The film functions as a kind of rejoinder, from two artists at the forefront of the “trans-cinema” field, to a question that gender theorist Judith Butler posed in the preface to her 1990 book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*: “What happens to the subject and to the stability of gender categories when the epistemic regime of presumptive heterosexuality is unmasked as that which produces and reifies these ostensible categories of ontology?” Later in the same volume, Butler suggests: “The task is not whether to repeat, but how to repeat or, indeed, to repeat and, through a radical proliferation of gender, to displace the very gender norms that enable the repetition itself.” She adds: “If identities were no longer fixed as the premise of political syllogism, and politics no longer understood as a set of practices derived from the alleged interests that belong to a set of ready-made subjects, a new configuration of politics would surely emerge from the ruins of the old.” Butler closes her book with a final question: “What other local strategies for engaging the ‘unnatural’ might lead to the denaturalization of gender as such?”

Throughout *She Gone Rogue*, and especially in the instant described above, Drucker and Ernst accomplish this task of denaturalizing gender. Moreover, they arrive at several of the “strategies” sought by Butler: for example, using cinematic editing and scenography to construct convoluted narrative structures that undermine linear, time-based storytelling; setting action in disassembled dream spaces that...
render the characters’ mental states fragmentary and indiscernible; and presenting a gamut of identities and genders in overlapping segments that refer to tropes of sexuality as both hegemonic and counterhegemonic. Hegemony in this film is conveyed voyeuristically, in a pastiche of love and longing—at once genuine and parodied—glimpsed through the glass of a cabin window at twilight, the romantic glow of candlelight accentuating the faces of the couple sitting across from each other, engrossed in conversation. Counterhegemonic constructions are organized in a raucous cacophony of objects and images; claustrophobic assemblages and painted portraits; the physical vibration (at one point) of the set itself; transitions of locale; and exhibitionistic presentations of gender self-interpretation and -determination.

In other contexts preceding She Gone Rogue, Drucker and Ernst have revealed a wicked sense of humor, marshaled to undermine the insidious, specious reasoning that leads to suppressive political and social consequences. A 2010 photograph of Drucker by Manuel Vason evinces the complex wisdom in this humor: seated on a blue chair in a domestic setting, smoking a cigarette, Drucker splays her legs, exposing a vagina dentata—with actual teeth—located on her upper thigh, not far from the expected anatomical location. Gorgeous in her best string of pearls, Drucker gazes candidly into the camera lens and calmly instructs: “Don’t look at me like that.” The video for She Gone Rogue’s Kickstarter campaign is a lampoon of a TV cooking show, in which Ernst plays a mustachioed sous chef, whipping up “transformational reductions” in the form of plastic confetti. Drucker chops up false eyelashes and mixes in sparkly stones as she tells viewers about the film and flirts suggestively: “Make sure your oven is preheated to 400 degrees, and you are ready for action.” After asking for donations to the project, Drucker promises the viewer “a slice,” prompting the deadpan Ernst to brandish a giant, phallic knife. Such images are not camp but outright satire, directed at prescribed phallocentric and feminized categories, duties, and behaviors.

By refusing to be what they are not, Drucker and Ernst overturn the supposed normativity of heterosexuality, configuring their own social politics. A group of photographs showing the evolution of their relationship makes this point vividly. These pictures testify to the process of expansive “multiplication” that both artists have undergone: rejecting regimes of gender, denying dicta of state and organized religion, and repudiating any attempt by institutions or individuals to control their bodies/beings. The photographs reveal how, alone and together, Ernst and Drucker have transitioned through the liminal space between genders, dismantling the political imperatives of gender mandates. Drucker describes these images as “authentic diaristic documents...of our moments together, from two androgynous bodies transitioning to falling in love, companionship, partnership, and play, and then to images of us alone.” Although she insists that they are “straight-up family snapshots,” these exquisite photographs achieve a singular force through framing, lighting, and setting, all of which aid in visually presenting the warp of emotion in this relationship. The portraits depict the moods of the artists—which range from desirous, playful,
and searching to contemplative, skeptical, and lonely. Each photograph, with its Vermeer-esque, intimate lighting, offers a portal into a life that was once private and protected, now made public. Yet Ernst and Drucker also confound this privileged view by being self-consciously performative, staging themselves in the images as the personas they may be, but also as they wish to be seen. Autobiography here is both fact and fiction. These arresting photographic works express “a lie that tells the truth” (to borrow Picasso’s famous observation about the capacity of art). Whatever the future of their relationship, Drucker and Ernst produce art resonant with rare strength, integrity, and subversive power.

