a people
that may have been lost through modern influence. To
this end he sometimes dressed his subjects in old-
fashioned costumes and had them reenact for his camera
traditional events that they no longer practiced.\textsuperscript{250}

Although Flaherty did not abide by the “rules” that exist today,
Nanook of the North is still considered one of the first documentaries.

Another consideration with documentaries is technology.
Equipment was a problem especially in Olympia, but also in Triumph.
Some of the haze during the night scenes in Triumph, that many
have attributed to Riefenstahl’s so-called attempt to create a
mystical, “quasi-religious aura,”\textsuperscript{251} may have been due to the smoky
magnesium torches that were used because the bright spotlights
Riefenstahl’s crew had rounded up were turned off by Nazi
officials.\textsuperscript{252} “I realized too late what mischief we’d perpetrated, but
we had shot some atmospheric footage, and that comforted me.”\textsuperscript{253}
Critics also mention sporting events in Olympia that she might have
filmed during practices, which implies that inclusion “unreal” footage
is not valid for documentary. Riefenstahl had no zoom lens to work
with and no hand-held, easily portable cameras available to her as

\textsuperscript{250}Sklar 122.
\textsuperscript{251}See page 19.
\textsuperscript{252}Riefenstahl, The Sieve of Time 160-1.
\textsuperscript{253}Riefenstahl, The Sieve of Time 161.
filmmakers do today. In order to get great shots, it was necessary to get up close, which was often only possible during practices. Because of the era and newness of the genre, Riefenstahl's *Triumph* and *Olympia*, like Flaherty's *Nanook*, merit the title of documentary.

Riefenstahl also placed events out of chronological order in *Triumph*. This topic circles back to the fact that she used feature film techniques, and that her goal was to make the documentary interesting. The rules are different today. Because so much more is available, more is expected of a filmmaker today. Like technology, culture, or a society, art is always changing and forming new rules. Riefenstahl followed the rules of filmmaking during 1934 and 1935 when she made *Triumph des Willens*.

Whether or not Riefenstahl herself purposely made *Triumph* in order to influence the film's viewer into believing Nazi ideology is a question for which there are several possibilities. On one hand, one can see *Triumph* as propaganda because it portrays the worship of Hitler. On the other hand, one must remember that *Triumph* is a film of the 1934 Nuremberg Nazi Party rally. It was a rally and rallies are meant to make people excited and supportive of the political party in question. With such a massive event it is clear to understand why she tells Müller that only Hitler and the people existed.\(^{254}\) Although she excludes negative elements such as drinking, fat, vulgar party officials, chaos in the streets, absence of non-Nazis, the constant noise, and the "tasteless" anti-Semitic

\(^{254}\)See page 45.
propaganda that circulated in the streets, she does present the viewer with a sense of massiveness, excitement and Hitler's god-like status, all of which existed during the rally.

Many critics believe that Riefenstahl employed techniques that constitute Nazi propaganda or Nazi ideology. A major criticism of Triumph is that she reduces the individual into nothing; the individual becomes part of a whole--the masses. There are many scenes in Triumph that contain masses of people and sometimes the individual faces are not even visible, but it is necessary to look at when and with whom she employs this technique. Throughout the film she takes many close-up shots of the rally onlookers--the people in the crowd. These images do not only consist of moving close-ups, but also include still close-ups. This type of close shot does not establish a lost identity. The viewer of the film receives information from these close, intensive shots. With the incorporation of close-ups, Riefenstahl captures the feeling of a particular onlooker at that particular time, whether it be serious and pensive or happy and excited. One cannot claim that everyone looses identity, because close-ups allow the viewer to see what types of people and feelings were involved in the Party rally, which, after all, is the main subject of this film.

It is impossible to maintain that the individual is entirely lost in Triumph, not only because of close-up images, but also because of the inherent meaning of military. The people involved with the various military groups do lose their identity. During sequences of

\(^{255}\)Deutschmann 4.
military groups, a single face is rarely shown if the faces are even shown at all. The viewer is only able to observe a strong moving group of faceless bodies. Because of this lost identity, one must question the purpose of a military. When one thinks of a military, individuality does not play a role. Instead one imagines a group, an entity that defends a country. No one has ever informed soldiers in a military that they are becoming too alike, and that they should try to be more individualistic. Such a military could never work. The whole principle of the military is to work together as a team in order to get things accomplished. By depicting the individual in certain occasions and choosing to omit it in others, Riefenstahl uses normal definitions to portray the individual and the military.

