Chris Maloney Dissertation

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Leni Riefenstahl: An innovative mind.
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In this dissertation I intend to examine the relationship and influence Leni Riefenstahl had on the German film industry of the 1930s and 40s. I intend to scrutinise her talents as a director and how she became one of the most influential filmmakers of her era. I intend to do so by examining two of her most famous films “Olympia” and “Triumph of the will” as examples of developments in filmmaking techniques and then a further examination of “Triumph of the Will” as an example of film being used as a political weapon and as a propaganda tool. I will attempt to illuminate the roles Riefenstahl played as both a filmmaker and a contributor to the Third Reich. As a part of this examination of her political ties to the Nazi party I will look at the fine line she walked and whether or not she was guilty of being culpable to witnessing war crimes. The objective of my work is to illustrate Leni Riefenstahl’s career in terms of her contribution to national cinema and her contribution to the evolution of filmmaking production and content.

The subject of “national” cinema and its connotations to politics is an idea that is a focus in this essay and is the subject of both of Riefenstahl’s most famous works. More importantly I intend to prove how cinema can be used as a powerful weapon by a political regime and the how the role of a filmmaker can be altered by producing propaganda. Of all wartime filmmakers Leni Riefenstahl became not only a famous and talented filmmaker but also one of the world’s first female filmmakers, a fact that is even rarer due as it contradicts Nazi party ideology. I also intend to examine the personal relationship Riefenstahl shared with Hitler.
who was an avid fan of hers since the 1920s. I will also illustrate how a number of major political changes within Germany allowed for and help the rise of Riefenstahl and how without the unique situation that arose at the time she would not have had such an opportunity to work. As a whole this work will attempt to give an unbiased view of Leni Riefenstahl’s contribution to German Cinema and as a producer of political propaganda for the Third Reich.

For this essay I will not attempt to absolve Leni Riefenstahl of any war crimes or of her connection to the hierarchy of the Nazi political machine. I will instead showcase how certain events and opportunities in a nation’s political climate can facilitate the rise in popularity of nationalist filmmaking or political filmmaking which is the case here. I will prove how different factors in a nation contribute to the films that it produces at the time and use Riefenstahl’s works and their content as an example. I will illustrate how Riefenstahl used her directorial talents to help the Nazi parties ideological message blanket the masses but instead of simply condemning her I will simply examine the course of events that aligned to her success in this time in Germany. I will also attempt to illuminate key elements which help show how the two films I have chosen differ in political ideology and narrative object, how one film is an element of a political ideal while the other is a film showcasing Riefenstahl’s talents as a director and as an editor. I would hope that by properly examining these two films I can illustrate how she was not a political director so much as a director that made a film about politics.

A key element of Riefenstahl’s success and what facilitated the nature of her films would be the important historical, political and economic changes which change the face of Germany and the German film industry from the end of the first world war to the end of the second world war. These two world Wars had enormous effect on the German film industry in terms
of content and distribution and on Riefenstahl’s career in general. They also dictated the nature of the films produced for the industry as both governments in Germany at the time of these wars sought to use their countries film industry as a major propaganda tool for their domestic audiences and abroad. I wish to highlight the relevance of the two wars because of the economic implications they created for Germany from 1918 onwards to 1945. During this period the film industry endured censorship and changes in technology, distribution and ownership. These elements had huge bearing on the subject matter of German films, which meant the subject matter of Leni Riefenstahl’s films changed in accordance with the industry. I will also highlight the conditions the German film industry found itself in leading up to the 1930s and how this affected Riefenstahl’s career.

The first important point is the end of the First World War in 1918. Up until this point the German film industry was mostly state controlled since the beginning of the war and a rule of strict censorship was enforced on films being shown in theatres in Germany during this period. With the end of the war the film industry suffered somewhat for a number of years until the early 1920s due to the economic strife which paralyzed Germany in its post war years. From 1918 until the early 1930s Germany’s economy was crippled due to the harsh reparations it had to pay in recompense for the war. People had no spendable income to use in theatres so the film industry suffered. On top of this, the monopoly the German film industry enjoyed during the war due to strict censorship on foreign films was lifted and the national film studios now faced competition from the foreign film industry, especially from Hollywood.

