

Olympic Fascism.

The relationship between sports spectacles and mass propaganda

Fascismo olímpico. Sobre la relación entre espectáculo deportivo y propaganda de masas

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ABSTRACT

When limiting fascism to a time and often, a country (Germany), it is considered whether its cultural devices and communicational strategies are still valid, not as part of a classical fascism, but instead as functional equivalents that preserve pragmatic features and social conditions. To do this, there is an analysis of the fascist imagery in the documentary *Olympia* (1938) by Leni Riefenstahl, a film about the sports storytelling besides Nazi propaganda. There is a critical analysis about the concepts of leader and public. The aim is to establish projections towards other official films of modern Olympic Games to question whether there is a point of contact between the mass culture, fascism and propaganda. The overcoming of the mechanic relationship between the ideas and the image is identified, as well as the propaganda possibilities of aesthetic or documentary codes and the coincidence of fascist and contemporary communication policies.

KEYWORDS: Fascism; Riefenstahl; propaganda; sports; Olympia; cinema.

RESUMEN

Frente a la reducción del fascismo a una época y en muchas ocasiones a un país (Alemania), se plantea si sus dispositivos culturales y estrategias comunicativas siguen vigentes, ya no como parte de un fascismo clásico, sino de equivalentes funcionales que conservan rasgos pragmáticos y condiciones sociales. Para ello, se analiza la construcción del imaginario fascista en el documental *Olympia* (1938) de Leni Riefenstahl, film referente del relato deportivo además de la propaganda nazi. Se plantea un análisis crítico en torno a los conceptos de líder y público. Se busca así establecer proyecciones a otras películas oficiales de Juegos Olímpicos modernos con la intención de cuestionar si existe un punto de contacto entre la cultura de masas, el fascismo y la propaganda. Queda identificada la superación de la relación mecánica entre el ideario y la imagen, las posibilidades

propagandísticas de los códigos estéticos o documentales y la coincidencia de políticas comunicativas fascistas y contemporáneas.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Fascismo; Riefenstahl; propaganda; deporte; Olympia; cine.

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Translated by **Yuhanny Henares** (Academic translator, Universitat de Barcelona).

1. Introduction

As fascism appears as a remote historical episode, supposedly limited to the first half of the 20th century, more viable and necessary the critical analyses of said political and ideological phenomenon. The economic, social and cultural crisis that shocked the international map in the period 1920-1930 had one of its most terrible epicentres in the Nazi Germany during the government of Adolph Hitler and the German National Socialist Worker's Party (1933-1945). The classical fascist project would be defeated with the outcome of the II World War, but the cultural devices and the communication tools characteristic of the fascist politics caused a world impact that could hardly be erased. Later, some analysts warned about the "the always present need to de-Germanise Nazism" (Michaud 2009, p. 9). This need works against the ideological inertia that tends to reduce the fascist phenomenon to specific years and nations. Likewise, an inertia that would hinder the understanding of those elements (like the power of propaganda, the mass spectacle or racism among others) that the fascism shared with other socio-communicational contexts and that, in fact, could prevail by renewing their formulas and methods.

The philosopher Walter Benjamin, who would die in 1940 escaping from the fascist persecution, stated in a renowned text that the "self-induced alienation" is related to the "aestheticisation of politics championed by the fascism" (2012, p. 85). There is an explanatory note added to that same text: "In huge and merry parades, in enormous assemblies, massive sports celebrations and, in brief, at war, in all these events recorded by filming devices, the mass stares at itself" (2012, p. 83). Now, it is that pragmatic relationship between fascism, mass culture and sports spectacle, what would stand out as a current interrogation mark. This article suggests an analysis of some elements of that cultural production, especially in relation to the mass spectacle, to better understand some aspects of the contemporary sports communication. It is about a critical review, in terms of audiovisual textuality, of one of the most complex and valid film productions left as heritage by the classic fascism: *Olympia* (1938) is the film production made by Leni Riefenstahl about the Olympic Games of Berlin (1936) in a film considered still today as one of the best documentaries in history (Downing 2012, p. 121). It is about repositioning the fascist imagery in this cinematographic production by putting an emphasis on the figures of the leader and public to suggest hypotheses about what projections are still in effect nowadays. Since it is a complex and multidimensional theme, there is an attempt to delimit and stand out only some detail aspects that, from a *micro* perspective, could contribute to enlighten a rather *macro* perspective about the current communicational dynamics.

2. Theoretical delimitation: fascist mark

Among the most influential studies of the classic fascism at least one polemic transversal argument can be highlighted. This argument, expressed in a synthetic form by Z. Bauman (1998, p. 15),

suggests “that we manage the Holocaust as a strange, although significant and reliable proof of the hidden possibilities of the modern society”. More provocatively still, Bauman indicated in *Modernity and Holocaust* (1998, pp. 14-15) that

it is difficult to ease the anxiety if we consider that none of the social conditions that made an Auschwitz possible have disappeared, but no effective measures have been taken to avoid that those possibilities and principles could generate catastrophes similar to Auschwitz’s.

Following Bauman, the “simultaneous singularity and normality of the Holocaust” (1998, p. 123) supported on specific bureaucratic, propaganda and technical mechanisms that persisted in a renovated manner after the Nazism, because its generation was related to the socialising project of the Western, industrial and colonial modernity.

Also, in its already classic and prestigious study *Fascism: Comparison and Definition* (original dated 1980), Stanley G. Payne investigated in detail, both the background as well as the historical effects of fascism to establish that “Hitlerism was a symptomatic product of the modern world” (Payne 2014, p. 127). Payne argues how “the fascist philosophical ideas are in fact a direct product of the Enlightenment aspects” (2014, p. 20) as, in fact, implicitly other scholars have already developed like T. W. Adorno and M. Horkheimer, when connecting the dynamics of totalitarian social control with the emergency of the Cultural Industry (Adorno / Horkheimer 2003). The conclusion of Payne (2014, p. 265) is quite unsettling: “In this sense, the influence of the fascism will keep being felt in the future, as will also be felt by some of the most vociferous formal anti-fascists”. R. O. Paxton points out at this same direction in his most recent publication *The Anatomy of Fascism*, a detailed, contextualised and documented study about the genealogy and the nuances of the fascist phenomenon of the 20th century. To prepare to answer to the critical question: “What is fascism?” Paxton alerts:

Armed with the historical knowledge, we must be able to distinguish the unpleasant but isolated imitations of today, with their shaved heads and their swastika tattoos, versus the authentic functional equivalents in the form of a fascist-conservative mature alliance. Thus warned, we must be able to detect the authentic thing when it comes out. (2005, p. 240)

Namely, the world present must trigger alert mechanisms to prevent the resurgence, not of the fascism in its already classic and recognisable *modus operandi*, but instead, the form of new but authentic “functional equivalents”. Although it is a question that cannot be completely “empirically analysed” (Bauman 1998, p. 15), it can be deduced here that the obsession about the *normality* characteristic of the fascism (Arendt 2013, p. 46) has stalled precisely as a norm in subsequent developments of the contemporary society and the culture. The (neo)fascist mark requires, then, an attentive discernment of the factors that contributed to the creation of politics and a culture of unprecedented human devastation in times of an acute crisis. Therefore, following Amery (2002, p. 157), “the first premise for its application (or reapplication) is a situation of crisis that includes both the material shortage as well as experiencing an existential disorientation”. Again, it can be noted why there are still debates in this critical sense: “Our first question formulates: is it possible, or likely, to have a Hitlerian crisis in the 21st century? Yes”. (Amery 2002, p. 157).

From a cultural and audiovisual perspective, based on the analysis of the case that represents the filmic and photographic legacy of Leni Riefenstahl, Susan Sontag in “Fascinating Fascism” (2007)

has highlighted that the fascist imagery feeds from resources like the propaganda spectacle, the cult for beauty, the physical idealisation or the rejection of the intellect. Based on these, Sontag denounces that still “these ideals are alive and touch many people” [which represents a challenge for] “the modern capacity to identify the fascist longing in our context” (2007, p. 105-106). Sontag's diagnosis could support on previous reflections of the filmmaker and writer Pier Paolo Pasolini, who on different passages of his production, he reflects upon how the classic fascism has been shifting in the second half of the 20th century into techno-cultural methods rather than political-military. This “new power” could be emblematised, according to Pasolini, into the quotidian *Pregnanz* of television as a sign of a “new fascism” even more repressive than the previous fascism. Using the terms applied by Pasolini (2009, p. 34) regarding the seventies:

Undoubtedly (referring to results) the television is more authoritarian and repressive than any other media in the world. Compared to it, the fascist newspaper and the Mussolini-related signs painted on the farmsteads are worthy of laughter, as (if with pain) a plough before the tractor. The fascism was unable to hardly scratch the soul of the Italian people; the new fascism, through the new communication and information media (precisely, above all, television) has not only scratch it, but instead lacerate it, rape it.

This critical view will confirm in the indication introduced by Jean-Luc Godard in the script of his film *Goodbye to language* (2014): in the same years of the historical rise of the fascism, there start the first tests with the television technology. It was the iconoscope or cathode ray tube invented by the Russian Engineer Vladimir Zworykin. From here, Godard makes an elementary reflection: someone defeated by weapons can overcome his enemy politically. Or culturally: the iconoscopic camera was the most used camera for sports broadcasts in the United States during the 1936-1946 period. In that same period, the experiments of J. Goebbels with the radio and cinema would become references both of massive persuasion as well as of the *mass communication research* (Pizarroso 1990).

In December 1938, there is written a chapter about the cultural progress of the Nazi propaganda. In the middle of the American tour to introduce *Olympia*, Walt Disney turns into the only great producer to receive Riefenstahl, boycotted by the "night of the broken glass". The first great scholar of this Olympic film, Cooper C. Graham, cites the disbelief of Riefenstahl before those who did not understand the exchange and states that Disney "had a great German feeling. He often used the German fables and tales to find inspiration" (Graham 2001, p. 223). The meeting between Riefenstahl and Disney, who will be even investigated as a Nazi sympathiser (Vidal González 2006, p. 240), takes place within a framework of shared industrial interests, both about the interest in the propaganda cinema by USA as well as for the entertainment cinema by Germany.

