
Title: The Holographic Self: Self-Representation and Logics of Digitality in Three Contemporary Narratives of Cosmopolitanism

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Abstract: This dissertation is an examination of the holographic self in three contemporary novels of cosmopolitanism. The holographic self is a concept I present which expands upon the cyborg to suggest a self that operates in relation to a hologram of digital self-representation, or operates in the logic of such. In this project, I deploy two models of the holographic self: one in which the hologram functions as an interface for fantasy to move toward an actualization of an ego-ideal; and another in which the amalgamation of holograms or instantiations of self form a rhizomatic or constellational arrangement of subjectivity in which movement itself is prioritized. In each of the focal novels—Gautam Malkani’s Londonstani; Hari Kunzru’s Transmission; Teju Cole’s Open City—the protagonist functions as a holographic self in a manner that expresses a desire for a post-positionality subjectivity, where traditional notions of bodily or singular identity itself are exceeded. In chapter one I argue that in Londonstani, protagonist Jas seeks to produce a culturally hybrid self in which the virtual is used as a tool of self-actualization, as it ultimately prioritizes the bodily self reconfigured by its holographic dimensions. I compare the novel to Wilde’s Portrait of Dorian Gray to suggest that text has no similarly phenomenal ground for an outsourced self. In chapter two, I assert that in Transmission, Arjun also operates in relation to a hologram of self, but the text’s desire for Arjun to exceed identity itself expresses yearning for a non-bodily notion of selfhood that seeks to escape the policing of identity. I compare the novel to Bront’s Jane Eyre to argue that Jane’s trajectory functions to manifest a set of inescapable material socio-ideological constraints that demand a particular conclusion. In chapter three, I examine William Gibson’s Pattern Recognition and its explosion of taxonomy and signification in relation to digitality, and then argue that Open City manifests such ideas through a holographic self that desires escape from not just identity but consequence. I conclude by suggesting a potential harmony between the concept of the holographic self, digitality, and narratives of cosmopolitanism.
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