

Anatol, the "Torchbearer"

The truth about the prologue to Riefenstahl's *OLYMPIA*

By Volker Kluge

Box 309: On top of the pile was Anatol, the "torchbearer"

Photo: Jörg Krauthöfer



In February 2018, fifteen years after the death of Hitler's favourite female director Leni Riefenstahl, the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation took delivery of some 700 boxes of material from her estate. It was an announcement which caused some excitement and was probably a source of great disappointment to many who collect Olympic or Nazi era memorabilia.

For historians however, it was good news. Not only did it ensure Riefenstahl's artistic legacy was preserved, but also that this would be done in a public institution which offered the guarantee of scientifically funded research. At least this was the intention of President Hermann Parzinger spoke of the "particular responsibility for a critical debate".¹

Two months later the media had their first opportunity to what was of some of the archive boxes. There was great expectation when Box 309 was opened. On its lid were the words "ATTENTION! Do not take any pictures out. Unique templates for repros!".

The director of the Museum of Photography carefully lifted out the top exposure. This was from the prologue of *OLYMPIA* – "Anatol, the torchbearer". The photo, slightly wrinkled and with a hole in the left edge, formed a strange contrast to the white gloves in which it was held.

The media were shown only a fraction of the archive. After Riefenstahl's death in 2003, it had been deposited in her villa in Pöcking near Munich. Apart from Riefenstahl and partner Horst Kettner² no one was permitted access. To this day it remains a Black Box of film history: the rolls of film alone fill 140 chests. A further 170 cardboard boxes contain written material, among them two ring binders bearing the inscription "Special letters".

Who corresponded with the controversial director? It is possible to speculate but under the letter "H" for Hitler, there is nothing sensational. Riefenstahl, who lived to be 101, had time enough after the war to "denazify" her legacy. Anything else was confiscated by the occupying powers or was lost, among it much filmic material.

To find answers to open questions it is not necessary to wait for the preparation of the legacy by the Prussian Foundation.³ Even in the accessible archive material many new and hitherto unknown insights are to be discovered.

The theme of this contribution is the prologue of the *Olympia* film. It depicts a fictional return of the Greek gods. They arise from the ruins of the Acropolis amid mist and smoke in Riefenstahl's work.

Function and significance of the Olympic film

Since the IInd International Olympic Games of 1906 in Athens there have been films, but these were seldom more than somewhat disconnected reports. The first more or less complete documentation came for Paris 1924 and the Winter Games of Chamonix, which were recognised in retrospect.⁴

It was only in 1930 that the *Olympic Charter* stipulated that the organising committees be responsible for making "the necessary arrangements for making a record of the Games by means of photography and moving pictures".⁵ Those responsible in 1932 in Los Angeles took the charter at its word when held to that they permitted four American production companies to produce "news reel" reports.

The organising committee of the 1936 Olympics in Berlin was presided over by Carl Diem, an experienced sports official of many years standing. Diem was ambitious and determined to surpass what the Americans had done. Despite the effects of the world economic crisis they had staged the 1932 Games to a high standard in every aspect.

To Diem's surprise, the possibilities became almost infinite after Hitler came to power in 1933 and declared the 1936 Games to be a national affair and a question of the prestige of the "Third Reich".⁶ For the first time Olympic preparations were not made and carried out by an organising committee but by rather by the machinery of a totalitarian state with all its organisations, agencies and facilities. For this reason, the true cost of these Games can only be estimated.⁷

Hitler entrusted Joseph Goebbels with looking after Olympic publicity and propaganda at home and overseas. The Reich Propaganda Minister was also responsible for the film industry. In 1935, this led to conflict with creative spirits such as Diem and the President of the Organising Committee, Theodor Lewald, who did not want a run of the mill documentary record of the Games. Rather, they wished to create an artistically valuable Olympic film. It would be the first time this had been done. In particular it was intended to especially impress foreign countries.

"Who is creating the Olympia film?" asked the *Reichsportblatt* in 1935. They highlighted the film *Wunder des Fliegens* [*Miracle of Flying*] as a positive example. The Nazi regime wanted to encourage enthusiasm for flying amongst young people. In this movie well-known pilot Ernst Udet played himself.⁸

For the Olympia film, the choice fell finally on the extremely busy actress and director Leni Riefenstahl, who had just made a film about the 1934 Nazi rally or Reichsparteitag at Nuremberg – *Triumph des Willens* [*Triumph of the Will*]. For this work Riefenstahl had been awarded the "National Film Prize" on 1st May 1935.⁹

Placing the job and financing

For decades Riefenstahl maintained that she had been charged with making the film in 1936 by the IOC. In her *Memoirs* she maintained that this offer was made to her during a meal in a restaurant at the Berlin Emperor Wilhelm Memorial Church by the Swiss national Otto Mayer, who she variously describes as President or Treasurer of the IOC.¹⁰ This was the product of fantasy, for Mayer at that time had no office at all with the IOC, and only became its chancellor in 1946.

In fact she received this job from Hitler. When she appeared before the Denazification Commission in Freiburg on 6th July 1949 she testified:

In the summer of 1935 I was again summoned to the Reich Chancellery, where it was revealed to me by Hitler that it was his wish that I should take over the Olympia film, because he knew nobody who possessed the experience necessary for the felicitous production of such a film. As the production of this film for me demanded a very great sacrifice of time, while I had to neglect for this work my own ideas, and also could not be an actress which entailed financial losses of a considerable extent, I tried to pass this job on. But I did not succeed, although I brought Dr. Fanck's outline for the production of this film to Dr. Goebbels, because I assumed that Goebbels would eagerly use this opportunity to help someone else in my place to this job."



OLYMPIA. Fest der Völker. Programme of the 1st part of the Olympia film

Illustration: Volker Kluge Archive

Leni Riefenstahl and her team in the Berlin Olympic Stadium. In the centre with hat: production director Walter Traut.

