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Between Motion and Stasis: Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* and *Schönheit im Olympischen Kampf*

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This Dissertation, prepared under the supervision of Dr. Erika Wolf, is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the University of Otago for the degree of Bachelor of Art with Combined Honours in *Art History and Theory* and *Communication Studies*. 
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Cover image from Leni Riefenstahl, *Schönheit im Olympischen Kampf* (Berlin: Deutschen Verlag, 1937), 225.
Abstract

This dissertation examines the impact of viewing images in motion compared to when static. This is achieved through an analysis of the film *Olympia* compared to the photographic book *Schönheit im Olympischen Kampf*. In doing so, it aims to illustrate the complementary, yet distinct, nature of the two forms. The photographic book has received little attention compared to the well-known film. However, it is worthy of attention for a number of reasons. Previous scholarship on the film has been focused on the evidence of Nazi ideology in its content and construction. The images in the book are then analyzed in order to see how this ideology has been translated into photographic images. By rendering moments in the film as individual static images it has allowed for a different kind of contemplation. In turn, this has highlighted how the film viewer occupies a different position to that of the book reader. The images in the book are, arguably, open to a wider range of interpretation than when they are seen in the context of the film. The book is found to be a significant photographic book in its own right.
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Introduction

This dissertation aims to bridge the gap between the film *Olympia* (*Olympische Spiele*) (1938) and the book *Schönheit im Olympischen Kampf* (*Beauty in the Olympic Struggle*) (1937). This will be achieved by identifying how the portrayal of Nazi ideology in the film has been translated into the book. This dissertation also aims to reassess the status of *Schönheit im Olympischen Kampf*. The individual images in the book have proven to sustain interest over time, however the book as a whole is yet to be sufficiently acknowledged. Through the processes of analysis, it is hoped that it is recognized as a photographic book worthy of note.

In 1937, while Riefenstahl and her assistants were editing *Olympia*, the book *Schönheit im Olympischen Kampf* was published. The book contains a mixture of frame enlargements, photographs, and production stills from *Olympia*. There are two main texts that deal with Riefenstahl and *Olympia*: Richard Mandell's *The Nazi Olympics* (1972) and Cooper C. Graham's *Leni Riefenstahl and Olympia* (1986). Curiously, neither of these works discusses, nor even mentions, the book *Schönheit im Olympischen Kampf*. Subsequent scholarship on *Olympia* has relied heavily upon these texts as a key source of information. As a result, *Schönheit im Olympischen Kampf* has been largely overlooked. Later scholarship often includes reproductions of the images from the later reprints of *Schönheit im Olympischen Kampf*, titled *Leni Riefenstahl: Olympia*, but there is seldom any mention of the actual book in the text.¹ The reprinted editions are far more accessible than the 1937 edition, which is now a rare and often valuable item. The fact that the book has been reprinted a number of times shows it has not been entirely overlooked. More recently, the book has been included in *The Book of 101 Books: Seminal Photographic Books of the Twentieth Century* (2001) and *The Photobook: A History* (2004). The book's existence in these two large and

comprehensive photography volumes highlights a significant point. The book has been acknowledged as a significant photobook in its own right. The images have made an impact as individual photographs, independent from the film.

The first chapter, “Context, Construction, and Content,” provides an overview of the history of Olympia. It situates the film within the broader context of Germany at the time. In doing so, it addresses the production and reception of the film. In regards to Riefenstahl, the biographical information given is concise but it will aid in the advancement of later arguments. The photographic work Riefenstahl produced after Olympia will also be mentioned, as there are a number of significant correlations. The remainder of the first chapter is spent addressing Schönheit im Olympischen Kampf and illustrating its significance. The question is then raised as to why it has been disregarded in accounts of Riefenstahl’s life and work. It has been appreciated for its formal qualities but not for its role as a historical document.

The second chapter, “Nazi Ideology in Motion: Rhythm, Race, and Regeneration,” identifies the ways in which Nazi ideology is manifest in the film. It focuses on the construction of a “mythicized past” conveyed through the connections made between ancient Greece and modern Germany. The body is discovered to be a site of great importance for Nazi ideology. The treatment of the body in the film is a particularly significant part of its ideological analysis. It is through the depiction of the athletic body that the most powerful messages are conveyed. Furthermore, it is Riefenstahl’s treatment of the body that has been the subject of a wide range of criticism. It is at the centre of the argument, put forward by many, that the film exhibits a fascist aesthetic. This chapter examines what is meant by a fascist aesthetic and evaluates the claim through selected examples.

In the third, and final, chapter, “Olympia frozen: The effect of Silence, Stasis, and Selection,” the Nazi ideology addressed in the second chapter is developed further. Where the second chapter illustrates how the film as a motion picture works to emphasize its ideology over time, this chapter employs Schönheit im Olympischen Kampf to demonstrate how the static
images exemplify that ideology. In the film there are a number of different elements that help shape the images on the screen. The narration, voice-over, and soundtrack all contribute to how the audience formulates an understanding of the visual. When these elements are removed, and frames from the film are frozen, the images take on a different form. The organization of the images stands in for the editing of the film. The captions replace the narration and voice-over. The formal qualities of the images become heightened. Thus, the portrayal of the body in the film becomes even more apparent in the static images. Arguably, it also opens itself up to a wider range of interpretations. The reader of the book takes on a different role to the viewer of the film. As the context of viewing both changes so does the effect of the imagery.

The first modern Olympics and the creation of cinema both occurred at the end of the nineteenth century. In 1894, sports leaders from around Europe met in Paris, an event that culminated in the establishment of the International Olympic Committee. The purpose of which was to revive the ancient Olympic Games. In 1895, also in Paris, the Lumière brothers gave what is considered to be the first public performance of the cinématographe. One year later, a brand new stadium was built in the centre of Athens and nearly 300 athletes came together to participate in the first Olympic Games of the modern era. It is an interesting coincidence that the two of the most powerful cultural and social forces of the twentieth century, the Olympic movement and the moving image, were born at the same time. The importance of movement for both carries equal significance.

Footage was shot of the London Games of 1908, but the first Olympics to be effectively conveyed through film were the Stockholm Games of 1912. This was not in the form of a complete film. The footage was only released as a series of newsreels or news features. Up until this time Olympic footage functioned as a historic record. Wide-angle lenses were used, the camera angles were fixed, and there was minimal camera movement. This was all typical of the newsreel cameraman. The footage did not strive toward the cinematic, nor were the people filming the Games

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interested in the art of film.³ It is a common error among sport and film historians, and those writing on Riefenstahl's *Olympia*, to claim that Dr. Arnold Fanck's film of the 1928 St. Moritz Winter Games was the first Olympic feature film. It was the 1924 Winter Games in Chamonix, France, that saw the production of the first full-length feature film. A film of the Summer Games in Paris later that year improved on this one. In comparison, Fanck's film was mediocre and uninspiring.⁴ There was no film made of the 1928 Amsterdam Olympics and, despite the new Olympic stadium located around the corner from the heart of Hollywood, there was no official film made of the 1932 Los Angeles Games.⁵ Then in 1936, the Berlin Games saw the filming of the Olympics rise to an unprecedented, yet to be rivaled, level. Leni Riefenstahl's film *Olympia* is widely acknowledged as a propaganda and cinematic masterpiece. It is certainly the most spectacular sports film ever made.

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Due to the limited scope possible in a brief dissertation, the controversies surrounding how the film came about will not be examined in much detail. This subject has already been thoroughly contested and it is not central to my thesis. Similarly, this essay will also refrain from indulging in discussions put forward, by both Riefenstahl and others, regarding her political position or notorious life. For the most part, what will be examined is the production and reception of *Olympia* and *Schönheit im Olympischen Kampf*. It should be noted that the figures have been listed in the same sequence as they appear in the book, rather than as they are referenced in the text.

³ Downing, 13.
⁴ Downing, 14.
⁵ Downing, 14.
1
Context, Construction, and Content

Berlin was announced as the location of the 1936 Olympic Games in 1931, prior to the National Socialists coming to power in 1933. The hosting of the games was a troublesome inheritance from the Weimar Republic era. The very nature of the Olympics completely went against the ideology of the Nazi Party. However, in 1936 the world was eager to believe that the Nazis were reforming, and the propaganda potential of the games to give that impression was soon realized by the National Socialists. Germany would impress the world with the organization, size, and efficiency of the games, as well as with their athletes.