Even though it is indisputable that the propaganda “reaches its most brilliant summits” (Pizarroso 2005, p. 56) with the Nazi cultural politics, it has also been studied and confirmed that “Goebbels decided that entertainment programming was a vital part of the war effort” (Negus 1996, p. 207). The interest of cinema as a mass spectacle, shared both by Riefenstahl and Disney, is thus introduced as a metonymy of the rise of what would later be known as *the spectacle society* (Debord 1999). In this sense, the idea of the totalitarianism as a tyranny based on isolation (Arendt 1987, p. 702) can be articulated with the critical hypothesis that perceives isolation as inherent to the spectacle pragmatics

- in the sense that, as Debord (1999, p. 49) says, “the spectacle gathers the separated, but it gathers *since it is separated*”.

In brief, in the second half of the 20th century the spectacle fascism could have experienced a technological and media metamorphosis due to the boost of the *consumption society*. Namely, during the last century, the capitalism and fascism would have entered into a regime of mutual alliance at global scale. This strategic alliance would have allowed both the capitalist system as well as the fascist project to support mutually by virtue of the hegemonic implantation of *soft*, or *smart*-like, of a complete process of screenisation socially assimilated as a “standardisation treatment” (Baceiredo 2016, p. 48). Thus, it can be reasonably stated that “the Holocaust is, for good or for evil, already a consumption product (Lozano 2010, p. 78), at the same time that the fascism could have turned into another enclave of the tourism imagery, a topic of the commercial film industry or a motive of popular and massive entertainment. As noted in the famous and awarded *Schindler's List* (S. Spielberg, 1993), capitalism and fascism can even have a human face, namely “a businessman as hero; the capitalism can provide a universal healthcare system and can also provide a Schindler” (Lozano 2010, p. 101). If, like Paxton (2005, p. 243) says with sarcasm, “capitalism and fascism became bed partners”, then the accelerated and globalised expansion of the capitalist system in the 21st century could take place in a “complex network of interaction” (Paxton 2005, p. 31) where the mass politics, socioeconomic crisis and audiovisual propaganda could work jointly. Naturally, even so we cannot talk about fascism in a traditional or classic manner, but perhaps we could in the sense of a *new fascism* or *low intensity fascism* (Méndez Rubio 2017) which triggers would be yet to identify and evaluate.

3. Analysis and results: the Olympic spectacle

“The fascism is, among all the political forms, the most deliberately visual”. This statement (Paxton 2005, p. 17) can serve as a guiding thread to review the specific cases of sports spectacles and their current validity. The Olympic Games of Berlin, in fact, were the most relevant international event of the Nazi Germany with 49 countries and 4,069 athletes (Yagüe 1992, p. 199). It is estimated that 32 million dollars were spent compared to the 2.5 million of the Olympic Games in Los Angeles in 1932 (Yagüe 1992, p. 197). For the first time, homes were built for athletes, the stadium was extended up to 100 thousand spectators, there was a premiere of the relocation of the Olympic torch... The film *Olympia* (1938) was a personal assignment commissioned to L. Riefenstahl by Hitler, the *fürher* satisfied by the psychological and symbolic effect of one of the greatest productions of filmic propaganda, also produced by Riefenstahl, *The Triumph of Will* (*Triumph des Willens*, 1934). On its part, *Olympia*, concretises and creates the image that Germany wanted to convey to the rest of Europe and the world. The violent individuals never needed to refute opposite arguments, “they preferred methods that concluded with death rather than persuasion, that disseminated terror, rather than conviction” (Gubern 2004, p. 251). The propaganda are not slogans for the persuaded “but considering that the already convinced did not need such propaganda, it was targeted instead to the non-totalitarian layers of its population or the non-totalitarian foreign countries” (Gubern 2004, p. 251).

The cinema offered for the fascism, the crucial function of channelling the collective energy towards a “power of awakening that was perceived as the power of the truth immanent to image” (Michaud 2009, p. 158). The experience of masses, as Gustave Le Bon already suggested in his pioneer essay *Psychology of the masses* (1895), demanded a “reduction of the linguistic thinking to the image” (Michaud 2009, p. 295), therefore the moving images served as a space of projective and effective self-fulfilment of the affective needs of the multitude. Thus, the film image turned in a space of production and channelling of “mobilising passions” (Paxton 2005, p. 255). The image triggered

devices of mass control that tend to sublimate both the crisis as well as the violence of the social context. In brief, the image, “model of the controlled anticipation and of the engendering of the same for the same, it was the language par excellence of the government of bodies” (Michaud 2009, p. 276). And the cinema stood back then as an extremely functional and powerful communication device. The documentary films about military campaigns and the weekly news programmes persistently supported that need for “direct cinematographic propaganda” (Kracauer 1985, p. 257).

The Nazi era, like Eric Rentschler warns in his study about the posthumously life of the Nazi cinema (*The ministry of Illusion*, original de 1996), represents for the popular mythology, an era of terror, violence and destruction like an “endless terror movie where the devil and his minions conquer the world” (Rentschler 2002, p. 7). Everything fades, explains Rentschler, when you sit before the screen. When analysing the compendium of the sociologist Gerd Albrecht it is discovered that out of the 1,094 productions of the Third Reich, 941 were completely generic productions: 295 melodramas and biopics, 123 adventure films and approximately half, 523, were comedies and musicals (Rentschler 2002, p. 7). The review of the Nazi cinema ranges between the condemnation of this Great German Show of Terror (Rentschler 2002, p. 8) where entertainment is just an amplifier of the propaganda or, to the other extreme, the Nazi cinema is alluded under the most absolute fascination, playing with the words used by Sontag. In fact, many pop heroes of the 70s claimed and recovered Riefenstahl's legacy: Francis Ford Coppola, Mick Jagger or Bryan Ferry (Seesslen 2013, p. 25). There are also scenes that refer to her films, for instance, in *Star Wars*, by George Lucas (Rentschler 2002, p. 6) ends with the same image of Riefenstahl in *Triumph des Willens* (1934).

The fascination questions the inertia that delimits fascism to a place, Germany, and a past century. But at the same time, it is necessary to undo the topic that talks about the Nazi cinema as a sort of anachronistic and propaganda pamphlet. Only in the televisions of the Federal Republic of Germany (the zone ruled by allies), 8% of the films broadcasted in 1980 belonged to the Nazi period, 113 films that in 1989 increased to 169 (Rentschler 2002, p. 4). The data and the admiration are only indicators of the validity of a complete system and some cultural strategies and mechanisms. Between the fascination and the disgust, emerges the complexity of a system where illusion and propaganda coexist, namely, where “the fiction and non-fiction film where more than once, perfectly articulated to achieve the desired effect” (Sandoval 2005, p. 100). Precisely, cinema as another piece of that culture (sculpture, architecture, radio, public staging, sports...) that wanted to mechanise the illusion and that dispels the idea that preconceives this system as an hagiographic, insubstantial pamphlet unworthy of analysis. But, like Rentschler says, that complexity is precisely another sample of timeliness and proximity to a specific mass model:

The Nazi culture of masses emulates and reproduces the American patterns of recognition. It produced the entertainment industry at an affordable cost and of second hand: successful melodies, fashion trends, magazines, brilliant advertisements, household appliances for everyone, massive audiences and anxious cinemagoers that awaited the weekly novelties of cinema showtimes. (2002, p. 22)

One of the largest scenarios where that Nazi mass culture was put into practice (using Rentschler's term) were the Olympic Games of Berlin, where the complexity of messages and the convergence of image were unavoidable. *Olympia* was the attempt to narrate it to the world. Another proof before these inertias that consider the Nazi cultural production as a story characteristic from a time and very ideologised, is that scholars analysing the Olympic phenomenon (Kruger 2003, p. 21) consider them

“the first games of the modern era” thanks to this “planned propaganda”. Already in *Triumph des Willens* the “spectacular ornaments of excited masses” have become a dramaturgical resource in the screen (Kracauer 1985, p. 272). Furthermore, in *Olympia* there would be a decisive synergy: the convergence of the power of cinema with the power of the sports spectacle for the fascist imagery of mass. Therefore, it is a singularly illustrative case. In Riefenstahl's film, the key-elements or focuses of emphasis both in the production procedure as well as the design of the political message were three essentially: the figure of Hitler, the representation of the public of masses and the image of sportsmen.

3.1. Leader

Michaud (2009, p. 10) explains that the visual representation of Hitler was scarcely original and rather inspired on the sources of European tradition, perhaps this is why it suggests there produced an embodiment of evil over him, an evil that was happily defeated afterwards. There is the example of the assimilation of work to the art joined together in the expression “creative work” (2009, p. 10) that grants to work the capacity, like art, to be judged by results, not in an economic sense, but in the sense of generating objects, of creating. Behind this fantasy and this example, Michaud tries to disclose the Nazi myth and does so, by referring to two fields, religion and art, that continuously constitute a model for the national-socialism:

- “The man of the State is also an artist. For him, the people is not different from the stone to the sculptor. The Führer and the mass is not that different from the painter and the colour”. This is how Michael, the hero in Goebbels' novel titled *Fight for Berlin* (1931) (cited in Michaud 2009, p. 13), expresses and summarises how Hitler becomes the total creator, the ultimate artist. There is no censorship in the dictator manipulating the mass but instead, in fact, the aim is to provide meaning to that defenceless mass. The Führer is the architect or the sculptor of this Germany that in the end, it is really the tool that will enable the performance of his true work of art (universal). The means are not deemed so relevant compared to the fulfilment of that purpose. Furthermore, this way, Hitler updates another classic myth, where there was linkage of art with freedom, in such a way that every new act of violence seemed only another conquer of freedom (2009, p. 20).
- “Just like Jesus released men from sin and hell, likewise, Hitler saved the German people from doom. Jesus and Hitler were persecuted, but while Jesus was crucified, Hitler was promoted to Chancellor”. This discourse issued by a professor in a community school (collected in Michaud 2009, p. 101), is better than many discourses and speeches to summarise how the Nazi myth appropriated the schemes of religion. There was only required to replace Jesus by Hitler and there was no need to wait for this new god to perform his deed. His presence also entailed that the hopes and desires of the new believers will begin to fulfil. Germany could be like every individual wanted it to be. In that new State there were no limits, but instead faith and illusion. “The party is Hitler, but Hitler is Germany, just like Germany is Hitler”, like Rudolf Hess said in Nuremberg (2009, p. 63) in an identification that reminds about the Gospel of Saint John.

