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The Antelope and the Lioness

Ancient Greece in the Prologue of Leni Riefenstahl's Olympia

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to show that readings of Riefenstahl as an artistic genius with full control over all aspects of her work have closed off more complex readings of the prologue of her film *Olympia* (1938). The author argues that we cannot begin to appreciate the density of this section of the film and its complex attitude toward ancient Greece without taking a closer look at the troubled collaboration between Leni Riefenstahl and Willy Zielke as two filmmakers with different visions, preoccupations, methods of work, and degrees of involvement in the making of the prologue. Attention is drawn to the hermeneutic difficulty of policing the boundaries between different types of aesthetics and different types of politics as they are played out in this section of *Olympia*. The article also teases out some of the difficulties around the question of how to situate the different themes and practices of the prologue within broader cinematic and extra cinematic histories of fascist aesthetics as they intersect with issues of classicism and modern subjectivity.

Keywords

fascism – film – *Olympia* (1938) – Ancient Greece – Leni Riefenstahl (1902–2003) – Willy Zielke (1902–1989).

Art, propaganda, or athletic documentary? Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* (1938) is notoriously difficult to assess. On the one hand, it is 'an aesthetic milestone

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in film history',[1] displaying 'enormously powerful and ground-breaking accomplishments in the art of film',[2] especially in terms of technical innovation and in expanding the aesthetic and stylistic possibilities of documentary filmmaking. On the other hand, it could not have been made without the material and human resources and without the active institutional support provided by National Socialism (as a party that becomes the state and is followed by the nation):[3] from commissioning to production without competition, distribution in a closed market, and state-controlled film criticism.[4] What is more, from Siegfried Kracauer to Susan Sontag and Linda Schulte-Sasse, scholars have shown that it is not only the conditions of production and circulation of Riefenstahl's films that situate these films centrally within National Socialism but also the themes and structures with which they are imbued. The seventeen-minute prologue of *Olympia* has often been thought to be immune to such a reading, because it does not feature any of the explicit references to National Socialism from which the rest of the film suffers (flags, hymns, views of Hitler) and which led to its re-editing after the Second World War. In recent years, however, critical readings of the prologue have advanced on two fronts. First, as far as its visual language is concerned, much attention has been given to its preoccupation with the classical body and its associations with Aryan masculinity.[5] Second, the contribution to the prologue of the filmmaker and director of photography Willy Zielke has come to the fore following a long period during which his name was edited out of the credits of the film, and his production stills (some of the most iconic of *Olympia*) were published under Riefenstahl's name.[6] Such

1 Jürgen Trimborn, *Leni Riefenstahl: A Life* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2007), 136.

2 Michael Mackenzie, 'From Athens to Berlin: The 1936 Olympics and Leni Riefenstahl's Olympia,' *Critical Inquiry* 29, no. 2 (2003): 303.

3 Rainer Rother, 'Leni Riefenstahl und der absolute Film,' in *Mediale Mobilmachung*, vol. 1: *Das Dritte Reich und der Film*, ed. Harro Segeberg (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2004), 135–136.

4 See esp. Susan Tegel, 'Leni Riefenstahl: Art and Politics,' *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 23, no. 3 (2006): 185–200; Cooper C. Graham, *Leni Riefenstahl and Olympia* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2001).

5 See Daniel Wildmann 'Desired Bodies: Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia*, Aryan Masculinity and the Classical Body,' in *Brill's Companion to the Classics, Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany*, eds. Helen Roche and Kyriakos Demetriou (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018), 60–81, with much of the relevant bibliography.

6 On Zielke's production stills being published under Riefenstahl's name, see Leni Riefenstahl, *Olympia: Documentation for the Olympia Film* (Cologne: Taschen, 2002), 25–63. For the original credits of *Olympia*, see Graham, *Leni Riefenstahl and Olympia*, 292–293. The most thorough and impassionate discussion of the dynamics of the relation between Zielke and Riefenstahl is Nina Gladitz, *Leni Riefenstahl: Karriere einer Täterin* (Zurich: Orell Füssli Verlag 2020), but see also Ann-Kathrin Kramer (Zielke's great-niece) in the documentary film *Vor-*

advancements in criticism have challenged the narrative cultivated by Riefenstahl herself over decades of statements, interviews, and publications, of a neat separation between her artistic struggle for self-realization and the political environment within which her work was created. Even so, there has been no systematic attempt to date to relate those two critical approaches and to assess the prologue of *Olympia* as the troubled collaboration of two filmmakers with different visions, preoccupations, methods of work, and degrees of involvement in the making of this section of the film.[7]

The aim of this article is to show that readings of Riefenstahl as an artistic genius with full control over all aspects of her work have closed off more complex readings of the prologue of *Olympia*. I argue that we cannot begin to appreciate the density of the prologue and its complex attitude toward ancient Greece without taking a close look at its different sequences, the ways they work internally, the ways they relate to one another, and the ways they were shot and edited. In doing so, I draw attention to the hermeneutic difficulty of policing the boundaries between different types of aesthetics and different types of politics as they are played out in this section of *Olympia*. I also tease out some of the difficulties around the question of how to situate the different themes and practices of the prologue within broader cinematic and extra cinematic histories of fascist aesthetics as they intersect with issues of classicism and modern subjectivity.

The Film Print

The original cut of *Olympia*, screened in April 1938, can be approximated but cannot be known with exactitude. Over the years, the film was edited repeatedly for release in different languages and in historically and politically shifting environments.[8] Today, prints of the film exist in numerous film archives around the world. The film can also be accessed through a dozen DVD and Blue Ray editions. For this article, I have worked with the Criterion edition of the film from

fahren gesucht: Ann-Kathrin Kramer, dir. Heiko Schäfer (broadcasted on WDR on March 19, 2010); Trimborn, *Leni Riefenstahl*, 140; Rainer Rother, *Leni Riefenstahl: The Seduction of Genius* (London: Continuum, 2002), 176; Rother, 'Leni Riefenstahl und der absolute Film,' 175–176. For a concise presentation of Zielke's biography and work as filmmaker, see Thomas Tode, 'Willy Zielke,' in *Encyclopedia of the Documentary Film*, ed. Ian Aitken (New York: Routledge, 2006), 1507–1509 with further bibliography.

7 The nearest approximation to such an attempt is the analysis of the prologue by Graham, *Leni Riefenstahl and Olympia*, 41–45, 136–143 and 157–158.

