

Thompson, Krista, Northwestern University, United States

Video-Light: Performing Visibility in Jamaica's Dancehalls

In the twenty-first century cultural forms circulate within and beyond the Caribbean through visual means of technology. This paper interrogates not only how these visual cultures have changed the modes through which cultural expressions circulate but have informed new types of cultural production. The paper examines a contemporary cultural practice referred to as “video-light” within Jamaica’s dancehall culture, wherein youth perform before the bright light of a video camera. I use the fairly recent centrality of young people’s performances for the video camera in dancehall and emphasis on being in the light of visual technology as an example of how the ascendancy of visual media has resulted in the creation of distinctly visual forms of cultural practice. More specifically, the circulation of visual media has influenced how youth learn to see and assign value to being seen and has informed performances of visibility, practices that are about staging being seen and, oft-times, about being seen in the process of being seen or photographed.