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The Advancing Avatar. Projections of the Self in Literature, Film and Videogames

In this essay, I will examine the avatar's presence in literature and cinema over the past two decades, examining how avatars are understood in media closely related to, yet importantly different from, videogames. My focus will be primarily on the contemporary science fiction genre. I will look toward foundational cyberpunk, such as Neil Stephenson's influential *Snow Crash* (1992), as well as digital cinema ranging from the Wachowski Brothers' *The Matrix* (1999) to James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009), arguing that such texts forward an understanding of the avatar that is inherently individual and necessarily personal. Then, I will turn to both classic and contemporary videogames, tracing the emergence of the avatar over the past decade, arguing that the avatar requires a database of modifiable elements from which the player can create an individualized self-projection. Specifically, my analysis will focus upon *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo, 1998), *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* (Rockstar North, 2004) and *Skate 2* (EA Blackbox, 2009), as I trace a timeline of an increasingly complex modification potential between players and the interactive agents they control. Finally, I will discuss the avatar and its appearance within literature, film and videogames as a multimedia culture network, one that currently informs the texts we read, the movies we watch, and the games we play.