

Doubles and *doppelgangers* : religious meaning for the young and old

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The theme of the double has an illustrious history in various art forms, including literature, painting and cinema. The literary examples are especially revealing since some of the most important authors of the last few centuries have been interested in the double : among the most famous examples, we can cite Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Poe's *William Wilson* (1839), Dostoyevsky's *The Double* (1846), Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), Maupassant's *The Horla* (1887), Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), Nabokov's *Despair* (1936) and some of Borges' and Cortazar's best-known short stories¹. The cinematic examples are just as interesting, notably because the very medium of cinema, being illusionistic in nature, draws on images that are considered as real — just as the prisoners of Plato's allegory of the cave take the shadows on the wall as their own reality², many characters in works of art are subjected to the sudden apparition of beings that confound them.

What must be understood is that the aesthetic potential of the double derives in large part from a long history during which the theme has drawn considerable attention in a wide variety of societies. Milica Zivkovic rightly points out that « with respect to form, the double originates in myth and thus is not a strictly literary motif but a construction of traditional culture³ ». After all, the double carries a heavy symbolic baggage, be it mythological, religious, philosophical or psychological. Doubles are numerous in many cultures, and while they change guises from one culture to the other and may differ in their most minute details, they also share sufficient traits so that we can analyze what brings them in such close proximity.

The theme confronts us to several tensions, the most important of which might be that between the Same and the Other. The double initially seems to point to the same, but upon further review (in both the arts and mythology, religion, etc.), doubles are less pure replicas than sometimes radically inverted personalities; expecting to find the Same, we might be confronted to the Other.

¹ Pierre Jourde and Paolo Toronese offer a detailed overview of literary works in which the theme of the double is central : see *Visages du double. Un thème littéraire*, Paris : Nathan, 1996, p. 187-229.

² I will insist on the link between the *shadow* and the *double* in section 1.

³ Milica Zivkovic, « The Double As the 'Unseen' of Culture : Toward a Definition of Doppelganger », *Linguistics and Literature* 2:7 (2000), p. 123.

Writing about the literary doubles, Zivkovic suggests that « like its mythical predecessor, the double in modern literature desires transformation and difference⁴ ». Some of the most famous literary examples of the theme indicate this. In some cases, like Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll, the conflicting personalities are present in a single individual, making the conflict all the more acute. Thus, what we are often dealing with, here, are not two members of a perfect couple, but a battle (sometimes internal, sometimes external) between opposites.

Inspired by the theme of the double, this paper will consist of two interrelated endeavors. In the first part, I will first recall some of the meanings attributed to the double over the years. I hasten to add that my survey will be far from exhaustive — given the abundance of literature and imagery on this theme, I can only pretend to offer a partial overview. Among the many forms taken by the double — from fetches to evil twins and alter egos — I will especially insist on the *doppelganger*, a form which has emerged in German literature, at the turn of the 19th century.

Turning to contemporary phenomena in the second part of this paper, I will try to show how the theme of the double has heuristic value if we wish to understand some of the activities through which younger generations express themselves. To many observers, these activities are strongly ritualized : in several ways, the young construct their identity by projecting (on a screen, a page, a wall) what they wish to be. These often richly symbolic representations are as many creative self-portraits and, given their importance in the young's journey towards adulthood, can be considered as being part of rites of passage. After having shown how graffiti artists create characters as they embark on a quest for a style and self-knowledge, I will briefly address the importance of the alter ego (or *avatar*) in video games.

1. A short mythological and philosophical survey of doubles

As quick as it may be, no overview on the theme of the double can afford to neglect a few important moments or « stations » in the cultural history of the theme; mythology, philosophy and religion — sometimes separately, sometimes together — have played a decisive role in establishing the cultural significations of the double. These multiple meanings were then studied and adapted in many sectors of the social sciences during the last few centuries, especially psychology.

In Plato's *Symposium*⁵, Aristophanes' eulogy of love (the fourth in a series of seven) consists in the myth of androgyny and makes central use of the double. Aristophanes tries to explain why

⁴ Milica Zivkovic, « The Double As the 'Unseen' of Culture : Toward a Definition of Doppelganger », p. 121.

