

Interpretations of the Filmed Body: An Analysis of the Japanese Version of Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia*¹

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Introduction

In Japan, Leni Riefenstahl's famous and classic film, *Olympia*, was once again a focal point of discussion during the 1992 Albertville Winter Games and Barcelona Summer Games.² The film portraying the 1936 Nazi Olympic Games was contrasted with the history of the 1936 "*People's Olympics*" or "*Workers' Games*" in Barcelona.³ During the Lillehammer Winter Games in 1994, Riefenstahl's past films and a recent film about her life, *The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl*, were also discussed extensively in Canada.⁴

In 1992 an exhibition of Leni Riefenstahl's work was held in Japan as a cultural event supported by a major department store and newspaper company. This event was under the auspices of the Japanese Minister of Culture and, therefore, was extensively covered by the press and well attended by the public.⁵ Riefenstahl herself visited Japan during the event and spoke about her films with the various media. Her autobiography was translated into Japanese and several books on her life were published.⁶

Despite the exposure and initial popularity of this event, her films were overlooked in related areas of sport and physical education in Japan. Japanese journals failed to report any of her works related to sport and physical education. Riefenstahl's film was not screened at the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich because the film was viewed as a Nazi concoction and showing it would be an insult to the victims of the Nazi regime.⁷ However, the situation was very different in Japan.

Olympia continues to intrigue us despite being produced almost a half a century ago. Why was it

screened in Japan three times? An interesting question arises; namely, how does the film now relate to mega events and sport commercialism as we approach the 1996 Games in Atlanta?

The purpose of this paper, consequently, is an attempt to respond to this intriguing question by means of examining the film within the context of its original time and society, and in light of Riefenstahl's philosophy of art. An analysis of this film is also warranted in light of the meanings of the reflections of body, the socio-cultural impacts of these meanings, and the influences to modern sport situations. In addition, the timing of this study is appropriate in order to stimulate a reconsideration of modern Olympism, which has certainly encountered substantial problems in recent times. This film, the first official Olympic film of the IOC, recorded the festival of nations and beauty of sport at that time. Parenthetically, this paper may also be viewed as a response to Murray's criticism that little research on the 1936 Olympic Games has been undertaken in Japan.⁸

In Japan, there has not been detailed research in the field of sport science about Riefenstahl's artistically and politically controversial film since it was first screened in 1940. The edited version of the original film was shown in 1974, and the original films were screened again in 1992; in all, it was shown three times as a cultural event. However, there were few artistic and journalistic comments in Japan that focused on the images and reflections of the sporting body in relation to the nature of sport and the ideals of the Olympics.

Recent research on Riefenstahl's film is typified by a comment offered by Guttman, "It is the nearly unanimous opinion of film historians that *Olympia* is one of the most impressive documentaries ever made, but the debate over its political significance continues. Whether or not Riefenstahl was a Nazi propagandist as well as a great artist is a question we can answer for ourselves..."⁹

1. The Outline of the *Olympia*: Making a TEXT

"*Olympia*" was filmed in 1936 in Berlin; it encompassed vast amounts of film footage on many diverse athletic events. It was shot by over 60 cameramen, and edited into two parts of about two hours duration each. In Japan, Part I, entitled "*Festival of the Nations*," was first screened in 1940. (In Germany, this

film was premiered on Hitler's birthday, April 20, 1938).¹⁰ Part I began with a lyrical and mystical prologue consisting of a montage centered upon individual track and field events. Part II, "*Festival of Beauty*," showed the pastoral Olympic village as an opening scene. Athletic events such as gymnastics, yachting, field games, cross-country equestrian, bicycle races, and rowing, were included, as well as the renowned diving scenes.

The Japanese-edited version of *Olympia* included scenes of diving, swimming, and cross-country riding of equestrian in Part I (screened in 1974 in Japan). In this edited version, the footage of two parts were shortened in order to screen the total in two hours. This version included the famous victory scene of the Japanese female swimmer in the 200m breast stroke. It was hailed enthusiastically by Japanese announcer, Kawanishi. Copies of *Olympia* were made in sixteen languages, and each version included triumphs of athletes in those nations.¹² These versions varied in the number of events included.¹³

Riefenstahl did not follow the exact sequence of the Games' events in the film's composition. This enabled her to use fully her creativity of expressions. Deguchi made a good evaluation of this procedure: "Riefenstahl composed the film according to the images of the beauty of the athlete's body, not by the records and the sequence of events, which allowed her to use artistic sensibility, therefore, this film could be unified artistically."¹⁴ In particular, the prologue was a retake according to her inspirations,¹⁵ which she harbored before agreeing to make the film. Except for the opening sequence, there were 10 insertions filmed after the actual events, to improve aesthetic structure over the actual records and outcomes. Also, some events were prolonged after-the-fact in the evening when darkness set in on the actual competition; therefore, film shooting was not possible. These retakes heightened the artistic nature of the film.

This film did not emphasize German athletes' activities, even though many German athletes won medals in the Games.¹⁶ Hitler was shown in a few shots, and was depicted in a normal manner. As well, however, the normal figure of Hitler expressed in the film, fulfilled its function as propaganda. Many non-German athletes were filmed in *Olympia*; for example, many American athletes, including Jesse Owens, Finns, New Zealanders, and Japanese

(Murakoso, Tajima, Yata, Maehata, Ohe, Nishida, Sohn, Nahn). These shots showed Riefenstahl's aesthetic appreciation of the beauty in the athletic body, irrespective of the races.¹⁷

2. Evaluations of Leni Riefenstahl

There are differing views held about this film. English-speaking people, in general, hold primarily negative evaluations, believing the film to be largely a form of propaganda issued by the National Socialists.¹⁸ One exception is the positive evaluation of this film held by Hart-Davis:

This film has often been described as a triumph of propaganda, but this is less than just. What it did was to record a triumph of propaganda, brilliantly capturing the militaristic nature of the organization, particularly the opening ceremony; but its enduring merit is a creative work of art.¹⁹

In Japan, there were many positive reviews of *Olympia* as an artistic film, particularly in newspapers during its premiere in Japan.²⁰ In 1992, a similar response occurred in the Japanese media;²¹ however, negative evaluations also were reported. This negative situation was also developed when the Japanese-edited version was screened in 1974.²² In these negative estimations, it was said that the film was not a pure documentary of sports but rather an inclination towards aesthetic-centered sports images, namely, the film was not a record of real Olympic Games but a fabrication by Riefenstahl.

