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Panel Proposal: “Shifty Subjectivities: Race, Gender, and Contingent Imagery in Popular Culture”

This panel organizes three individual but somewhat interlocking papers that wrestle with the ways in which intersectional identities (constructed across and within multiple genres of popular culture) are informed by/through ideology, culture, and power. Taking cues from theories of subjectivity, visual narrativity, and cultural studies, each paper explores a particular popular genre via the visual, literary, and lyrical texts of these genres (photography, film, literature and rap music) in order to engage and ultimately to embrace the uncertainty that various artisans of 21st Century popular culture are so frenetically encountering in their work.

Contingent Imagery in Black Cover Art

Through various applications of visual narrativity, this paper analyzes the Dave LaChapelle photograph of Kanye West and Lady Gaga, the Vanity Fair cover featuring LeBron James and Giselle Bündchen, The New Yorker cover art of the Obamas and the album cover of rap artist, Nikki Minaj. Each of these images conveys a wide range of technical, historical, and aesthetic manipulations that destabilize the identities and physical shapes of the image’s subjects. What emerges from these visual readings is the hidden palimpsest haunting each of the images and the blurring of the racial and gender identities of each image’s subjects.