National Socialist racial ideology proved problematic for the propaganda success of the games. Jews were increasingly becoming the target of racist violence. On June 2, 1933 they were excluded from youth, welfare, and sporting organizations. By 1935, Jews were banned from all public and private practice fields in Germany. This hindered their ability to be able to participate in any kind of sporting practice. In Der Stürmer, a Nazi tabloid, Julius Streicher wrote “we waste no words here, Jews are Jews and there is no place for them in German sports.” Similar statements were made in regards to the African American athletes. The National Socialists were receiving international bad press for such racist rhetoric. The American Athletic Union proposed a boycott of the Berlin Olympics, asserting that they would start campaigning to have the games removed from Germany if the racist treatment of the Jewish athletes continued. This caused an undesirable amount of negative press for the National Socialists, so they

decided to minimize their more visible religious and racial propaganda. These actions took the form of token gestures, such as temporarily taking down anti-Semitic posters and signage. They ceased publicly denigrating African American athletes and allowed the Jewish hockey player Rudi Ball and the Jewish fencer Helene Mayer to participate on German teams. Mayer even went on to win a silver medal in the Games. Ultimately, the international pressure and the threat of the games being moved from Germany forced the National Socialists to uphold the Olympic ideal, albeit for the wrong reasons.4

The games took place as planned and the National Socialists used the event as an opportunity to promote Germany as a “decent, friendly, peace-loving, nation.”5 Steven Bach noted that “if Triumph of the Will made Hitler safe for Germany, a film of the 1936 Olympics in Berlin could make him safe for the world.”6 The Games facilitated three main propaganda aims. Firstly, the German government would “impress the world with the size and the efficiency of the games.” Secondly, “the Nazis would impress the world with the accomplishments of German athletes.” Lastly, they could show the whole world their friendly and good willed nature.7 How better to achieve these aims than to document the spectacle of the Berlin Olympics? Leni Riefenstahl was well-suited to the task. Riefenstahl had risen to fame with the release of her propaganda and filmic masterpiece Triumph of the Will (Triumph des Willens) (1934), which documented the 1934 Nazi Party Rally in Nuremberg. Riefenstahl, the now unofficial film director of the Nazi Party, was engaged to make a documentary of the Olympic Games. Debate continues concerning the commission of the film and the appointment of Riefenstahl as director. It is generally agreed that The Reich Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda indirectly funded the film, although

4 Graham, 5.
5 Mackenzie, 303.
Riefenstahl refuted this. Riefenstahl assembled a camera team, many of who had worked on *Triumph of the Will*. They traveled to Garmisch to film some of the Winter Olympics, in order to practice photographing athletes in motion. Most of the cameramen, including Otto Lantschner, Hans Ertl and Walter Frentz, had no experience with sports coverage. In addition to this, the footage of previous Olympics provided little precedent for any potential filming challenges. In the end over 400,000 meters of film was shot, 300,000 of which was later discovered to be useless due to technical problems or errors made by the cameramen.

Riefenstahl's film had to conform to the regulations of the International Olympics Committee, regardless of who financed it. One of the most enforced guidelines was that cameras could not distract athletes at any time during the competition. Instead of allowing this guideline to impede upon the collection of desired footage, Riefenstahl and her cameramen developed a number of innovative ways to film particular events. In many instances, the solutions they found to technical problems ultimately enhanced the stylistic variety of the film. For example, pits were dug at a distance from the track and field events for the cameramen to film from inside. The resulting low camera angle monumentalized the athletes and eliminated the surrounding crowd from the shot. The effect is that the athletes become the sole focus of the imagery and the sky appears as the only backdrop. Further analysis of the style and effect of the imagery in *Olympia* will be discussed in the following chapters.

The premiere of *Olympia* was a grand occasion. It took place in Berlin at the Ufa-Palast am Zoo on April 20, 1938, Hitler's forty-ninth birthday. It was two years after the Games. Everybody who was anybody was there. Hitler gave Riefenstahl a bouquet of flowers, and the Greek ambassador

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8 Mackenzie, 303.
9 Bach, 149-150.
10 Graham, 155.
presented her with an olive branch from a “sacred tree” at Olympia.\textsuperscript{12} The German media was full of praise for \textit{Olympia}. The Nazi film critic Frank Maraun hailed the film as the cinematic embodiment of the models derived from “the ideological realm of National Socialism.”\textsuperscript{13} The film was screened night after night, becoming the biggest success to date for The Reich Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda (Promi). The Promi gifted copies of the film to every country that had participated in the games. They then sent Riefenstahl on a publicity tour to enhance the propaganda value of \textit{Olympia}. She was met with more praise during her international screenings. However, the film she screened abroad was an edited version of the German production. A number of shots of Hitler and swastika scenes had been cut. Riefenstahl encountered some protest in Europe, but mainly in America where, despite Goebbels’ advice not to take her film there, she received an extremely hostile response.\textsuperscript{14}

The German version was designed for German audiences. However, the film does not depict an overtly biased rendition of the Olympics. Other countries victories are adequately appreciated and there is an ample amount of footage of foreign spectators. In fact, the film gives the impression that a substantial amount of the audience members were foreign fans.\textsuperscript{15} On the other hand, this is in line with the propaganda aims for the Olympics outlined earlier. In reading the film as propaganda, it is all the more effective for not appearing unashamedly so.\textsuperscript{16} In saying this, the film does portray a more favourable representation of the German athletes. This is achieved in a variety of subtle ways. German performances are often shown in slow motion with the music increasing into a more triumphant tempo. Competitions that the Germans excelled in, such as the equestrian events, are given more than ample coverage. German athletes are often focused on as much as the overseas victors of events, even though they did not gain

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{12} David Clay Large, \textit{Nazi Games: The Olympics of 1936} (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 310.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Large, 310.
\item \textsuperscript{14} Large, 311-312.
\item \textsuperscript{15} Large, 306.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Large, 315.
\end{itemize}
places. Athletes from nations that were either allied with, or friendly toward, Nazi Germany are also given substantial coverage in the film, for example the Japanese and Italians. In contrast, there is no footage of any of the successes of Czechoslovakia, which was then in conflict with Germany over the Sudetenland. Knowing the history behind *Olympia*’s construction is necessary for a greater understanding of its content. It is also beneficial for the later analysis on the formal properties of the film.

Riefenstahl was born Helene Amalie Bertha Riefenstahl on August 22, 1902, in Berlin. Her relationship with the camera began at a young age, although on the other side of the lens. She was first an expressive dancer and then an actress. After numerous dancing successes, Dr. Arnold Fanck, the director of the 1928 Olympic film, discovered her. She soon secured lead roles in his popular mountain films. Fanck subsequently became a sort of mentor to Riefenstahl, and later helped her with the planning for *Olympia*. Riefenstahl played an interesting part in the prestigious Ufa film studio’s production of *Ways to Strength and Beauty* (1925). This documentary was described as “promoting physical fitness and calisthenics as the path to what the filmmakers ambitiously called the ‘regeneration of the human race.’” This was a common theme related to physical fitness and exercise in the early 20th Century, even evident in New Zealand popular culture. The film was released in 1925 and was an enormous success; particularly in the way it alluringly encouraged athletes to serve the fatherland. Many of the scenes alluded to classical antiquity. Riefenstahl appeared part nude in some while she attended to the needs of “a well-upholstered noblewoman of Athens or Rome.” Riefenstahl’s part in this film is seldom mentioned in accounts of her life and work. This is immediately curious for those who are familiar with *Olympia*. In his recent biography of Riefenstahl, Bach has observed the absence of reference to *Ways to Strength and Beauty*, especially in regards to its apparent correlation to *Olympia*. The film was inherently

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17 Large, 307.
18 Bach, 33.
19 Bach, 34.
20 Bach, 33.
21 Bach, 34.
propagandistic and militaristic, which was most likely why Riefenstahl later denied her appearance in it. Bach notes that, while some people have also attributed this to her being embarrassed about the little credit she received for the role, there is another more likely possibility for her denial. *Ways to Strength and Beauty* is widely acknowledged for its sports footage. It includes swimming, diving, and "rows upon rows of flawless bodies swaying in coordinated rhythms and geometric patterns." When such imagery in considered in relation to the accompanying antiquity motifs, *Ways to Strength and Beauty* is surely a forgotten precedent to *Olympia*. It also highlights the influence of Riefenstahl's dance background in relation to the treatment of the body throughout *Olympia*. The significance of this will become more apparent in later discussions on the relationship between movement and stasis in *Olympia* and *Schönheit im Olympischen Kampf*.

*Olympia* is divided into two parts. The first is called *Fest der Völker (Festival of the Nations)* and the second is called *Fest der Schönheit (Festival of Beauty)*. Together they are nearly four hours in duration. The two parts both begin with fifteen-minute prologues that are not directly related to the actual athletic competition. *Olympia* was a pioneering film, unlike any other form of sports documentation. The expressive quality of the film was often achieved at the expense of the factual recording of events. It is not chronological, and it suppresses the details of a number of events, in many cases even the final scores. Instead, it favours the highlighting of the "grace, poise, and strength of the athletes." For example, in *Festival of Beauty*, there is a celebrated platform diving scene with no accompanying commentary. The concern is not with verbal narrative; instead we are to enjoy the visual spectacle and not worry about the result. It is not simply sports coverage or propaganda; it is also a work of art. It is for this reason, that over seventy years on, it is still a remarkable film of a sporting event that is yet to be rivaled.

