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 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. Freud’s concept of the uncanny explains the double as our confrontation with what we failed to keep hidden from ourselves, the return of the repressed. But doubling is also a form of magic, a practice of making resemblances that live a borrowed life, and a way of knowing the world: an “embodied knowing” by imitating, knowledge as mimicry rather than mastery. In Lacan’s theory of the mirror stage, mimicry is how we form our ego: we imitate our own reflection, longing for an image of bodily coherence that we can never match. 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 be writing 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 of the two classes you 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. As with the responses, I will expect your presentations to discuss specific passages from the text. Be as creative and far-reaching in your interpretations as you like — only make sure you base them on close reading. 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.
Essay 1 (4-6 pages): 15%
Essay 2 (4-6 pages): 15%
Essay 3 (4-6 pages): 15%
Response Papers (1-2 pages) and Presentation: 30%
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.

Academic Integrity

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 hard copies to class.


Schedule

1. *The I and Its Double*
Week 1

Thu, Sep 3
- Introduction
- In-class reading: Jorge Luis Borges, “Borges and I” (1960)
- In-class writing: noticing

Week 2

Tue, Sep 8
- Discussion: self-knowledge: reflection and misrecognition; self-love as self-destruction; differentiating the senses: seeing and hearing; dying from repetition

Thu, Sep 10
- Film: “The Case of Mr. Pelham” (*Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, 4 Dec. 1955 [Season 1, Episode 10]), dir. Alfred Hitchcock
- Discussion: what is a double?

Week 3

Tue, Sep 15
- Reading: Otto Rank, “The Double as Immortal Self” (1941) (from *Beyond Psychology* [1941], pp. 62-101)
- Discussion: the meaning of immortality

Thu, Sep 17
- Reading: Edgar Allan Poe, “William Wilson” (1839)
- Discussion: the guilty self

Week 4

Tue, Sep 22
- Reading: Joseph Conrad, “The Secret Sharer” (1910)
- Discussion: the ideal self; self as other; responsibility to the other

Thu, Sep 24
- Reading: “The Secret Sharer” (continued)
- Discussion: the ideal self (continued)
Week 5

Tue, Sep 29
- Reading: Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny” (1919)
- Discussion: the uncanny: the forgotten self

Thu, Oct 1
- Reading: “The Uncanny” (continued)
- Discussion: the uncanny: the return of animism
- Essay 1 due

Week 6

Tue, Oct 6
- Reading: E. T. A. Hoffmann, “The Sandman” (1816)
- Optional reading: Sarah Kofman, “The Double is/and the Devil: The Uncanniness of The Sandman” (from Freud and Fiction, pp. 119-162)
- Discussion: the double eye; the manufactured double: the deathly artwork; the animate and the inanimate

Thu, Oct 8
- Reading: Jorge Luis Borges, “Death and the Compass” (1942)
- Discussion: pursuer and pursued: the uncanny detective; repetition: finite (rhombus) and infinite (labyrinth); the artwork as murder weapon

II. Making Doubles: Mimesis as Magic

Week 7

Tue, Oct 13: no class: Legislative Day (classes meet on a Monday schedule)
- 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 15
- 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 8

Tue, Oct 20
- Reading: Otto Rank, “The Double in Anthropology” (from The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study [1925], pp. 49-68)
- Discussion: the practice of immortality
Thu, Oct 22
- Reading: Walter Benjamin, “On the Mimetic Faculty” (1933)
- Discussion: what is the mimetic faculty? how have we lost it? where could we find it again? why would we want to?

**Week 9**

Tue, Oct 27
- Reading: 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 29
- Reading: Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (1993), ch. 8 (pp. 100-112)
- Discussion: what is mimesis? (continued)

**Week 10**

Tue, Nov 3
- Reading: Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus* (1818)
- Discussion: the nature of creation, the creation of nature; science and magic

Thu, Nov 5
- Reading: *Frankenstein* (continued)

**Week 11**

Tue, Nov 10
- Reading: *Frankenstein* (continued)
- Discussion: gendered figures, gendered knowledge; the double as monster

Thu, Nov 12
- Reading: *Frankenstein* (continued)
- Discussion: the double as landscape
- Essay 2 due

**Week 12**

Tue, Nov 17
- Reading: Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891)
- Discussion: “all art is quite useless”; the artist as narcissist; two models of the artwork: mirror of the self, window on the other

Thu, Nov 19
- Reading: *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (continued)
- Discussion: the double as artwork; the world as thing (the commodification of the senses); the body in time

**III. The Eye and Its Double**

Week 13

Tue, Nov 24
- Reading: Jacques Lacan, “The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience” (1949)
- Optional reading: Sigmund Freud, “On Narcissism” (1914); Juliet Mitchell, “Narcissism” (from *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* [1974], pp. 30-41); Dorothy L. Sayers, “The Image in the Mirror” (1933)
- Discussion: the mirror image: the self as mimicry of an other

Thu, Nov 26: Thanksgiving

Week 14

Tue, Dec 1
- Discussion: the male gaze

Thu, Dec 3
- Reading: “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (continued)
- Optional film: *Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977), dirs. Laura Mulvey, Peter Wollen
- Discussion: the male gaze (continued); remaking the gaze

Week 15

Tue, Dec 8
- Discussion: suture: the politics of (film) form

Thu, Dec 10
- Reading: “Suture” (continued)
- Discussion: resisting the male gaze

Week 16

Tue, Dec 15
- Film: Vertigo (1958), dir. Alfred Hitchcock
- Optional film: The Dark Mirror (1946), dir. Robert Siodmak
- Discussion: seeing (through) the double; beyond repetition?

Thu, Dec 17
- Essay 3 due (by email as a Word document)