⁵ From 189c to 193e.

people feel « complete » when they have found the one they love. He suggests that, in ancient times, there were three sexes : the all male, the all female and the « androgynous », half male and half female. Zeus eventually separated the halves so that they could go on alone in their life, desiring their counterpart and trying to recapture their former, complete state. « Love » is the name humans give to this desire for wholeness, which is also a sort of nostalgia since it is tied to a past, long lost state. The theme of androgyny would gain much importance in the study of religion over the years⁶ : among others, Mircea Eliade has argued that it is a religious archetype that can be found in most of the world's religions⁷.

As the introduction has suggested (and to continue with the Platonist connection, albeit obliquely), the double is often thought of as a *shadow*. Studies in psychology have insisted that the double/shadow couple can be found in many cultures; this is tied to the fact that many societies link the *shadow* and the *soul* itself. Otto Rank⁸ has shown that the Tasmanian indigenous use the same word to designate *shadow* and *spirit*; the same can be said about the Algonquins. Gerardus Van der Leeuw⁹ insisted on the Egyptian *Ka*, which is a part of the soul and also a sort of shadow. For Rank, again, the belief in the soul is caused by a division in the self between mortal and immortal parts. After having identified the kinship between the soul and the shadow, these scholars usually extend this kinship between the shadow and the *double*. Van der Leeuw suggests that the double emphasizes conflicting emotions — attraction and repulsion — in the individual. Similarly, in Rank's studies the double also brings opposites together : the soul's immortality and death. This helps to understand why matters of life and death are crucial in the consideration of the double, as we will see in section 2.

In classical mythology, *twins* are one of the most easily recognizable forms taken by the double. In ancient cultures, twins tended to be taboo, and the apparition of a person and its double usually gave the twins mysterious, almost supernatural powers. In « primitive » societies and in many mythological traditions, twins are conceived as the force of civilization itself — the most obvious example is probably the mythological twin founders of Rome, Romulus and Remus, who are supposed to be descendants of Aeneas. It is very rare that both twins survive in these myths : more often than not, one must murder the other to guarantee the living one's survival. Once again, the double has a central role to play in both life, death and a possible rebirth.

⁶ Regarding the prevalence of this theme, see Peter Jones, « Androgyny : The Pagan Sexual Idol », *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 43/3 (September 2000), p. 443-469.

⁷ He explored the theme in many articles, including those published together in the French *Méphistophélès et l'androgynie*, Paris : Gallimard, 1981.

⁸ In Otto Rank, *The Double. A Psychoanalytic Study*, London : Karnac Books, 1989.

⁹ In Gerardus Van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation: A Study in Phenomenology*, New York : Harper and Row, 1963.

Measuring the evolution of the theme of the double over the years is a difficult task, given the sheer variety of its manifestations. Otto Rank does note that the double has gradually been assigned a darker half : « Originally conceived of as a guardian angel, assuring immortal survival to the self, the double eventually appears as precisely the opposite, a reminder of the individual's mortality, indeed, the announcer of death itself¹⁰. » This is a change that, according to Rank, is almost entirely caused by a religious — more precisely : Christian — shift in how people thought about the afterlife : it depends strongly on « the Christian doctrine of immortality as interpreted by the church, which presumed the right to bestow its immortality on the good ones and exclude the bad ones¹¹ ».

Milica Zivkovic takes this intuition further in her aforementioned article, since she contends that the double has often served to provide « a clue to the limits of culture¹² ». She writes that « the naming of the otherness¹³ » is the most telling index of a society's beliefs : the double is conceived as a potent form of otherness, and thus of *evil* — as « a possible disturbance to the familiar and the known¹⁴ ». This partly explains how the fictional occurrences of the double tend to invest the darker realms of art, as opposed to its most wholesome aspects. It also explains why the double has offered a fertile ground for aesthetic ventures and anthropological studies alike : it places the artist and the scholar in the margins of the phenomenon which they study (or take part in); it enables them to think and act « outside the box », as it were, since the double is never devoid of mystery.

2. The genesis and evolution of the *doppelgänger*

Although the double has taken many forms, one of the most definitive double motifs is the *doppelgänger*, which originated in German romantic literature; more specifically, in a 1797 novel by Jean Paul known under its abbreviated title of *Siebenkäs*.

