

Storia della Storiografia

Histoire de l'Historiographie
History of Historiography
Geschichte der Geschichtsschreibung

Rivista internazionale · Revue internationale
International Review · Internationale Zeitschrift

63 · 1/2013



Fabrizio Serra editore, Pisa · Roma

Autorizzazione del Tribunale di Milano n. 310 del 26/07/1982

Direttore responsabile: Edoardo Tortarolo

★

Sono rigorosamente vietati la riproduzione, la traduzione, l'adattamento, anche parziale o per estratti, per qualsiasi uso e con qualsiasi mezzo effettuati, compresi la copia fotostatica, il microfilm, la memorizzazione elettronica, ecc., senza la preventiva autorizzazione scritta della *Fabrizio Serra editore*®, Pisa · Roma. Ogni abuso sarà perseguito a norma di legge.

★

Proprietà riservata · All rights reserved

© Copyright 2013 by *Fabrizio Serra editore*®, Pisa · Roma.

Fabrizio Serra editore incorporates the Imprints *Accademia editoriale*, *Edizioni dell'Ateneo*, *Fabrizio Serra editore*, *Giardini editori e stampatori in Pisa*, *Gruppo editoriale internazionale* and *Istituti editoriali e poligrafici internazionali*.

www.libraweb.net

Stampato in Italia · Printed in Italy

ISSN 0392-8926

ISSN ELETTRONICO 2281-1141

Amministrazione e abbonamenti

Fabrizio Serra editore®

Casella postale n. 1, succursale n. 8, I 56123 Pisa,

tel. +39 050 542332, fax +39 050 574888, fse@libraweb.net

I prezzi ufficiali di abbonamento cartaceo e/o *Online* sono consultabili presso il sito Internet della casa editrice www.libraweb.net

Print and/or Online official subscription rates are available at Publisher's web-site www.libraweb.net

I pagamenti possono essere effettuati tramite versamento su c.c.p. n. 17154550 o tramite carta di credito (*American Express*, *CartaSi*, *Eurocard*, *Mastercard*, *Visa*)

★

Uffici di Pisa: Via Santa Bibbiana 28, I 56127 Pisa, fse@libraweb.net

Uffici di Roma: Via Carlo Emanuele I 48, I 00185 Roma, fse.roma@libraweb.net

Contents

ARTICLES

- Ian J. Aebel, *Textual Colonization: the Many American Histories of Richard Eden* 11
- Berber Bevernage, Chris Lorenz, *Breaking up Time. Negotiating the Borders between Present, Past and Future* 31
- Mark Gamsa, *Challenges to Generalization in Historical Writing* 51

A FORUM ON CONTEMPORARY HISTORY

- Kalle Pihlainen, *Mulholland Drive and the Surrender of Representation* 71
- Paweł Wolski, *The Making of Primo Levi: Holocaust Studies as a Discursive Force of History* 91
- Hannu Salmi, *The Witness, Memory and the Truths of the Past. Modes of Narrating History in Hans Jürgen Syberberg's Winifred Wagner (1975)* 107

REVIEW ARTICLES

- Marco Platania, *Relire l'histoire coloniale au XVIII^e siècle. L'édition critique de l'Histoire des deux Indes (2010)* 125

- NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS 137

The Witness, Memory and the Truths of the Past. Modes of Narrating History in Hans Jürgen Syberberg's *Winifred Wagner* (1975)*

Hannu Salmi

ABSTRACT

This article focuses on a meeting of generations that takes the form of an interview film: Hans Jürgen Syberberg's *Winifred Wagner oder die Geschichte des Hauses Wahnfried* (1975). The only 'actress' of the five-hour film is Winifred Wagner, Richard Wagner's daughter-in-law, who was the head of the Bayreuth Festival in 1933-1945. A historical narrative, Syberberg's film is simultaneously also a document and an oral history based on an individual's memory. Although the film is extraordinary in many ways, it gives the spectators an opportunity to reflect on the ways of narrating history that are common in audiovisual historical narration. Syberberg presents us with a witness who has experienced the past, but simultaneously also comments on the problem of remembering. Despite its controversies and ambivalence, Hans Jürgen Syberberg's memory-historical film comes very close to the post-positivist thoughts that researchers like Luisa Passerini and Alessandro Portelli were sketching while pondering the possibilities of oral history.

HANS JÜRGEN SYBERBERG, born in 1935, is one of the most controversial figures in German film culture. He became famous for his experimental, wilfully stylised drama documentaries that often focused on troubled national themes. Syberberg's most famous films are *Ludwig – Requiem for a Virgin King* (*Ludwig – Requiem für einen jungfräulichen König*, 1972), *Karl May* (1974), *Hitler: A Film from Germany* (*Hitler – ein Film aus Deutschland*, 1977) and his opera adaptation *Parsifal* (1982). His *magnum opus* is a 442-minute film about Hitler, intended by the director to cause an aesthetic scandal by combining Bertolt Brecht's teachings with Richard Wagner's aesthetics.¹ For Syberberg, the making of the Hitler film was an expedition into a dark history, "German misery", which could only be overcome by means of art, by first establishing what kind of "Hitler" is still alive.² The backdrop of Syberberg's career is formed by Germany's traumatic relationship with history: the post-war attempts to comprehend, conceptualise, and control the past.

Wulf Kansteiner, a researcher who has studied the German culture of history, *Geschichtskultur*, remarks in his *In Pursuit of German Memory: History, Television and Politics after Auschwitz* (2006) that the generation who lived their adolescence in Nazi Germany struggled after the Second World War both to forget and to remember the past.³

* This article is based on a previous Finnish text published in *Medeiasta pronnisoturiin*, ed. Pertti Grönholm and Anna Sivula (Turku: Turku Historical Association 2010), 136-157.

¹ H. J. Syberberg, *Hitler - ein Film aus Deutschland* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1978), 28.

² Syberberg, *Hitler - ein Film aus Deutschland*, 9.

³ W. Kansteiner, *In Pursuit of German Memory: History, Television, and Politics after Auschwitz* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2006), 3.

