Personalization of Aggression in 9/11 Literature

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Abstract

Denne avhandlingen analyserer litteratur tilknyttet terrorangrepene i USA 11. september 2001, med den hensikt om å vise hvordan ulike forfattere og sjangre eksemplifiserer, tar for seg og eventuelt faller inn under en personliggjøring av aggresjon i ettertid av angrepene.

Oppgaven knytter seg til tre verk: David Foster Wallace sitt essay *The View from Mrs. Thompson's* (2001), Art Spiegelman sin samling av tegneseriestriper i *In The Shadow of No Towers* (2004) og Michael Moore sin dokumentar *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004). I tillegg vil disse verkene bli sett i lys av Tony Judt sitt essay *Bush's Useful Idiots* i London Review of Books fra 2006, som argumenterer for at Amerikansk liberalisme ble erstattet av en mer personlig og mindre effektiv identitets politikk. Judt forklarer hvordan tidligere solide liberale holdninger i USA ble satt til side etter angrepene 11. september og essayet vil fungere som et rammeverk gjennom oppgaven. Litteratur knyttet til større, omveltende forandringer innen politikk, historie, kultur og samfunn krever historiske og kulturelle forklaringer, noe denne avhandlingen vil presentere ved behov.

Avhandlingen er delt opp i to kapitler som er systematisert kronologisk. Dette er gjort for å skape en tidslinje som er enkel å forstå, samtidig som det viser hvordan verden rundt oss endret seg med tiden som gikk etter 11. september. Det første kapittelet tar for seg noen av de første litterære reaksjonene på terrorangrepet, hvor forfatterne selv hadde en nær tilknytting eller opplevelse av den dagen og tiden etterpå. Kapittel to omhandler konsekvensene som oppstod i årene etter angrepet, hvor krigføring og maktmisbruk står i fokus. Til slutt vil konklusjonen i tillegg til en oppsummering av oppgaven ta for seg dagens og de senere års politiske situasjon i sammenheng av forfatternes tanker.

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Introduction

> This great Nation will endure as it has endured, will revive and will prosper. So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance.
>
> Former President Franklin D. Roosevelt on fear, during his inauguration, 1933 (Lengel, 2017).

Historian Tony Judt wrote in his article from 2006 *Bush's Useful Idiots*, how liberal approaches were abandoned following the September 11 attacks. He argues that a loss of liberal self-confidence intensified under Bush, with reasons such as conformism during time of war. Judt notes:

> Liberal intellectuals used to be distinguished precisely by their efforts to think for themselves, rather than in the service of others. Intellectuals should not be smugly theorising endless war, much less confidently promoting and excusing it. They should be engaged in disturbing the peace – their own above all (Judt, 2006).

One factor that Judt arguably points at, which this thesis will explore, is that a personalization of aggression arose post 9/11; a personalization of hatred and fear this thesis argues takes place at a different level than converted acts of military aggression or defense. This type of aggression only disables the aggressor and distracts them from the larger political and ongoing social transformations in society. The thesis will look at works and authors that explores 9/11 and the attacks' aftermath, considering a personalization of aggression, which they either illustrate or

are an indirect part of. The three selected works, David Foster Wallace's *The View from Mrs. Thompson's* (2001), Art Spiegelman's *In The Shadow of No Towers* (2004) and Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004*)* differentiate both in their genres and contents. However, they all explore the human reactions to tragedy, in addition to examining the politics and cultural changes that followed. Not only do they depict the feelings at the time; they also portray the power of literature across genres in terms of their intentions and messages, which we will see depends on the authors' context, background and the time periods in which they were written. *Bush's Useful Idiots* will work as a framework to provide perspectives to the thoughts and literary responses of the authors. Judt's article will also contribute to understand the American culture and politics at a time consisting of the emotional scars of the attacks and the politics in the aftermath, involving changes in everyday lives and war fares.