As Andrew J. Webber suggests in his book about double visions in German literature, the *doppelgänger*, in Jean Paul's work, is tied to the time of *rebirth* : in the novel, the *doppelgänger* emerges when the main character finally comes to terms with himself. He says : « my self tore away from its objects... and I saw myself¹⁵ ». In that book and in Jean Paul's work as a whole

¹⁰ Otto Rank, *Beyond Psychology*, Dover : New York, 1966, p. 74.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Milica Zivkovic, « The Double As the 'Unseen' of Culture : Toward a Definition of *Doppelgänger* », p. 124.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Cited by Andrew J. Webber, *The Doppelgänger : Double Visions in German Literature*, Oxford : Clarendon Press, p. 58.

according to Webber, the doppelgänger is an « inwardly divided, self-seeing subject¹⁶ »; he is prone to all sorts of double visions. The theme of rebirth implies that the doppelgänger tends to be experienced at extreme moments of a person's existence — the conjunction of *life* and *death*. Many of the doppelgänger's occurrences in folklore are witnessed by a person at the point of death or near death¹⁷.

The modest aims of this paper prevents me from making elaborate distinctions between the more specific forms taken by doubles in the history of culture, but I would also add that such distinctions can be problematic. In an otherwise very enlightening study, Don L. F. Nilsen¹⁸ suggested the following distinction between the doppelgänger and the double: whereas doppelgängers are two separate characters who are indistinguishable, a double is a single character or person that has two distinct personalities (and that can thus be given two distinct names¹⁹). Such a distinction is interesting, but it does not truly follow Jean Paul's lead: as Webber has shown, Jean Paul's doppelgänger is a single subject with a divided nature.

In any case, the cultural genesis of the doppelgänger helps to understand why doubles have been so prevalent in German art, especially since the Romantic period and the works of E.T.A. Hoffman, an early admirer of Jean Paul who used it memorably in *The Sandman*. Expressionism — particularly expressionist cinema — made wide use of the doppelgänger, notably in films by Wiene (*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* [1919]) Murnau (*The Last Laugh* [1925], *Faust* [1926]) and Lang (*Metropolis* [1927]). Among artistic movements, surrealism has also been fascinated by the doppelgänger — this is not surprising, since the surrealists' artistic practice is especially concerned by the union of opposites²⁰. The most striking surrealist use of the doppelgänger in cinema occurs in Luis Buñuel's very last film, *The Obscure Object of Desire* (1977): Buñuel daringly cast two different actresses to portray the same character, Conchita; the French Carole Bouquet highlighting Conchita's colder and more reserved aspect, and the Spanish Angela Molina emphasizing Conchita's frank sensuality²¹.

¹⁶ Webber, *The Doppelgänger: Double Visions in German Literature*, p. 59.

¹⁷ Not only in folklore: it is well known that a few weeks before his death at age 29, famous poet Percy Shelley claimed to have seen his doppelgänger.

¹⁸ Don L. F. Nilsen, « Doppelgängers and doubles in literature: A study in tragicomic incongruity », *International Journal of Humor Research*, Volume 11, Issue 2 (1998), p. 111-134.

¹⁹ Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll character is the paradigmatic double in Nilsen's study.

²⁰ I have addressed this theme in a few articles, including « La culture des contraires. Bricolage religieux, bricolage surréaliste » in *Cultures & Sociétés*, 6 (April 2008), p. 59-64.

²¹ As John Baxter recalls in *Buñuel* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1998, p. 309), Maria Schneider was initially cast as Conchita but disappointed everyone. Buñuel and his producer Serge Silberman then had the following exchange: « He said to Silberman, 'Serge, do you know a woman who could be all the women in the world?' Silberman looked puzzled. Luis went on: 'This woman is difficult to cast because one day she's like this, and the next like that.' And Serge understood. He said: 'You want to do it with two different actresses?' »

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This survey has thus far highlighted the importance of the double in various traditions, from the arts to the social sciences. In the last part of this paper, I wish to show how the theme can be useful when we consider some activities that enthrall the younger generations. The choice of graffiti and video games stems from the importance the double plays in each. As we will see, the double is not only witnessed, but throughly *embodied*; it is by *being* this double that the graffiti artist and gamer alike reach self-knowledge in quests that, though not identical, are still strongly related.

3. The graffiti artist and the heroic double²²

In various ways, the graffiti phenomenon brings together worlds that are often regarded as distinct : the artistic world of pure aesthetic expression and the religious world of rituals (rites of passage in particular). It has been considered as one of the most noteworthy *conduites à risque* by French sociologist David Le Breton²³, who often wrote about risky behavior and its impact in the lives of the younger generations. Doing graffiti qualifies the artist as a *marginal* : after all, to do a graffiti is to question the order which regulates everyday life. Graffiti and tags²⁴ and are often thought of as *vandalism*; they are sometimes asked for (when a store owner hires an artist to ornate a wall, for example), but, more often than not, they are not well received — anti-graffiti surveillance has become more and more palatable since the 1990s. Unlike paintings exhibited in museums, graffiti art is always in a precarious situation, constantly threatened to be destroyed or erased. Whatever the goals of the artist, graffiti « is subjected to the good will of the weather and of the passersby²⁵ ».