The notion of controlling the past (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*) was developed to resolve this conflict: although we perhaps cannot entirely extricate ourselves from history and its attendant responsibility, we can control the past. According to Kansteiner, the ways of studying, representing, and consuming the past were a passionate topic of discussion in the Federal Republic of Germany, and the misdeeds of the past were often discussed in public a long time before it became customary to make public apologies for any collective wrongdoings. When the international media discussed Syberberg's *Hitler*, West Germany talked about the anti-Semitism of Rainer Werner Fassbinder's play *The Garbage, the City and Death* (*Der Müll, die Stadt und der Tod*).⁴

This article focuses on a meeting of generations that takes the form an interview film: Syberberg's *The Confessions of Winifred Wagner* (*Winifred Wagner oder die Geschichte des Hauses Wahnfried*, 1975), a film that Syberberg made on the spur of the moment while researching and collecting material for his film on Hitler. The only 'actress' of the five-hour film is Winifred Wagner, Richard Wagner's daughter-in-law, who was the head of the Bayreuth Festival from 1933 to 1945 in Adolf Hitler's Third Reich. *The Confessions of Winifred Wagner* examines the history of Germany from the beginning of the twentieth century to the 1970s from the perspective of a single family, the Wagners, and a single house, the Wahnfried. A historical narrative, Syberberg's film is simultaneously also a document and an oral history based on an individual's memory. Although the film is extraordinary in many ways, it gives the spectators an opportunity of reflecting on the ways of narrating history that are common in audiovisual historical narration. Syberberg presents us with a witness who has experienced the past, but simultaneously also comments on the problem of remembering and the role memory and oral history play today. My article analyses how the film is constructed as historical narrative and what methods it relies on.

I. FAMILY HISTORY AND NATIONAL MEMORY

The German title of *The Confessions of Winifred Wagner*, literally "Winifred Wagner or The Story of the Wahnfried House" links the person, Winifred Wagner, to history and place. As stated in the beginning of the film, the aim of the film is to examine how, particularly in Wahnfried, the history of one family becomes inextricably intertwined with national culture. Before his death, Richard Wagner made the small town of Bayreuth in Northern Bavaria the centre of his artistic endeavours: he decided to organise an annual opera festival in the village. Bayreuth was situated in the very heart of the Germany of Wagner's day; on the other hand, it was also a place where nothing would compete with the composer's own art. Wagner had Villa Wahnfried built as his residence between the years 1872 and 1874.⁵

Winifred Williams (her maiden name) joined the Wagner family on the eve of the First World War. She had her roots in England, but after losing her parents, she had become the stepdaughter of the conductor and violinist Karl Klindworth. She visited

⁴ Kansteiner, *In Pursuit of German Memory*, 6. About Syberberg's standing in the German media, see S. Brockmann, "The Rebirth of Tragedy: Syberberg, Strauss, and German Identity", *Transformations of the New Germany*, ed. R. A. Starkman (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 35-54.

⁵ B. Millington, *Richard Wagner - Elämä ja teokset*, trans. Jopi Harri (Turku: Finnish Wagner Society 2003), 97-107; H. Salmi, *Imagined Germany. Richard Wagner's National Utopia* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 172-178.

Bayreuth in 1914, when she was 17, and married Richard Wagner's son Siegfried a year later. At the time, Richard Wagner's wife Cosima was the unquestioned authority figure in Bayreuth. Winifred became acquainted with Villa Wahnfried at a time when it had already established its position as a meeting place of Germany's cultural elite.

As stated in its German title, Syberberg's film is interested both in the person being interviewed and the history of Wahnfried. The film would, however, have never been made if Syberberg had not been in need of background material for his film on Hitler. His ultimate objective was to shed light on the relationship between Adolf Hitler and Winifred Wagner. It was common knowledge how strongly Hitler had identified with Richard Wagner's music: Hitler wrote about his experiences with Wagner's music in *Mein Kampf*, and Wagner's musical dramas were later employed in the propaganda machinery of National Socialist Germany. Although Wagner died 50 years before the National Socialists came to power, his ideological impact on the Third Reich was discussed heatedly after the Second World War. What was often highlighted was Wagner's 1850 essay *Das Judenthum in der Musik*, which was seen as a seminal work in German anti-Semitism.⁶

Rumours about Adolf Hitler and Winifred Wagner's relationship circulated already during the Second World War. The stories gained momentum after the war, partly because of new information that came from within the Wagner family. In 1939, Siegfried and Winifred's daughter Friedelind had escaped through Switzerland to the United Kingdom and the United States, and had made her knowledge available to the Allied propaganda machinery. In 1945, Friedelind Wagner published a memoir entitled *Heritage of Fire*, which was also published in German in the same year as *Nacht über Bayreuth*. The sensational work portrayed the relationship between Hitler and the Wagner family as very close while simultaneously linking Bayreuth inextricably to the history of the Third Reich.⁷ Winifred Wagner's role in the cultural life of National Socialist Germany was considered so important that she was put on trial after the war. She was also replaced in the Bayreuth Festival organisation by none other than her sons Wieland and Wolfgang. Ms. Wagner lived in Oberwarmensteinach, 30 kilometres from Bayreuth, until 1956, when she was given permission to return to her hometown.

After the post-war trial, Winifred Wagner was uncommunicative and never opened her heart to the public. Her silence was part of a wider cultural problem: the trauma of German history and the difficulty of talking about painful questions. In this sense, the case of Winifred Wagner was at the very heart of the German history controversy. When Hans Jürgen Syberberg was given permission to interview her, Winifred Wagner broke a silence that had lasted for three decades. This alone makes Syberberg's film exceptional. It is an extraordinary witness account from a person who had experienced the vicissitudes of the Wagner family since the First World War.

In 1975, Syberberg had a personal stake in the making of the film; however, the time of the interview has broader significance as well. Exactly in 1975, Villa Wahnfried was practically nothing but a construction site. This is shown in the first few images of the film: the first frames show Wagner family's home ruined – as if the filmmaker were walking over the remains of Wagnerism and the German mind-

⁶ On Wagner's heritage, see Salmi, *Imagined Germany*, 184-188.