It was during this time that the Universum Film AG or UFA was formed in 1917 as a government-owned producer of propaganda to help the war effort by the German government. UFA was comprised of most of the biggest commercial producers of film in
Germany at the time and had a monopoly of the industry for many years to come. When the war ended UFA retained control of the industry and was further enlarged in 1921 by merging with yet another distributor meaning the company now produced over 600 films a year. Part of UFA’s success was the convenience of the silent film which was the only film form available at the time meaning that films made in Germany had no language barrier and could be exported and used around the world. During the silent era of cinema the German film industry enjoyed great success in the global market, a shot lived as with the advent of sound in cinema in the early 1930s, German films faced the problem of the language barrier and focused on making films for a domestic, German speaking audience.

Ufa would remain the largest film company in Germany until after the war due to government assistance and funding, making it the central producer of films in Germany. It enjoyed box office success and critical acclaim during the 20s from films it produced such as Dr. Mabuse (1922) or Metropolis (1927) and was fortunate enough to have some of German cinemas most innovative minds such as Fritz Lang and F.W. Murnau work for it. Sadly with the rise to power of the Nazi party in 1933 and better financing made available in Hollywood, UFA lost many of its greatest cinematic artists who left Germany. It should be noted that the loss of so many great minds can nearly fully be attributed to the ruthless anti-Semitic laws of the new Nazi regime which persecuted and later arrested any Germans not of white European descent. It should also be noted that many if not all of these people helped pioneer the expressionist film period that swept through the German film industry in the 1920s and so with their loss, detrimentally affected the industry until 1945.

Along with the creative losses Ufa suffered, the fact that the film company was controlled by the Nazi party from 1933 onwards meant the nature of the films it would produce from then on would change drastically and it would once again become a government tool used for
propaganda purposes. UFA would lose all the creative freedom it enjoyed during the 20s to face strict censorship and ideological obedience in tandem with the Third Reich.

It would be UFA that would employ a young Helene Bertha Amelie “Leni” Riefenstahl and became the main studio she worked with for many years to come. Born in 1902 in Berlin to a wealthy family, Leni Riefenstahl originally followed a career as a professional dancer, career she pursued passionately until the mid 1920s when she suffered a leg injury.

Riefenstahl first became interested in film when she saw a poster for Dr. Arnold Fanck’s mountain film *Der Berg Des Shicksals (1924)*. Curious as to pursuing a career in film she travelled to the Alps and became known to the famous German director.

Arnold Fanck was pioneers of a German film genre known as the *bergfilm* or mountain film that was highly popular with German audiences in the 1920s. His films focused on spectacle and struggle man faces against nature. Plot was not a major factor in his films and so the acting was not of a high class. Riefenstahl’s first films with Fanck began in 1925 and she continued to work with him until the early 1930s when she began her directing her first film *Das Blaue Licht* in 1932. From her previous years working as an actress Riefenstahl had learned the art of filmmaking an camera work from Fanck and other crew members she worked with in the field. She had also accumulated a crew of cameramen, sound and light technicians who would work with her on the majority of her projects until the late 1940s.

It was during her acting career that Riefenstahl became known to the German public and briefly to audiences abroad from her starring roles in famous Fanck films such as *The White Hell of Pitz Palu* and *S.O.S Eisberg*. By the 1930s she was a celebrity in Germany but more importantly had become known to the new leader of Germany, Adolf Hitler.
The rise of Riefenstahl’s career has historical parallels with the rise of Nazism in post war Germany in the 1920s. From the early 20s the Nationalist socialist party (NSDAP) led by Adolf Hitler had risen in power until the 1930s whereby it managed to seize control of the government and began instilling a strict fascist system of governance on Germany. This new regime became known as the third Reich (Reich meaning empire) and began persecuting the Jewish population of Germany and then Europe. By 1939 the Nazi party had total control of all elements of Germany and using propaganda in all media services had control over the German people. In respect to propaganda, the German film industry had became a main source for expounding Nazi ideology which usually consisted of elevating the status of the Aryan (German) race over all others, the importance of Adolf Hitler and the degradation and destruction of society facilitated by the Jewish race. Never before in history has the media been used so ruthlessly to enforce and coerce the minds of millions of people apart from that found in Stalinist Russia. Propaganda minister Dr. Joseph Goebbels orchestrated a collective production of ideologically acceptable media to be produced from Germany during the years of the third Reich, propaganda which influenced millions and helped the administration retain power until 1945. Though Nazi ideology rejected Communism and declared Russian or Slavic people to be subordinate, Goebbels had much admiration for Sergei Eisenstein’s 1925 film *Battleship Potemkin* for its innovative editing and the power it held over people. According to Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, in reference to Soviet cinema of this kind Goebbels hoped to create an equally vivid cinema expressing Nazi ideals. In 1939 Germany invaded Poland and Britain and France declared war on it. The next six years became known as the Second World War and cost millions of lives before ending in the destruction of the third Reich and the end of Nazism. In regards to the propaganda produced during that time, two of the most famous propaganda films ever created were directed by Leni Riefenstahl under the Nazi regime at the behest of Adolf Hitler, the leader of Germany, himself.
Riefenstahl had come to Hitler’s attention in the 1920s when he watched her in Arnold Fanck’s mountain films. Hitler was a fan of the *bergfilm* genre and felt Riefenstahl epitomised what an Aryan woman should look like. Riefenstahl became a fan of Hitler’s after hearing him speak at a party rally in 1932 and requested a meeting with the future leader of Germany. Both figures showed enormous respect for the other with Hitler requesting that Riefenstahl film the 1933 Nazi Party rally. The film would be *Sieg des Glaubens*. It is important to note that though Riefenstahl rose to prominence as one of the members of Hitler’s “inner circle” she would later dispute any knowledge of military operations the Fuhrer enacted or any information pertaining to the Holocaust.

