



Global & International
Studies Building
Room 2067

May 5, 2016
Thursday, 9:00 am

Attendance by invitation
only.

COMMITTEE:

Andrea Ciccarelli
(French & Italian)
Chair

Antonio Vitti
(French & Italian)

Massimo Scalabrini
(French & Italian)

Mark Roseman
(History)

PHD DISSERTATION DEFENSE

**The Other Consequences of Interpretation:
Survivor Literature on Holocaust Memory**

David N. Winkler

Recent historiographical works have constructed an intricate topography of Holocaust memory in Italian society between the postwar and the turn of the 21st century. These projects illustrate that the Shoah has been interpreted within a number of highly politicized and selective frameworks. In the context of the hotly-contested legacies of Fascism and anti-Fascism, American-style conservatism and left-wing rebellion, reactionary Catholicism and secularization, the Holocaust frequently became the rhetorical playing of the various social actors remembering, representing, and interpreting it. This dissertation positions itself within this field of scholarly inquiry by asking a glaring, but as-yet-unanswered question: *how do the survivors react to the multiform interpretations, appropriations, and misappropriations of their tragedy?* What, to their minds, are the mistakes society has made in its attempts to remember, interpret, and narrate the Holocaust, and how can they be corrected moving forward? What constitutes a proper, historically and ethically faithful approach to Holocaust remembrance? In three detailed chapters, I show that the issue of collective Holocaust memory figures significantly into the respective literary and intellectual projects of Edith Bruck, Primo Levi, and Giuliana Tedeschi. I argue, among other things, that Bruck's semi-autobiographical novel *Transit* contains a current of sub-textual rhetoric insisting that Holocaust memory will necessarily be falsified wherever the tragedy is represented in artistic simulacra; that in Primo Levi's thought, hagiographic narratives of Italy's role in the Holocaust impeded post-war society from identifying the "disdain for the human value of labor" as the surviving seed whence could emerge a second Auschwitz; that Giuliana Tedeschi's long disinterest in collective Holocaust memory was informed by a philosophically complex and deeply personal sense of female Holocaust specificity; that Tedeschi's public polemic with Vincenzo Cerami in 1999 evinced her conviction that *Life is Beautiful* represented a massive affront to the memory of the female dimensions of the Holocaust.