

*Folie à Deux* explores the melodramatic partnership of madness & queerness in drag & transgender performance. In their cinema of regression, Felix Bernstein and Gabe Rubin re-vamp the Marquis de Sade as “Madame de Void”—the vanity of the void in waiting. Trapped between de Sade’s *120 Days of Sodom* & de Void’s *101 Dogs of Gomorrah* and unable to endure waiting on the stage long enough to convert waiting into weight—they hang off the ledge of compulsory ridiculousness/hysteria/critique. Theater precedes essence but essence is always in transit.

Genre, genus, and gender transition from the monodrama/duodrama (one/two speakers) of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s 1770 *scène lyrique* “Pygmalion” (recitative dialogue with music as intermittent illustration) to the 19th-century form of melodrama (continuous music and sentiment in synchronous motion), which brought pantomime, dialogue, action-music, and spectacle to fruition. “Pygmalion” oft named the first melodrama marks a point of contention and confusion for the genre. By the 20th-century ridiculous, avant-garde, and kinetic theaters exploded melodrama and soap opera, (which by the 1950s had become Soap Opera). Postwar indeterminate, de-skilled, and auto-deconstructive approaches to Theater slashed spectacle to bits. Our impossible folly is an ode to incongruent forms—monodrama, duodrama, melodrama, soap opera, and poetic anti-theater.

A note on the two plays—

*Madame de Void: A Melodrama & Folie à Deux: A Duodrama*

The melodrama: a narrative telling of a fashion designer’s love for her pup, Blot, as she grooms him for fur. Bernstein plays Madame, Rubin plays Blot.

The duodrama: an audio-play that features the Blot and Madame in a dialectical tangle with harp, percussion, and piano; featuring the voices and instruments of Jim Fletcher, Ken Jacobs, Black-Eyed Susan, Jill Kroesen, Richard Foreman, Amy Sillman, Michael Evans, and David Grubbs.

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Felix Bernstein and Gabe Rubin have presented film, music, and theater at MOCA Los Angeles, Issue Project Room, Anthology Film Archives, and the Whitney Museum of American Art. At the Whitney, they staged and exhibited Bernstein’s libretto *Bieber Bathos Elegy* (2016). They directed and performed in *Victorine* by Mayo Thompson and Art & Language for the 2012 Whitney Biennial. Also at the Whitney, Rubin performed in Jill Kroesen’s *Collecting Injustices* and Bernstein in Andrew Lampert’s *Synonym for Untitled*. Bernstein is the author of the poetry collection, *Burn Book* (Nightboat), and a book of essays, *Notes on Post-Conceptual Poetry* (Insert Blanc Press). His writing has been featured in *Flash Art*, *Spike Arts Quarterly*, *Poetry Magazine*, *Hyperallergic*, and *Texte Zur Kunst*. Rubin’s films have shown at the Brooklyn Film Festival, MIX Queer Experimental Film Festival, and he was recently featured in the transmasculine photo series, *American Boys* by Soraya Zaman. This is their first joint exhibition.