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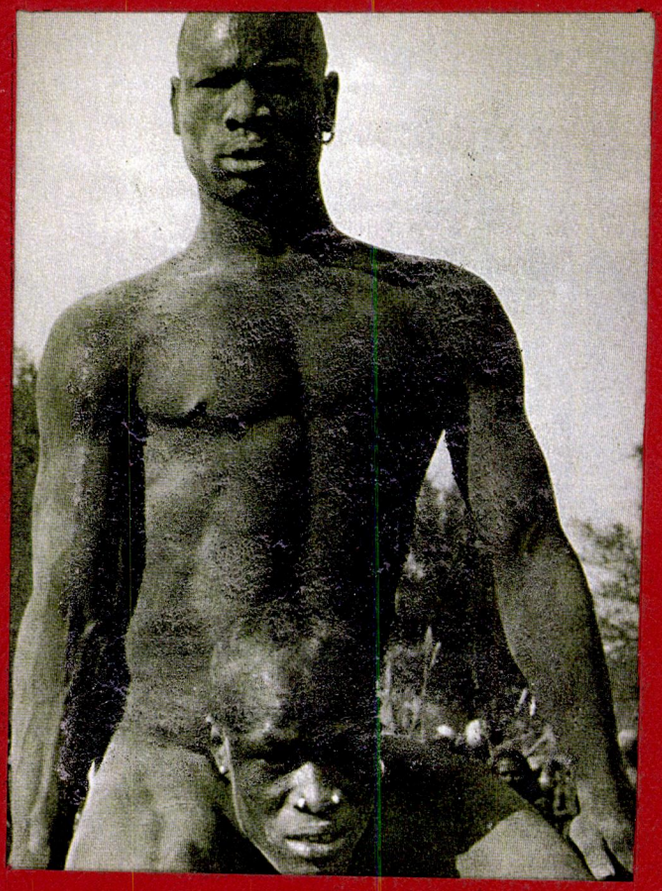

NUBA

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NAZI NUBA

(LENI RIEFENSTAHL'S PORTRAYAL OF THE NUBA TRIBE)

BY

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INTRODUCTION

Hitler's filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl is a unique artist. This is because her work was both "artistically impressive" whilst also propagating National Socialist ideology. It is the marriage of these two seemingly opposing elements that makes her work both disturbing and fascinating. Hitler clearly admired her as an artist, in creative terms she could reach everything that he wished to achieve himself, but so conspicuously lacked the talent to do so. (Muller, 1991) She claims that she was apolitical, purely motivated by aesthetic concerns and that she was forced to make films for the Third Reich. However in the sixties she freely chose to create a series of photographs of the Nuba tribe of Northern Sudan. Susan Sontag wrote that this photographic essay carries the same overtones and connotations as her Third Reich films; the cult of physicality, worship of nature, strictures against urban civilisation and glorification of the irrational. (Sontag, 1985, p.38) These are fundament Nazi principles. Throughout my thesis I will discuss in detail the strong links between these photographs and National Socialist ideology.

In chapter one the counter argument that an artistic celebration of Black people could never embody any Nazi sentiment will be dealt with. The Nazis were primarily interested in racial purity, which is one of the reasons why Riefenstahl chose the Nuba tribe as her subject. This has to be established before I can proceed to present the reasons why her work is fascist. In the following chapter, "A Classicist or a National Socialist?", the difference between the Greek physical ideal and the Nazi ideal of the genetically perfect human being will be distinguished. Riefenstahl's association with the latter will be proven. Throughout the final chapter, "Riefenstahl's Utopia", her philosophy of life and Hitler's *weltanschaung* will be compared. Her attitude towards the Nuba's elementary existence, tribal community, and pugilistic culture will be discussed. Her portrayal of Nuban woman will also be examined.

CHAPTER ONE

BUT THE NUBA ARE BLACK!

Racial ideology was not merely an element of Nazism. It was at its essence. Therefore it is impossible to begin to prove that Leni Riefenstahl's Nuba photographs are fascist, without first deciphering the National Socialists' attitude to race and explaining why the Nuba would not have necessarily fit into the Nazi Category of the *untermenschen*, the subhuman, despite the fact that they are a Black tribe.

Nazi ideology bares more resemblance to a religion than to a theory of political science. All of their ideas were based on the fundamental creed that the German people were the master race and had the divine right to be, as Nietzsche described it, "lords of the earth". (Shirer, 1993, p.101) Hitler believed that the Aryan was

> the Prometheus of mankind from whose shining brow the divine spark of genius has sprung at all times, forever kindling anew that fire of knowledge which illumined the night of silent mysteries and thus caused man to climb the path to mastery over the other beings of this earth. (Shirer, 1993, p.86)

All Nazi logic is subservient to this ridiculous premise.

The French Count Joseph Arthur de Gobineau and the English Houston Stewart Chamberlain were the two principal Nazi racial theorists. Both of these men concocted racial doctrines so spurious that no people, not even their own, took them seriously with the single exception of the Germans. To the Nazis their questionable theories became gospel. Count de Gobineau admitted that he wrote his theories partly to prove the superiority of his own aristocratic ancestry. He thought that the contemporary Aryan lived above a line running roughly along the Seine and east to Switzerland. This took in some of the French, all of the English and the Irish, the peoples of the low countries and the Rhine, Hanover and the Scandinavians. However he excluded a large bulk of the German people, who lived to the east and south-east of his line, a fact which the Nazis chose to gloss over when they embraced his teachings.