8 For documentation, see Graham, *Leni Riefenstahl and Olympia*, 194–249.

2019 which offers a restoration made by the International Olympic Committee (as part of a larger project of restoring Olympic films),[9] in collaboration with Leni Riefenstahl and her Estate but also with numerous other film archives. For the purposes of my discussion of the film's prologue, this edition stands out from other versions currently in circulation for two reasons: it offers a much higher quality print, and it also features a fuller version of the torch relay section. To my knowledge, very little audio-visual material from the prologue that has survived is not included in this version. First, there is a four-minute outtake from the sequence of the torch relay which suggests an alternative editing of the sequence (this comes from a collection of original nitrate elements of the Library of Congress, and it was donated to the International Olympic Committee for safekeeping in 2006). Second, a few minutes' worth of footage also survives from Zielke's filming of male athletes in the short film entitled *Olympiade 1936: Kameraleute bei der Arbeit* (held in Bundesarchiv, Berlin). It is yet to be seen if the systematic indexing of all film reels in Riefenstahl's Estate by the German Kinemathek, scheduled for completion in the next couple of years, will bring to light new film footage related to the prologue. In interviews conducted in 1983, both Zielke and Riefenstahl claimed independently that, at that time, Zielke's cut of the prologue was still in Riefenstahl's possession.[10] Should his cut emerge, it would make for a surprising find considering Riefenstahl's anxiety about cleaning and adjusting her records and legacy, but it would also allow for a much more systematic comparison of two rather different artistic approaches to the same material. In the absence of such a cut or other film footage, Riefenstahl's and Zielke's different perspectives on the prologue can be gleaned through careful cross-examination of published and especially archival sources, including their autobiographies, interviews, and Zielke's film exposé.

The Making of the Prologue

The filming for the prologue took place in at least four stages: the filming involving archaeological sites (in the opening section and in scenes from the torch

9 *100 Years of Olympic Films: 1912–2012*, The Criterion Collection, 2017, available on DVD, Blu-Ray and via The Criterion Channel.

10 Willy Zielke, typescript of the interview conducted by Cooper C. Graham in Bad Pyrmont, 17–18 May 1983, 2; and Leni Riefenstahl, typescript of the interview conducted by Cooper C. Graham in Munich, 23 May 1983, 7. The typescripts are held at the Moving Image Research Center of the Library of Congress.

relay) took place before the Olympic games, over a few weeks in May 1936 by Zielke (and his film crew) and over a couple of days in late July 1936 by Riefenstahl (with a different film crew), mostly on the Acropolis in Athens and in the Stadium at Delphi.[11] Documentary footage of the torch relay was shot during the initial leg of the torch-relay route in late July 1936 on the Peloponnese, by Riefenstahl.[12] The filming of athletes and dancers and much of the rest of the torch relay was done during or after the Olympic Games, in August–September 1936, at the sand dunes of the Curonian Spit in the Baltic Sea near the Lithuanian border, by Zielke. The shooting of the statue of the discus thrower also took place at the Curonian Spit, with a plaster cast in light grey produced and transported from Italy specifically for the needs of the film.[13] As far as the sequences with the other statues are concerned, it is most likely that they were filmed by Zielke in the Plaster Cast Museum of Classical Sculptures in Munich. The bust of Alexander the Great is the only statue in the prologue from the collections of the Acropolis Museum,[14] and it must have been filmed there. I have not been able to ascertain who designed the opening credits and the animated map of the torch relay, but they would have been produced under Riefenstahl's supervision during the time she devoted to the editing and sound synchronization of the film.[15] In sum, Zielke was more involved in filming the prologue than Riefenstahl. He spent two months in the Munich State Library researching ancient Greece and developing his ideas, and he then spent several weeks in trips to Greece (Athens, Sounion, the Ionian Sea, Delphi) and the Curonian Spit, plus time elsewhere location scouting, before devoting addi-

11 Graham, *Leni Riefenstahl and Olympia*, 42–45 and 56–65.

12 Leni Riefenstahl, *The Sieve of Time: The Memoirs of Leni Riefenstahl* (London: Quartet Books, 1992), 188–189.

13 Willy Zielke, Unpublished autobiography, n.d., 94–95. Typescript held at the Photography Division of the Munich City Museum.

14 Stanley Casson and Dorothy Brooke, *Catalogue of the Acropolis Museum: Sculpture and Architectural Fragments*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921), 232–234.

15 Herbert Windt's musical contribution to the prologue lies outside the scope of this article. It was composed after Riefenstahl's cut was completed, and it needs to be discussed as a response to that cut. For perceptive analysis, see Graham, *Leni Riefenstahl and Olympia*, 173–178; and Celia Applegate, 'To Be or Not to Be Wagnerian: Music in Riefenstahl's Nazi-era Films,' in *Riefenstahl Screened: An Anthology of New Criticism*, eds. Neil Christian Pages, Mary Rhiel, and Ingeborg Majer O'Sickey (London: Bloomsbury, 2008), 179–201. For the use of the prologue in the music video of Rammstein's cover version of the Depeche Mode song 'Stripped' (1998), see Valerie Weinstein, 'Reading Rammstein, Remembering Riefenstahl: "Fascist Aesthetics" and German Popular Culture,' in *Riefenstahl Screened: An Anthology of New Criticism*, eds. Neil Christian Pages, Mary Rhiel, and Ingeborg Majer O'Sickey (London: Bloomsbury, 2008), 130–148.

tional time to producing a fully edited version of the prologue in January 1937.[16] During this period, Riefenstahl had a few meetings with Zielke, she spent a couple of days filming in Olympia, Athens, and Delphi (late July 1936), and a few more days at the Curonian Spit near the end of Zielke's filming schedule (mid-September 1936) but was otherwise preoccupied with the rest of the film.[17] As far as the prologue is concerned, her main contribution seems to have been the re-editing of Zielke's cut over a period of 'two months' between early February 1937 and the original release of the film in the Spring of 1938.[18] That the re-editing of this section of the film took two months may be an exaggeration to show how different her version was from Zielke's but may also be due to real difficulties (conceptual or technical, not least because of Zielke's blending of shots in the process of filming)[19] that also explain the urgency with which she attempted (without success) to get Zielke out of a private psychiatric hospital in the immediate aftermath of his forced sterilization in the summer of 1937.[20] Zielke speaks of how underdeveloped her ideas were, how she would change her mind between their meetings, how he needed to reassure her that his ideas were actually hers so as to get on with the work,[21] and how she destroyed his work: 'you can't fight with a lioness, can you? I shot the antelope, and she ate it up'.[22] Riefenstahl speaks of how his cut of the prologue was far from ready and in need of much additional work: 'it was completely unusable. The shots were fantastic, but I couldn't use the cut. I had to cut everything myself. . . . What he got was all messed up'.[23]

As it currently stands, the prologue consists of six sections: ancient ruins and monuments, classical statues, male athletes, female dancers, torch relay. It can also be seen as consisting of three sections: material remains of antiquity (ruins and monuments followed by statues), bodies (male athletes and female dancers), torch relay (from ancient Olympia to present day Berlin). Equally important as the question of how to divide the prologue is the question of how its sections are linked with one another, how they are linked internally, and also

16 Zielke, Unpublished autobiography, *passim*. See also the material collected in his 'Prolog, *Olympia* ein Film: Historisches Material gesamelt von Willy Zielke,' 1936, typescript from Leni Riefenstahl's Estate held at the Manuscript Department of the Berlin State Library.