However, this ideal of Führer-Messiah as total creator finds in *Olympia* a different and perhaps complementary representation. Hitler was not only the leading actor (like an author in its maximum sense, a creator) and the embodiment of a new Germany, mandatorily Hitler was also father, friend and partner. In Riefenstahl's film there is suggestion to consider the development of a counter-figure as a concept that allows to discharge the violence and the weight of authority that involves the religious-artistic double myth. Before that Führer who needs to apply violence as an almighty creator in favour of the salvific, final, work of art, what Riefenstahl introduces instead is a Führer necessarily close, human, flawed and who suffers.

The Berlin stadium used to inaugurate the Olympic Games with 100 thousand spectators was like a great cathedral or the raw material for a great work of art. A multitudinous celebration was the basis of the message, of course, but it cannot be overlooked that it was not enough to trust only the witnesses. Such an spectacle needed to be disseminated and this is why Riefenstahl's film is conceived. We cannot forget that Germans were already convinced and, if the stage setting works to overwhelm attendants, the filmic message elaborated with it must serve to convince the rest of the world instead. "*Olympia*" is a film configured for international propaganda; therefore, it is so interesting also to analyse its differentiated view compared the perspective inside Germany and to consider the nuances provided to that construction of the Nazi myth. Graham (2001, p. 46) cites the press director of Riefenstahl, who exposed that if the filmmaker showed Hitler as a hero in *Triumph des Willens*, now in *Olympia* she wanted to show him as a:

the private man, the spectator who modestly stepped back before the heroes of the hour, the athletes. At the important victories, he was to applaud: his pleasure would signify more than an Olympic victory. A whole string of cameramen was specially trained to take candid shots of his most natural poses.

The Führer appears in 8 different sequences out of the 20 in which the first part of *Olympia* divides and does not appear in a single image of the second part, "*Olympic Youth*". Every appearance entails at least a set ranging between three and five frames that constitute a micro-sequence. In the prelude, three scenes are counted: Hitler observing and opens the parade with his greeting, Hitler tapping his chest before the German sportsmen and Hitler pronouncing the inauguration discourse. Therefore, the first characteristic is austerity: in 190 minutes, the total duration of *Olympia*, Hitler appears only a few minutes and in the second part, he disappears. Even so, that space is already enough to configure the leader as the main character because no other athlete or character equals his time on the screen. The first thing in the prelude is to establish the leadership of the Führer. His first images are that of the Chief of State inaugurating the Games and the reference greeted by the athletes. Hitler is Germany, Germany is Hitler. The greet and his discourse establish the framework or political reference. The Nazi leader is shown resounding, solemn, without emotions.

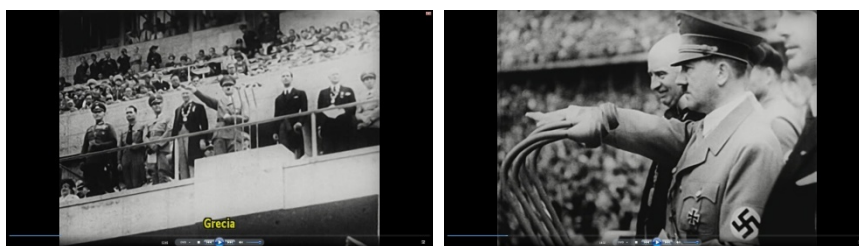


Figure 1: images of Hitler in the balcony during the preamble.

Two anecdotes illustrate well to what extent every appearance of Hitler is complex. On the one hand, a camera that specifically dedicated to record each one of his movements. In fact, the request letter of the Olympic award is preserved due to the great results among which there is specified "having shown the Führer in an enthusiastic and euphoric mood at some moments" as well as other relevant figures (Graham 2001, p. 46). This hint confirms there was a planning to carefully record Hitler's reactions. The fact of having a camera destined to the balcony means that every occasion where the Führer attended, were recorded. Therefore, the limited presence of the Führer in the film (he does not appear in the second part) is something aimed paradoxically. Frames of tests could have been used and hence, fake his presence in others. There were enough frames since there was a camera only for

him. However, the historical research demonstrated that, when needed the appearances were cut off: Riefenstahl herself elaborated a version cutting all appearances of Hitler when the censorship and the critique hindered the commercialisation of the film in the United States (Graham 2001, p. 195).

About this, there is a second anecdote provided by Yagüe (1992, p. 199) (and that is confirmed by other authors like Downing 2012, pp. 82-83) about the first German victory in the Olympic tests. On Sunday, 2 August, a well calculated calendar made possible that the first Olympic champion was German. The policeman Hans Woelke, who would be promoted that same night for the services to his country, threw the weight 16.20 meters and the cries of “Heil! Heil!” thundered in the stadium. Woelke is received together with other champions of the day in the balcony by Hitler. This detail, as pointed out by Yagüe (1992, p. 200), is the origin of a legend “that does not quite adjust to reality”. And neither would Hitler receive Jesse Owens the next day, but he won't do so out of racism (something that Hitler never hid), but instead because the Count Baillet-Latour (president of IOC) warned him that his gesture did not comply with the protocol and if he received some champions, he needed to receive everybody that followed afterwards. Therefore, everything indicates that Hitler only attended to the Games when a German victory could take place and the film shows such occasions. That first day there also produced the triple victory of Finland in the 10,000 meters that, although in Riefenstahl's film it appears almost one hour after Woelke's victory, it took place that same morning. In the evening, for the final high jump, without Germans and with two Americans as favourites, Hitler left.

What should be considered, knowing that a camera recorded every movement, is the construction of the image of Hitler chosen. After the prelude, there are other five blocks where Hitler appears. The hammer throw, shot put, long jump, 10,000 meters and relay race female tests events. What is directly attributable to the film in terms of the image of the leader is that his appearances are duly distributed and organised so that, at the same time, they are not redundant or too repetitive. Hitler takes 11 minutes to appear (hammer throw test) disappears another 16 minutes (shot put), then again, another 7 minutes (long jump) and there he is absent for another 20 minutes (until the 10,000 meters and relay race). This way, his last appearance occurs in the tests number 18 of a first part, where there are 20 athletic disciplines recorded. There is not only a certain balance in those absences, but instead the presence of the Führer extends from the minute 12, with his first appearance in the parade, at minute 1:27:25 when the female relay test finalises and there are barely 15 minutes of film left.

The nuances that the different appearances of Hitler involve are also worthy of being highlighted. For instance:

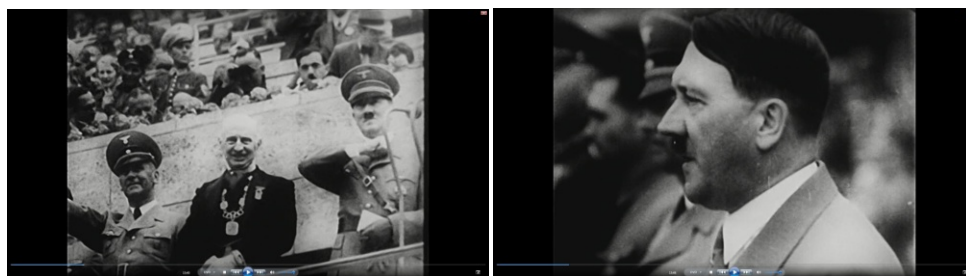


Figure 2: images of Hitler during the parade of German sportsmen, with their fists in their chests and the opening discourse with the head uncovered.

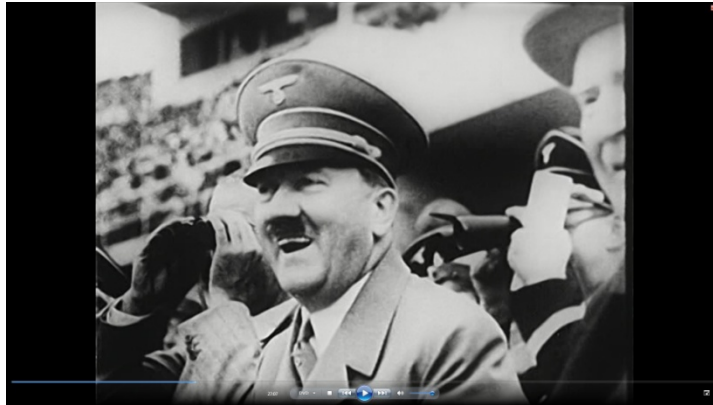


Figure 3: images of Hitler during the hammer throw test event, when Germany wins the gold medal. Hitler smiles.



Figure 4: Hitler during the shot put test (sequence 8). Germany wins and his leader claps vigorously.



Figure 5: during the long jump test (sequence 11) the camera frames a panoramic shot from the flag towards Hitler. The United States wins the test event, Germany wins the silver medal. Hitler shows his pride after the German jump.



Figure 6: the 10,000 meters, test number 16. Hitler shows nervous when Finland fills the medal ranking.

