

BOMB

Leigh Ledare by Chris Kraus



Double Bind (Diptych #6/25), 2010. Courtesy of the artist and Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York.

I first met Leigh Ledare on the 7 AM plane from Burbank to JFK in 2012 or 2013. He was sitting one row behind me, and since we move in similar worlds, either I recognized him, or he recognized me. We spent the rest of the trip passing notes. I didn't know his work then, but it became clear that I should. I was reading one of the season's big books that—as I explained in a note—I was ambivalent about, and Leigh wrote the author's name on one of the white vomit bags that jetBlue still kept on the seats of its planes. I found that pretty hilarious. Any interruption of routine professional life in the arts is a gift.

Later, Leigh sent me two books on his work—*Pretend You're Actually Alive* (2008) and Leigh Ledare, et al. (2013)—and I saw that disruption lies at the heart of his projects. They are wholly disruptive, not in a strictly transgressive sense—although many of his images can be seen that way—but in their willingness to expose the subtextual exchange that fuels all relationships. From Ledare's notorious case study of his immediate family in *Pretend*, to his manipulation of a fraught commission from a collector couple to photograph the wife in the nude in *An Invitation* (2012), Ledare's work pivots on his highly curated assemblage of documents that implicate all involved, not least himself. As his collaborator Nicolás Guagnini wrote, "Neither critique nor utopia can be construed as such in this state of bitter lucidity ... [Ledare's work] confronts us with a montage of disenchantment and aesthetic gratification that stirs deep within us, but with a thick varnish of guilt."

When I got home from that trip, I pinned the vomit bag onto the corkboard behind my desk and there it remains. Leigh and I met and talked again recently, this time face-to-face, at a friend's Mt. Washington house in Los Angeles.

—Chris Kraus

Chris Kraus It seemed like no coincidence when you sent me your DVDs in Lenny Bruce's *The Berkeley Concert* CD box. I see a lot of connections between you. The first is biographical: both your mothers were strippers. Bruce hung out at her club after school and eventually they put him to work emceeing. He told a few jokes as part of his patter, and things went on from there. Most of the early discourse around your work centered on Oedipal issues. You're the guy "who takes porn pics of his mom." But knowing she was already a stripper makes the whole thing less shocking to me, or maybe differently shocking. It's not like she was a legal secretary dressing up in lingerie for her son. Stripping and soft prostitution were her occupations, her means of support, even in late middle age.

Leigh Ledare That's a funny coincidence. I had already digitized the Lenny Bruce CD and that was the only case lying around. I got interested in him when I first moved to New York in 1998 and started making photographs. At the time I was living with Larry Clark and he insisted I read *How to Talk Dirty and Influence People*.

CK Wait, you were living with Larry Clark?

LL Yeah, I worked as his assistant. I was still a fresh little thing. Just then my mother had started "auditioning" different men she'd been meeting through the personal ads and through dancing at a strip club, which happened to be next door to the apartments where she and my grandparents lived.

CK Oh, that's so troubled.

LL She had just turned fifty-one. Because she'd been supported by my grandmother, whose health was ailing, everything felt very precarious for her. My questions always centered on how she was using her sexuality to cover all these basic needs and as calls for intimacy and affirmation, or even financial support. Maybe in a more pronounced way it also manifested a kind of antagonism toward my grandfather, toward his expectations for how she should behave as a daughter and mother.

CK Sexuality was always a part of her work, but in a more artistic, legitimate way. She was a child ballerina and later a model. You used her Seventeen magazine profile on the cover of your exhibition catalogue for Leigh Ledare, et al. at the WIELS Contemporary Art Centre in Brussels. She was a gorgeously perfect American girl projecting a clean sexuality. Whatever drop-off occurred over the years is somewhat withheld from the viewer. Somehow, her career and her life devolved to a point where she had to support herself as a quasi-sex worker.

LL As a fantasy space it also allowed her a context to fictionalize her life. There's a kind of masochistic theater in how she performed herself and the negation of the narrow social expectations placed on her.

CK You mean the sex work itself was a dramatization?

LL My grandfather experienced my mother's activities one way, and my grandmother took them another way, so they had this divisive effect within their relationship and the family as a whole. Keep in mind that she was soliciting me as her son to document these performances. Those were the terms of our relationship.