Photo: Rolf Lantini



Why did she, someone completely foreign to the subject, receive the job? In 1938, she gave an interview and stated that:

I was entrusted at that time with the still completely unmissable task, because my films 'Sieg des Glaubens', 'Triumph des Willens' und 'Tag der Freiheit' were great successes and because I am familiar with sport and sport film technique through my work on many mountain and ski films.¹²

In other words, her propaganda films about the Nazi rallies (Reichspartei days) had pleased Hitler. So it was no wonder that she was granted unprecedented opportunities by Goebbels, although she had experience of difficulties with his agencies whilst working on the Nuremberg films. Goebbels allocated her 1.5 million Reichsmarks (RM) from his budget, to which was added a loan from the Film Credit Bank, also controlled by him, of 550,000 RM.¹³

This torrent of money gave Riefenstahl personally, technically and logistically an amount never before permitted to any director. By the end of the Games, the lists show that she had employed 41 permanent staff, to whom were added the three chief camera operators Hans Ertl, Walter Frentz, Guzzi Lantschner and his brother Otto, who produced a documentary about the creation of the Olympia film.

In addition she engaged as "temporary" workers, 50 cameramen and 120 assistants, of whom many had already worked on the Reichsparteitag films and some on her mountain films.

Riefenstahl had no financial risk, as Goebbels paid her a total fee of 250,000 RM, with the prospect of an increase of 100,000 RM after the film had been screened.¹⁴ In May 1938 to February 1939, when she visited 23 countries on a promotional tour for the film, she received 5000 RM each month in expenses.¹⁵

The public of course learned nothing of this. They were only informed in a press statement that Goebbels had assigned "the entire filming rights" to Riefenstahl and that other companies were not permitted to shoot the Games.¹⁶ An exception was made for the German newsreel shot by the UFA agency. This was on condition that they made their material available to Riefenstahl afterwards free of charge. Private individuals were permitted to film from the stands, but only with 8 mm cameras.

The Reichspropaganda Ministry did not want to officially appear as the producer. An Olympia Film GmbH was founded as a "front" organisation. Riefenstahl and her brother Heinz were entered into the trade register as partners on 9th December 1935.¹⁷ This was a deliberate move, which the director later described as a "formality undertaken for tax reasons".¹⁸

Just how comfortable Riefenstahl felt with this arrangement was demonstrated when the ministry made some inquiries on 8th October 1936, less than two months after the Games. This revealed organisational confusion and a great waste of money. Even the basic capital of the company, which was set extremely low 18,000 RM for Leni Riefenstahl and 2000 RM for brother Heinz. This had not been paid in by the siblings at that time.¹⁹

In the end it proved a rewarding business for her. The production costs reached 2,831,355.41 RM, a gigantic sum for the time. The film grossed 3,448,191.62 RM.²⁰ Riefenstahl received 20 per cent of the profits.

Conception of the content

Riefenstahl later claimed to have filmed the Reichsparteitag films and the Olympia film completely independently of the Nazi leadership. Yet as early as 17th August 1935, Goebbels indicated in his diary that Riefenstahl had reported to him about her previous works. His entry for 5th October 1935 noted: "Discussed her Olympia films with Leni Riefenstahl. A woman who knows what she wants."²¹ Then on 13th October: "Contract with Leni Riefenstahl in respect of Olympia film granted. My view is agreed in everything. I am very happy about it."²²

Even if Goebbels' own viewpoint is not made entirely clear from these entries it seems inconceivable that they would only have discussed contractual arrangements.

These notes contradict the legend propagated by Riefenstahl until the end of her life. She claimed "the Propaganda Ministry or other National Socialist party or

state agencies neither had an influence on the Olympic Games nor on the production or creation of the Olympia film".²³

Of all people Carl Diem, called by her as a crown witness, noted on 4th February 1936 during the Olympic Winter Games in Garmisch-Partenkirchen:

*P.m. worked and at 5 o'clock with Leni Riefenstahl together with Klingeberg²⁴ long discussion about the coming films. She is subordinate, as she said, formally to Goebbels, in reality only to the Führer and is completely independent in her work. 1.5 million marks are at her disposal for this film, without obligation to get her involved again.*²⁵

Hitler's expectations connected with the distribution of the job cannot be ascertained. He probably did not want to let all that money melt away into the sand, but expected "added value".

According to Riefenstahl "the 'idea' of the film already in the winter" of 1935 had taken shape. It is at least not improbable that she might have lay her intentions under "Hitler's Christmas tree" when she was a guest in his Munich private flat on 25th December.²⁶

Hitler and the ancient Greeks

In order to understand how the prologue for *OLYMPIA* came into being, it is necessary to examine Hitler's vision of the world. For him the Philhellenes took were very important. He described Sparta as the "clearest racial state" and he held the Greek ideal of beauty in high esteem. In his book *Mein Kampf* Hitler tried to play this out against the excessive emphasis on purely spiritual instruction in a chapter about the educational principles of his future "völkisch state".²⁷

He however did not propagate the superiority of a "Nordic-Germanic race" whereas Nazi chief ideologue Alfred Rosenberg did so.²⁸ Even when Hitler invented stories with much pathos about a "Germanic Reich", he like to devalue this and especially the Neanderthals²⁹. He said:

*Somewhere a skull is found and the whole world says: that's what our forefathers looked like. Who knows if the Neanderthaler was not an ape? In any case our ancestors did not sit there at that time! Our country was a filthy land through which at the most they went through. If we are asked about our forefathers, we must always indicate the Greeks.*³⁰

Seven days later Hitler simply reversed the facts:

*If we look at the Greeks, who were also Teutons, we find a beauty which lies high above what we can demonstrate today. ... One needs only to compare the head of Zeus or of Athene with that of a medieval crucified person or of a saint.*³¹



Hitler and the Discobolos of Myron. The "Führergeschenk" was given to the Munich Glyptothek in 1938.

