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Figure 1. Egon Schiele, *The Self-Seers I (Double Self-Portrait)*, 1910. (KP174)

## Doubling as a Device in Vienna 1900

Beginning in 1895, the *Doppelgänger* began to take on new forms in Viennese cultural production, and it emerged with increasing frequency during the following fifteen years. During the latter half of this period, Egon Schiele translated this literary theme into visual production. This new type of doubling is an important element in Schiele's work, and his employment of doubling in a self-portrait marks its earliest appearance in 20<sup>th</sup> century visual art. This study outlines how the Double was presented in Vienna 1900 to different publics in various forms of art.<sup>1</sup>

This rich motif had developed over the course of the Romantic era. Translating literally to "double goer" or "double walker," *Doppelgänger* retains the same spelling whether it is singular or plural, thereby expressing in concrete form its linguistic ambiguity. Coined by Jean Paul (1763-1825) in his novel *Siebenkäs* (1796-1797), its role was that of an alter-ego in its inception. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the literary *Doppelgänger* also came to include psychological phenomena such as a split personality or the effect of a hallucinatory state, and these aspects captured the imagination of Otto Rank and Sigmund Freud. However, Viennese playwrights and poets such as Arthur Schnitzler (1862-1931), Hugo von Hofmannsthal (1874-1929), and Leopold von Andrian-Werburg (1875-1951) also used doubling in a broader sense, through duplication of character or a character's qualities, and it often served as a means of pointing to the structure of the narrative.<sup>2</sup> They did not necessarily use the term *Doppelgänger*, however, and although they are often used interchangeably in English, the words *Doppel* and *Doppelgänger* do not necessarily mean the same thing. This distinction is necessary to more fully understand the shared features and characteristics between Schiele's *Doppelsebstbildnisse* and *Doppelgänger*.

The relationship between the double self-portraits and their literary counterpart is widely accepted, beginning with Alessandra Comini's 1974 monograph<sup>3</sup> and continuing through the present. However, the congruencies and the discordant elements between these textual and visual manifestations have not yet been investigated. They are most often viewed within a psychoanalytical framework, as their production occurred in the same time and place as Sigmund Freud's founding of psychoanalysis. In the following, I will demonstrate how the Viennese literary impulse toward duplication relates to Schiele's use of doubling in his self-portraiture, and I will also establish the limited visual tradition of doubling in portraiture that was already in place at the time.

This study begins heuristically; it includes two rather lengthy sections on the Double's appearance in early psychoanalysis and in Viennese Modernist literature. These findings are important insofar as they distinguish the

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- 1 For an introduction to the metamorphosis of the *Doppelgänger* from Romantic literature through Expressionist film, see Andrew J. Webber, *The Doppelgänger: Double Visions in German Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996). Webber includes Viennese Modernist literature in his study, and he credits the popularization of hypnosis for the revival of the Double in literature at this moment. As a result, he analyzes the resurgence of doubling in Viennese Modernist literature within the context of Freud's writings.
- 2 Richie Robertson has already identified the compositional reflexivity in Hugo von Hofmannsthal's *Reitergeschichte*. I will argue that other Viennese authors use a similar, albeit more subtle approach. See R. Robertson, "The Dual Structure of Hofmannsthal's *Reitergeschichte*," *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 14/4 (October, 1978), 316-31.
- 3 Alessandra Comini, *Egon Schiele's Portraits*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), p. 80. Comini also distinguished that the *The Prophet* of 1911 is double self-portraiture. (p. 80) Schiele never titled his double self-portraits as such, and the designation did not become common practice until the publication of Jane Kallir's catalogue raisonné in 1990. See Jane Kallir, *Egon Schiele: The Complete Works*. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1990).

execution and coloration of the rear figure, and the lively hand tugging on the fore figure's ear must be the hand of the hind figure. Because of the hands, the viewer must conclude that the hind figure is not a self-portrait in the background, in spite of the visual cues to the contrary. The irony of this work is that it is, of course, a painting itself. A visual joke such as this would not have been lost on Schiele, and he includes similar trickery in his *Self-Seers I* through his inclusion of the space before the canvas in both of these paintings. However, while Aachen might have been playfully alluding to the constructed quality of portraits, Schiele seems to have been aiming for a more complex theme, as evidenced by his titling and somber colors. Similar to Aachen, Schiele distinguishes between the two figures,

These two paintings do not have the same effect as Schiele's double self-portraits, and it seems clear that their purposes are quite different. Each of the forerunners is a singular portrait in an otherwise cohesive body of work. However, Schiele's compositions are far from anomalous as he returned to the theme of double self-portraiture regularly, and he counted them among his most important works.<sup>40</sup> His regular production on this theme is clearly in sync with contemporary Viennese interests, as evidenced by the range and quantity of Doubles produced in other cultural arenas such as literature, theater, film and photography. Given that the theme was so prominent, it is not surprising that double self-portraiture was established in this context. In addition to the popularity of the *Doppelgänger* theme, the similarities between the two forerunners and Schiele's double self-portraits provide compelling evidence that Schiele encountered and modified an existing double self-portrait, taking up the theme and reworking it throughout his career.