Although his referentiality is reminded when the camera takes a panoramic frame of the flag towards Hitler before the long jump test, the Führer deprives here from his gesture formality. In these frames there is a Hitler without military cap, laughing openly, clapping without restraint half standing, or serious and disappointed. The scope of emotions positions Hitler close to the spectator, like another individual. The difference is that now the dictator has emotions. This also grants a greater relevance to his appearances. However, even though Owens is the winner of the Games and that we see him win several medals, he cannot act, gesticulate nor position in front of spectators as the leading character of the screen.

A scene allows to detail the distance of Hitler, the maximum artist-messiah of Germany, compared to the Hitler-father represented in *Olympia*. It is the female relay test where Germany is the absolute favourite, after its athletes have already beaten the world record in the previous qualifying rounds. The test barely lasts 2 minutes and there are four frames of Hitler. The athletes position in the track and Hitler appears talking in a friendly stance with his balcony companion (which, by the way, won't be the same person two minutes later, when opening the frame at the end of the test, we note Goebbels by his side instead). Immediately afterwards, we see an uneasy Hitler after a false start obliged to begin the test again. The third frame appears right after the starting signal. The figure of Hitler stands up like a spring, so quickly that he gets out from the frame (perhaps due to these details the cameraman was not decorated) and swiftly we see a nervous, tense, expecting Hitler, attentive about the German female runners. The race is not interrupted, and we see later how in the third relay, the German athletes make a mistake and the relay falls to the ground. They have lost. The United States female runners win and immediately we are offered the scene of a Hitler that regrets and bangs his fist on his lap.



Figure 7: in the test of female relay (sequence 18) Hitler suffers and gets thrilled about what would have been a German victory until the German female runner loses the relay (images ordered by strict order of appearance).

Riefenstahl not only shows Hitler as a non-threatening figure (Graham 2001, p. 46), rather humanising his figure. In the previous paragraph there have been described the variety of nuances, emotions or feelings expressed by the Nazi leader that turn him, in addition, into the most complex character of the film. It can be discussed whether Jesse Owens, since he appears in two tests, gets more space in terms of physical times, but it is true that the greatest part of time Owens is running or jumping while Hitler spends the time dedicated by the camera in the middle of the performance. However, if this sequence has been selected, it is because, undoubtedly, it not unnoticed that the frame shows a loser Hitler.

Although what is expected is that the German female relay runners win the race, their accidental mistake ends up in the public's disappointment and, of course, Hitler shows this as another part of this massive public. Naturally, the editing could have avoided these images of the Führer that regrets, who appears upset and that *a priori* does not seem to be a very consistent image with a Hitler that embodies the Guide or Messiah of the new Germany. However, precisely the fact of opting for this sequence allows to maintain that, above that myth, in this message prevails the intention of showing a human and close Hitler. A film produced to show the world how Germany is, does not leave this small detail, undoubtedly relevant, to the spectator's discretion. Likewise, no other detail is overlooked (there are complete Olympic tests that are recorded again to generate a specific effect and many others that are erased) but instead there is a close, earthly Hitler, that is also part of that myth. It is not only a matter of nationalistic code (Hitler always linked to German sportsmen) but it even can be interpreted as a support to the people, to the defeated ones in times of the bitter sports (and political) defeat.

Using Downing (2012, p. 78) words:

But specifically, in terms of the number of frames, the English version of the film does not elevate Hitler above the relevance of any State leader in the inauguration of the Olympic Games. A minor director would have dedicated a greater number of frames to Hitler. But the subtle approach of Riefenstahl even leaves the spectator with the feeling of a Hitler who presides, above specific tests. Even unseen, his presence is sensed.

The cinematographic skill of Riefenstahl, like Downing indicates, consists of the fact that it does not need many frames or a simple redundancy, which would be denouncing, to turn Hitler into a reference above the Games. On the one hand, it seems that he is simply positioned as public in the tests he attended to. On the other hand, besides that documentary-like tone, the images disclose an intentionality and that previous plan that also evidences the words of the cameraman who needed to record the exclusive scenes of Hitler. *Olympia* turns Hitler, in his first part, into a leading role actor, but not a quasi-divine figure.

This characterisation even allows to understand that he does not appear in the second part of the film, simply because he did not attend to those test events, true, but perhaps also because it is not necessary to redound in a message that was clear. In that second part, like Downing establishes (2012, p. 78), Hitler turns into a ghost which presence is sensed. Hitler is the protagonist, not only in the Games, but instead in Riefenstahl's film. It is not necessary to evidence that Hitler is there, his presence is sensed with every stare at the sky, at every Nazi greet, and this is thanks to the *Pregnanz* that this presence acquires in the first part (a key part to summon the view of the spectator in the story). What is surprising is the fact that it is an emotional and close Hitler. But that distance between

a violent reality and a kind film is the key of propaganda to deactivate the image of the aggressive and threatening Hitler, feared by Europe.

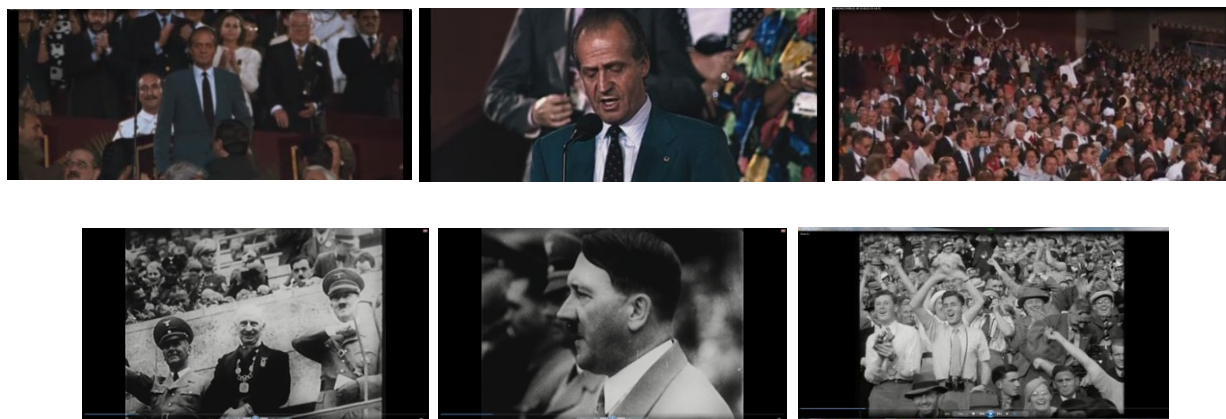


Figure 8: (From left to right and from up and down) Images of *Marathon* (1992) by Carlos Saura. The first image corresponds to the standstill of the king before the improvised applause of the public when he is given way to read the discourse (second image) before the acclamation in a multitudinous stadium (third image). They are compared with the image of Hitler who bangs his chest during the nations parade, and later he will read the discourse (fifth image) before the acclamation of the multitude (sixth image).

Politically speaking, Hitler cannot be compared to King Juan Carlos, but this sequence of frames iconically compares the staging of the führer's discourse in *Olympia* (1938) and the opening with the words of the monarch of the Games of Barcelona, narrated by the official film of those games, *Marathon* (1992), produced by Carlos Saura. 60 years later the political reference, the king in this case, is again the only one with as many appearances (three) as the sports reference (Carl Lewis equals with other three scenes) and, another coincidence, also his frames open the film. It is just an example of the role of the symbolic power played by the royal family. *Marathon* will show the king again, precisely, when the Spanish team wins the golden medal for a discipline as popular as football, to highlight that communion between the public and the monarch. However, it would not be the only reference to the royal family: despite not doing any follow-up to the sail test, there is a musical collage to show Prince Felipe back then, practicing this discipline and the camera will also record his role as representative. The symbolic exhibition of power is one of those traits that the sports stories assume from *Olympia*. One of the two monographic manuals about Riefenstahl's film, the study of T. Downing, already advances that Riefenstahl “captures the potent emotional impact of the Opening Ceremony. But merely in terms of the number of frames, the English version of the film does not elevate Hitler above the relevance of any other national governor proclaiming the inauguration of the Games” (Downing 2012, p. 78). The symbolic load of Hitler and his later demonisation avoided these parallelisms and analyses for many years.

In perspective, the first key that *Olympia* leaves is that any other political leader, democratic or not, that has followed Hitler in the presidency of some Games, receives greater detail and space in any of the re-broadcasts offered. The question is whether the validity of the Nazi myth should be reviewed with this reformulation. Because it is not only about a messiah that identifies his destiny with that of a complete nation. The fascist leader is the personalisation of the illusions of his people, the personification of an achievement, it is also who must lead and mould but, at the same time, is one of them. It is not about a leader that is elevated, grandiloquent and more enabled than the mass, but on the contrary. It is someone who evidences his mistakes, even his clumsiness, someone who makes

mistakes, who thrills or gets frustrated like them. In this sense, the leader intervenes with the same characteristics of what is commonly known in the cultural industry as *star system*.

At this point, the reference to P. Sloterdijk (2002) might be useful, who considers the fascism in direct relationship with the experience of masses and, specifically, through analogies with the religion (2002, p. 23). The novelty is that he introduces, above all, a will of extolling the hero and refers to the ideologist Thomas Carlyle. Sloterdijk (2002, p. 23) offers two characteristics: the idealisation or glorification without attending to the real properties of the object, on the one hand, and on the other, to what extent that identification also involves a psychic regression of spectators. Thus, the role of the Führer does not stand out due to his extraordinary aptitudes but due to his “vulgarity” (2002, p. 25). Hitler abandons for a moment his role of guide or hero to become the spokesman. What seems an adaptation and moderation of the propaganda message of the Führer (of the superiority based for instance on race, the delegate who gathers and knows how to interpret the will of the people) is a more complex and updated message. In both cases, it is the same strategy of self-proclaiming depository of the people's will (by divine decree or by intuition) but the second perspective is much more moderate, more *democratic* so to speak. The question is whether that adaptation of the fascist myth for the world, has not ended up becoming the liberal modernisation line of the myth that has allowed it to endure until the current days.