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22 Bach, 34.
23 Mackenzie, 319.
24 Mackenzie, 304.
25 McFee and Tomlinson, 93.
The formal properties of the film outdo its actual sports coverage. Ostensibly, the film was not even made for an audience interested in sport. Riefenstahl has always asserted that “beauty” was the driving factor in the production of *Olympia*. Her defenders employ this as an alibi, while others see it as damning evidence in support of the claim that the film is a work of political and race-theory propaganda. The main argument for this is that the film produces a beautified version of the masculine athletic physique in order to promote the Nazi ideal of the Aryan body. The other aspect of the film that has received much criticism is the way it draws upon previously vague Greek associations with the Olympics in the service of constructing a connection between ancient Greece and modern Germany. The links to classical Greece were also being propagated in other visual arenas in Germany at the time. This can be seen in the classicizing architecture, sets and the stage-production of the Berlin games. In addition to this, an exhibition of classical art and artifacts was organized in the Deutsches Museum in Berlin. The exhibition, entitled “Sport der Hellenen,” opened the night before games begun and served to stress the Hellenic heritage of the Olympics. This exhibition led to the acquisition of a copy of Myron’s Discobolus (fig. 3). The Discobolus was much admired by Hitler, and plays a significant role in the first prologue of *Olympia*, which will be discussed in the following chapter. Those who believe Riefenstahl was actively propagating Nazi race theory in Olympia, by establishing a link between ancient Greece and modern Germany, have mentioned this exhibition in support of their argument.

After the war *Triumph of the Will* and *Olympia*, the two films that made Riefenstahl famous, were banned in Germany. However, not even Riefenstahl’s harshest critics could deny the fact that they were great films. It is the power of the two films that has kept them alive. A cinema in San Francisco screened *Triumph of the Will* for eight months in 1950, and a

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26 Mackenzie, 304.
27 Mackenzie, 312.
28 Mackenzie, 317.
29 Mackenzie, 318.
retrospective in Venice was held in 1959. \(^{30}\) *Olympia*, the expurgated version, was screened in New York, first in 1940 and later at the Museum of Modern Art in 1955. One critic coined the film "history aestheticized." \(^{31}\) Later that year, American film directors, including some who had boycotted its screening in 1938, included it in the list of the top ten films ever made. \(^{32}\) The film received similar responses in England. The British Film Institute even invited Riefenstahl to lecture at the National Film Theatre in 1960. However, this caused controversy among other speakers due to attend, as well as members of the public, resulting in the withdrawal of her invitation. Despite *Olympia* being acknowledged as one of the best documentaries ever made, and Riefenstahl being hailed "one of the greatest filmmakers in the world, and certainly the greatest female filmmaker in history," she could not escape her past. \(^{33}\) That is not to say she did not try, in an effort to redeem herself, Riefenstahl moved away from film and started a new career in photography.

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, Riefenstahl traveled to Africa, where she began photographing the Sudanese Nuba tribe. Three books of her photographs of the Nuba were released in the 1970s and Riefenstahl was once again in the limelight. The books, titled *Die Nuba, Menschen wie von einem anderen Stern* (1973), *Die Nuba von Kau* (1976), and *Mein Afrika* (1982), were seen by some as a continuation of the fascist aesthetic exhibited by Riefenstahl's work during the Nazi regime. The concept of the fascist aesthetic will be addressed more thoroughly in the following chapter. Despite the controversy, these three books established Riefenstahl's reputation as a photographer, and they continue to be of interest. In fact, Taschen published a large, limited edition volume titled *Africa* (2002), which contains photos from the three books. After battling with numerous magazines that refused to publish any of her work, Riefenstahl was finally given the opportunity to make a few photo series for *The Sunday Times Magazine*. Interestingly, one of these series consisted of photographs of the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich. The fact Riefenstahl photographed these

\(^{30}\) Bach, 253-254.
\(^{31}\) Bach, 254.
\(^{32}\) Bach, 254.
\(^{33}\) Bach, 254.
games appears to be relatively unknown. The series was called "Riefenstahl’s Second Olympics," but the images fall in comparison to *Olympia*. The photographs were never republished and have not been included in any of the exhibitions or bound collections of her work.\(^{34}\)

Exhibitions of Riefenstahl’s work began to take place at the beginning of the 1990s. A large show was organized in Tokyo in 1992, consisting of her Nuba work and the underwater photography she had moved on to after Africa. There were some images of *Olympia*, but no references to the Nazi Party rally films. Similar exhibitions took place internationally, including one in Germany, in Hamburg 1997.\(^{35}\) One collection of photographs began to gather more and more attention: the photographs of the 1936 Olympic Games. In 2000, the Camerawork Galerie in Berlin organized an exhibition of just the Olympic photographs. The Camerawork Galerie sells the work of renowned photographers, including Diane Arbus, Robert Doisneau, Alfred Eisenstaedt, Helmut Newton, and Man Ray. Responses to the exhibition varied from “in 1936 propaganda, now money,” to “photographs over 60 years old that look so artistic.”\(^{36}\) The photographs for sale in the exhibition were silver gelatin prints and they were identical in content to the ones found in *Schönheit im Olympischen Kampf*. In fact, *Olympia* prints are still for sale in America. Gallery Fahey-Klein in Los Angeles reportedly sells them for about $10,000.\(^{37}\) In the same year as the exhibition, Taschen published *Leni Riefenstahl: Olympia*, a reprint of *Schönheit im Olympischen Kampf*.

*Schönheit im Olympischen Kampf* consists of 273 black and white images from the film and 31 images of the film production. The production images are interesting, because they are unique to the book. They are informative in that they show where cameras were placed. This gives the


\(^{35}\) Deneulin, 298.

\(^{36}\) Deneulin, 298.

\(^{37}\) Deneulin, 298, the prices are not listed on the website, Deneulin provided the value, Fahey Klein Gallery, accessed September 28, 2011, http://www.faheykleingallery.com/photographers/riefenstahl/exhibition/olympia/riefenstahl_ex_olympia_frames.htm
reader a better understanding of how a number of the shots in the film were captured. In saying this, they do not provide greater transparency than the film. One illusion is simply replaced with another. Riefenstahl is present in the majority of the images, which works to reiterate her position as the director and artistic genius behind it all. In a number of the images, Riefenstahl is shown in the middle of a group of official looking men, with whom she appears engaged in serious conversation (fig. 20). In the introduction to the book, Riefenstahl states:

The illustrations are not selected and compiled with a view to an athletic documentary. Had that been my intention, I should have had to include something from every event, and show every winner. In such selection the guiding principle would have been, not beauty, but the need to include everything that documentary coverage required. Since there are already plenty of documentary picture books of the Olympic Games, I felt it right to choose images primarily for their beauty. 38

This suggests that Riefenstahl had a key role in the selection and compilation of the book, yet this is not entirely true. In fact, the book credits Guzzi Lantschner for the selection of the material from the film and Gertrude Sieburg and Rolf Lantin for the enlarging and processing of the photos. 39 The introduction, Riefenstahl’s name on the cover, and the images of her in the production shots all serve to promote Riefenstahl’s authorship, evidently in order to heighten interest in the book.

In “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1935), Walter Benjamin describes the cinematic medium as being necessarily fragmentary. In “The Fascist Choreography: Riefenstahl’s Tableaux,” Brigitte Peucker states that Olympia contradicts Benjamin’s claim in that it “deliberately serves to ally film with idealist artistic practice.” 40 This is most evident in the use of dissolves to provide transition between shots, rather

38 Leni Riefenstahl, introduction to Schönheit im Olympischen Kampf (Berlin: Deutschen Verlag, 1937), III.
39 Riefenstahl, Schönheit im Olympischen Kampf, 283.
than through fragmentation. A dissolve is when the first shot gradually disappears while the second shot gradually appears so that two images temporarily blend in superimposition.\textsuperscript{41} The use of dissolves in the prologue suggests that the film “proceeds by a way of a layering of images, by accretion rather than by means of the cuts that stress fragmentation.”\textsuperscript{42} In \textit{Schönheit im Olympischen Kampf} artistic status is achieved by compiling frame enlargements as though they are independent photographs. They contain meaning both on their own and through the organization of the book. The fact that the images are still being sold as independent photographs to this day is supportive of their autonomy.

The ongoing interest in the film, and static images from the film, is significant for a number of reasons. It shows that \textit{Olympia} is still relevant, not only as a historical document, but as a work of art. Arguably, it is the static images, the photographic books, and the individual prints for sale, that allow for greater contemplation of the formal qualities. Analysis of the film continues to be centered upon its propaganda value, and all its visual techniques are seen to be in the service of that aim. That is not to say that formal techniques have not been used for the purposes of constructing a particular message. Rather, that the reception of the static images would change among those who have and have not seen the film, and among those versed in the context of its production. At this point, it is necessary to address the role Nazi ideology played in the film in order to subsequently examine how it has been translated into static imagery.