This paper will attempt to address the previously delineated opinions and criticisms by providing hermeneutical evaluation of the film based upon socio-cultural conditions when the film was made and when it was screened in recent times. In order to capture the time filmed and Riefenstahl's career, a brief chronology of her is cited.²³

3. The Framework of Interpretation of the Film: Text, Context, and Metatext

The sequences of events expressed in the film can be made into Text, which was made from the description of activities of events filmed by Riefenstahl. In order to interpret these images, it is necessary to consider not only the direct contents of expressions but also the intentions and the film techniques of the filmmaker. This includes evalu-

ation of the Context and Metatext. This hermeneutical analysis of sport is to interpret Text of sports in accordance with a specific Context and in consideration of the prevailing Metatext.²⁴ In these hermeneutical interpretations, it is important to read both the soft data behind the hard data (Text) expressed with images and the function of the film as one of hegemony. Figure 1 shows the framework of this hermeneutical process of interpretation to *Olympia*. This framework was shown as the hermeneutics of sport, and partly depends on the spectacle theory advanced by MacAloon,²⁵ but is mostly based on Bateson's paradox theory of play.

As Context 1, the evaluations to Riefenstahl herself are included, but the film of *Olympia* itself is main Context. Context 2 is the atmosphere of the product of ages and spirits in existence of the time of filming in 1936. Context 3 includes the modern socio-cultural situations of Olympic Games. In this study, this Context includes the era when the Japanese-edited version was first screened in 1974.

Metatext, that is, the Text about the Text, for example, "this is a sport film," "this is an art film," and "this is a documentary film"; need to be taken into consideration because the Metatext contains reference to the frame itself. According to these references, Metatext 1 has a meta-message, "this is sport, but not just sport." The word "just" means the adverbial sense, the same as "only." So, "this is sport, but not only sport" means that sport may be a trivial thing, but, by playing it, real human nature will be expressed, therefore, sport is very important. Thus, paradoxically, this meta-message obliges the audience to rethink the images expressed in the film according to reflections of the Text. As Metatext 2, there is a meta-message, "this is film, but is also art," and in this message, the producer's point of view is reflected. Lastly, Metatext 3 is the meta-message for the audiences, that is, "this is just documentary film." With this meta-message, the audience has a preconception that in this film the real records must be filmed; thus a kind of sport image is made or reinforced. According to the Metatext, one of the frameworks of viewing the sport film is made. Then, the preconceptions, for example, about the nature of sport, art or politics, and about the transmissions of the truth are formed. These are to re-reflect the Olympic images expressed in the film. It is important to describe and interpret the meanings expressed in the film in accordance with these

frameworks and those multiple messages. These standpoints are necessary to describe and deeply interpret the meanings and symbols. In addition, it seems to be effective to have a point of view based on the considerations of the relationships between the signification of film and the body.²⁶

4. Context 1,2: Days of the Production and the Release

The man who first asked Riefenstahl to film the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games was not Hitler, but rather, Carl Diem. At first, she did not agree to make the film, but she finally concurred after a request from the Swiss Otto Mayer, Chancellor of the IOC. It was said that during the making of the film she was harassed by Goebbels, German Minister of Propaganda. However, the film was completed with the overall support of Hitler; therefore, it was inevitably influenced by the existing European atmosphere evident before World War II. This atmosphere specifically made up the context of the film. In the film German athletes entered the stadium in military uniform, and the officials, which included Hitler, wore arm bands marked with swastikas. The Japanese athletes marched with battle caps because in Japan, earlier in the year, a major military affair, namely, the February 26th Incident had happened. During the premiere of this film in 1940 the war expanded.

As the Riefenstahl chronology shows,²⁷ she was recognized by Hitler and her two films of the Nazi party rallies were admired by film societies worldwide. It was said that she had changed the documentary style of film making.

At first Hitler was not aware of the political opportunity that the Olympic Games could provide. But, after suggestions by Goebbels and others, Hitler came to understand that these Games were a great opportunity to demonstrate the political propaganda of Nazism; subsequently and he thus stressed them eagerly. Anti-Semitism, which was largely due to Hitler's racial concept of 'Aryan' superiority, was already prevalent at the time. This racism, Aryan supremacy, was dependent on Hitler's notion that the true descendant of the Greeks and their cultural spirits was the German. He hated the Olympic Games because non-Aryan and many American "black auxiliaries" were active participants.²⁸ It was reported that there were intense boycott movements

against the anti-Semitic policy of the Third Reich in 1936 when the Winter Games were held at Garmisch-Partenkirchen.²⁹

The idea for the establishment of the Olympic torch run, with the 'Olympic Fire,' rose from the German Propaganda Ministry, and in order to broadcast this relay, all of the available wireless forces of the day were employed. Riefenstahl used this torch run as much of her prologue. She showcased the relay route which began in Greece, travelled through many European countries, and finally reached Berlin. Scene were shot by aerial photographs, and it was said that the routes of the torch run were used later on by the German army's invasion of the Balkan Peninsula. This Olympic torch run had a symbolic meaning, that the true descendant of the Greek was pure German, and that "All roads lead to Berlin."