17 Riefenstahl, *The Sieve of Time*, 184–204 and Zielke, Unpublished autobiography, *passim*.

18 Riefenstahl, Interview, 7–8.

19 Gladitz, *Leni Riefenstahl*, 167, 201–203. Riefenstahl, *The Sieve of Time*, 205: 'cutting it was so difficult that I nearly gave up'.

20 Gladitz, *Leni Riefenstahl*, 198–203.

21 Zielke, Unpublished autobiography, 33–34, 45, 66, etc.

22 Zielke, Interview, 1–2.

23 Riefenstahl, Interview, 7–8.

how they are linked with what comes before (opening credits) and what comes after (opening ceremony). As far as the editing is concerned, some of it must have been done by Zielke during filming with the technique of double exposure; this must be the case in the sequences of ruins and monuments and in the sequences of classical statues. Zielke must have also edited some of it on the editing table. One such scene, discussed by him in a detailed manner that leaves no doubt about his role in it, is the transformation of the statue of the Discus Thrower into a modern discus thrower (played by the German decathlete Erwin Huber).[24] Much of the rest of the editing of the surviving version of the prologue, and its overall structure, must have been undertaken by Riefenstahl. This would have all been done after filming, on the editing table, and it must have included the credits, the brief sequence of the clouds, much of the torch relay, the animated map of the torch relay, the arrival of the Olympic flame in Berlin, and probably the rearrangement of other sequences, including the ones of athletes and dancers. As Zielke puts it, Riefenstahl made the prologue 'smaller, shorter. . . . I made it more fairy-tale-like, dream-like, and she made it more factual. . . . She had this spirit of struggle: one thing after another, continuation, continuation, speed—she had that in her. But she didn't need that. The prologue is something imaginary in itself, it has no tempo, it's centuries long, Greece, soul, mythology. And I cut it like that, so dreamlike.'[25]

Opening Credits

The credits serve several functions. At a most basic level, the text introduces key information about the film (title, makers, purpose), while the framing or background images introduce themes that are central to the narrative to come: athletics, victory celebrations, different kinds of sports, music, and, at a more general level, bodies in movement. Both lettering and images, however, are also instrumental in establishing the idea of the film as a monument, as an architectural construct built to last, as a temple complete with friezes and inscriptions. Both lettering and images show how the true value of the documentary narrative about to begin seeks validation from the true value of the 'trace'.[26] This

24 Zielke, Unpublished autobiography, 125–127; Zielke, Interview, 11.

25 Zielke, Interview, 2.

26 On the concept of the 'trace' and its connotations of inscription, absence-presence, and evidence as related to photography and cartography, see Giuseppe Fidotta, 'Animated Maps and the Power of the Trace,' *Necsus: European Journal of Media Studies* 3, no. 1 (2014): 267–298.

is most obviously the case with the lettering and reliefs as inscribed in stone. However, it also applies to the documentary value of photography in its etymological sense as 'drawing in light.' In the case of the lettering, the adoption of the inscription is foregrounded as a visual strategy: the decision to make it look ancient and monumental is aspirational—it invites reflection on the film as a modern artwork that wants to look like and be remembered through the materiality and expressive means of a different art and through the communicative practices and values of a different time.[27] The reliefs that act as a frame and background for the lettering can be seen as supporting and enhancing the idea of the film as an ancient Greek monument. By contrast to the lettering, however, they also serve another function. As remains of the classical past to which the film gives access, they appear to illustrate the film's generic identity as a documentary. Nevertheless, it is precisely through techniques of inscription that information is added to, or removed from, the photographic surface of the reliefs on display, to make them reminiscent of classical works while also altering their meaning. For instance, the very last image of the credits (figure 1) looks like a reproduction of Block 12 from the frieze on the west side of the Parthenon (figure 2). Upon closer inspection, however, a number of subtle differences come to view: the raised arm of the figure with the short chiton in the middle (most likely a herald) is made to hold a wreath; the outline of the horse bending its head has been erased, and what is left of its wavy mane is made to look like the branch of a palm tree. The naked figure on the left is no longer a horseman resting his hands on his staff, but an athletic victor about to be crowned. As a result of traces removed or added, a composition that looks authentic is thoroughly repurposed. What looks like an accurate reproduction of an ancient frieze is based on practices of visual manipulation that derive their rhetorical force from modes of inscription they thoroughly redefine.[28]

27 On film form conceptualized as architecture, see Riefenstahl quoted in Graham, *Leni Riefenstahl and Olympia*, 155.

28 It is plausible that the choice of images for the credits and perhaps also their alteration involved Walter Hege, an established architecture photographer employed by the German Archaeological Institute in Athens in 1928 to photograph the west frieze of the Parthenon in situ. Many of his photographs, including photographs of Block 12, were published in the *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung* 17, 1929, and in an influential volume: Walter Hege, *Die Akropolis* (Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1930). Although Hege was one of the contributors to the filming of Riefenstahl's *Olympia*, his involvement appears to have been only in the shooting of sports events and in the organization of classical lectures. There is no evidence that I have come across that he was among the film crew that travelled to Greece in May 1936 and July 1936 or that he contributed to the design of the credits.

FIGURE 1 Final image from the opening credits of Riefenstahl's *Olympia*. Frame grab from the International Olympic Committee's restored version of the film in *100 Years of Olympic Films: 1912–2012*
THE CRITERION COLLECTION, 2017

FIGURE 2 Block 12, West frieze, Parthenon
SOURCE: HTTPS://WWW.THEACROPOLISMUSEUM.GR/EN/PARTHENON-WEST-FRIEZE-BLOCK-12-XII

Clouds

Just after the credits and before the opening sequences of ruins and monuments, *Olympia* begins with a brief sequence in which the camera is descending through the clouds. The spectator is transported to ancient Greece by air, through skies that, by contrast to the animated map of the return flight (on which more below), afford no visibility of the journey. Riefenstahl's initial vision for the prologue was something resembling the painting *Isle of the Dead* by the Swiss symbolist Arnold Böcklin, a 'dream picture' (according to the painter himself, who produced several versions between 1880 and 1901) featuring a rocky islet surrounded by dark water and being approached by a small rowing boat.[29] Zielke's vision for the beginning of the prologue was rather different, but in keeping with the prominence of the sea and the rocks in Böcklin's painting: it involved the surf of the sea splashing up against the rocks and the marble columns of Parthenon emerging from the foam of the surf.[30] The opening of the prologue as we have it does away with the familiarity of a painting that according to the novelist Nabokov, writing in 1936, could be 'found in every Berlin home'.[31] It also does away with Zielke's 'lyrical' and 'meditative' (his words) symbolism of Aphrodite's resurrection as the marble columns of the Acropolis: 'Venus rises and freezes into sculpture'.[32] What replaces the stillness and solemnity of Böcklin's seascape but also the dynamism of Zielke's vision of the sea surf, are the clouds. What replaces the journey by boat and the emergence of Acropolis-as-Aphrodite from the sea, is the descent from the skies. This brief sequence revisits Riefenstahl's own experience of her round trip from Berlin to Athens by a specially commissioned plane (for the purposes of filming the Olympic flame lighting ceremony and the beginning of the torch relay).[33] As such it instrumentalizes a glamorous mode of transportation which makes technology liberating but also invisible, at the service of the passenger for whom the journey matters less than the destination. In addition to that, however, it also revisits Hitler's approaching Nurnberg in Riefenstahl's previous

29 As reported by Zielke, Interview, 1–2. The quote from Böcklin can be found in John Culshaw, *Rachmaninov: The Man and his Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949), 73.