⁷ For more information, see F. Wagner-P. Cooper, *Nacht über Bayreuth. Die Geschichte der Enkelin Richard Wagners* (Bern: Verlag Hallwag, 1946).

scape. Wagner himself provided a starting point for symbolism like this by naming the house *Wahnfried*, an abode of peace, a place where he could take his retreat to build the future of German art. The German word *Wahn* refers to illusion, delusion and vision, while *Fried* denotes peace. *Wahnfried* was therefore a place where Wagner could feel free from futile attempts at pursuing illusions and subsequently find solace. Later on, *Wahnfried* would stand for Richard Wagner's heritage – in both good and evil. The symbolic meaning also hinted at the notion of violating a 'sacred' site: near the end of the war on 5 April 1945, the house was hit by a bomb that partly destroyed the facade that faced the garden. The lobby and the second floor were also badly burnt. When Allied troops reached Bayreuth, magazines featured photographs of the conquerors in front of the grand piano, and stories were told of black soldiers dancing to jazz tunes on Wagner's grave. Immediately after the war, the house was used by the US military administration, and the adjacent house – Siegfried Wagner's residence – served as an officers' mess.⁸ After the occupation, *Wahnfried* was returned to the Wagners and was Wieland Wagner's home until his death in 1966. The scars left by the war remained, however, in plain sight; the building was not restored to its original form. The situation remained unchanged until the preparations for the 100th anniversary of the Bayreuth Festival began in the 1970s. In 1973, the Richard Wagner Foundation was established to foster German cultural heritage, and the Wagner family donated *Wahnfried* to the city of Bayreuth. A decision was made to restore the house to its original form, the work being completed before the anniversary celebrations in 1976. The ruins that open Syberberg's film were actually images of the restoration works: in order to restore the original structures, the house first had to be torn back to its wartime condition.

When Hans Jürgen Syberberg and his crew arrived in Bayreuth, a substantial rehabilitation of Richard Wagner's heritage was underway. In academic literature, the encounter between Syberberg, one of the leading cultural radicals of the day, and Winifred Wagner, always branded a cultural conservative, was seen as exploitation in the sense that Winifred Wagner apparently did not fully understand how the footage shot in the interviews would be used. Gottfried Wagner, however, persuaded his grandmother to agree to be interviewed, and Syberberg played the part of an understanding interviewer in order to obtain the results he wanted. According to the recent Winifred Wagner biography written by Brigitte Hamann, Ms. Wagner was initially under the impression that only a few minutes of the interview would be used in a documentary film that would mark the anniversary of the festival. Winifred Wagner stated in 1975 to August Roesener that she had only agreed to be interviewed because Gottfried had convinced her that Syberberg was "worth her trust".⁹ Syberberg himself has confirmed that Winifred Wagner knew nothing about the Hitler film he was preparing, and had no knowledge that his real interest was in extracting information about her relationship with Hitler.¹⁰ Researchers have, however, also presented dif-

⁸ H. Mayer, *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth 1876–1976* (Stuttgart: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch, 1978), 125–126. On the history of the house *Wahnfried*, see the *Wahnfried* website at <http://www.wahnfried.de/_engl/wahnfried/index.html>.

⁹ B. Hamann, *Winifred Wagner: A Life at the Heart of Hitler's Bayreuth*. Translated from the German by A. Bance (London: Granta Books, 2005), 486, 554.

¹⁰ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 486.

fering views. Winifred Wagner had remained silent for thirty years, and many attempts had been made to interview her before. She could not have been as ignorant as she feigned to be. In his book *The Wagner Clan* Jonathan Carr insinuates that the exploitation might have been mutual. Perhaps Winifred Wagner simply wanted to make her own voice heard on the eve of the anniversary.¹¹

At the end of the film, she comments on the question of why she had broken her silence after such a long time. Instead of answering, she throws back a question: “Warum eigentlich nicht?”.

II. FIVE HOURS OF WITNESSING

The Confessions of Winifred Wagner was shot in black and white 16-millimetre stock and was never intended for theatrical distribution. The format made the film ideal for festivals, lecture halls, and other temporary screening venues, but the film was also made for television. According to the credits, the film was – in addition to Syberberg’s own production company – financed by the Austrian public broadcasting company ORF and the West German television company Bayerischer Rundfunk. The running time of the film is 303 minutes.¹² Its end credits only mention the television companies as associate producers, which would seem to indicate that the intended distribution format did not determine the film’s aesthetics and form to any significant degree. In practice, Syberberg could shoot as much footage as he needed.

The story – like Hans Jürgen Syberberg’s film narrative – is fundamentally concerned with the structuring of temporal experience. In *Time and Narrative (Temps et récit, 1983-1985)*, the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur emphasises the role of narrative as the articulation of temporal experience. For Ricoeur, however, the internal structure of the narrative is only a starting point for reflecting on a certain restructuring of the narrative and an investigation of the different levels of mimesis.¹³ My point of departure, in the spirit of Ricoeur, is the notion that all study of historical audiovisual narration must set out by reflecting on how the narration essentially structures time.

¹¹ J. Carr, *The Wagner Clan: The Saga of Germany’s Most Illustrious and Infamous Family* (New York: Grove Press, 2007), 323.

¹² H. G. Pflaum-H. H. Prinzler, *Film in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Der neue deutsche Film von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Bonn: Inter Nationes, 1992), 413. According to filmography data, the duration of *The Confessions of Winifred Wagner* was 303 minutes at the film’s premiere. The duration of the video copy I have used is, however, exactly 300 minutes, or five hours. The video is an Inter Nationes production, the same version the Goethe-Institut uses for cultural exchange purposes. The film has been divided into two parts so that the credits are repeated in both parts. The running times of the film and video versions do not match exactly. This can be caused by a variety of reasons. To begin with, the length/duration data of film copies is never exactly accurate. Differences are caused by factors such as the countdown leaders of each film reel. The difference may also be caused by the two-part nature of the video copy (with repeated credits). This difference does not, however, have any effect on the interpretation employed in this article. Syberberg constructed his film to be a single whole. This is evident from the film’s chiasmic structure: i. e. it does not construct a tension between the parts; instead, it constructs an arc from the beginning of the five-hour film to its end.

¹³ See e. g. P. Ricoeur, “Mimesis, viittaus ja uudelleenahmottuminen”, translated to Finnish by A. Kauppinen, *Tulkinnasta toiseen: Esseitä hermeneutiikasta*, ed. J. Tonnti (Tampere: Vastapaino, 2005). See also K. D’Souza, “Ricoeur’s Narrative Hermeneutics in Relationship with Gadamer’s Philosophical Hermeneutics: Continuity & Discontinuity”, *Issues in Interpretation Theory*, ed. P. Vandeveldt (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2006), 138-139.