5. Reactions to the Film's Release in Japan

Part I, "*Festival of the Nations*" was released in June, 1940, in Japan, two years later than in Europe. Initially, popularity was low, with few film reviews in Japanese newspapers, but the film rose in popularity as shown in subsequent newspaper film advertisements.³⁰ The film was supported and recommended by the Japanese Army, Ministry of Education, and Ministry of Health and Welfare, and scheduled for an extended showing period. The film, at the time, was part of the school educational program and almost all students were exposed to it.³¹ When Part II, "*Festival of Beauty*" was premiered in December 1940, Part I was still popular. Part I was awarded the best foreign film prize of the 1940's, as-reported in the famous Japanese film magazine, *Cinema Junpo*. In those days everything was aimed at raising the nation's fighting spirits, and Yasujiro Ozu, a well known director, was commanded to make a war film by the Japanese Army.

The new "*Festival of the Nations*" in the Japanese-edited version was re-screened in 1974. The popularity of Riefenstahl as a great film director was well known after World War II and, therefore, people from all around the world were curious to see the film. Unfortunately, there still existed strong anti-Nazism, developed from the version of her film seen in Britain, the United States, and in particular, Germany. In 1972, at the Munich Olympic Games, Olympia could not be shown on television in Berlin

for fear of protest.³² In Japan, with there-evaluation of her film, numerous roundtable discussions took place, and a special issue related to "Olympia" was published in a film magazine. In those discussions, Mr. Yata, one of the Japanese athletes of the Berlin Olympic Games, talked about events at that time and the impact of the film. Yam's comments about the film were not favourable. He asserted that the retake of events was profane to the true nature of sport.³³ Although the film was not a box office hit, the edited version received high evaluation as an art work. The edited version is now readily available for videotapes or laser discs in Japan.

In 1992, when she was 90 years old, Riefenstahl revisited Japan, 15 years after her initial visit when the edited version was screened. She was introduced as an "indomitable" female filmmaker and artist, and she attended the exhibit where her films, *Festival of the Nations*, *Festival of Beauty*, and *The Blue Light* were shown. As well, a translated autobiography and many books in relation to her artistic career were published and made available. Her interviews on television and in journals provided further information helpful to understanding her original intentions in directing the film.³⁴ The dominant tone of comments of the media were somewhat favourable to her, but Japanese journals of sport science did not report or study this event.

6.The Riefenstahl's Intentions of Filmmaking; Context 1,2, and Metatext 1,2

6-1. Determination to Make a Film

Riefenstahl had made two propaganda films for Nazi party rallies, namely, *Victory of Faith* (1933) and *Triumph of the Will* (1935), according to Hitler's demands. After the success of these films, Carl Diem, secretary general of the organizing committee of the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games, asked her to make the first official film of the IOC. Riefenstahl was motivated to make the film after she developed some preliminary thoughts on the matter:

In my mind's eye, I could see the ancient ruins of the classical Olympic sites slowly emerging from paths of fog and the Greek temples and sculptures drifting by: Achilles and Aphrodite, Medusa and Zeus, Apollo and Paris, and then the discus thrower of Myron. I dreamed that this statue

changed into a man of flesh and blood, gradually starting to swing the discus in slow motion. The sculptures turned into Greek temple dancers dissolving in flames, the Olympic fire igniting the torches to be carried from the Temple of Zeus to modern Berlin of 1936 - a bridge from Antiquity to the present. That was my vision of the prologue to my *Olympia*. After experiencing these images, I decided I would make the film...³⁶

The plot of the prologue of *Olympia*, from ancient Greece to modern Berlin, echoed Hitler's racism through the depiction of Aryans as the true descendants of Ancient Greece and their high cultural spirits. Riefenstahl produced this scene using the Greek runner Anatol and the German decathlete, Erwin Huber as models in order to compose these images into a lyrical and mythical prologue. Her interests in the beauty of the body was shown by superimposing the statues of the Ancient God on the figure of the modern Aryan athlete, Huber. Sequences that could be interpreted as techniques of montage connecting Ancient Greece to modern Germany were displayed by shots of dancing girls in the nude turning to flame and then dissolving into a sacred fire.

6-2. The Ideas and the Plots

Riefenstahl's chief interest was how the Olympic film could be completed as an art work: "The crucial issue for me was that my artistic freedom would not be restricted."³⁷ She always insisted there were no connections to Nazism or Hitler, or any interest with political parties, and that her art work should be interpreted as an independent Text. If one could not read the spirit of the age, it would be a shallow interpretation and a non-political standpoint. Moreover, it could be unimaginable for the filmmaker not to suppose the possibility of the political interpretations by the viewers.

Actual scenes of the games beginning from the opening ceremonies involved artistic movements, positions, and angles. Riefenstahl dug pits in the infield of the track to film the athletes from a low angle for the purpose of keeping the background calm and plain. She used the sky as the background to capture its beauty, and to avoid the noisy stands, advertising, etc. Unfortunately, such filming tactics caused some inconvenience, such as when Owens

almost plunged into one of the pits in the field after finishing.³⁸ Riefenstahl, in spite of this accident, persisted in filming from the pits because her aim was to beautify idealistically the athletes.³⁹

Riefenstahl filmed the athlete's body without regard to race, since the bodies of Owens, Sohn, Nahn, and Tajima, all of whom were not Aryan, were exemplary in active movements. She said that "Any content and any material would be available for me, the most important things as an artist are the techniques and methods to express the beauty from these materials."⁴⁰ Riefenstahl steadfastly held this view even when Goebbels had asked her to omit the sequences of black athletes from the film.

As mentioned later, with the novel and epoch-making devices in those days, and with her original filming techniques, she tried to express inner situations as well, such as loneliness, fatigue, and the extreme tension of the contestants: "My main concern was how athletes were feeling the contest. I would like to express the subtlety of the athlete's mind in connection with body movement."⁴¹ She devoted herself to create the artistic images which could evoke the impressions of the past. She composed, therefore, many retakes and insertions in her film to accomplish this aim. Part I was mainly composed of individual events; team sports like soccer, field hockey, and polo, were filmed in part II as editorial sequences. She explained the composition in the following manner: "The body movements, the changing looks, and the oscillations of emotions, which are subtle things, will appear more in individual sports."⁴²

The realism of many of the retakes are questionable since it is difficult to capture the real expressions of tensions, anxieties, and fatigue of the athletes in this manner. This was particularly evident in retaking the famous pole vaulting scene where the tensions and powers lacked the levels that actually occurred during the event. Also, the marathon race, where the Japanese athletes, Sohn and Nahn were first and third, was difficult to compose dramatically as an artistic image due to its length of more than two hours. Riefenstahl used techniques that were aimed at showing the runner's willpower in overcoming fatigue by shooting at the runner's feet, to evoke the loneliness of the runner by filming the shadows of trees. These shots were impossible to film in the live race, because these scenes were filmed with the compact camera hanging from the runner's neck. It

is doubtful this film could be viewed as a real documentary, or as a real drama. For Riefenstahl, her aim was to capture the aesthetic composition and expressions - not records or outcomes. Her filming recorded the aesthetics of the strong and victorious, not those of the loser.