30 As detailed in Willy Zielke, 'Prolog Exposé zum *Olympia*-Film,' typescript from Leni Riefenstahl's Estate held at the Manuscript Department of the Berlin State Library, 1936.

31 Vladimir Nabokov, *Despair* (London: Penguin, [1936] 2000), 56.

32 Zielke, 'Prolog Exposé,' 1.

33 For a photograph of Riefenstahl's specially commissioned plane for her return flight from Berlin to Athens via Belgrade, see a picture from the Belgrade daily *Vreme* reproduced in Srdan Radaković, 'Another Footnote to the History of Riefenstahl's *Olympia*,' *Film History: An International Journal* 32, no. 2 (2020): 107.

film *Triumph of the Will* (1935). Although the claim that *Olympia* bears similarities with *Triumph of the Will* is often made, the similarities in the way the two films begin have gone unnoticed. Writing of the opening scenes of *Triumph of the Will*, Kracauer notes how 'Hitler's airplane flying towards Nurnberg through banks of marvellous clouds' must be seen as 'a reincarnation of All-Father Odin, whom the ancient Aryans heard raging with his hosts over the virgin forests'.[34] In *Olympia*, the descent from the skies is not that by Hitler approaching Nurnberg. The airplane is no longer visible within the frame. The clouds are less 'marvellous' (in Kracauer's formulation) and more opaque. But if the harmony of politics, technology, and nature is less foregrounded, this brief sequence at the beginning of *Olympia* replays a mythological structure that can nonetheless be effective even without the amount of attention and explicitness that it was given in *Triumph of the Will*. Being transported to ancient Greece is conceptualized through narrative conventions that, even without familiarity with Riefenstahl's visual depiction of national socialism through Norse mythology, can allow us to situate the prologue of *Olympia* within technological, imperial modernity. 'Some things belong next to each other and time is only a mist that makes it hard for our eyes to see what they do':[35] Nietzsche's claim about the proximity between Wagner and Aeschylus is worth relating to the function of the clouds in the opening sequence of *Olympia*. Here, as in *Triumph of the Will*, the clouds evoke 'a Wagnerian twilight of the gods and the dawning of a new age'.[36] As the mist of time, their role is not to obscure close proximity (as they do in Nietzsche) but to assert the close proximity between ancient Greece and the present of the film. Smokescreens were part of aerial military strategy as early as 1915:[37] in Olympia, the clouds (to be followed by more clouds, haze, mist, smoke, veils, and shadows in the sequences that follow) do not just create a 'mood'[38] but also become part of 'infrastructural concealment,'[39] driven ideologically.

34 Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*, revised ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, [1947] 2019), 290.

35 Quoted in Curt von Westernhagen, *Wagner: A Biography*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 99.

36 Dagmar C.G. Lorenz, *Nazi Characters in German Propaganda and Literature* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018), 79.

37 Frederick A. Talbot, *Aeroplanes and Dirigibles of War* (London: W. Heinemann, 1915), 172.

38 From a contemporary description of the shooting of the film quoted in Graham, *Leni Riefenstahl and Olympia*, 43–44.

39 Lisa Parks, 'Technostruggles and the Satellite Dish: A Populist Approach to Infrastructure,' in *Cultural Technologies: The Shaping of Culture in Media and Society*, ed. Göran Bolin (London: Routledge, 2012), 64–84, followed by John Durham Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds: Toward a Philosophy of Elemental Media* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 35.

Ruins and Monuments

The next section begins with tracking shots of rocks, grass, and monuments that gradually emerge as identifiable monuments: the Parthenon and the Erechtheum. They are not a backdrop to the plot, as is the case with the use of the Acropolis in feature films since the early 1920s (such as *The Gypsy of Athens*, dir. A. Madras, 1922). Nor are they shot in the documentary style of newsreels and of photography (and related technologies) in which the Acropolis had been in circulation for several decades.[40] In fact, these sequences do not document the Acropolis as a site—as an architectural space or a space of ruins. Nor do they feature the city of Athens, whether modern or ancient, as the location of the Acropolis. The sequences are not about the geographical, cultural, and historical specificity of the ruins on display, nor of the Parthenon and the Erechtheum as specific monuments. What they offer is a utopia rather than heterotopia, an unreal place rather than an actual one.[41] This is an engagement with the aesthetic of the ruin in cinematic terms, a studied composition of the monumentality and sublimity of ancient Greece in terms which are simultaneously broader and more subjective. On the one hand, monumentality and sublimity are experienced as evocative ruins in a corporeal manner. Through soft focus and the use of smoke, they are spectacularized, with naturalistic details being suppressed (figure 3). Through a repertoire of devices pointing to the 'New Vision' photography of the 1920s and 1930s,[42] they are also rendered surprising and novel: oblique or up and down angles, fragmentary close-ups, spatial depth effects, and experimentation with the optical and expressive properties of light and the structural lines of architecture. Alongside this subjective, hallucinatory encounter with the Acropolis, however, we also find a historically more ambitious and politically more regressive rework-

40 On photography, see esp. Matthias Harder, *Walter Hege und Herbert List: Griechische Tempelarchitektur in photographischer Inszenierung* (Berlin: Reimer, 2002), and the collections of essays in Philip Carabott, Yannis Hamilakis, and Eleni Papargyriou, eds., *Camera Graeca: Photographs, Narratives, Materialities* (London: Ashgate, 2015), and Demetres Damaskos and Demetres Plantzos, eds., *A Singular Antiquity: Archaeology and Hellenic Identity in Twentieth-Century Greece* (Athens: Benaki Museum, 2008).

41 On the Foucauldian distinction between utopias and heterotopias, see Michel Foucault and Jay Miskowiec, 'Of Other Spaces,' Diacritics 16, no. 1 (1986): 22–27.

42 On the persistence of 'New Vision' in photography and design under National Socialism, see Rolf Sachsse, 'Dark Sky, White Costumes: The Janus State of Modern Photography in Germany 1933–1945,' in *Photography in the Third Reich: Art, Physiognomy and Propaganda*, ed. Christopher Webster (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2021), 31–57, https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0202.01.