Nazi ideology was fickle and highly selective in character. Pseudo-scientific theories were fabricated in an attempt to lend authority to spurious belief. Their theorists fanatically believed that all human culture (all the results of art, science and technology) were exclusively the creative product of the Aryan. The National Socialists falsely identified themselves with many great artistic achievements of the past. The pyramids of Egypt, the temples of Greece, Michelangelo's figures, Goethe's FAUST together with many other creative achievements were culturally appropriated by them. Any Oriental, Mediterranean or Black influences on these works were overlooked. The Nazis thought that these great works were the carriers of a spiritual content determined by the same blood.

(Adam, 1992, p.23)

Their identification with ancient Greece is undoubtedly the most well known of the Nazi lies. Martin Bernal refers to this as "the fabrication of ancient Greece". He claims the ancient Greeks believed that they were descendants of the Egyptians and Phoenicians, and that this is accepted by most modern historians. The Nazis denied both of these influences. According to the Aryan model there had been an invasion from the north, which went "unreported" in ancient tradition, and had overwhelmed the local Aegean or pre-Hellenic culture. (Bernal, 1991, p.2)

Because the Nazis were impressed by ancient Greek culture, they refused to accept that it was not Aryan. So they invented absurd theories to link themselves biologically to it. It is plausible to suggest that if the Nazis found the Nuba impressive enough that they could have responded to them in a similar fashion. Though Hitler's attitude to Black people is well documented, it is important to note that the Black Olympic medallist Jesse Owens, whom Hitler despised, came from an underprivileged, racially mixed, urban background, which is very different to that of the Nuba's. The Nuba's heroic culture, physical type and way of life, would have certainly appealed to the National Socialists. They are an unique artistic tribe noted for their exceptional physical beauty and strength. The idea of the Nazis identifying themselves with a Black tribe might seem very far-fetched. But Nazi theorists never failed to push the limits of the imagination to the extreme, when it suited them. Their theory on Jesus Christ illustrates this most vividly. Houston Stewart Chamberlain claimed that Jesus Christ was an Aryan. He declared "whoever claimed that Jesus was a Jew was either being stupid or telling lies. Jesus was not a Jew." (Shirer, 1993, p.107) His "Galilean origins" and his inability to utter correctly the "Aramaic gutturals" were to Chamberlain clear signs that Jesus had a "large proportion of non -Semitic blood". By 1938 his book had sold more than a quarter of a million copies.

Even if the Nazis had have rejected the Nuba as non- Aryan. They might have still considered them racially pure. In the SS training manual limited recognition is given to the ancient civilisations which the Nazis conceded as non-Aryan.

> The high cultures of the Indians, Persians, Greeks and Romans were Indo-Germanic creations. They unmistakably show Nordic creativity. Even today we feel an affinity with those cultures of the same racial origin. People of other races also created cultures. But when we approach the culture of ancient China, of Babylon, of the Aztecs and the Incas, we feel something different. They too are high cultures but they are alien to us. They are not of our race. (Adam,1992, p.22)

As I referred to earlier the idea of the high cultures of the Indians, Persians, Greeks and Romans being "Indo-Germanic" creations is highly contentious, nevertheless, the Nazis believed that the so-called non- Aryan cultures could never have reached their heights. But what is significant is that the relative greatness of these "non-Aryan" cultures was attributed to racial purity. Hitler wrote that blood mixture and the resultant drop in the racial level is the sole cause of the dying out of old

cultures. He believed that men did not perish as a result of lost wars, but by the loss of that force of resistance which is continued only in pure blood. In his view all who were not of "good race" were "chaff". (Shirer, 1993, p.87) Hitler propagated a form of Darwinism. The pure master race had to subjugate people of mixed race to maintain their supremacy. He preached of a world where the death of the weaker implied the life of the stronger. The Nazis thought that many peoples including the Slavs and the Jews were weak and degenerate. From their perspective none of these groups even constituted what was considered to be a race. They were "bastardised". In short the Nazis were obsessed with a warped perception of racial purity.

The less worthy but acceptable category of non-Aryan yet racially pure, was not just reserved for certain ancient civilisations. Despite the obnoxious writing of Count de Gobineau on the subject of the yellow man, Hitler had given the Japanese honorary Aryan status. (Bernal, 1991, p.404) This was not just politically motivated, it also was a response to the cultural similarities between the two countries. They both share a feudal imperialistic history. Life in Japan is ordered by strict rules of manner and conduct. Self discipline is deemed to be very important. Duty comes first and the Japanese must put the good of their family and country before all else. On December 11th 1941 Hitler made a long speech in the Reichstag defending the Japanese attack on Pearl harbour and his own declaration of war on the United States. In part of the speech he stated that the Japanese Government had at last become tired of being mocked by Roosevelt in such an unworthy way. And that this filled the German people, and "all other descent peoples" with deep satisfaction. (Shirer, 1993, p.900) Hitler thought the Japanese, though not Aryan, were of "pure blood" and "good race".

So does the Nuba tribe measure up to the Nazi ideal of "good race" or are they "chaff"? They certainly mean something special to Leni Riefenstahl. Coming to the end of her lengthy six year search for the tribe she expressed how she and her team felt; "We all feel that the extraordinary phenomenon we are looking for will be hard to find."(Riefenstahl, 1982, p.21) The Nuba are the indigenous and most ancient people of the Sudan. In modern times they only number 5% of the Sudanese population. They retreated to the Nuba mountains several centuries ago in response to invasions. They are a remote community who have had little contact with the outside world. "The central theme of Nuban history is the tension between political incorporation into the state of Sudan and maintenance of local identity." (Facing Genocide, 1995, p.11) The Nuba are noted for their vigorous resistance to the British. Between 1900 and 1945 there were thirty uprisings and rebellions in the Nuba mountains, including a major revolt in Nymang in 1903. They have endured the civil war which started in 1956 after British withdrawal. They have also managed to withstand hundreds of years of colonisation by the Arabs and still survive as an ethnically pure, indigenous group.