In her photobook, the aesthetics of the strong were shown in a shot of the medal ceremony where a laurel crown was awarded to the triple jump victor, Tajima of Japan⁴⁴. Also, in the Japanese-edited version, Maehata, the winner of the gold medal in the women's 200m breaststroke, hung her head listening to the Japanese national anthem, *Kimigayo*. Conversely, Riefenstahl was thought to misinterpret the scene where marathon winner Sohn hung his head on the podium in the honor ceremony, in the same manner and for the same reason as in Maehata's case. It was said that Sohn, in truth, was hanging his head bearing the humiliation of putting up with the Japanese national flag and anthem.⁴⁵

In 1992, at the roundtable meeting in Japan, Riefenstahl stated that her desire was to project the ideal of the Olympics. It was the peace, friendship, and ideals continuing from ancient Greece that she wanted to film. She declared, "I would like to express such feelings that the winner and the loser experienced that may develop friendships. Especially, the honor ceremonies were impressive for me."⁴⁶ The coverage of the honor ceremonies were suitable for her - no athletes lower than third place were involved.

6-3. The Shooting and the Editing

It is said that Riefenstahl was keen on the preparations to shoot before the Games. She went to Garmisch-Partenkirchen with her staff to test the cameras and films when the Winter Games were held in February 1936. But this test ended in failure.⁴⁷ Riefenstahl engaged in test shooting during the German national sports contests in May 1936. Her attitude to shooting was described in this way: "One would also have to be familiar with every single sport, research its dramatic potential and work out how to achieve the most effective images."⁴⁸ She intensely trained her cameramen so that they could catch the rapid movements of athletes, thereby training herself as well.

It was required to develop new shooting techniques and devices in order to realize her artistic concerns

and plans. She and her staff tried new ideas one by one that were epoch-making and astonished the filmmakers in those days. For example, the following techniques were used: the 600mm telephoto lens to shoot the close-up of athletes, aerial-photographs with airplane, air-ship, and balloon for the bird's eye view, devices to fly the compact camera with balloon, the catapult camera to shoot the runner at full speed, soundproof hoods for the camera, the high-speed camera, the underwater camera, holding the compact camera on the saddle of a horse, the usage of a motor boat to shoot from a low angle, the shots of spectators with a compact camera, and so on... In sum, she used everything to shoot the Olympics dramatically. There were many failures, nevertheless, but every device was tried in order to produce an artistic film. For these reasons, the costs of shooting the film were increased dramatically.

Because the real footage of the Games did not satisfy Riefenstahl's artistic interests and conceptions, many retakes and insertions were incorporated. To justify these retakes and insertions, one could deem them necessary in making the Text. These artificial treatments reconfirmed her aims and contentions of this particular style of filmmaking. Her autobiography indicated the various techniques used. They include: the sacred fire retaken not at Olympia's temple but at Delphi using a model, Anatol.⁴⁹ This retake showed her attachment to herself to realize the images which came from her mind when she agreed to make the film. Small cameras were used in cross-country equestrian riding where cameras were put on the saddles of horses and, in the marathon where they hung on the runners in training.⁵⁰ To alleviate the darkness of the evening, filming was done the following day to retake the pole vault events. Because of the retake the next day, this scene did not include the intensity of competition.⁵¹ This scene is still popular in Japan, because two Japanese athletes, Obe and Nishida, shared second and third places. In the prologue, dancing girls in front of the temple turned to flame. Trick filming of a discus thrower, transformed the statue of Myron into the Aryan athlete, Erwin Huber. The scene of lighting the sacred fire using the Greek, Anatol, was taken at a model of a Dorian temple. The retakes of the 1500m event in the decathlon were shot because the race was prolonged till night, when they could not shoot in darkness. The hammer throwing scene, interrupted by officials, sub-

sequently needed to be retaken. Lastly, all announcements, except Hitler's opening speech of the Games, were recorded and edited later since the sounds recorded in the stadium were not utilizable by the recording techniques existent in those days.⁵²

Riefenstahl herself edited the two films from more than 40 million meters of footage. She took two years to edit *Olympia*, to create her own artistic conceptions, and to affirm the aesthetic composition from her standpoint. The philosophy of her editing was as follows:

The creation of a documentary actually takes place in the editing room. Creation in this context means first of all that the architectural design has to be established. How does the film begin, how does it end, where are the high points, where are the major suspense elements and the less dramatic parts? A crucial factor is the length of the takes, which can be short or long, thereby determining the rhythm of the film. Equally decisive is the way in which each motion replaces the previous one. It is like composing music, and just as intuitive.⁵³

Riefenstahl decided to complete a sport film, despite her original inclination to compose only the aesthetic images, without considering the values of sport itself. In her composition of gymnastics, sailing, and diving, she did not emphasize the competitive sport aspect but rather the aesthetics and its rhythmic laws. These aesthetic sequences were composed in Part II, *Festival of Beauty*. Riefenstahl's editing included plot sequences, connecting scenes, and the use of rhythm. Her editing was completed using sound effects and timing of the music to the film footage. The music and sound effects played by Herbert Windt, were major undertaking achievements and heightened the impressions of the film. Riefenstahl immediately took to the music as she said, "When he played his themes for me I was very impressed by the wonderful rapport he had achieved with the Olympic atmosphere, the way he made everything come alive."⁵⁴

The narration was post-recorded by two well known sport announcers from Germany. At this time in film history, recording techniques could not be used in original sound recordings. Except for Hitler's opening speech, all sound effects and narrations were post-recorded and synchronized with

images. It is said that the breathing of the horses, the sounds of the athletes' feet, the bouncing of the hammer in the hammer throw, the noises of the crowd, indeed every sound effect used in the film were post recorded with light-on-sound negatives.⁵⁵ Riefenstahl's philosophy of editing was that in the documentary film, the images and sounds were important to take the place of the dialogue. For these reasons, it could be said that her main purpose of making the film was to express high quality artistic images, not necessarily to film records and competitive outcomes.