*Sieg Des Glaubens* would become Riefenstahl’s first political film work and first of three collaborations with the Nazi party. Although she became a party member in 1933 Riefenstahl was not accepted into the inner circle of Hitler’s subordinates due to her gender. Joseph Goebbels was reluctant to allow a female director take on such prolific projects that showcased the Reich’s success and strength, projects that would be showcased to the world and form an essential view by other nations as to the power of a fascist German empire. Despite this, according to David Hinton, both Hitler and Goebbels had long hoped that the German cinema would produce a film to rival Eisenstein’s *Battleship Potemkin* in artistic importance.

*Sieg Des Glaubens* was received extremely well within Germany and Hitler was so impressed that he asked Riefenstahl to direct a documentary film about the 1934 Nazi party congress in Nuremberg in Germany. Her film would become the most famous propaganda film ever made and sadly mar Riefenstahl’s career until the end of her life. All of Riefenstahl’s technical experience learned from working in the film industry would come to light in her next film for the government *Triumph des Willens* (Triumph of the will) and would launch
her career into the public forum and be the biggest film she would be famous for long after the end of the Third Reich. I will now do small case studies of two of Leni Riefenstahl’s most famous films made during and focusing on the Third Reich and Nazism.

**Triumph des Willens (Triumph of the will) 1934.**

*Triumph of the will* would be the most prolific film made under the Third Reich and became the textbook example of propaganda filmmaking at its best. It is also the first of Riefenstahl’s films I will discuss.

The Nazi party, especially Hitler and Goebbels, understood the power of cinema and its capability to sway the minds of the masses. They saw cinema as a way to expound ideals to millions of people around the world through a visual medium. The purpose of making *triumph* was to showcase German military strength to the world, in effect to cause fear amongst other European countries. The film contains footage of thousands of troops marching in uniformity and rank in front of Nazi party leaders, displaying to the world that Hitler had unwavering support of the army and had military strength to counter all other nations.

The film itself is a catalogue of the entire Nazi rally, charting the arrival of Hitler to the city of Nuremberg in Germany and his role in the ceremony. It is also a piece designed to help cement the Nazi party’s status as the ruling party of Germany and establish a new ideology in German society. The film is split into four days of marches and speeches expertly filmed and designed by Riefenstahl to exemplify and encompass the full might of the party’s following in one location so as to achieve a visual impact.
Day One: The film opens with beautiful shots of Nuremberg and the arrival of Hitler’s plane at the airport. Innovative shots of his plane’s shadow moving over the city gives the effect that Hitler is almost an ethereal being, a godlike hero of Germany. This idea is used multiple times throughout the film to present the audiences with the idea that Nazi ideology has replaced religion for the German people. It is during the first day that we also see the civilian crowd’s reaction to Hitler as he waves to them from the balcony of his hotel room and on the way from the airport. What scenes like these do is reinforce the notion that the people of Germany all support Hitler and that the nation is in favour of the Nazi cause. We see close up shot of happy mothers, fathers, sons and daughters all cheering and waving flags with the party swastika on it. This is designed by Riefenstahl to make the audience believe that no matter what age or gender, all members of the family unit are dedicated to the German leader and his party and more so, are happy being supporters of the regime.