To say that Riefenstahl is not a racist because she has taken flattering photographs of Black people is too simplistic. The Nazi theorists might or might not have made an exception for the beautiful Nuba tribe and accepted them as Aryan. But the fact remains that she did not chose people

of mixed race to photograph. It took her six years to find these racially pure people, whom she considered worthy subjects for her camera.

CHAPTER TWO

A CLASSICIST OR A NATIONAL SOCIALIST?

The notion that the artist created lasting works on a higher plane kept anti -semitism out of the fine arts in Nazi Germany. Art was to concentrate on the good and the good had to be beautiful and consequently there was no place for the Jew in it. (Adam, 1992, p.173) The National Socialists believed that he would have debased German art just by being there. The task of artists and politicians was to remove the diseased and create freedom for the healthy.(Sontag, 1985, p.41) This was during a period when the arts else where followed a trend towards a search for truth rather than beauty in the traditional sense. The fact that human suffering in an increasingly dehumanised world became a major theme of modern art is an example of this. But Riefenstahl admits that she could never be creative with a negative subject. She is and always was to use Susan Sontag's term a "Beauty-Freak". She is fascinated by what is beautiful, strong, healthy, what is living. For Hitler too, beauty always involved health: "We only want the celebration of the healthy body in art." (Adam, 1992, p.149) This obsession with health and nature was a reoccurring theme for Nazi artists. The forces of man, plant and animal became their favourite topics. Each of these subjects have preoccupied Riefenstahl throughout her career. Her first feature film, THE BLUE LIGHT (1932), was concerned with the plight of a young peasant girl who (like the Nuba tribe) was untouched by civilisation and was in pure harmony with nature. Even her seemingly innocuous contemporary choice of subject matter, the world of underwater plant and animal life, would have been an acceptable Nazi theme.

Of all the fine arts, sculpture emerged as the most successful propaganda tool. This was because it was more suited to expressing ideas about race and biology. It offered a body language that people found accessible. It had also become an architectural element of many public buildings and was apart of everyday life.(Adam, 1992, p.175) Themes like womanhood, the family and nature were peripheral. It was the virile beauty of the male body which became the overwhelmingly dominant theme of the Nazi sculptors. Hitler proclaimed that a new type of human being was evolving and that this new type appeared in front of the whole world at the Berlin Olympic Games. Nazi sculpture was obsessively preoccupied with this concept. The new fascist human being was tall and broad shouldered, with narrow hips. He was not just a physical ideal but he had an heroic character,

comradeship, discipline, obedience, steeliness and courage.

Leni Riefenstahl was always inspired by the male athletic body. In her film OLYMPIA (1937), which documented the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games, she demonstrated a quality rare among women; a keen appreciation of muscular, male good looks. There are dozens of brief close ups of fine Aryan heads and shoulders of sturdy mesomorphs and slender boys in the tent cities. (Dutton, 1995, p.207) She admits that she was interested in the Nuba tribe because of their physique; " Nuba men have an athletic build rare in any other African tribe." (Sontag, 1985, p.38)

Nazi sculptors believed that they were returning to pure forms. They thought their work was the equivalent of ancient Greek art . However the truth was that Nazi art had little to do with classical art. The German peasants who settled in the cities as the new proletariat learnt to read and write for the sake of efficiency, but they did not have the leisure time necessary to cultivate an understanding of the cities avant-garde culture. (Greenberg, 1992, p.543) Modern art came as a shock to a nature loving and provincial people, who through urbanisation had become alienated from their own traditional folk culture. In order to establish a spurious continuity and eternal validity Nazi art imitated the realism and naturalism of Classical Greek art. National Socialist art, unlike the abstraction of avant-gardism, was populist. To an unsophisticated public in Germany, the appeal of Nazi art may have been that it was simple, figurative, emotional, not intellectual, a relief from the demanding complexities of modernist art. (Sontag, 1985, p.41) The kitsch was ideal for propaganda purposes.

The same approach is adopted by all twentieth century totalitarian systems. This is evident in the official art of the Soviet Union. Socialist realism aimed to produce art comprehensible to the masses, and inspire the people with admiration for the dignity of the working man and his task of building communism. Heroic idealisation of work and the worker was the required theme. The approved techniques were also derived from the realistic and naturalistic traditions so to create, in Stalin's words, "worthy engineers of the souls". (Read, 1984, p.397) A similar tendency was evident in fascist Italy. The elimination of physical weakness and a nostalgia for ancient Roman civilisation was reflected in the vast, columned buildings and sporting arenas in neo-Roman style erected by Mussolini. (Dutton, 1995, p.208)

The precondition for kitsch is the availability of a fully matured cultural tradition. Kitsch can, then take advantage of its discoveries, acquisitions and perfected self-consciousness, for its own ends.(Greenberg, 1992, p.543) For the National Socialists, the naked man repeated the Classical ideal of the heroic athlete in his naturalness. The Olympic spirit became identical with the German character and the order of antiquity was the best weapon against the chaos of modern art. Riefenstahl promoted this idea in OLYMPIA. In the opening scene a naked runner brought the flame from Greece to Berlin as she skilfully juxtaposed naked sportsman and antique statues. In this sequence Riefenstahl captured one of the stage tricks of the regime to perfection: the transposition of the antique ideal into the modern world. (Adam,1992, p.252) Her depiction of the Olympic Games and her portrayal of the Nuba tribe does not merely demonstrate an appreciation of the human body, in the tradition of Classical art. Instead the ideological basis of her work can be found in the principles of Nazism.

