

**Miegunyah Lecture,  
Professor Barbara Maria Stafford (University of Chicago)  
Wednesday 28 October, 6.15-7.15 pm Prince Philip lecture  
theatre, Architecture building**

**"Self-Love Widens into All that Lives": Mirror Neurons and the  
Performance of Reciprocity**

This lecture addresses the issue of reciprocity both as a theory and as a practice. It is a question of major importance across the humanities, social sciences, and biological sciences: not only because of the central role it plays in every type of human/animal/environmental exchange-from the molecular to the behavioral level-but also because of the increasing value of, and perceived need for, scholarly collaboration between researchers and among disciplines.

The speaker argues that new data coming from the neurosciences concerning mirror neurons and mirror systems-allowing us to re-cognize another being from within our own depths-allows us fundamentally to reconceptualize the venerable humanistic tradition of imitation. Further, it opens a new avenue for escaping the post-modern impasse of absolute difference by demonstrating incontrovertibly the hidden mechanisms of seeing likewise.

Conversely, the neuroscientific and neuro-philosophical research into re-enactment requires the contextual evidence provided by the humanities. Repetition with variation was not inaugurated with Neural Darwinism but infuses the active history of magic, prognostication, and the divination of meaning from remote, obscure, or ambiguous things.

Most importantly, the speaker believes that mirror systems provide a model for dislodging the primacy of a strictly textual hermeneutics to restore the cognitive work of the senses to their rightful place. Here, the visual arts offer us shoulders to stand on. Paradoxically spurred on by the neurosciences, then, aesthetics as well as poetics have the novel power to transform the sociology of knowledge in exciting directions.

Barbara STAFFORD is the William B. Ogden Distinguished Service Professor, Emerita, at the University of Chicago. Her work has consistently explored the intersections between the visual arts and the physical and biological sciences from the early modern to the contemporary era. Her current research charts the revolutionary ways the neurosciences are changing our views of the human and animal sensorium, shaping our fundamental assumptions about perception, sensation, emotion, mental imagery, and subjectivity. Stafford's most recent book is *Echo Objects: The Cognitive Work of Images* (University of Chicago Press, 2007).