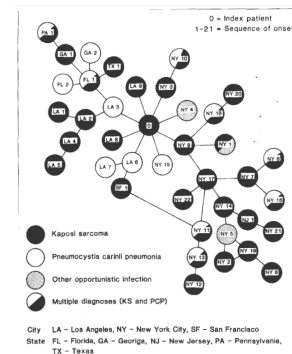


The Chain of Infections: Narratives of the Epidemic since the 19th Century

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The global struggle against Covid between 2020 and 2023 has shown that fighting a widespread infectious disease demands not only medical knowledge and vaccination programs, but also includes questions of narration and mimesis. The pandemic can only be mastered when its ways of dispersion and contagion can be represented reliably. My talk will outline a view on the younger history of epidemics which combines medico-historical and narratological perspectives. I will especially discuss how the replacement of the “miasma” doctrine (which was the leading theory of infection in the first two thirds of the 19th century) by the triumph of bacteriology in the 1870s implied a new narratability of the epidemic – from the simultaneous infection of a whole population through the effluvia of the miasma to the “chain of infections” from person to person. This shift 150 years ago, which established new forms of individual guilt and responsibility, determines epidemiological narratives until today.



*4pm on Wednesday,
January 17, 2024
Phelps 6206C*

Sponsors: Department of Germanic and Slavic Studies, Interdisciplinary Humanities Center, and Comparative Literature Program. We also express our appreciation to the Max Kade Foundation and the Division of Humanities and Fine Arts at UC Santa Barbara.