Four decades later, Susan Sontag would go back to the Nazi myth to analyse the photographic production of the de-nazified Riefenstahl. In her essay “Fascinating fascism”, written in 1974, Sontag argues (2007, p. 103):

For an unrefined German public, the appeal of the Nazi art could consist of the fact that it was simple, figurative, emotional; not intellectual; a relief from the demanding complexities of the modern art. For a more refined public, the appeal could be due, partly, to that eagerness with which today all the styles from the past are being discovered, especially the most criticised.

Sontag's essay about the photographic series of Riefenstahl titled *Los nuba* is pioneer in terms of grabbing attention about the symbolic, magnetic appeal of the fascism for the new generations. It is about a simplistic, straightforward message that Sontag (2007, p. 111) compares with a form of Pop Art supplemented with the hook of a cursed, criticised and prohibited art. Sontag denounces the validity of the fascist message but also its complexity of nuances. In Riefenstahl's films there are swastikas, crowds encouraging Hitler, the fascist greet... but also a circumspect, humanised leader, in such a way that the message seems to contain its measured counterpoints. Hitler is also a father, disappointed spectator, enthusiastic follower... it is as if, at the same time, some scenes dismantled or nuanced others. Some images serve as an alibi for others. Thus, the documentary will keeps a dialogue with the propaganda will.

3.2. Mass

If Hitler or the soldiers are the leading characters of the Olympic spectacle, then the public is it as well, due to the space, function and time spend on the screen. This public we see cheers, sings, stands up, laughs and continuously responds to what happens in the stadium. The public serves as a diegetic representative of spectators in the cinemas, hence its strategic relevance in the narration and production. We must start by saying that the images of the public that attends to the stadium present a variety of frame sizes and, above all, a great abundance. This proliferation of images of the public creates a symbolic plot that grants a collective and social sustenance to the message and the meaning

of the film. For instance, if the image of detail, like a hammer that has just been thrown or the face of a cycle rider, allows to advance the scene (by ellipsis), the public slows the action, the moment of victory. Without this public-mass, the image of Olympic Games of Berlin wouldn't be the same, nor the image of fascism either.

The public in *Olympia* is, above all, a mirror. A double mirror: reflecting the sports events live, and at the same time anticipates the effect expected with the reception of the film by any spectator. The attendees translate to us and convey what is happening in the field. What happens is that when verbalising or showing a reaction, it is turned also into a reaction model that is offered to us. Namely, if at first the spectators in the stadium show happiness because their athlete has won, at the same time they work as a proposal so that we feel what is happening on a deferred basis through them and we also get happy, thrilled and share that happiness for one victory or another.

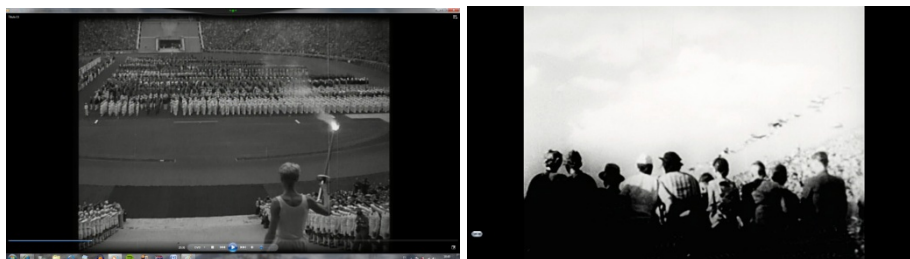


Figure 9: subjective images in the prelude and rowing test event.

This proposal to turn into the public does not only happen at the moment the torch gets to the stadium (when the camera invites us to be who witness its arrival there) but rather, repeats all over. After the rowing test, already in the second part of the film, a large panoramic camera shot gets us back to the stadium and positions us again (as observed in the figure 9) behind the public. It is rather noteworthy that the subjective, implicative position is already introduced: the camera positions us by the public or behind the torch-bearer, not only as if we were resonating with the public, but also positioned in the harrow.

That level of identity that is aimed between the sportsman and the public (and between the public and the spectator) is also present in a detail that may not be noted at first, but that it repeats many times: the public encouraging the participant, usually shares the nationality along. It is not about an identification or a translation of what happens subjectively through the spectators, but instead there is aimed, in the ideological sphere, a competition between nations that is also transferred to the public (and to the spectators before the screen). It is about a nationalism translated at the same time to sports and cinema. Perhaps this subjective and ideological involvement of the spectator-like perspective might be what leads Sontag to declare that the fascist resource to the “drama of the leader and the chorus” boosts a “political fervour” that distances Riefenstahl from the *cinema vérité* and installs her completely in the registries of the propaganda cinema (Sontag 2007, p. 90). This fervour is observed in *Olympia* as a sort of *topos* or common ground of the recorded spectacle:

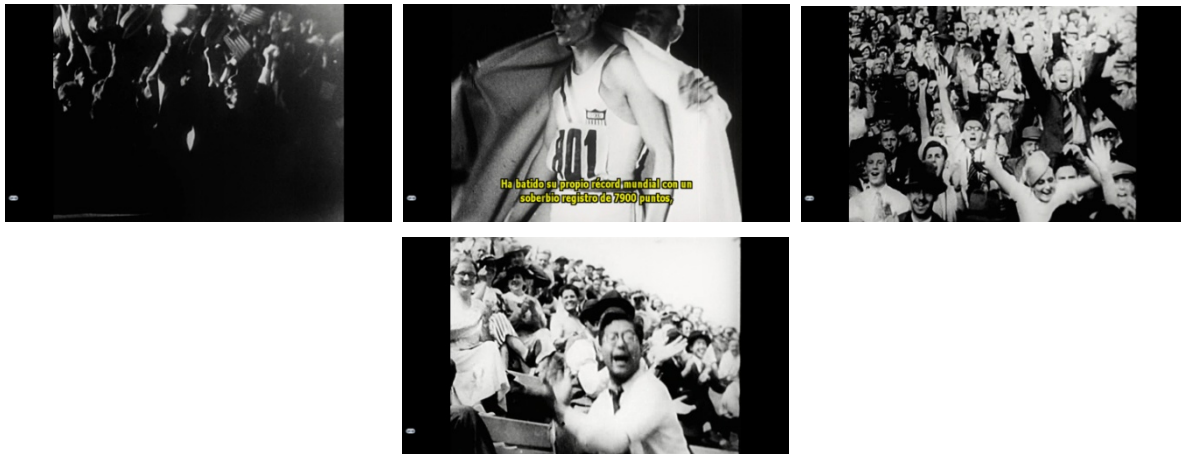


Figure 10: identification of the public with national elements like flags or athletes.

The examples of the camera shots that can be mentioned are abundant, but there are North American flags flapping among the public, something that allow us to identify that it is those who are encouraging Morris after winning the decathlon. Likewise, the same situation occurs after the goal of the tie of Austria in the football game or with the Japanese who scream and jump with joy before the victory of the Japanese swimmer. Perceived like this, the nationalist propaganda does not limit to the German national socialism but instead, from the perspective of it, which stands out in the initial part of the film, invites or shelters other nationalisms, so that they feel integrated in the same space of visual representation, in the collective imagery.

The public also turns into a cheering chorus, in a sort of deposit or celebration energy engine. If athletes are reserved the glory, extolled through illumination, the close up camera shots or the soundtrack music, the public plays the critical role of summoning us, challenging us, thrilling us, even making us laugh, etc. *Olympia* also shows strokes of humour. For instance, during the shot put test, the public's participation is even more direct. Here it is observed that an spectator nicely imitates a throw athlete of whom the narrator already stated that the weight “seemed like a pea” in his hands. Each individual member of the public provides a specific human face, to the generalised potency of the summoned mass inside and outside the stadium to celebrate the sports and political event that Olympic Games represent. From this perspective, it seems clear that this formula of audiovisual representation of the sports public has generalised in the last decades for apparently diverse television and cinematographic re-broadcasts. This appreciation might seem to grant reason to the argument of W. Benjamin: “The mass is a *matrix* from which there emerges, renewed, all the usual behaviour. (...) Quantity has become quality. The great masses of participants have generated a different class of participation” (Benjamin 2012, p. 81).



Figure 11: the humour in the shot put test event.

This particular scene from *Olympia* remains in a note, a detail, of how the public becomes a broadcaster of massive emotions. And how the mass activates like a behavioural *matrix*. But throughout the film we will see all kinds of gestures: one typically Italian like that “boh!” of the lad with a cap who mixes surprise and admiration, the cheering ladies, the girl with his protective father, the soldiers always in first line... again we see ourselves taking seat and being part of that public in a subjective frame in this case, of the public, but in others, even the perspective of some cameramen is also reflected as part of that wide passionate public.

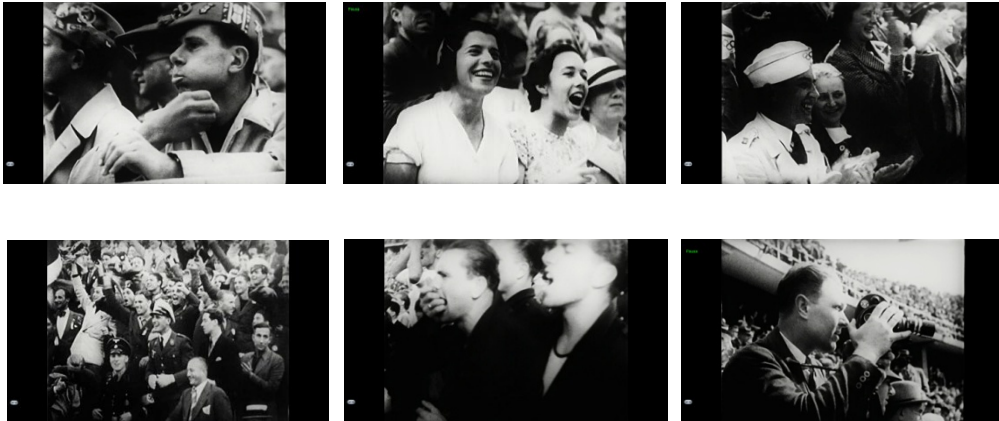


Figure 12: nuances in the public's expressiveness.

