

Steve Brantford, Head (Michel Foucault), 2004, 6 3/4 x 11 1/2", Acrylic and graphite on paper. (Courtesy of the Artist and Features Inc., New York)

**12 November 2010**  
Keynes Hall, King's College, Cambridge

Foucault writes of how the internal power-dynamics of the family interact with the social politics of society. On the one hand, social politics impact family structure and dynamics in many ways, including legal judgements, medical interventions, and social work. On the other hand, members of families call on discourses and institutions from society at large in order to manage or change the operation of the family. This conference will examine the theme of the family in Foucault's life and texts, and use his ideas to explore the politics of the family more generally in the contemporary world.

For further information and to book online:  
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This event is part of the CRASH Conference Support Programme. It is also part of the Centre for Gender Studies Public Event Series, kindly supported by Cambridge University Press. We are also grateful to the Development Fund of the Faculty of History, the French Embassy, the BSA Theory Study Group and the French Department at Cambridge for their sponsorship.

# foucault

the family and politics

Confirmed speakers include:  
Valerie Walkerdine (Cardiff / Oslo)  
Vikki Bell (London, Goldsmiths)  
Remi Lenoir (Centre de Sociologie  
Européenne, Paris)  
Gillian Harkins (University of  
Washington, Seattle)  
Leon Rocha (Yale / Cambridge)  
Malcolm Thompson (Vancouver,  
British Columbia)  
Veronique Mottier (Cambridge)  
David Macey (Foucault's  
biographer and translator).



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British Sociological Association

# ***Foucault, the Family and Politics***

**Friday, 12 November 2010  
Keynes Hall, King's College, Cambridge**

## ***Conveners***

Robbie Duschinsky (Sociology, University of Cambridge)  
Dr Jude Browne (Gender Studies, University of Cambridge)  
Dr Deborah Thom (History, University of Cambridge)

## ***Conference summary***

Foucault writes of how the internal power-dynamics of the family interact with the social politics of society as a whole. On the one hand, social politics impact family structure and dynamics in many ways, including legal judgements, medical interventions, and social work. On the other hand, members of families call on discourses and institutions from society at large in order to manage or change the operation of the family.

The conference will begin by examining the theme of the family in Foucault's life and texts; it will then use his ideas to explore the politics of the family more generally in the contemporary world.

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# Programme

- 9.00 - 9.30am Registration
- 9.30 - 9.45am Welcome and Introduction
- 9.45 - 10.45am **Professor Rémi Lenoir** (Centre de Sociologie Européenne, Université Paris 1, France)  
*Foucault and the Family*
- Chair: Dr Deborah Thom (History, University of Cambridge)
- 10.45am – 12pm **Professor Valerie Walkerdine** (School of Social Sciences, University of Cardiff, UK & Visiting Professor, University of Oslo, Norway)  
*From Political Economy to Advanced Liberalism: Foucault, Family and Generation*
- Response: **Netta Chachamu** (History and Philosophy of Science, Cambridge University)
- Chair: Dr Susan Walker (Child & Family Health, Anglia Ruskin University, UK)
- 12.00 - 1.30pm *Break (Lunch in Town)*
- 1.30 – 3.00pm **Malcolm Thompson** (History, University of British Columbia, Canada)  
*Family, Economy and Governmentality: The Birth of the Chinese Population*
- Dialogue Paper: **Dr Leon Rocha** (History of Science, Needham Research Institute, Cambridge)  
*'The Dark Side of Society': Herbert Day Lamson and the Establishment of Social Sciences in China*
- Chair: Professor Terrell Carver (Politics, University of Bristol)
- 3.00 – 4.00pm *Break (Tea & Coffee)*

