



The Institute of Advanced Studies presents a free public lecture

## The Mirror Test: Humans, Animals and Sentience

By Sherryl Vint, Associate Professor at Brock University in St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada

### About this Lecture

The mirror test – a classic investigation of consciousness in animal research – has aspects of a typical pulp science fiction scenario of alien abduction: an animal is rendered unconscious, during which time dye is applied to its face in some way; when it awakes, the animal is given access to a mirror. If the animal then attempts to investigate the mark in some way, it is deemed to have passed the mirror test, revealing that it recognises the other in the mirror as self. Animals pass this test by mirroring consciousness as it is experienced by humans as much as by seeing themselves in the mirror's image.

The image of the mirror also signifies that we often understand animals as mirrors for ourselves, constructing images of them that glorify some species in whom we see qualities we want to possess, while simultaneously vilifying others, often by projecting onto them human faults. Frequently, then, cultural representations of animals will tell us little about the animals themselves and much about the ways animals become caught up in human ideology.

This talk will explore the tension between these two meanings of mirroring by looking at three science fiction texts that deal with questions of animal sentience: Connie Willis's *Samaritan* (1985), Walter Miller's *Conditionally Human* (1952) and John Crowley's *Beasts* (1976). Professor Vint will contrast the mirror test's method of defining a line between human and animal being with other constructs.

### About Sherryl Vint



Sherryl Vint is Associate Professor at Brock University in St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada. She is the author of *Bodies of Tomorrow* (2007) and co-editor of *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction* (2009) and *Fifty Key Figures in Science Fiction* (2009). An editor of the journals *Science Fiction Film and Television* and *Extrapolation*, she has recently completed *Animal Alterity: Science Fiction and the Question of the Animal*.



### Lecture Details

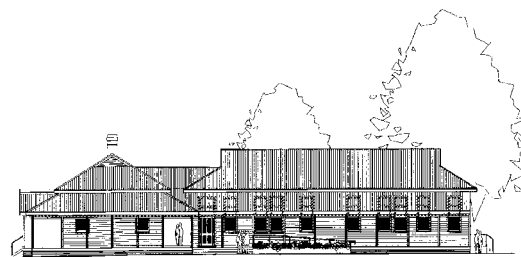
**Date:** Tuesday, 7 July 2009

**Time:** 6-7pm

**Venue:** Alexander Lecture Theatre, UWA

The nearest carpark is P3 off Hackett Drive Entrance 1

**This lecture is free and open to the public, no RSVP required**



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