In a stimulating study about the importance of graffiti in Denver, Jeff Ferrell analyzed the Keep Denver Beautiful movement, launched after a 1987 survey in which sixty-five percent of Denver's residents pointed to graffiti as a « major problem » in their respective neighbourhoods²⁶. The very name of that movement tells a lot about public opinion concerning graffiti, which are thought of as being opposed to beauty and cleanliness. But as Ferrell has

²² The masculine is predominantly used in the last two sections of this paper for the sole purpose of decluttering the text.

²³ Among other books : *Passions du risque*, Paris : Métailié, 1991; *Signes d'identité. Tatouages, piercings et autres marques corporelles*, Paris : Métailié, 2002; *Conduites à risque. Des jeux de mort au jeu de vivre*, Paris : PUF (Quadrige), 2004.

²⁴ In this section, I will sometimes use *tags* instead of *graffiti* (and « taggers » instead of « graffiti artists ») : tags can be quite elaborate illustrations, but are mainly *signatures*. Most of those who practice the activity do both.

²⁵ Martine Lani-Bayle, *Du tag au graff'art*, Marseille : Hommes & Perspectives, 1993, p. 29.

²⁶ Jeff Ferrell, *Crimes of Style. Urban Graffiti and the Politics of Criminality*, New York and London : Garland Publishing, Inc., 1993, p. 106-117.

pointed out in his book, the movement had an unwanted effect on the practice of graffiti : it actually brought graffiti to national attention and gave artists more visibility than they ever had. The antagonistic nature of the movement prompted them to do even more work — this should not be surprising because, as Ferrell writes, « tagging develops out of anger and resentment²⁷ ».

At the same time, the practice of graffiti writing is not completely marginal. Those who practice it seek to find people sharing roughly the same goals and values. The mere fact of doing graffiti places the individual in a certain bracket; he expresses his difference from those who don't do graffiti, but at the same time, he expresses the need for some kind of filiation. This is probably the most important of the many tensions found in this phenomenon : that between *singularization* and *affiliation*.

The graffiti artist does not fashion his identity while being isolated : the consideration of others is paramount. The young aims to give himself an identity that corresponds to his own goals, but he also wants this identity to please and impress others. It becomes necessary to insist on what separates him from the others — a quest that is also the search of a *style*. Graffiti artists try successive signatures to master an expressive graphic language. But this style is somewhat malleable : it is not necessarily found once and for all on a given day. The quest brings on trials and errors : a proliferation of masks that are useful for a while, and abandoned when they are no longer adequate. Identity becomes the subject of an aesthetic game that corresponds to « the youth's desire to show his multiple evolutions²⁸ ». Tags and graffiti are fluid and adaptable; the roles the graffiti artist decides to play helps him to negotiate the transition towards adulthood. Artists create for themselves characters of impressive powers : characters that are « heroic, elusive and ubiquitous²⁹ », present even as they are absent, thanks to the signs they left on walls (or on the surfaces of moving vehicles such as subways or trains, who will then make their creations travel from city to city).

Concerning roleplay, an example merits closer scrutiny even though it might initially seem to be merely amusing. In their book on graffiti, Marie-Line Félonneau and Stéphanie Busquets point out that many of the earlier taggers made reference to very well known American superheroes in their illustrations. These are characters with whom graffiti artists can readily identify : superheroes lead a double life — the ordinary life of everyday chores and jobs, but a secret, nocturnal life as well, with its share of surprises and risks : an *extraordinary* life. During the night, superheroes transgress a slew of moral rules that they would never dare to challenge during the day.

²⁷ Ferrell, *Crimes of Style*, p. 148.

²⁸ Marie-Line Félonneau and Stéphanie Busquets, *Tags et grafs*, Paris : L'Harmattan, 2001, p. 141.

²⁹ Félonneau and Busquets, *Tags et grafs*, p. 137.