CK In *Pretend You're Actually Alive*, your grandfather appears as an idiosyncratic figure ... kind of an amateur intellectual.



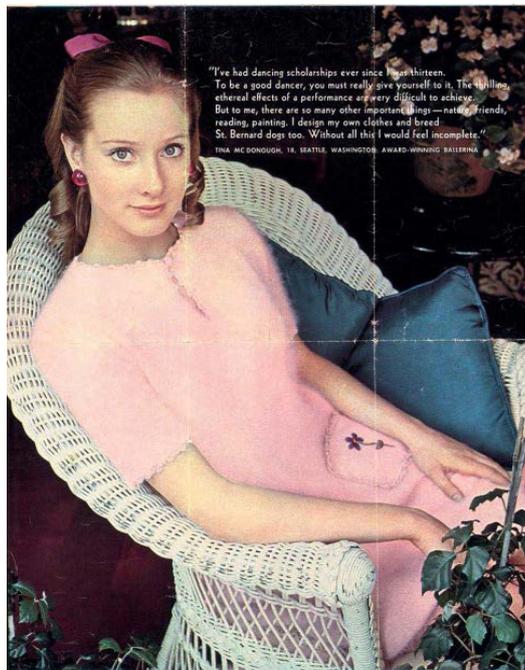
Installation view of *Pretend You're Actually Alive*, 2000–08. Courtesy of the artist, Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York, and The BOX, Los Angeles.

LL He had five masters' degrees. He'd been a dean at Hamline and an assistant dean at the University of Chicago. He retired to home school my brother and me. He was an amazing figure. At ten he had won a national poetry contest; the prize was to live with Robert Frost. He was friends with Erving Goffman and Kurt Lewin. He became a Unitarian minister after studying under Paul Tillich. He'd grown up in Bridgeport, Connecticut, with an alcoholic father and a semi-literate Polish mother, and had watched his parents drink their way through problem after problem.

In his seventies, he told me it'd taken him most of his life to understand that they weren't celebrating misfortune but instead exhibiting an amazing perseverance against circumstance.

CK So your grandfather escaped his family background, but his cultural confidence wasn't passed on to your mother. She fell off the track.

LL She felt that he'd pulled the rug out from under her. When she was thirteen, she moved to New York and was studying as an apprentice with the Joffrey Ballet. Then she danced with the New York City Ballet under Balanchine. At a certain point, she and my grandfather had some blowout, and he refused to help support her in New York any longer. She returned to Seattle temporarily, only to meet my father, who got her pregnant. That was that. She traded her earlier ambitions in. Later she'd transfer those unfulfilled desires onto my brother, who was also a kind of prodigy.



Pretend You're Actually Alive, 2000–08, Mom's Profile in Seventeen Magazine (1966), tear sheet, 13½ × 10¾ inches. Courtesy of the artist, Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York, and Office Baroque, Antwerp.

CK The second connection between your work and Lenny Bruce's is its confrontational aspect. Like him, you question what's really pornographic. The images deemed by our culture as "pornographic" are not as obscene as other realities we'd rather avoid. Your work has been increasingly absorbed into the art world, but at some price. The discourse around it tends to soften the pain and confusion that, to me, sits right on the surface. Your images entail intersubjectivity—what image doesn't? Any situation involving more than one person asserts an agenda.

What's most disturbing about the work with your mother is the disappointment and pain it reveals—the unmet expectations. And she becomes crazy. The photographs in *Pretend You're Actually Alive* of rooms crammed with boxes and clothes, the compulsive hoarding, are even more troubling than the split-beaver shots of a fifty-year-old woman. Your brother was a child genius who skipped high school and ended up a heroin addict. *Pretend* includes documentation of credit card frauds and bankruptcies—the inevitable fallout of addiction and mental illness. The larger conditions behind these psychic dilemmas are rarely mentioned when critics discuss your photos and videos.

LL I think the intricacies of those social and psychological details actually challenge a lot of art-world discourse.



Double Bind, Vitrine (Ephemera), 2014, assorted and stacked ephemera, magazine pages, photographs. Courtesy of the artist and Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York.

