Docs, Germs and Steel: Chapters in the History of Western Medicine

What is the definition of disease, and where is it located? What makes it develop or spread? and how can one make sure that one’s personal, communal or national body remain healthy, strong, clean or pure? The seminar will be devoted to examining the changing answers given to these questions in Western medicine during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in disciplines such as bacteriology, epidemiology, immunology, genetics and eugenics. We will discuss the ways in which medical knowledge was created, the use of various media (posters, museums, movies) to spread new medical perceptions, and mostly the social and cultural contexts of scientific-medical discoveries. We will examine the historical developments of concepts such as ‘carrier’, the identification of immigrants with diseases, the change in the social and moral role of doctors as well as the destructive potential of the aspiration to eradicate illness. Seminar participants will be required to read extensively and actively take part in class discussions.