Hitchcock Expressionist Style and The Double in *Vertigo*

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Although Hitchcock is known for his very English film style, it is not a coincidence that he was influenced by the German expressionist style when he produced his films. Alfred Hitchcock is a filmmaker inspired by the German romanticism doppelganger theme. He absorbs visual rhetoric and narrative structure from German expressionists to address the existence of the double through visual aspects. The use of double in a story often implies the existence of a hidden or mysterious world that lies beyond the realm of the ordinary. This hidden world is frequently associated with unspoken sexual desires or motivations in a way that is reminiscent of Freudian psychology. One of his films that uses the double theme is *Vertigo* (1958). He uses mirror shots, color design, and a one-sided profile frame to express the double. Thus, this paper explores Hitchcock's expressionist visual style, such as the mirror shot and color design, as a technique for transmitting the doubling effect in the cinematic medium.

Keywords: kHitchcock, Vertigo, German Expressionist, Double.

In the nineteenth century, fantasy as a genre in literature was established, and the double became one of the rising themes of the fantasy genre. The double theme in the story occurs in Romantic literature works. The psychoanalyst, who is attracted to the phenomena, turns Romantic fantasy into science, and the film makes the fantasy a reality. According to Friedrich Kittler, psychoanalysis has clinically confirmed all the shadows and mirrors of the human subject, but cinema has technically implemented them (Kittler, 2003). In cinema, the double, doppelgänger, or parallelism is used as an element that fascinates directors and writers. Alfred Hitchcock is a filmmaker inspired by the German romanticism doppelganger theme. He absorbs visual rhetoric and narrative structure from German expressionists to address the existence of the double through visual aspects. One of his films that uses the double theme is *Vertigo* (1958). He uses mirror shots, color design, and a one-sided profile frame to express the double. Thus, this paper explores Hitchcock's expressionist visual style, such as the mirror shot and color design, as a technique for transmitting the doubling effect in the cinematic medium.

Although Hitchcock is known for his very English film style, it is not a coincidence that he was influenced by the German expressionist style when he produced his films. In his interview with Bob Thomas in 1973, he talks about his first experience directing a film, *The Pleasure Garden (1925),* in Munich. For him, the German cinema at that time was impassioned even though Germany suffered defeat after the First World War. He confessed that he learned from the Germans to create the visuals in his cinema. "I've always believed that you can tell as much visually as you can with words.

That is what I learned from the Germans" (Hitchcock & Sidney Gottlieb, 2003, p. 158). Richard Allen notes Hitchcock worked at UFA in Berlin in 1924 as a set designer and sometimes helped Graham Cutts for *The Blackguard*. He observed how F.W. Murnau directed his *The Last Laugh* (1924). Hitchcock says his visual model will forever reverse the German filmmakers of 1924 and 1925 (Allen, 2007, p.165). His impression of German cinema in the 20s is not an overstatement. The German golden cinema started at the end of the First World War. German cinema can be seen as an extension of German Romanticism, with modern techniques merely giving a visible form to romantic fantasies. German expressionism is motivated by aesthetic and moral psychology, and the double theme or parallelism is part of expressionism's moral psychology. The use of double in a story often implies the existence of a hidden or mysterious world that lies beyond the realm of the ordinary. This hidden world is frequently associated with unspoken sexual desires or motivations in a way that is reminiscent of Freudian psychology.

In *Romanticism, Psychoanalysis, Film: A Story of Doubles*, Kittler traces the double (doppelgänger) presence in Romantic works, then transfers it to psychoanalysis and the film. He starts the essay with the story of one of the Romantic poets, Adalbert von Chamisso, who saw his double in his study room when he was under the alcohol in 1828. Both duels are about who most aspired to be beautiful, good, and true (Kittler, 2003, p. 70). The double is also depicted in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. The psychoanalyst sees the double in literature as "the phantom of our ego." In 1914, the psychoanalyst transferred poetry into science. He is Otto Rank, who dismantles Chamisso's encounter with his double. Rank connects the double in literature as a psychopathological dimension by portraying a paranoid condition centered on the persecution of the ego by its double and comparing these fictitious creations to the authors' symptoms. Rank sees the double link to the shadows, the mirror reflection, the idea of the guardian angel, and the sign of death. Sigmund Freud cites Rank's double concept and develops it in his essay The *Uncanny* (1919). In response to Rank's double concept, Freud writes, "The double was originally an insurance against the destruction of ego and 'energetic denial of the power of death." The double as self-immortal has its equals in the language of dreams, in the role of representing castration by a doubling of the genital symbol. For Freud, when this stage has been surmounted, the double will reverse from "assurance of immortality" to "the uncanny harbinger of death." The uncanny (*unheimlich*) is something familiar that is long known to be terrifying because it has undergone repression and emerged from it. Freud writes: "This uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind, and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression" (Freud, 1999, p. 241). As Romantic doppelgänger ended around 1900, the cinema and the screenplay writers filled the position. Cinema not only makes the hallucination of the double real by using several techniques, such as mirrors and multiple exposures, but cinema also literally creates the actor's doppelganger in the early cinema, filmmakers. Cinematic doppelgangers depict the consequences of individuals who cross into the line of technical media. These mechanized replicas enter databases that archive bodies. (Kittler, 2003, p.79).

