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# *Texts, contexts and meta-texts: Multidimensional interpretations of Olympism in sport films*

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## **Introduction**

The fundamental basics related to the Olympic spirit, that is, Olympism, the Olympic movement, and its aims and goals, are clearly defined in The Olympic Charter. Nevertheless, the concept of Olympism remains unclear (Meier, 1996). Several authors have argued that there are diverse interpretations of Olympism, and there is no established theory on Olympism (Shimizu, 1996; Sanada, 1996; Tahara, 1996; Meier, 1996).<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, despite the lack of clarity in definition, Olympism as a philosophy of life arguably prevails in some kind of general form: it is reproduced in keeping with one of its obscure meanings, and this meaning is transmitted despite being transformed from the original meaning. Thus, it seems likely that Olympism is represented as a prevailing general meaning according to the era in which the films to be considered were produced. Of course, films are themselves one aspect of cultural reproduction systems.

The purpose of this study is to clarify Olympism as represented in several sport films and to interpret the symbolic meanings according to the direction of the sport images idealized therein. Olympism, as a sport ideology, was examined by interpreting the concepts transmitted by the sport films.

In this study, cultural hermeneutics, cultural semiology, symbolism of culture, and text theory were applied. The sport films representing the Olympic Games were interpreted, especially with reference to the framework of sport hermeneutics, that is, “the interpretation of play-text of sport performer in accordance with a specific context and in consideration of the prevailing meta-text.” The subjects of the interpretation were seven films: three were official Olympic documentaries, and four were dramatic films related to general themes surrounding the Olympic Games.

## **2. Research regarding Olympic films**

### **2.1 Film history of Olympic Games**

Downing (1995) showed that the first few Olympic Games were almost completely ignored by film-makers. In 1908, the London Games were filmed on newsreel, and in 1912, the first full-length film of the Games was taken in Stockholm (p.57). Coubertin, who was acquainted with the cinema, described the film as an “enchantment.”<sup>2</sup> However, the film’s camera angles were fixed, wide-angle lenses were used, and the camera movement was lacking. Hence, the film was mediocre and no significant cinematic achievement (p.58).

In 1924, both the first ever Winter Games in Chamonix and the summer Paris Games were recorded in feature-length films. These films first captured the spirit of the Games beautifully (Downing, p.58). However, according to Downing, it was not until 1936 at the Berlin Games that Leni Riefenstahl created the first truly powerful piece of Olympic cinema in her three-and-a-half hours epic called "*Olympische Spiele*" (p.58). Through the first official Olympic documentary film, "*Olympia*," "the Olympic aura was spread to millions who had never seen the Games for themselves" (p.58). "*Olympia*" not only helped the development of the Olympic movement but, it is often argued, was a propaganda film that promoted Nazism (Bergan, 1982, p.99; Masumoto, 1994b).

Following the 1936 Games, the IOC decided that each successive Olympic Games should be recorded in the form of an official documentary film. From this point, images of the Olympic Games were recorded as showing Olympism in action, and have helped to fix particular types of memories of the Games.

## **2.2 Film reviews of Olympic films**

Unfortunately, there are few reviews of Olympics-related films. Zucker and Babich (1987) reviewed seventy four films in a package of Olympic and track and field films. They stated that films dealing with Olympic sports had appeared in a slow but steady fashion, and that the Olympic Games had provided the basis for a number of screen biographies (p.283). The films had been affected by the fashion of society at the time of filming. For example, they showed that during the growth of jogging in the 1970's, a spate of track films began appearing on the screen, including "*Chariots of Fire*," "*Personal Best*," and "*Running Brave*" (p.283). Nevertheless, the films did not refer to Olympism; nor did this occur in any of the film reviews.

Bergan (1982) pointed out that Coubertin first had the idea of the Modern Olympics as 'the family of man' while at the same time exalting nationalism (p.98). Bergan also commented that "*Chariots of Fire*," for instance, manages to demonstrate both, while "*Olympia*" pays only lip-service to internationalism (p.98). In his comments about "*Olympia*" Bergan took a strong political stance, showing his anti-Hitler and anti-Nazism views clearly. He criticized the film images in which Leni Riefenstahl had centralized beautiful bodies and, thus, promoted Nazism. Bergan's central criticism was that in the opening sequence, a grandiloquent prologue attempts to link the ideals of beauty in Greek antiquity with those of the Third Reich. Bergan proclaimed that the ideals of the Olympic movement were transferred and corrupted into the ideal of the Nazi movement (pp. 99-101). Moreover, he called attention to the possibility that it is easy to be seduced by the beauty of many of the images of the film into ignoring the sinister significance of the swastikas on the arms of officials (p.101).