Day Two: The second day can be said to be the official start to the rally as crowds move into the parade grounds of the Lutipold arena, an open air zeppelin field, and the final preparations for the rally ceremonies. When the rally begins, the highest ranking Nazi officials including Hitler, all enter the arena and give speeches from the podium erected on a stone rise which was in actual fact an unfinished Zeppelin dock. After the speeches the Reich labour service conducts a parade in front of the podium. This parade is important because though the disarmament on Germany is still in effect, the construction workers are all wearing military uniforms and marching whilst holding spades where their rifles should be. This military display is the genius work of Riefenstahl, creating a sense of an army marching for inspection and saluting the Fuhrer proudly overseeing them from the podium. It has all the appearance of an intimidating army without any arms. Using different angles of shooting Riefenstahl manages to get shots that encompass the sheer immensity of the rally, from low angle shots pointing upwards, presenting Hitler as a taller, more domineering man, to broad
crane shots that take in the huge ranks of troops assembled at the rally. These shots, revolutionary for their time, manage to impress upon the audience the enormity of the rally and the strength in numbers the party possessed. Hitler also addresses the crowds of Labour workers and commends them on their contribution to rebuilding Germany as a stronger nation.

Day Three: The third day also saw a militaristic parade of sorts in front of Nazi officials, but this was a parade by the “Hitler Youth” organisation, a group of young German boys indoctrinated with Nazi ideology form an early age. Hitler addresses them in his speech, refer to them as the future of Germany and claiming that they would have to make sacrifices and be a source of strength in the years to come. It is agree that this speech is a direct reference to the military operations that Germany launched against neighbouring European countries the following years which would result in the Second World War. The Hitler youth would come to play a large role in both German society and the armed forces as it was this organisation that proved most fanatically loyal to Hitler throughout the years of the Third Reich. Military vehicles and soldiers form a procession in front of the podium in a display of uniformity and power leaving no doubt in the minds of the audience as to the might of the new German empire.

Day Four: The fourth day of the rally is the most extravagant and important of the entire event and is the climax of the film. SS and SA troops march in strict fashion in silent reverence under the eyes of the Nazi party leaders in a commemorative parade saluting the sacrifices made for the party cause. Speeches commemorate the fallen followers who died at the failed Munich Putsch in 1923. The entire parade and ceremony has a solemn attitude designed to create a reverent attitude towards the Nazi party, a ceremony constructed to unify all followers and meshing militarism and ideological policy into one idea under one leader.
and one flag. The “Blood Flag” ceremony whereby Hitler “anoints” party flags with the Munich Putsch’ blood stained flag is almost religious in the silent respect it is presented in by the camera. This “political sermon” is highlighted by the camera which takes in the solemn attitudes of the army and the civilian attendees whom all stare wide eyed at the podium in awe of the spectacle unfolding before them.

The ceremonies and parades, though they are partially constructed by Albert Speer, party member and rally architect, are also constructed by Leni Riefenstahl who designed the ceremonies around the advantages and shortcomings of the camera lens. Huge imposing parades, domineering symbolism and carefully premeditated execution of cinematography help cast the illusion of the 1934 rally being a Eucharistic congress of nationalism and political ideology that transfixes the audience. As Bordwell and Thompson State in regards to Triumph, “using skilful cinematography, editing and music, Riefenstahl created an impressive two hour pageant of Nazi ideology and fervor.” The film was extremely well received in Germany with Hitler commending Riefenstahl on her work personally. The film also achieved recognition globally and began Riefenstahl’s successful career as a pioneering female director. Riefenstahl agreed to make an 18 minute short film in 1935 of the German army at Nuremberg again called Day of Freedom: armed forces. This small film was later called as sub set or attachment to Triumph.

Olympia 1938.

Riefenstahl’s next film of notable acclaim during the Nazi era would be labelled politically motivated like triumph yet its content would differ greatly from her 1934 documentary. Olympia is a documentary of the 1936 summer Olympics held in the Olympic stadium in Berlin Germany. Though the film follows the entire games, its main objective and the reason for its funding was to showcase Germany under the Third Reich to the world as a society of
prosperity, happiness and a producer of a perfect, dominant race (the Aryan race). The film was funded by the government which hoped that the German Olympic team that year would prove the winners in many of the sporting challenges. *Olympia* was the first feature-length documentary film of the Olympic Games. The film is so long it was split into two parts.

