

For Sally - Dec 4th, 1972, Denver

December 1, 1973

Dear Hollis,

Just survived a night of continuous mares riding-me-down/waking-me-up. In fact it was one of those nights one isn't assured of having slept at all. Anyway, I was up reading at 2-4-6 (like unto, was it?, the Dr. Pepper ads during the war -- no! "Ten, two, and four" were the suggested hours for drinking, was it?, Dr. Pepper. . . yes, and that radio-ad-remembered does complete pitch of psyche back/black with World War Two-ness: "ten, two, and four": and my chewing tobacco has turned to Charcoal Gum: three dumb blonds stand there (in the movies) singing . . . the Andrews Sisters, is it?: and sweat is streaming off me and my hands are shaking on these typewriter keys: (and I never have found out for sure IF there IS REALLY such a thing in the universe as blond pubic hair -- sorry, Hollis, I can't take your word for it . . .) And all this (old WWII where psyche is forever pitched, this ter pit) touched off (blazing afresh) by reading the Leni Riefenstahl issue of Film Culture last night -- NOT good bedtime reading for us Depression Babies . . . our pre-adolescent dreams forever haunted by the penis of Hitler ranging overhead, its 'eye' (as in Rodin's painting) searching us out. WHAT a way to identify with Leni (who has, anyway, that boyish sound to her name . . . Lenny): did she or did she NOT sleep with Hitler? (as I and most of my generation did, certainly, in abject terror) -- THIS question overwhelms all else (sweeps Art aside, tumbles every aesthetic question); and those Nazis will NEVER understand the agony caused beyond all their obvious atrocities . . . (Leni keeps insisting in interview with Hitchens that she never saw the concentration camps . . . never knew . . . never was a member of The Party . . . never/etc. -- as well as that she never danced naked in Hitler's bunker, NEVER went to Berchtesgaden (((((Laughs "This is foolish. In my whole life I was there very few times in my life, only twice, and not one minute during the war."))) . . . answered "no, no, no" to all the questions after the war): she really does not understand the shadow cast through dreams, the extent of her moves -- Pandora opening the box . . . the extent of the projection, etc. And she does, with ALL justification (in my mind) hide behind Artist, that mask of balance she so clearly deserves; but . . . aghghghgh! -- "deserves" if ANYone does (there's the rub!)

And I took some pain killer (Empirin # 3) as I am, again, these nights in order to get to sleep -- this backspain from last summer's "Text of Light" photography waking me up 2,3,4 times a night, leaving me mad insomniac gnashing the sheets; but the pain was too much last night -- was only lightly buzzed by Empirin. And why last night? I'd read that whole Riefenstahl issue before. But last night (preparing notes for my lecture in Chicago to precede "Triumph of the Will" next week) it all came to focus! "T o t W" and "Olympia" is what my students at Art Inst. will see; and because The Museum of Modern Art has screwed-up again with a Nazi Newsreel I ordered (their one print gone astray) it falls out that "T o t W" will be prefaced by "Blue Moses" (my sudden inspiration) and whatever lecture I manage in this our year of Watergate . . . whatever I can manage to say to a classroom of increasingly frightened students REacting with increasing ready conformism (to distinguish themselves, no doubt, from those older brothers and sisters and neighbor children who smothered in flowers mid sixties -- ah, god!)

I don't, this morn, know what these notes I last night made do mean: I'll simply type 'em up for you, and me (my easier reading, as eyes give out) in Chicago.

Blessings Stan

Leni Riefenstahl

born 1902

Married to (Major or Col. in Air Force) Jacobs (Jew?)
who runs off with a dancer

1923 - 26 dancer (before or after above?)

1926 become film actress (mainly the mtn. films of geologist-turned-film-maker A. Fanck) . . . notably:

1927 "The Holy Mtn." (in which she plays a dancer) . . . these for UFA

1929 "The White Hell of Piz Palu" (co-directed by Pabst)

1932 Makes her own film -- scripted, directed, starred-in:
"The Blue Light" shot in the Italian Dolomites

An Ever Recurring Obsession (from '32 on)
And Two Diversions Unrealized:

Kleist's play "Penthesilea"
(in which she wished to play
Queen of Amazons who, as K.
has it, kills Achilles ((H.O.)))
-- script-listed in bib. as 1939

Unrealized film "Van Gogh" -- 1943

Unrealized film "Friedrich and
Voltaire" (Ho-ho!) -- 1955

This has got to be rooted in
her singular marriage -- (basic link
with childhood?): "If there is a
transmigration of souls, then I must
have lived her life at some previous
time . . . at no time could I act
differently from Penthesilea."

Then (Van Gogh) herself represent
(denied gossip) as nymphomaniac.

Finally the question which might
best be posed as:

Udet's (the red baron's) mistress
Hitler's . . .

(as denied: in what sense?)