On the other hand, Bergan's review of "*Tokyo Olympiad*" was a very favorable one. Bergan quoted Kon Ichikawa's statement that he (Ichikawa) had tried to penetrate human nature, not through fiction, but through the truth of the Games (Bergan, 1982, p.102). He praised Ichikawa's attempts to depict the universal human. Bergan also said that the film did get nearer to the body and soul of the athlete than any previous attempt, and that the result was a crystallization of Japanese technical and creative genius (p.102). Finally, citing Ichikawa's statement, "the camera must capture, in all its living reality..." (p.102), Bergan praised highly Ichikawa's attempt to represent the universal human in the ultimate situations of the Olympics.

In the case of "*Chariots of Fire*," Bergan's film review showed critically that the film was a classic English tale told in classic English terms, containing a nostalgia for Empire and old-fashioned patriotism (Bergan, 1982, p.105). He stated that the story told of how Harold Abrahams and Eric Liddell managed to overcome a series of figurative hurdles to win the 100 and 400 metres respectively for Britain at the 1924 Paris Olympic Games. Bergan also pointed out that the film title, "*Chariots of Fire*," was taken from the poem written by William Blake, a religious artist (Bergan, 1982, p.105).

Judging from the above previous research and film criticism, unfortunately, there is no clear mention of Olympism in these sport films histories and reviews. Thus, it is possible to conclude that Olympism as a sport ideology has been somehow overlooked in sport film studies, notwithstanding that promoters of Olympism state that it has been represented on screen.

## **3. Research Methods and Subjects of Analysis**

### **3.1. Research method and the framework of interpretations**

In this study, the films were interpreted according to the formula of hermeneutics of sport, that is, to interpret the play-text of sport in accordance with a specific context and in consideration of the prevailing meta-text (Masumoto, 1988; Masumoto, 1994a). Hence, cultural hermeneutics, cultural semiology, symbolism of culture, and text theory were applied

to interpret the dialogues, acts, performances, and sequence of behavior. In other words, first, the diverse textual representations of Olympism depicted in the films were extracted, taking notice of aspects such as: educating the young, international exchange, peaceful atmosphere, ceremony and rite, Olympic symbols, opening and closing ceremony, Olympic motto and maxim, etc. Second, the representational context of the films as well as the production and technical context, or the context of sport skill were interpreted. Third, the text about the text, or the text about the explanatory notes to the frameworks of interpretation belongs to the meta-textual analysis. In this study, then, the meta-text is closely related to the framework of interpretation of Olympic films.

More importantly, it must be considered that the frameworks used to interpret forms of sport images have a strong role in promoting and reconstructing Olympism in a way that is hegemonic. As Whannel (1984) points out, it is important to notice that sport ideology is reproduced by the broadcast of the Olympic Games world-wide (p.52). Thus, attention must be paid to the structure of the ideal of Olympism, that is, of the ideology, which may be promoted and reproduced tacitly. It seems that this structure might be clarified by considering the meta-text of the films.

### 3.2 Restriction of the research subjects

As noted previously, in this paper, the subjects were three official Olympic documentary films, and four dramatic films related to the staging of the Olympic Games.<sup>3</sup> The two documentary films of summer Games were extensively evaluated world-wide. Though documentary films of winter Games were difficult to acquire, in this study, the one renowned for its technical wizardry was chosen. As for the dramatic films, films were chosen which were produced in politically, economically, and socially problematic eras or that represented those problematic eras as a context. That is, in this study, films were examined that depicted the problems clearly as the context of the production and representation. Specifically, I have focussed upon films which were produced when both the Olympic Games of 1980 and 1984 were exploited by the Cold War (being boycotted by the West or the East), a film produced after the 1976 Games and their failure economically, films which were produced during an era of doping and growing commercialism, and a film representing the running boom in 1970s which reflected an increasingly health-oriented society.

