

DEEP-SEATED

**DEEP-SEATED**



Daniel Agnew/AL, The NY, NY and NY, USA, ©backbone.Org/AL, ©Marian Green

Chris Kraus

## SOMETHING ABOUT LOSS

Sheldon Ave.,  
Rosedale, Toronto 5  
February 7, 1983

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Turk,—

Thank you for your nice Christmas card which arrived well before Christmas. I wish you could have seen the seventy-two cards I had on display in our living room, and among them was the one from you. Christmas is a busy time, but interesting. My Christmas Day was a lonely one until I left the house at 4:30 in the afternoon to go downtown to have my supper in a restaurant. Following that, I went to my cousin's home to spend the evening. I was back home at 11 o'clock, and was soon off to bed. However, there was one "bright spot" while I was alone—it was Her Majesty's Christmas Message. I'm sure you heard it too.

I was glad to get your letter early in December, and to know the car didn't annoy you. You said you had not been well, but was feeling better. You also said that Mrs. Turk had high blood pressure, and was not feeling well. I do hope she is much improved. Do take good care of yourselves—both of you. Good health is our greatest asset.

I do part time work, so keep plenty busy. The house seems to require quite a bit of my time. In a house there is always something requiring to be done, and I do of my own work. Even though I live alone, I find plenty to do. It's quite a responsibility, as well as expensive, but I have to live somewhere, and apartments, too, are expensive. I much prefer one's own home, to an apartment, so I will carry on here as long as I can do so.

I think I told you that John and his wife were going to California for Christmas. John arrived home, and said the time was too short.



David Askevold, *The Pit #3 and #6*, 1996, cibachrome. Courtesy of Mandarin Gallery

Chris Kraus

---

## SOMETHING ABOUT LOSS

Standish Ave.,  
Rosedale, Toronto 5  
February 7, 1963

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Tuck,—

Thank you for your nice Christmas card which arrived well before Christmas. I wish you could have seen the seventy-two cards I had on display in our living room, and among them was the one from you. Christmas is a busy time, but interesting. My Christmas Day was a lonely one until I left the house at 4:30 in the afternoon to go downtown to have my supper in a restaurant. Following that, I went to my cousin's home to spend the evening. I was back home at 11 o'clock, and was soon off to bed. However, there was one "bright spot" while I was alone—it was Her Majesty's Christmas Message. I'm sure you heard it too.

I was glad to get your letter early in December, and to know the calendar arrived safely. You said you had not been well, but was feeling better. You also said that Mrs. Tuck had high blood pressure, and was not feeling well. I do hope she is much improved. Do take good care of yourselves—both of you. Good health is our greatest asset.

I do part time work, so keep plenty busy. This house seems to require quite a lot of my time. In a house there is always something requiring to be done, and I do all my own work. Even though I live alone, I find plenty to do. It is quite a responsibility, as well as expense, but I have to live somewhere, and apartments, too, are expensive. I much prefer one's own home, to an apartment, so I will carry on here as long as I can do so.

I think I told you that John and his wife were going to California for Christmas. John enjoyed himself, and said the time was too short.



*We have had a good share of cold weather, but as yet not much snow. Winter is getting by, and we will all welcome Spring. Can you notice the daylight stretching out? It is quite noticeable here, and I always watch this with interest.*

*You said you and Mrs. Tuck would see what this coming Summer would bring forth, and perhaps you could both make a trip up here. That would be very nice, and this home will make you welcome, should you wish to stay here—will cost you nothing. You will not see Mother, but I will take care of you both as best I can.*

*This is all for this time. Write when you can. Your letters are welcome.*

*Sincerely,  
Bertha Lowe*

I found this letter in a disused Anglican school building in Pouch Cove, a town 15 miles north of St. John's, Newfoundland. The letter was typed and tacked onto a board in one of the bathrooms. In its last incarnation, the school had been used by a foundation to house visiting artists from all over the world. One of the artists must have scavenged it out of the pile of debris in the moldering building, which had been red-tagged last summer during a drawn-out dispute between the foundation director and the Pouch Cove Building and Safety Department. The letter was touching in its archaism. Beyond its literal obsolescence—who, who isn't trying to be amusing, writes letters anymore?—it reflected certain lost cultural values: an absence of high expectations, a stoic acceptance of loneliness. It reminded me of my parents. I copied it into my notebook.

During the past several years I've chosen to live somewhat nomadically, accepting various invitations from cultural institutions like the one in Pouch Cove. I have a house that I'm rarely in

near downtown Los Angeles. The house has a value—although, not to me, since I'm usually traveling—so I often loan it to friends, friends-of-friends, family members, even passing acquaintances met during these travels. (During the past several years I've noticed the fierce desire that once preempted rational choice, evaporating. Slightly confused, I concluded the best course to follow was: if I don't actively want something and someone else does, just let them have it. This applied to my house.)