CK Your work reveals an American tragedy. But perhaps the joke's on the viewer: the way we talk about things to avoid talking about what we actually see ... "The Emperor's New Clothes."

LL Clearly it's more comfortable to pathologize an individual than a society that one is a part of, and hence complicit in.

CK Yes, it's like Shirley Clarke's film *Portrait of Jason* (1967).

LL Whoa! Another Clark.

CK I wanted to re-watch it last night but couldn't find it online. Instead, I read the criticism. The film is usually described as an "intimate portrait," but critics leave out the fact that it's a work of Artaudian cruelty. Clarke holds the camera on Jason Holliday and allows him to talk for over an hour. He was a black gay man whose real name was Aaron Payne—he wanted to be a club entertainer, but supported himself as a bellhop. There were very few black participants in the ultra-white, urbane cultural world of New York in the 1960s, and those who were there often performed as court jesters. Talking to Clarke, Jason runs the routine of self-presentation he must have performed hundreds of times at parties and openings. Fifteen minutes into the film, you see it's a mask. And as the shot continues, you see it slipping away to the point where you can actually feel Jason's despair and panic.

You do something similar in *Shoulder* (2007). The video starts with your mother casually talking about her current relationship. There's no porn affect here; she could be a writer or artist. And then you offer your shoulder for her to cry on. She does this for almost seven minutes. When you step out of the frame, we're left with an ordinary woman who's more emptied out and alone than before the embrace. She seems almost unbearably desolate.

LL It ends with me actually exiting the room and her being left to contemplate what it means for me to exit. In that sense its proposition encapsulates our entire relationship. It's also about breaking past that guarded, sardonic edge, that shielding humor of hers that accompanies her beginning monologue. The arc of our encounter progresses through different moods, slipping between acting and real emotions and, at points, very clear vulnerabilities.

In the Shirley Clarke film, what's interesting isn't just what's visibly revealed on the surface versus what remains unseen. It's also about a kind of double register that both Holliday and Clarke are playing out. It's a question of credulity, and deception—and of whose. Both their positions are problematic. Like Clarke, who does not show her own face either, my non-disclosure is in pointed contrast to the subject's unmasking. Structurally speaking, I also present this asymmetry, placing it in front of the camera.

CK Yes. Your work strips off the mask and invites us to see what is actually there, providing we're willing to see it.



Pretend You're Actually Alive, 2000–08, Mom Fucking in Mirror, 2002, silver gelatin print, 13 × 9 inches. Courtesy of the artist, Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York, and Office Baroque, Antwerp.

LL What's made visible is always a facade, a kind of screen to project onto. That's to say, any given image is underwritten by an ecology: by structures, interrelations, and circumstances.

CK It's like performance ... Watching plays, I've always felt like I'm viewing the tip of an iceberg. The whole history of the production—the rehearsals, the relations between people, their fights and alliances—is informing the action. I remember you telling David Joselit in an interview that Nan Goldin found *Shoulder* exploitative and inauthentic. To me, it's all too authentic. Nan's comment implies that your work transgresses some ideal equality in human and artistic relationships ... an equality that's maybe false and impossible. I've always disliked the idea that "healthy" relationships are equal. Relationships are never equal, but that doesn't mean they're exploitative. Agree? Disagree?

LL I agree entirely. I see Nan's investment in notions of authenticity as a reaction to accusations of voyeurism. Stressing authenticity, and couching it inside a model of self-portraiture—in her instance, one extending from herself out to the social milieu which she was a part of—assumes that everyone shares the same agenda.

It's important to ask: How might a person in one position repurpose an asymmetry, while someone else might utilize it in another way? How do these dynamics operate indirectly, through triangulation, for instance? And how might the intentions of any given gesture come to mean something different, or be redefined inside a networked set of relations? Agency is a product of how subjects attune themselves to a specific context and how, tactically, they end up negotiating that structure. Systems are confining to lesser and greater degrees.