## 4. Text and context: Tentative interpretations of Olympism in the films

### 4.1. Confirmation of the text and the context of the films

I turn now to the textual interpretations of the films. Here, the interpretations are conducted with particular notice paid to the representational form which seems to depict a message especially related to Olympism. The concept of Olympism used in this section was synthesized according to the *Olympic Charter* (IOC, 1998) and the opinions of Olympism researchers (Segrave, 1988; Loland, 1995; Grupe, 1997; Tahara, 1996). The following six dimensions are my criteria for the representations of Olympism: (1) education of youth through sport, (2) individual fulfilment, (3) ethical value of fair play, (4) aspiration for the peaceful society, (5) rite and ceremony as peaceful festival and religious aspect, and (6) internationalism - including the five continents and racial diversity.

#### 4.1-1) "Olympia," Germany, 1938

\* Text: 1) Opening subtitle - "The film of the XI Olympic Games Berlin 1936, Dedicated to the founder of the Modern Olympic Baron Pierre de Coubertin, To the honour and glory of the youth of the world"; 2) Olympic symbol and flags; 3) Olympic symbol hanging behind the stands; 4) the rite of kindling the sacred fire; 5) torch relay and the lighting ceremony; 6) Olympic bell with Olympic symbol and eagle as a symbol of the Nazis; 7) opening ceremony; 8) flags of all nations; medal ceremony; 9) closing ceremony.

\* Context of the film production: 1) Nazis gaining power before World War II; 2) boycott movement before the Berlin Games; 3) the production of Nazi party propaganda films with Hitler as the central figure; 4) epoch-making devices of film shooting; 5) the first torch relay.

#### 4.1-2) "Tokyo Olympiad," Japan, 1965

\* Text: 1) Superimposition of the opening and ending scenes of the film - "Olympic Games is a manifestation of the human dreams" and "In the night, the sacred flame returned to the sun. Every four years, human being have a dream. Is it right to finish this realized peaceful situation as only a dream?"; 2) close-up shot of sun; 3) opening ceremony; 4) the chaotic entrance parade of athletes at the closing ceremony; 4) the pervasive shots of all participants including audience, referee, athletes officials, and guests; 5) the torch relay across the peace memorial park in Hiroshima.

\* Context of the film production: 1) First Olympic Games in Asia; 2) the political problem in Taiwan; 3) up-lifting Japanese prestige; the dispute about the film as art or record of the Games; 4) the live broadcasts of the Games by satellite system to a world-wide audience.

4.1-(3) “*13 jour en France*,” France, 1968”

\* Text: 1) Torch relay and kindling of the sacred fire; 2) opening ceremony; Olympic flag and Olympic anthem; 3) the joy of the winner after the goal and congratulations by teammates; 4) the welcome performance by the street performers; 5) the contrasting and analytical shots between the artistic practice of modern ballet and the physical exercise of athletes.

\* Context of the film production: 1) The first doping test in the Modern Olympic Games; 2) the travelling shots of downhill skiing by the cameraman; 3) the first live television coverage of the Winter Games.

4.1-(4) “*Chariots of Fire*,” England, 1981

\* Text: 1) Olympic motto, citius, altius, fortius, on the backboard of the stadium; 2) fluttering of the Olympic flag; 3) opening ceremony (entrance parade, flags of all nations, Olympic anthem); 4) joy of the winners and the congratulations by the other athletes; 5) exchange party; 6) Eric’s handshake with his opponent before the race and the congratulations by his team-mates after his win in the 400m race; 7) his triumphant ride on his team-mates’ shoulders.

\* Context of the film production: 1) the appearance of running films with the jogging boom in 1970’s; 2) the boycott to the Moscow Games by the countries of the West; 3) Falkland War in 1982.

\* Context of representation: 1) the Paris Olympic Games in 1924; 2) the executives of Cambridge University sustaining a strict amateurism; 3) the confrontation between England and France in athletics; 4) the rivalry between England and Scotland; 5) the era of strict religious commandments of Protestantism.