\textsuperscript{41} Bordwell, 493.
\textsuperscript{42} Peucker, 287.
Nazi Ideology in Motion:
Rhythm, Race, and Regeneration

In *Olympia*, Leni Riefenstahl draws on the heritage of the Olympic games in order to make direct links between ancient Greece and the new Germany. Fascist ideology often employed history, in the case of Nazi ideology a "mythicized past," in order to instill traditional values into the building of a new future.¹ The German historian Frank-Lothar Kroll saw the imagined history, namely the myth of the Aryan race as being descendents of the Greeks, as integral for the transformation of Germany. In other words, the direction for the future of Germany was constructed from the idea that some kind of lost, or suppressed, national essence had to be restored.² The existence of this ideology is evident in *Olympia*, particularly in the two prologues and the epilogue, and the effect created is so strong that it is hard to believe it was not intentional.

Looking first at the prologue to *Festival of the Nations*, the traditional values of Classical antiquity are evoked in three main ways. Initially, through the use of the Greek landscape, followed by the Greek sculptures that transform into live Aryan bodies, and finally through the torch relay. The sequence begins with a cinematic tour through the ruins of the Acropolis at Athens. The camera slowly moves about the columns of the Erechtheion and the pillars of the Parthenon. The architecture and masses of rock start out off-focused and gradually sharpen, suggesting a sort of visual metaphor of creation.³ Willy Otto Zielke, who transformed the setting into a misty environment through the use of smoke pots and filters, filmed the opening

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² Griffin, 257.
sequence. Originally a photographer, Zielke studied at the Bayerische Staatslehranstalt in Munich and is one of the most interesting and enigmatic figures in German film. Riefenstahl even described him as a genius. Lazslo Moholy-Nagy and Albert Renger-Patzsch influenced Zielke’s photography, and it was not until the 1930s that he turned to film. In 1935, Zielke directed a film about German railroads that Goebbels declared to be “damaging of German reputation.” Zielke was sent to an insane asylum, and he was released only due to Riefenstahl’s determination to have him film the prologue. Zielke traveled to Greece, where he began shooting material for the prologue, soon to be joined by Riefenstahl and her assistants. The use of the smoke pots, in conjunction with the traveling shots, not only creates an idealized atmosphere of ancient Greece but also relates to the concept of rebirth, which will be discussed shortly, as the sculptures appear to be rising from the ashes.

The classical sculptures filmed include the Medici Venus, Medusa, Alexander the Great, Apollo, Aphrodite, the Barberini Faun, Achilles, and Paris. The sculptures are shot in soft focus, with high contrast lighting applied to the faces. Michael Mackenzie describes the dramatic effect created as being “wrapped in the misty and penumbral formal vocabulary of photographic pictorialism.” This is also attributed to the use of vivid chiaroscuro, rich colouristic tonal ranges, and a shallow depth of field that was typical of art photography at the turn of the century. The slow pace at which the camera travels encourages the viewer to take care in viewing the features of these figures. When there are multiple sculptures in a single shot, one figure appears as a silhouette, such as with the montage of the Barberini Faun and Aphrodite (fig. 2). This creates depth of field and also parallels

6 Graham, 42.
7 Graham, 42.
9 Mackenzie, 319.
Riefenstahl's fascination with shadows throughout the rest of the film. The last solid sculpture we see in the prologue is the Discobolus of Myron, and it is here that the symbolic link between ancient Greece and modern Germany is epitomized. The Discobolus depicts a nude discus thrower, about to release his throw (fig. 3). The sculpture transforms into the German athlete Erwin Huber, who is also nude, thus rendering the transition practically seamless (fig. 4). Not only does the shift from statue to living object link the ancient past with the present, but it also supports the idea that Germans were heirs of the Aryan legacy. It becomes increasingly apparent how ideal the Olympics were as a vehicle for propagating Nazi ideology. The juxtaposition of static figures with the figures in motion will also become relevant in later discussions about the effect of the film compared to that of Schönheit im Olympischen Kampf.

Prior to the Discobolus only motionless statues appear. Any sense of movement is created through the panoramic movement of the camera. It occasionally lingers on the countenances, sometime panning out to show entire sculptures. The well-proportioned, twisting body of the Discobolus perfectly illustrates the moment of stasis right before the discus is launched. Furthermore, the shadows created by Zielke emphasize the muscular physique of both the sculpture and of Huber, thus aiding in the transition between the two. In addition to this, the bodies in the prologue were covered in petroleum jelly in order to enhance their sculptural physique. Huber begins to rhythmically rock back and forth, entering into a full body spin, before finally releasing the discus. Huber's arm then merges with that of a shotputter, and then that of a javelin-thrower. The shots alternate between the releasing of the three objects. The use of montage here is very modern in contrast to the pictorialist effects witnessed earlier in the sequence. The figures in the prologue are rather hazily lit, especially the females, aiding in the continuation from misty ancient Greece.

When the female athletes come into focus, the music changes to a softer, more lyrical sound. Their bodies are celebrated, but in a manner distinct from that of the male athletes. While the shots of the male athletes focus upon their strength and power, those of the females stress their
slenderness and unified rhythm. We see a slow-motion shot of hands waving back and forth against a cloudy backdrop, their bodies outside of the frame. Following this are scenes of what appear to be nude gymnasts passing a ball and using hoops. This scene was choreographed by Riefenstahl, influenced by her background in expressive dance. In fact, there has been speculation that one of the nude female figures in the prologue is Riefenstahl herself, but this has never been confirmed nor denied. The depiction of the female athletes in the film as dancers is significant. Dance is illustrative of the complementary nature of movement and stasis, in that "it defines motion as emerging from and returning to the stillness of an ideal pose." However, they are most likely rhythmical gymnasts rather than dancers. Rhythmical gymnastics was a form of open-air exercise highly endorsed in Nazi Germany as an aspect of body culture. It involved dance-like exercises and the modeling of poses adopted from Greek statuary, consistent with Nazi ideology.

The females seem less powerful than the males, yet they are no less evocative of the Greek athletic spirit. They also highlight the reoccurring motif of the cloudy sky that was introduced at the beginning of the prologue and is carried throughout the film. At one point it appears as though the female dancers, pitched against the cloudy backdrop, are offering their beauty to the sun (fig. 5). The scene fades to the long strides of a running javelin-thrower who leads us up to the burning flame of the torch. This introduces the viewer to the torch relay sequence. Prior to this, the nude dancers become superimposed with images of fire rising from the base of the screen. Resembling purified bodies rising from the ashes, this imagery evokes the Nazi concepts of rebirth and regeneration. Roger Griffin characterizes the core myth of generic fascism as being expressed in the term "palingenetic ultra-nationalism." Palingenetic is derived from the

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12 Peucker, 290.
13 Peucker, 289.
14 Mandell, 262.
Greek word “palingenesis,” meaning regeneration or rebirth. Griffin describes this as being the triumph of new life over decadence and decay.\textsuperscript{15} When the term palingenetic is read in accordance with the culturally specific phenomenon of nationalism, it can be perceived as ultra-nationalism: “Fascism thus emerges when populist ultra-nationalism combines with a myth of a radical crusade \textit{against} decadence and \textit{for} renewal in every sphere of national life.”\textsuperscript{16} Griffin states that all forms of fascism can be reduced to the idea that their

Ideologies, policies and any organization are informed by a distinctive permutation of the myth that the nation needs to be, or is about to be, resurrected phoenix-like from the forces, which, without intervention from the forces of healthy nationalism, threaten to extinguish it forever.\textsuperscript{17}

The rising flames superimposed with the dancers, the smoky atmosphere, and the Olympic torch could all be read as illustrative of Germany rising from the ashes.

The flame motif also visually strengthens the transition into the torch relay. Central to Riefenstahl’s metamorphoses of ancient Greece into modern Germany, the torch relay links the “Arcadian dreamscapes to the actual, modern day events of the Olympics.”\textsuperscript{18} As Michael Mackenzie has observed, the torch relay is “the most famous and lasting example of the wholesale reintroduction of neoclassical references or pseudo-references into the mass spectacle of the Olympics.”\textsuperscript{19} Carl Diem, the then secretary of the German Olympic Organization Committee, came up with the idea of the torch relay. Diem staged the original torch relay that was to be incorporated into \textit{Olympia}. However, Riefenstahl re-filmed the entire event, stating that

\textsuperscript{16} Griffin, 13.
\textsuperscript{17} Griffin, 13.
\textsuperscript{18} Mackenzie, 319.
\textsuperscript{19} Mackenzie, 317.
Diem's version was "hopelessly un-photogenic."\textsuperscript{20} The torch relay, still reenacted today, is often assumed to be a tradition carried on from the earliest games, when in fact it was, just like the Berlin Olympics, "a modern, technological, mass media event masquerading as an authentic reenactment of ancient Greek ritual."\textsuperscript{21} It required 335 runners, together traversing over 3,000 kilometers, while carrying the sacred flame from the archaeological site at Olympia in Greece to the titanic ritual tripod overlooking the stadium at Berlin.\textsuperscript{22} At times, images of a map of southeastern Europe are superimposed over shots of the relay runner, on which a black line traces their path from Olympia to the stadium. It is the transition between the two sites, enhanced by the mystical symbolism of the flame, rather than the actual relay itself that spiritually connects classical Greece to modern Germany. This is further aided by the transformation of the Discobolus into the body of the perfect Aryan superman, who we do not need to know is Erwin Huber in order to get the message.\textsuperscript{23} Even though Zielke did most of the filming for the prologue, it is Riefenstahl's editing that enforces the underlying themes and gives the transition coherency and meaning.\textsuperscript{24}