Last August, when I arrived at the house in LA en route to Pouch Cove after spending the summer in Mexico, I noticed several small, insignificant things misplaced or missing. The front door key (redundant, since I leave the house open) was gone; also, the TV remote and the black plastic scoop used to measure espresso-ground coffee. I asked Justin and Karen and Bob and Sylvère and Iris and Samantha and Joan—all of whom used the place briefly during my absence—about these things, but no one knew anything. Nothing major was missing and the house was left clean. There was no one to blame, certainly nothing to rage about—but the losses were very unsettling. Each of these things was part of my LA routine, which, I liked to think, resembled the life of a 70s sit-com air hostess.

What bothered me most was the loss of the black plastic scoop. Made of hard shiny plastic, it came with the Bodem French press-style coffeepot sold at Starbucks for \$34.95. I'd encountered a similar problem two years ago, when houseguests Charlie and Billy and Jane accidentally broke the glass flask. They left a nice note and ten dollars. Theoretically the flask was replaceable for \$10.95, but the Silverlake Starbucks (a 30 minute round-trip from my house) was out of stock on this item. Faced with the choice



of driving to Glendale, Pasadena, or Burbank on one of my 3 days back in LA in the hope that one of those stores would have the replacement, or simply buying the whole thing again, I surrendered my credit card ... though not without airing my views on softly-enforced consumption to the barista; a rant as wasted as the use of air-quotes around phrases like “choose to service my own account” to Call Center workers in prison, or India.

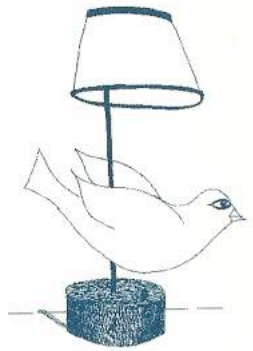
But the “challenges” posed by the loss of the black plastic scoop during the summer proved insurmountable. (I’d just “concluded” six months of therapy, after concluding the 75 minute round-trip drive to an inconvenient Westside location to discuss my resistance just wasn’t worth it. It occurs to me now, as I think of the black plastic scoop, this fact might be relevant.) Because the black plastic scoop had never been sold as a separate component of the Bodem French Press, at Starbucks or anywhere, and moreover I learned, after driving to the Silverlake Starbucks, the entire chain has stopped selling these coffeepots, replaced them with travel mugs.

Where do you find a black plastic scoop? I tried searching the web, but no luck. Sylvère, my ex-husband, was empathetic. (He and his girlfriend Iris were among those using the house.) “I am aware of the plastic scoop and its fragile existence,” he said. This show of support nearly moved me to tears. Sylvère understood. And I wondered: just how much time and care should a person spend in the attempt to replace a fetishized object? Or rather—a commonplace object that, in its absence and newly unattainable state, becomes fetishized? Although Sylvère was helpfully quick to point out that this, desire, transferred onto an object, in fact defines the term “fetish.” But was this correct? There was no Freudian



Iris Klein, *Kitchen I*, 2003/05, Gelatin Silver print, 10 x 8" framed;  
*Swallow*, 2005, Lambda print, 46 x 46".





I DIDN'T  
KEEP  
A LOG.

Theresa Pendlebury, *I Didn't Keep a Log*,  
2007. Courtesy of Mandarin Gallery.

guesswork involved in my need for the black plastic scoop, no magical thinking. I'd already had a black plastic scoop. I simply wanted it back.

Still, at a certain point, one must ask: At what point is it better to devote one's mental focus to simply getting over the plastic scoop, and, as they say, "moving on"? Asking yourself this question is like asking what's real. Can you notice the daylight stretching out? How do we accommodate loss, how do we live alongside it?

When Walter Benjamin traveled to Moscow in the winter of 1926, he kept a diary. He was not a habitual diarist. He was funding the trip by writing articles for magazines back in Berlin, and took notes to make his job easier. He traveled to Moscow because he wanted to see for himself what life in a realized communist culture was like. He also traveled to Moscow because he wanted to see a woman he loved, Asja Lacsis.

He and Lacsis had met two years before in Capri. At that time, he was married and she already had two other lovers, but they embarked on an intellectual/erotic romance which included the writing of manifestoes and, presumably, some kind of sexual congress. They met up in Berlin the next year, and then once again, in Riga. Lacsis, a Lithuanian actress, lived in Moscow with her companion, the theater director Bernhard Riga. She was a communist; a colleague of Meyerhold, Brecht. In Berlin, a

few months before, Benjamin wrote: "This street is named Asja Lacsis Street, who laid it through the author," a pretty sexual dedication to *One Way Street*, the book he'd just finished.

