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Between Theory and Lived Experience:  
Olga Freidenberg Chronicles Her Life and Times

One of the preeminent Russian cultural theorists of her time, Olga Freidenberg (1890-1955) left a monumental chronicle of her life and times (34 handwritten notebooks, still unpublished). As she claimed in the diary she kept during the Leningrad blockade, “I could never set up barriers between a scientific theory and the immediate apprehension of life; one was the expression of the other.” Her professional attitude notwithstanding, Freidenberg wrote with intensity and emotion that some readers may find difficult to tolerate. What does it mean for a scholar of myth and literature to write a record of her own life in 20th century Russia? How are we to read such documents? The talk will address problems in genre, method and ethics of life-writing.

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