CK There's a paragraph in Renata Adler's novel *Pitch Dark* where she says that whenever two people talk one is always the doctor, the other the patient. But the "doctor" role isn't necessarily exploitative. I think the ethics revolve more around consciousness, how the imbalance is used—

LL I'd add that posing contradictions through art functions as something like an immune system—it sounds an alarm and acts as a catalyst for consciousness. It seems necessary to self-implicate in order to ask certain questions.

CK These questions run throughout your *Personal Commissions* series (2008) where you temporarily assume your mother's position as model and de facto prostitute. For this project, you answered a series of personal ads placed by women like her who were looking for benefactors. Instead of having sex or photographing these women, you asked them to photograph you in poses and backdrops of their own choosing. The meetings always took place in their homes or apartments. It's all very loaded. Who's exploiting whom? You're assuming the role of the "subject" but the images reveal more about them than about you. As images do. These women expose themselves more nakedly through their aesthetic choices than they would if you'd performed as expected.

LL I also appropriated the women's original personal ads to title each photograph, understanding that the ads serve as a self-description and inscription into an economy of relationships.

CK The woman who described herself as "the sharpest knife in the drawer" wasn't lying. She photographed you fully clothed on a white sheet, against a white wall. No frilly duvets, stuffed bears, or cheesy fetishes. She had your number!



An Invitation: Thursday, July 28, 2011; 2012; photolithograph on archival newsprint, silkscreen, pencil; 91 × 48 inches. Images Courtesy of the artist, Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York, and Pilar Corrias, London.

LL She was a psychology PhD student. Rather than using me to mirror herself, she let the whole construction collapse.

CK (laughter) She's the best critic of your work so far.

LL That work inverted the subject/object relations in *Pretend You're Actually Alive*, so instead of photographing my mother, surrogates for her photographed me. It proposes our positions as equivalent, swapping out a woman for a man as the sexualized subject, but, at the same time, this is revealed as a false equivalence, making you recognize how deeply gendered these asymmetries are.

CK The cruelty of amateur porn lies more in the décor than in sexuality. The environment tells the whole story—the subject's aesthetic taste, or lack of it. I mean, everyone has a body. It's almost always about class.

LL Yeah, and the ads behave almost like epitaphs, expressions of desire that oppose the class reality of their surroundings.

CK But back to the earlier question of American tragedy ... The hoarding pictures of your mother's rooms troubled me more than the porn. I've noticed this kind of hoarding among people who lived through the American Depression, the Jewish holocaust, and other traumas. Something in your mom's life made her a hoarder.

LL Perhaps a past trauma, but also a traumatic identification with something that just doesn't match up. The futility of her attempt to control something that can't be controlled comes to control her. In her case there's a paradox, in that there's something artful in the things she hoards. Almost like a museum curator, she's compelled to weave stories around all these objects in an attempt to create value. And as much as needing to care for the objects themselves, she's bound by needing to prop up those stories.



Installation view of *An Invitation*. Courtesy of the artist and Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York.

CK She sees herself as a curator?

LL Basically, which makes me think about the dialectic between the hoard and the museum. I made another piece that suggests it too. It responded to my grandfather's gifting each member of our family a grave plot one Christmas. This was his subtle way of expressing concern over how my mother and brother were living their lives. He wanted us to acknowledge how fractured the family was, and he couched this inside a reminder of his own mortality, and ours.

CK The gift is never a gift.

LL Exactly! And so I attempted to regift the plot by donating it to the Museum of Modern Art. The idea was for the plot to be transferred as real property to the museum. As an artwork entering the collection, the museum would strip the plot of its intended use, ensuring it would remain unoccupied, and prohibiting me from being buried there. This would transform it into a kind of negative monument, a gap speaking back to the lack that precipitated the gift in the first place.

CK Did they accept?

LL No. (laughter) But maybe it's better they didn't—it allows the idea to retain its tension. The gesture wasn't at all about projecting myself into MoMA's collection. It proposed this ambivalent family structure as an allegory for other structures of validation, the inclusions and exclusions inherent in participating socially in the art world.

CK That was a great gesture, and you paid for it. It took awhile after that for your work to be shown in the mainstream US art world. Too aggressive ...

LL That may have been more due to the mainstream's cautions to appear correct. The project resonated with a work like Lee Lozano's *Dropout Piece*, staging a path away from unwanted family obligations, and against demands that people tried to impose on my own practice. What people tend not to realize is that you can play with biography and the expectations around it.