With film, this question is already important in the sense that the spectator is forced to follow the stream of images created by the filmmaker and has no ability to control his or her reception of the 'text'. This is especially true in the case of film projection. As far as literary texts are concerned, the recipient can interrupt his or her reading at any point in time, go back in the text, read parts of the text again, or even skip parts of it. When Ricœur in *Time and Narrative* ends up pondering the 'restructuring' of a narrative, he is, in fact, trying to explain how the text is shaped and given a social meaning by the reader. The reception of a filmic text is more temporally structured than the reception of a literary text. However, this distinction should not be regarded as too categorical. It is, nevertheless, important to be aware of the different levels of temporal manipulation and to try to discern how time is perceived in both a cinematic text and cinematic experience.

As a documentary film, *The Confessions of Winifred Wagner* is a rare specimen, because it centres very strongly on the person being interviewed while simultaneously being very demanding for the viewer: the camera focuses solely on Ms. Wagner, usually portraying her face in close-up or medium close-up.¹⁴ The film was shot over five days, and the director has marked the footage shot during each day with intertitles. The shooting schedule functions as the film's organising principle. The structuring of narrative time can, therefore, be examined through the perspectives of order, duration, and frequency established by Gérard Genette.¹⁵ If we analyse *Winifred Wagner* in terms of order and duration, we can take the sequences delimited by the director's intertitles as our starting point. (Please note that the times are from a 25 fps video copy [cf. reference 12]).

Part I

1. Introduction and opening credits (00:00-00:09). Duration: 9 minutes.
2. First day (00:09-00:48). Duration: 39 minutes.
3. Second day (00:48-01:32). Duration: 44 minutes.
4. Third day (01:32-02:24). Duration: 52 minutes.

Part II

5. Third day (02:24-02:38). Duration: 14 minutes.
6. Fourth day (02:38-03:15). Duration: 37 minutes.
7. Fifth day (03:15-04:56). Duration: 101 minutes.
8. Winifred Wagner's epilogue (04:56-04:57). Duration: 1 minute.
9. Ending (04:57-05:00). Duration: 3 minutes.

The footage filmed over the first three days forms approximately half of the film and also forms its first part. The beginning of the second part, however, features a 14-minute insert from the third day where the escape of Winifried Wagner's daughter, Friedelind, from the family is discussed. Even a cursory analysis of the material shows that the director's principal topics of interest were discussed during the last two days, which is why they dominate the finished film. In terms of temporal distri-

¹⁴ See e. g. M. Landy, "Politics, Aesthetics, and Patriarchy in the Confessions of Winifred Wagner", *New German Critique*, 18 (1979): 151-152.

¹⁵ For more information see G. Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, trans. J. E. Lewin (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), 32-35.

bution, the percentage of screen time allotted to each day varies. The finished film features only 39 minutes of footage from the first day. The second day is represented by 44 minutes and the third day by 66 minutes, while the final fifth day is given no less than 101 minutes. The duration of the final interview session alone is that of an average feature film.

One reason for a structure that adheres so closely to the shooting schedule has been to highlight the constructed nature of the film: references to the shooting days make the gap between the actual shooting and the finished film visible. On the other hand, it can also be considered a device that is used to construct plausibility: the filmmaker creates for the spectator an illusion of an opportunity of seeing authentic interview situations, where Winifred Wagner appears to be given primacy over Hans Jürgen Syberberg's work as the director of the film.

The entire point of the film is to listen to Winifred Wagner as a witness. The notion of her role as a witness is highlighted in the beginning of the film. A narrator's voice states that the perspective assumed in the film is consciously subjective: it is Winifred Wagner's perspective, *her story* (00:08). This does not, however, make Ms. Wagner the narrator of the film, and neither can her memory be considered the organising principle of the film, although her memories provide the film with its impetus. At the end of the film, Winifred Wagner's concluding words (04:56-04:57) emphasise the importance of the interviewer: "I want to emphasise that my answers only describe a few perspectives to my life. These particular perspectives came up because of Mr. Syberberg's questions. I have answered the questions freely and without notes." The situation was fully controlled by Syberberg, and in this sense the film was scripted in advance. In the actual interview shots, the director usually makes himself invisible, but in some scenes his questions can be heard. The director is also present as the voiceover narrator heard in the beginning and at the end of the film, as well as at some points during the film, often reading citations from historical studies or from the newspapers of the time. The citations are highlighted by also showing the text in the form of intertitles.

The analysis of narrative time can be taken further by examining how the content of the film is structured. The film features an extensive cultural historical introduction (1) and ending (9), where the desire – or even the obligation – to remember is highlighted. On many occasions, the narrator encourages the spectator to remember. Simultaneously, the narrator shows Villa Wahnfried in ruins. These images are, however, balanced by old photographs of a vital centre of cultural life. The narrator introduces the interviewee and explains the extraordinary nature of the event: a silence that has lasted for three decades is about to end.

In the sequence shot on the first day (2), the atmosphere is not very relaxed. Ms. Wagner is seated behind a desk with a stack of papers in front of her, possibly as a memory aid. She starts out by remembering her childhood and her first visits to Bayreuth. The sequence ends with her marriage to Siegfried Wagner and the experiences of the young daughter-in-law in the house where the 78-year-old Cosima Wagner still lived with her children. The second shooting day (3) begins with more photographs, which are studied for approximately 15 minutes. However, towards the end of this sequence the tone becomes more sombre. The director highlights one person who appears in the photos: Richard and Cosima Wagner's son-in-law Houston Stewart Chamberlain, who became famous for his book, *Die Grundlagen des Neunzehnten Jahr-*

*hundert*s (1899), a work that had a significant impact on the Nazi theories of race. The narrator comments on the album by noting that it does not feature a single photo of Richard and Cosima's daughter Isolde (01:04). In the photograph sequence, the narrator clearly assumes an active role as a commentator of Ms. Wagner's memories.

Later on, Ms. Wagner is seated on a sofa, telling about the difficult years of the 1920s, i. e. about the inflation and how the Bayreuth Festival was revived after the First World War (01:05). The sequence ends with Cosima's and Siegfried's death in 1930. Ms. Wagner also recounts her experiences of her first years as the head of the festival, and Adolf Hitler's name is mentioned for the first time. Ms. Wagner would already like to end the interview, but Syberberg tries to direct the conversation back to Hitler. Ms. Wagner, however, returns to artistic questions and describes the conflict between generations in the form of Wieland's critical stance towards his mother (01:30).