As discussed earlier, Riefenstahl claims that she did not have anything to do with the planning of the Party rally and had a difficult time filming what she wanted to film. The opening address and the speeches by the various Party members in Leopold Hall seem to give truth to her statements. She employs only one static angle, which makes this segment dull. Because Riefenstahl was so innovative, it is unlikely that she purposely made the opening speeches stagnant; she probably did not receive permission to move around or set up more than one camera because of the nature of the building and the fact that the building was packed with bodies. The most interesting footage occurs when there are no human figures in view. Despite its possible connotations, the infamous opening scene, the airplane carrying Hitler through the clouds and over the city, is beautiful as well as peaceful. The soft, billowy clouds are
dramatically lit by the sun and the entire sequence flows gracefully. The early morning scene of windows opened to greet a radiant sun is also visually impressive. This segment's editing is reminiscent of a scene in *Das Blaue Licht* when the villagers close their windows in order to block out the dangerous, but beautiful night moon light. Riefenstahl definitely had to play by someone else's rules, which is clearly evident because of the difference between the flat sequences, in which she had limits, and the vibrant sequences, in which she had none.

Riefenstahl admits that she wanted to create a film that was different from static newsreels. As can be seen in the earlier in the Leopold Hall segment, static shots are simply not very interesting. Despite these facts, many critics fault her for incorporation of movement into *Triumph*. Kelmen claims that the movement has a "quasi-hypnotic" effect on the viewer. The viewer might become dizzy because of the movement, especially in the segment in which a camera films children along the side of the road as it quickly drives away, but hypnotic is a bit strong. Even if it were to become hypnotic and make one dizzy, one must imagine actually being at the rally; the feeling of movement would be ten times stronger. During the long parades towards the end of the film, most of the movement occurs as the military marches in the parade—anyone who stares at a parade long enough is bound to feel a bit queasy. It is Hitler and the rally's planners that create the

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256See page 44.
257See page 18.
movement, not Riefenstahl. As a film director, she simply recreated the feeling of movement, that one would experience if one had physically been at the rally, by use of a moving camera.

As mentioned before, the problem of symbol has also been a factor against Riefenstahl among critics. Many believe that her close-ups on symbols change reality or transform those symbols into reality.\textsuperscript{258} If one views her films, one would notice that symbols play a part in most of them. In \textit{Das Blaue Licht}, the crystal is a symbol for nature and an ideal;\textsuperscript{259} she continuously shoots close-ups of nature, such as animals and plant life, to remind the viewer of nature's place in Junta's life. \textit{Olympia} has many close-up shots of Olympic flags, the Olympic flame, and the Olympic stadium to remind the observer of the purpose of the film. Riefenstahl uses similar methods in \textit{Triumph} by employing Nazi flags, banners, and staffs with swastikas on them to place the viewer in the context of the film and to remind them of what the subject is--the Nazi Party rally.

The assertion that Hitler is presented as a cult figure is difficult to deny. Hitler is often filmed from extremely low angles. At times, as Hitler's face becomes a little darker and clouds drift past in the background, he looks very powerful and perhaps even menacing. These low angle shots are full of an eerie energy, almost foreshadowing what is to come in later years. Though Hitler is portrayed as having a sort of godly quality, Riefenstahl does depict him as the people saw him; Hitler was able to ignite the crowd into a

\textsuperscript{258} See page 19.
\textsuperscript{259} See page 41.
frenzy, which one experiences while watching the speeches in the film. In Müller’s film, Marlene Dietrich explains on a recording that the Germans thought they needed a Führer and Riefenstahl concurs, and adds that order was an important in the German society.\footnote{Müller.}

Mass patterns in \textit{Triumph}, as many already have agreed, are problematical. Sontag believes that the individual is lost and Kracauer claims that the aesthetic of the pattern lure people into believing Nazi politics.\footnote{See page 18.} Mass patterns are used in the rally, but to put the blame on Riefenstahl as if she were the one who suggested them is nonsensical. She would have to have planned the rally herself. She claims if she would have planned the rally she would have been the Hitler, and all the people would have posed for her alone.\footnote{Müller.} It is unlikely that Riefenstahl had that much to do with the planning because grand rallies occurred every year:

The Party Conventions was an annual highlight of the Nazi calendar, and always a massive propaganda event. It was staged not only (or even especially) for the camera, but for the spectators and participants. The parades, congresses, rallies and military-style reviews were carefully planned and often ‘rehearsed.’ They reflected the experience of the Nazi faithful in thousands of rallies and street marches that took place throughout the year.\footnote{Deutschmann 3.}

It is true that elements such as movement, symbol, godliness, and mass patterns are involved in \textit{Triumph}, but they were employed by Riefenstahl because she found these elements in the rally and
conveyed them into the medium of film. Therefore, it is unfair to constantly maintain that Riefenstahl transformed the rally into something entirely or even partially different on film. Claiming that these elements are not Riefenstahl's original idea is not meant to assert that these elements are harmless, but only meant to note that she filmed a Nazi Party creation, she did not create it.

