ABSTRACT

Because novels are verbal constructions, intuitively it seems their ability to criticize verbal language would be limited. This thesis seeks to explain how four contemporary American novelists use embedded photography to levy political criticism that would not be possible without the inclusion of images. The inclusion of photography in the novel is notable because it expands the capabilities of the novel in general, but by incorporating visual media in the novel these novels are specifically able to criticize the arbitrary verbal labels that reinforce capitalism and xenophobia.

The overall finding of this thesis is that the compounding of inherently ambiguous text with ambiguous images forces readers into a mode of active interpretation that allows them to interrogate concepts they generally taken for granted.

The four novels examined are Ben Lerner’s 10:04, Davis Schneiderman’s [SIC], Benjamin Hollander’s In the House Un-American, and Jesse Ball’s Silence Once Begun. Notably, this thesis marks some of the first scholarly research on Schneiderman, Hollander, and Ball’s texts.