FIGURE 3 Production still by Willy Zielke
SOURCE: UNATTRIBUTED PUBLICATION IN LENI RIEFENSTAHL, *OLYMPIA: DOCUMENTATION FOR THE OLYMPIA FILM* (COLOGNE: TASCHEN, 2002), 30, WITH THE CAPTION 'OUT OF THE PAST'

ing of antiquity. Views of the Parthenon are prepared for and juxtaposed with views of stones on the ground and overgrown grass (figure 4). Zielke is not the first modern visitor of the Acropolis to pay attention to the grass and the broken columns scattered around the Parthenon, but such details enter the film not as historical debris of bygone eras or as signs of modern neglect—as Zielke himself presents them in his autobiography—but as traces from the beginning of time.[43] The juxtaposition that is set up in these sequences, then, is not between a glorious past and a pale present, but rather between a glorious past and its (imagined) origins. In other words, monumentality and sublimity are not portrayed as decaying into heaps of stones and nature in a Romantic manner. Rather, they are seen as emerging out of a misty landscape of stones and grass associated with the dawn of time. Quite literally, the scene demonstrates how cinema can reverse the process of discontinuity and destruction of ruination to give shape to the concept of historical continuity and progress.

43 See, for instance, Zielke, Unpublished autobiography, 42: 'Among the overturned and broken remains of a splendid culture, only grass sprouts today'. For the role of such details in photographs of the Acropolis before Zielke, see, for instance, Walter Hege's Parthenon growing out of a rocky field of rubble in Harder, *Walter Hege und Herbert List*, 235, fig. 91 (with comments in 243).

FIGURE 4 Production still by Willy Zielke
SOURCE: UNATTRIBUTED PUBLICATION IN LENI RIEFENSTAHL, *OLYMPIA: DOCUMENTATION FOR THE OLYMPIA FILM* (COLOGNE: TASCHEN, 2002), 32, WITH THE CAPTION 'RUINS'

By replacing one kind of history (discontinuous, of decline) with another (of continuity and progress), it reverses and restructures linear time itself.[44]

A brief comparison between Zielke's approach of the Acropolis and those of three of his contemporaries is illuminating. The first is Riefenstahl herself who, with Heinz von Jaworsky as her cameraman, filmed the northern and western porticos of the Parthenon in late July 1936. The very brief glimpses we catch of her Parthenon are part of the torch relay section of the prologue, and they come across as a functional ornament[45] in the background of the action which is all about the passing of the Olympic flame from one runner to another. The second is the Soviet film director and theorist Sergei Eisenstein who discusses the Acropolis in his essay 'Montage and Architecture,' composed between 1937 and 1940.[46] Eisenstein's approach shows appreciation of

44 On the similarities in the temporalities of ruin and cinema, see Johannes von Moltke, 'Ruin Cinema,' in *Ruins of Modernity*, eds. Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 395–417.

45 On the suspension of the opposition between decorative ornament and functional structure in popular culture and film, see Sigfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, [1963] 1995).

46 Sergei Eisenstein, 'Montage and Architecture,' in *Sergei Eisenstein: Selected Works*, vol. 2: *Towards a Theory of Montage*, eds. Michael Glenny and Richard Taylor (London: I.B. Tauris, [1937–1940] 2010), 59–81.

the Acropolis as an ensemble to be explored sequentially, through a walking tour, in a move that traces the concept of visual continuity from his own cinema of montage back to earlier film criticism (Vachel Lindsay), the history of architecture (Auguste Choisy's analysis of the Acropolis), and, ultimately, textual accounts of visiting the Acropolis and the hodological perspective of ancient ritual practice itself. In Zielke's approach, the wandering of the camera on the ground does not follow Acropolis as a unified architectural project. Rather, it creates a sense of fragmentation, disorientation, and abstraction. It is preoccupied less with the specificity of the Acropolis as an architectural project and the histories of its interpretation and more with its symbolic power to conjure associations regarding a whole culture. The spatial coherence of the Acropolis is replaced by the temporal continuity of civilizational progress. I would finally turn to Sigmund Freud who, writing just a few months before Zielke's filming, in January 1936, analyzes his experience of visiting the Acropolis in terms of 'derealization,' anxiety, and memory disturbance.[47] By contrast to Freud's 'derealization', Zielke's dream-like experience of the Parthenon is a vision that is totalizing, encompassing, as it does, Greek civilization in its entirety.

Statues in the Museum

This section takes the spectator from the open-air ruins and monuments to statues in the museum. This is not the museum as a repository of humanity's history, where statues are on display as aesthetic objects from bygone eras, 'now only stones from which the living soul has flown' as Hegel puts in the context of his discussion of the necessity of the historical process.[48] Rather, the dark, misty, private space inhabited by the statues makes the museum an environment where artworks transcend classificatory and chronological distinctions (no attempt made to separate the classical Greek from the Hellenistic and the Roman, or the original from the copy) but also their materiality, viewed as people of old times who are brought back to life. This is not the museum that serves the aesthetic education of the modern individual who sets out to own

47 Sigmund Freud, 'A Disturbance of Memory on the Acropolis,' in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, [1936] 1964), 244–245.

48 G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1807] 1977), 455–456 discussed in David Roberts, *The Total Work of Art in European Modernism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 51–52.

the cultural legacy of the past. Rather, it is 'tied to the revolutionary-romantic idea of a refoundation and regeneration of society, espoused by Wagner and Nietzsche'.[49] Moreover, what we have here is not 'living statues' as in the performance arts, literature, or psychoanalysis, where marble coming to life comes face to face with a living and longing observer.[50] Instead, attention is drawn to the surfaces of the statues—presented as looking, breathing, perspiring, desiring. The sense of sight is certainly important, but even more important is the sense of touch. If the sequences of ruins and monuments were about a subjectivity that is disembodied, manifest in contemplation (even if combined with amazement) and mediated through an ancient bust of Alexander the Great (the only human figure present), here subjectivity is also at a distance from the materiality of the human body (we are dealing with stone artefacts as if they were made of flesh) but nevertheless foregrounded in its association with tactility and corporeal needs and desires. In other words, here we are dealing with a different aesthetic, that is orientated less towards contemplation and vision and more towards corporality, tactility, and the sensual. The statues at play, as actors engaging in a social action or performance, convey a 'unifying experience of communal presence and fusion' that breaks down the distinction between past and present, viewing object and spectator, stone and flesh. They can be seen through a hermeneutics that, as David Roberts has shown in his study of the 'total artwork', can be associated with 'a hermeneutics of participation (Gadamer), presence (Gumbrecht), or performance (Alexander)' that 'stands as the antithesis of the hermeneutics of high culture, which revolves around the concept of the artwork as objectivation'.[51]

49 Roberts, *Total Work of Art*, 53.

50 Lynda Nead, *The Haunted Gallery: Painting, Photography, Film c. 1900* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007).

