Introduction

What happens when we look out into the world and find our own face staring back? An encounter with a double is an intimation of immortality, of the body’s survival beyond its limits, which reminds the self of its own demise. A double is also the outward projection of internal division, a copy that displaces the original, continuity that tears the fabric of rationality. This class will explore the ambivalence of the double by examining its repeated appearances in literature, photography and film, psychoanalysis and critical theory. We will consider doubling as magic, a practice of making resemblances that live a borrowed life. Freud’s theory of the uncanny explains the double as our confrontation with what we failed to keep hidden from ourselves, the return of the repressed. In photography and film, doubling defines the very nature of the medium, which simultaneously copies the world and causes it to disappear. We will consider the camera itself as a double, a mechanical eye that positions the viewer’s gaze and projects it onto the film. Students will write several analytic essays exploring these views of the double through close readings of texts on the syllabus.

Course Objectives

To formulate the aesthetic, psychological, and political meanings of the trope of the double in literature, photographic art, and critical theory.
To introduce students to interdisciplinary work by demonstrating the rhetorical and thematic continuities between fictional and theoretical texts. To practice closely reading verbal and visual works and drawing theoretical conclusions on the basis of empirical observations.

Assignments and Grading

Over the course of the semester, you will write 3 analytic essays (4-6 pages each). In the first two, you will pose a specific question related to the topic of the double and explore it through a close analysis of one or more texts on the syllabus. In the third, you will choose a representation of doubling in a verbal or visual text not on the syllabus and explore and interpret it, drawing on your own research and on one or more of the theoretical perspectives introduced in class. Be sure to choose topics and texts that truly interest you. Essays will be graded for the form as well as the content of their analysis.

In addition, you will write weekly response papers (1-2 pages), which you will post to NYU Classes under “Forums.” You will need to write one each week, and it’s up to you for which class you will write it. Please post your response at least 24 hours before the class, to give all of us time to read it before we meet. Part of the assignment for each class will be to read the responses posted for that day. Rather than grading each response individually, I will assign one grade for all of them at the end of the semester.

These responses are designed to prepare you for class discussion as well as generate ideas for your essays. While you are welcome to include personal reflections in your responses, you must organize your comments around an analysis of the assigned text, which should include quotes from and references to specific passages. As the author of a response to a particular text, you will be responsible for helping to direct the discussion about it by raising questions, introducing passages, suggesting interpretations.

I will also ask you to do one oral presentation on any of our texts. You will briefly explain its origin and historical context, offer some interpretive thoughts, and pose two or three discussion questions. Be as creative and far-reaching in your interpretations as you like — only make sure you base them on close readings of specific passages. You can do this presentation by yourself or with another classmate.
From time to time, I may assign additional brief, informal pieces of writing to be
done at home in preparation for our discussions. I may not collect them, but you
will often be sharing them in class and sometimes posting them to NYU Classes.
Your work on these will figure into your participation grade.

This course is a seminar, so your regular, active participation in our discussions
is crucial. I will expect you to come to class prepared with questions and
comments on the day’s reading.

Response Papers (1-2 pages) and Presentation: 25%
Essay 1 (4-6 pages): 15%
Essay 2 (4-6 pages): 15%
Essay 3 (4-6 pages): 20%
Participation: 25%

Attendance

If, due to illness, emergency, or religious holiday, you cannot attend class, please
be in touch with me directly as soon as possible so that you can be prepared for
the next class. You will also need to get the notes for the day you missed from
one of your classmates; once you’ve gotten the notes, I would be happy to meet
with you and go over what you missed. Please be aware that more than two
unexcused absences will jeopardize your course grade.

A Note on Plagiarism

As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists
and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship
depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these
values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the
University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of
the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling
coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin
website www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html for a full
description of the academic integrity policy.

Required Texts
You can buy all our books at the NYU Bookstore. All other readings will be posted throughout the semester to the Resources folder of our NYU Classes site. Please print these out and bring a hard copy to class.


**Schedule**

1.  *The I and Its Double*

**Week 1**

Tue, Sep 2
- Introduction
- In-class reading: Jorge Luis Borges, “Borges and I” (1960)
- In-class writing: noticing

Thu, Sep 4
- Discussion: self-knowledge: reflection and misrecognition; self-love as self-destruction

**Week 2**

Tue, Sep 9
- Discussion: what is a double?