The graffiti artist almost never signs with his real name : he must *choose* a name to be recognized by the others and to recognize himself. More than a mere name, the tag is a *double* of its author, a mysterious pseudonym; « the phantasmal image that the tagger assigns to himself and lets others see³⁰ », the center of « a game of mirrors whose keys are held by the youth³¹ ». The choice of a name and image should not be underestimated, because « in discourse, there is an equivalence between the tagger and his tag, merging the individual and his mark³² ». The identification thus goes a lot further than the relationship between an author and his character : whereas the author retains a persona somewhat distinct from that of his creations, the flesh-and-blood graffiti artist disappears; he is completely subsumed by the character that he has *become*, and not only created. The name he has selected precedes the tagger everywhere he goes : people see his marks and not himself.

Acquiring a new identity is a process that entails at least a modicum of originality (without which the graffiti artist could not be distinguished from his peers), but it also filters various influences — be they slogans, commercial blurbs, other tags and artworks. The influence does not take the simplistic form of copy-and-paste : it is a sort of *creative imitation*. Jeff Ferrell contends that « writers piece³³ not to establish permanent works of art, but to participate in an ongoing process of shared creativity and pleasure of subcultured give and take³⁴ ». The taggers thus recognize the precarity of their situation and their works' vulnerability; but this is not problematic *per se* as it is all part « of the inherently risky process of doing graffiti³⁵ ». Excessive influence does exert critical reactions from the inside. In Denver, taggers who copied preexisting tags were accused of « biting », insofar as they had « inappropriately taken and used distinctive images or stylistic touches, either from other writers in the scene or from sources outside the scene³⁶ ».

Another way to assess the influence of what has been done before on graffiti artists is to consider how they reinterpret symbols and use them in their work. The case of Keith Haring (1958-1990) is of interest in this regard : Haring's imagery perpetually refers to existing, widely known symbols, in American and abroad. Most of the symbols he uses are of two worlds : Haring is not a religious painter in the usual sense, but his work often features religious (mainly christian) symbols; among other themes, he has painted many crucifixions. The other symbolic universe he often exploits is that of American popular culture, from Disney to comic books. He isn't content

³⁰ Gilles Boudinet, *Pratiques tag*, Paris : L'Harmattan, 2002, p. 28.

³¹ Le Breton, *Signes d'identité*, p. 63.

³² Félonneau and Busquets, *Tags et grafs*, p. 136.

³³ In graffiti jargon, « to piece » is to create a graffiti painting of at least three colors, and not just a tag.

³⁴ Ferrell, *Crimes of Style*, p. 89.

³⁵ Ferrell, *Crimes of Style*, p. 90.

³⁶ Ferrell, *Crimes of Style*, p. 85.

to simply take the symbols as they are : he turns them on their head, featuring, for example, sexualized versions of Mickey Mouse or Pinocchio. Even the quickest look at the creations of younger, lesser known graffiti artists underline their own joy in perusing the wealth of symbols pertaining to various cultures, as they take specific images and transform them according to their own perspective. This brings their activity in the vicinity of syncretism and what Levi-Strauss has described as *bricolage*³⁷ : an activity articulated by the permutation of existing elements. It is at once an *analysis* (the person who practices bricolage turns back to existing elements) and a *synthesis* (the person does not take the elements as they are, but submits them to permutations than can somehow alter their meaning). Just as the double is not an *ex nihilo* creation since it is tied to other things or persons, works born from bricolage inevitably draw on existing objects or ideas.

4. The gamer and the violent double

When we consider video games, the theme of the double is at hand since the gamer has a stand-in on the screen : a figure identified as the *avatar* in video game studies (ludology). In some ways, the weight of this relationship is one of the main factors in the discussion about video game *violence*, as we shall see. My aim, here, is not to take sides and produce an apology in favor of violent games or a moral condemnation; the debate on violence in video games is worthy of attention in this paper because it could be said that the controversy is tied to an identification deemed *too* pronounced between the gamer and his avatar or alter ego.

This debate is at least 34 years old and its beginnings can be traced back to a game released in 1976, *Death Race*. The game was based on a dystopian science-fiction film, *Death Race 2000* (1975), in which the participants of a deadly extreme sport earned points after killing pedestrians. Using the very rules of the film, the game provoked its share of heated reactions and received wide coverage in the media. The debate on video game violence continued for years after that, reaching a peak in the early 1990s and the early 2000s. During the last ten years, the debate has been spurred by several tragedies that caused heavy prejudice to video games and the video game industry as a whole, singled out as the main culprit³⁸.