Photo: Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München/Bildarchiv

It was no accident that Hitler should announce the resumption of German excavations at Ancient Olympia when he gave a reception for IOC Members at the Reich Chancellery to celebrate the opening of the 1936 Games. The work on the site had begun in the 19th century but had ceased in 1881. By 1938 there would be as a further "gift of the Führer" to the Munich Glyptothek, one of the five known marble heads of the Discobolos of Myron by the Roman Lancelotti family purchased for 6 million lire – just – one million Reichsmark.³²

In the press brochure for the first part of the Olympia film (*Fest der Völker*) Riefenstahl emphasises that she wished to create a "timeless work" and that "there was never a thought given to an actual reportage of the Games".³³ As the main motifs, she described "the eternal longing in the human being for perfection and beauty". She called her film a "hymn to the strength and beauty of humanity" with the aim of "making visible the healthy mind in the healthy body".³⁴

If beauty and health exist, with this theory there is also the opposite. The final Olympic fanfares had hardly sounded when ten weeks later, the rooms of the Berlin National Gallery for Contemporary Art were closed on the orders of Reich minister Bernhard Rust. The confiscated works went into a "chamber of horrors", which served as a precursor for the exhibition "Decadent Art" at the Munich Hofgarten in the summer of 1937.³⁵

To this day it is not known if Riefenstahl had any kind of shooting script at all for her "film without a plot" or whether she did not just simply let things be filmed. There are hints about the latter. Immediately after the

Film worlds:
A Russian "Greek"
lights the Olympic
Flame on the beach
of the Baltic under
the Nordic sun at
the stump of an
"antique" column
made of paper
maché.

Photo: Prolog Olympia-Film /
Willy Zielke



Games she identified three themes. There were "struggle for victory", "beauty" and the "idea of Olympia", whatever she understood by that.³⁶

Seen after an interval of 80 years, this corresponds with strategic aims which are outlined in a "Circular on the activity of the Political Police" of 17th July 1936:

*A generous and trouble-free running of the Olympic Games of 1936 in Berlin is of far-reaching significance for the respect of the new Germany in the eyes of all foreign guests. The Olympic Games are to be by the will of the Führer an unanimous recognition of German desire for peace and of German hospitality and is to demonstrate to foreign visitors the tidiness and discipline of the National Socialist state.*³⁷

A statement that placed the reality of the concentration camp state on its head.

The Function of the prologue

The concept of "pro-logos" was the province of the ancient Greeks. Aristotle defined it as the "whole part of the tragedy before the entry of the chorus"³⁸. The "pre-speech" served to introduce the main characters.

Later – as with Goethe – their action was often connected with the play in order to raise the entire work to a high level. *Faust*, as is well-known, begins with the "Prologue in Heaven" with a "Job's wager" between

God and Mephisto as to whether Doctor Faustus can be steered off the correct path by the devil.

In the present day, the prologue can take the form of a trailer (film), preface (book), preamble (lecture), intro (music), overture (opera) but also as an abstract (presentation) or editorial.

Riefenstahl opened her *OLYMPIA* with a homogeneous 15 minute long "Filmdichtung", with which she wished to transform her work "from the start from the region of a mere sports reportage to the elevated sphere of art".³⁹

Hilmar Hoffmann, former President of the Goethe Institute and occasionally critic, has described the prologue as her real "masterpiece" for this very reason.⁴⁰ In his view this prologue is the most important indication for the judgement of what Jean Cocteau described as Riefenstahl's genius: the staging of a filmic illusory world by using the metaphorical and allegorical with the aim of a pragmatic semantics in the service of politics

In this film, it achieved the alignment of antiquity with the present day Olympic Games of 1936 as legitimatisation of Nazi ideology through allusion to the classical-Greek tradition. From a technical viewpoint it is a film montage which climaxes in a hymn of rejoicing.

Initially an ancient landscape of ruins is shown, above which the smoke billows. There is dismal silence. The day begins to dawn and in the background the Parthenon comes into view on the Athens Acropolis. The camera moves along the blocks of stone and remains of columns



The Greek runner Konstantin Kondylis was the first torchbearer in the relay but did not satisfy Riefenstahl's aesthetic requirements. The blond Jürgen Ascherfeld (far left) was initially used instead. He was soon replaced by the 18 year old Anatol, who had been discovered by the director on the side of the road.

Photos: Arthur Grimm; Volker Kluge Archive

to marble statues. There is Aphrodite with her eternal smile, then Apollo, Alexander the Great, Achilles and the face of the Medusa. A naked youth – the Barbarini Faun – stretches himself lasciviously.

The Discobolos moves into the picture and slowly awakens from his paralysis. The film dissolves from the statue into an athlete of flesh and blood, who steps out of his frame, hurls the disc, putts the shot and throws the javelin.⁴¹

Now, the masculine power gives way to the tender-limbed female dancers, shown in against the light and from whose circling movements a flame is lit.

The rays of the sun announce the new morning. On the stump of a column burns the fire from which a youth lights a torch which he carries from the kingdom of the dead. His path leads over mountains to the stadium of Delphi, thereafter along the seashore and through olive groves until he is relieved by the next runner.

The Olympic torch relay through seven countries was revealed as a brilliant idea to countdown to the Games. It was intended by Diem that with every kilometre covered the Olympic mood of anticipation would be intensified. The radio reporters who had travelled with the relay knew how build excitement with their broadcasts. Here too the Goebbels ministry ruled the roost with the aim of strengthening the feeling of belonging with the "Volksdeutschen" and incidentally to validate territorial claims.