*Olympia .1 Teil- Fest der Volker* (Festival of Nations)

*Olympia .2 Teil- Fest der Schönheit* (Festival of Beauty)

The film contains subcategories appropriated to each sporting event so as to allow coherence within the narrative. What is important when examining Olympia however is not so much the composition, though that in itself is innovative for its day and worthy of mention, but the content of the screen and why these images are presented in such a manner. We see in the beginning of the film the Olympians jogging together in an indiscernible group followed by them all chatting together in the club house, a group of sports enthusiasts as opposed to competitors vying for control or harbouring ill will for each other. This coincides to *Olympia’s* true theme of community and unity between nations. She uses the Olympics to highlight the political tensions in Europe at the time which as rife with paranoia about Germany’s military bullying of neighbouring states and the possibility of war. This feeling of mutual respect and friendship that Riefenstahl promotes in the film works perfectly for the regime which at that time was under global scrutiny for its rearmament and military aggression that precluded the Second World War.

Olympia though, is not simply a documentary of an event or a series of events. It’s hallmarked because of its innovative camerawork and revolutionary filmmaking practices that have now become the industry standard. Riefenstahl introduced for the first time the use of the smash cut, an editing style designed to be abrupt and to change scene sharply. This
editing is used constantly throughout the film to snap from category to category. There is no narrative storyline to be followed here; no plot, only the games themselves and the end result.

Riefenstahl also uses tracking shots from the point of view of the audience in the stands to achieve footage that follows the participants as they compete in different categories, a shot system which works to immerse the theatrical audience in the film as if they were there themselves.

Where there may be no prevalent ideological motivation behind *Olympia* it is obvious that the whole film is dedicated to the beauty of the body and of the sporting events that said body undertakes. Riefenstahl’s camera follows the athletes constantly in the film but the athletes themselves are not so much the protagonists but their physiques are and how physical prowess should be exemplified and celebrated, in effect the objective of the Olympic Games themselves. Riefenstahl relates this focus on the human body and athleticism by referring back to the Greek Olympics, the source of the Olympic Games, in her opening sequence. The opening sequence is a montage of clips of Greek Olympians participating in a series of athletic activities such as discus throwing and running, to illustrate the body and how the ancient Greeks celebrate it as well. This celebration of the physique, originally the objective of the Olympic games, is now the cameras objective and obsession throughout the film as it follows the athletes in various activities with extreme close ups and tracking shots. As Rainer Roth says in his book, *Olympia is certainly an example of the cult of the human body and it does celebrate beauty and athleticism*.iv

Nothing serves as a better example of this cinematic obsession with the body than the last scene of Olympia where we see the diving sequence. The camera takes shots of divers from different angles including underneath the diving board to catch the divers poised in mid air, suspended in animation before they plummet down to the water. As Bordwell and Thompson
state in *Film Art* , in the diving sequence at the end there is no differentiation among participants and the sheer beauty of the event dominated. “This series of suspended diving can almost be called a ballet in the sky as different figures make forms as they leap of the diving board. Riefenstahl”s experience as a dancer can be seen her as the divers seem choreographed to move in balletic ways that appeal to the camera and act with a kind of rhythm that makes it all the more beautiful.

Thought the visual elements to *Olympia* can be applauded for their innovation and use, the use of music in the film also deserves recognition. Riefenstahl is famous for being involved in all elements of her production and her hand on the scoring of Olympia is no different. She uses different musical numbers in each category of the events to identify and clarify the difference between them and highlight the victories and losses of the athletes in them.

This editing style is also used to some extent to highlight Germany”s wins at the games using smash cuts and sound editing to downplay losses and exemplify wins for the German Olympians. This editing is also used to show Hitler attending the games, presenting him as a sports enthusiast and only cutting images of him spectating when the Germans when games and not showing or at least downplaying the losses.