As stated earlier, the methods Riefenstahl employs in Triumph, in order to make a flowing film rather than a static one, are important because she is the person who discovered these new techniques. The tracks that she built around podiums helped the film flow. The elevator, for which she fought for, allowed Riefenstahl to show the massiveness of the rally and the "show" that took place.

Although Triumph has its great artistic and technical elements, because Riefenstahl is able to depict the rally through her filming, editing, and invention in a successful manner, Olympia is more captivating. From a personal view, the Olympics are simply more interesting and enjoyable to watch than a Nazi Party rally is.

Olympia

Again, techniques are employed in order to make her Olympia film visually enjoyable. The most important of these techniques are different angles and movement, which at times conveys the essence of sport, and at other times becomes Riefenstahl's own, purely abstract, idea of sports.
Fest der Völker

Riefenstahl succeeded in her Olympic film effort, whereas the few before her had failed. She had an extremely large task with the Olympia film not only because she had to film so many events, but because she had to create a flowing, visually pleasing, two-part film, out of a lot of similar, potentially monotonous material. An element that helped her achieve this was the use of different filming styles. She begins with a prologue set in ancient Greece; the statues become athletes. Much of the first part, Fest der Völker, is made up of various track and field events. She often alternates between regular and slow motion and long, medium, and close shots, which acts as tension for the athletes in the film as well as for the viewers of the film. The change of pace also keeps the film from being static like the typical newsreels. Riefenstahl creates excitement, anticipation, and tension as she cuts from the athletes that are competing, to the viewers in the stands, to the other athletes who are waiting for their turn to compete.

Most of the first part of Olympia is rather straightforward. Although these “normal” segments are excellent, there are some sequences that are especially different, which obviously play a role in making the film successful. The different segments that help vary the film include: the pole vaulting for its unusual view point, the marathon for its dramatic effects, and the javelin sequence for its creative editing.
In order to film the pole vaulting, Riefenstahl was allowed to
dig pits next to the pole to achieve an angle that many viewers do
not experience. During the day time vaulting scenes, only music and
the cheer of the crowd is audible as the jumper makes his goal.
Shadows of the jumpers are also included and most of the footage is
in slow motion. The most impressive shots occur as the jumper is at
his highest jumping point, for he seems to float in mid-air. These
elements give the pole vaulting scenes an abstract quality and
Riefenstahl's artistic talent is clearly visible here.

Riefenstahl says that her goal with the marathon was to depict
the extreme difficulty of the event as well as the will of the athletes
to go on. She explains that she used music as well as different angles
to portray this. The angles used are perfect for fulfilling her goal.
She illustrates that shots of the runners' feet, filmed with a camera
attached to the athletes' bodies, are supposed to show how heavy the
feet become and how difficult it is to find the strength to go on.
The shots of the quickly passing landscape, combined with the view
of the athletes' legs, give the viewer a sense of actually running the
marathon. This, along with the inspirational music, does indeed
create a sense of the athletes' intense willpower. The dramatic feel
of this segment includes the viewer and creates tension and
anticipation that can typically be found in a feature film.

\[264\] Müller.
\[265\] Müller.
\[266\] Müller. The voice over narrator explains that these dramatic
techniques are those of feature films.
Like the marathon sequence, the javelin event is also dramatic because of editing. Here, Riefenstahl does not start with the athletes, but with javelins flying in rapid succession quickly through the air. As they land, they punctuate the staccato-like music that has been added to the film. They pierce the audience as they soar through the crowds to their destination on the other side of the field. The athletes also appear at a brisk pace—one right after the other. The entire sequence does not last more than three or four minutes and the segment moves at a very fast pace. The quickness and selectivity of what is shown and when is what gives the sequence an electrified quality. This type of fast paced event juxtaposed with the slow, graceful sequences of the pole vaulting give *Olympia* its energy.

*Fest der Schönheit*

The second part of *Olympia, Fest der Schönheit*, is similar to *Fest der Völker*, but one of its focuses is on the bond between the athletes and nature. It has a prolog of its own, which begins in a natural setting. Soft music plays and the viewer watches trees, water, and various small animals slowly crawl by. The athletes appear only after the viewer has observed early morning nature for several minutes. The natural light is soft and glows through the trees. The back lit athletes have a certain mysterious or spiritual quality similar to the glowing Junta in *Das Blaue Licht*. After the athletes appear, the mood becomes more lively; it is clear that Riefenstahl attempts to show the camaraderie between the athletes by filming them in nature, having fun, helping each other stretch and train, and simply relaxing.
Despite some of the slower, more monotonous segments of Fest der Schönheit, there are some dramatic scenes such as the eight man rowing race and the bicycle race. At the start of the rowing race Riefenstahl uses a long shot of the boats to place the viewer. The film suddenly cuts to individual rowers, and again, she uses "impossible" angles. One shot is taken from the front of the boat with the camera directed towards the row of rowers. The second "impossible" angle, and perhaps the best at giving the viewer a feeling of being in the boat, is an angle from inside the boat, which focuses on the frontal image of the caller. As the viewer looks at the caller, the viewer(camera) moves back and forth as if the viewer were actually rowing.