- 4.00 - 5.30pm      **Professor Vikki Bell** (Sociology, Goldsmiths, University of London, UK)  
*Foucault's Familial Scenes: Subjects of Critique*
- Associate Professor Gillian Harkins** (English, University of Washington, Seattle, USA)  
*Foucault and the Afterlife of Children*
- Chair: Robbie Duschinsky (Sociology, University of Cambridge)
- 5.30 - 6.30pm      **Professor Véronique Mottier** (Sociology, University of Lausanne & Sociology, University of Cambridge, UK)  
*Gender, Sexuality and the State: Beyond Foucault*
- Chair: Dr Jean Khalifa (French, University of Cambridge)
- 6.30pm              End of Conference (participants welcome to socialise in King's Bar)

## ***Abstracts and biographies***

**Professor Vikki Bell** (Goldsmiths, University of London)

*Foucault's Familial Scenes: Subjects of Critique*

This paper traces the place of 'the family' in Foucault's thought, and considers the common questions that link distinct moments. In the *History of Sexuality Vol 1*, the family is the point at which the deployment of sexuality and the diagram of power that preceded it, the system of alliances, meet. There is a tension between a society ordered by blood, where sexual practices were understood and controlled in relation to lines of descent and where concern is with the link between partners and the statutes, and the dispositif that grew up around those relations, the deployment of sexuality, that informs a society traversed by concern with the quality of pleasure, its exposure and its judgement against a norm, a tension that is contained and sustained at the site of the family. Foucault's attention at that point was to the family as a site and anchor of a certain diagram of power, with its correlative figures and bio-political governmentality. In the later volumes of the *History of Sexuality*, his attention shifted to the games of truth into which distinct categories of persons entered in Antiquity, games which were always relational in relation to each other and in which the modern notion of 'the family' – as opposed to 'the household' – barely makes sense. And in the lectures concerning parrhesia, the art of speaking the truth to power, and in particular in the attention he gave to Euripedes' *Ion*, Foucault explored those moments when the one who speaks truth, and contrasting *Ion's* with his mother Creusa's speech, argued that there were different modalities of truth-speaking. In each of these scenes, the paper suggests, Foucault explores the difficulty of existing or even speaking outside the dispositif within which one is produced; yet of course exactly the question of movement, the genealogy of shifting dispositifs, the power of their arrangements and productions as well as their fragility, which this work invites us to ponder.

**Vikki Bell** is Professor in Sociology at Goldsmiths College, University of London where she convenes the taught MA programmes. Her books include *Interrogating Incest: Feminism, Foucault and the Law* (Routledge, 1993), *Feminist Imagination: Genealogies in Feminist Thought* (Sage, 1999) and *Culture and Performance: The Challenge of Ethics, Politics and Feminist Theory* (Berg, 2007). Her work has engaged with the thought of Michel Foucault over many years, as well as other theorists of power, ethics and socio-cultural processes, and she has also spoken and written extensively on feminist theory and cultural aspects of sexuality and child abuse. Of late, she has also been working on socio-cultural aspects of transitional justice in Argentina and in Northern Ireland. Vikki has published numerous articles in peer-reviewed journals such as *Social & Legal Studies*, *Cultural Politics*, *Journal of Visual Culture* and *Theory, Culture & Society*. Some of her articles and chapters are available free through Goldsmiths Research Online.

**Gillian Harkins** (University of Washington, Seattle)

*Foucault and the Afterlives of Children*

This paper takes up Foucault's concept of 'incorporeal materialism' from the *Discourse on Language* and reads it in relation to his later work on the family and the monster. There are two major domains in which Foucault's account of incorporeal materialism is drawn into paradox: the family (where paradox appears as incest) and the monster (where it appears as paedophilia). Across *The History of Sexuality Vol I* and *Society Must Be Defended*, Foucault's account of the family meets its limit in the paradox of incest. Incest appears as both pivot and secret of biopower, instituting the regularities and dispersions of discursive formations ('statements'), as well as new realms of 'incorporeal materialism' ('events'). In the second domain, that of the monster, paradox appears as paedophilia. But this claim is far more curious than the first. For the monster traced across Foucault's earlier archaeological works largely disappears from his later studies of biopower. In its wake, we find the flickering and occasional presence of the paedophile, a 'monster' who is peculiarly (paradoxically) incidental to biopower. This paper explores how the paedophile appears in the wake of the archaeological monster and asks how we might use the concept of 'incorporeal materialism' to move beyond the specific paradoxes of Foucault's biopolitical framework. In particular, I ask how the paedophile reveals the afterlife of children in the expansion of virtual realities associated with the neoliberal era. Developing my earlier work on the incorporeal materialism of 'fantasy' articulated through incest, this paper argues that virtuality best describes the incorporeal materialism enabled by the paedophile.