A detail that can also serve to assess the affirmative role of the public is that there is never observed a negative or disapproval gesture. It is symptomatic that they can scream, cheer, suffer, clap, stand up, point out, record, clap... but never show disapproval or rejection. It is true that sometimes whistles can be heard (Morris or Owens tests) but, either we do not see the public at that moment (Owens), or we are looking at the public with the USA flags (Morris). Namely, the public never regrets nor complaints. The public might be heard to complain in an indirect or transient manner, what might instead seem a sound flaw or disadjustment that is perhaps minimal neglects in the expressive function of sound, but the public always appears visually with positive, affirmative and even a merry attitude. According to Michaud (2009, p. 65),

The great stimulants of life that these spectacles represented, hosted by the narrator with an ecstatic style, neighbouring the expressionism, constituted the narcissistic experience expected by the Führer and his people: experience of the authentic, the *hic et nunc*, the re-found unity of the Volksgeist with its Volkskörper. It was the constitutive experience of people as a subject.





Figure 13: images of *16 days of glory*, official film of the Olympic Games of Los Angeles (1984). The first three images correspond to the first minute of the film, an introduction where there abounds the presence of the flag. The three following correspond to the introduction of the swimming test (100 meters) that the USA participant Rowdy Gaines would win.

The second Olympic Games held in Los Angeles entailed the entrance of olympism in the world of spectacle: the torch that was added a symbolic taximeter, was rented, the sponsoring of every kilometre increased to half million *pesetas* (Yagüe 1993, p. 433). These were the Games of the Russian boycott and overwhelming victories of Carl Lewis. The official story of the Games was called *16 days of glory* and was produced by Bud Greenspan, perhaps the best expert in Olympic documentary cinema (his series *The olympiad*, was awarded with an Emmy in 1976, broadcasted in 80 countries). The first three images correspond to the first minute of the film. In those 60 seconds there are 8 American flags in 11 different frames (here are cited 3). The three following scenes correspond to the swimming test where the USA participant Gaines won, constructed, as it can be seen by the images that extend the test, about the national identity. The American flag links the athlete to the harrow and also faces the Australian swimmer, which flag is also flapped by other spectators. Here the flags do not have swastikas nor Nazi symbols, but there are more American flags in the first minute of *16 days of glory* that in the complete prelude of the Nazi exaltation of *Olympia*. The flags are the projection of the national identity and, at the same time, in a wide sense, they build an emotional link with the public. A public that, as mentioned in that refraction of mirrors, constitutes the *alter ego* on the screen of the spectator, on which there is also the idea of that irrational link of flags. Pasolini already leaves a warning (2015, pp. 41-42):

There is nothing compared to a stadium full of people: not even the great public of the cinema, divided into a thousand theatres and rooms, can be compared to that live, roaring, and finally, tormenting mass of spectators. And in no other area there is such a transference in the idol, as a fulfilled ideal of the self.

It is true that in the planning of this film of Riefenstahl the idea is not to get exalted before the rhetoric of the Führer as if it were a massive event before his presence. But the formula of involvement and mobilisation of masses is analogue in every case. From the perspective of the mass, one of the functions of that messianic leader is the “mass suggestion” like Hitler established already in *Mein Kampf* (Michaud 2009, p. 63) to increase his power and socio-political effects. Hitler stated that the relevant thing about a mass meeting was not its content, but instead its visible, recognisable context. He would say, literally, that it is necessary to release from the idea that the ideological conceptions could satisfy the multitude. “The knowledge is a shaky basis for the mass. What remains stable is the feeling, the hatred...” (Michaud 2009, p. 64) and also the euphoria of victory (like *Olympia*). The fascism displayed the power to increase that power and that collective trust of mass, at the same time its power projected towards the future was anticipated. The film analysis shows that

the function of massive suggestion, in *Olympia*, is not exerted so much by the leader compared to the production and visual planning display that the film suggests as a representation device.

That expression of power, that staging of the mass not merely acclaiming its leader but like a general behaviour guideline, like a behaviour formula, is also an element of modernity that has provided continuity to the fascist code. An image of the public and the mass of this sort, like Sloterdijk would say in a more open sense, “offers the most plausible description, and also polemological, of the behaviour of the majorities in the modern societies” (2002, p. 57). Therefore (like Bauman explained 1998), modernity and fascism maintain between them a pragmatic, latent relationship that goes beyond the usual topics and schematisms when the fascism theme is handled.

3.3. Athletes

One of the greatest experts about *Olympia*, Cooper C. Graham says that the first time he saw Riefenstahl's film without knowing much about the history of the Games, his impression was that the United States had won the Games, while Germany (if medals were awarded) won this competition by far (2001: 255). In fact, precisely it turns into one of the essential arguments to advocate that it is a propaganda production: “the film is dangerous due to its apparent equity, never despite of it” (2001, p. 259). On the other hand, the analysis of the film discloses a complex and ambivalent message. An example is the figure of Hitler who is extolled but also humanised, who is elevated but also dismantled, as if every exaltation had its apology. In this sense, either the film analysed here is a dialectical combination of documentary and propaganda, or instead, considering only the propaganda key, that interpretation would lead to a correction of the dominant or traditional idea of propaganda, as proposed by Graham (2001, p. 251):

The most common definition (of propaganda) denotes that a group deliberately and consciously tries to change the ideas of another group. If this definition and the Riefenstahl version is assumed (she always denied the film to be more than a documentary), then Riefenstahl's arguments are correct. That definition excludes this film of being propaganda.

This complexity of dimensions and nuances can finally be confirmed by paying attention to the treatment that the film provides to the two American athletes: Glenn Morris and Jesse Owens are indisputably the protagonists of the Games of Berlin and of *Olympia*, at least under sports terms, but also in the extra-sports aspect (Yagüe 1992, p. 200-203).

If there is a sum of the 100 meters and the long jump tests, this would be the third block with more space of the first part. Owens is the only winner who repeats in the film (in reality, the Dutch female athlete, Mastenbroek, also won 4 medals but she is practically omitted). Regarding Morris decathlon, this is, only behind the marathon, the test that most space is dedicated to in the whole film. In the track nobody equals Morris and Owens, frame to frame, not even Hitler gets that much space, although as mentioned earlier, Hitler has many more expressions and emotions than that conveyed by these two sportsmen. Nevertheless, it is not only a matter of time in the scene but also how it is to be there. No other athlete entertains and smiles directly at the camera as much as Owens. And neither in any other test, the narrator provides hints of the victory, like with Morris, and much less the camera personalises and provides so many frames focused in a sportsman, as it does in the case of the American athlete.

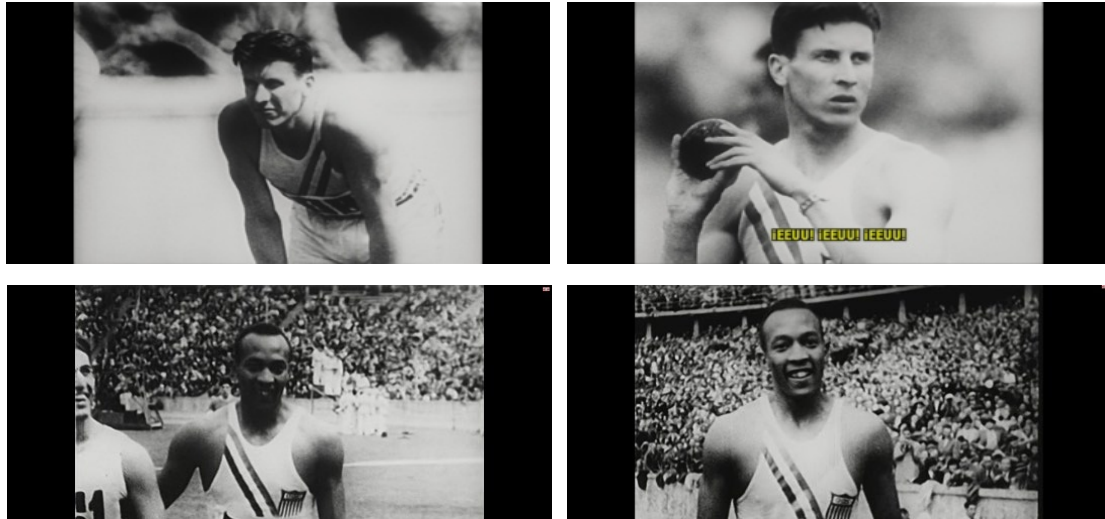
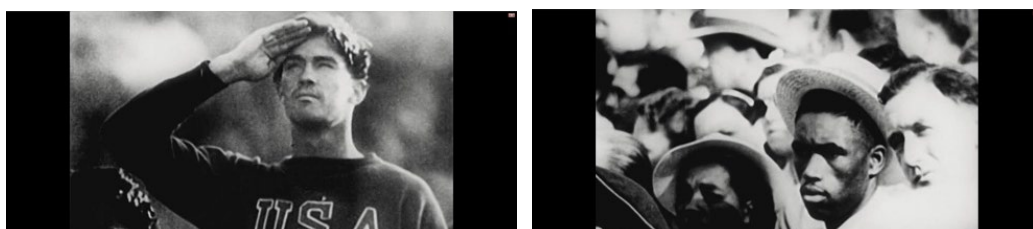


Figure 14: protagonism of Owens and Morris.

In the case of Morris and the decathlon test, there sums the fact that the victory of North-Americans is overwhelming. The American sportsmen of the discipline, perhaps because it was the only country with specialists, win in all tests. In the track tests (Hurdles or 400 meters) they achieve victory with a considerable distance; therefore, the frames tend to show Morris reaching the finish line alone and there is not much emotion to it. Morris, already a champion, even defeats Hubber in the last test, the German participant, therefore, the American victory also involves the German fail and there are whistles. The same happens with Owens, who in the long jump test he defeats Long, German and before the eyes of a Hitler that has come to see how Owens is defeated and who witnesses just the opposite.