4.1-(5) “*Personal Best*,” United States, 1982

\* Text: 1) the growth of youth through the sport (self-realization, independence from coach); 2) from homosexual relationship to friendship, and encouragement of each other when they had been discouraged; 2) “do all that you can do, because that is who you are”; 3) it is not winning but surpassing yourself that is important, that is the struggle with yourself; 4) to do one’s best is the original meaning of the movie title, “Personal Best,” and is an analogy of Coubertin’s maxim that it is not winning but participation that is important; 5) the boycott in the Moscow Games; 6) the narrations of TV announcers in the closing scene ironically transmitting the difficulty of keeping peace through sport.

\* Context of the film production: 1) the appearance of running films along with the jogging boom in the 1970’s; 2) Western countries’ boycott of the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow; 3) before the overt commercialization of the Olympics.

4.1-(6) “*Running Brave*,” United States, 1983

\* Text: 1) running for the tribe; 2) the handshake with rival Yellow Horse before the race, making an oath for a good race; 3) the great upset in the 10,000m race through an indomitable fighting spirit despite course interference; 4) shaking hands with each other on the podium; 5) the reconciliation with coach Eston.

\* Context of the film production: 1) the formidable deficit of Montreal Olympic Games in 1976; 2) the boycott of the Moscow Games by the West; 3) before the Los Angeles Games; 4) the flourishing of running films as influenced by the jogging boom.

\* Context of representation: 1) the situation of the Tokyo Games in 1964; 2) the era of explicit racism when Native Americans had been confined to reservations.

4.1-(7) “*Finish Line*,” United States, 1989

\* Text: 1) the white Olympic rings hanging in the protagonist’s dormitory room (the white rings could be dyed any colour, in this dramatic film, the protagonist Grenn died because of doping and the rings might be turned to black); 2) the real friendship of Tito who gave advice and help by showing the article concerning doping; 3) the ironic message of the sport doctor as one of anti-Olympism, that is, doping is a part of sport, it can broaden human possibilities; 4) the situation of the doping test after the race; 5) the TV interview of Tito after the qualifying race for the 1984 Olympic Games when Tito said that he ran for his late friend Grenn.

\* Context of the film production: 1) growing Olympic commercialism; 2) the Olympic world as focussed on winning at all costs; 3) the negative influence of TV, 4) Ben Johnson’s positive test at the 1988 Seoul Games.

\* Context of representation: 1) 400m qualifying race before the 1984 Los Angeles Games; 2) social situations of doping abuse and winning at all costs.

Referring to the context of these films, it is evident that they all, including official Olympic films, depict inevitably political, financial, and social problems. Though the Modern Olympic Games place the lofty ideal of the Olympic truce as a model after the Ancient Olympian Games, the ideal could not be realized. The contextual situation of some of the films reflect conditions of the Cold War. In the case of England, it is useful to remember the hard line policy of Thatcherism as shown in the Falkland War - as if to regain a glorious imperialism. The Montreal Games were a good example, in the financial context, of how the Olympic Games can create a deficit. Indeed, in the early 1970s the situation became more serious as Denver had to give up the 1976 Winter Olympics because of opposition by its inhabitants. These serious financial situations were preliminaries of the 'commercialympic' of Los Angeles in 1984. In the social context, the winning at any cost ideology spread at the same time as the situation of having the opportunity to attend the Games without winning became unacceptable in some countries. (The Olympic motto, *citius, altius, fortius*, is in one sense a logic of modern industrial society. It can be argued that this progressiveness is one of the strong factors which brought problems like doping to the sport world.)

It can be inferred that these political, financial, and social conditions encouraged the film producers to reconfirm the Olympic ideal. Moreover, it may be suggested that the film-makers encouraged viewers to rethink the Olympic ideal, that is, what should Olympic sport be originally, and what ought the Olympic movement be?