Perhaps the best way to distinguish the difference between Nazi art and that of the ancient Greeks, is to look at the work of Arno Breker. He was the most well known Nazi sculptor. He became an official state artist, the exponent and inventor of the National Socialist style. He was offered many public honours and the number of commissions he received for public buildings was phenomenal. Hitler had immense regard for his work. He studied at the Dusseldorf Academy and worked in Rome on the restoration of Michelangelo's "Rondanini Pieta". Between 1927 and 1933 he lived and worked in Paris during which time the influences of Maillol and Rodin were evident. However within the following twelve years he abandoned the depiction of individual traits and anatomical detail and developed a smoother surface. The change in his style is best expressed in the widely distributed Nazi documentary ARNO BREKER, whose narrator explains that Breker's early sculptures of heads are

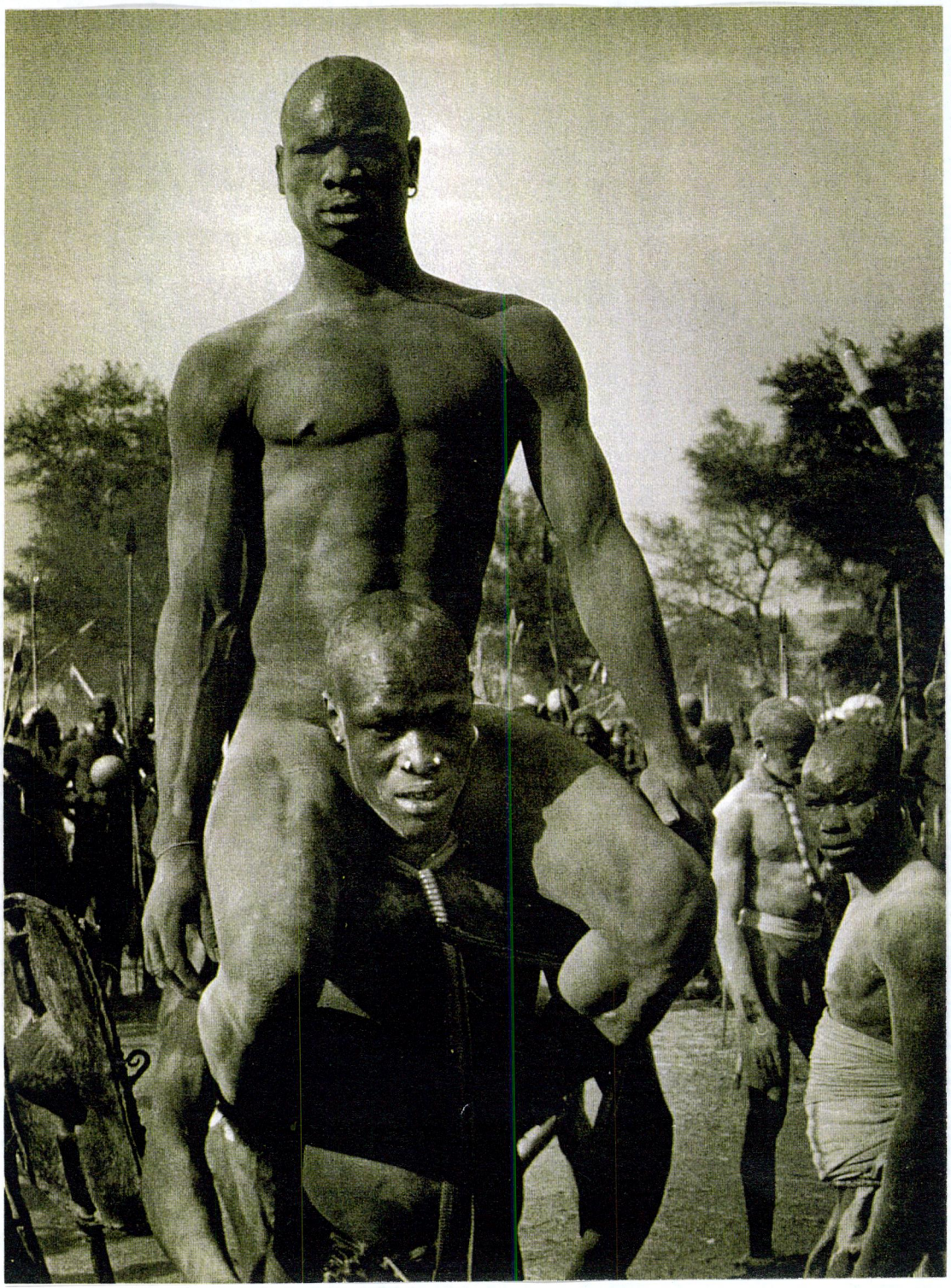
> marked by an uncompromising penetration into every detail of the face. Every thought is revealed, every individual trait has been captured with unfailing determination. Only a change in the philosophy of the artist could alter his passionate search for the subjective. A change that would lead to a form which showed what is generally valid rather than what is individual. Force has replaced sensitivity, hardness the fluidity shimmering in the light....Everything that moves and deeply concerns our entire people is expressed in these heads. This head does not tell the story of an individual, it says 'I am concentrated strength of man! I am anger against cowardice! I hate the enemy of my people. You should be like me'." (Adam, 1992, p.197)

The Nazi scorn for "the passionate search for the objective" manifested itself in the

persecution of modern artist. The arts at that time very much followed a trend towards introspection. The press spokesman for the Ministry of Information announced that the National Socialist revolution was a revolution of thought. Its greatness lay in the fact that it had dethroned individual thought. They were not interested in encouraging the growth of the individual. The desire to probe, to experiment or to search was not tolerated. Hitler demanded that this automaton like Aryan was to make the national cause his or her own and give it primacy over everything else. The Nazi regime pursued physical perfection only for the purposes of conflict and conquest. Their male nudes mainly expressed two things the heroic will to fight and readiness to be sacrificed. Susan Sontag remarked that it is hardly the intricacy and subtlety of primitive myth, social organisation, or thinking that Riefenstahl extolled in her portrayal of the Nuba tribe. (Sontag, 1985, p.39) Riefenstahl is especially enthusiastic about their wrestling matches in which the "heaving and Straining" Nuba men with "huge muscles bulging", throw one another to the ground. Her interest in the Nuban physique is primarily pugilistic. It was a photograph in Stern magazine of two Nuban wrestlers that initially attracted her to the tribe. Riefenstahl's celebration of a society in which, as she sees it, physical perfection ultimately means victory of the stronger man over the weak betrays her Nazi ideology.