What really happened on the route was not revealed to the public except in sanitised form. The "hours of remembrance" in Vienna turned into Nazi rallies but this was not highlighted. When runners in Czechoslovakia were attacked by anti-Nazis with stones this too went unreported.

"Typical Greeks" as Olympic torchbearers

Riefenstahl did not stay long in Greece, but what she experienced in this time did not correspond with her ideas at all. Three camera teams were sent to the event but although her crew shot extensively (in her memoirs she spoke later contemptuously of "pure newsreels"⁴²), these were scarcely considered for her film. Instead she shaped the torch relay according to her own tastes and ideas.

The first runner, a young Greek diplomatic worker named Konstantin Kondylis, did not satisfy her aesthetic standards, she replaced him with what she saw as a "typical Greek". He was a blond called Jürgen Ascherfeld, a 26 year old who had been sent to Athens by Diem as a representative of the organising committee.⁴³ Instead of the black gymnastic shorts worn by many of the relay runners, a short "loincloth" was created for a photo. In fact, where for the sake of speed a hotel towel had to be held. In this way Ascherfeld's photo reached many German newspapers, and in the very next year Diem

The author of the prologue on the Acropolis: Willy Zielke

Photo: Filmmuseum Potsdam/Sammlungen/Nachlass Willy Zielke



chose the picture as the cover for his book *Olympische Reise*⁴⁴.

Scarcely had Jürgen Ascherfeld served as a model than Riefenstahl discovered another photogenic 18 year old on the road to Pyrgos. On the spot, she made him a tempting offer. It was to appear in *OLYMPIA* and to come with her to Germany for "further work".

By doing so Riefenstahl cause a storm of outrage in Greece.⁴⁵ The Athenian press even spoke of an "abduction" and did not calm down even when it became known that the youth, one Anatol Dobriansky was not a Greek but a Russian refugee. He had been born in Odessa on 15th February 1918. His father had been a major with the remains of the Tsarist Denikin army and in the early Twenties the family relocated to Crete. Later Dobriansky moved with his parents to Pyrgos.⁴⁶

In her *Memoirs* Riefenstahl maintained that Dobriansky had been the fourth runner in the relay⁴⁷, yet he is not listed in the register of participants. The Hellenic Olympic Committee believes that he was out in only at the 27th kilometre, whereby appeal is made to the newspaper *Anexartitos* of the 23rd July 1936.⁴⁸

An article in the *Hellenikon Mellon* perhaps offers more reliable evidence. On the front page is a headline "The torchbearer of Pyrgos who is becoming a UFA star. Riefenstahl's protégé", and notes that the director had discovered the young man in Pyrgos "among the crowd of gawpers".⁴⁹

While in Berlin the Games began and Riefenstahl, returned from Greece, had the army of her cameramen shoot 400,000 metres of film. This was done without a detailed shooting plan. It was calculated that Riefenstahl only used around two percent of the rushes in the final film. Goebbels for one, was unhappy with the waste.

One segment that was included was that shot when Dobriansky played his role as "torchbearer" in the ruins of Delphi. This particular segment of the film was shot by the avant-garde cameraman Willy Zielke⁵⁰ and this was not his only role. He was also a director based in Munich and had written the screenplay for the prologue. In fact he signed a contract of the 11th May 1936 to deliver two versions: "1st His own concept based on the existing manuscript, 2nd A version according to the concept of Ms. Riefenstahl (The manuscript has still be handed in)." Zielke was to be paid 10,000 RM as well as a camera of his choice suitable for the prologue.⁵¹

As part of the contract he also directed the other sequences at the Grabschen Haken in the Curonian Spit not far from the Lithuanian border, where a camp had been built as accommodation. There he first produced the sequence with the naked "temple dancers". Thirty performers were chosen from some 300 female sports students in Berlin. They had been select for their beauty and the nudity was carefully shot.

In order to be present with the male actors, Zielke next had a visit from Riefenstahl, who was joined not only by his wife Elfriede, but also the handsome Anatol. He was supposed to light of the "Olympic" flame on the stump of a pillar which had been installed by a set designer. The steeply falling Northern sunlight produced superior images to those obtained in Greece.

There was immediately a dispute when Riefenstahl, who insisted on posing with the female dancers in front of the camera. Zielke described her figure later as "on the plump side"⁵² but managed in the end to persuade her not to pose. Instead her hands were seen.

The tension escalated in January 1937. Zielke, who had delivered the finished version on time as per contract and now waited impatiently for days in a Berlin hotel for the approval of his prologue. He was not sure of the decision when there was another argument. This ended when Riefenstahl declared him to be "crazy". Zielke was sent back to Munich, where he suffered a nervous breakdown.

Zielke described a young man he named as "Russian X" as an "agent provocateur" and continued "whom Frau Riefenstahl recently had added to her film team".⁵³ According to Zielke the Russian was supposed to provoke him "to acquire proof of my homosexual inclination!"⁵⁴

On 13th February 1937 Zielke's wife took him to the Psychiatric Department of a Munich hospital, where he was diagnosed with "severe schizoprenia", which he



later described as “abduction”. He maintained that Riefenstahl wanted to put him behind bars so that she could take control of his work. “This woman was my enemy” he said.⁵⁵

This episode is open to an alternative interpretation. The letters of Elfriede Zielke demonstrate a plausible concern for the well being of her husband. She had suddenly left been without any money after her husband had spent the fee for the prologue on an expensive Askania camera, there is a quite believable concern about the fate of her spouse.⁵⁶ It is impossible at this distance to establish the truth.

Zielke spent six years in the asylum of Munich-Haar and in the so-called Healing and Nursing Institute of Eglfing. Only after he had been compulsorily sterilised was he released in September 1942. He was placed in the care of his mother in Blankenburg/Harz.