51 Roberts, *Total Work of Art*, 260, referring to Hans-Georg Gadamer, 'The Festive Character of Theater,' in *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 12–49; Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, 'Production of Presence, Interspersed with Absence: A Modernist View on Music, Libretti, and Staging,' in *Music and the Aesthetics of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005) 343–355; and Jeffrey C. Alexander, 'Cultural Pragmatics: Social Performance between Ritual and Strategy,' in *Social Performance: Symbolic Action, Cultural Pragmatics, and Ritual*, eds. Jeffrey C. Alexander, Bernhard Giesen and Jason L. Mast (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 29–90.

Bodies

The young, white, Aryan bodies on display in this section of the prologue have attracted much scholarly attention.[52] The opening of the section with the *Discus Thrower* by Myron that comes back to life has also attracted some attention, not least because of the political background of Hitler's acquisition of a well-known version of the statue from Italy during the time the film was being made.[53] What should we make of the section as a section though? The appeal of male athletes and female dancers on screen is not due to their ability to impersonate in the way actors do; nor is it due to their projection of an onscreen persona in the manner of film stars, or star athletes. Individuals are de-individualized to become bodies. Bodies then lose their specificity in seriality, in the group, and in close-ups of individual limbs. They then also lose their materiality in their powerful or gracious movement, movement that lacks specific goals and is linked to the elemental power of stone and fire, the monumentality of sculpture or the symbolism of fire.[54] The body is liberated from 'the bourgeois structures of clothing,' but it is then trapped in the coldness of the marble, the all-consuming power of the flame, the fantasies of unfulfilled desire, fascination with something uninhabitable rather than security or belonging.[55] If male athletes are sculpted artworks that come to life, female dancers are what the Olympic flame is made out of. If men are given a genealogy, women, identified as sea nymphs or temple priestesses, in discussions of the prologue by both Zielke and Riefenstahl,[56] are devoid of a genealogy and are assigned instead the role of serving the Olympic flame, being consumed by it as willing sacrificial victims or as fuel. The sequence upholds gender roles of male power versus female grace. Men are displayed as straining and striving, head

52 See Daniel Wildmann, 'Desired Bodies: Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia*, Aryan Masculinity and the Classical Body,' in *Brill's Companion to the Classics, Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany*, eds. Helen Roche and Kyriakos Demetriou (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018), 60–81, with much of the relevant bibliography.

53 On Hitler's acquisition of the Massimo-Lancellotti Discobolus (Roman copy of the Greek original), see Raimund Wünsche, *Glyptothek, Munich: Masterpieces of Greek and Roman Sculpture* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2007), 204–206.

54 See Georg Seesslen, 'Blood and Glamour,' in *Riefenstahl Screened: An Anthology of New Criticism*, eds. Neil Christian Pages, Mary Rhiel, and Ingeborg Majer O'Sickey (London: Bloomsbury, 2008), 21: 'The man must be sacrificed. He must be made less and less real. The human being becomes the body, the body becomes a sculpture, the sculpture is made into a war monument, the monument becomes an eternal repetition of the man as the masses, which then leads from the masses to the Führer'.

55 Seesslen, 'Blood and Glamour,' 22.

56 Zielke, Interview, 2–3, 5; Zielke, Unpublished autobiography, 87, 98.

held high, engaging in activities involving props, visible as full figures in a landscape, defined by their muscularity, orienting our vision. Women are presented with their bodies outlined as soft and round, lost in the multitude, reduced to individual body parts, especially arms whose waving takes its cue from the arms of the last male athlete, before it then blends in with the movement of the grass in the wind and prepares for the flickering flames of the fire that follows. Such hierarchical oppositions, accentuated by Riefenstahl's reversal of the order in which Zielke filmed these sequences,[57] cast the female director in the role of the mother raising the spectator as a child into the symbolic. No less important than that, however, is that the male athletes, replaced in quick succession, come across as no less dispensable than their female counterparts: like them, they are reduced to raw material, to instrumental use. If women are ethereal fuel that feeds the idea of the Olympic fire, men are links in a serial assembly of connected pieces that flicker for a moment and then disappear—exactly like the torch relay runners in the section that follows. In both cases, we are dealing with a type of self-sacrifice or substitution that is cast as redemptive, beautiful, and even euphoric because of being at the service not of the community but of an idea. This is an example of the Fascist sublime and its fascination with death and sacrifice, 'the total rejection and negation of the values of bourgeois society in the name of the implacable absolute'.[58] David Roberts could be speaking specifically of *Olympia* when discussing how the 'transfiguring reversal of death into the highest form of life elevates sacrifice to the supreme value of a heroic cult that acquired all the trappings of a state religion in Fascism'.[59] No other reader of this section of the prologue of *Olympia* brings out the violence of this imagery as effectively as the British poet Tony Harrison. His film-poem *Prometheus* (1998) revisits this imagery of transformation through the staging of two processes: the melting down of a male Chorus of coal miners for the production of the statue of Prometheus and the deep freezing of a group of fish-factory workers for the production of the statues that constitute the film's singing sea nymphs. In *Olympia*, art and human labour are kept apart. By contrast, Harrison's *Prometheus* foregrounds and problematizes the violence of the transformation of human labour into art, the 'barbarity of gleaning artistic profit out of horror'.[60]

57 For the filming of the sequences of the female dancers before those of the male athletes, see Zielke, Unpublished autobiography, 118.

58 Roberts, *Total Work of Art*, 246.

59 Ibid.

60 Antony Rowland, *Tony Harrison and the Holocaust* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001), 43.

Olympic Fire

Riefenstahl describes her experience of the lighting of the Olympic fire in ancient Olympia as follows: 'Reality surpassed my worst expectations. Cars and motorcycles marred the landscape. The altar where the Olympic fire was to be ignited looked duller than dull. Nor did the Greek youth in athletic garb quite fit the image that I had in mind. I was bitterly disappointed'.[61] In the ceremony that took place in the archaeological site of ancient Olympia in late July 1936, the role of priestesses was to ignite the Olympic flame with the light of the sun, whose rays were concentrated by a concave glass reflector, and to transport it from the ruins of the temple of Hera into Olympia's sacred enclosure where an altar was erected as the starting post for the torch relay.[62] In the film, being at the service of an idea is radically redefined through a completely new ritual. Whereas in the ceremony held in ancient Olympia the purity of the Olympic fire comes from the sun (with the help of the Zeiss optical equipment firm[63]), in the reconstructed ceremony of the film the purity of the fire comes from the consummation of the female dancers whose waving hands become its flames. In Zielke's exposé, the dancers of an ecstatic ancient dance that follows a victory at the Pentathlon vanish between white columns which in turn are engulfed by the roaring surf (which 'greedily licks and covers them'[64] in a sequence meant to echo and reverse the emergence of white columns from the surf in the opening sequence of the prologue as envisaged by Zielke). By contrast, in the prologue as we have it, it is the modern dancers-as-ancient-priestesses that vanish, this time consumed by a different force of nature: fire. Unlike the 'sinister and gloomy fire-magic made technically possible by color film', as Walter Benjamin puts it in a note on Disney's Mickey Mouse films in the winter of 1935–1936,[65] this sequence offers a vision of fire in black and white which comes across as solemn, auspicious, and celebratory, associated with the light of truth and knowledge rather than the darkness of magic. It is attractive

61 Riefenstahl, *The Sieve of Time*, 188.

62 Relevant film footage can be found at '1936, Αφή ολυμπιακής φλόγας, ολυμπιακοί αγώνες, ομιλία Χίτλερ,' *Youtube*, April 22, 2015, accessed June 15, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U8uKZCvBLAw.