Nature was seen as a fighting ground in which the strong dominated the weak. Nazism adopted a crude form of Darwinian theory. (Shirer, 1993, p.90) Darwin called an individual's probability of surviving and reproducing its fitness. Also each individual because of its genetic constitution will have a certain probability of growing, escaping enemies, the hazards of weather and of enjoying food, light and other resources. The term "survival of the fittest" refers to this probability. (Owen,1989, p.172) Hitler believed that culture was bound up with rigid law of necessity and the right of the best and strongest in the world; "Those who want to live let them fight, and those who do not want to fight, in this world of eternal struggle do not deserve to live." (Shirer, 1993, p.86) Fritz Bernuth's and Michael Kiefer's paintings of soaring eagles symbolised German military might and triumph. In the "blood and soil" paintings of Carl Baum and Julius Paul Jungham's even horses and cows became symbols of physical and national strength.

1. The Nazi male nudes mainly expressed two things, the heroic will to fight and readiness to be sacrificed.



2. This photograph first attracted Riefenstahl to the tribe. The victorious wrestler is carried on the loser's shoulders

The Nazis had what was called the *Ordensburgen* or order castles. These were elite educational institutions for the racially pure. There aim was to produce trained and ideologically "sound" young men. The schools fostered a closely knit community life. Physical education and gymnastic exercises held a place of major importance in all state schools and their militaristic overtones were apparent. The ideas of the nineteenth century German athlete Friedrich Ludwig Jahn were adopted and turned to more sinister ends. His development of systematic physical training lead to modern gymnastics. But the National Socialist application of his methods was Lamarckian. The nineteenth century French Biologist Lamarck claimed that the organs of animals could be classified according to a hierarchy of complexity, from the lower to the higher stages of life. These organs were improved with repeated use and weakened by disuse. The application of Lamarckian theories for the improvement of the human race was a subject of fascination to a number of thinkers, who were interested in the new science of Eugenics.

Lamarckism meant that the development and effectiveness of organs are proportionate to the exercise of those organs. The individual could consciously and substantially modify their bodily organs during their lifetimes. The Lamarckian "law of exercise" provided a scientific and moral basis for physical education. But popular Lamarckism went further. It thought that such temporary improved organic condition in an individual could promote a corresponding permanent improvement in the individuals off spring. Similarly the failure to exercise any organ weakened and gradually atrophied that organ in both creatures and its descendants. From here it is only a small step to the assumption that certain races of men have preserved their organic capacity better than others, in other words, the theory of racial superiority. (Dutton, 1995, p.204) Although physical training was apart of life in the Third Reich, the Nazi health culture, unlike that of the Ancient Greeks, was based on eugenics and naturalism.

The Nazis believed that despite a thousand year effort to alienate the German peasant from his nature, his deep blood feeling preserved the German breed. The racially pure German was to maintain this physical prowess not only through participating in athletic sports but also by adopting a lifestyle that was implemented by the state and bound to nature. Communal work and harvesting were encouraged. It was away of solving the unemployment problem but it also took on deeper

meanings. It was used to create a feeling of physical confidence and to transform manual labour into a kind of ritual. Dance as a messianic happening that embraced the cult of the naked body and rhythmic movements was very popular. Nude bathing became one of the favourite pastimes. The schools of Rudolf Steiner and Emile Jaques Dalcroze propagated the collective dream of a healthy, natural human being. The productions of Max Reinhardt, the dances of Isodora Duncan and Mary Wigman were seen as a liberation of the body in a kind of ecstatic union with nature. Riefenstahl initially was employed by Max Reinhardt as a dancer. It was her performance, DANCE BY THE SEA, which attracted Hitler's attention. (Muller, 1991)

Young healthy Greek mesomorphs did train to an outstanding degree. But their aim was not naturalism. Most young Greeks looked nothing like the sculpted Greek hero figure. Their sculptures were readable as an inspiration towards a perfect state. The three areas into which education was traditionally divided were literature, music and physical education. All were of equal importance. The educational ideal of the Greeks, *arete* (which means goodness), referred to the cultivation of the whole person. Physical excellence was certainly an aspiration but was to be accompanied by spiritual development. This is reflected in their mythology in the two very different yet complementary male ideals of Hercules and Narcissus. The former epitomised the physically perfect muscular hero while the latter embodied the virtues of knowledge and reflection, which represented the holy man. In short the ancient Greek culture balanced the cult of the body against an interest in philosophy and the pursuit of the moral and social good. The difference between the Greek and the Nazi preoccupation with physicality is that one aspired to physical perfection in order to enjoy and understand life better, whilst the other pursued it so as to subjugate the rest of humanity. The Nazi body culture was an ideology which was imposed on society a political, racial and moral ideal. Premarital chastity and conjugal fidelity were demanded. Also homosexuality was deemed unhealthy. The same puritanical attitude towards sex was not a feature of Greek society. Arno Breker's statues are superbly crafted lifeless perfections. They look even more artificial when they are compared to Classical Greek figures, which visualised feelings that came from within.

