

## **Postscript 58**

**CHRIS GAUDET**  
**on “Where Does it Hurt?”**

## EXPERIENCES IN GROUPS

**“I had, it was true, had experience of trying to persuade groups composed of patients to make the study of their tensions a group task [...]. It was disconcerting to find that the committee seemed to believe that patients could be cured in groups such as these.” (Wilfred Bion, *Experiences in Groups*, 29.)**

Take the show's title, for a start. "Where Does it Hurt?" On the one hand, the question implies a kind of reparative attention. It's the kind of question we imagine a doctor asking us, or that we may ask a child as we, half-listening, scan for the bruise or the cut that has provoked the cry, the complaint. We know not to ask when, even if we often are, we're only curious, though—and here comes the "on the other hand"—we often do ask when we're unable to help, because we're incapable of the right actions or because action itself, or even precise diagnosis, might be beside the point.

And who hasn't hesitated, briefly, before bursting into tears at that question, or something like it? There is a large photographic poster in the front window: *This Book Can Change Your Life!* Cathy Busby first produced this work in 1996, and it has been reprinted for this exhibition. A Dale Carnegie bestseller is cradled by a pair of hands—the way the camera is positioned, they might be ours, if we are forty feet tall—and we are looking at the back cover. The book's title, and its central, disconcerting, promise, in bold type: "How to Stop Worrying and Start Living." Disconcerting because it suggests a painful lack of which we might have been otherwise unaware, and because it is disconcerting to imagine that anyone believes we might be cured by books, or by works, such as these. The front of the book is obscured, as is its interior, with its promise of "practical formulas you can start using *right away*."

It elicits, for this show, a whole complex of fraught doublings and repetitions, which are only amplified by the physical division of the gallery by a central wall that bisects the room, obscuring part of the exhibition from the view of the street: among them, past/present; event/trauma; analyst/analysand; conscious/unconscious; exterior/interior. A weaving by David MacWilliam is suspended in the exterior of the two gallery spaces. In formal resemblance, and in title, it suggests a diagnostic tool (the inkblot test) that is perhaps less familiar from clinical experience than it is from its many representations in textbooks and pop culture. As a tool, it wants to know *us*—what are we like, where does it hurt. Hung in the centre of the room, and that room being a gallery, it is *exposed*—the image is doubled, imperfectly, by a reverse that exposes the conditions of its making and that would, under most circumstances, remain obscured.

In the darker, more “interior” of the two gallery spaces, two videos by Krista Belle Stewart are projected onto facing walls. Because they are on opposite walls, it is difficult (though not impossible) to watch them both at the same time; at the same time, it is difficult to resist reading their proximity in terms of an encounter or, a long series of encounters—among them, formal, generational, therapeutic, colonial, biographical. The movement between these spaces, between the brightly lit exterior and the darker interior space, might be another psychoanalytically charged doubling; my sense is that many thoughtful responses to the show have recorded precisely this kind

of experience, of having the “surface” of the outer gallery retroactively transformed through the passage into the “depth” of the projected works.

But there is a lightness of touch to these works, and to their configuration within this show, that evades—or, often, ironizes—these sententious doublings, including the supposedly therapeutic dyad of artwork and viewer. There is no way of looking at the weaving without also encountering Cathy Busby’s library of self-help books on the back wall, or the paintings by Rachelle Sawatsky (two on canvas, several more on the letterhead of a California psychotherapist) that face each other across the gallery, without hearing the soundtracks of the films, and to think through an encounter with the show is to think through the ways in which these experiences overlap with and impinge on one another. Those eight paintings on letterhead—*Norman Tabachnik, M.D. / A Professional Corporation / Psychiatry, Psychotherapy*—constellate variously both with one another and with the other works, which, according to their own affordances, draw out what is parodic in them, or what is formally complex and multiple, or what is generous or reparative. The point is not to pretend that duality is never at issue for these works, but to acknowledge, as the show does, that it forms one among a broad and flexible set of potential relations between a relatively fixed group of participants.

The question becomes: how to make the study of their tensions a group task—a task for the group of which both

the artworks and we are members?—To make a study of their tensions is not to imagine that we might provide them with a cure, or that they might cure us. It might simply be to observe as the works ask one another, in various registers, with various degrees of intimacy or discomfort, what they have to disclose. Which is, sometimes, where it hurts.



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