Context

The 9/11 Commission's final report (Kean et al., 2004) writes that on the morning of September 11, 2001, the deadliest terrorist attack in human history occurred in the United States[1]. The attacks were coordinated by Al-Qaeda, a multi-national terrorist organization. Their leader Osama bin Laden had signed a fatwā in 1998, encouraging the killings of American citizens (Bergen, 2002). With motives of attacking the United States later revealed to mainly be the cause of American politics in the Middle East, the terrorist group carried out the plot in which four passenger airplanes were hijacked and deliberately flown into targets across the American north-east. Two of those planes, American Airlines Flight 11 and United Airlines Flight 175, crashed into each of the towers of the World Trade Center in Lower Manhattan, New York; . Flight 175 hit the South Tower just 17 minutes after Flight 11, as the world were watching the already burning North Tower. As a result of the impacts and the fires that developed in the

[1] From here on abbreviated as US.

buildings, both towers collapsed. The third plane, American Flight 77 flew into the Pentagon, the headquarters of the United States Department of Defense in Washington DC. United Airlines Flight 93, the final plane to be hijacked that day, crashed into a field in Pennsylvania while also headed for the capitol with the United States Capitol Building believed to be the hijacker's target. The attacks resulted in nearly 3000 people losing their lives, with thousands more injured and billions of dollars in damage (Kean et al., 2004)

In his book *9/11 and the War on Terror*, scholar David Holloway at Edinburgh University sums up important consequences of the attacks. In October 2001, less than a month after 9/11, the United States waged war against Afghanistan, with the intension of capturing Bin Laden and destroy his group's network, as well as removing the Taliban-regime, an Islamic movement with connections to Al-Qaida. The war in Afghanistan was part of a 'War on Terror', a term used to describe actions taken to neutralize threats against the United States and their allies. The War in Iraq two years later was also a part of this campaign. A coalition led by the United States and Great Britain, invaded Iraq in March 2003 (Holloway, 2008). The background for the invasion was to remove President Saddam Hussein, with claims of him having weapons of mass destruction. Though President Bush, as we shall see later in the thesis had a growing support in the US, the war was controversial, with the claims of Iraq having weapons of mass destruction later proved to be incorrect. (Borger, 2004). Meanwhile in the US, 9/11 caused changes to everyday life within aviation and boarder control. In addition, the USA Patriot Act paved way for the growth of United States Intelligence, with an increase in government surveillance (Holloway, 2008).

The dominant social and political issues during the period that the selected works were written were connected to the attacks and its aftermath. In 2002, the *9/11 Commission* was created in order to give a detailed account of 9/11 and the readiness and response to the attacks

(Kean et al., 2004). The result of the commission was an official report, of which this thesis will later refer to.

The aftermath did not only change the political landscape, but also the culture. As we shall see in the first chapter, there was an increase in expressions of patriotism, as well as church attendance and a general search for comfort. The attack influenced American entertainment as well. In *September 11 in Popular Culture: A Guide,* Sara Quay and Amy Damico state that the immediate aftermath consisted completely of reports from the attacks. They note that entertainment changed quickly due to 9/11, where TV and movie theatres either cancelled or delayed projects that was deemed too violent or harsh in the aftermath and instead focused on a positive image of the US. Flags and the American colors were often to be seen, also in other forms of popular entertainment such as sports. In stadiums, the national anthem, the 'Star-Spangled Banner', played an important role in the feeling of togetherness and in music too, there was a focus on patriotism (Quay & Damico, 2010).

In terms of literature, Quay and Damico note that several novels used 9/11 as a plot. Much has been written about 9/11 literature, such as *Literature after 9/11*, edited by Ann Keniston and Jeanne Quinn, who explore the effect the attacks had on literature and how authors depicted the 9/11 attacks. In their introduction, they state that 9/11 literature is recognized by its focus on the World Trade Center, rather than the attack on the Pentagon and the crash in Shanksville. Keniston and Quinn argue that the Twin Towers were an important symbol, and that 9/11 literature is 'on the space between the real and the imagined' (Quay & Damico, 2010, p. 2). The literature that developed after the attacks prompts us to see the real and the imagined together, such as the World Trade Center being a symbol versus the towers' destruction.

Other scholars such as Martin Randall suggests that 9/11 literature had issues with representations of the attacks and the aftermath, as they are often distinguished by being respectful and less politicalized. However, he concludes that as the years go by, writers are

moving away from such discourses and rather towards critical views (Randall, 2011). This thesis will argue that the selected works and their particular approaches saw the problems early on.