#### 4.2 Consideration of the meta-text

In the case of Olympic documentary films, such as "*Olympia*" and "*Tokyo Olympiad*," the context that they are official films of the IOC promotes the meta-text that all that is depicted must be true. With this meta-text, film viewers and interpreters form cognitive frameworks about the film. The frameworks for interpreting documentary films may be intensified with this meta-text. Likewise, the frameworks of the film production side can be clarified by paying attention to the meta-text. In the case of Olympic documentary films, for example, the following ideas could appear; "Because the Olympic Games are a peaceful festival, many peaceful scenes should be included," "human authenticity and universal humanism must be depicted," or "peaceful egalitarianism ought to be represented with no connection to race, gender, or age." With these meta-texts, cognitive frameworks of the films' production might be reinforced or strengthened. Nevertheless, it has been shown that there were a lot of retakes and 'aftertakes' in "*Olympia*" (Masumoto, 1992b; Masumoto, 1994b). In "*Tokyo Olympiad*," the director Ichikawa utilized retakes in the same way (Masumoto, 1997). Thus, it seems that all the images do not necessarily represent truth in documentary films, and that the producer and film-makers construct, shoot, and edit the films according to their notion of Olympism. Thus, it is possible that their view of Olympism can be spread through the images.

In the case of dramatic films related to Olympic games, they seem to be classified into two types of meta-text: one based on the real story and the other on the fictional. In "*Chariots of Fire*," where the story is said to be based on real people, for example, there is a message that this dramatic film is based on the real story. Therefore, this message will be followed by the meta-text that because the text represented in the film is based on a true story, all the story might be true. This meta-text is one of the frames of reference of recognition of the film. It is not easy for film viewers to decide to what degree it is true or not. Nevertheless, the film has a framework which can be perceived as an aspect of Olympism in that individual fulfilment for the two real protagonists was based on their strong beliefs. On the other hand, there is an opposing message connected with the framework that this film is a theatrical drama. Therefore, the meta-message, "All the text represented within the film must be fiction, it is a much too well fitted story, so, it is not worth believing," will be created.

According to these meta-texts, it might be said that the cognitive situation of sport drama films is constructed. In "*Running Brave*," it might be recognized that it is untrue to assume that Billy Mills ran for his tribe because of the fictitious nature of the film. Likewise, in "*Personal Best*," it is questionable to believe that the ideology of doing one's best is one of the ideals of Olympism. In a similar occasion in "*Finish Line*," it seems to be considered that ethical aspects of Olympism such as friendship and fairness are suspicious and naive ideals.

However, in these dramatic films related to Olympic Games, as MacAloon (1984) has pointed out, ironically they give us clues to reflective thinking about the nature of Olympism. For example, "what are the Olympic Games at all?" or "For what purpose is sport played?" This is, in Goffman's term, a 'frame breaking' of the cognition, and it leads to reinforcement of an understanding of Olympism (pp. 274-275).

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Definitions of Olympism

Tahara (1996) referred to a definition of Olympism as stated by Otto Szymiczek, former President of the International Olympic Academy, and cited six values: 1) educational value, 2) value of peace, 3) achievement value, 4) ethical value, 5) aesthetic value, and 6) religious value. Hargreaves (1992) asserted that the meaning of the Olympic Games is encoded in certain signifiers, that is, the symbols and ritual practices which are: 1) religious ceremony and aesthetic sense of Coubertin, 2) gold medal and flag ceremony, 3) the nationalism in the opening ceremony, 4) the award ceremony, torch relay and Olympic Flame ceremony, and 5) the balance of the international versus national (pp. 125-126). Segrave (1988) said that the discussions from the 1985 Olympic Academy of Canada also attempted to define Olympism. Hence, it may be conceived as a set of specific goals or aspirations: 1) for education, 2) for international understanding, 3) for equal opportunity, 4) for fair and equal competition, 5) for cultural expression, 6) for independence of sport, and 7) for excellence (p. 151). Loland (1995) argued that four goals can be found in Coubertin's Olympism: 1) to cultivate the individual, 2) to reform society through education, 3) to promote international understanding and peace, and 4) to be a secular "humanism of muscle." Grupe (1997) arranged five basic principles of Olympic education: 1) the unity of mind and body and harmonious development of man, 2) self-perfection, 3) the ideal of amateurism, 4) the law of fairness, and 5) the ideal of peace through sport. Thus, scholars have arranged and defined Olympism in many ways.

### 5.2 Multidimensional aspects of Olympism represented in films

If we assume that the definitions of Olympism mentioned above are those of researchers and advocates, we may argue that a general form of Olympism is transmitted in images which this research tries to clarify. By rearranging these images concerned with Olympism, five other dimensions of Olympism can be clarified. At the same time, this trial can be said to be a reconstruction of the multidimensional interpretations of Olympism.