Riefenstahl's treatment of the body throughout \textit{Olympia} further emphasizes the connection with the Classical past. This is evident in the way that focus is placed on the statue-likeliness of the athletes. The celebration of the body and the "perfect supermen" in \textit{Olympia}, although partly a reflection of Riefenstahl's own personal aesthetic, also ties in closely with the National Socialist glorification of health, strength, and physical perfection. Peter Wollen writes that the Berlin Olympics of 1936 was designed as a massive festival in celebration of the human body, as idealized by the Nazi ideology: the body of the sportsman in harmony with nature, disciplined in the quest for unsurpassed achievement,

\textsuperscript{20} Mackenzie, 317.
\textsuperscript{21} Mackenzie, 317.
\textsuperscript{22} Mackenzie, 317.
\textsuperscript{23} David Clay Large, \textit{Nazi Games: The Olympics of 1936} (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 309.
\textsuperscript{24} Mackenzie, 319.
hardened by struggle, recapturing the grace, beauty, and strength of the bodies of antiquity. Other political philosophies, such as communism, also idealized the healthy and strong body, but the Nazi ideology differed from communism in its preference for naked bodies in a natural setting. This is further illustrative of the racist nature of the ideology and how the beautiful body was considered a marker of racial purity. The naked body was also used to strengthen the connection to the models of Greek antiquity. Images of perfectly proportioned, athletic, healthy bodies were publicly presented in Nazism as models, specifically racial models, to depict a new Germany, "restored to health and setting itself apart from a past 'marked by illness' and apart from other groups and nations." The weak body was associated with the inferior other. Art history pioneer Johann Joachim Winckelmann, in his seminal text *History of the Art of Antiquity* (1764), elevated ancient Greek art and culture, and the Hellenistic ideal of the body, as a model for artists to emulate. The Nazis considered the bodies of classical Greek art to be ideal models from which artists could draw physical distinctions.

In *Olympia*, it is not just the German athletes whose bodies are celebrated. One athlete whose body receives particular attention in the film is that of the African American Jesse Owens. Riefenstahl and her defenders often cited Owens' prominence in response to accusations concerning the film's promotion of Nazi ideology. It has been argued, however, that although all races and nationalities have been given ample coverage in Riefenstahl's film, her treatment of the body is inherently fascistic. Susan Sontag has put forward the most convincing argument in this regard. In her essay, "Fascinating Fascism" (1974), she notes that Riefenstahl's films and

26 Large, 309.
28 Mackenzie, 313.
29 Alkemeyer, 72.
30 Mackenzie, 313.
photography exhibit a fascist aesthetic, in that they "celebrate the rebirth of the body and of community, mediated through the worship of an irresistible leader."\textsuperscript{31} Sontag describes fascist aesthetics as a

Preoccupation with situations of control, submissive behavior, extravagant effort, and the endurance of pain; they endorse two seemingly opposite states, egomania and servitude. The relations of domination and enslavement take the form of a characteristic pageantry: the massing of groups of people; the turning of people into things; the multiplication or replication of things; and the grouping of people/things around an all-powerful, hypnotic leader-figure or force. The fascist dramaturgy centers on orgiastic transactions between mighty forces and their puppets, uniformly garbed and shown in ever swelling numbers. Its choreography alternates between ceaseless motion and congealed, static, "virile" posing. Fascist art glorifies surrender, it exalts mindlessness, it glamorizes death.\textsuperscript{32}

It is easy to see the existence of such an aesthetic in \textit{Olympia}, yet it is also evident in the organization of the actual games. This raises the question of whether Riefenstahl simply documented the aesthetic. There are a number of factors that would contradict such a claim. Riefenstahl restaged a number of the events seen in the film in order to get visually more effective footage and to get closer to the athletes than was possible during actual competitions. Pits were dug alongside a number of track and field events in order to achieve a low, "worshipful" angle. The athletes are typically shot close up and individually, whereas images of the crowd emphasized the massing of people.

One of the most visually effective scenes in the entire film appears in \textit{Part Two: Festival of Beauty}. Three Aryan women swing exercise clubs in unison and then the shot fades out and the amount of women has multiplied with each time it fades back in. Eventually there are "perhaps 10,000 perfect

\textsuperscript{31} Susan Sontag, \textit{Under the Sign of Saturn} (New York: Picador USA/Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002), 86.
\textsuperscript{32} Sontag, 91.
women in faultless patterns in perfect unison.\textsuperscript{33} It is the epitome of mass choreography, of the multiplication and replication of things, of people exercising the utmost level of control. The scene is also analogous to the similar construction of masses seen in \textit{Triumph of the Will}. The replication of people and things is also one of the central elements of the masochistic scenarios to which Sontag refers. Repetition creates an "aesthetic coherence of fantasy that expresses infantile fixation, and promotes the behaviors that defer (orgasmic) resolution."\textsuperscript{34} In regards to the grouping of people around a leader-figure or force, the mass spectacle of the Olympics can be considered the force. The circular structure of the Olympic stadium organizes spectators so that they are grouped around the athletes, thus the athletes are also the force. Riefenstahl’s cameras are arguably the most significant force, in that no one was exempt from their gaze, not even Hitler. The German version includes Hitler’s opening ceremony speech and a number of shots of him watching the games, especially after German victories. The English version Hitler only features occasional shots of Hitler and the camera never lingers too long. However, they are enough to remind the viewer of his presence in the stadium.

Riefenstahl has edited \textit{Olympia} in a very definitive way. It is her treatment of the body that has primarily given cause to a fascist interpretation of the film. Sontag’s statement that fascist “choreography alternates between ceaseless motion and congealed, static, ‘virile’ posing” becomes even more pertinent in the analysis of \textit{Olympia} and \textit{Schönheit im Olympischen Kampf}, the subject of the following chapter. In “Images and Politics of the Body in the National Socialist Era” (1995), Thomas Alkemeyer discusses the cult of the strong body in relation to \textit{Olympia}. Alkemeyer is one of the few scholars on \textit{Olympia} who has used images from \textit{Schönheit im Olympischen Kampf}, rather than the later reprints, in his text. However, the existence of the book itself is not mentioned in the text. In relation to the nudity of the athletes, also evident in other Nazi art of the time, Alkemeyer notes that the athletes’ nakedness is not sexualized, but rather it serves

\textsuperscript{33} Mandell, 266.
\textsuperscript{34} Peucker, 283.
solely as a means of idealization. Painters and sculptors working under the Nazi regime often depicted the nude, but they were prohibited to display any bodily imperfections. This is an interesting notion to consider. Even though the strong, fit, and healthy body was idealized in Nazi Germany, to say that the images in *Olympia* are not at all sexualized is not easily justifiable. It is hard to remove all forms of sexual connotation from the depiction of any naked body, let alone the physically perfect bodies portrayed in *Olympia*. Of course, the only time we see completely, or practically, naked bodies is during the prologue, not during the actual Olympic events. Still, the camera often dwells on the bare skin of the athletes, such as the focus on the muscular legs of the track and field competitors. This is not just to portray their physical strength but also to show the beauty in this type of physique. To portray something as being beautiful is both an act of idealization and, arguably, indicative of attraction. Thus to set the images of nude athletes apart from any kind of contemplation other than idealization seems slightly detached from basic human perception. Of course, it is at the moment of reception that such meaning is generated, and perhaps sexualized is too strong a word, but the naked bodies in *Olympia* do not serve solely as a means of idealization.

There is another argument put forward by scholars who see another explanation for Riefenstahl's treatment of the body, other than her being a propagator of Nazi ideology. Mackenzie believes that the notion that *Olympia* exhibits a fascist aesthetic is often focused on the wrong issues. He sees it unlikely that Riefenstahl, supposedly uninterested in National Socialist ideology, actively formulated "a visual equivalent for the convoluted, vague, and illogical race theories of National Socialism." He states that Riefenstahl was working under demanding circumstances and did not have the ability to direct the multiracial athletes. It is proposed instead that, it is more plausible to assume that her imagery was formed by her own ideologies and experience, namely her background in expressive

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35 Alkemeyer, 80.
36 Sontag, 92.
37 Mackenzie, 313.
dance. There are flaws in Mackenzie’s argument, such as the moments in the film when Riefenstahl clearly has given the athletes direction, and the fact that a significant amount of filming took place prior to and after the actual event, but he is right in highlighting the discontinuities between Nazi ideology and Riefenstahl’s aesthetic. She is not racist when it comes to the beautiful body. The importance of her expressive dance background, discussed earlier in the chapter, could go a long way in explaining her fascination with the beautiful body. However, Sontag would surely attribute Riefenstahl’s fixation on beauty to the idea that her character is attracted to, consciously or unconsciously, the “superior” body. In Schönenheit im Olympischen Kampf the bodies are rendered static, which produces another form of contemplation that will be discussed in the next chapter.