**Gillian Harkins** is Associate Professor of English at the University of Washington, Seattle where she teaches late nineteenth and twentieth century U.S. literature and culture. She is the author of *Everybody's Family Romance: Reading Incest in Neoliberal America* (University of Minnesota Press, 2009). She is currently at work on a book entitled *Screening Pedophilia: Virtuality and Other Crimes Against Nature*.

**Professor Rémi Lenoir** (Université Paris 1)

*Foucault and the Family*

Foucault makes reference to the family in a few dazzling yet brief pages, as if the definitions ('family cell', 'relational family') and the structures of the family ('restrained family', 'enlarged family') were self-evident. He conceives of it as an effect, both in the sense of 'revealing effect' and as a product of what he calls the 'mechanisms of power'. In fact, it is primarily in relation to power that Foucault mentions the family: 'model of sovereignty' on the one hand and 'disciplinary instrument' on the other, according to the dichotomy that he exercises between the historical forms of power. Sovereign power, according to Foucault, is the power to 'kill and let live'. The family is considered by Foucault as a model and as an instrument of power.

What then are relationships between the forms of power and family structures? With the effects of the structures of power not being the same among the social classes, what are the relationships between class structures and family structures? One of the forms of exercising disciplinary power is, according to Foucault, the medicalization of society, notably psychiatry. How has this move toward medicalization and psychiatrization affected the family? Finally, since the family has been the object of Foucault's reflections, at the end of his life while he was orienting his works towards what he called the 'practice of self' as an 'art of living', how does he analyze the social conditions of the emergence of 'the conjugalization of the family' in Greece during Hellenistic period? These are the four points that I will evoke before pointing out, in conclusion, what may be Foucault's contributions to sociological works on the family.

**Rémi Lenoir** is Professor of Sociology at the University of Paris 1 (Paris Sorbonne). He is the author of numerous articles and of a book, *La généalogie de la morale familiale* (Paris, Seuil, 2003).

**Professor Véronique Mottier** (Université de Lausanne & University of Cambridge)  
*Gender, Sexuality and the State: Beyond Foucault*

This talk will reflect upon Foucault's writings on biopolitics and sexuality in the context of a specific area of politics of the family: eugenic policy-making. More precisely, historical examples of eugenic policy-making in various European countries (1920s-1970s) will serve as a basis for theorising the role of the state in regulating and policing the reproductive sexualities, sexual practices, sexual identities and future families of its citizens. In doing so, I shall both draw upon Foucault, and attempt to go beyond some of the blind spots in his own work – highlighting in particular the importance of gender for exploring the complex links between sexuality, politics and the modern state. To conclude, I shall argue that the notion of the state itself needs conceptual unpacking.

**Véronique Mottier** has been Fellow and Director of Studies in Social and Political Sciences at Jesus College since 1999, and part-time Professor in Sociology at the University of Lausanne since 2006.

**Dr Leon Rocha** (Needham Research Institute & University of Cambridge)  
*'The Dark Side of Society': Herbert Day Lamson and the Establishment of Social Sciences in China*

In his paper *Family, Economy and Governmentality: The Birth of the Chinese Population*, Malcolm Thompson analyses the discourse of 'social problems' (shehui wenti) that emerged in China in the early twentieth century. This dialogue paper addresses the questions: How did people in China in the early twentieth century come to know what they knew about these 'social problems'? Where did the discourse of 'social problems' and 'social pathology' come from, and how were they disseminated? Through the activities of a network of American academics operating in urban China in the 1920s, and using Brown University-trained sociologist Herbert Day Lamson's *Social Pathology of China* (1935) as a

point of anchorage, I discuss the establishment of social sciences in China, an apparatus seen as capable of generating reliable knowledge of the population and accurate diagnoses of the ‘pathologies’ of the nation. This history will shed light on how European-American sociology contributed to the development of what Foucault calls modern ‘technologies of government’ in twentieth-century China.