That said *Olympia* does not serve as an ideological vehicle for the Nazi party despite showing the lush symbolism surrounding the games in terms of the banners, Nazi salutes form the German Olympic team or the presence of the massive Zeppelin *Hindenburg* flying constantly over the stadium bedecked in swastikas. *Olympia* exemplifies the beauty of the human body and the athletic prowess involved in the games themselves.
Examining the two works

The important thing when examining Riefenstahl’s career as a director under the Third Reich is to look at her films as examples of cinematic contribution and themes. To identify and separate the ideology from the practice and look at what makes her a talented and innovative director as opposed to another element of a political regime. *Triumph of the will* and *Olympia* are two very different films in terms of content, theme and objective. Both were made by the same people under the same regime and in the same era. These two films cannot, in my opinion, be regarded separately first of all when examining and critiquing Leni Riefenstahl’s career in Germany under the Nazis or because of the effects the first film had on the latter.

Without the acceptance of Riefenstahl by the Nazi party, neither *Triumph* nor *Olympia* would ever have been made. While both films are not original pieces created by Riefenstahl, neither film would have the stylistic grandeur or innovative camerawork that made them such successes. It was through Riefenstahl’s success with *Triumph of the Will* that she was able to secure funding for *Olympia* and make her sports film. Without her public popularity and being in the good graces of Hitler and other high ranking party members she would have undoubtedly found it more difficult to make the film. This success in Germany with the party also allowed her to secure more funding for *Olympia* than she ever had before and gave her free artist reign over the film even though it was secretly funded by the Reich ministry for Propaganda. Riefenstahl’s career and more importantly the success of that career depended on the approval of the government as to the content of the film. It worked perfectly that she was a follower of Adolf Hitler and so went on to direct a film which effectively depicted him as a German deity come to earth. It was also convenient that her obsession with the human
body, beauty and athleticism coincided with Nazi party ideology of Aryan physical prowess. 

To illustrate how Riefenstahl was not simply a filmmaker who made ideological films I will state the difference between the two pieces I have already discussed.

*Triumph of the Will* is an ideologically motivated film made to exemplify the Nazi party cause and display to the world the strength of the German people united under one flag and one leader. *Olympia* has no ideological objective and is a simple showcase of the Olympic Games and the events that transpire within them. I will not claim that it is devoid of political connotations but I believe it goes beyond serving the simple purpose of being a propaganda piece made by the Reich. Though Riefenstahl herself admits to being a follower of the Nazi party and of Hitler she does not display a great amount of political fervour or favouritism in *Olympia*. In *Triumph* we see Nazi symbolism everywhere and political agenda permeates through images of Militaristic marching, speeches and camera work that projects party officials in prominent poses and dominating positions. In *Olympia* we are shown close ups of different athletes from different nationalities, not just German, winning and losing sporting events, not highlighting political agendas or reminding audiences of the current situation in Europe, politically. The Olympics promote a feeling of unity and community. All the contestants show determination to succeed, all share the same challenge of competition.

*Triumph* is a film about submission, a film about national identity and being unified under a single ideology. It is also a film designed to present an idea of Germany to the world. In this respect *Olympia* shares a similarity to some degree as it too gives a view of Germany to the world, yet this view is one of a peaceful nation, seeking to find a place with all the other European nations in the Olympic games. Germany downplays its strength and military dominance so as to be seen as a welcoming hub of European unity and friendship. This element is a small part of *Olympia* yet is one of the few elements to the film that is shared in
Triumph if giving the completely opposite message. As Bordwell and Thompson say in Film History when referring to the political motivations behind Olympia „the intention was that the film would show Germany as a cooperative member of the world community and thus quell fears of Nazi aggression.\textsuperscript{vi}

Both films coincide in terms of Nazi party ideology yet one, Triumph, does so purposefully while the other Olympia only contains elements of that ideology because it works to the German governments advantage. It is my belief that though both films showcase the enormous filmmaking talents that Riefenstahl possessed, both of these films are forever stained by the time in which they were set and the political ideology which they purposefully or even accidentally expound on the screen. While Riefenstahl was asked to make her first feature, historical evidence found in her diary proves that Olympia was a project she chose to make and had complete control over despite it being funded and owned by the Reich. While Triumph cannot be fully absolved of its connection to a regime responsible for so much destruction and global anguish, Olympia can at least be seen to simply be a good film made by a good director under a fascist regime in a troublesome time in history.

Conclusion.

My conclusion must be drawn on two main ideas.

Firstly that Leni Riefenstahl was not a director who made films for the Third Reich to expound propaganda and further the interests of the German nation.