#### 5.2-(1) Individualism: personal fulfilment and achievement

Both Eric's deep religious belief in God and Harold's protests against anti-Semitism are symbolized by their runs in "*Chariots of Fire*." Also, their runs are in some sense considered to be an individual fight and struggle for self-perfection in the individual. In the same way, in "*Personal Best*," the message of "do one's best" is a metaphor for self-fulfilment and accomplishment.

#### 5.2-(2) Ethnocentrism: admiration of the team and race

The protagonists and their Cambridge teammates in "*Chariots of Fire*" ran for the team and school in Paris. While their wins were for the English establishment, the film represented their runs as being for the team and university. In "*Running Brave*," running to promote ethnocentrism is well depicted. These dimensions of Olympism are results of a film theme structure that is against racism.

#### 5.2-(3) Nationalism and patriotism: the honor of countries and nations

This dimension of Olympism can be noticed in all three official films of the IOC, particularly in the scenes of the award ceremonies and spectators cheering in the stadium. In "*Chariots of Fire*," the two protagonists agreed, finally, to run for England. All scenes that include the English team and athletes and officials, the Prince of Wales, or the parade of celebration on their triumphal return, represent the frenzied nationalism connected to the Olympic Games.

#### 5.2-(4) Internationalism: international interchange, mutual understanding, international goodwill and peace

This dimension of Olympism is represented frequently in official Olympic films, except "*Olympia*." As a matter of course, in "*Olympia*," which had a strong propaganda element, the atmosphere of international friendship was depicted to soften anti-Nazi criticisms. Although all the flags of the nations were represented in the film, the frequent exposure of swastikas appears uncanny. In contrast, this dimension of Olympism is depicted differently in "*Tokyo Olympiad*," that is, the fluttering of all the nations' flags, the torch relay at the Hiroshima peace memorial park, and the opening and closing ceremonies.

#### 5.2-(5) Trans-nationalism: Universal humanism

This dimension of Olympism is well depicted in the official IOC films except in “*Olympia*.” For example, in “*Tokyo Olympiad*,” it was symbolized by the scene at the closing ceremony where all the countries’ athletes entered the stadium chaotically, carrying on their shoulders the Japanese athlete and flag-bearer Ono. The depiction of people in “*Tokyo Olympiad*,” which represented all persons with no segregation of men and women, older people and younger, winner and loser, is *in striking* contrast to “*Olympia*” which was filmed with an inclination to the aesthetics of the winner and the strong, or the aesthetics of the winner’s body. This dimension of Olympism represented in “*Tokyo Olympiad*” showed the universal human being in the festival, transcending nation-states. In this sense, it may be suggested that this dimension of Olympism in films represents a universal humanism or ideal human being that includes all human dignity, ethics, justice, and fairness. It is no exaggeration to say that this aspect of Olympism is an idealistic one in which it is possible to attain international friendship and a peaceful world.

## 6. Legend and mythology: Hegemony structure

As mentioned above, it is possible to consider that there is a cognitive structure to Olympism. The multidimensional aspects of Olympism discussed above, with the theme structure of each film, precipitate in the viewer’s consciousness, and are reproduced tacitly. In this section, I would like to examine the representational structure of these Olympic films, which has the function of ideological reproduction.

According to the anthropologist Yamaguchi (1986), mythology exists as three types of story: 1) as a tale of God narrated in a typical rite or scripted in a sacred book, 2) as a tale secularized in everyday life, or spoken as an old tale, and 3) as a latent framework of thinking which serves to fulfill man’s desire for irrationality, like the paradigm of the era (p.137). According to this definition, mythology cannot be transmitted except through continual narrations (as a legend). Moreover, it must be transmitted with the same meaning repeatedly, be interpreted as having the same meaning, and, thus, be fixed in meaning. In order to become a mythology and not just a story, it is structured so that its meaning is settled not at the surface but in the sub-conscious. When this happens, the density of meaning is increased, and supercedes surface consciousness without actually appearing at the surface level in ordinary life. When this type of structure is complete, mythology is shaped and reproduced tacitly. If these types of structure of mythology in sport films related to Olympic Games can be confirmed, it may be argued that there is a representational structure which may form tacit frameworks of thinking and behaviour that create a prevailing view of Olympism.