The Double

Vertigo's basic idea is adapted from a short novel *D'entre les morts* (From Among the Dead) by Pierre Boileau and Thomas Narcejac, published in French in 1954. Even though Hitchcock said that he adapted the idea and forgot all about the book, the plot of the film adaptation is still close to the novel. *Vertigo* is a thriller or suspense film, but we also say *Vertigo* is about tragic love stories, duplicity, swindling, dizziness, and ghosts. The film as a medium, the narrative, and the repetition

create the *mise en abyme, making* real vertigo, which is the real ghost. In the narrative, the ghost apparition is embedded in the figure of the double, mostly in Madeline. Madeline/Judy becomes an objective and subjective double in the film. As an objective double, Judy appears identically with Madeline. Madeline also resembles Elster's wife. As a subjective double, when Judy acts as Madeline, she has at least four identities in one body: herself, Madeleine, Carlotta, and Elster's wife.

The film consists of a series of repetitions, visiting the same place, experiencing the same condition, and returning to the same person. The repetition makes the double in the film become an uncanny experience. Freud observes that repeating certain conditions with certain circumstances creates an uncanny feeling because it recalls the sense of helplessness experienced in some dream state. However, ghosts are not only in the narrative but also in the film. Film is a medium of ghost where the celluloid encapsulates the actors' bodies. The screen image becomes the virtual doppelgänger of the actor and the actress, and the film preserves the actor's body into celluloid. For Kittler, the camera works as a mirror to store the self-image. On celluloid, the gesture becomes absurd. The larynx does not produce the sound we heard, the voice has no timbre, and the face looks like a "vaguely criminal face" (Kittler, 1999). The film robs the soul.

In this film, Elster is a ghost, an alter ego of Hitchcock, and the master of the story. He creates the script, hires Judy, the ordinary salesgirl as an actress to be the ideal woman, Madeline, and dresses her into the desired figure with blonde hair, fancy clothes, and so on. He also resurrects Carlotta in Madeline's body. As Madeline, Judy plays her role to seduce Scottie. In this notion, we might see Scottie is equal to the audience. Scottie becomes a part of his story. Soon, the audience will learn from Judy's confession letter to Scottie, which reveals her secret but is never sent to Scottie. Then, Scottie copies Elster by reduplicating Madeline when he meets Judy. Identically the same, he turns Judy into Madeline. His obsession and desire to resurrect the "dead" are also associated with his obsession with necrophilia. The double here becomes the denial of death, the desire for immortality, and the desire for other existence that are raised by men's obsession related to the power to control women. Mulvey, who refers to Lacan's concept, explains that desire results from the symbolic order. This order enables us to go beyond desire's instinctual and imaginary aspects. Nevertheless, its reference point always goes back to the traumatic moment of its beginning, the castration complex. In this sense, the double, Madeline, Judy, and Carlotta, is a man's fetish object whose purpose is to ease the castration and the men's fear of death (Kriss Ravetto, 2019, pp. 227-46).

Hitchcock Expressionism

Richard Allen argues that Hitchcock's expressionism style has a connection to the Freudian wordplay that contains sexual payoff. Hitchcock embraces the use of color in his films to express the characters and the narration as a part of his expressionism. Hitchcock also uses the profile and mirror shots to convey the doubling effect. In *Vertigo*, the mirror shot functions to show the hidden aspect. Meanwhile, profile shots, mainly one-sided profiles, also often capture Madeline. This shot is the iconography of Janus-face. Murnau's film "The Janus Faced" features a marble bust with two faces, one godlike and the other diabolical. Hitchcock was inspired by this film and applied the same principle in Vertigo. In the movie, Madeline's one-sided profile works like the bust in "The Janus Faced." She shows her godlike side to Scottie for the first time, and the other side reveals her dark secret. The object in the film is also part of Hitchcock's visual design, which includes color design, object, mirror shot, and profile shot. Vertigo creates a subjective double where the character has multiple identities in one body.