Riefenstahl prepares us for the drama of a the bicycle race by filming the bicyclists fixing their gear and reviewing maps for the race. As the race begins, the music becomes more animated and an announcer explains who is in what position, which heightens the excitement of the race. Towards the finish line the viewer is presented with close-ups of faces, hands, and feet. The atmosphere of this segment is comparable to that of the marathon sequence.

The abstract sequences in the second half of the film, like the pole vaulting segment in the first half, provide an artistic element to the film. These flowing pieces include the gymnastic event, and most well known, the diving event. The gymnastic event is the first event to appear in Fest der Völker. There has not been any commentary so far and there is none throughout the entire gymnastic component of the film. All the gymnastic events are filmed in slow motion and
clouds are a prominent part of the image. The combination of slow
motion and athlete behind a backdrop of big, downy clouds make the
athlete look graceful and precise—almost magical. Athletes look like
butterflies as they float through a cloud filled sky descending from
the uneven bars. The music varies its pace, which assists in giving
the images its highs and lows.

Although the gymnastic segment of the film is abstract,
Riefenstahl approaches the men’s diving a bit differently. Instead of
pure slow motion, she slowly builds the way in which the sequences
become abstract. She begins by depicting the athletes diving at
regular speed. As the speed of the film gets slower, the divers are
shot from different angles. At the slowest speed the divers become
birds or falling leaves; they either soar in a cloudy sky or appear as
silhouettes.

Though these scenes are an essential part of Olympia, because
they create variety and portray sports from several angles, one
cannot disregard those critics that believe the entire film, especially
the more artistic scenes, consist of Nazi propaganda. Many attacks on
Riefenstahl’s Olympia are illogical because they criticize the inherent
nature of sports rather than Nazi ideology. For example, Barsam
compares Olympia to Triumph:

[... ] [B]oth films express a deeper and subtler idea. By
twentieth-century standards of humanism and
democracy, the films insinuate that only the strong and
the muscular, the chosen and the elite, can lead and win [...].
The marathon race, as seen in Olympia, is won by a
slightly built Oriental, a victory which seems to refute
Nazi racial theories of heroic Aryan superiority. But the
race itself is the important element, as a metaphor for
one of Riefenstahl's controlling concepts: the triumph of the individual will over physical obstacles. Sontag describes *Olympia* as containing "one straining, scantily clad figure after another seek[ing] the ecstasy of victory, cheered on by ranks of compatriots in the stands [. . .] (Olympia, which could as well have been called *Triumph of the Will*, emphasizes that there are no easy victories)." It is true that athletes must possess a certain will in order to win, but this the nature of competitive sports. These critics must focus on criticizing sports rather than Riefenstahl for creating a competitive atmosphere, because competition is intrinsic in the definition of sports. In addition, she does not only show victorious athletes, she also shows those "gods", as Sontag and Barsam insinuate, as possessing the ability to fail.

It is understandable that readers, film viewers, and critics have difficult time separating the subject matter of *Triumph* from that of *Olympia*, because they have the advantage of hindsight and are aware of the atrocities that occurred under Hitler. Though it is unfortunate for Riefenstahl that she made or was talked into making *Triumph*, it does not give critics the power to push her following films under a heading that carries "Nazi ideology" as its title. Too many have struggled to find fault with *Olympia*, where not much exists, calling it subliminal propaganda, when what must be examined is the worth of *Olympia* as an excellent, artistic film.

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267 Barsam 33-4.
268 Sontag 87.
Tiefland

Riefenstahl was correct in stating that she had miscast herself in her last film Tiefland and that the style of filmmaking had changed within the many years that Tiefland was left incomplete.\textsuperscript{269} Although Bernhard Minetti plays a perfectly sinister Don Sebastián and Franz Eichberger, as Pedro, is wonderful at being naive, Riefenstahl does not fit the part of the dancer Martha. The fiery dancer does not have a fiery temper; instead Martha uses a lot of one word answers delivered breathlessly--primarily “ja” and “nein.” This film is the least impressive of the four films Riefenstahl completed, but, as she mentions to Müller, she was striving for a picturesque quality--images that could stand on their own, and she does capture some strong, “highly-expressive” footage with black and white photography in Tiefland.\textsuperscript{270}

The most striking representation in Tiefland are those that involve nature. The opening scene takes the viewer to the Hochland and presents its beauty. The sun peeks out from a mountain, the clouds are grand and velvety, and soft, peaceful music plays. The camera moves gracefully over the landscape, pausing occasionally on a particularly breathtaking spot. The black and white film works exceptionally well in depicting nature. Contrasts between light and dark are impressively strong, but the subtle tones give the image a soft “airy” effect.