Downing states in terms of the treatment that Owens receives in the film, that Riefenstahl defied the Nazi desires with the celebration of the achievements of the Afro-American athlete. The victories of the “Black man of Alabama” were a complete “political statement of the Nazi Germany” (Downing 2012, p. 82). In addition, the authors reminds that, meanwhile, the German Ministry of Propaganda prohibited to carry and publish the loss of victories per country and insisted that victories were something personal. Likewise, it was also prohibited to publish the achievements of black athletes (Downing 2012, p. 89). Meanwhile, the film of Leni Riefenstahl turns into a display of achievements, not only from Owens, but also Morris.



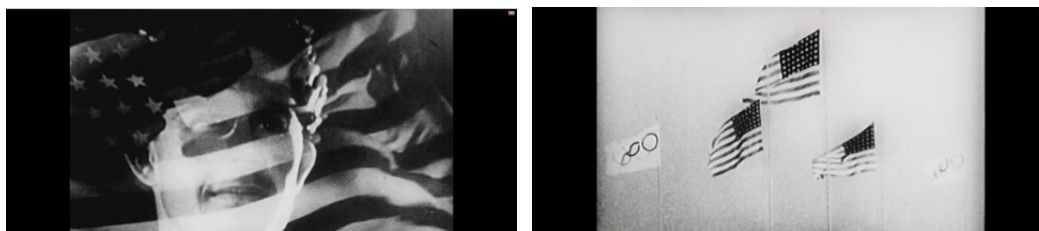


Figure 15: North-American victories.

It is not only about a test or particular image. The camera shows the American patriotic symbol per excellence, the flag, that flaps in the three poles after the male high jump. Among the public, there is search of the black public of the 110 meter hurdle test and that closes the scene with the Olympic greeting of the American athlete awarded with the laurel wreath. The end of the thrilling pole vault test ends with the faded effect of the United States flag over the face of the winner. *Olympia* could have spared many of these scenes. The most evident example perhaps was the faded effect over the face of the American winner Meadows. It is not only the fact that this closed image is chosen over the face of the winner, but in addition, a production effect is used to evidence the sportsman and his country. But how does this fit into a film that should exalt fascism?

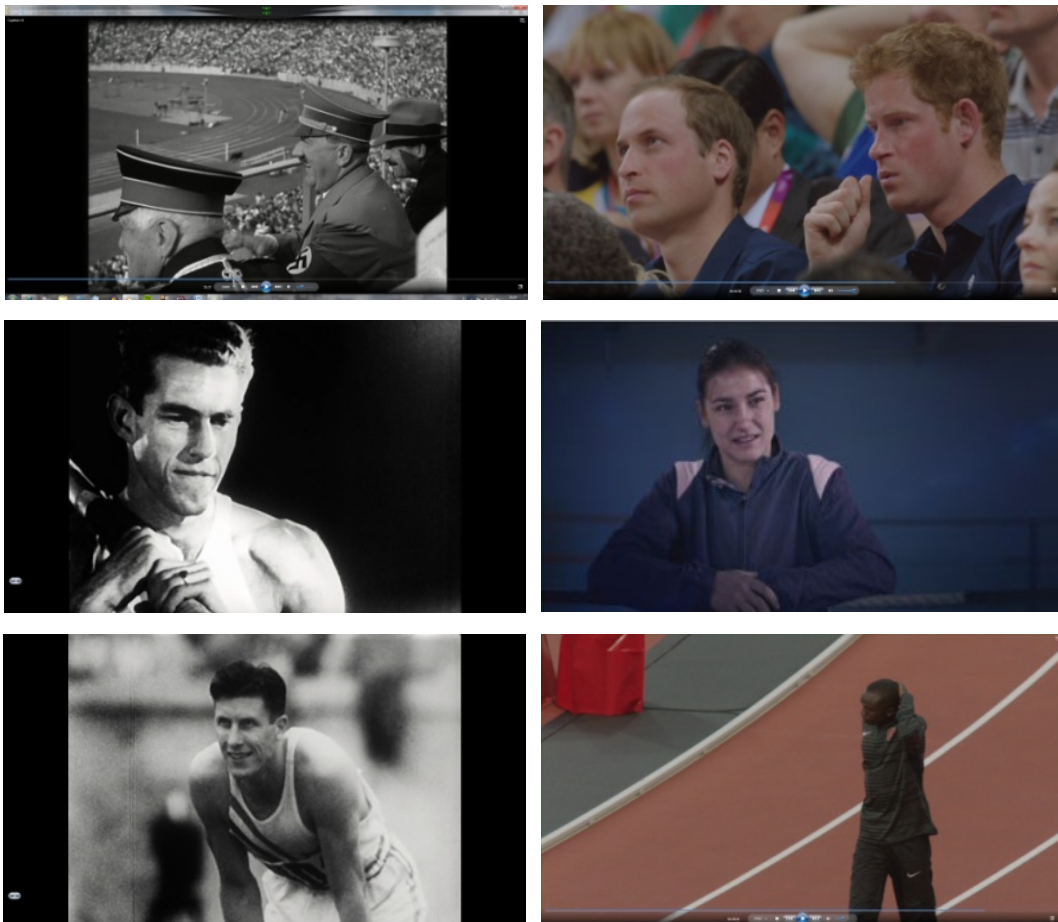
Olympia introduces a markedly nationalistic view of the Olympic Games. This not only impacts the symbols of the Nazi Germany that will be hoisted after every victory, but instead the language will serve to narrate the rest of victories of the other countries. It is not casual that, when there intervenes an athlete from India, there are Hindus among the public, that the Japanese accompany the victories of their women compatriots or that the German military men hug the soldier that has just won the Great Cup of Nations for Germany. These identifications make of *Olympia* an explicitly nationalistic film since the national identity works as a ruling principle of the production and the compositional rhythm. Graham exposes that precisely “with its equity towards all nations, the film disarms criticism” and reminds that “one of the greatest purposes of the film was to represent the kindness and good will of Germany” (it generated a lot of apprehension back then) (Graham 2001, p. 255).

It could be said that, above Germany or Hitler, or even the victories, there is the message. When thinking about classic fascist propaganda, there is thinking about the absolute exaltation, but *Olympia* is far from being an irrational praise of fascism and its leader. Instead, and in specific cases, as seen earlier, here the idea is to dismantle the image of Hitler as an imperturbable and distant leader to avoid that fear that the Nazism produces outside the borders. The identification of the public with its athletes or the exuberance of the description of the American victories are not paradoxical when a nationalist conception of the world is considered. To foster that competence, to nuance the idea of the Nazi Germany within a code of open representation, there are some of the paradoxes that show the specific complexity of this audiovisual message, but that also allow to rethink the Nazi myth. Thus, the representative code, is located in a complex, renewed, self-critical propagandistic treatment. This openness or self-correction of the propaganda is related to the documentary vocation of the film. At this point, the understanding of *Olympia* becomes complex due this dialectic relationship between documentary and propaganda:

Ultimately, over the documentary film, there hangs a suspicion: the fact that it is not real cinema because it does not make the masses dream (does anybody really go to the cinema to see a documentary?) (...) and nevertheless, (...) there only exists a fundamental difference

between a landscape filmed in a fiction and a landscape filmed in a documentary: the selection of a frame, a duration, a location within a production and, *a fortiori*, within a story; namely, a difference of form and not nature. (Breschand 2004, p. 4)

If the documentary “does not make the masses dream” then it could be considered a sort of anti-propaganda. However, and at the same time, since documentary and fiction are necessarily connected (by a difference of nature, but not of form) it could be said then that the documentary, propaganda and fiction can dialogue in practice. The documentary component opens way in *Olympia* to the irruption of the fiction and, with it, narrative and visual elements would enter in the film (namely, in an indirect manner) that could complement a propagandistic approach by turning it more dynamic, flexible and close. This dialectic would approach *Olympia* to subsequent Olympic films. And conversely, this same reflection would approach the hypothesis that said films or contemporary post-fascist re-broadcasts could be reproducing propaganda resources shared with those of the fascist context. An example would be the images cited as follows of one of the most recent films of the olympism. First (2012) describes what happens during that summer in the Olympic Games of London. It is not only about visual contiguities but instead resources like the resignification of Olympic symbols (torch), the exaltation and individualism of athletes, their transformation into characters, something that is already noticed with Owens and the political referentiality.