In the case of official IOC films, arguably the radio and TV announcers are used as narrations, and these narrative structures symbolize a successful story. There were announcers, for example, in “*Olympia*” who spoke in the language of various countries. For example, there was a Japanese announcer. In athletic scenes the announcers of each country would narrate the games in a way that focussed on the performance of the athletes from their own countries. This coverage would then be transmitted to their own countries. In “*Tokyo Olympiad*” Ichiro Mikuni’s narrations played a great role in myth-making. The performances and play of athletes were included in his narrative structure and turned into an opportunity to tell a story. Mikuni was a narrative person in the film, and part of his role was to spread Olympism outside the film, and to construct a mythology.

There are hegemonic devices in the dramatic films which are, in some sense, gimmicks to condense viewers’ memories and settle the sport images through the narrations. For example, in “*Chariots of Fire*” we are first informed that the film is based on a real story through the superimposition of historical narratives in the opening scene where Harold Abrahams’ funeral service is being conducted. Both the opening and closing scenes of the film were the same scenes of English athletes running along a beach. In this sequence, father and son-like figures appear, watching the running athletes. It is important to read the gimmick of the two figures because it can be interpreted that the filmmakers used them intentionally. Before the final scene of the movie, the great performances of the protagonists depicted in the film were already transmitted to England via newspaper. At this time, together with film viewers, in the eyes of those father and son-like figures, the glorious performances of English national athletes were fixed. Hence, in this final scene, it may be supposed that the elder person might whisper to the child-like figure, ‘Those are England’s Olympic athletes.’ “That fellow is Harold Abrahams, and that fellow is Eric Liddell.” These gimmicks could be interpreted as mythological devices used to talk about transcending different generations. Then, after the funeral service, there was a short conversation between Aubly and Linsey, “He did it!” Thus, the great achievements of individuals can be reconfirmed by film viewers and settled deeply in their collective memory.

It is possible to consider that the TV announcers are merely common narrators in the fictional Olympic films, such as “*Finish Line*” and “*Personal Best*.” In the final scene of “*Finish Line*,” the TV showed a victory interview of the winner of the qualifying race for the Los Angeles Games. Tito proclaimed strongly, “I ran for my friend Grenn. He died from drug use.” By the TV interview, the message that Tito won the race through fairness according to Olympic ideals,

without taking drugs and representing the ethical value of good friendship, was distributed throughout the U.S.A. This TV interview was a gimmick to settle the ideal in the subconscious of film viewers. In *“Personal Best,”* TV announcers transmitted the message of the moral aspect, doing all that one can do, and praised the individualism aspect of Olympism, that is, self-fulfilment and friendship, perseverance and encouragement. Moreover, the announcers narrated that the endeavor to win the U.S.A. qualifying race would not be rewarded, because the West was going to boycott the 1980 Moscow Games. This ironic message for international peace was transmitted to the audience by the story-tellers. This type of gimmick has a nation-wide representative structure through the TV apparatus in the film.

Likewise, the same type of representative structure can be seen in *“Running Brave.”* In this case the message is one of heroism. Here the model person was Billy Mills who won the 10,000m race at the 1964 Tokyo Olympic Games where he ran for his tribe and against racism in spite of interference. Other gimmicks appeared in this film: there were specific scenes where children had a newspaper clipping of Billy’s activities, and they expected for Billy to persevere for the tribe in his attempts to go to Tokyo. Billy’s sister had a newspaper scrapbook of her brother’s performances, too. Finally, Billy’s win was covered in *Life Magazine* when he returned to his home town after winning. These gimmicks as representational forms, that is, newspapers, a magazine, and TV are unique transmitting devices in the films as story tellers, and these are used to make the great performance of runners turn into legends.

Thus, it is possible to argue that there is a representative structure in the films which can make a mythology of some dimension of Olympism by settling the athletes’ great performances deeply into people’s (sub)consciousness. Mosher (1983) said that it is the Olympics from which the mythology of sport arises and to which it always returns (p. 17). It is possible to confirm the existence of a hegemonic structure of sporting films where the Olympic ideal or an idealized view of sport can be formed, strengthened, preserved, and transmitted tacitly as a mythology.