### Conclusion

The psychological aspect of Schiele's double self-portraits cannot be ignored; however, these works offer far more to be considered. Because the titles of his double self-portraits fall into two categories, death and sight, the work of Rank and Freud comes quickly to mind and leads to the conclusion that these works are only about Egon Schiele's own psychological condition. This, I would argue, greatly limits our understanding of the works, because regardless of whether they are, or are not about Schiele's psyche, they are neither singular as a theme nor are they isolated in their theoretical framework. Indeed, as strategic compositions that are designed to challenge the limitations of their media, they have much to tell us about Schiele's approach and concerns in allegory and portraiture.

Schiele loved opposites, as he declared through the titling of his 1912 watercolor, *I Love Antitheses* (KD1187). The psychoanalytical and the literary double served the role of resolving antithetical qualities, just as Schiele's double self-portraiture unifies opposites within the picture itself and between the picture and the space before it. Similarly, the Viennese Modern literary *Doppelgänger's* qualities often mirrored the structure of the plot, just as the content of Schiele's photograph references the qualities of the medium and his painting challenges the limitations of the canvas. Finally, the allegorical nature of the doubles hints at universal themes, yet the insistence upon painting his visage imbues them with a more personal aspect. This reflects the use of doubling in Viennese drama and fiction around 1900 as it became more loosely tied to the protagonist's character and more indicative of metaphysical binaries.

<sup>40</sup> Schiele wrote a letter to Arthur Roessler in December of 1910 inquiring who had bought *Self-Seers*, because he believed that only certain collectors should have access to it. Egon Schiele Autograph Database, [http://www.egonschiele.at/browserecord\\_en.php?action=browse&recid=184357&-skip=0&-max=10](http://www.egonschiele.at/browserecord_en.php?action=browse&recid=184357&-skip=0&-max=10), accessed 7/20/2013.

Double self-portraiture was almost unprecedented in 1910, and Schiele's innovative self-duplication introduced a theme that would become significant in 20th-century art. Citing Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Hermann Bahr, Reinhart Steiner argues that doubling in Vienna 1900 is an "*Epochensignatur*," a symbol of an alienated sense of self-observation, and he designates its importance as a revolutionary development within the genre of self-portraiture. However, it is unlikely that Schiele uncovered this theme in isolation. Schiele was also fascinated by the complicated relationship between oppositional qualities, a traditional characteristic of the literary *Doppelgänger*, which remained of interest to Viennese authors at the time. I have demonstrated that Viennese authors used doubling as a means of resolving opposing concepts and of highlighting the structure of the literary composition. The few visual examples of multiples in portraiture within the Habsburg Empire did not address these concerns. However, a comparison between these examples and Schiele's double self-portraiture yields compelling evidence that Schiele drew from these visual sources, modifying them to refer to the space before the picture plane. This suggests that his double self-portraiture reflects his concern with antithesis and the qualities of the artistic medium, indicating that these are strategic compositions in harmony with the Viennese exploration of dualities through the *Doppelgänger* theme.

### **Deutsche Zusammenfassung**

Egon Schiele malte sein erstes Doppelselbstporträt im Jahre 1910, kehrte später regelmäßig zu diesem Sujet zurück und entwickelte es im Laufe seiner Karriere weiter. Diese Werke sind auf eindringliche Weise beides: sowohl Selbstporträts als auch symbolistische Bilder. Und die Opazität des allegorischen Œuvres von Schiele macht diese Bilder zu Mysterien bezüglich Ursprung und Bedeutung. Viele Interpretationen dieser Bildthemen betrachten Schieles Darstellung eines zweiten „Selbst“ als psychologische oder spirituelle Manifestationen. Eine solche Interpretationsweise unterschätzt jedoch die Bedeutung des Doppels in Schieles Œuvre als kreative Entscheidung und übersieht zudem die Verwendung dieses Ausdrucksmittels in anderen Bereichen der Wiener Kulturproduktion.

Der vorliegende Artikel zeigt, dass Schieles Doppelselbstbildnisse in ein größeres kulturelles Phänomen eingebettet waren, in dem das Verdoppelungsmotiv als Strategie verwendet wurde um gegensätzliche Qualitäten aufzuzeigen und die Aufmerksamkeit auf die Struktur des betreffenden Werkes zu lenken. Sigmund Freud und sein Kollege Otto Rank beschrieben die psychoanalytischen Implikationen der Verdoppelung in ihren jeweiligen Essays "Das Unheimliche" und "Der Doppelgänger" und verorteten die dualistische Natur der Verdoppelung letztlich im Reich der Subjektivität. In der Wiener Literatur hingegen verwendeten Arthur Schnitzler, Hugo von Hofmannsthal und Leopold Andrian die Verdoppelung einerseits als Mittel um Gegensätze in den Eigenschaften des Protagonisten zu bezeichnen, andererseits reflektierte der Doppelgänger stets auch die Struktur der Geschichte selbst. In gleicher Weise demonstriert bei Schieles gemalten und fotografischen Doppelselbstporträts die Miteinbeziehung des realen Raumes vor der Bildebene sowohl eine Beschäftigung mit Gegenüberstellungen als auch mit den Qualitäten des künstlerischen Mediums selbst. Dies bezeugt, dass es sich hier – ganz im Einklang mit der Wiener Beschäftigung mit dem Doppelgänger-Thema – um strategische Kompositionen handelt.

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