63 Anton Rippon, *Hitler's Olympics: The Story of the 1936 Nazi Games* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2012), 105.

64 Zielke, 'Prolog Exposé,' 4.

65 Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version,' in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, vol. 3: *1935–1938*, eds. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, [1936] 2002), 130.

FIGURE 5 Production still by Willy Zielke
SOURCE: UNATTRIBUTED PUBLICATION IN LENI RIEFENSTAHL, *OLYMPIA: DOCUMENTATION FOR THE OLYMPIA FILM* (COLOGNE: TASCHEN, 2002), 56, WITH THE CAPTION 'THE TORCH IS LIT'

not for being mysterious and threatening but for its visibility and constancy. If, for Disney, fire conveys 'the dream of a flowing diversity of forms,'[66] for Riefenstahl it conveys a very different dream of stability and permanence, of destiny, fully aligned with national socialism's symbolic language where fire is associated with 'rebirth and awakening'[67] and where the sun and light are seen as symbols for the 'National Socialist idea' itself.[68] If, in Disney, the subjectification of fire is an example of his animism, 'the pleasure of awakening life in an inert object,'[69] in Riefenstahl the idealization of fire serves a different kind of pleasure, masochistic, involving the willing objectification of moving subjects that act as raw materials to keep the fire alive. In case there was any uncertainty about the sacrificial nature of the ritual, the Olympic fire appears on top of what is constructed, specifically for the needs of the film on the sand dunes of the Baltic Sea, as an altar (figure 5).[70] This altar is reminiscent of the stone

66 Eisenstein quoted in Daniel Mourenza, 'Walter Benjamin, Film and the "Anthropological-Materialist" Project' (PhD Dissertation, University of Leeds, 2014), 221.
67 Wildmann, 'Desired Bodies,' 75.
68 Ibid.
69 Eisenstein quoted in Mourenza, 'Walter Benjamin,' 220.
70 Zielke, Unpublished autobiography, 101.

altars used in the summer of 1936 in both ancient Olympia and in Berlin (especially the one in Lustgarten, where the fire was to be guarded by members of the Hitler Youth until brought to the Olympic stadium for the opening of the games),[71] but, unlike them, the altar of the film is *also* a column stump ('monumental and grandiose' comments Zielke), and as such it resembles a giant candle or a tree stump. As well as consuming burnt offerings, this is an altar whose own stone acquires organic qualities, consumed like wood or wax. The blending of art and ritual acquires a sacrificial tone that engulfs in its symbolism not only the bodies of the female dancers but also the function of the altar itself.

Torch Relay

The torch relay consists of three sections: a section set in antiquity, a section with original film footage from the torch relay of the summer of 1936, and a section where the route of the torch relay from ancient Olympia to Berlin is displayed on an animated map. For Zielke, the prologue would end with the discus thrower scene which would serve as an 'optical bridge'[72] to the Olympic stadium in Berlin. The slow transition from the ancient statue to the modern discus thrower would be accompanied by a jump cut, a film technique associated with forward movement in time:

> The intention is to give the impression that the stone discus thrower is awakening from his centuries-long rigidity, is moving with laboriousness, is becoming more and more alive, is turning in circles, is lunging, and is hurling the discus far away. This decisive opening of the prologue would create a visual bridge to the main part of the film—the beginning of the Olympic Games in Berlin. As soon as the discus leaves the hand of the stone athlete, it lands in the stadium of Berlin—in the middle of the sand of the arena . . .[73]

Riefenstahl replaces Zielke's jump cut with the torch relay, a drawn-out transition between antiquity and the present day which lasts several minutes. In this

71 For the altars used in ancient Olympia and in Berlin's Lustgarten, see the photographs in USHMM, '1936 Olympics: Torch Relay,' *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, accessed June 12, 2022, https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/gallery/1936-olympics-torch-relay.

72 Zielke, Unpublished autobiography, 79.

73 Ibid., 126.

transition, a sense of progress and of continuity between past and present is achieved through the conceptualization of time as space. What looks like linear and forward movement, from the lighting of the Olympic fire at ancient Olympia to modern Berlin, is in fact a collage of sequences shot several weeks apart, some by Zielke and others by Riefestahl, which, geographically, take us from the Curonian Spit in the Baltic Sea to the Greek countryside between Delphi and Athens, the Stadium in Delphi, the Parthenon at Athens, the countryside near Delphi, and finally, to the original torch relay near Olympia. The final section of the torch relay allows the spectator to follow the progression of the Olympic fire from ancient Olympia to Berlin with the help of an animated map. The prologue of *Olympia* does not feature the moving arrows of a military attack, nor the broadening out of coloured surfaces of conquest on display in other film documentaries of the 1920s and 1930s (visual effects to become a staple of war films during the Second World War).[74] It does, however, feature a winding line passing over the map that marks an itinerary, and it combines it with photography, typography, graphic design, and photomontage. In doing so, it provides a good example of how animated maps let the territory appear as something that the spectator 'can capture at a glance, an intuitive presence rather than a distant absence'.[75] As Giuseppe Fidotta argues, animated maps and film documentaries have a strong correlation: both of them are preoccupied with the idea of the trace and both of them have a peculiar relation to reality and the truth, displaying an ability to 'respond to a typical 19th century belief fostered by positivist, modernist, and colonial ideologies that asserts the possibility of knowing, seeing, and charting all aspects of the world'.[76] If descending through clouds at the beginning of the film mystifies the transportation of the spectator from the present to ancient Greece, the way back 'home' to the opening ceremony of the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin gives full access to expanses that, as Kracauer notes for the use of visual effects in Nazi film propaganda, 'resemble areas seen from an airplane—an impression produced by the camera always panning, rising and diving'.[77] This is a flight from ancient Greece to modern Berlin that, like the images of ancient reliefs in the opening credits, exercises its rhetorical force through a display of the tenets of accuracy, clarity, and transparency. It is instructive to turn again to Tony Harrison's *Prometheus* for the way in which it reverses this depiction of effortless

74 Examples in Fidotta, 'Animated Maps'.

75 Ibid., 270.

76 Ibid., 268.

77 Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, 279, building on the seminal work of Hans Speier, 'Magic Geography,' *Social Research* 8, no. 3 (1941): 310–330.

movement across time and space: a statue of Prometheus, alongside a group of marginalized individuals and their tormentors, traverse the same territory on foot and by car, rather than by plane, and in the opposite direction, from Germany to Greece, problematizing issues of mobility across national, linguistic, and cultural boundaries of a divided Europe.[78]

Conclusion: Art, Solid and Liquid

The aims of the analysis undertaken above have been threefold: to provide the first detailed reading of the ancient Greece of the prologue of *Olympia* as it emerges out of a focus on individual shots, sequences, and scenes; to show how, despite our reliance on secondary sources, we can address in a head-on manner the question of the prologue as the work not of Riefenstahl's singular genius but of her problematic collaboration with the less well-known but crucially important Zielke; and finally, to situate the aesthetic and ideological work performed in each section of the prologue within the broader artistic context of the late 1930s. By way of conclusion, I want to tease out, however briefly and schematically, the wider implications of my analysis, specifically regarding the dynamics of collaboration at work in the making of the prologue and the resulting depiction of ancient Greece.