And

Secondly that she was simply a director whose only way of working in Germany at that time was to obey the rules and regulations of the regime in power then and that she was simply a talented person who worked for the wrong people.
Leni Riefenstahl, it can undoubtedly be said, was a film director of enormous talent and determination whose work helped form filmmaking practice as we see it today. Her career in Germany went through three different political changes with two of those changes being favourable and one marring her career until her death in 2002. Her career peak was found during the years of the Nazi regime and it is this popularity and association with the Third Reich that led to her blacklisting and retirement from the film industry for many years to come. Her close relationship to Hitler and her status of being high in the party hierarchy was later to condemn her in the public eye for decades to come and diminish her post war career. Though she continued to pursue photography in the 1960s she was greatly criticised for her contribution to the Third Reich and the German film industry.

Despite her political agenda and personal relationship to the Nazi party, Leni Riefenstahl made valid contributions to the film industry and her techniques were used by filmmaker for years after the war. Even though it is a propaganda weapon expounding the ideology of a hate mongering fascist dictator, *Triumph of the will* remains an excellent example of political motivated filmmaking and how the medium of film is capable of encapsulating political ideology and transporting it globally to the masses. *Triumph* pegged Riefenstahl as a politically motivated filmmaker yet it is my belief she was not so. She made *Triumph* as a German filmmaker who, like millions of other German people, believed in the redemption of Germany at the hands of its saviour, Adolf Hitler, and in the effects that the agenda the Third Reich brought about. If she is found to be guilty of being a Nazi for these reasons then half if not all of the population of Germany in the 1940s is also guilty.

I am of the opinion that Leni Riefenstahl simply utilised her talents to make a film that exemplified and showcased the status that Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party held in German society in 1934 and her films serves as a reflection of public opinion of the regime by the
German people. As much as Triumph influences, it is also influenced in turn, by the party propaganda to which even Riefenstahl was a victim and to the swaying opinion at the time that Nazism was saving Germany from economic depression and anarchy which until the party came along, dominated Germany during the Weimar years. The film really serves as a cinematic representation of how German society viewed the Nazi party during that time, before war would envelope the country and the strife that it would bring terrorized its people. In 1934 the Nazi party was a political party that offered a stable economy and a promising future or Germany that would restore the country to its pre war glory and take care of its citizens. Attempting to salvage her reputation after the war Riefenstahl stated in her defence that Triumph simply documented actual events. This statement is proven to be somewhat untrue however as many of the events within the film were later proved to be staged.

Though Riefenstahl never left Germany or the Nazi party neither did her exclusively work under their directives as we have seen with Olympia. In this case we can examine the film as a simply homage to the human form and the beauty and strength of athleticism. Riefenstahl for the most part remains impartial to the political influences of the time in Berlin and focuses on the games themselves and sidelining the location and events in Europe at the time. If Triumph argues that Riefenstahl was a political filmmaker, Olympia argues against this idea by displaying a film that removes any excuse for highlighting the government. This in turn works to the party”s advantage as it downplays their aggressive role in Europe at the time but this objective was not deliberately enacted by Riefenstahl.

Though she is a filmmaker blacklisted for her past I believe that Leni Riefenstahl was simply the victim of propaganda herself and was a tool to be used by the Nazi party to full effect in achieving their goals. Sergei Eisenstein was doing similar work to hers in the 1920s for the soviet government and yet he avoided the public condemnation Riefenstahl endured. It
appears that in Eisenstein’s case he was lucky enough to work for the publicly acceptable tyrant as opposed to the globally hated one that Hitler became.

A matter of chance and timing not only helped Leni Riefenstahl’s career to succeed but in the end killed her career also. It can be called a shame that a filmmaker that showed such innovative charisma and talent should be condemned for flourishing in the wrong place at the wrong time and for her work to be blacklisted for years because of its political content.

Leni Riefenstahl was undeniably one of the most influential female directors of the twentieth century helping to revolutionise cinematic practise and reform the theory of political filmmaking in such a way that filmmaking practice would change after her. She helped make one of the most influential propaganda films in history and some of the most entertaining documentary work to ever be filmed. She showed and intuition for filmmaking and helped illustrate how ideology can be expounded through the medium of cinema in such an effective way. It was sadly her knack for conceiving this political filmmaking that would prove her undoing in the post war years and cause her to suffer in the public eye as an ardent Nazi when she was anything but. It is only recently enough after her death that people can understand the full extent to which she altered filmmaking for generations. Had she worked in Hollywood I can only imagine the success this director would have achieved without the scrutiny that critics have persecuted her.
Bibliography:


Filmography:


