



The Semblance of Identity: Aesthetic Mediation in Asian American Literature

Christopher Lee

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The history of Asian American literature reveals the ongoing attempt to work through the fraught relationship between identity politics and literary representation. This relationship is especially evident in literary works which claim that their content represents the socio-historical world. *The Semblance of Identity* argues that the reframing of the field as a critical, rather than identity-based, project nonetheless continues to rely on the logics of identity.

Drawing on the writings of philosopher and literary critic Georg Lukacs, Christopher Lee identifies a persistent composite figure that he calls the "idealized critical subject," which provides coherence to oppositional knowledge projects and political practices. He reframes identity as an aesthetic figure that tries to articulate the subjective conditions for knowledge. Harnessing Theodor Adorno's notion of aesthetic semblance, Lee offers an alternative account of identity as a figure akin to modern artwork. Like art, Lee argues, identity provides access to imagined worlds that in turn wage a critique of ongoing histories and realities of racialization.

This book assembles a transnational archive of literary texts by Eileen Chang, Frank Chin, Maxine Hong Kingston, Chang-rae Lee, Michael Ondaatje, and Jose Garcia Villa, revealing the intersections of subjectivity and representation, and drawing our attention to their limits.

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