In the prologue to Part Two: Festival of Beauty the references to Nazi ideology are just as apparent as in the prologue to Part One: Festival of Nations. This part of the film emphasizes the rural atmosphere and idyllic country setting of the Olympic Village. Instead of the beautiful, sculptural, naked bodies of the Festival of Nations prologue, we are now faced with the bucolic surroundings and communal environment of the athletes’ village. The music is rhythmical as the camera paints the scenery of dewy leaves, birds, and spider webs all illuminated by the rising sun. The camera lingers on the reflection of the trees in the twinkling lake. The music increases in tempo and the athletes come into view. They run through the trees, single file, with the lighting emphasizing the repetition of their movement. Following their morning training, the athletes enjoy a communal sauna and a steam bath. In the film the sauna scene creates the feeling of relaxation, playfulness, and togetherness. The naked, sweating bodies washing each other are erotic but the scene is too brief to appear overly sexualized. However, the book includes a shot from this scene that, when viewed as a static image, is nothing if not sexualized. It depicts a Finnish athlete lying on his back, his head in the foreground, mouth open, with sweat beads covering his bare chest (fig. 12). The image also evokes the Greek sculptures from the

38 Mackenzie, 313.
39 Sontag, 93.
first prologue in the way that the lighting sculpts the figure’s face and body so that it resembles stone. The way the static images arguably appear more erotic than they do in the film will be addressed further in the following chapter.

The rest of the second prologue, however, although consisting exclusively of men, serves to evoke a sense of fraternity and multinational togetherness. As has been noted by others, the entire sequence is highly reminiscent of that of the Hitler Youth brigades in *Triumph of the Will.* In *Olympia,* even though most of the athletes are not Nazis, the Olympic Village, like the Hitler Youth encampment at Nuremberg, reads as an expression of the profound communitarian ethos considered at the heart of Nazi ideology. The images selected for *Schönheit im Olympischen Kampf* from this sequence further emphasize the multinational togetherness depicted in the film. There is an image of three Canadians training, of two Japanese athletes training, and a very interesting image from an aerial perspective of Italian and American athletes talking on a balcony, who seem completely unaware of the camera. There is also an image of a “small notice in Chinese” that has not been translated into the other languages in the captions (fig. 13). The image is not directly related to the games, like the others, it simply serves to elaborate on the presence of multiple races and nations. The prologue to *Part Two* perfectly illustrates the way *Olympia* functioned to portray Germany as a “peace loving nation” to the rest of the world, through the success of the Olympic Village.

The epilogue to *Olympia* is constructed from footage taken during the closing ceremony of the Games, combined with staged imagery. It begins with a distant view of the architect Albert Speer’s “Cathedral of Light” as it encases the entire stadium (fig. 19). The “Cathedral of Light” was created using approximately sixty aircraft and anti-military searchlights. They were placed around the stadium, shooting vertical beams of bright light into the sky. Speer, who was Hitler’s main architect, constructed similar displays for Nazi Party rallies in Nuremberg as a “dramatic display of Nazism’s

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40 Large, 309.
41 Large, 309.
transformative technological and cultural power."\textsuperscript{42} In \textit{Olympia}, the beams of light take over the sky and begin to move inwards to a central point. It is an unavoidably powerful display with connotations of imprisonment, not helped by the pitch-black sky. The beams of light are also reminiscent of the columns and pillars from the first prologue, once again linking the stadium at Berlin to the historic site at Athens (fig. 1). A close up of the swinging Olympic bell interrupts the scene and then fades out again. The beams of light are once again visible, and the Olympic flame takes central stage. The camera zooms in on the flame and then pans back out to show rows of flags, upright like the beams of light. It then focuses temporarily on the rings of the Olympic flag, while it blows in the wind, before returning to the flame. The flame is extinguished, symbolizing the end of the games, and billows of smoke rise upward in line with Speer's cathedral. The camera follows the ascending smoke until all that is visible are the beams of light culminating in a central, glowing point in the sky. The last image we see is that of a stone slate, another reference to Greek antiquity, with the name “Leni Riefenstahl” carved into it. The only theme that is not reinforced in the epilogue is the treatment of the body throughout the film. When viewed in conjunction with \textit{Olympia}, \textit{Schönheit im Olympischen Kampf} reinforces many of the references to Nazi ideology. By rendering the images of bodies' static, the ideology shaping their portrayal becomes more solidified and evident.

\textsuperscript{42} Griffin, \textit{Modernism and Fascism}, 278.
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Olympia Frozen:
The Effect of Silence, Stasis and Selection

The majority of the frame enlargements selected for Schönheit im Olympischen Kampf are identifiable in Olympia. In most cases it is possible to pause the film and see a similar image. However, the effect of the images changes greatly when these are viewed in the form of a motion picture compared to the photographic book. Instead of meaning being made from the editing and rhythmic continuity of the film, meaning is made in the book through stasis and sequence. The athletes in the film who were brought to life through statues are once again rendered motionless in the book. Movement is no longer constructed from the joining together of moments of time, but rather movement is frozen within the individual images. The book places the reader in a different position to the film viewer. It allows for the prolonged contemplation of certain images, and the absence of a soundtrack and narration heightens their visual power.

Herbert Windt, whose specialty was “heroic” music for nationalistic radio programs and films, composed the musical score for Olympia.\(^1\) Riefenstahl’s goal for Windt was to make the music parallel the story told through the images. This is evident in the way that when new themes appear in the film, the music changes synchronously. This either increases or decreases the dramatic effect of what is being depicted. The tone of the music also changes when the male and the female athletes appear on screen. It alternates between a sort of militaristic and triumphant beat to a softer, more melodic sound. This signifies a change in how we are to perceive the presence of the male athletes compared to the female athletes, which is in line with the Nazi gender ideals. Comparatively, in the book there is no

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\(^1\) David Clay Large, *Nazi Games: The Olympics of 1936* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 305.
accompanying music to elaborate the changes in the way male and female athletes are represented. However, the change in treatment between the two genders is still apparent, even equal to that witnessed in the film. The fact that there are significantly more images of the male athletic competitions in the book, as is also the case in the film, is testament to who was considered the dominant gender in the Olympics. In addition to this, most of the images of the female athletes are either of their face, with their sport unknown, or are of the rhythmic gym events, where their poise and grace is highlighted rather than their physical strength. For example, in *Festival of Beauty* the music during the men’s pentathlon cross-country race evokes strength and determination, echoing the sound of the galloping horses. The next scene is of the Loges School gymnasts, who demonstrate skipping exercises. The music changes instantly into a more delicate rhythm that follows their display of unified movement.

In the book, the shift in how males are portrayed compared to females is enhanced through the selection and organization of the images. This is particularly effective when the book is read in the desired sequence. The first of the pentathlon images depicts the German first-Lieutenant Handrick on his horse, mid race (fig. 14). Speed is shown through the angle of the shot, Handrick’s posture, the horse’s hair, and the blurred background. Strength is shown in the muscular stature of the black horse. The determination of Handrick can be read in his facial expression. On the opposite page is an image from the awards ceremony (fig. 15). Three male figures, including Handrick, are shown against the backdrop of the cloudy sky. Their military attire, the virile posing, and the low angle of the camera are commanding of power and authority. Both of the images are sharp; it is possible that they are actual photographs rather than frame enlargements. The lighting creates a high level of contrast, particularly on the figure’s faces. Their defined features and posture are decidedly reminiscent of the Greek statues from the prologue. Turn the page, and you are presented with two images of the Loges School skipping demonstration (figs. 16 and 17). The images are hazier and less defined than the previous; they are most likely frame enlargements, with their skin tone barely differential from the cloudy
backdrop. Movement is also represented in these images, but it is not the same forceful, directional movement as that seen in the images on the previous pages. It is portrayed in the repetition of the girls' legs and arms, displaying their unison rather than their strength. The demonstration of skipping exercises is obviously not an official Olympic event. Therefore the reason it has been recorded is purely for its visual quality, to show the "beautiful" side of the Olympic Games. One does not need to see these images in motion, with accompanying sound, to understand their message.