The case of the Columbine High School massacre is especially famous. On April 20, 1999, Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris, aged 17 and 18 respectively, shot 13 people, including 12 students,

³⁷ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *La pensée sauvage* (Paris : Plon, 1962), especially p. 21-33.

³⁸ It could be noted that, much like anti-graffiti movement's ironically positive effect on graffiti, rules and debates about video games and video game violence has made those games even more popular. A case in point : during the week following a senate hearing about video game violence, Sega sold about 50,000 copies of their game *Night Trap* (1993), which was singled out as one of the main offenders. About the hearings and their context, see Steven L. Kent, *The Ultimate History of Video Games*, New York: Three Rivers Press, 2001, p. 466-478.

before taking their own lives. When the media learned about their passion for first-person shooting games³⁹ *Doom* (1993) and *Duke Nukem 3D* (1996), the debate on video game violence was again put to the forefront. A year before the massacre, Harris had written the following in his diary : « It'll be like the LA riots, the Oklahoma bombing, WWII, Vietnam, *Duke [Nukem]* and *Doom* all mixed together... I want to leave a lasting impression on the world. » In a video filmed in March 1999, Harris again insisted on the parallels between *Doom* and the dark project he was planning with his friend. Gus Van Sant wrote and directed a film about the tragedy, *Elephant* (2003). The film includes a powerful, phantasmatic scene in which the two young men shoot people; these scenes use the same first-person point of view of shooting games like *Doom*, making their dream massacre look like a video game.

After shooting games influenced by *Doom*, the genre most discussed in the discourse about video game violence has been so-called « sandbox-style » action games — thus named because they enable the gamer to move freely (and commit as many deeds as he wishes) in a truly realist environment; the best-known example of this type of games is the *Grand Theft Auto* series, which spanned over 10 games from 1997 to 2009. In June 2003, in Alabama, Devin Moore (then aged 18) was arrested because he was driving a stolen car and had just killed three policemen (two deeds that could be easily accomplished in *Grand Theft Auto*). After the police caught up with him, he confessed his passion for the game and famously said : « Life is like a video game. Everybody has to die sometime. » Merely a few weeks after that, on June 25, William and Joshua Buckner, aged 16 and 14, fired shots on cars in Tennessee; one person was killed, and another badly hurt. The boys told the policemen who arrested them that, because they were bored, they decided to simulate their favorite game, *Grand Theft Auto*.

At first, we could contend that such an identification between the gamer and his double could only be possible in an era during which the technology is advanced enough to produce eminently realistic environments; but older cases, such as that of *Death Race* (whose graphics, sounds and gameplay pale in comparison to what is produced nowadays), imply that the tensions surrounding the identification of the gamer and his double is an integral part of the dynamics of the video game medium itself.

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The double has several ways to emerge in its various cultural manifestations. It sometimes makes strange, seemingly unexplainable apparitions that trouble those who see it : in such a context, the

³⁹ These games do not show the avatar in its entirety : much like point-of-view shots in cinema, they only show a few clues about the person (in the cases of *Doom* and *Duke Nukem 3D*, the character's arms, hands and weapon).

double's apparitions are not provoked, but undergone, almost by force. This seems to be the main *modus operandi* of the doubles in most of the literary works in which they appear : fantastic literature abounds in stories and novels whose events escape the characters' grasp, at least initially. Even if they do progressively make sense of what they lived through, some mystery remains and haunts them. Still, the relationship between the double and those who encounter it can be less passive : after all, the double can be created or provoked by one of the individuals who then have to deal with it. Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll is an obvious example, since Jekyll's experiments are what ultimately make Hyde come about; one might think, also, of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, in which Frankenstein's monstrous creature embodies most of what his creator seems to lack⁴⁰.

In the two activities that I have considered in the last two sections, the latter case applies. The doubles are purposely created by graffiti artists, and serve them to refine their own identity; as for what is at play in video games, the double might not be created by the gamer (it is already present in the game), but the latter willingly maintains and reworks his double because it is at once his alter ego in the world of the game and a figure in which he can project what he wishes to be. The brief study of those two phenomena has hopefully shown that the double can be a useful tool in humanities; that its aesthetic potential is largely tied to a strong mythological, philosophical and religious baggage.

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⁴⁰ It is somewhat ironic — but not that surprising, given the importance of the doppelgänger in Shelley's novel — that in popular discourse, Frankenstein's monster tends to be called just like his creator : « Frankenstein ».

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