6-4. The Contents Expressed

The main content expressed in the prologue was the spiritual uplift provided by holding the Olympics in Berlin. The aerial photos and the relay of the Olympic sacred fires are some examples of how this spirit was expressed. The scene of enthusiastic spectators cheering the German athletes indicated Germany's control of the masses, typified in scenes of the mass-games in front of the stadium.

Hitler appeared in many scenes. He was depicted not as a powerful dictator who controlled the nation and who advocated racism and militarism, but as a typical person cheering the sports events. For example, he was filmed while leaning his body enthusiastically, while tapping his knees in disappointment. He was notably disappointed when the last German runner dropped the baton in women's 400m relay final. The portrayal of Hitler in this film showed him as a normal spectator. It could be one of the functions of 'hegemony' by film culture that Hitler was depicted as an ordinary man. Viewers of the film unconsciously perceived a positive image of Hitler, one they naturally believed as true. The function of hegemony is known as implicit power to reproduce the culture. No doubt, this was used to give a favourable impression on Nazism as anti-propaganda. But this was truly propaganda.

Riefenstahl filmed many activities of non Aryan athletes, such as American blacks, Japanese, and others from non-Aryan countries. The United States, above all, was a country where sensitivity to the boycott movement of the Berlin Olympics was evident, and Riefenstahl was not welcome, when she visited the United States in 1940. Convenient, as well, for Nazi propaganda was that the athletes of many nations were shown in such a way as to main-

tain a balance with scenes featuring German athletes.. In this sense, the film title, *Festival of the Nations*, was well chosen.

The content of the film, other than the sum of the competitive outcomes, suited the general spirit of the public at the time. This could be one of the main reasons the film was well received by many foreign countries. It is possible to consider that this tuning of the spirit was connected to the feeling of images deeply connected with the viewer's body awareness at the time. The athletes' dynamic bodies composed from low angle shots were expressed as beautiful figures of human movement, and accompanied by the psychological depictions of various forms of anxieties, tensions, and releases. These were highlighted by techniques of slow motion filming and close-up shots. For example, one of the excellent expressions of this film showed Jesse Owens swallowing hard before the start of his race. It must be considered that these shots were not intended to dramatize the actions or the psychology of the game, but simply to capture "sport" itself.

The edited sequences of the events in *Olympia* were composed irrelevant to the actual schedule of events. For example, the throwing events followed the prologue, so that the shot put, discus and javelin sequences could show the relationship of throwers with the well proportioned bodies of ancient Greek sculptures. It could be interpreted that the muscular bodies of the athletes were suitable metaphors signifying the descendants of the Greeks depicted in statues and sculptures. The aesthetics of the victors were expressed in the scenes of the medal ceremonies. As well, their inner expressions were captured in shots where they watched the trials of their opponents. In the marathon scene, the shadows of runners and the surrounding grass and trees were expressed as a motif of the runner's willpower.

Riefenstahl asserted that most of her interest was in 'the beauty of the body' or 'the beautiful body,'⁵⁷ though, this was most often limited to the winner's body. For this reason, her art work was named 'the aesthetics of the strong.' In her photography book, *Nuba*, which was published in 1968, there were neither children nor elderly. She responded to this point by saying, "Those who are children and the old men have no attractiveness as a photographic subject for me."⁵⁸ "My concern is that the body as a thing transcends for itself just as a thing. I will call this transcendence the stylization."⁵⁹ According to this

artistic philosophy, she constructed the total design of the film through her own ideas focusing on re-takes. Riefenstahl accomplished this by using three methods: (1) mythical and illusional bodies in the prologue; (2) physically dynamic and psychologically oscillating bodies in individual events; and (3) aesthetically composed bodies in *Festival of Beauty*.

7. The Interpretation of the Today's Meanings of Olympia: Context 3 and Metatext 3

7-1. As a Sport Film Culture

The intentions of the filmmaker are reflected in Context 2 of *Olympia*. The framework of interpretation of this film needs to be considered. That is, first, there is a preconception that this film was a documentary, so the images in this film must be true. Second, it is inevitable to reflect Context 3 for the audience that views the film during the modern age. To appreciate the two parts of the film as art work, one must experience such during the spirit of the Olympics filmed by Riefenstahl. In order to interpret this film fully, it seems that one needs to understand the atmosphere of those days. Only through this standpoint can one interpret the film from the same horizon of the time, and fully appreciate the novel filming and editing techniques during those times. The techniques used by Riefenstahl are outdated today, since sport is now filmed with zoom, extra-high-speed film, superimposition, etc. Because techniques are so changeable, the important message in the interpretation of film culture lies in the meaning expressed in the film. It must be realized that this meaning is universal, and, thus, transcends the era. For audiences to evaluate and be affected by it, it is necessary not to see the film nostalgically, but to see the bodies of athletes moving dynamically, just as the dynamic nature of sport itself. This standpoint could be considered as the function of formation and reinforcement of the sport images in film culture. In the case of the affirmation that; 'sport is just like this,' is the reinforcement of the images, and the case that 'sport is really like this,' is the formation or the transformation of the images. In the latter case, it can be named as the 'function of enlightenment,' because this function is not restricted to the film, since most images have this function.