When Benjamin arrived in Moscow, Lacsis was hospitalized in a sanitarium with a mysterious illness. Presumably Benjamin knew of her attachment to Reich; in fact, he found Reich "a fabulous guy," and during his trip, the three spent most of their evenings together ... at Asja's bedside playing dominoes and eating halvah; attending concerts and plays; meeting most of Moscow's cultural innovators. Sometimes Benjamin goes out alone with Reich. Sometimes Benjamin goes out with Asja, although he laments that they're "rarely alone."

What's astonishing about Benjamin's *Moscow Diary* is that while his longing for Lacsis pulses through his descriptions of Moscow, it does not overwhelm them. The trip is not about their doomed love; doomed love doesn't even necessarily inform all of his Moscow experience. The diary is a portrait of the most enviable, ultimate form of urbanity where grief exists and can be sampled, like some exquisitely potent local intoxicant. On December 15 he records that Lacsis "never turned up" for their date ... and goes on to describe St. Basil's Cathedral, Moscow arcades, wooden toys, the political histories of some acquaintances, and the "beautiful view of the long string of lights" on Tverskoi Boulevard.

On New Year's Eve, the snow "had the sparkle of stars ... When we arrived in front of her house, I asked her, more out of defiance and more to test her than out of any real feeling, for one last kiss in the old year. She wouldn't give me one. I turned back, it was now almost New Year's, certainly alone but not all that sad. After all, I knew that Asja, too, was alone."



Benjamin's closest friend Gershom Scholem was not buying any of it. "The diary is desperate in its outright urgency ... [it] leaves us without insight into or understanding of this intellectual dimension of the woman he loved ... The times he waits in vain for Asja, her continual rejections, and finally even the erotic cynicism that she displays to no uncertain extent ... makes the absence of any convincing evocation of her intellectual profile doubly enigmatic ... Everybody was bewildered by these two lovers who did nothing but quarrel." And: "the theme of their relationship," Gary Smith writes in the afterword, "drawn as an erotic red thread ... is one of obsession and denial." Harvard University Press reduces this further on their back-jacket copy to "the account of his masochistic love affair with this elusive—and rather unsympathetic—object of desire."

These interpretations of Benjamin's experience—clearly stated by him, in his own words, in his own diary—remind me of psychotherapy.

At the end of his trip, Benjamin lost sight of Lacsis as his sleigh left the hotel, and rode to the train station in tears. Nine years later, Bernhard Reich—together with all Jewish German émigrés—was banished from Moscow, then jailed. Lacsis was interned for more than a decade in Kazakhstan, after the first Stalinist purge.

Who defines happiness? And is it a goal? We have had a good share of cold weather, but as yet not much snow. Is my need to recover the black plastic scoop masochistic, or is it more like—"I know what I want"—a self-affirmation?

This is all for this time. Write when you can. Your letters are welcome.



Giovanni Jance, *The timeless serenity of a statue standing adjacent... Portraits of Wendy Moore.*





Tony Duvert

---

### The Skinner

When a woman gave birth to her thirteenth child, it was customary that a great feast be held to celebrate the happy occasion. For this, another of her children would be sacrificed, serving as the banquet's main course. However, it was necessary that the roast not yet be seven years old; if more than one kid qualified, the plumpest would be chosen; if none did, a neighbor's child filled the role.

Next, one called upon the skinner of children (typically, this was the wolf shepherd from the local woods). He'd immerse the child in a tub of hot water to soften the skin, then rub it down with grit to cleanse it and make it flush, purging unwanted oils. A bath in frigid water, then, would restore its former whiteness.

Once the child was hung from a good-sized branch, the skinner's four helpers came in. The first one moved in front of the child and, before its eyes, pulled an assortment of faces to distract it throughout the skinning. This face-puller had to be deft and well-versed in character types: too ordinary and his antics did nothing; too overblown and they'd prompt the little tyke to start to shake with laughter, and the knife would stray from its course.

The other three helpers were two dogs and a beefy kid. This youngster would tie up the dogs and whip them mercilessly—for their yelping had to cloak the skinned child's cries as soon as, the job nearly over, the face-puller's faces ceased to work. The beaten dogs' howling, alongside the child's once it started, had directly inspired a homegrown polyphony, of a decidedly rustic nature, sung at local weddings.

The skinning done, one gently strangled the child with a lace: death is rapid and the meat more flavorful. As for the skin, after some chemical procedures it was washed, then dried; one employed, for the drying, another child of exactly the same height as the first. One sewed it inside the skin, then, for three days straight, took turns swatting the tissue with wide straps. The skin would thus maintain its bodily form and take on a marvelous translucence.