Surprisingly Riefenstahl approached Zielke in late 1944, when because of the “total war” her staff had left, to persuade the allegedly “crazy” cameraman to make “completion pictures” for her film *Tiefland*.⁵⁷ Although he saw her at least as co-responsible for his time of suffering, he felt compelled to agree as since Olympia film, he had been without an income.

However he was once shocked to discover that in Riefenstahl’s archive, which she had meantime moved to Kitzbühel, his name was completely missing from the credits and that she claimed to be the originator of the

prologue, although she had only cut around two tiny sections.⁵⁸

It was the same story with the de luxe volume *Schönheit im Olympischen Kampf*, which had appeared at the end of 1937 before the film was premiered. The author is listed as Riefenstahl but the first 40 pages are Zielke’s photographs. He is not mentioned until the last page as originator of the “pictures of the temples, statues and nudes” – mostly enlargements from the prologue.⁵⁹ The photographers Arthur Grimm⁶⁰ and Rolf Lantin⁶¹ looked after templates.

The original film disappeared without trace

The authentic Olympia film, first screened on 20th April 1938 which was Hitler’s 49th birthday, can no longer be found. It is said that at the end of the war, the original negative was stored in the Alps along with together with the films of the Reichspartei days and other Nazi works.⁶²

There were versions in German, Italian and French. The latter with the title *Dieux du Stade (Gods of the Stadium)*. In addition Riefenstahl produced an English and an American cut but it was not a success in the British Empire and there Americans refused to screen it.⁶³ No rental company was prepared to take on the film.

Not until 1948 was it shown in the USA an abbreviated version under the title *Kings of the Olympics*.⁶⁴ Originally Riefenstahl intended to sell this film to the American

Fresh from the register office: Anatol married a young Berlin girl in 1938.



Olympic Committee during her USA tour at the end of 1938 for an "amazing sum"⁶⁵. This however was a deal which did not come to pass.

What many know today is thus only a reconstruction of the Olympia film which Riefenstahl had pieced together in the mid-1950s. To do that she was able to use a German copy which she had bought from a cinema owner. She also acquired a damaged French strip which had been returned by the Parisian authorities and an American version which had been in the possession of IOC President Avery Brundage.

Riefenstahl, who had been banned from working after the end the war, only managed that after years of struggle, in which it was a question of her mere existence. The films she made from 1926 to 1933 had been overtaken by time. Her Nazi films were forbidden and her last production, *Tiefland* was incomplete. Thus *OLYMPIA* was the only way she could make money.

The first person she spoke to was Diem, who had started to develop what later became the German Sport University in Cologne in 1947. He tried to secure the release of the film material confiscated by the French authorities in Kitzbühel. Diem's efforts proved in vain. IOC Member Marquis de Polignac, who had once been sympathetic to the National Socialists, let Diem know that he had lost influence in France.

The contact with Otto Mayer proved more fruitful. Mayer, a jeweller in Switzerland had now become IOC Chancellor. He despatched the Olympic Diploma to Riefenstahl. This had been awarded in 1939 at the request of Avery Brundage but it had never been formally handed over.⁶⁶ In return he requested a copy of the "splendid film"⁶⁷, which the Olympic Museum did not own.

It would not be until 27 years after the film's release that Riefenstahl was in a position to fulfil this wish, however at a price of 4200 German Marks (DM). In late 1965 the secretary of the IOC, Lydie Zanchi, confirmed that the rolls of film had arrived in Lausanne and the bill was paid.⁶⁸

Riefenstahl's priority at this time was to get the film released so that it could again be shown in cinemas. However she failed to convince the censors who made permission dependent on an additional commentary which was to contain the truth about the "Third Reich". Riefenstahl was not prepared to allow that.⁶⁹ The letters of protest from Diem, Mayer and other office-bearers whom Riefenstahl had enlisted had no effect.

It was only when she agreed to the proposals of the controlling authority and to shorten certain sequences that permission was granted to allow the film to be exhibited. The cuts are often somewhat clumsy. In the film 86 metres are missing mainly from the first part, from which she had to remove all the images of Hitler.

A swastika flag and the head of Hitler had originally filled the screen as a transition from the torch relay to the Olympic Stadium ended on the cutting room floor. Other cuts included the march in of the Austrian team, Rudolf Ismayr's Olympic Oath, some spectator scenes and three victory ceremonies for German athletes.⁷⁰

The prologue did remain untouched even though the authorities had demanded its removal on the grounds that it had nothing to do with the Olympic Games. There

Stage free! The Berlin Varieté-Theatre "Scala" engaged Dobriansky in the foreground of the premiere of the Olympia film for a performance as torchbearer. The payment for the evening was 130 Reichsmarks. Adjacent: A much sought after document: without membership of the Reichsfilmkammer (controlled by Goebbels) it was not possible to work as a film actor in the "Third Reich"

Photos: Estate Anatol Dobriansky



was suspicion of the great deal of incense and the naked flesh. The year 1958 was during the austere "Adenauer era" when people were quick to reproach other over what they saw as pornography.

Yet the release was only a half victory, because the film evaluation office which had the task of judging the artistic or historical quality then refused it a classification.⁷¹ *OLYMPIA* could be shown, yet the cinema owners lacked the interest in a piece of film for which an official recommendation was missing.

Even the rights to the prologue were gifted to Riefenstahl

Where there is a prologue, the epilogue should not be missing. Riefenstahl's "Tolik", as Dobriansky was called, remained in Germany even after filming of *OLYMPIA* had ended. Riefenstahl's affection went so far that as to finance his training as an actor as well as language instruction. She even arranged his membership in the Reichsfilmkammer, from which opposition and Jewish filmmakers were excluded.