The third day (4 and 5) begins with intertitles that highlight the close ties between Hitler and the Wagner family. The narrator makes a reference to Hannah Arendt's notion of the banality of evil. After a tour of the rooms of the Siegfried-Wagner-Haus, Ms. Wagner again sits down to reminisce: this time about her relationship to Adolf Hitler. She recounts how Hitler used to visit the family in the evenings and how uncle Wolf would come to say hello to the children. Now the question of the Jews also come up, and Ms. Wagner tells about her attempts to help those who came to ask for help (02:08). Compared with the material of the first two days, the atmosphere is relaxed – not so much because of the subject – but because Ms. Wagner has now become comfortable with the interview situation. Syberberg tried to arrange the shooting in such a way that the production equipment would not disturb the atmosphere. Gottfried Wagner was constantly present, and the sound recordist was either in another room or otherwise unseen¹⁶

The second part of the film starts off with material from the third day (5), where the focus of the interview shifts from Hitler to Friedelind Wagner. The sequence is short, and soon moves on to the fourth day (6), when Syberberg assumes a more visible role: he is seen seated in a chair opposite Ms. Wagner. From Friedelind the conversation returns to the years of the war. The reminiscing comes to an abrupt halt at 02:59, after which material from the fourth day includes a comment added later as an "Addenda". The actual question that elicits the comment is never heard, but apparently Syberberg has asked what made Ms. Wagner turn to National Socialism. The narration reveals that Ms. Wagner had told something during the break that Syberberg very much wanted to record. Ms. Wagner replies in a laconic style that her interest in National Socialism was tied to Hitler's persona, and that she was not interested in anything else. After a short comment we return again to photographs now focusing on Villa Wahnfried: what was the bastion of Wagnerism that was destroyed in the war like? The photograph session ends at 03:10, after which the discussion shifts to the post-war years. Ms. Wagner is again seen behind the desk and is telling about the extended presence of American soldiers in Bayreuth. All in all, the fourth day is the shortest sequence of the film, but undoubtedly the most difficult for Ms. Wagner.

¹⁶ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 487.

The fifth day (7, 03:15) once again starts with viewing photographs. Now the interview focuses on Siegfried Wagner's house where Winifred Wagner lived after her return to Bayreuth in 1956. Ms. Wagner tells how the Americans considered the house the property of Adolf Hitler, and that it was never returned to its rightful owner (her). The actual reminiscing part begins with a return to the previous day's theme. Ms. Wagner elaborates on her notion of Hitler by reading aloud a letter from Houston Stewart Chamberlain describing his first encounter with Hitler in 1923 (03:22-03:26). After this the conversation moves on to the post-war trial and, gradually, to the revival of the Bayreuth Festival under the direction of Wieland Wagner.

The most significant sequence of the fifth and last shooting day starts with the intertitle *Final questions* (04:19). Ms. Wagner has no papers: she is seated in an armchair, answering the question in a relaxed manner. The sequence begins with Syberberg asking whether any topics have been left unmentioned because of family reasons or reasons that could impact the current situation. Ms. Wagner starts out by stating that for Wolfgang, any comments related to National Socialism are not in the least welcome. Any talk about the "the old Nazis of Bayreuth" could put the festival's future at risk. Ms. Wagner makes further remarks about her position as a woman (04:21), Richard Wagner's lost manuscripts (04:28), the origin of Hitler's nickname Wolf (04:34), the rumour of her marriage with Hitler (04:38), and the last time she met him (04:42). Ms. Wagner's final statement concerns her relationship with Hitler (04:49-04:56). Unlike previously, Ms. Wagner is not seen physically while she speaks: what follows is a montage sequence of photographs from Wahnfried, until the camera once again closes in on her. The final images show Ms. Wagner from behind, seated in a dining table, while on the soundtrack, she asserts her loyalty to Hitler. This sequence has, in all likelihood, been recorded without Ms. Wagner being aware of it. Syberberg had simply asked the sound recordist to record everything, even when the camera was not rolling.

After the interview material ends, the film features a short comment from Ms. Wagner (04:56-04:57) and a final sequence that returns to the mood of the beginning of the film (04:57-05:00). Reference is made to the present time, both in the beginning and the end of the film, but the order of the actual interview material mostly employs a linear narration, with Ms. Wagner proceeding from her childhood towards the present. In terms of content, the most substantial sequences are the ones shot on the third, fourth and fifth interview days, which focus on the years of the Third Reich and the post-war situation. Ms. Wagner recollections, however, do not proceed in a linear way: their progress is repeatedly halted by the director or the interviewee. *The Confessions of Winifred Wagner* is an oral history that also follows the logic of memory and remembering. Categories more important than order – once again using Genette's terms, duration and frequency – support the shaping of narrative time. The more often the relationship between Winifred Wagner and Adolf Hitler is broached, the more this repetition fractures the connections between the parts of the film and builds longitudinal relationships of meaning, or, in other words, thematic durations. These lines are, in the end, the elements that form the picture of which events Winifred Wagner's memory could recall from the past, and which of them she wanted to highlight. In terms of narrative comprehension, it is very significant that the situation between the years 1933-1945 is returned to repeatedly, and that the final memory is of Winifred Wagner's loyalty to Hitler.

III. ANTI-ILLUSIONISM AND ENUNCIATION

As a filmmaker, Hans Jürgen Syberberg has habitually been associated with the generation of the 1960s and 1970s German New Wave: Werner Herzog, Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Wim Wenders.¹⁷ Syberberg took his inspiration not only from anti-mainstream art house and avant-garde traditions, but also from the tradition of German art, from figures like Richard Wagner and Bertolt Brecht.¹⁸ Like the new wave directors, he strived for an anti-illusionistic narration. However, unlike Herzog, Fassbinder and Wenders, he remained firmly outside the theatrical distribution system or only inhabited its margins. The opposite of anti-illusionistic narration was formed by the narrative methods of mainstream films, especially Hollywood films, which strive for maximally transparent narration. The aim of Hollywood narration was to focus the spectator's attention on what was being told instead of how, i.e. on the devices that were being used to construct the diegetic world.¹⁹ In Hollywood, this strategy was controlled, and employed clear-cut principles. One of the most important points of departure was continuity editing. Syberberg, however, consciously questioned this highly controlled method of narration by making Bertolt Brecht's notion of alienation (*Verfremdung*) a central part of his aesthetics: the intention of his art was to provide the necessary critical distance for the viewer, not to cajole him or her to identify with what was being shown.²⁰

In his studies of historical films, Robert A. Rosenstone has established a division between mainstream and experimental historical films.²¹ While in the former, history appears personified, closed and centred on the individual, in the latter it is left open and often questions the individualistic notion of history. For Rosenstone, this division is a way of categorising fictional portrayals of history, and it is clearly based on the hegemony that Hollywood films have exerted as historical narratives. It must be noted however that Rosenstone's division is based on fiction films, and Syberberg's output cannot be clearly categorised as fiction or belonging to any specific genre. Syberberg has often combined different filmic styles and narrative devices, and this method has, as such, functioned as an anti-illusionistic, distancing strategy. In Syberberg's entire opus, *The Confessions of Winifred Wagner* is an exceptional film in the sense that it fits very nicely into the category of documentary films – although its dimensions are far from conventional.²² Nevertheless, *Winifred Wagner* also in-

¹⁷ T. Elsaesser, "Myth as the Phantasmagoria of History. H. J. Syberberg, Cinema and Representation", *New German Critique*, 24/25 (1981-1982): 108.