Thu, Sep 11
- Reading: Otto Rank, “The Double as Immortal Self” (1941) (from *Beyond Psychology* [1941], pp. 62-101)
- Discussion: the meaning of immortality
Week 3

Tue, Sep 16
- Reading: Edgar Allan Poe, “William Wilson” (1839)
- Discussion: the guilty self

Thu, Sep 18
- Reading: Joseph Conrad, “The Secret Sharer” (1910)
- Discussion: the ideal self; self as other; responsibility to the other

Week 4

Tue, Sep 23
- Reading: E. T. A. Hoffmann, “The Sandman” (1816)
- Discussion: the animate and the inanimate

Thu, Sep 25
- Reading: Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny” (1919)
- Discussion: the forgotten self

Week 5

Tue, Sep 30
- Reading: Jorge Luis Borges, “Death and the Compass” (1942)
- Discussion: pursuer and pursued: the uncanny detective

Thu, Oct 2
- Discussion: the uncanny: the return of the surmounted (animism)
- **Essay 1 due**

II. **Making Doubles: Mimesis as Magic**

Week 6

Tue, Oct 7
- Reading: James George Frazer, “Sympathetic Magic” (from The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion [1900], pp. 12-52)
- Discussion: the practice of magic

Thu, Oct 9
- Reading: James George Frazer, “The Perils of the Soul” (from *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* [1900], pp. 206-220)
- Discussion: the soul as double

**Week 7**

Tue, Oct 14: **Fall Recess**

Thu, Oct 16
- Reading: Otto Rank, “The Double in Anthropology,” “Narcissism and the Double” (from *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study* [1925], pp. 49-86)
- Optional reading: Sigmund Freud, “On Narcissism” (1914)
- Discussion: the practice of immortality; the meaning of narcissism

**Week 8**

Tue, Oct 21
- Reading: Walter Benjamin, “On the Mimetic Faculty” (1933); Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (1993), chs. 1, 2, 4 (pp. 1-33, 44-59)
- Discussion: what is mimesis?

Thu, Oct 23
- Reading: Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (1993), ch. 8 (pp. 100-112)
- Discussion: what is mimesis? (continued)

**Week 9**

Tue, Oct 28
- Reading: Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus* (1818); David Collings, “The Monster and the Maternal Thing: Mary Shelley’s Critique of Ideology” (2000)
- Discussion: the nature of creation, the creation of nature

Thu, Oct 30
- Reading: *Frankenstein* (continued)
- Guest: Prof. Yevgeniya Traps

**Week 10**

Tue, Nov 4
  - Reading: *Frankenstein* (continued); Barbara Johnson, “My Monster / My Self” (1982)
  - Discussion: gendered figures

Tue, Nov 6
  - Reading: *Frankenstein* (continued); a critical essay of your choice
  - Discussion: gendered figures

**Week 11**

Tue, Nov 11
  - Reading: Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891)
  - Discussion: the body in time

Thu, Nov 13
  - Reading: *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (continued)
  - Discussion: the figure of the artist; “all art is quite useless”
  - **Essay 2 due**

**III. The Eye and Its Double**

**Week 12**

Tue, Nov 18
  - Reading: Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1975)
    Discussion: the male gaze

Thu, Nov 20
  - “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (continued)
  - Discussion: the male gaze (continued)

**Week 13**
Tue, Nov 25
- Kaja Silverman, “Suture” (from *The Subject of Semiotics* [1983], pp. 194-236)
- Discussion: the politics of form

Thu, Nov 27: **Thanksgiving**

**Week 14**

Tue, Dec 2
- Reading: Jacques Lacan, “The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience” (1949); Juliet Mitchell, “Narcissism” (from *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* [1974], pp. 30-41)
- Film: *The Student of Prague* (1913), dirs. Stellan Rye and Paul Wegene, writ. Hanns Heinz Ewers
- Discussion: the mirror image

Thu, Dec 4
- Reading: Dorothy L. Sayers, “The Image in the Mirror” (1933)
- Discussion: the mirror image (continued)

**Week 15**

Tue, Dec 9
- Film: *The Dark Mirror* (1946), dir. Robert Siodmak
- Discussion: seeing through the double

Thu, Dec 11
- Film: *Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977), dirs. Laura Mulvey, Peter Wollen
- Discussion: beyond the double?
- **Essay 3 due**