In Japan during the the Olympic year of 1992, people who re-watched *Olympia*, may have experienced nostalgic feelings about the changing sport situation. This nostalgia may have included some sentimentalism not to take part in regaining the old and good sport conditions. On the other hand, the persuasion, that is, “the sport is like this in itself,” may unconsciously establish the view of the values of sport, and this value may be transcended to the future. These two types of images are made from the functions as the hegemonic apparatus of film culture. It is necessary in the hermeneutics of sport to interpret these two vectors, where two kinds of sport images could be formed.

7-2. Interpretation According to the Modern Olympics: Barcelona 1992

In Japan, *Olympia* was screened three times, and each time the film was well received. It must not be overlooked that this film offered opportunities to rethink modern Olympism and many sport situations today. The Olympic images filmed by Riefenstahl were frequently cited to show examples in many contexts in Japan. First of all, this film was cited as the ‘festival of the nations.’ The 1992 Barcelona Games were the biggest Olympics in history. Due to recent international events, such as the collapse of the Soviet Union and reorganization of East Europe, the post-Cold War era emerged and many countries gained independence. One hundred and seventy two countries participated in the Barcelona Games, which signified the ‘festival of the nations.’ Although wars were continued to be waged based on racial issues, the Barcelona Games conspicuously symbolized the Olympic ideals, that is, a festival of peace and friendship.

Second, this film was shown to point out the history of the 1936 *People’s Olympics or Workers’ Games* in Barcelona, festivals which ended before they really began. Those games were planned as a movement to boycott the 1936 Berlin Games. It is said that the athletes who had tried to participate in those Games took part in the Spanish Civil War. In order to reemphasize the Olympic ideal, Riefenstahl’s *Olympia* was cited to recall the phantom Barcelona Games in 1936. In contrasting *Olympia* with the 1992 Barcelona Games, the deep emotions which could be evoked when the Olympic Games were going to be held under peaceful conditions as

a real ‘festival of the nations’, can also be realized from the film.

Third, *Olympia* can be associated with the 1992 Barcelona Games as a ‘festival of beauty’ that was displayed in true meaning during the opening and closing ceremonies. Part II of the film reconfirmed the beautiful ideal of the Olympics, when the real ‘festival of beauty’ had been held in the ceremonies of the 1992 Barcelona Games. Barcelona was well known as an artistic city and region, for example, many illustrious artists, that is, Miro, Dali, Gaudi, and so on, appeared. The opening ceremonies march was decorated with colorful clothes representing each country and gave rise to an aesthetically pleasing atmosphere. It could be said that these Games were the real ‘festival of beauty’ because of the spectacular pageant re-enacting the birth of Barcelona through folk dances and opera shows, etc., that were held as forms of entertainment.

The 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games were admired for the Olympic ideals as the ‘festival of the nation and beauty’, and helped reconfirm peace and friendship between nations. On the contrary, Riefenstahl’s film served to show the difference between the nature of sport in the past and the modern ‘commercialimpics’ as mega events as seen in Barcelona. Paradoxically, it is possible to consider that her film reflected the universal and unchangeable ideals of the Olympic Games. Nevertheless, Riefenstahl criticized the situations of modern sport as follows: “Today’s sportsmen have lost sight of the sensitive expressions of bodies and emotions, adhering too much to the skills, the winning or losing, and the records. It is disappointing that sporting broadcasting has become an ordinary affair and, on the contrary the artistic impressions have been lost.”⁶⁰ The indication of losing “sensitive expressions” could apply to both producers and players. These remarks referred to transformed sport, not from the nostalgia but, from the artistic susceptibility.

Conclusion

It is easy to criticize Riefenstahl’s film purely as a propaganda vehicle. As well, it is also easy to recognize her film as an official record of the 1936 Olympics. The film still fascinates people today, despite the different messages it delivers. It is necessary to ask the question, of just “what attractiveness the film still has.” The main structure of the

events expressed in Riefenstahl's films focused on the compositions consisting of tensions, suspensions, peaks, dynamics, and relief. The crowds, the sounds of cheering, smiles and griefs on the athletes' faces, all contribute to express this structure of the film. The beautiful and dynamic bodies of the athletes were focal points in the film. Riefenstahl's main concern was the style of beauty, and the moving bodies of the strong and the winners. These concerns were also expressed in the *Nuba*, as well as in her writing style in her autobiography. Further, the structure of the film itself must not be overlooked. Riefenstahl attempted to express the moving bodies of athletes through both a problematic and an attractive film. This could warrant further study including its historical evaluation.

Further study is necessary and, in particular to further understand the interpretation of the film and to better analyze the techniques used. This present study was necessary to continue the mission and task of interpretational circles of hermeneutics.

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Notes

1. This paper is an extensively expanded and revised version of a paper originally published in Japanese: Naofumi Masumoto, Takuro Endo, and Takayuki Hata, "Revival of 'Olympia': Reflections of Body by Leni Riefenstahl," in *Journal of Philosophy and Principles of Physical Education*, no. 23, pp. 1-15, 1993.

2. *Asahishinbun*, "Festival of the People," *Asahishinbun* December 15, 1991; Masaru Ikei, *Politics of Olympics*, Tokyo: Maruzen, 1992, pp. 45-88; and Hiroshi Kawanari, *Phantom Olympic Games*, Tokyo: Chikuma, 1992, pp. 120-137. (all in Japanese)

3. Richard D. Mandell, *The Nazi Olympics* (2nd ed.), Urbana/Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987, p. 81.

4. "Triumph of the Willful," *The Globe and Mail*, (Toronto) April 8, 1994.

5. This event included the showing of her films and panel exhibition of her works and career as an artist, and was held from December 15, 1991 to January 26, 1992 at 'Tokyo Bunkamura' at Shibuya, Tokyo. The attendance at this exhibition was almost 5,000 people, and the audiences of concurrent screening of Leni Riefenstahl's films, which were "Festival of the Nations," "Festival of Beauty," and "The Blue Light," reached approximately 4,000. Eight television stations, four newspapers, and seventeen journals reported this event.