> These derivative and artistically worthless attempts to recreate Hellenic beauty took the conventional form of advanced male muscularity, symbolising German racial perfection though idealised physical purity. (Dutton, 1995, p.207)

3. The Sleeping Faun's erotically suggestive posture is frequently imitated by gay iconography. Alternatively Nazi art was chaste and homosexuals were sent to concentration camps.

Leni Riefenstahl did not search for athletic subjects in the modern gymnasiums of Europe or America instead she searched for an "unspoilt" ancient tribe, who herd cattle and hunt to survive in the inhospitable desert. The Nuba's physique is both a tribal trait and the outcome of their natural yet harsh lifestyle. This mirrors the Nazi belief that physical perfection was to be achieved through racial purity sustained by a healthy peasant life style, which was bound to nature. The only thing Nazi sculpture and Riefenstahl's work has in common with Classical Greek art is that all three depict muscular men.

CHAPTER THREE
RIEFENSTAHL'S UTOPIA

Rienfenstahl has never been an advocate of urban civilisation. Her first feature film, The Blue Light (1932), demonstrates this. In it Junta, a young village girl, has an unique relationship with the nearby mountains. On nights when the moon is full a mysterious blue light radiates from the peaks. Only she, the village outcast, can reach the light safely. The blue light is emitted by precious stones. Junta being a creature of pure spirit only revels in the jewels beauty, indifferent to their material value. However she tells her secret to a painter from the city, whom she has fallen in love with. He tells the villagers, who scale the peaks, take the treasure and sell it. In her ascent on the next full moon, the blue light is not there to guide her and she falls to her death, which is brought about by the materialistic villagers and the rationalism of the visitor from the city. (Sontag, 1985, p.p.33-34) This preoccupation with a elementary existence and her opposition to modern city life is one of the reasons why she was attracted to the Nuba.

> When I met the Nuba they were in a state of innocence. They did not know about money, they lived by barter and therefore neither envied nor claimed other people's possessions. They respected each other, and in today's phraseology one would say that they lived in ecological harmony with each other and the world around them. It is money and the influences of civilisation from films to prostitution that have banished them in an alarmingly short time, from their inner paradise. (Riefenstahl, 1982, p.24)

This is not a harmless humanitarian yearning on her part. Her ideal world is similar in some senses to Hitler's. His utopia was not based on economics either. He believed that the state should have nothing to do with any definite economic conception. He thought that the inner strengths of a state coincided only in the rarest cases with so-called economic prosperity and that usually this prosperity indicated, the state's imminent decline.(Shirer, 1993, p.p.83-84) Both Hitler and Riefenstahl blame capitalism and civilisation for the moral decline of a people. This would relate to one of Count de Gobineau's explanations for the downfall of the Jews. He thought they lost their ideal virtues when they changed from "martial herdsmen" to "effeminate merchants". (Bernal, 1991, p.341)

How does Hitler's *weltanschaung* or philosophy of life compare to Riefenstahl's idea of Nuban inner paradise? Hitler did not promise a better material world. He promised a better way of life. A life filled with deeper meaning. The Nazis promoted a simple and modest way of life. The true German was uncomplicated, decent, clean and earthy. Riefenstahl notes that the Nuba are happy, warm, cheerful yet poor. They only had their land and a little water but they were happy. (Muller, 1991) With this longing for a simpler life came the call for a deep communication with nature. The Nazi "Blood and Soil" paintings and their Health Culture (discussed in chapter two) were not the only products of this philosophy. It lead to a wider social programme. They ardently

promoted many German writers who previously celebrated the landscape and country life including Annette Von Droste Hulshoff, Conrad Ferdinand Meyer, Hermann Lons and Adalbert Stifteer. Their themes were usually a call for a return to nature and a rejection of the industrial revolution and spread of urban developments. The Nazis embarked on a new housing project. They built new homes in the countryside for the poor, who lived in dingy city courtyards. These houses were built not to help the people materially but to bring them closer to the soil. The German Workers' Front fulfilled a building programme in line with the will of the Fuhrer. They created homes which were in harmony with the landscape. The new housing developments were mostly an expression of the Reich's hostility to the city, their small houses reflecting a wholesome world. (Adam, 1992, p.280) It is the same ideals which excited Riefenstahl when she was introduced to the Nuba. Her following description of Nuban houses show her delight at finding a people who were wholesome and who lived in ecological harmony: "Suddenly we notice round huts on the mountain slopes stuck against the rocks like birds' nests. Nuban houses! My tiredness has vanished." (Riefenstahl, 1982, p.22)

It was not only Hitler social aim to restore the link with nature, he also wanted to bind people again into a *volkish* unity. The idea of *volk* was one of Hitler's main concepts. It can not be translated accurately into English. Usually it is rendered as nation or people but in German there is a deeper and some what different meaning that denotes a primitive tribal community based on blood and soil. (Shirer, 1993, p.88) This could easily be a description of the Nuba tribe. Hitler wanted to unite the German people and turn them in to a collective. He thought of them as a group of children that needed a strong father. Riefenstahl admits that she sees the Nuba as childlike. She also comments on their collective way of life: "They were attached to their families and blessed with a happy balanced social structure. There was no crime, the land was owned communally." (Riefenstahl, 1982, p.25) There is little evidence for her interest in the individual, instead she explores what is "generally valid" about the tribe. According to her account, wrestling and the attendant rituals bind the Nuba together. Their pursuit of physical perfection is regarded as a fight "for the renewal of the Sacred vitality of the tribe." (Sontag, 1985, p.39) When she does talk about an individual, it is only to briefly explain a common tribal ritual or trait. She rarely refers to any of the Nubans by name or reminisces about how she related to any member of the tribe specifically. This is highly unusual if you consider that she lived with them for eight months. Once again it seems that Riefenstahl shares common ground with Hitler. It is not the uniqueness of individuals that inspires her. What interests Riefenstahl is the collective in a tribal or racial context. This is at the core of National Socialism. The poet Gottfried Benn expressed this concept vividly when he wrote:

> I declare myself for the new state, because it is my people (*volk*) that is making its way now. Who am I to exclude myself; do I know any better? No! within the limits of my powers I can try to guide the *volk* to where I would like to see it: but if I should not succeed, still it would remain my *volk*. *Volk* is a great deal! My intellectual and economic existence, my language, my life, my human relationships, the entire sum, of my brain, I owe primarily to this *volk*. My ancestors came form it, my children return to it. And since I grew up in the country and among farm animals I also still remember what native ground stands for. Big cities,

> industrialism, intellectualism these are all shadows that the age has cast upon my thoughts, all powers of the century, which I have confronted in my writing. There are moments in which this whole tormented life falls away and nothing exists but the plains, expanses, seasons, soil, simple words: *volk*. (Adam, 1992, p.56)

In Hitler's new *volkish* society the gender roles were strictly defined and adhered to. The role of the woman in the Third Reich was very limited. She was born to be pure beautiful and to bring healthy Germans into the world. Premarital chastity and conjugal fidelity was compulsory. This was to ensure pure offspring. Those women who wore make up were forbidden to attend certain National Socialist gatherings. Smoking was also unacceptable. Throughout Riefenstahl's thirty page introduction to LENI RIEFENSTAHL'S AFRICA she only briefly mentions the Nuban women twice. She describes how the girls and women walk at the end of the group. That they carry calabashes and large baskets erect and light footed behind the group of men. She also describes their beauty. She notices that they are very pretty with enchanting figures, tall slim legs, very narrow hips, beautifully formed arms and hands, broad but finely made shoulders and a long slim neck. The most noticeable feature of the unmarried girls, according to Riefenstahl, was their beautifully shaped breasts. (Riefenstahl, 1982, P.27) Her interest in the Nuban women is marginal. When she does comment on them it is their beauty she celebrates. When she notes their place in the tribe, at the back, she only remarks on their elegance. She also fondly remembers Nuban courtship rituals and explains how a Nuban girl who showed her feelings too plainly would have no chance with Nuban man, however pretty she was. This lead the girls to wear a proud and self confident expression. (Riefenstahl, 1982, P.27) Nuban women are not encouraged to freely express their sexual desire. They remain celibate before marriage and monogamous within it. Riefenstahl is non-critical of this, in fact she writes about this subject in an approving tone.

It is clear from this attitude and the fact that she does not talk about the women often, that women's rights and sexual liberation are of little interest to her. An outlook which Hitler undoubtedly shared. Whilst treating Nuban women in this fashion she, personally, lives a very independent life. This is typical of the double standards which were associated with the Nazi establishment, of which she was a part of. An example of this is Goring's confiscation and display of the work of Marc, Gaugin and Munch in his luxurious hunting lodge. Despite the fact that this art was condemned as degenerate.(Adam, 1992, p.295) Also Goebbels had a Slavic mistress for years, Lida Baarova (Rees, 1992), and the physique of the Nazi leadership never quite measured up to the ideal of the "blond beast".

If the woman was preordained by nature to be the bearer of children then the man was preordained to fight . In Hitler's view only this interpretation of the role of the man was acceptable. Riefenstahl's main interest in Nuban culture was their fighting rituals. In Nazi culture the mans sexual energy was to be transformed into a spiritual force, for the benefit of the community. Riefenstahl explains why Nuban marriages, in contrast to their splendid funerals involve no

ceremonies or feasts.

> A Nuban man's greatest desire is not union with a woman but to be a good wrestler, thereby affirming the principle of abstemiousness. The Nuba dance ceremonies are not sensual occasions but rather "festivals of chastity" - of containment of the life force. (Sontag, 1985, p.41)

The Nazis mystical attitude towards fighting and death is embodied in the work of the composer Richard Wagner. Hitler said "Whoever wants to understand National Socialist Germany must know Wagner". (Shirer, 1993, P.102) He was inspired by the German mythological past, which was free of those elements which distorted modern society. Wagner's NIBELUNGENLIEDD RING (1869-1876), is made up of four separate operas and was Wagner's most ambitious enterprise. It was based on the great German epic myth Nibelungenlied. This piece of work gave Germany and especially the Third Reich its primitive Germanic mythos. Many people in Nazi Germany identified with the ancient heroes and heroines such as Siegfried, Kriemhild,Brunhild and Hagen, who featured in this opera cycle. These characters lived in a primitive world which was overwhelmed by violence. Often a peoples' myths are the highest and truest expression of their spirit and culture. Nowhere is this more true than Germany, were blood feuds, primitive tribal codes and the nobility of death inspired the myths of modern Germany and gave it a Germanic *Weltanschaung* which Hitler and the Nazis took over as their own. (Shirer, 1993, P.102)

The last opera of the NIBELUNGELIED RING is GOTTERDAMERUNG(1876). This title is translated into English as the twilight of the gods . The opera ends with a vast funeral pyre which consumes all the gods and the temple of Valhalla. (Hamilton, 1990, P.176) Glorification of death was a consistent feature of Wagner's operas. In his opera TRISTAN UND ISOLDE (1865) the lovers reach fulfilment in death. Susan Sontag refers to the important events in Nuban society as "Gotterdammerung time". These events are wrestling matches and funerals. This is when the Nuba paint themselves and smear on their bodies a white grey ash which unmistakably suggests death. Riefenstahl seems right on target with her choice, as a photographic subject, of a society whose most enthusiastic and lavish ceremony is the funeral. (Sontag, 1985, p.p.38-39)

In choosing to portray Nuban society her approach is not unlike her contemporary Robert Flaherty. When making MAN OF ARAN (1934) he seemed determined from the start to find (or to invent) a story that would embody his theme.(Barsam, 1988, p.59) It was film maker John Grierson who suggested that he make a film in the Aran Islands. This was the film about man and nature that Flaherty has been trying to make for ten years. What makes MAN OF ARAN particularly problematic is his decision to dwell on the shark hunting episode when this activity had died out a hundred years previous.