¹⁸ See e. g. A. Kaes, *From Hitler to Heimat: the Return of History as Film* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 37-72.

¹⁹ See e. g. H. Bacon, *Audiovisuaalisen kerronnan teoria* (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2000), 73.

²⁰ Syberberg's narrative techniques are best exemplified by his seven-hour film *Hitler – ein Film aus Deutschland* (1977). For more information, see A. Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows: Film and the Holocaust*, foreword by E. Wiesel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 191.

²¹ R. A. Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), 54-64. In his more recent work, Rosenstone speaks about "innovative drama" instead of experimental filmmaking. See R. A. Rosenstone, *History on Film / Film on History* (Harlow: Pearson, 2006), 50-69.

²² See e. g. C. Flinn, *New German Cinema: Music, History, and the Matter of Style* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004), 6-7.

cludes all the characteristics of anti-illusionistic narration. The film begins and ends with a series of images accompanied by voiceover narration. The images do not, as such, deviate from the conventional style of historical documentaries. After they are shown, however, the director reminds the spectator of the existence of a filmic process between the spectator and Winifred Wagner. After the opening credits we see a stretch of the countdown leader of a film reel followed by quick, fleeting shots from the shoot that appear almost as if by accident: a hand flits across the frame, the sound recordist is seen in the image looking straight into the camera, etc. Although the director employs these devices later in the film as well, their percentage of the total duration is very small. These shots, however, form a picture of the film as a result of a process, bringing about an awareness of the camera being present in the interview, reminding the viewer that Winifred Wagner is not addressing the audience: she is addressing a camera and the crew. The impression is highlighted by the fact that in one of the longer interview sequences, Ms. Wagner asks whether it wasn't already time to stop the camera. At times she also appears unaware of whether the camera is rolling or not, or seems to be under the impression that the crew is taking a break. The controversy elicited by the film was caused exactly by these shots, and because of them, Ms. Wagner considered herself deliberately led astray.²³

The manner in which Syberberg is strongly present in his own films can also be linked to anti-illusionistic narration. The film uses voiceover narration, but also – in a style familiar to the films of Jean-Luc Godard – intertitles that comment on Winifred Wagner's memories. Like Syberberg, Godard was influenced by Bertolt Brecht.²⁴ The use of intertitles abounds; at times it feels as if the director was using them to defend himself. When Ms. Wagner denies Hitler's anti-Semitism and claims Hitler was originally not against the Jews (02:20-02:23), intertitles are used to provide evidence of the untenable nature of Ms. Wagner's thoughts. In this case the intertitles are direct citations from Hitler's speech in Zirkus Krone in 1923 and another speech in Wannsee in 1942. The citations are given additional emphasis because they are shown as intertitles and heard on the soundtrack simultaneously. The use of intertitles reinforces Syberberg's position as the narrator of the film. The film is not only concerned with the story of Winifred Wagner, but also with Syberberg's interpretation of the story, which constructs an image of a witness of the past and her memory.

One could initially assume that anti-illusionism was an important element of the narrative techniques of this particular historical documentary, and that the filmmaker would seek to highlight the notion that his or her story is only one interpretation of the past. For spectators used to televised mainstream historical documentaries, however, the narrative methods employed in *Winifred Wagner* feel extraordinary, as documentary filmmakers rarely make the technical process of making the film visible. As a matter of fact filmmakers who make historical documentaries have during the past few decades tended to use illusionistic narration methods more than in the past. This can clearly be observed from the fact that historical documentaries of the 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century feature large numbers of fictional sequences.

²³ Carr, *The Wagner Clan*, 322-323; Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 490-494.

²⁴ Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows*, 191-192. On similarities between Syberberg's and Godard's narrative techniques, see also Landy, "Politics, Aesthetics, and Patriarchy": 153.

The question concerning the relationship of historical narration and illusionism can also be approached by drawing on the enunciation theory. In *Problems in General Linguistics* (*Problèmes de linguistique générale*), Émile Benveniste focused on the dual nature of the speech act: each speech act always includes the levels of what is being said (*énoncé*) and how it is being said (*énonciation*). Another crucial pair of concepts is *histoire/discours*, which further defines the levels of the speech act. According to Benveniste, *histoire* represents – at least ostensibly – objective, impersonal use of language, where an attempt is made to conceal the source of the speech. This way of using language is exemplified by newspaper articles and historical studies, where the author is not expressing himself or herself, but tries to make it appear as if history were telling itself. *Discours*, on the other hand, is openly subjective and communicative, identifying who is speaking and clearly highlighting the level of how something is being said.²⁵ Benveniste's notions have been an important influence on the study of narration: how is the narrator present in the work and how does the work suggest the narrative process? Since Benveniste wrote his study in the 1960s, its conceptions about historiography cannot be considered universal. According to Benveniste, a historian never says "I", "you", "here" or "now". The historical speech act is, instead, strictly limited to the third person.²⁶ It is clear that today's historiography cannot be characterised using Benveniste's notion of *histoire*, because the author's relationship with his or her object of study is increasingly more often explicitly discussed: the historian not only reveals the level of the speech act, but also speaks in the first person more often than before. Benveniste's idea about the presence of the level of enunciation is, however, fruitful. *The Story of Winifred Wagner* is a historical documentary that makes enunciation an essential part of its narration. In the context of 1975, the method was radical in the sense that unlike mainstream historical narration, Syberberg explicitly wanted to emphasise that his film was more *discours* than *histoire*.