Fear

Much of the literature post 9/11 referred to fear, whether it was the initial reactions to the attacks or the fearful atmosphere of the aftermath. Fear is defined by Cambridge Dictionary as 'an unpleasant emotion or thought that you have when you are frightened or worried by something dangerous, painful, or bad that is happening or might happen' ("Fear," n.d.). In a 2002 study done by the Institute of Social Research at the University of Michigan, it was found that several Americans felt insecure post 9/11, with half of the participants saying they had lost their safety. These numbers did not change notably with military actions later taking place in Afghanistan (Traugott et al., 2002). Dr. Bradley Schmidt, a research professor who has published works on anxiety, post-traumatic stress syndrome and human behavior includes the research in the article *Anxiety After 9/11* that he wrote together with Jeffrey Winters for Psychology Today. In the article, Dr. Schmidt and Winters state that Americans were troubled with overemphasized fear and anxiety disorders. They argue that not only did the terrorist destroy infrastructure, but they also damaged the psyche of the American people. They assert that though the general fear will tone down over time, some psychological effect from 9/11 will last beyond the immediate shock of a traumatic event such as 9/11. Dr. Schmidt and Winters highlight examples from everyday life to give us an idea of the fear that developed after the attacks. One such example is a retelling of a story, where a passenger on a plane became a victim of the general fear:

> A man on a flight to San Jose, California, opens an envelope and a powdery substance spills out. A fellow passenger alerts the flight attendant, reporting that he had dispersed

> the powder into the ventilation system. Once the plane lands, it is held on the tarmac for three hours and the FBI is called to investigate. The "powdery substance" was confetti enclosed in a greeting card (Schmidt & Winters, 2002).

Dr. Schmidt and Winters call the episode onboard the plane to San Jose an overreaction, saying that the incident works as an example of how frightened the average person can be. They argue that there are various types of fear, such as certain phobias and post-traumatic stress syndromes, where fear is a result of experiencing life-threatening events. For most of Americans, however, they assert that we should talk about a more general fear, as most people live away from where the attack took place. Locations will be important later in the thesis, with the example of small towns in rural Illinois playing a large part of David Foster Wallace's essay about the attacks, whereas Spiegelman's comic were largely restricted to New York City.

In terms of a general fear, an interesting part is to read Dr. Schmidt's and Winters' covering of memories. They write that factual memories are removed over time, but the memories attached to emotional experiences stays. Memories are therefore an important part not only of fear itself, but also regarding literature and the real versus the imagined, as the writers touches upon a national trauma. Thus, the authors arguably had a challenge when it comes to portraying the reality of the attacks and its aftermath, without getting caught in an emotional, exaggerated sphere. Even though Dr. Schmidt and Winters argue that fear can make people find better solutions in life, they emphasize the dangers of holding on to emotional memories. They say that in nature, one would know what to be looking for after being attacked by a snake. In relation to 9/11 however, the threat and dangers are not as clear, where Dr. Schmidt and Winters say the fear led to people declining to enter certain rooms or even 'panic at the sight of a man in a turban' (Schmidt, 2002).

Personal Aggression

A personal aggression or a personalization of aggression in relation to 9/11 is complex and arguably connected to a culture that cultivates fear. This aggression can be directly linked with what Dr. Schmidt and Winters writes can happen when 'the fear structure is in place' (Schmidt, 2002), where the everyday life can be disturbing if the fear involves people's health or family. People would then arguably take various situations personally, as they either think or feel that they are in danger. The problem occurs when those fears and aggressions need to be directed at someone. In the mentioned study by the Institute of Social Research, researchers at the University of Michigan also found that the trust the participants had in their fellow Americans were 19 % higher than the trust in foreigners, whereas the trust in their neighbors were 49 % higher than the latter. When the participants were asked how they felt towards Middle Eastern ethnic groups, the ratings were lower compared to those historically more typical groups such as African and Hispanic. In fact, the latter category got a slight increase in ratings compared to earlier research from 1998 and 2000. The research team found that the ratings for 'American' groups were connected to the news about the 'war on terror', as those participants updated on the news were more likely to give higher ratings to such groups. In addition, there were more people giving commendatory ratings to Jewish Americans than to Arab and Muslim Americans. As the research concludes, the lower ratings towards Middle Eastern people are linked with people associating the group with the perpetrators of the attacks, thus developing a dislike towards what they think is the reason for their fears (Traugott et al., 2002). What is clear and important to state is that Muslim Americans had nothing to do with the September 11 attacks. However, this Muslim group were the victims of harassment and hate crimes in the aftermath of 9/11. In a book based on research of Muslim Americans called *Behind the Backlash: Muslim Americans after 9/11*, Lori Peek explores the increasing discrimination towards Muslim