It is not just the musical score that affects the way in which we consume the images in the film, but also the narration and voice-over. The voice-overs were recorded in German, English, French and Italian, each version with slightly varying messages. There are significant differences in the narrative tone between the German and foreign versions. The narrative voice over in the English version is relatively neutral. Female athletes are often referred to as "girls" rather than by their name. The narration in the German version also does this, but of more interest is the way in which the games are described as a battle between races and nations. For example, in the one-hundred-meter dash, the African American runners are said to be facing "the strongest representatives of the white race." It is not only the visual repetition seen in the film, and solidified within the images in the book, but also the narration that reflects Nazi ideology. During the marathon three Finnish athletes are shown running together, and the narrator announces "three runners, one country, one will," which is undeniably similar to the Nazi slogan "one nation, one people, one leader." Furthermore, the narration in the foreign language editions tend to more frequently mention the athletes' names, while the German version often only identifies them by nation. When Riefenstahl's attempts to screen the

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2 Bach, 160.
3 It should be noted that the inclusion of women at all in a sports film was very forward for the time and, to an extent, their treatment in the narration can be largely attributed to the time period.
4 Olympia, DVD, directed by Leni Riefenstahl (1938; Venice, CA: Pathfinder Entertainment, 2006).
5 David Clay Large, Nazi Games: The Olympics of 1936 (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 308.
film in the years after the Holocaust were rejected, one of the reasons given was that the German version had National Socialist overtones. Riefenstahl appealed this, stating that the English and German narration is similar.\(^6\) However, Dr. Paul Lavin, the main narrator of the original version, said that although the information given was indeed similar, the tone could not be more different. The English narration is “dry, clipped, and matter of fact,” whereas the German narration uses “alliterative and rhetorical repetition of the word \textit{ein (one)}” and emphasizes the competitive struggle of the athlete.\(^7\)

The \textit{Olympia} that German audiences saw reinforced Nazi ideology in the way that the Olympics were made to be seen as a contest between races and nations, a chance to their demonstrate supremacy.\(^8\)

In the two-hundred-meter breaststroke the competition is described as a “blood battle” between Japan and Germany. In the book, Japan is overly represented in the swimming imagery, yet from the images alone it is impossible to see signs of the “blood battle.” Instead, what comes forward in these images is the intimacy that Riefenstahl wanted to create between her cameras and the athletes. Hans Ertl constructed an underwater camera especially for the swimming and diving events in order to achieve this closeness.\(^9\) The swimming images in the book only ever show one athlete at a time in a shot. The focus is placed on their facial expressions and the cameras ability to capture the nature of water so accurately (fig. 18). Movement is created through the breaking water and the diagonal lines of the pool and the swimmers, whose hands are well in the foreground. It is at times like this that the images in the book have a different effect to when they are seen in motion in the film.

The narration in the film structures these images so that they express the Olympic struggle, whereas in the book there is a greater focus on the formal quality of the images. Of course, this is naturally the result of rendering the images static. However, the images in the book are not

\(^{7}\) Graham, 168.
\(^{8}\) Large, 308.
completely without narration as the captions often match the voice-over in the film, even when they do not, they are still informative. The difference in the treatment of genders is evident in the captions. Aside from the German athletes, the female athletes are almost always referred to by their nationality, followed by the word “girl.” For example, “American girl gymnasts show their free exercises.”

The gender divide is set up very clearly in the captions accompanying the images from the prologue. The descriptions, such as “Eurhythmics,” “At play,” “Poise,” “Hoop dance,” “By the sea,” and “In the dunes,” all have connotations of femininity and appear less serious than the captions given to the males. The meaning generated from two captions viewed beside each other is unique to the book. For instance, in relation to the treatment of gender, on one page a male from the prologue has the caption “Young athlete,” while on the opposite page a female athlete is labeled “Dancer.” The next two images paired together are, on the right, a female athlete labeled “Grace” and, on the left, a male athlete with the caption “Strength.” It should be noted also that the captions appear in the five languages that the film was also produced in, in list format below each image. Their size and placement renders them secondary to the images, yet they are a significant part of the book with regard to the message being delivered and also in terms of the book’s overall design.

Photographic books should have a design that compliments what is being dealt with and should deal with content that sustains an ongoing interest. The production of a photographic book in conjunction with a film was a very forward looking. The modern typeface used for the captions in Schönheit im Olympischen Kampf is supportive of its modernity. The overall design of the book aids in the elevation of the images from being purely representational to being of artistic status. The book sustains ongoing interest because of the formal qualities of the images, as well as the fact that they are historical documents. The dual status of photographic books – and of photographs in general – is an interesting point in itself. Just as Olympia is

10 Riefenstahl, Olympia, 196.
at once a documentary as well as an art style film, *Schönheit im Olympischen Kampf* is both informational and a significant cultural object. It could be said that all photography, all art even, can be considered a form or documentary, in the same way that fictional films can be, as the construction of one reality references an actual reality. Therefore, how we choose to address *Schönheit im Olympischen Kampf* is a matter of intention and reception.

The static image is entirely different to the moving image. It is a different type of cultural object. The static image evokes a sense of the past, while film gives the illusion of a living presence. Static images of the Olympic games are particularly interesting as the very nature of the event is centered on movement. *Schönheit im Olympischen Kampf* is twice removed from traditional sports imagery. Firstly, because it consists primarily of frame enlargements, not "real" photographs. Secondly, because the source of these frames, *Olympia*, was a radical departure from existing sports recording. The frame enlargements propose a different kind of stasis than witnessed in the individually composed photograph. For one, the apparatus is different. The film camera is made to capture motion across time while the photographic camera works to capture one moment in time, thus freezing motion. That is not to say that movement cannot be conveyed in the static image, *Schönheit im Olympischen Kampf* is testament to this. Rather, that the frame enlargement was at one point part of a moving dialogue; compared to the standard photograph, which is a singular, frozen frame. In other words, the images in *Schönheit im Olympischen Kampf* represent the capturing of movement in two ways: the freezing of the motion film, and the freezing of the moving athletes. They are images removed from two different points in time: from their origin at the Berlin Olympic Games and from their original context in the film.

The distinction being made here between the two apparatuses and the two types of static images is at times problematic. Analog film is, in its simplest form, individual photographic frames shown in sequence so that

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they appear to be one constant, moving picture. A frame enlargement is
different from a film still. A film still is a still photograph taken during
production to stand in for a moment in a film, whereas a frame enlargement
is a photographic print made from one of the aforementioned individual
frames. Therefore, to say that Schönhheit im Olympischen Kampf is rendering
the images from Olympia static ignores the fact that they were static from
the start. In addition, the differences between the two apparatuses are
ultimately minimal. The film and photographic camera both produce images
that are framed by a machine and its operator, following similar processes
of selection. Therefore, although the images are frame enlargements, the
resulting images function the same as photographs. The photographic book
is also photography at its most filmic, as the images are arranged in a
sequence, which constructs a desired narrative. The book’s release as
promotional material before the film premiered, and its relative obscurity
compared to the film, make it is obviously secondary to its motion picture
counterpart. However, how this book is to be addressed falls back on the
importance of intention and reception.

In Schönhheit im Olympischen Kampf, meaning does not come solely
from the individual images. The whole sequence works to form a complete
text. The images are organized in a sequence so that they compliment and
challenge each other. The idea that some kind of narrative can be
constructed through the structure of photographic books is one of the
reasons they are likened to film. However, the very nature of the
photograph, the frozen frame of a moment in time, challenges the ability of
the book to form a complete narrative. The static photographic image,
removed from its context in time and its context in the book, is open to an
array of different interpretations dependent on the experience of the reader.
This is true of film too, but images in film are arguably more structured
toward a desired reading. For example, the previous chapter looked at the
image of the Finnish athlete in the sauna and commented on his unavoidably
erotic depiction (fig. 12). The eroticism of the sauna scene is downplayed in
the film and is only exaggerated in the book because the static image allows
for prolonged contemplation. It presents the athlete’s body as an object for
contemplation. Removed from the context of a book about the Olympic games, this image could easily be incorporated into an erotic or pornographic publication. This reading goes against other readings, such as Mackenzie's, that have contextualized the image within the Nazi ideology of the time. The fact that the book is still being viewed over seventy years since its original circulation, and in many cases the reader will not have seen the film or be versed in Nazi ideology, means that how the images are consumed is highly dependent on the position of the reader.

It is not just the personal experience of the reader, their knowledge and beliefs, but also the context in which they view the book that alters the way in which the images are read. It is unlikely that many people would have the chance to view *Olympia* in a theatre today. Nevertheless, this is how the images in film were initially intended to be viewed. The atmosphere of the theatre is typically very different to the act of reading a book. It is a time constrained viewing experience. It is characterized by groups of people, noise, and the need to be considerate toward others. There is the ability to discuss the film both during, although frowned upon, and immediately after the experience. These things both distract from and add to how the images on the screen are consumed. In contrast, a book allows for a more intimate relationship between the reader and the text. It enables a greater level of control over the narrative, as the reader can move between the images in any order and for any amount of time. Where the book is read will also change the perspective of the reader. For example, if we assume that the most common place to see the book today would be in a library then all the things associated with libraries, such as quietness and knowledge, come into play. Though *Olympia* is now available on DVD, with the option of pausing and skipping scenes, the point here is that the film viewer occupies a more passive position to that of the book reader. This is not to say the film audiences are passive in a cognitive sense, but rather that the act of looking at static images requires a more active engagement, both physically and mentally, as meaning is also constructed in the spaces between the images. The viewer of the film is, typically, fixed in one spot, watching the images...
move. The reader of a book moves between the pages, but the images are fixed.