Dobriansky had however to earn his own living. He appeared in the forefront of the Olympia film premiere as "torchbearer" in the Berlin revue theatre "Scala" Through Riefenstahl's agency he got a supporting role in the film *Revolutionshochzeit*.⁷² However this film career was to be short lived. In front of the camera he confused who was cook and who waiter. Also his voice was considered "shaky".⁷³

Soon after that Anatol married a Berlin girl, and Riefenstahl's interest cooled. It had not been for entirely artistic reasons. Anatol was still stateless, and he was deported to the armament industry in Brunswick, where he worked as a technical draughtsman.

From 1941 he served in the navy which trained him as a wiretapping specialist because of his talent for foreign languages. At the end of 1944 he was transferred to the Kleinkampfverbänden [Small Fighting Units], a suicide squad with very small U-boats.⁷⁴

After a short internment he returned to Berlin where he became a stocking salesman. He like moving amongst the Russian emigre circles who had gathered on the Kurfürstendamm around the last member of the family of Prince Kropotkin.⁷⁵ After Dobriansky's marriage had failed he moved to Bavaria with a new partner. He died on 24th July 1982.

Dobriansky had the good fortune that his blond double lacked. Sergeant-major Jürgen Ascherfeld was missing in action at the end of August 1942. He was only 33 kilometres from Stalingrad.⁷⁶

Zielke the creator of the Olympia prologue fought in vain for his recognition as a victim of political persecution and for restitution. It was not until 1987, only two years before his death, that he received 5000 DM in compensation.



Whilst he struggled with bureaucracy and civil servants, Riefenstahl signed a contract worth millions with Federal Transit film company GmbH. This was formally agreed on 16th January 1964 although it was undoubtedly clear from the papers of 1941 that it was not Riefenstahl but the German Reich which was listed as "owner of the originator's and exploitation rights".⁷⁷

Yet, "in the interest of an undisturbed continuing exploitation" the rights were now more or less gifted to her and the profit from the exploitation divided 70:30 in favour of Riefenstahl. She and her heirs continued to earn with every metre of film recorded by cameramen like Zielke.

When Riefenstahl then prepared a video cassette in 1990 for the IOC, she included some of the sequences which had previously been cut from the film. However the dvd offered for sale nowadays remains an incomplete version of the film.

The exploitation rights of the Olympia film did not as return as agreed after 30 years to the Transit company, but remained with Riefenstahl. A press statement of the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation notes: "The commercial exploitation rights were passed on by Gisela Jahn", Riefenstahl's last secretary, "to the firm La Tresor Kreativhandel GmbH".⁷⁸ Nowadays, the business from Unterföhring is better known for the representation of pop stars.

It cannot be excluded that the arguments about the Olympia film and its copyright is only properly beginning now. The gift of 700 cardboard boxes is unlikely to change much more. ■

During the Second World War Anatol Dobriansky served in the German navy. He was trained to monitor enemy submarines. In the last years of the war he joined the "small fighting units", with one-man U-boats ordered to sink enemy shipping. He was spared from anything serious.

Photo: Estate Anatol Dobriansky

1 Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation, Press statement, 12th February 2018
2 Horst Kettner (1942–2016) was Riefenstahl's cameraman from 1968. They were a couple from 1978. After Kettner's death the estate was dissolved by the long-serving secretary Gisela Jahn. From 1924 to

From film star to a sales rep. for stockings: Anatol in West Berlin after the war.

Photo: Estate Anatol Dobriansky



- 1926 Riefenstahl had been engaged to tennis player Otto Froitzheim (1884–1962). Her first husband was Peter Jacob (1909–1992) an officer in the alpine military section who was a holder of the Knight's Cross. They were married from 1944 to 1947. After the divorce Jacob married the daughter of Hitler's personal photographer Heinrich Hoffmann. Henriette von Schirach (née Hoffmann) had separated in 1950 from her husband Baldur von Schirach, sentenced to 20 years imprisonment (former Reich Youth Leader and Gauleiter of Vienna).
- 3 *Die Welt*, 20th April 2018. The director of the German Kinemathek, Rainer Rother, suggested that a period of six to eight years would probably be need for cataloguing and digitalisation. This estimate had been calculated taking into account how long had been needed to process the estate of German actress Marlene Dietrich.
 - 4 www.criterion.com/films/29360-100-years-of-olympic-films-1912-2012
 - 5 IOC, General Rules applicable to the Celebration of the Olympic Games, XXVII, The taking of photographs and cinematograph-pictures, Berlin 1930, p. 30
 - 6 Bundesarchiv (Barch), R 1501/5608 Reichsministerium des Innern, letter Theodor Lewald to Hans Pfundtner, Vertrauliche Aufzeichnung, 5th October 1933
 - 7 Henry Picker (Ed.), *Hitlers Tischgespräche*, Ullstein Verlag, Berlin, 1993, pp. 216–217. Hitler boasted that the building of the Olympic Stadium had cost 77 million Reichsmarks and the Games had generated half a billion in foreign currency for the state. The estimate of the Reich interior ministry is considered more reliable. It puts the cost of the stadium at 40 million RM.
 - 8 *Reichssportblatt*, Vol. 2, No. 31, 3rd August 1935, pp. 863–864
 - 9 The first performance took place on 28th March 1935. Before that she had already produced a propaganda film about the 1933 Reichsparteitag with the title *Der Sieg des Glaubens*.
 - 10 Leni Riefenstahl, *Memoiren 1902–1945*, Ullstein, Berlin 1990, p. 236–237
 - 11 Staatsarchiv Freiburg, Badisches Staatskommissariat für politische Säuberungen, minutes, meeting, 6th July 1949, D 180/2, No. 228165/1, p. 22. Moreover she was classified as “not involved” by a civilian court responsible for denazification with the indication that Riefenstahl had already been an “internationally recognised film star”.