## 7. The frameworks of interpretation of the films related to Olympic sport

The hermeneutic process of description, analysis, and interpretation of text, context, and meta-text can be synthesized as a framework as shown in Figure 1.<sup>4</sup>

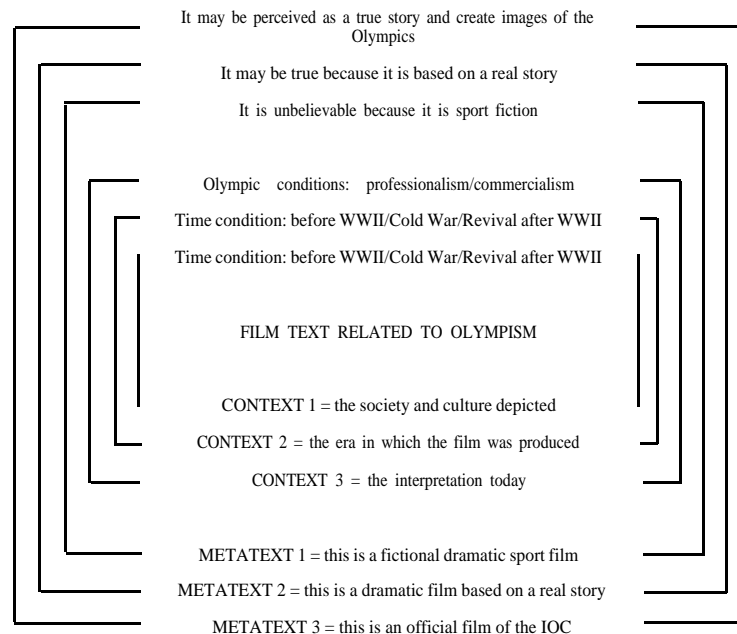


Figure 1. The frameworks of interpretation of the film related to Olympic sport

From this figure, it seems reasonable to conclude that the frameworks of ordinary film viewers of Olympic sport films are constructed in a general manner. Then, it leads to an understanding of the problems related to the Olympic Games, and to advocacy to return to (create) a humanistic dimension of sport. For instance, Grupe (1997) regarded the Olympic motto, *citius-altius-fortius*, as a sport ideology, accentuated and linked to the principle of success in a business-oriented modern society (p.64). He introduced Hans Lenk's recommendation that the motto should be followed by "humanus." It can be interpreted that this additional motto is the one of the main messages which Olympic films have tried to depict.

Finally, new subjects remain in this area. For example, what is the difference between Olympic films and sport films in general, especially high quality international championship competitions televised world-wide? Therefore, new themes in the cultural interpretation of sport images on TV remain to be examined.

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### Endnotes

1. If we wish to reach a common definition it is important to return to the original educational intention of Baron de Coubertin. That goal is not one to be pursued in this paper.
2. Espagnac (1995) showed that Coubertin had written an article about athletes and cinema. (Pierre de Coubertin (1987) "The sportsman and the cinema," *Olympic Review* 238:388-390, reprinted).
3. In this study, following video tapes were used for the interpretation of Olympism.
  - (1) "Olympia-fest der Volker" 1936 Berlin Games (1938, German; CBS SONY Group, VHS)
  - (2) "Tokyo Olympiad" 1964 Tokyo Games (1965 Japan Toho Co., VHS)
  - (3) "13 jour en France" 1968 Grenoble Winter Games (1968 France, Japan Columbia Co., VHS)
  - (4) "Chariots of Fire" 1924 Paris Game (1981 England CBS/FOX VIDEO, VHS)
  - (5) "Personal Best" 1980 Moscow Games (1982 U.S.A. Warner Home Video, VHS)
  - (6) "Running Brave" 1964 Tokyo Games (1983 Canada Toshiba Eizo Soft Co., VHS)
  - (7) "Finish Line" 1984 Los Angeles Games (1989 U.S.A. CIC Victor, VHS)
4. The framework of interpretation of films was drawn up by Masumoto (1992b, 1994b) according to MacAloon's (1984) theory of spectacle.

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