6. Leni Riefenstahl's German autobiography was published in 1987, and translated to Japanese by Noriko Kabashima, *Kaisou (Memory)*, Tokyo: Bungeisyunju, 1991; for example, Eiko Ishikawa, *LENI REIFENSTAHL LIFE*, Tokyo: Kyuryudo, 1991; *Bunkamura, Leni Riefenstahl Film*, Tokyo: Toyku-Bunkamura, 1991, and so on.

7. Leni Riefenstahl, *ibid* note 6, p. 368, and translated to English by Namara Group, *The Sieve of Time; The Memoirs of Leni Riefenstahl*, London: Quartet Books, 1992, p. 577.

8. Bill Murray, "Berlin in 1936: Old and New Work on the Nazi Olympics," *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, Vol. 9 No. 1 (April 1992) pp. 29-49.

9. Allen Guttman, *The Olympics: A History of the Modern Games*. University of Illinois Press; Urbana/Chicago, 1992, p. 71.

10. In Japan, Part I was screened in the spring of 1940, and Part II in the winter of the same year. *Tokyo Asahishinbun*, March 19, and December 22, 1940.

11. See, Koichi Hino, "Introduction of Film," *Cinema Junpo*, No. 1085, 1992, p. 228 (in Japanese). This announcer ranted, "Hang on, Maehata!" 23 times, not even broadcasting the race.

12. Glenn B. Infield, *Leni Riefenstahl: The Fallen Film Goddess*, New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1976, p. 153.

13. Nicholas Thomas (ed.), *International Dictionary of Film and Filmmakers: 1, Films*, Detroit/London: St. James Press, 1992, p. 657.

14. Joji Deguchi, "Sport and Films," in Yuzo Kishino (Eds.), *New Sport Dictionary*, Tokyo: Taisyukan, 1987, p. 531. (in Japanese)

15. Leni Riefenstahl, *op. cit.*, note 7, p. 171.

16. The German athletes won 33 gold medals, 26 silver medals, and 30 bronze medals. See, Leni Riefenstahl, *op. cit.*, note 7, p. 188. These perform-

ances were the greatest in German Olympic history. It is said that in these Games, German athletes used drugs which included testosterone and, these drugs were used at the front lines of World War II. See, Shigeru Yamamoto, "Collapse of Socialists' Sport Culture," *Taiikuka-Kyoiku*, Vol. 40, No. 1, 1992, pp. 42-44. (in Japanese)

17. Makoto Saeki, "SPOTLIGHT: Leni Riefenstahl," *Number*, No. 285, 1992, p. 13 (in Japanese.

18. For example, see, Ronald Bergan, *Sports in the Movies*, London: Proteus Publishing Co., 1982, pp. 99-101; Infield, *op. cit.*, note 11, p. 215, Tom McNab, "Sport on Films," *Bull. Phys. Educ.*, Vol. 14, No. 2, 1978, pp. 37-41; David Robinson, *The History of World Cinema*, New York: Stein Andday Publishers, 1981, p. 221; and Harvey Zucker et. al, *Sport Films: A Complete Reference*, Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers, 1987, pp. 283-299.

19. Duff Hart-Davis, *Hitler's Games: The 1936 Olympics*, New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1971, p. 242.

20. See *Asahishinbun*, *op. cit.*, note 10.

21. For example, *Asahishinbun*, *op. cit.*, 1991, Bunkamura, *Leni Riefenstahl Film*, Tokyo: Tokyu-Bunkamura, 1991; Bunkamura, "Body and Will of Film," *The Museum*, Tokyo: Tokyu-Bunkamura, 1991; Koichi Hino, *op. cit.*, note 13; Eiko Ishikawa, *op. cit.*, note 6; Yasuhisa Nagasawa, "Sport on the Screen," in Santory (Ed.) *Culture as Sport*, Tokyo: TBS Britannica, 1992, pp. 159-162; Leni Riefenstahl, Kon Ichikawa, and Masayuki Tamaki, "Lost the Impressions of Sport," *Cyuokoron*, No. 1280, 1992, pp. 294-303; and Makoto Saeki, *op. cit.*, note 17. (all in Japanese)

22. Kei Kumai, Rou Takenaka, Aromu Mushiake, Kouji Mashiko, Kimio Yata, Kazuo Kuroi, Kaoru Shimizu, and Yoshio Shirai, "The Editing Version of 'Olympia': What Meanings This Film Spectacle Transmits Today?," *Cinema Junpo*, No. 628, 1974, pp. 50-59 (in Japanese).

23. A brief chronology of Riefenstahl is provided by Renata Berg- Pan's book, *Leni Riefenstahl*, Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980, as follows:

1902: Leni Riefenstahl, born in Berlin, Germany, August 22.

1910: Begins to take dancing lessons.

1920: Appears regularly on stage as a dancer.

1926: Signs contract with Arnold Fanck ...in "The Holy Mountain." Learns filmmaking from Arnold Fanck.

1931: Establishes her own production company, Riefenstahl Films.

1932: Release of "The Blue Light," the first film she directs and in which she also stars. Meets Adolf Hitler for the first time.

1933: Upon Hitler's request, films "Victory of Faith," about 1933 Nazi party rally.

1934: She is asked by Hitler to film Nazi party rally in Nuremberg that year, September 5-10, films "Triumph of the Will."

1935: Signs agreement to produce 1936 summer Olympic film.

1936: August 1-14, shoots film about the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin.

1937: Publishes "Beauty in the Olympic Struggle".

1938: April 20, Hitler's birthday, premier of Olympia I: Festival of Nations. Olympia is awarded first prize at the International Moving Picture Festival in Venice, and the Grand Prix in Paris.

1945-48: Detained in various prisons and camps by Allied forces on charges of pro-Nazi activity.

1948: Receives diploma certifying award of the Gold Medal for Olympia.

1949-53: Struggles for rehabilitation and tries to receive her lost films.

1952: Charges that she was a Nazi dismissed by a Berlin court.