In *Schönheit im Olympischen Kampf*, the structure is at its most effective when a single spread of two pages presents images that complement each other. There are a number of full-page close-ups of individual athletes' faces with the corresponding page showing an action shot of an event in which they partook. For example, there is a close up of the New Zealander Jack Lovelock, the winner of the men's 1500 meters, looking downwards, his face an expression of relief and achievement (fig. 8). It is a beautiful image that perfectly captures his emotion, as well as his magnificent hair. On the opposite page is an image of the race in action, Lovelock third from the front, only distinguishable by his all black costume, and the caption reads "Cunningham – USA still in the lead" (fig. 9). By informing the reader that Lovelock was the victor, through his facial expression and the caption, and then displaying Cunningham as the probable winner, gives the reader an insight into the tense nature of the race. Similar foreshadowing is evident in the film, such as during the decathlon Glen Morris is described as "a hitherto unknown American." The use of the word "hitherto" informs the viewer that he will most likely win the event.14 Here meaning is generated through the narration, whereas in the book it is the captions that anchor meaning in the images.

A number of the images from the marathon, the last event of *Part One*, seem to have been selected to show the struggle of the athletes. They capture moments of exhaustion and pain, evident in the strained expression of the athletes. The final two images in the series, on corresponding pages, are of the marathon winner Kitei Son from Japan (figs. 10 and 11). The first image shows Son about to cross the finish line, his face contorted as he summons every last bit of energy he has. The opposite image is of Son's face, against the cloudy backdrop, with the Olympic wreath in his hair. His facial expression is decidedly calm and content, compared to during the marathon,

and it is an extraordinary image. Images such as this one and that of Lovelock are indeed illustrative of the “beauty in the Olympic struggle.”

The organization of the photographs serves a similar purpose as the editing does in the film. It works to generate narrative, continuity and visual appeal. As previously mentioned, the sequence of the book follows very closely the sequence of the film. In the book, meaning is contained both in the individual images and in the greater narrative attainable by reading the images in the desired sequence. For example, the first classical sculpture in the series of images from the prologue is that of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, beauty, and sexuality. Turn the page and the next sculpture included is that of the head of Medusa. The reverse of Aphrodite, the ugly Medusa’s gaze is said to turn her onlookers into stone. The juxtaposition of Aphrodite and Medusa rather accurately foreshadows the privileging of beauty throughout the rest of the book. It could be coincidental, but with nearly four hours of film to choose from, one can assume that the inclusion and organization of every frame enlargement was intentional.

The order of the images in the book works not only to follow the theme of the film but at times it also attempts to convey the movement of the film. Unlike in the film, the turning of the pages in the book interrupts its ability to provide seamless continuity. Therefore, at times when movement needs to be emphasized it has to be expressed on either one or two corresponding pages. This is achieved by including multiple frames per page. For example, the 110-meter hurdle is shown with four images across a single spread (fig. 6). The images are positioned directly opposite each other, so that the lines of the tracks would connect perfectly if the images were to be merged together. The athletes are depicted in the four stages of their leap over the hurdle, similar to the style of Eadweard Muybridge’s precinematic motion study chronophotographs. The four images are interesting because the stages of the athletes’ leap are shown anti-clockwise from top left to bottom right. However, because of the direction they are headed in, it looks like the images should be read from right to left, as though we are looking at two parallel tracks. Thus, there is movement contained within the individual images, by reading the images in their
sequence, and by the effect of all the images seen together in the open book. The same technique has been used to illustrate the equestrian events in the book (fig. 7), which are highly reminiscent of Muybridge's *The Horse in Motion* (1878).

There is a clear awareness of the art photography of the time in *Olympia*. The fact that a photographic book version of the film was produced is also illustrative of the rise of photography in print in Weimar Germany in the 1920s. This raises the question of how we are to address the book in relation to its place in art history. Is it a documentary photo book, the paper version of the documentary film? Or is it an art book, an autonomous work in its own right? The film itself has no set genre; it is simultaneously a documentary, an art film, and a propaganda film. The diving scene is, perhaps, the most artistic sequence in the film, in that it privileges the visual aesthetic over any other element. It starts out showing male and female divers leaving the platform and tracing their journey through the air into the water. The editing of the sequence gradually builds pace, until series of bodies are twisting and soaring through the air. Riefenstahl has cut in some shots backwards, so that we are seeing the divers fly upwards, as though in rewind. One shot is even cut in upside down and backwards so that the diver appears to be flying straight up off the board. The fact that the cloudy background appears the same seen from any angle and the speed at which the shots change, means that the gravity defying images are almost indistinguishable from the real dives. The divers also become indistinguishable from each other. Their facial features are lost as the deliberate underexposure reveals only their silhouettes. Eventually we no longer see the athletes leaving the platform or entering the water, just their shadowlike forms against the cloudy backdrop. The sequence transcends the limitations of space and time and shows no consideration for the details of the actual Olympic event. It is irrelevant who these divers are, and where they are from – all that is important is the visual masterpiece that Riefenstahl has created. Mandell states: "We have been carried to an artistic

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15 Bordwell, 347.
16 Mandell, 267.
realm of the ineffably beautiful and the undeniably false." It is scenes such as the diving sequence that takes *Olympia* beyond the realm of documentation, into what is undeniably a great example of the artistic possibilities of film.

The famous diving scene is somewhat underrepresented in *Schönheit im Olympischen Kampf*. Only one out of the eight images of the sequence depicts a silhouetted figure against the cloudy sky. The images selected, however, are magnificent. There is arguably something about the static images that makes the book closer to traditional art, such as painting, than the film. Just as the diving sequence in the film is stripped of time and space, so are the images in the book, perhaps to a greater extent. The divers are no longer cutting through the air, in the film there was even two or more at once in the air at times, but rather are depicted frozen in mid air. Aside from the two images that show divers breaking the water, all the athletes are identifiable and, by in large, are not portrayed in movement. Even though the images are taken of the athletes descending downwards, their bodies arched, there is no evidence of the speed at which the event is depicted in the film. Each image is of a single athlete, suspended in space, and is largely unrelated to the images on the opposite pages. An attempt to convey the effect of the editing in the film could have been made by displaying multiple, successive frames per page, like has been done with the equestrian and track and field events. Instead, it would seem that the frame enlargements in the book are striving to be read like individual photographs, as autonomous art images in their own right.

17 Mandell, 267.
Conclusion

The National Socialists employed the body as a vehicle for disseminating their ideology. Olympia and Schönheit im Olympischen Kampf demonstrate a number of the quintessential features of fascist aesthetics. Fascist aesthetics continue to be a subject of much interest. The treatment of the body as an empty icon or sign means that the human figure can serve as support for any kind of message. The Olympic Games, with its celebration of the human body, proved to be an event with enormous propaganda potential. Leni Riefenstahl’s Olympia successfully recorded the spectacle of the Berlin Games. However, it moved beyond mere documentation. There is a prominent political message evident in the powerful visual imagery. However, the passage of time has allowed for a formal analysis of the film and the book that is not centered on the propaganda inherent in the two.

There is an interesting interrelationship between the movement of the Games, the motion of the film, and the stasis of the book. While the content of the three is essentially the same, the effect on the audience of each is different. At the time the film was released, it would have given the sensation of watching a live event. The film does not have this effect now, due to the significant technological and cultural changes that have occurred since 1936. It is arguably the desire of film to convince the viewer, through the illusion of movement, into forgetting the constraints of time and place. The photograph is different to film. Its stasis symbolizes a past event. The static image depicts a moment that can never be captured again. At the same time, in capturing that moment, the photograph preserves it. The film and the book are maintaining interest in an event that happened over 75 years ago. The connection to reality that film and photography have is a curious characteristic for two mediums that are unavoidably subjective. Olympia

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and *Schönheit im Olympischen Kampf* are great examples of the inability to control interpretation.

Since 1936, there have been a number of attempts to produce films of the Olympic Games. Films were made of both the 1948 Games in London and of the 1964 Tokyo Games; both of these films were clearly modeled on Riefenstahl's. In more recent years, television has meant that films of the Olympic Games do not offer anything particularly unique. Television audiences can see close-ups, slow-motion action, and instant replays. All of which is shot from every possible angle. Television is also not a filmic illusion of a live event, as the majority of the footage is actually screened live. Photographs of the Olympics are a different story. Though the technology of the photographic camera has evolved drastically, the caliber of the photography has arguably stayed much the same. If images of the quality of *Schönheit im Olympischen Kampf* were to be taken of the Olympics today, they would surely be highly regarded. It would be an interesting continuation of this topic to investigate more recent photographs of the Olympics and compare them to those of the book.

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2 Taylor Downing, *Olympia* (London: British Film Institute, 1992), 89.
3 Downing, 89.
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FIGURE 15. “Handrick – Germany, Pentathlon winner, with Leonard – USA and Abba – Italy,” Leni Riefenstahl, Schönheit im Olympischen Kampf (Berlin: Deutschen Verlag, 1937), 179.
FIGURE 20. "Production-manager Traut decides where the operators Neubert and Kebelmann are to be posted," Leni Riefenstahl, Schönheit im Olympischen Kampf (Berlin: Deutschen Verlag, 1937), 259.