\textsuperscript{269}See page 53.
\textsuperscript{270}See page 53.
A scene that portrays the evils of Sebastián through the quality of black and white photography takes place at the end of the film. Sebastián struggles against the strong wind of the storm that has just begun brewing. He is very dark, almost a silhouette. The camera takes the viewer through dark alleyways and the music becomes dark and lively. Everything in this sequence is sinister and evil, even the massive storm clouds, but on the bottom of the chain of clouds lies a streak of light far off in the distance. The present darkness depicts the wickedness that lurks, but it is as if the stream of light clouds, contrasted with the main group of violent clouds, give Pedro and Martha hope for the future. This hope remains alive as Pedro kills Sebastián during the storm, and Pedro and Martha ascend into nature, which initially gave them their hope.

The Nuba

After Tiefland Riefenstahl was no longer able to make films. She chose to explore Africa, but was unable to escape the harsh criticism that appears to hunt down her every move. Despite Riefenstahl's assertion that the people of Africa were her main interest as she traveled, critics, as stated earlier, believe that she insists on continuing the fascist aesthetic that she has supposedly always supported.

\footnote{See page 54.}

In her paper titled *Leni Riefenstahl: The Nazi and the Nuba Or, My Own Private Africa*, Jesseka Brooks discusses fascist aesthetics. Brooks has three questions:

Do you know a fascist piece of art when you see one? Why does it seem to be popular to deny that representations with clear fascist tendencies or traits such as sado-masochism, SS uniforms, sculpted bodies, and terminators are devoid of any political implication? Can a piece of art be called fascist based solely on its content, or is it the process by which and context in which the art is created that qualifies it as fascist? As critics, we will probably all agree that the content of a work cannot be separated from the forces that shape it.

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As mentioned on several earlier occasions, it is essential to consider what Brooks calls "the forces that shape" a work, but it is clear that Brooks has a different idea of what has shaped Riefenstahl than I do. Brooks believes that Nazi ideology has shaped her work, whereas I believe it was time/situation, her disinterest for politics as well as an interest in art that shaped *Triumph*, and her pure interest in art that shaped her other works.

Brooks believes that the link between Riefenstahl's African images and fascist aesthetics is what she refers to as "sculpted bodies." "Her work is filled with images of young, strong, healthy, beautiful, well-groomed, uniformed, half-naked, and naked male warriors, individually and en masse."\(^{277}\) Although the Mesakin Nuba's wrestling matches and the Kau Nuba's knife matches may not be what one would care to watch, for the Nuba these fights are considered a type of sport rather than an aggressive attempt to inflict pain on others.

Although she mentions all three of Riefenstahl's books, Gates focuses on *Die Nuba von Kau*. This book is the most bloody, because the Kau fight with knives unlike the Mesakin who just wrestle using only the body. Riefenstahl is aware that the Kau Nuba are more peaceful than the Mesakin, which she addresses in Müller's film.\(^{278}\) Gates is concerned that "Nuba men and women are never named [...]

\(^{277}\)Brooks 4.
\(^{278}\)Müller.
working the fields, how they care for their children, how they live
and how they die." Gates is correct in stating that Riefenstahl does
not go into depth in Die Nuba von Kau, she tends to focus on
tradition, but Gates fails to address her other two books, especially
The Last of the Nuba. In her first book, Riefenstahl commits a
chapter to life in the village, another to harvesting, and yet another
to death. She also often names the individuals in The Last of the
Nuba. A reason for the difference between the content of the two
books is most likely due to the two relationships Riefenstahl had
with the Kau and the Mesakin. The Mesakin were her friends. She
visited the Mesakin about five times and spent many months and
Christmases with them over several years. She spent considerably
less time with the Kau and never became as close to them as she was
with the Mesakin.

Riefenstahl’s photos from Africa are, as most of her critics
agree, beautiful. The colors in the images are bright and rich. But
after reading essays from critics like Sontag, Gates, and Brooks one
would imagine that Riefenstahl’s three books are full of blood, guts,
and beautiful bodies. The most of the Africans photographed do
possess beautiful bodies, but then again, it is likely that all of the
people in the villages photographed had fit bodies: they walked
everywhere, built and made everything, and grew all their food
themselves. In addition, wrestling was simply an important part of
the Nuba’s society.