CK Yeah, I know. It took a long time for people to read my first book, *I Love Dick*, seriously, and I'm glad that they do now, but it's not what I'm doing anymore. People don't respond very well to Dadaist pranks unless they're part of art history.

The couple that commissioned you to take porn photographs of the wife in *An Invitation* (2012) were too smart to fall for the power-flip staged in *Personal Commissions*. They don't reveal their décor or surroundings at all. So instead, you invent a décor by collaging each of the seven nude pictures of her, one taken each day over the period of a week, onto that day's front page of the *New York Times*. Her self-exposure becomes absurd when it's positioned against a larger mediascape.

LL Wow, I love thinking of that as a décor. I saw her as trying to map herself over my mother, making some assumption about my desires. So in turn, I mapped her image against a context that, while seemingly at odds with her erotic life, in reality had everything to do with her and her husband's prominence and proximity to politics. Further contradictions revealed themselves through the roles they desired I play, and how I navigated that, as well as their desires around what role art could play. My condition for using these images was to obfuscate her identity through redacting her face in each photograph. This situates the piece in a space of anxiety around private fantasies being made public, which was uncanny in that a number of the stories in those days' papers echoed this theme: the Rupert Murdoch phone-hacking scandal and the Dominique Strauss-Khan case, for instance.

CK The other great joke driving the work was the way their contract with you became the exhibition's centerpiece.

LL Again, control, but legal control. Each party submits themselves to a social contract that constitutes a taking, and giving over, of rights, and, in this instance particularly, rights around representation. The contract enacts their control, presents it, and presents it alongside their flirtation with losing control.

So in addition to the redacted private photographs that are montaged against the historical events of the newspaper—the Anders Brievik massacre in Norway, for one—a handwritten text at the bottom of each piece serves as a register of my subjectivity within the situation. I saw that as the precondition for them to instrumentalize me. You can read the piece through the perspectives of each of the three obvious participants and their intersubjectivity, but the frameworks of the newspaper, the legal contract, eroticism, art, and photography also all come into play.

CK Part of the pleasure in viewing your work is seeing how these games will play out. They ultimately question the entire setup. Talking with David Joselit about Personal Commissions, you mention your “disbelief in these utopian ideas of how self-expression on the Internet operates as democratizing, despite obviously subjecting us to implicit contracts through which we sell and classify ourselves in spite of our better interests.”

I found that fascinating. We're never less free than when we believe we're exercising our personal freedom. It reminds me of the Tony Duvert essay “Tristan's Folly, or The Undesirable” that Hedi El Kholi published in the current issue of his magazine, *Animal Shelter*. Writing in France in the mid-1970s, Duvert prefigured Michel Houellebecq by a couple of decades. As a gay writer, Duvert was passionately anti-assimilationist. In this essay, he quotes a letter to a gay magazine's advice column from an ugly old guy who can't get laid. Everything, he complains, depends on attractiveness. Duvert goes on to explain how this dynamic between beauty and ugliness mirrors everything within the larger political economy. Duvert sees a sub-economy of fragile desire where conventional ideas of attractiveness pit me against you within the grand economy of desire capital. He rails against this petty commerce of private libido, and concludes: “therefore, sexual liberation inside an unchanged sociopolitical system is an illusion.” This seems even truer to me when prostitution is involved. His ideas resonate with a number of your projects.

LL And, in this sense, the work serves as a kind of negative diagnostic tool, a means of pointing to these mishaps and traps, how certain approaches to sexual liberation might actually be a false bill of goods. At the same time, as a result of certain reactions, the corporeal can fall into a kind of cultural blind spot, and the work also sets itself against a denial of sexual economies. It is not possible to analyze the complexity of all this from some safe vantage point. I've always disagreed with the assumption that being a male precludes me from dealing with tangled questions relating to gender, or from being aware of feminist contestations of normative roles, or from even identifying as a feminist.



Personal Commissions: “Let the Good Times Roll. 1 Blond, 53 yrs old, curvey, buxom, slim, clean, petite. No diseases or drugs. Seeking healthy, honest, reliable, financially secure younger man for discreet sensual fun. Ext#1084,” 2008, C-print, 20 × 14¼ inches. Courtesy of the artist, The BOX, Los Angeles, and Mitchell-Innes and Nash, New York.

CK In a sense, you're also a hoarder. You collect magazines, and have a huge bank of images that you draw from for a lot of these projects, especially in *Double Bind* (2010/2012). You're a collector—a hoarder of your private museum.

LL And yet the process of making that piece, of creating a container for all that material, it was a way to clean. Maybe I'm more like that little catch for the drain. (laughter)

CK There's something else you said to Joselit: "There are ways in which information becomes more valuable than objects exchanged. It's almost pornographic in that, through our information, we're completely depersonalized and circulated as commodities." This really struck me. It's not the bodies themselves that create a pornographic dynamic, but the circulation of images. You set up a game, but the real game always circles back to the viewer.

LL Something similar happens in your novel, *Summer of Hate*. Early on, the character Catt travels to Mexico to escape from a man who she fears may have plans to kill her. Her investment in role-play, while motivated as an escape from the tedium of her world (and many of your readers' worlds), leads her into a stressful scenario.

CK Catt is involved in a BDSM game that, at least in her mind, gets a little too real. She sees it leading to bankruptcy, dissolution, and possible death.

LL Submitting herself to a set of experiences can be seen as Catt's attempt to question inherited values and to undo the scripted certainty of her reality. This man has requested that she sign over her assets. This comes as a shock, but seen against the routines of her life, it starts to look liberating.

CK Yeah ... whenever someone is tempted to act on a death wish, they've obviously hit a wall in their belief system! Everything falls apart. The rationales we invent to explain our actions are revealed as nonsensical. Mind you, the BDSM game at the front of the book is mostly a set-up. The goal was to hook the reader into a much larger game, the American criminal justice system.

LL Completely. And against what comes later, this flirtation with complete submission reads as a privilege. One can afford to play out a promiscuity of positions, and then back out. Catt also seems to be set up as a carryover, a known theme that follows out from your earlier work. You give the reader a space to identify with, only to then *détourn* this.

CK Right. Catt, the authorial character, is not the protagonist. When the story moves to the Southwest and the criminal justice system, the whole game double helixes. You might "win" at the game, but you can never escape it. Which brings me back to *Double Bind* ... (laughter)

LL Okay.

CK In *Double Bind*, you ask your ex-wife, Meghan Ledare-Fedderly, from whom you had been separated for five years, to participate in a project that involved going to a remote cabin and photographing her. She agreed. But then she remarried and you amended the proposal to include her new husband.

LL Actually, I knew when I asked her that she was engaged. From the outset I'd proposed these two trips and the photographs of Meghan that came out of them as a conversation.

CK So Adam Fedderly, her new husband, became one of the players. You'd go away and take photos of Meghan for four days, and then Adam would do the same.

LL The viewers have to hold these two relationships in their heads simultaneously. The totality of the almost 1,000 photos that were taken over the course of the two trips are exhibited, and each image of Meghan has to be understood as the product of one relationship or the other. The camera records and transmits information. It's a surrogate. And as such, it's always one couple articulating something to the absent third participant. I organized these photographs into a series of black-and-white diptychs that correspond to the two couples: Meghan either photographed by me, or by Adam. This makes up the first comparative structure. For the second comparative structure, I then combined these private images against a collection of roughly 6,000 tear sheets from the mass media. Again, one register becomes an allegory for the other.

CK Yes, but why? The motivations behind your earlier works are apparent. Five years after your and Meghan's separation, there must have been some irresolution that drew you into this project.

LL I think it was a writing back into the reception of the work with my mother, into people's desires for self-exhibition, and their tendencies to distance themselves through moral positions. My own position was one of empathy with my mother's needs. Despite my own complex ambivalence around this at the time, by going along with her solicitation I became complicit in her fulfillment of that, but it was also a way for me to reframe the situation. The autobiographical premise within *Double Bind* shifts this. It's a foil against that permissibility of self-exposure. It presents a hook, as you say, but one that's also only a facade. Overall, the piece shifts to another temporal model that's not diachronic or autobiographical at all. The camera instead is cast in the role of feedback, recording the cognitive dimensions of these dynamic interrelations, but also extending those dynamics onto a questioning of the media materials.

