

**CFCUL Research Seminar**

**Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> February 2016**

**Foucault's Oedipus and the History of Truth**

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The publication of Michel Foucault's lecture courses at the Collège de France have provided new insights into his work. His 1970-71 course, entitled *Lectures on the Will to Know*, includes two important pieces dedicated to the figure of Oedipus, as we find him in Sophocles' play, *Oedipus the King*. Foucault's reading places the story of desire, familiar from Freud, to one side and instead presents Oedipus as uniquely placed in a configuration of knowledge, power, and history.

Importantly, in Oedipus, one can recognise the figure of man, which Foucault characterised in *Les mots et les choses* as at once the subject and the object of knowledge: Oedipus tries to find the identity of a murderer that he committed himself. In the context of the Sophocles' play, Oedipus is at once caught in a certain relation between knowledge and politics, and disrupts that relation.

In this seminar, I will: 1) set out the reasons for Foucault's interest in the figure of *Oedipus* against the background of his account of man in *Les mots et les choses* (*The Order of Things*); 2) situate his reading of *Oedipus the King* in relation to his analysis of knowledge, truth, and history, earlier in the same lecture course; 3) consider the extent to which Foucault's analysis of the figure of Oedipus both looks back to Foucault's earlier work on 'archaeology' and forward to his later writing, with a particular focus on the political dimension of the care of the self