\(^{279}\)Gates 7 and 9.
The photograph that gave Riefenstahl desire to meet these particular people was taken by George Rodger, a British journalist who has traveled the world several times photographing all types of situations and people.\textsuperscript{280} When Riefenstahl first asked him where she could find the Nuba he refused to have anything to do with her. After Riefenstahl made her first book, she sent a copy to Rodger, who says, "Ich hatte sie so lange gehaßt. Aber einmal, dachte ich nun, muß Schluß sein mit dem Haß, ich will mit ihr essen gehen."\textsuperscript{281} Although Rodger states that he finds Olympia "fabelhaft" and her Nuba pictures "außerordentlich professionell," he claims that Riefenstahl had to bribe the Nuba to take off their clothes for pictures.\textsuperscript{282} Riefenstahl does write that she gave the Nuba things that were useful such as food and medical supplies as well as gifts of colorful beads, but this occurs more often after she has developed a friendship with the Nuba. Riefenstahl never mentions anything about asking the Nuba to take off their clothing; she says she photographed them as they were.\textsuperscript{283} Rodger also asserts:

der allmähliche Niedergang der Nuba begann mit der Veröffentlichung von Leni Riefenstahls täuschenden Farbbildbänden.\textsuperscript{1} Dokumentarfilmer, Photoamateure und Touristen strömten herbei, und was sie bewunderten, die natürlichen, ursprünglichen Lebensformen der Nuba, war den islamischen Fundamentalisten im Sudan ein Dorn im

\textsuperscript{280}Inge Bondi, \textit{George Rodger} (London: Gordon Fraser, 1975) 1.
\textsuperscript{281}Peter Sager, "Jenseits von Afrika," \textit{Die Zeit} 17 März 1995: Modernes Leben 23. I had hated her for so long. But eventually I thought it was time to end the hate and go out to dinner with her.
\textsuperscript{282}Sager 23. magnificent--exceptionally professional
\textsuperscript{283}See page 55.
Rodger neglects to consider that he was the man who's picture of the Nuba captured Riefenstahl's soul; he acts as if this is a singular incident and fails to acknowledge the changes occurring in Africa.

The similarities between Rodger and Riefenstahl's work forces one to consider the possibility that Riefenstahl has been singled out for criticism. In a compilation of Rodger's work, about three are taken from the Nuba tribes and several more are from other African tribes. Based on what she writes in her memoirs, one can assume that she only saw one of Rodger's photographs. This is most likely true considering that the 1975 survey of Rodger's photographs is his first. Despite her lack of contact with this photographers work, the work of both Rodger and Riefenstahl are very similar. Riefenstahl's images of wrestler's are almost identical to those of Rodger's--groups of men looking on and wrestlers wrestling--documentary photography. In addition, their style of composition is also extremely similar.

Rodger and Riefenstahl have other similarities besides their photography. Bondi quotes Rodger as stating "[a]t school I was a dreamer [. . .] I dreamed of faraway places and never really

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284 Sager 23. The gradual decline of the Nuba began with the publishing of Riefenstahl's remarkable color picture books. Documentary filmmakers, amateur photographers, and tourists flocked in and admired the Nuba's natural, unspoiled way of life. This was like a thorn in the eye for Islamic fundamentalists of the Sudan, and, therefore, triggered the ethnic cleansing of the Nuba area.

285 See page 54.

286 Bondi 1.
studied."\textsuperscript{287} Riefenstahl constantly refers to her dreaming in her memoirs. Already on the first page of her memoirs Riefenstahl writes, "[b]y the time I was four or five years old [. . .] I was beginning to enjoy dressing up and playing games of fantasy."\textsuperscript{288} Peter Sager asks Rodger what he would like to be remembered for. Rodger replies, "[a]ls jemand, [. . .] der seine Mitmenschen liebte."\textsuperscript{289} Though their photographs are similar, and both possess similar viewpoints towards life, Riefenstahl is harshly criticized for her Nuba images and Rodger is praised. I believe that this sort of indiscriminate criticism regarding the two photographers proves that Riefenstahl has been unjustly singled out as someone easy to attack because of the film \textit{Triumph}. It is unfair and nonsensical that critics would stereotype her, unwilling to examine all the surrounding circumstances of her films in the Nazi era.

\textit{Coral Gardens}

Riefenstahl's most recent endeavor is deep sea diving. She published \textit{Coral Gardens} in 1978, before she completed her last book on the people of Africa. Riefenstahl considers the underwater world a "fairytale world."\textsuperscript{290} Although, \textit{Coral Gardens} has been available for seventeen years, it has not been examined. What happened to the claim of the inability of separating forces that shape a work and

\textsuperscript{287}Bondi 1.
\textsuperscript{288}Riefenstahl, \textit{The Slave of Time} 3.
\textsuperscript{289}Sager 23. As someone who loved his fellow men.
the work itself? Why hasn’t her underwater world been related to the Nazis. The answer is quite clear--there is no relationship. Critics struggle with relating other aspects of Riefenstahl’s life to the Nazis, but this subject would be difficult if not impossible. After reading so many questionable claims, it would be interesting to hear critics, who contend that she uses a fascist aesthetic, discuss *Coral Gardens*.