1934 Begins another obsession that is to keep her busy filming from
1940 to '45 and re-involved as late as 1954:
"Tiefland", based on the d'Albert opera.

1935 "Triumph of the Will" (shot in only 6 days and cut in 5 or 6
months -- money from UFA, not Nazis . . . Ruttman ("Berlin,
Symph. of City") shot beginnings and titles . . . film, as she
sez, "not directed" . . . footage was only newsreel, then, and
her contribution only to edit? . . . ONLY to EDIT!: Nutz (Credit
cameraman Jaworsky, Henry Jaworsky, interview with Kitchens in
Film Culture # 56-57 Spring 1973, for his remembrance of her ab-
solute control over cameramen: credit Kelman for his clarity re:
"bldgs. in relation to the sky and not the earth, some literally
castles in the air . . . flags parading . . . merest glimpses of
those bearing them" -- and especially: "under any conditions but
this absolute reportorial truth, the propaganda itself would be
quite incredible." (Filds "aura of factuality" -- F. Williams.)

1936 "Olympic Games 1936" or "Olympia"
(Evokes immediate image-as-SPEECH(in me)) that image in F.C. of
her lecturing her tired cameramen ((this vulnerable GIRL up
aGAINst this crew of tired professional GERMAN MEN. . . mostly

((shot with 42 -- Jaworsky -- or 34, as Leni would have it, cameramen, working 12 to 16 hours a day followed by nightly conferences with Leni: "Gentlemen, 2 weeks from now you can sleep. Right now we think abt. tomorrow." Special pits built for cameras so as not to interfere with the sports -- traveling crane over swim-stadium -- not only underwater camera but one which could plunge into water and automatically change aperture -- automatic tracking camera . . . spec. equip. commission by this woman overSEEING EVERYthing, even automating control over camera away from some of the best Germany had to offer ((including one from "Caligari", one to become Hitler's official photographer, and that one I later directed at the '58 Geneva Peace Conf.)) . . . all shooting 1,300,000 feet of 35mm film ((205 hours)) / ((yeilding abt 60-to-1 or 1 min. for every hour)) cut over 18 months to create this 4-hour film . . . Leni herself RE-creating the Prologue on a beach in the Baltic, including herself and protege nude when footage shot in Grècee disappointed her: herself and the Greek torch-bearer...ahyes!)

1954-55 "Tiefland" again and then the aborted "Fred and Voltaire"

1956 "Black Cargo" (shot North Coast Kenya but uncompleted due to auto accident, with gossip abt. sabotage by Arab slavers).

1960s "Nuba"-film

That stubborn/honest insistence of hers about Hitler's being BELIEVED in, as she still obviously/unhappily does . . . CENTERS the Water(gate)logged mind on that myth which she shared with so many Germans/U.S.ences: Hitler was good (tho' possibly . . . a little "crazy") . . . but surrounded by criminals . . . who betrayed him . . . As she says:

"It is important I say the truth. But my feeling . . . why I was against Hitler or why I was for Hitler, or why I was what I like, or what interests me . . . this I have to say. If it is good for me or not, yes?"

(my underline . . . and then to let her have the last words; but only to underline that "yes" as I remember it so well from my German-upbringing / ~~U.S. upbringing~~ U.S.unbrought childhood);

In interview with Gordon Hitchens, re "Triumph":

"I did not make a propaganda film -- I have made a documentary film, and they make it propaganda, yes?"

Appropo lack-of-honors/medals-with-held, etc.:

"Because I was once nearly the only artist -- I don't want to have any kind of official honor because I need my time. I don't want to lose my time to get this honor because you have duties then, yes? I want to be 100% independent."

"Triumph of the Will was distributed from UFA and not from the Party". . . "It was not possible because the Party has had its own film dept." . . . "I was not a member. I was not good with Goebbels . . ."

Goebbels whose definition of woman's ideal beauty was "Pregnant and obedient."

"I was not good with Goebbels and all this and only Hitler wants that I make this film."

Going on that she was afraid she couldn't do the film, that she wanted her friend Ruttmann to do it:

"He was Communist -- Ruttmann -- but I ask him if he will make the Nazi Party rally film he was very happy. He said yes. Because an artist, most artists, I don't know how many but the most artists are thinking for work and not for politics, yes? Some for money or morality, some less . . . I myself was feeling like Ruttmann. I thought that people were good" . . . "I was at this time 32 years old. But I mean if I was naive or not has nothing to do -- I would make it if Hitler wants 100% that I do it. It was no reason not to do it" . . . "Triumph of The Will was not propaganda, it was documentary. There is a difference. You have to understand if it is a document or if it is a propaganda, yes? "

And then, of course, having loaded it for BAAAArrrrrr, I'll show the film and hope SOMETHING of this masterpiece can at least BEGIN to give back what it has taken . . .

Blessings,

Stan

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