In *Winifred Wagner*, enunciation is present on many levels. The notion of watching a film as a communicative situation is established already in the introductory sequence before the starting credits have rolled. The narrator's voice encourages the spectator to remember. In the English edition, the narrator uses a collegial expression: "Let us remember..." The narrator does not refer to himself in the first person, speaking instead of "us", thereby establishing a connection with the spectator. The appeal to remember is repeated four times, which highlights the enunciative nature of watching the film, while on the other hand, the request can be understood as a reference to watching as a process of remembering. As the next level of enunciation, Syberberg emphasises the constructive nature of cinematic narration right after the opening credits have rolled and the interview starts: the spectator is reminded of the technical nature of the medium by showing the countdown leader and images from the shoot. During the first 15 minutes of the film, the levels of enunciation are linked to the substance of the film: in addition to the director, the film is shown to feature an important witness from the past, Winifred Wagner, as its speaker. The director

²⁵ É. Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), 258-266. I have examined this theme also in H. Salmi, "On the Nature and Structure of Historical Narration," *Storia della Storiografia*, 23 (1993): 253-260.

²⁶ Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, 239.

highlights this by inserting comments directed to the crew, by sometimes allowing his questions to be heard, and by showing situations where the interviewee is confused and does not know what to say – or how to say it. The end result is a film where the spectator cannot forget the narrative situation for a moment.

IV. ORAL HISTORY, TRUTH AND ETHICS

It would, however, be too simplistic to interpret Syberberg's highlighting of enunciation merely from the perspective of the anti-illusionistic tradition of filmmaking. We must also take into account the subject of the film: an oral history based on memory. Using memory as a key element of the film requires the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee to be highlighted. The intention of the film is not merely to become absorbed in Winifred Wagner's story, but also to comment on it critically. It is stated in the beginning of the film that its objective is to record Winifred Wagner's subjective version of history. However, through intertitles the film interprets memory and establishes a dialogue. At times the comments question Ms. Wagner's memories and often imply her memories are distorted. Maybe this could not be avoided in the cultural atmosphere of 1975: the director had to avoid a situation where Winifred Wagner's truth would become one with the cinematic truth – even more so because the legacy of fascism was discussed heatedly in the media at the time.

It is also fascinating to place *Winifred Wagner* into the context of historical studies of memory and oral history. Interest in the question of memory started after the Second World War. The academic study of history had traditionally concentrated on archival sources and literary documents, while oral history had been marginalised. What were now being investigated, however, were the experiences of social groups that could only be reached via oral histories. The focus of the studies was, however, more on understanding and reinterpreting the reality of the past than on the actual process of remembering that separates our time from the past. In his recent article examining the paradigms of oral history, Alistair Thomson observes that in the early 1970s, this 'history from below' was subject to fierce criticism. The critics maintained that memory was prone to distortion: the account supplied by a person remembering the past was bound to be influenced by nostalgia, the physical deterioration of the interviewee's memory, the personal relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee, and the later notions of the past depicted. It was exactly in the early 1970s that this perspective on oral history started to change, and it was exactly in the 'weaknesses' of oral history where the new generation of researchers saw opportunities. Researchers such as Luisa Passerini and Alessandro Portelli considered the actual process of remembering historically significant. Oral history opened new vistas not only for the meaning of the historical experiences, but also for the connections between past and present, memory and identity, and private and collective memory.²⁷

Winifred Wagner was made at a time when the role of memory was debated in-

²⁷ A. Thomson, "Four Paradigm Transformations in Oral History", *Oral History Review*, 1 (2007): 49-70. See also A. Green, "Individual Remembering and 'Collective Memory': Theoretical Presuppositions and Contemporary Debates", *Oral History*, 2 (2004): 35-44.

tensely. Syberberg himself had an ambivalent vantage point towards memory. For his great Hitler film, he needed a person who would not deny his or her history: "It was difficult to find a Nazi who would speak".²⁸ The director was motivated by curiosity, but in retrospect he has also noted how obnoxious it was for him to be forced to listen to a person who tried to "joke about the fate of the Jews".²⁹ The ambivalent attitude is reflected by the fact that Syberberg consciously fished for sensitive information from his interviewee. When Winifred Wagner asked whether the camera was off, Syberberg affirmed it, even though the camera was still rolling, and although the film reel had to be changed every ten minutes, Syberberg had instructed the sound engineer to keep recording everything during the break. For today's historians who study memory, Syberberg's methods would appear unethical.

The most controversial part of the film is its final sequence, where Winifred Wagner openly describes her relationship with Hitler (04:49-04:56). The sequence was recorded when the camera was not rolling. While the spectator is shown images of Wahnfried, Winifred Wagner's voice is heard on the soundtrack:

I will never denounce my friendship with him. [...] I can completely dissociate the Hitler I knew from what he is being accused of today. Let's assume, for example, that Gottfried would murder a girl. It would not change my feelings in any way. I don't know how to explain this, but that is the way it is. If Hitler was to walk in the door today, I would be as happy as I always was when I saw him. The dark side of the things... I know they are true, but for me they are not real, because that side of him is unknown to me. If I have a relationship with someone, it is only my personal experience that counts. Maybe this will remain incomprehensible forever. You must leave the question about my relationship with Hitler to psychologists. It can remain a mystery. I cannot explain it even to myself. I am an extremely loyal person.

As she speaks, the camera closes in on her, but – unlike in the rest of the film – her voice and the image are not synchronised. We see Ms. Wagner from behind, seated alone in a dining table. Syberberg, in effect, makes his film culminate in an unauthorised sound clip, as if that were the primary objective and most important outcome of the interview. The final words we hear are invested with meaning as secret information that has accidentally slipped from the private sphere to the public domain. Syberberg has compensated for the lack of an image by granting the statement an abstract content. Winifred Wagner's final words portray her at her most tender and loving, and these feelings are only reinforced by the images of the old woman sitting alone in the big house, abandoned by everyone. It is, however, as if the spectator were simultaneously moving further from the protagonist, who is left by the filmmakers and the audience to the loneliness of her home. The doors of Villa Wahnfried slam shut, and the witness of the past is left in a Wagnerian utopia that the spectators have no way of entering.

The last minutes of the film remind one of the philosopher Theodor Adorno's criticism of the German culture of remembering. According to Adorno, German culture would often indulge in 'forgetful remembrance' after the Second World War. Although the traumatic past was made an object of study, in the end it became yet

²⁸ On Syberberg's comment in *Zeitmagazin* in April 1975, see Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 486.

²⁹ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 487.

another closed historical episode.³⁰ In *The Memory of Art: A Study on Adorno and the Shoah*, Ilona Reiners points out how Adorno's notion resembles Jean-François Lyotard's idea of *anamnesis*: remembering itself does not heal, but it can eventually reinforce the politics of forgetting.³¹ As the camera pulls back from Winifred Wagner, it feels as if the filmmaker were somewhere on the borderline of understanding, wavering between the pain of remembering and the desire to forget. Winifred Wagner states that she cannot understand herself. But does even the interviewer understand the aim of his own cultural bereavement?

If we examine remembering as an ethical act, Winifred Wagner has, in the end, acted honestly by speaking from her individual, genuine perspective. Syberberg, who recorded her final memory without permission, has, as a matter of fact, heard something he never wanted to hear. Winifred Wagner is telling about her love and friendship, which should not, as such, be problematic. The scene, however, is so impressive because in the context of 1975, confessing that love was politically incorrect. When constructing the scene, Syberberg, like the audience of the film, had the benefit of awareness of the tragedy that surrounded the relationship between Wolf and Winni, Adolf Hitler and Winifred Wagner. According to Lyotard, *anamnesis* is linked to the pain of remembering that cannot necessarily be cured by experience.³² Syberberg has also spoken about the anxiety that underlies his films.³³ The final moments of *The Confessions of Winifred Wagner* express the pain of remembering, which is made even worse by the fact that the interviewee refuses to feel the pain herself.

The ending of the film is ambivalent in several ways. The narrator's voice and the intertitles constantly express a critical distance to the person being interviewed: by constantly focusing on Winifred Wagner and giving the floor to her, the film grants the spectator a certain freedom of interpretation. As a result, *The Confessions of Winifred Wagner* appears to support different ways of interpreting the film. The spectator is not obliged to accept the perspective constructed by Syberberg. Because the film foregrounds the original interview footage, the viewer is free to use it to construct his or her own interpretations. The historian Brigitte Hamann, for example, has highlighted the sequence where Syberberg asks when Ms. Wagner met Hitler for the last time. Ms. Wagner is clearly baffled by the question and cannot find the right words immediately. She evades the question by saying she did not meet Hitler after the assassination attempt in 1944. In the actual interview, Syberberg did not stop to consider this because he did not have sufficient background knowledge. According to Hamann, however, Winifred Wagner never met Hitler after 1940; the impressions of an idyllic friendship therefore must primarily refer to the years before the war. Adolf Hitler did, on the other hand, meet Wieland Wagner – whom the mother Winifred regarded coolly – quite frequently. Hamann suspects that, despite the seemingly undisguised nature of her comments, Winifred Wagner's warm depiction of Hitler is actually a cover-up for the bitterness she feels towards Wieland. When Wieland denounced all Nazi connections immediately af-

³⁰ I. Reiners, *Taitteen muisti. Tutkielma Adornosta ja Shoahista* (Helsinki: Tutkijaliitto, 2001), 185-186.

³¹ Reiners, *Taitteen muisti*, 187. See also J.-F. Lyotard, "Anamnesis of the Visible", *Theory, Culture and Society*, 1, (2004): 107-119.

³² Lyotard, "Anamnesis of the Visible": 109.

³³ See e. g. Landy, "Politics, Aesthetics, and Patriarchy": 163.

ter the war, Winifred described her relationship with Hitler as being even warmer and closer than before.³⁴

In the filmic narrative constructed by Syberberg, the friendship with Hitler is seen as Winifred Wagner's secret 'truth', but the film also provides a possibility for deconstructing this image. Paradoxically, Winifred Wagner's confessions regarding her support of National Socialism were exactly what Syberberg was looking for: it was a taboo that nobody would say out loud in the Federal Republic of Germany at the time. But when the taboo is presented as 'true', it becomes relativised: 'truth' is merely the meaning Winifred Wagner gave to her past in 1975. It contains no more 'truth' about the life and culture of wartime Germany than any other witness account. It does, however, tell about her particular relationship with the past. Despite its controversies and ambivalence, Hans Jürgen Syberberg's memory-historical film comes very close to the post-positivist thoughts that researchers like Luisa Passerini and Alessandro Portelli were sketching while pondering the possibilities of oral history.

Syberberg's film can be labelled 'forgetful remembrance', but this interpretation would also be too narrow. Paul Ricœur has emphasised the way historical narratives are refigured in interaction with the audience. When analysing the mimetic levels of a story, we should take into account how the narration is refigured as a result of the audience's reading (or watching). What Syberberg's *The Confessions of Winifred Wagner* ultimately means cannot be discovered by merely analysing the cinematic text.

When the film was released in the summer of 1975, it caused an uproar. After a private viewing in Munich, Wolfgang Wagner made a short list of changes that were required, but he approved of most of the film. *The Confessions of Winifred Wagner* received its premiere in Paris as a part of an extensive Syberberg retrospective. According to eyewitness accounts, approximately one hundred spectators were in the cinema when the film started, but only around thirty watched the film to the end: five hours of an old German lady speaking did not interest the others.³⁵ The real debate started after *Die Zeit* published a sensational article entitled *The Nice Uncle of Bayreuth* (*Der gute Onkel von Bayreuth*) just before the festival.³⁶ The press focused especially on the relationship between Adolf Hitler and Winifred Wagner. Because the film did not premiere in Germany before November 1975 in Düsseldorf, a vast majority of Germans received all information about the film through secondary sources. After the premiere, however, the reception changed. Winifred Wagner also received positive comments, and she was thanked for her courage. For many spectators her wartime recollections had provided raw material for thinking about the role and activities of their own parents during the war.³⁷ In this sense – through its reception – *The Confessions of Winifred Wagner* did, in the end, become a part of a collective memory that has the power to heal.

After Hans Jürgen Syberberg's film, Winifred Wagner never gave any further interviews. In the remark added at the end of the film, she states she is leaving her memories "for today and tomorrow's historians to analyse".

University of Turku

³⁴ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 491.

³⁵ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 494.

³⁶ "Der gute Onkel von Bayreuth", *Die Zeit*, 18 July 1975. See Carr, *The Wagner Clan*, 323.

³⁷ Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 494-497; Carr, *The Wagner Clan*, 323.

COMPOSTO IN CARATTERE DANTE MONOTYPE DALLA
FABRIZIO SERRA EDITORE, PISA · ROMA.
STAMPATO E RILEGATO NELLA
TIPOGRAFIA DI AGNANO, AGNANO PISANO (PISA).

★

Luglio 2013

(CZ2/FC3)