The techniques in *Coral Gardens* reflect Riefenstahl’s past style. Her lighting exposes the brilliant colors of the sea, which must be difficult considering that “colours disappear a depth of 10 metres [. . .] and] the landscape appears blue-green.” Most of her images are close-ups; this gives the viewer an intense look of the water world. Besides just photographing fish, Riefenstahl also photographs plant life, which relates back to her love of nature as a child as well as to her first film, *Das Blaue Licht*, in which nature is an essential part of the world.

In light of Riefenstahl’s deep sea work, one must reconsider her so-called “fascist aesthetics”. Sontag claims that a fascist aesthetic includes:

> [. . .] celebration of the primitive [. . .] they flow from (and justify) a preoccupation with situations of control, submissive behavior, extravagant effort, and the endurance of pain; they endorse two seemingly opposite states, egomania and servitude [. . .] Fascist art glorifies surrender, it exalts mindlessness, it glamorizes death.293

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291See page 75.
293Sontag 85-6.
In addition, fascist aesthetics include what is staged, and that which is uniform and lasting. Riefenstahl's *Coral Garden* and Nuba photographs do not possess these qualities. Though Sontag feels that the wrestling matches fulfill much of her definition of fascist aesthetics, I must disagree. In no way do Riefenstahl's photographs of wrestling matches express Sontag's definition, instead Riefenstahl depicts wrestling as the sport and tradition that it actually functions as--no one is killed (or wishes to be killed) and the images neither promote surrender, nor exalt mindlessness.

Riefenstahl is interested in capturing the beauty of a fleeting moment, a uniqueness that comes about very rarely underwater as well as with the Nuba, which points to her desire to photograph beauty in its essential form. She often speaks of her "deep-seated urge to pursue the strange and beautiful."²⁹⁴ Both the Nuba and the underwater world require Riefenstahl to have patience and quickness in order to capture a certain ephemeral moment. "I often spent hours sitting in the terrible heat, concealed behind rocks, just to snap a few pictures."²⁹⁵ Because of the nature of diving, it is only safe to remain under water for about forty-five minutes during an average dive at 40 to 60 feet, so Riefenstahl had to be very observant and quick to capture a distinctive instant. In Müller's film, she explains a clip from the sea and states that in her twenty years diving she had never seen such giant stingrays, which of course implies that one must do a lot of diving before finding something

²⁹⁵Riefenstahl, *The Sieve of Time* 608.
unique. In addition to her photographs, Riefenstahl wished to grasp the moment in her films, which explains her use of so many cameras in *Triumph* and *Olympia* and why they both took so long to edit. This is also apparent in her feature films; she explains that she had the time written down in order to capture the image that only that particular moment in time could possess.

Because Riefenstahl’s images are unique, infrequent occurrences, they can be considered individualistic. She has documented a moment in time that no longer exists within the Nuba in Africa today. It is evident that Riefenstahl is interested in the individual as she is captivated by the beautiful masks that the Nuba of Kau paint on their faces:

Every ‘mask’ is a new creation and some are changed twice in a single day. […] The fundamental purpose of body-painting is to enhance the wearer’s appearance. […] They use paint to accentuate their best features, facial and physical, and conceal or divert attention from blemishes.

As already pointed out, one must often wait for things to occur underwater. She focuses on the individuality of certain sea creatures of plant life by employing close-ups rather than cluttering the image with many subjects. Close-ups are also used in this manner to photograph the masks of the Kau Nuba.

Susan Sontag believes that nature, especially within the Nuba books, is just a cover-up for her blatant fascist ideology. It is true

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296 Müller.
297 See page 40.
298 Riefenstahl, *Kau* 220.
that nature has several functions in Riefenstahl’s life. It also has served as a healer in several different ways. In the most practical vein, nature is a healer for Riefenstahl in a physical sense. She often went into the mountain air to rest after working herself into a state of sickness, and in later years she found that water was the only thing that stopped her pain after suffering from a broken leg in a skiing accident.\textsuperscript{299} Nature also acts a harbor for Riefenstahl. The manner in which she describes the mountains, Africa, and then the underwater world\textsuperscript{300} expresses her longing for an escape; she searches for peace in her life, something which she has sought out since her childhood through nature.\textsuperscript{301} Lastly, nature has been a source of beauty in Riefenstahl’s life. She has been fascinated with the sun, the moon, and the stars ever since reading a fairy tale in her childhood\textsuperscript{302} and presently she is fascinated with the beauty of the sea.\textsuperscript{303} Because nature has been a strong force in Riefenstahl’s life ever since she was a small child, it is rather difficult to believe Sontag’s assertion of nature used as a method in which to get her underling message across especially if that message is to be fascism.