- 12 “Leni Riefenstahl gossips out of school”, in: Walter Trömel (Ed.), *Olympia. Der Film von den XI. Olympischen Spielen in Berlin 1936*, Verlag Deutsche Volksbücher, Wiesbaden 1938, p. 12
- 13 Barch R 55/503, Reichspropagandaministerium (RMVP), Bericht der Kassen- und Rechnungsprüfung bei der Olympia-Film GmbH, 16th October 1936
- 14 Barch R 55/1327, RMVP, Finanzierung der Olympia-Filme, 23rd November 1938
- 15 Barch R 55/1328, letter RMVP to Olympia-Film GmbH, 1st February 1939
- 16 Barch, R 43 II/731, RMVP, Pressenotiz, 18th May 1936, The Deutsche Nachrichten-Büro (DNB) however did not publish the statement until 10th June 1936.
- 17 The partners' shares of the propaganda ministry was administered by Riefenstahl (18,000 RM) and her brother (2000 RM) about on trust. The company was wound up from 1940 and dissolved on 9th January 1942.
- 18 *Memoiren*, p. 248
- 19 Barch R 55/503, RMVP, Bericht der Kassen- und Rechnungsprüfung bei der Olympia-Film GmbH, 16th October 1936
- 20 Barch, R 55/1327, Olympia-Film GmbH, final balancing, 31st December 1941
- 21 Barch R 003/001610, Goebbels Diaries, Vol. 3, p. 874
- 22 *Ibid*, p. 899
- 23 Carl und Liselott Diem-Archiv (CuLDA), Cologne, Leni Riefenstahl, *About the production of the Olympia films* (False statements and their contradiction), Response to the resolution of the film evaluation agency of Wiesbaden of 30th January 1958
- 24 Werner Klingenberg (1910–1982), from 1935 to 1936 director of the sports department in the Organising Committee of the Olympic Games 1936 in Berlin, then IOC adviser for the 1940 Olympic Games in Tokyo and Helsinki as well as designated IOC General Secretary. See also *JOH*, Vol. 3, No. 3/2015, pp. 14–27
- 25 Carl Diem, *Diaries*, Vol. 9, pp. 47–48
- 26 *Memoiren*, pp. 249–251
- 27 Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Franz Eher Verlag, München 1938, p. 453. The second volume first appeared in 1927.
- 28 Cf. Alfred Rosenberg, *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Hohen-eichen-Verlag, München 1930
- 29 A prehistoric human, whose remains were found near Düsseldorf, Germany.
- 30 Henry Picker (Ed.), *Hitlers Tischgespräche*, 18th January 1942, nachts (Wolffschanze), Bibliothek der Zeitgeschichte, Ullstein, Berlin 1993, p. 85
- 31 *Ibid.*, p. 93
- 32 Barch B 323/683. At Hitler's wish the Italian foreign ministry in May 1938 granted the sale of the Discobolos. As with the excavations in Olympia the statue was paid for by a specially created “Führer fund”. In 1948 the Italian government demanded the statue back. It had been stored in the American Central Collecting Point Munich.
- 33 *OLYMPIA. Fest der Völker*, Erstes Presseheft, Tobis Filmkunst GmbH, Berlin 1938, p. 9
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 31
- 35 Cf. Stephanie Barron, *Entartete Kunst. Das Schicksal der Avantgarde im Nazi-Deutschland*, Hirmer Verlag München und Museum Associates, Los Angeles County Museum of Art 1992
- 36 Olympia Film GmbH (Ed.), “Das Manuskript”, in: *Leni Riefenstahls Olympia-Film*, Berlin 1938
- 37 Barch, R 58/2320, Preußische Geheime Staatspolizei, Circular on the activities of the Political Police regarding the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin, 18th July 1936
- 38 Aristoteles, *Rhetoric*, III, 14
- 39 *OLYMPIA*, Presseheft, p. 47
- 40 Hilmar Hoffmann, *Mythos Olympia. Autonomie und Unterwerfung von Sport und Kultur*, Aufbau-Verlag, Berlin 1993, p. 135
- 41 The discus and javelin throwing athlete were represented by the muscular Erwin Huber (1907–2003), who placed fourth in the decathlon in 1936. Riefenstahl also engaged Luz Long as a shot putter. He won long jump silver behind Jesse Owens in Berlin.
- 42 *Memoiren*, p. 262
- 43 Jürgen Ascherfeld (1909–1942), a trained sports teacher, was employed in the organising committee as an expert on the sport of antiquity. For the book *OLYMPIA* (Atlantis Verlag Berlin 1935), which included three lectures by Ernst Curtius from the years 1856 to 1880, Ascherfeld published “Erläuterungen über den Sport und