Unstitched, resewn, hair combed, it held together so well one would have sworn it were an empty child. These fetched great sums from those who had the passion for them: priests, wives, schoolmasters, sailors embarking on long journeys.

—Translated from the French by S. C. Delaney and Agnès Potier



DEEP-SEATED: ORGY OF SCARY  
ORMSTON HOUSE, LIMERICK : 1 APRIL : 6PM

ALAN BUTLER : CONOR MARY FOY : TERESA GILLESPIE : BREDA LYNCH  
IAN MC INERNEY : (CURATED BY JAMES MERRIGAN)

DEEP-SEATED is an experimental art project which takes as a starting point the psychoanalytic promotion of the 'talking cure'. Something that psychoanalyst and essayist Adam Phillips said in conversation resonates throughout the project: "In your mind you're mad... whereas in conversation things can be metabolised and digested through someone else."

DEEP-DEATED is split into 3 public events in 3 cities at 3 art venues: Limerick, ? + ? For each conversation there will be approximately 5-8 participants. James Merrigan will 'loosely' chair each conversation around the themes: *orgy of scary* (Limerick); *orgy of talk* (TBC); *orgy of naughty* (TBC).

For each conversation each participant will briefly describe an artist, an artwork, an everyday object, thing or feeling that is a source of influence, fetishisation or frustration in their art or life. Analysis and critique of described personas, artworks, things and feelings will be drawn out by the group of participants and audience in an open forum. Each participant will be asked to read a text that contextualises each conversation before each event.

Depending on availability, some of the participants will be asked to be present at 2 or 3 of the events to create a sense of continuity and the potential for elaboration on the previously 'unsaid' in the tradition of psychoanalysis.

Although the theories and language of psychoanalysis undergird DEEP-SEATED this project is, above all else, a conversation around art. For Merrigan psychoanalysis is all about activating deep discourse and relationships between people + people, subjects + subjects. Psychoanalysis clings to other subjects like a symptom; it corrupts and challenges interpretation and insight; it seduces with its imagistic and linguistic base; it sees pathology in everything and anything. Art is invariably perverse and base through the psychoanalytic lens—but also revealingly and fundamentally human.

This is a chance to discuss and listen to art being discussed through an alternative discursive lens, one that can be seductive and fun.

Acting as documentation and an elaboration of what was discussed during the public talks, a booklet of confessional texts under the working title *Madder Lake* will be launched at Halloween 2016.



DEEP-SEATED: ORGY OF SCARY  
ORMSTON HOUSE, LIMERICK : 1 APRIL : 6PM

ALAN BUTLER : CONOR MARY FOY : TERESA GILLESPIE : BREDA LYNCH  
IAN MC INERNEY : (CURATED BY JAMES MERRIGAN)

DEEP-SEATED is an experimental art project which takes as a starting point the psychoanalytic promotion of the 'talking cure'. Something that psychoanalyst and essayist Adam Phillips said in conversation resonates throughout the project: "In your mind you're mad... whereas in conversation things can be metabolised and digested through someone else."

DEEP-DEATED is split into 3 public events in 3 cities at 3 art venues: Limerick, ? + ? For each conversation there will be approximately 5-8 participants. James Merrigan will 'loosely' chair each conversation around the themes: *orgy of scary* (Limerick); *orgy of talk* (TBC); *orgy of naughty* (TBC).

For each conversation each participant will briefly describe an artist, an artwork, an everyday object, thing or feeling that is a source of influence, fetishisation or frustration in their art or life. Analysis and critique of described personas, artworks, things and feelings will be drawn out by the group of participants and audience in an open forum. Each participant will be asked to read a text that contextualises each conversation before each event.

Depending on availability, some of the participants will be asked to be present at 2 or 3 of the events to create a sense of continuity and the potential for elaboration on the previously 'unsaid' in the tradition of psychoanalysis.

Although the theories and language of psychoanalysis undergird DEEP-SEATED this project is, above all else, a conversation around art. For Merrigan psychoanalysis is all about activating deep discourse and relationships between people + people, subjects + subjects. Psychoanalysis clings to other subjects like a symptom; it corrupts and challenges interpretation and insight; it seduces with its imagistic and linguistic base; it sees pathology in everything and anything. Art is invariably perverse and base through the psychoanalytic lens—but also revealingly and fundamentally human.

This is a chance to discuss and listen to art being discussed through an alternative discursive lens, one that can be seductive and fun.

Acting as documentation and an elaboration of what was discussed during the public talks, a booklet of confessional texts under the working title *Madder Lake* will be launched at Halloween 2016.