**Leon Rocha** is D. Kim Foundation for the History of Science and Technology in East Asia Postdoctoral Fellow, currently based at the Needham Research Institute and the Department of History and Philosophy of Science, University of Cambridge. He is working on Joseph Needham's investigations on sex and Daoist alchemy, and preparing a book proposal entitled *The Arts and the Sciences of the Bedchamber: Sinology, Sinography, and Chinese Sex*.

**Malcolm Thompson** (University of British Columbia)

*Family, Economy and Governmentality: The Birth of the Chinese Population*

For a whole class of people in China in the second decade of the twentieth century, China suddenly appeared to have been stricken with a virtually inexhaustible series of ‘social problems’: the problems of poverty and unemployment (*pinqiong wenti*), of women (*funü wenti*), of peasants and rural society (*nongcun wenti*)—the list goes on and on. Each was immediately related to the others: they constituted a set, and one could approach each through the others. In this respect, they were formally equal. But there were two problems that were, one might say, ‘universally present elements’, elements which were both *necessarily* included in discussions of any of the others and which together constituted a kind of metaset: the population and the family.

The privilege of the population did not derive from the fact that China’s population was so enormous, so ‘obviously’ a problem, but from its isolation as the ‘zero level’ of social problems as such: what all forms of social organization were organizations of, their ‘original material’ (*yuanliao*) or *prima materia*. The family’s privilege derived from its position as the primary site of emergence of this material, the hinge between the biological and the social, situated at the intersection of a cultural politics of modernity and a biopolitics of capitalism. It was impossible to consider one without the other: the family was the immediately given form of the content provided by the population. The Chinese family was resituated within a whole social and technical division of labour, an ensemble of problems of livelihood, so that a third element may be added to this set: economy. This population–family–economy nexus should be understood not as a concept, but as what Foucault would call a field of governability, an exchange through which all governmental activity in China increasingly passed. Nationalist governmentality in China was thus constituted as always-already biopolitical, organized around and through the population–family–economy nexus. Long before the much better known one child policy, this figure was first installed at the center of political rationality in China in the 1910s, where, making all the necessary adjustments, it still resides today.