1956: Begins work in Africa on "Black Cargo" (not completed).

1968: Publishes "The Last of the Nuba."

1969: Receives Gold Medal from Art Directors Club for her photography about the Nuba.

1972: Commissioned by London Times to photograph Olympic Games in Munich.

1975: Learns scuba diving.

1978: Publishes "Coral Gardens," about underwater photography.

1987: Publishes "Memoiren," autobiography.

24. Naofumi Masumoto, "Hermeneutics of Sport: Possibility and Limitations," *Journal of Physical Education*, Vol. 33, 1988, pp. 101-110. (in Japanese)

25. See the Naofumi Masumoto, "Some Notes on Hermeneutics of Sport Culture in the Movies: The Case of "Chariots of Fire," *TMU Journal of Sport Science*, Vol. 17, 1992, pp. 17-27. (in Japanese) And see, John J. MacAloon, "Olympic Games and the

Theory of Spectacle in Modern Societies,” in John, J. MacAloon (Ed.), *Rite Drama, Festival, Spectacle*, Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues Press, 1984, pp. 241- 280.

26. For a discussion of semiotics and film, see Keiji Asanuma, “Film and Semiotics,” Shigeru Kawamoto (Ed.) *Art as Sign*, Tokyo: Keiso-Syobo, 1982, pp. 194-2 11; and Toshio Matsumot, *Quest for Images*, Tokyo: Sanichi-syobo, 1991, pp. 232-240. (all in Japanese)

27. See, note 23.

28. Avery Brundage, *The Heritage of Modern Olympics* (Trans. by Tsuyoshi Miyagawa in Japanese), Tokyo: Baseball Magazine, 1974, pp. 160-182; Pierre de Coubertin, *Olympic Memoirs* (Trans. by Kenkichi Oshima in Japanese), Tokyo: Baseball Magazine, 1976, pp. 201-207; Seiji Kiyokawa, *The 60 Years with Olympics: Proposal to JOC*, Tokyo: Baseball Magazine, 1989, pp. 74-78; and Ryotoku Suzuki, *Continuation, Outside History of Olympics*, Tokyo: Baseball Magazine, 1982, pp. 185-186. (all in Japanese)

29. See, Hart-Davis, op. cit., note 19 and Infield, op. cit. note 11.

30. See, Asahishinbun, op. cit., note 10.

31. See, Kei Kumai et al., op. cit., note 22. This article was a transcription of a round table discussion that occurred.

32. See, Riefenstahl’s autobiography, op. cit., note 7, p. 577, and Infield, op. cit., note 11, p. 227.

33. See, Kei Kumai, et al., op. cit., note 22.

34. See, Riefenstahl, et al., op. cit., note 21.

36. Riefenstahl, *ibid.*, p. 171.

37. Riefenstahl, *ibid.*, p. 177.

38. Riefenstahl, *ibid.*, p. 193.

39. Riefenstahl, *ibid.*, p. 187.

40. See, Yasumi Iwagami, “Riefenstahl talked about the Olympics and Politics,” *Number, No. 246*, 1990, pp. 78-81. (in Japanese)

41. Yasumi Iwagami, *ibid.*

42. Yasumi Iwagami, *ibid.*

44. See Eiko Ishikawa, op cit., note 6.

45. See Masura Ikei, op cit., note 2.

46. See Riefenstahl, et al. note 21.

47. See Duff Hart-Davis, op cit., note 19

48. Riefenstahl, op cit., note 7, p. 173.

49. Riefenstahl, *ibid.*, p. 193.

50. Riefenstahl, *ibid.*, p. 193.

51. Riefenstahl, *ibid.*, pp. 196-197.

52. Riefenstahl, *ibid.*, pp. 188-217.

53. Riefenstahl, *ibid.*, p. 205.

54. Riefenstahl, *ibid.*, pp. 216-217.

55. Riefenstahl, *ibid.*, p. 217.

57. See Makoto Saeki, op cit., note 17.

58. Glenn B. Infield, op cit., note 11, but this citation is from Japanese translation.

59. See Makoto Saeki, op cit., note 17.

60. Makoto Saeki, *ibid.*

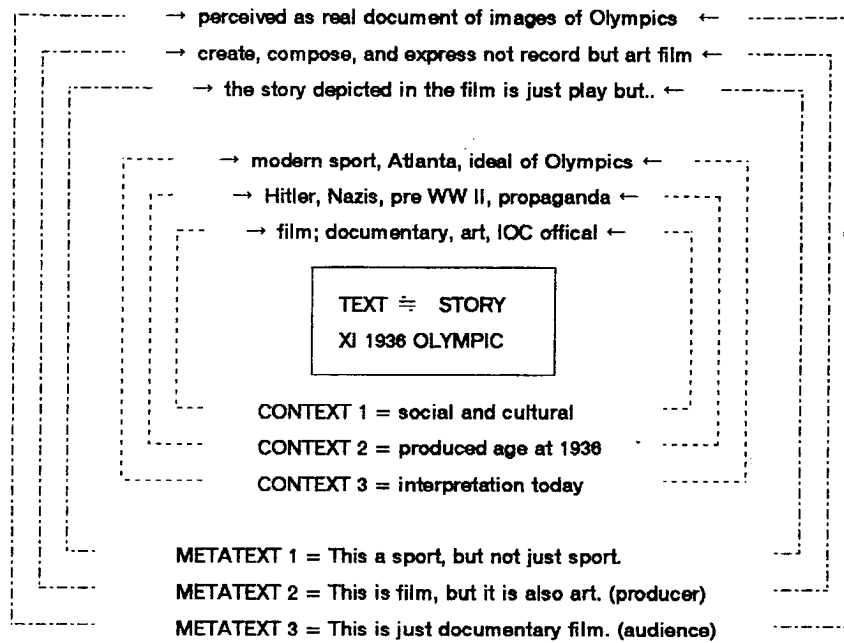


Fig.1. FRAMEWORKS OF CULTURAL HERMENEUTICS OF 'OLYMPIA'