



*Professor Gillian Straker*

## **Signing with a Scar: Understanding Self-harm**

17th April 2008, 10am to 4.30pm

**Senate House**, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HU

Therapists confronted with individuals who self harm are often challenged both by their own anxieties and by the duty of care generated by these acts. What can they do to contain their own anxieties and how can they provide the help and care that the other seems to need?

This workshop is designed to help therapists grapple with these questions and to provide concepts and ideas that might help them to keep afloat in the dangerous currents that self-harm generates. It does so by providing an overview of current theories of self-harm. It begins with an account of biological theories that examine the neurochemistry of self harm and its potential to regulate negative affect. It then moves to psychological theories as these have been elaborated within cognitive behavioural, systemic and psychoanalytic frameworks. There is a particular focus on psychoanalytic theories of self harm. A new way of understanding self harm within the framework of self psychology and attachment theory is also presented. In this framework self harm is seen as a form of auto-mirroring of communication with the self rather than only a communication with the other in the form of projective identification. The implications of this for therapeutic practice are explored.

The workshop will be balanced between the presentation of theory and the creation of opportunities to discuss clinical work.

**Gillian Straker** is a clinical professor in psychology in the Faculties of Medicine and of Science, University of Sydney and is a visiting research professor at the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa. She is an integrative psychotherapist and supervisor in private practice and is an organisational consultant to Encompass Australasia, an organisation that specialises in the treatment of professionals who have committed boundary violations. She is well published in the areas of psychotherapy and spirituality. She has broad experience working with the survivors of traumatic stress, among them the survivors of torture and trauma. Flowing from this work she has developed and published new ways of thinking about the effects of trauma and its problematic manifestations including self harm.