Let us turn to Scottie's dream. Scottie's dream scene is filled with different colored lights, such as green and red. Each color is identified by each character's identity, which also tangles through these colors, and with this visual style, Hitchcock provides sexual ambiguity. The dream scene begins after Scottie visits Madeline's graveyard. In a high-angle position, Scottie sleeps restlessly, the blue light flickering as a sign that he is in a dream state. Then, when he opens his eyes, a picture of a bouquet brought by Madeline appears. The bouquet turns into animation, and a flickering green light illuminates the flowers. In his dream, he returns to the inquest when Elster talks, and the light color changes to yellow. A dark female figure slowly becomes clear among them: she is Carlotta. She is looking at Scottie the same way Elster is looking at Scottie; the body is leaning toward Elster, and Elster holds Carlotta's shoulder. Then, the scene cuts to Carlotta's profile, and the camera zooms in on her red necklace, and the light changes to red, like the color of her pendant. The scene turns to Scottie flashing with a red light, and he walks out of nowhere, then suddenly into a cemetery. He is confused, and then he sees an open grave with "Carlotta Valdes" on the headstone and falls into it. He falls on the roof of San Bautista, and green and red lights flicker alternately, and the last background turns white.

Source: Screenshot from *Vertigo* (1958)

We can identify that the green (from her first appearance wearing a green gown and her car) belongs to Madeline, and the red (her red pendant) belongs to Carlotta. Scottie shares the same dream and fears with Madeline about Carlotta, an old Spanish building, the open grave, and the near-death time. The colors of Madeline and Carlotta also flash Scottie, so not only do Madeline and Carlotta's identities tangle but Scottie's (masculine) identity is attached to them (feminine identity). For Tania Modleski, Scottie's dream indicates Scottie's failure to cure Madeline, and it strikes his masculine identity. His failure immerses him in a "feminine" world of disintegration, madness, and death. "Scottie *lives out* Madeline's hallucination, that very hallucination of which he had tried so desperately to cure her, and he *dies Madeline's death*" (Modleski, 2016, p. 97).

In the film's second half, the color green will dominate after Madeline's death. The green symbolizes dreams, fantasies, and memories. The mirror image is also frequently used to evoke the past. When Scottie sees Judy for the first time, Judy wears a green dress, and Judy's room is always illuminated by the green light from the Empire Hotel's neon box. The mirror shot is also used after Judy introduces herself as a woman from Salina, Kansas. She stands in front of the mirror and speaks to Scottie through the mirror. The reflection in the mirror only catches Judy. Even though she has returned to her real identity, Madeline's shadow still surrounds her. Judy and Scottie are also framed in the mirror when the two visit the clothing store. Scottie wants to buy some suits for Judy. Ignoring Judy's choices, Scottie chooses the grey suit like Madeline's. Realizing the situation, Judy goes and stands in front of the mirror. Scottie follows her, and the two argue. When the salesperson says the dress is ready, both turn around, and the double from the mirror image is formed. The image implies Scottie trying to bring his past by reanimating Madeline into Judy, and Judy could not help but accept herself to be Madeline once again.

After Judy-Scottie returns from their first date, Scottie asks to meet again the following day, but Judy resists because she does not want to compare with Madeline. However, the words of refusal are inversely proportional to her actions while rejecting Scottie. She walks towards the window where the room is darker, and slowly, Judy's figure darkens, then she sits sideways on the chair. The camera captures her in a medium shot and zooming focus on her one-sided profile splashed with a green neon light as the background. Unlike the first time, when she was Madeline, her one-sided profile was shining. This time, she showed her darker side. She wants Scottie to know the truth without her telling the truth. In the scene where Judy wears Carlotta's necklace, Scottie discovers that Judy and Madeline are the same person. She purposely enlists Scottie's help with a necklace while discussing what to eat at Ernie's. She says implicitly, "How do you work this thing? Can't you see?" and through the mirror reflection, Scotties sees Carlotta's necklace. Then, the scene jumps to Carlotta's picture in the Museum. The image dissolves and goes back to Scottie's close-up. We know now he knows. Scottie's behavior suddenly changes. He says, "First, muss me a little," she replies, "Oh Scottie, I do have you now, don't I?". Scottie's knowledge of Judy's identity and dark secrets is not something that Scottie seeks for himself but something that Judy deliberately shows without having to say it.

Conclusion

The double theme or parallelism occurs as a part of the fantasy genre in romantic literature. The psychoanalyst attracted to the phenomena turns the double into science, and the film makes it a reality. Hitchcock is a filmmaker inspired by the German romanticism doppelganger theme. He absorbs visual rhetoric and narrative structure from German expressionists to address the existence of the double through visual aspects. He uses mirror shots, color design, and a one-sided profile frame to express the double.

The double in *Vertigo* deals with desire, threat, and uncanny experience. Madeline/Judy is double. She becomes an objective and a subjective double in the film. The objective double is when the character has identical twins, while the subjective double is when the character has two or more identities. The double that is raised by men's obsession is related to the power to control women and the denial of death. In this sense, the double, Madeline, Judy, and Carlotta, is a man's fetish object whose purpose is to ease the castration and the men's fear of death.

Not only that, as the subjective double, Judy has two more identities that tangle in her body, but Scottie's masculine identity is also attached to her feminine identity. Scottie's dream scene indicates Scottie's failure to cure Madeline, and it strikes his masculine identity. His failure immerses him in a "feminine" world of disintegration, madness, and death.

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