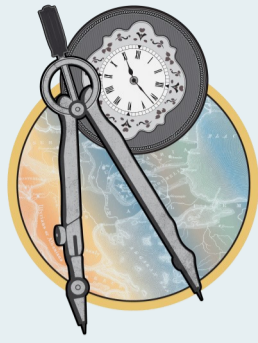


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# Mnemonic Responsibility: Dealing with the Past in Cultural Memory

By Dr. Guido Bartolini,  
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**Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Rijeka, Sveučilišna avenija 4**  
**Wednesday, 20 May 2026, from 14:15 to 16:00, classroom F-402**

Memory studies scholarship since the turn of the 2020s has been rethinking some of the foundations of mnemonic work across the West. Scholars from various disciplines have criticised the consequentialist assumptions underlying claims about the allegedly positive societal value of commemorating past injustices for democracy. In particular, they argue that the cosmopolitan memory paradigm that has dominated recent decades has failed to meet its stated goals, while simultaneously providing a template for the amplification of nationalist claims of victimhood (Gensburger and Lefranc 2020; Pisanty 2020; David 2020; Lim 2021, 2025). Such critiques resonate with the current mnemonic crisis brought about by recent international conflicts. The war in Ukraine and the destruction of Gaza have both been justified through narratives drawing on World War II and Holocaust memory, thereby revealing the instrumentalisation of existing paradigms and the emptiness of dominant slogans such as 'never again'. Our time appears to call for new paradigms through which to conceptualise our relationship with the past.

Presenting preliminary research from his postdoctoral project at the Free University of Bolzano, this talk introduces the concept of 'mnemonic responsibility', arguing that a sustained engagement with theories of responsibility can offer new models for thinking about both the problems and the potential of memory. Drawing on theories of memory, history, and politics, he argues that the act of taking responsibility for the past lies at the foundation of mnemonic endeavours, and that mnemonic responsibility requires the interplay of six different narrative modes, none of which is sufficient on its own for an ethical engagement with history. Given the plurality and complexity of the model he proposes, in the conclusion of the talk he will suggest that cultural memory—and literature in particular—remains a privileged site for cultivating a responsible memory of past injustices.

**Dr. Guido Bartolini** is a Seal of Excellence post-doctoral fellow at the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano (South Tyrol, Italy), where he works on cultural memory studies, theories of responsibility, and the memory of Fascism in Italian literature. He is the author of *The Italian Literature of the Axis War: Memories of Self-Absolution and the Quest for Responsibility* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021; Carocci, 2024). He has published articles on the representation of Fascism and the Second World War in Italian culture, as well as edited volumes and special issues on memory and responsibility, including *Mediating Historical Responsibility: Memories of 'Difficult Pasts' in European Cultures* (De Gruyter, 2024). He co-chairs the Memory and Literature Working Group and the Early Career Support Committee of the Memory Studies Association. Previously, he has held positions at Ghent University, University College Cork, and Royal Holloway, University of London.



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