The making of the prologue of *Olympia* shows the conditions under which artistic autonomy circulates in National Socialism as promise, reality, and myth. For Riefenstahl, it is a promise she holds before her many artistic collaborators, a script she herself performs as editor at the editing table and as head of a large team of cameramen, technicians, and assistants, but also what she reconstitutes as a myth in a discursive universe that spans over several decades and across countless iterations in interviews, statements, and memoirs: of art resisting politics, of the lonely artistic genius pursuing beauty against all odds, in defiance of, and through resistance of, all pressures from the male-dominated world of politics. For Zielke, on the other hand, artistic autonomy begins as a dream of creative freedom, financial security, and human and technical resources that becomes a reality. As a reality, however, it quickly blends with fear, anxiety, distrust, state-controlled moral prudence, surveillance, and paranoia; Zielke's autobiography is full of relevant examples. The dissolution of the artist as producer is not specific to National Socialism—it can be traced

78 Pantelis Michelakis, *Greek Tragedy on Screen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 164–168.

from Soviet constructivism to the new economy becoming dominant since the 1970s.[79] Similarly, the issue of commodification of art, of culture industry as described by Horkheimer and Adorno in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*,[80] manifests itself in liberal capitalism in all its different guises. In the case of *Olympia*, however, the invisibility of outsourced labour does not limit itself to Zielke's understanding of his role as performing personal services for a customer (as indicated by the pseudonym he uses in his autobiography, 'Viktor Valet'). Nor does it limit itself to strategies of resistance or to susceptibility to different processes of control. For Zielke, involvement in *Olympia* had consequences for the integrity of his work, for his artistic career, and for his position in the history of cinema and photography. Even more tangibly, it had consequences for his mental and physical integrity: suffering from persecution anxiety, panic attacks, and ultimately a mental breakdown at the time of delivering his cut of the prologue, he was taken to a psychiatric ward, misdiagnosed with schizophrenia, forcibly sterilized by surgical means (in line with Germany's compulsory sterilization law of 1933 called 'the law for the prevention of progeny with hereditary defects'), kept in the ward for five and half years, and then released under guardianship, through an intervention by Riefenstahl, only to return to the set of her next film project, *Tiefland*.[81] One does not need to ponder much over the timing of Zielke's forceful hospitalization and sterilization or over the timing of Riefenstahl's intervention to see that, from the precarity of labour in the field of art to the vulnerability of bodies racialized through eugenicist practices,[82] the distance is alarmingly close.

What are the implications of this troubled collaboration for the vision of ancient Greece on display in the prologue of *Olympia*? For Benjamin, the social significance of film and the power of film as work of art in National Socialism amount to an engagement with the cultural heritage that is as much a 'resurrection' as it is 'destructive, cathartic': replication is based on a process of 'detachment' and of 'substitution' amounting to what he describes as 'liquidation': 'The social significance of film, even—and especially—in its most positive form, is inconceivable without its destructive, cathartic side: the liq-

79 Alberto López Cuenca, 'Artistic Labour, Enclosure and the New Economy,' *Afterall: A Journal of Art Context and Enquiry* 30 (2012): 5–13.

80 Max Horkheimer and Theodore W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Continuum, [1947]1982).

81 For documentation and analysis, see Gladitz, *Leni Riefenstahl*.

82 On bioprecarity and eugenicist histories, see the contributions in Gabriele Griffin and Doris Leibetseder, eds., *Bodily Interventions and Intimate Labour: Understanding Bioprecarity*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2020), esp. those in section V.

uidation of the value of tradition in the cultural heritage.'[83] The prologue of *Olympia* follows this logic of liquidation of cultural heritage through the aestheticization of violent substitutions. Ancient Greece circulates in the prologue in the material sense of monuments, friezes, statues, bodies, and landscapes; in terms of cultural practices associated with athletics, dance, and rituals; and in terms of values and ideas such as beauty. In all its different manifestations, Greece oscillates between two modes of existence. On the one hand, it is idealized as a dream of imagined origins and as a vision for the present. On the other hand, it is used as raw, heterogeneous material. In offering a 'union of a secular religion of art and the culture industry,'[84] the prologue brings 'the myths and historicist decor of the long nineteenth century into the postmodern "society of the spectacle"'.[85] At the same time, in its use of practices of referencing, recycling, imitating, and adapting, it pays little attention to the material, historical, and cultural specificity of the artworks or art-forms with which it engages. If we follow Riefenstahl's architectural vocabulary, Greece can be seen as providing building blocks for the edifice that is the film. Such vocabulary helps bring out her aspirations for the film's monumentality and endurance. However, such a conceptualization of the film does little justice to the different aspects of Greece in circulation within it and the profound changes to which they are subjected. To account for that, we need to conceptualize it through the powerful effects and harsh materiality of processes and techniques of film making and film editing that ensure continuity through change: processes of cutting, editing, copying, inscribing, detaching, blending, replacing. The fluidity of images, ideas, and voices is sometimes foregrounded as a productive way to understand the reinvention of antiquity in modernity, to facilitate conversations across disciplines, to think about dialogical and critical modes of engaging with the classics, and to break the traditional notion of temporality that separates modernity from antiquity.[86] When considering the transformations on display in *Olympia*, of stone to plaster, flesh, fire, dream, or light, we are dealing with profound and permanent changes in form and matter that take us beyond Riefenstahl's architectural language and also beyond any unambiguously positive associations of liquidity, into a territory of dynamic energy that is at once attractive and destructive. Within this environment, seemingly competing conceptualizations of ancient Greece are woven into the dreams, reali-

83 Benjamin, 'The Work of Art,' 254–255.
84 Roberts, *Total Work of Art*.
85 Ibid., 264.
86 See the contributions in Brooke Holmes and Karen Marta, eds., *Liquid Antiquity* (Geneva: Deste, 2017).

ties, and myths constructed within and around *Olympia*, occasionally through dialectic juxtapositions but, more often than not, through hierarchical ruptures staged as continuities.

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