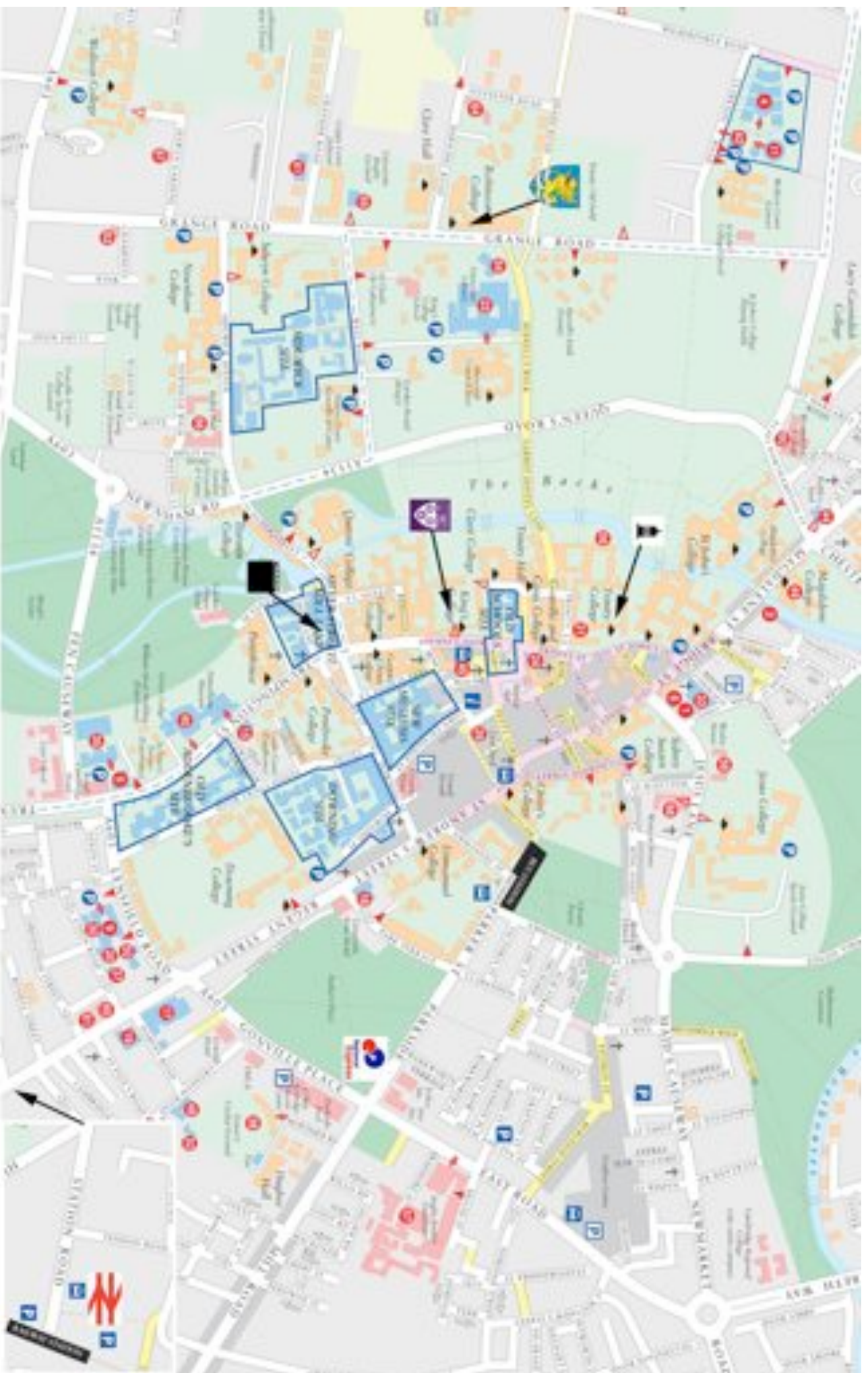
**Malcolm Thompson** is completing his Ph.D. in nineteenth and twentieth century Chinese history at the University of British Columbia, Canada. His current research concerns the birth of the Chinese population as a governable object, and its relation to China's incorporation, at a variety of levels, into the capitalist world-economy and world-episteme in the first half of the twentieth century. He is also involved in collaborative projects on Eurasian statecraft from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries, and on global economic nationalism in the period 1870–1940. Other research interests include gender history, Foucault and historical methods, and the global history of governmental logics.

**Professor Valerie Walkerdine** (University of Cardiff & University of Oslo)

*From Political Economy to Advanced Liberalism: Foucault, Family and Generation*

The town I shall call Steeltown was founded in the 1790s around an iron works. Steel production finally ceased in 2002. The centrality of political economy and pauperism to labouring families in the town cannot be overstated. The affective ties that bound families and passed down generations provided means for avoiding the workhouse and coping with chronic insecurity. In addition, hard labouring masculinity became a central trope through which labour and the avoidance of pauperism was expressed. The closure of the works has brought shifts in advanced liberalism's demands with respect to masculine labour, creating complex changes and difficulties within families and across generations. The paper will exemplify this with respect to entrepreneurialism (a former steelworker becoming a guitar maker) and intergenerational difficulties between fathers and sons.

**Valerie Walkerdine** is Research Professor in the School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University.



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