CK I see.

LL In this collapsing of what's performed and what's lived, there are also aspects I can't resolve: my own subconscious needs, or questions about why they agreed to participate. This constitutes a space of speculation. However, once I proposed it to them, and even before a single photograph had been taken, the mere idea set into motion a series of responses: one, their getting married two weeks prior to Meghan's going alone with me on the first trip.

CK Her participation may have been partly an exorcism of you—

LL Perhaps, but it may have also been a way for her to negotiate autonomy inside her new relationship. And we could also speculate on what agenda Adam had for agreeing to participate. Each of us, from our subjective space, is using the structure for something, or to problematize something, to channel it and rematerialize it in some way so it can be seen.

CK I was really struck by the long shot of Meghan outdoors in the woods taken by Adam. She's wearing a short white trench coat and thigh-high boots. It looks like one of the early photographs of your mother before her life fell apart. The long, glossy hair. The expression.

In a way, Meghan became implicit or complicit in your earlier body of work, *Pretend*. So perhaps her participation in *Double Bind* enacts her presence and exit simultaneously.

LL When it really comes down to it, attachments are exceptionally complicated. In *Double Bind*, one of the things she presents to me is a refusal to present herself. But still, agreeing to participate, and accepting the risks involved, suggests that something important was there for her. Contrasted against her restraint toward me, certain moments that Adam and Meghan's photographs capture are highly sexualized. They present a permission to look, at the same time that his looking defines my position as a lack of possession or access.

CK It's like what we were talking about earlier, the way a performance is really the tip of an iceberg. The *Double Bind* images allude to things that happened outside the frame, over time. Like the lines of a poem, they're abstracted from a larger history.

LL And there's an overinvestment in credulity concerning what we can see; what we can determine, or write, or define. About how we categorize things. Staging this complexity and that positionality: social relationships, structural relationships, individual psychological relationships, and fantasy relationships—it calls the authority of our frameworks into question.

CK I know but, for me, flux is a given. Meaning is always relational; it changes according to circumstances. What feels remarkable about your work is something beyond the situations. *Double Bind* offers a selection of individual images created over these two trips, each within the bracketed space of four days. But it's the history behind that bracketed time that makes the work possible.

I was just reading Colm Tóibín's wonderful book on Elizabeth Bishop. He describes how poetry brackets language in a white space and time. In this sense, he sees her work as exemplary. So, you're like the Elizabeth Bishop of pornography.

LL That's a welcome comparison!

CK In all these projects you're turning situations inside out, allowing people to see their hidden realities. And you can't do that unless you acknowledge your role as an active party. I don't think anyone can work at that level of intensity without acknowledging him or herself as an active agent. People find that really disturbing.

LL Enacting this, doing the very thing that one's being critical of, is a distinct form of bringing the unseen back into the seen, of insisting that we look at these issues. And that insistence on the subjective and its affects—sexuality, confusion, shame, guilt, attraction, all this and more—problematizes our tendencies to dissimulate. As a performance, the work is a kind of mirror that works on the social milieu, reflects it back to itself.

CK The work develops and changes right under the viewer's gaze. People have a hard time with contradiction and inconsistency, even though it's the norm. In Gary Indiana's novel *Resentment*, the prosecutors in the Menendez trial argue that the two brothers who killed their parents could not have possibly experienced remorse because they went on a shopping spree within days of the murders. As if guilt and consumption were somehow mutually exclusive—

LL That's something my own upbringing taught me, that these contradictions go hand in hand. In part I bring all this up because this cultural moment feels so deeply conservative.

CK I agree, and people respond to it differently. Your work casts doubt on all of the usual questions, and to me, that's the most radical way.

Chris Kraus is the author of four novels, most recently *Summer of Hate*, and two books of art and cultural criticism. *Lost Properties*, her monograph on conceptual art and economic activism, was written for *Semiotext(e)*'s contribution to the 2014 Whitney Biennial. She is currently working on a critical biography of Kathy Acker. She teaches at European Graduate School and lives in Los Angeles.