*She Gone Rogue* shares formal and conceptual strategies with the films of Todd Haynes (whom Ernst admires) and draws on similarly diverse sources, including “European art-film, punk, grunge, glam, underground [and] mainstream, pop art, and pulp fiction.”8 A subplot of the film is the ge, glam, underground [and] mainstream, pop sources, including “European art-film, punk, grunge, glam, underground [and] mainstream, pop art, and pulp fiction.”8 A subplot of the film is the ge, glam, underground [and] mainstream, pop art, and pulp fiction. “8 A subplot of the film is the ge, glam, underground [and] mainstream, pop sources, including “European art-film, punk, grunge, glam, underground [and] mainstream, pop sources, including “European art-film, punk, grunge, glam, underground [and] mainstream, pop art, and pulp fiction. "A mirror facing a mirror. Follow me into a mirror, Darling!": and ominously: “Here, kitty kitty kitty... Where are you going? You are me, in one direction; and I am you, in another direction. Your body is a dead end. You don’t even know which way you’re traveling.”

Running through the forest, Darling ends up at the home of her parents (played by Drucker’s actual parents). As the three of them share a meal, her father sings a children’s song, low and gentle, yet menacing: “Animal crackers in my soup,/ Lions and tigers loop-de-loop,/ Gosh, oh gee, won’t we have fun / Swallowing animals one by one.”9 The quest continues to Berlin, where the two Darlings move about and spy on each other (a sequence that pays homage to Maya Deren’s 1943 film *Meshes of the Afternoon*). Next, Darling enters a surreal world—from which it is unclear whether she will ever return. She is beckoned by the other Darling, who whispers: “A mirror facing a mirror. Follow me into a mirror, Darling!”

Close scrutiny of a still of this moment in *She Gone Rogue* reveals that Darling is gazing not, in fact, at her double through an open door but at herself, seen in a mirror. Thus Drucker and Ernst establish an opposition with the “other” at the door and at the same time with the “self” in the mirror. In this instant, they seem to fuse the “mirror stage” theorized by Jacques Lacan—when the infant first recognizes itself in a mirror and imagines itself as an autonomous “Ideal-I”—with the “I” that is perceived later in life, imbricated in what Lacan terms “socially elaborated situations.”

Lacan describes this dichotomy as one that “decisively tips the whole of human knowledge into mediatization through the desire of the other, constitutes its objects in an abstract equivalence by the co-operation of others, and turns the I into that apparatus for which every instinctual thrust constitutes a danger.”9

While *She Gone Rogue* might relate to such Lacanian concepts, its content also invokes the conundrum explored by Ovid in the story of the nymph Echo’s love for the vain Narcissus. Smitten with his own reflection in a pool of water, Narcissus rejects Echo, saying: “May I die before what’s mine is yours.” She responds with pathos: “What’s mine is yours.”10 Drucker and Ernst’s film traps and sequesters an elusive moment of psychic conflict, implying that in transitional states, and in negotiations with another, an individual wants, and must try, to “go rogue,” daring to deviate from the chokelights of norms and standards long enough—an instant is enough—to risk discovery of an undifferentiated self/other.

3. Ibid., pp. 141–49 (emphasis in the original).
4. Ibid., p. 149.
5. Ibid.

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I. Stuart Comer

Zackary Drucker

Rhys Ernst

Superior Flawless Sabrina, where—against a spectacular backdrop of masks, windup toys, makeup, and walls covered with paintings featuring the all-seeing eyes of Flawless—everything comes undone. Here, the refrain “She gone rogue” repeats, increasing in volume, until the sudden arrival at the door of the other Darling, and the confrontation described at the start of this essay: the adumbrated, psychological culmination of the film.

"You will find your true, deepest love, a little tiny diminutive man," the Whoracle predicts (describing Ernst). “This is the man of your dreams. You will have a wonderful time together in this beautiful afterlife. You know the ending of this story already... You were possessed before you were a possession.” Drucker’s imaginative overture is overcome. In its nonlinear schema, the film does not begin with this scene, but with an end point, after the lovers have separated, as we suurrise through fragments of a letter: “I just need some space [for] a while. I'm sorry.” The apparently unexpected departure of her lover leads Darling to visit and care for her ailing Aunt Holly (Holly Woodlawn), who is an important emotional touchstone throughout the film. The note from her lover also sends Darling down a “rabbit hole” in the wall of the home owned by the artist Ron Athey (the actual Los Angeles abode of Drucker and Ernst). She peers through the open hole in the wall into a shed and beyond to a forest, and then enters a surreal world—from which it is unclear whether she will ever return. She is beckoned by the other Darling, who whispers: “A mirror facing a mirror. Follow me into a mirror, Darling!”

Running through the forest, Darling ends up at the home of her parents (played by Drucker’s actual parents). As the three of them share a meal, her father sings a children’s song, low and gentle, yet menacing: “Animal crackers in my soup,/ Lions and tigers loop-de-loop,/ Gosh, oh gee, won’t we have fun / Swallowing animals one by one.”9 The quest continues to Berlin, where the two Darlings move about and spy on each other (a sequence that pays homage to Maya Deren’s 1943 film *Meshes of the Afternoon*). Next, Darling arrives at the New York apartment of Mother