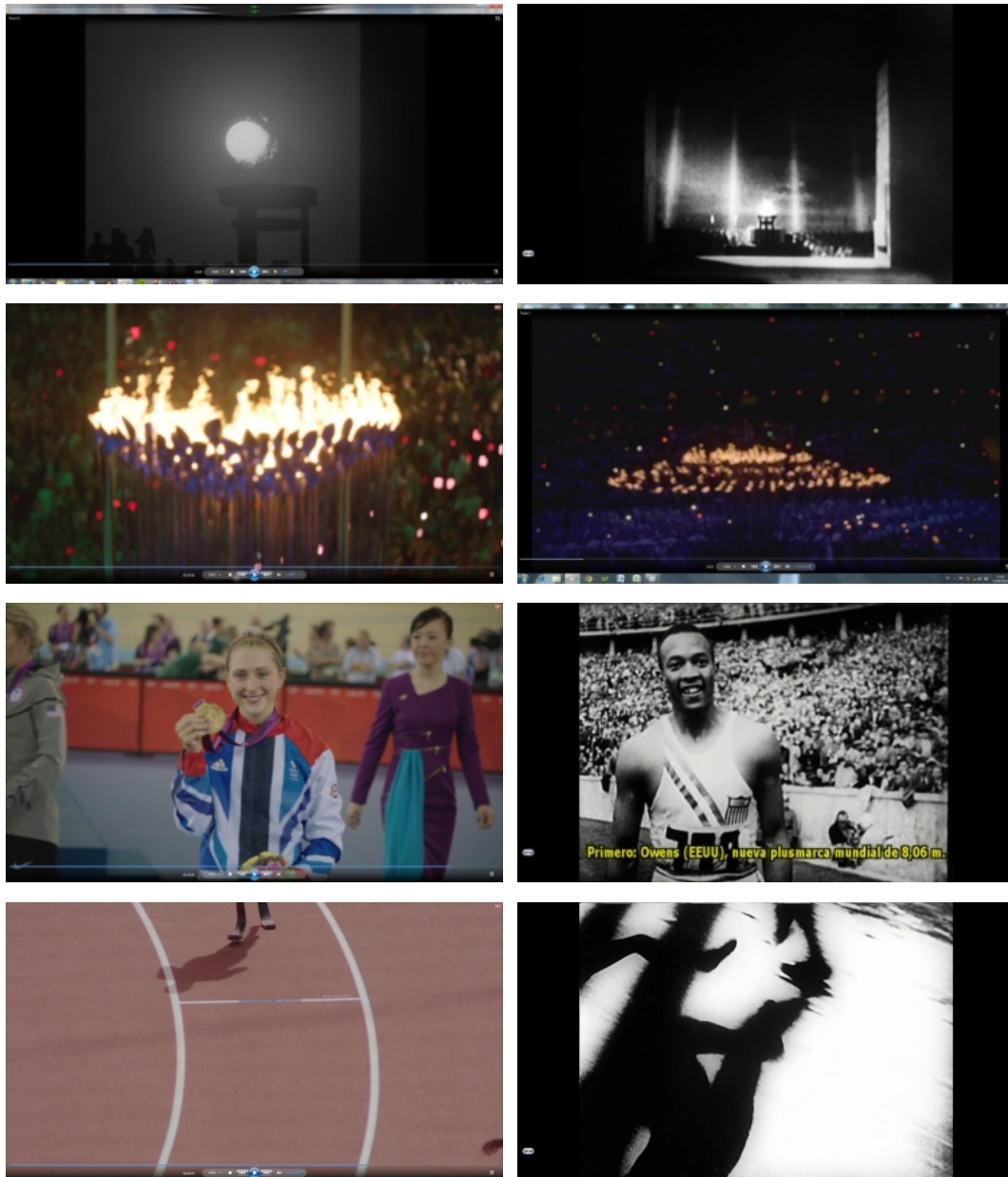


Figure 16: parallelism between the images of *Olympia* (1938) and *First* (2012), the official film of the Olympic Games of London. The image of Hitler and the crown princes is compared. The introduction of the athletes and the symbolism in the torch is also compared, as well as Owens smile and the wink to the images of the marathon in the appearance of Pistorius.

This resource to art to explain politics and to assume its characteristics must be also applied to the capacity to address the emotions that art entails. This is something that can be seen in the film where the nationalism is achieved through victory and the identification with the sportsman, often, through the winner. This capacity would never dismount the modern discourses of politics. On the other hand, the suggestion of the masses does not crash with the individualism. Another of the forgotten elements of this Nazi myth is the exaltation of the individual achievement. The mass is the one granting authority and supports the decision, but the hero is always individual. The saviour is always one. Regardless of the presence and the nuances of the public it does not stop being a plural chorus that empathises or reflects what happens on the track. The protagonists of *Olympia* are Hitler, Owen,

Morris, but also the mass public, and the view individualises each one of them. They are the ones staring directly at the spectator.

This theory of the self-production that Hitler applied clearly comes from Romanticism (Michaud 2009, p. 62). With that movement, there is also a link with the first films of Riefenstahl, the so-called "mountain films", where there is a mix of the epic aspect of an untamed nature together with individual heroes forced to fight against a society or the forces of nature (for instance, *The blue light* (1932), produced and starring Riefenstahl, which protagonist is a woman hermit who lives in a cave of precious stones that is finally ravaged by the town). Likewise, this theory of self-production is linked to the concept of individualism positioned in the centre of the Nazi imagery and that sublimates in the sports achievements. Sports serves not so much as an escape route, but instead and rather actively, neither in a harmless nor defenceless mode, as a massive projector of an ideal, timeless glory that denies for a moment the catastrophe of the real. Furthermore, the sport is able to gather the suggestion of the mass with the individualistic view of reality.

4. Conclusion: Towards the present, from today

In conclusion, the filmic study of *Olympia* (1938) is inserted into a series of critical frameworks both regarding its relationship with the historical context of the moment as well as with other contemporary and subsequent film texts. Thus, the analysis would methodologically require the consideration of wide and complex work hypothesis. These critical hypotheses are included in a relationship as a sort of concentric circles that, more specifically, would be essentially three:

- a) *The relationship of the filmic text with the fascist imagery.* Regardless of the factual bonds between Leni Riefenstahl and the Nazi regime the audiovisual analysis identifies formal traits in the film *Olympia* that nuance the idea of a mechanical relationship between the text and the context. In fact, some of these traits when it comes to represent the figures of the leader, athletes or mass public can be identified in other Olympic films performed in different context and initially, distanced from the classical Nazi or fascist context.
- b) *The dialectic relationship between the propagandistic, aesthetical, documentary and fictional codes.* The research of the formal, ideological and (con)textual springs seems to indicate the need of not limiting the analytical approach to specific representation genres but instead, of opening and interconnecting representation codes following a multidimensional, kaleidoscopic logic. This logic does not discard aesthetic nor propagandistic nor documentary factors, but instead, in a dialogical form, it articulates them by moving each one of those factors outside themselves, towards a syntagmatic and paradigmatic new and singularly powerful space.
- c) *The relationship of the fascist communicational policy with other contemporary communicational policies.* Ultimately, this hypothesis supports on the premise that "the contemporary fascism - or postmodern postfascism- can even become *democratic fascism*" (Querol 2015, p. 195). Thus, this analysis becomes polemic or polemological since it recovers the previous critical contributions (Adorno/Horkheimer, Arendt, Pasolini, Sontag, Pasolini, Stanley, Amery...) and repositions them in an updated constellation of arguments and coherent elements between them.

In the field of audiovisual and broadcasting sports records in the global era, it is evident, as Pasolini (2015, p. 104) indicated back then that "sports have been a spectacle for a long time, and every sports organisation favours the spectacle". Sports, as an audiovisual global spectacle, has done nothing else but experience an unstoppable rise in the last decades:

Today, progressively, nothing physical is necessary, considering that machines have replaced everything. Thus, before the need, sport has slowly become a purely hygienic fact and only survives, I would say, because it relieves certain aggressive and competitive instincts, of domination, that have not yet faded away in the modern man. In such a way that it had become an spectacle due to the demand of enormous masses that, undoubtedly, are not fond of the exquisite brevity of an hendecasyllabic. (Pasolini, 2015, p. 106)

The connection between the sports spectacle and the consumption society can be associated, in an updated manner, to the traditional resources of the propaganda as fascism renovates in new ways of influence. Following Pasolini, “the true fascism is what sociologists have gleefully called consumption society. A definition that seems innocuous, a mere indication. But it is not like that. (...) The results of this unconcerned *consumption society* are those of a dictatorship” (2009, p. 276). What Pasolini would metaphorically call “the disappearance of fireflies”, in brief, could then be related to the survival of supposedly surpassed problems as well as to the challenge of new poetic and political forms for understanding the world (Didi-Huberman 2012).

Sontag already exposed, in her critique to Riefenstahl that both in fascism and communism “there is a public display of freedom, in the drama of the leader and the chorus” (Sontag 2007, p. 101). Could this display have impregnated the model of audiovisual representation of the masses in democratic or liberal contexts? Sontag believes that the fascist art is hardly confined to works labelled as such or under openly fascist governments (she mentions *Fantasia* by Disney, as an illustration of this problem). She even indicates how the fascist and communist art share characteristics, as if there was what Pasolini called “left wing fascism” (Pasolini 2002, p. 39). The transversal or common trait could be “the preference for the monumental and the obedience of the masses towards the hero” (Sontag 2007, p. 100) but also, at the same time, the trend towards the idealisation of the body would sustain in the fascist imagery “an utopian aesthetic of physical perfection” (2007, p. 101). In short, what is interesting for Sontag is that during Nazism and Communism the totalitarian politics appropriated the rhetoric of art and of dominant codes in the communication of masses, in the same way that for Pasolini (2009) the consumerist capitalism would expand a sort of *new fascism*. Perhaps the image is only the most evident footprint of a continuity, of a shared ideological deposit, of transversal traits, common trends, a shared imagery or simple appropriations. Another example is presented by Michaud (2009, p. 343) citing Canetti, in relation to the coercion that the urge to excel represents, a Nazi feature that allows connecting to the insecurities and the unconscious of the current society. Elias Canetti noted:

Each one of its initiatives, but also of its deepest desires, are dictated by the coercion to excel:

it could be even be qualified as a slave to excel. But it is not alone in that. If the essence of our society should be qualified with a feature, there is only this one to be found: the coercion to excel.

These appropriations could confirm the critical hypothesis of Bauman (1998) and other analysts about the fascist phenomenon throughout the 20th century. Then the question is whether that appropriation did not blur to some extent the supposed limits between the regimes of symbolic

representation (art, propaganda, spectacle...) and between economic-political regimes (fascism, communism, social democracy...). To talk about the sentimentalism of the leader and the drunkenness of the mass, as usual in the debates about classical fascism, should lead to see how the mechanisms of classical fascism stalled in subsequent forms of understanding communication and politics. Not in vain, this fading of limits is a multidimensional phenomenon which marks may have continued in the post-fascist era. Klemperer suggests that “the determinant characteristic of the most German spiritual trend is called: limitlessness”. (Klemperer 2007, p. 208). But this ideological feature could be contrasted and evaluated beyond the totalitarian period that is conventionally recognised as such in contemporary history.

5. References

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