It is ironic that Riefenstahl, who claims that she was not in the least bit interested in politics, got to know and was admired by the most powerful man in the Nazi era. It is just as ironic that Hitler, who believed strongly in the dominant role of the male, could greatly

\textsuperscript{299}Riefenstahl, \textit{The Sieve of Time} 644.
\textsuperscript{300}Riefenstahl’s descriptions of mountains, Africa, the underwater world can be found in the second chapter.
\textsuperscript{301}Riefenstahl, \textit{The Sieve of Time} 7.
\textsuperscript{302}Riefenstahl, \textit{The Sieve of Time} 5.
\textsuperscript{303}Riefenstahl, \textit{The Sieve of Time} 570.
respect and give such high a position to a woman. Hitler had a background in art; he applied to an art school in Vienna and was not accepted. He was also interested in architecture and studied much of its history on his own.\textsuperscript{304} Hitler initially admired and respected Riefenstahl for her art, which he found in her dance, acting and directing, rather than in her ability to make propaganda. Perhaps he believed that Riefenstahl's films could be used for propaganda, but it is unlikely that he would put politics into the hands of a woman. In Müller's film, the voice-over claims that Hitler admired Riefenstahl because she "embodied an ideal that Hitler could exploit: heroic superwoman, queen of the mountains, beyond the masses an idol, a myth, larger than life."\textsuperscript{305} The voice-over asserts that Riefenstahl was what Hitler longed to be, but because he lacked the artistic talent he never succeeded in the art world as she did.\textsuperscript{306} Hitler was interested in Riefenstahl because she could create beautiful things—that he could possibly exploit—not because she was a Nazi or a politician.

Riefenstahl says that she is extremely unhappy that she made \textit{Triumph} in the sense that it brought her so much infamy. She does not think she was wrong to make the film, because she simply created a film that Hitler had ordered and she could not predict the future. Riefenstahl terribly regrets the horrors of the Third Reich, but she refuses to be the mythical figure responsible, an attitude that many are unable to accept from this filmmaker. It is slightly

\textsuperscript{304}Deutschmann 114.
\textsuperscript{305}Müller.
\textsuperscript{306}Müller.
understandable, although not forgivable, that she did not try to gain more information on what was really happening during the Third Reich, or that she did not try to imagine the possible results of Nazi racist politics. As Riefenstahl stated in Müller’s film, Hitler did promote peace and work and it is true that many Germans were for him, which must have created a feeling hard to go against, but she was and still is an extremely intelligent woman and could have opened her eyes a bit wider.

Riefenstahl is faulted for not being aware of politics, yet she is also faulted for escaping to Africa and the sea; this type of “nature” art is not political enough. Because she functions as a scapegoat, the mythical figure “responsible,” even if she had focused on a political topic, critics would inevitably find a way to derive fascist qualities from it. If one puts forth enough effort, anything can become fascist. Critics have used this type of extreme effort when observing Riefenstahl’s art; therefore, as the scapegoat, she has no escape. She will never be able to redeem herself despite the evidence in her favor.

Although she will never be free of criticism, the importance and beauty of Riefenstahl’s film and photography cannot be denied. Considering her feature films, her documentaries, her photographs, and her background in the arts, it is impossible to call her aesthetic a fascist one. The claim that Riefenstahl’s entire body of work is fascist obviously comes from her mistake in agreeing to make the documentary film Triumph because of its connection with the Nazis. She had no interest in Nazi ideology or fascist aesthetics and she is
not someone onto whom one can force a particular idea or ideology of art. Riefenstahl has her own concept of art consisting of nature, essential beauty, momentary uniqueness, and individuality, which she has and continuously does employ in her works of art.
Filmography

Das Blaue Licht 1932
Director: Leni Riefenstahl
Screenplay: Leni Riefenstahl and Béla Balázs
Photography: Hans Schneeberger
Cast: Leni Riefenstahl and Matthias Waiman
Music: Giuseppe Becce
Running time: 77 minutes

Triumph des Willens 1935
Director: Leni Riefenstahl
Photography: Sepp Allgeier
Music: Herbert Windt
Running time: 80 minutes

Olympia 1938
Fest der Völker--Part one
Fest der Schönheit--Part two
Director: Leni Riefenstahl
Photography: Sepp Allgeier
Music: Herbert Windt
Running time: Part one--111 minutes
Part two--97 minutes

Tiefland 1954
Director: Leni Riefenstahl
Screenplay: Leni Riefenstahl and Harld Reinh
Photography: Albert Benitz
Cast: Leni Riefenstahl, Franz Eichberger, and Bernhard Minetti
Music: Herbert Windt
Running time: 97 minutes
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