- die Kampfarten der Griechen". His article "Der Knabe aus Tralles", appears in *Olympische Rundschau*, Vol. 2, No. 6, July 1939, pp. 19–23.
- 44 Carl Diem, *Olympische Reise*, Deutscher Schriftenverlag, Berlin 1937
- 45 Barch R 58/2320, Deutsche Arbeitsfront, Zentralbüro Amt Information an Geheime Staatspolizei (Gestapo), Betr.: Bericht der „Fliegenden Redaktion“ des „Angriffs“ über die Vorgänge beim Olympia-Staffellauf in einzelnen Staaten, 14th August 1936. On the Riefenstahl expedition it states on p. 4: "Her propaganda rolled over all the rest. The press were only the tail of a comet. As is well known the Greek press started a campaign against Frau Riefenstahl because she wished to take a young Russian with her to Germany."
- 46 Interview by Volker Kluge with Michael M. Dobriansky (son of Anatol), Berlin 2009
- 47 *Memoiren*, p. 263
- 48 HOC Press Office, Information from Tassos Papachristou, 19th November 2014. The list of the torchbearers shows "A. Dobrogiannis" as runner number 24.
- 49 *Hellenikon Mellon*, 15th November 1937
- 50 Willy Zielke (1902–1989), director and cameraman, described himself as a "cultural film producer". From 1927 to 1933 he worked as a lecturer at the Bayerischen Staatslehranstalt für Lichtbildwesen. Riefenstahl became aware of him through his film *Das Stahltier*, which he produced in 1934/35 for the Deutsche Reichsbahn. The first showing was prevented by Goebbels who felt it was "too modern and too abstract".
- 51 Willy Zielke, Filmarchiv Potsdam, N 001/0041 429–446. In the contract of 11th May 1936 with the Olympia-Film GmbH is stated: "By reason of the work plan, manuscript and projected costs laid before us, which may not exceed 60,000 RM, we hand over to you the completion of the Olympia prologue proposed by you." As delivery date the 31st October 1936 was agreed.
- 52 Filmarchiv Potsdam, N 001/0041 429–446, "Kurze Beschreibung meiner Freiheitsberaubung im 3-ten Reich" [Short description of my deprivation of liberty in the 3rd Reich], p. 12. The 18 page document arose as an appeal against the refusal of his calling by the compensation office of Berlin (West) of 24th January 1958.
- 53 *Ibid.*, p. 6
- 54 *Ibid.*, p. 13
- 55 *Ibid.*, p. 8
- 56 Barch R 9361 V/115350, letter Elfriede Zielke to Professor Carl Froelich (from 1939 President of the Reichsfilmkammer), 3rd August 1937, as well as application "re: donation 'Künstlerdank'", 12th November 1938.
- 57 *Ibid.*, Riefenstahl-Film GmbH to Reichsfilmkammer, application for "general special permission" for Willy Zielke, 6th November 1944
- 58 *OLYMPIA, Teil 1: Fest der Völker*, arte Edition, Kinowelt Home Entertainment GmbH (DVD). Apart from Riefenstahl only the composer Herbert Windt (1894–1965) is named.
- 59 Leni Riefenstahl, *Schönheit im Olympischen Kampf*, Deutscher Verlag, Berlin 1937
- 60 Arthur Grimm (1908–approx. 1990), who was a member of the Nazi Party from 1933, worked on Riefenstahl's films as a stationary photographer and was responsible for templates. During the Second World War he was special leader of a propaganda company.
- 61 Rolf Lantin (1903–1978) worked from 1934 to 1945 for Riefenstahl as a photographer, inter alia on the feature film *Tiefeland*.
- 62 *Memoiren*, pp. 405–406. According to Riefenstahl three metal chests, which on the instructions of the Nazi leadership were stored in an unknown site in the Alps, came as far as Bozen (Bolzano). There is no trace of them now.
- 63 In addition Riefenstahl had more foreign language variants produced, partly some included different images, to suit domestic audiences in the territories where they were to be shown.
- 64 Riefenstahl's promotional tour to the USA (28th October 1938 to 26th January 1939) was a disaster. Through the call for a common boycott of the American Jewish Congress and the Jewish Labor Committee there were no public performances. There were only two private performances on the 20th November 1938 in the house of Avery Brundage in Chicago and on 14th December in the California Club in Los Angeles with over 140 guests (among others with Olympic champions Marjorie Gestring, Glenn Morris and Kenneth Carpenter). In addition the Deutsche Handelskammer issued invitations to a showing on 2nd January 1939. Also it came about that Riefenstahl's press chief Ernst Jäger left the travel party in which Klingeberg was a third member. Jäger remained in the USA. In June 1939 he wrote a series of articles in the *Hollywood Tribune* entitled "How Leni Riefenstahl became Hitler's Girlfriend".
- 65 CuLDA, letter AAU Secretary-Treasurer Daniel Ferris to Diem, 8th April 1947
- 66 Staatsarchiv Freiburg, D 18C/2, No. 228165/1, letter Otto Mayer to Riefenstahl, 6th April 1948
- 67 *Ibid.*, 28th May 1948
- 68 Olympic Studies Centre (OSC), Lausanne, letter Zanchi to Riefenstahl, 19th November 1965
- 69 CuLDA, Freiwillige Selbstkontrolle der Filmwirtschaft (FSK), Wiesbaden, 9th January 1958
- 70 As the Austrians had marched in with their right arms raised, that could be misinterpreted as the so-called German greeting. Ismayr had sworn the Olympic Oath on the swastika flag. (At the time the national flag was always used for this ritual)
- 71 CuLDA, Claim against the decision of the evaluation committee, 30th January 1958. According to the procedure regulations of today's Deutschen Film- und Medienbewertung (FBW) films receive no classification, which inter alia breach the constitution or the law as well as "serve political propaganda in a derogatory way".
- 72 *Revolutionshochzeit*, Regie Hans H. Zerlett. The cast included Brigitte Horney and Bernhard Minetti in the leading roles, Terra Filmkunst 1938
- 73 Interview Michael M. Dobriansky
- 74 Deutsche Dienststelle (WAST), Berlin, 18th March 2011. Dobriansky was interned by the British on 18th August 1945. His last rank was Bootsmannsmaat (Marine Corporal).
- 75 Barch, R 9361-IX Kartei/23491129. With the death of Nikolai Kropotkin (1924–2014), who had joined the Nazi Party in 1942, the 109th generation of the Russian princely family was extinguished, from which with Peter Kropotkin also a significant theoretician of anarchy had emerged.
- 76 Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V., Kriegsgräberstätte Rossoschka
- 77 Barch R 109 I/2163, Agreement Transit-Filmgesellschaft with Riefenstahl, 16th January 1964
- 78 Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation, Press statement, 12th February 2018



Willy Zielke fought for years for recognition as a victim of political persecution. It was not until 1987, shortly before his death, that he received compensation for his years behind bars.

Photo: Willy Zielke, documentation of *Die Wahrheit*. Ein Film von dem Leidensweg des Deutschen Arbeiters (1934).