4. Riefenstahl was mainly interested in the Nuba fighting rituals.

5. The Nuba smear on their bodies a white ash which unmistakably suggests death.

Flaherty also insisted on reviving the back breaking custom of carrying seaweed up the sheer face of the cliff in baskets on the islanders backs, when donkeys had long been used for the task. While he always used images out of real life, he never hesitated to stage an event, as long as it was probable. However by reviving disused customs and by ignoring all but the mythic elements of island life, Flaherty created an invalid picture of that life. (Barsam, 1988, p.66)

The same can be said of Riefenstahl in relation to the Nuba tribe. She depicts them through a highly personal selection of events. Her interpretation of their lives is a sentimental reaction towards the past, an escape in to a world that has little contemporary significance for the Nuba themselves, like Flaherty she places nostalgia above more urgent needs. When Riefenstahl was working on her Nuba project the Sudanese civil war (1956 -1972) was at its height. The agitation was between the Arab North and the Black South. Many Nuban warriors were fighting amongst the ranks of the Southern Sudanese Liberation Army. The Nuban people were at that time suffering greatly yet there is no refection of this in her work. The only plight she is interested in is the loss of their culture. She is disgusted at the fact that some of the Nuba had begun to wear sunglasses, ugly clothes and clumsy shoes. She does not see them as human beings but as strange impalpable creatures fashioned by artists. (Riefenstahl, 1982, p.28) She admits that she idealised the Nubans and projected onto them her own desire for an ideal world. Anything that does not fit the ideal is ignored, such as the guerrilla warfare of the civil conflict and the depredation that it brought. Once more Riefenstahl has constructed reality to serve the image as she did in TRIUMPH OF THE WILL (1935). She claims that not a single scene of the 1934 Nazi party congress was staged. But it represents an already achieved and radical transformation of reality. The Nuremberg rally was planned not only as a spectacular mass meeting but as a spectacular propaganda film. Everything was designed for the convenience of the cameras. The event instead of being an end in itself, served as a set to a film which was then to assume the character of an authentic documentary. (Sontag, 1985, p.36)

She pleads that her work is a sensual and emotional response, as opposed to being consciously influenced by political theory. This response rather than being part of her defence is more evidence of her Nazi ideology. One of the main accusations against the Jews within Nazi Germany was that they were urban, intellectual bearers of a destructive, corrupting critical spirit. Goebbels officially banned art criticism in November, 1936, for having typically Jewish traits of character, for putting the head over the heart, the intellect over feeling. (Sontag, 1985, p.39) The Nazis believed that the Aryan had an emancipated soul. He believed in the starry sky above and the eternal law within. He plunged into his/her soul and listened to the inner voice. (Adam,1992, p.24) The glorification of the irrational was an obligatory Nazi trait and one Leni Riefenstahl very much subscribes to.

> I can simply say that I feel spontaneously attracted by everything that is beautiful. Yes beauty, harmony and perhaps this care for composition. This aspiration to form is in effect something very German. But I don't know these things myself, exactly. It comes from the unconscious not from my knowledge. (Sontag, 1982, p.37)

CONCLUSION

Riefenstahl's choice of subject, the indigenous and most ancient people of the Sudan, is highly suspicious. Although Hitler's rhetoric about the "Negro" can not be forgotten, the Nuban population is "racially pure". This is due to historical events and geographical circumstances. It is purely incidental and certainly not a deliberate effort on the Nuba's part. However, the same can not be said about Riefenstahl's six year search for them. Nuban warriors have an athletic build rare in any other African tribe. (Sontag, 1985, p.38) They are tall, broad shouldered and have narrow hips. These are traits which the ideal Aryan was supposed to possess. Her portrayal of the Nuba bares no relation to Classical Greek athleticism or philosophy. Their physique is a racial characteristic which is sustained by a natural way of life. This is precisely one of the ways the Nazi regime intended to achieve Aryan physical perfection.

Like the filmmaker Robert Flaherty she has gone to great lengths to find a society that reflects some of her ideals. She selects elements of Nuban society which appeal to her Nazi sensibilities and she ignores the rest, such as the civil war. THE BLUE LIGHT and THE LAST OF THE NUBA express her hatred for urban civilisation and a deep yearning for a pure and elementary existence. This aspiration became part of the National Socialists' political and social programme. Yet these two pieces were not produced during the years of the Third Reich. Riefenstahl has freely chosen to consistently illustrate Nazi themes. She interprets Nuban pugilistic festivals as a unifying and magical tribal ritual. By doing this she glamorises aggression and brutishness. There is little evidence that she is interest in the individual. She focuses on what is "generally valid". She sees the Nuba as a racial organism. Also she is not very interested in the Nuban women. She remarks on their beauty and little else. She rejects intellectualism and claims that her work is derived from a mysticism. Riefenstahl's work like Nazism itself glorifies the irrational.

If Wagner's NIBELUNGELIED RING is the musical and dramatic realisation of a Nazi political utopia, (Chancellor, 1978, p.102) then Nuban society is the actualisation of this utopia, as Riefenstahl sees it. Her claim that she was always only interested in aesthetics does not vindicate her, since Riefenstahl and the National Socialist share the same concept of beauty. Nazism stands for an ideal. As in all Nazi art it is the ideal which Riefenstahl has extolled rather than the horrific methods of achieving it.

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