Americans after the terrorist attack. Here, she summarizes some of the many problems Muslims faced in the aftermath:

> In sum, in the wake of 9/11, Muslims personally experienced, heard about from others, or observed first-hand several different types of discrimination, which ranged from hostile stares to physical attacks. The severity and duration of the backlash exacted a heavy emotional and physical toll on Muslim men and women (Peek, 2010, p. 102)

Peek confirms that less favorable rating and hatred towards Muslim Americans escalated into emotional and physical, personal attacks. There are stories and examples of this discrimination and violence, even ones dating back to September 15, 2001, just four days after the attacks, when Balbir Singh Sodhi, a gas station owner, was shot and killed. The killer, who reportedly shouted patriotic chants as he got arrested, thought Sodhi was a Muslim due to his turban and beard, when he was in fact Sikh. Later that day, the perpetrator attacked a Lebanese clerk and an Afghan family as well (Peek, 2010. p. 28; Lewin, 2001).

This type of personal hatred is not only wrong to the degree that ordinary Muslims and Asiatic people had nothing to do with the attack, but also ineffectual. A highly personal form of aggression is simply not beneficial to anyone, as such hatred prevents the aggressor of seeing alterations in the society, which we shall see in selected works, notably in Moore's documentary which illustrates ongoing changes made by the Bush administration after the attacks. To help explain how and why open-minded approaches got lost after 9/11, this thesis will be seen in the light of Tony Judt's 2006 article, cited above. The piece explores how liberal Americans played along with the policies of the Bush administration post 9/11 and that liberals too, feared new potential attacks. Though he argues that a loss of liberal self-confidence intensified under Bush, he asserts it started during the Clinton era with his strategy of triangulation. Here, Judt refers to

a political term where President Clinton would stay at his political position on issues where the Democratic party were popular and take a rather centrist approach on the issues where a Republican position were favored (Nelson et al., 2016). Judt also gave the loss of liberal center in American politics as a reason for the intensification of lost liberal self-confidence. He asserts that 'liberals once believed in the provision of welfare, good government and social justice' (Judt, 2006) and that they saw the significance of being a useful example to follow abroad. In contemporary US, Judt argues that these values have been replaced with more egoistic approaches in both domestic and foreign affairs.

Judt argues that the media were seized by a 'fearful conformism' (Judt, 2006), saying that newspapers such as Washington Post and the New York Times left their liberal attitudes to support a President on his way to wars. He convincingly claims that American liberalism was replaced by a more personalized and persistent identity politics, which this thesis will argue is not particularly effective. The Cambridge dictionary defines identity politics as 'political beliefs and systems that place a lot of importance on the group to which people see themselves as belonging to' ("identity politics," n.d.). Scholars such as Jonathan Haidt at New York University states there have been two kinds of identity politics in American history. The first version of such politics is what he argues 'most civil rights leaders did' (BigThink, 2018) with the example of Martin Luther King jr., who he says pointed a collective of individuals within a society and saw the similarities within the group and called for equality. This version is effectual, according to Haidt. The other side of identity politics is one Haidt calls 'common enemy identity politics' (Big think, 2018), where certain groups or people are said to be the cause of the problems. Haidt calls this version a common concept within social psychology, where unified people come together against a shared enemy. The professor argues that the latter form of identity politics is a dangerous one to be presented in a society consisting of various ethnic groups. He further asserts that the essential factor to make identity politics effectual is to

focus on the climate of speech and to be open minded to ideas that are the opposite of your own. People, Haidt says, will have contrasting ambitions and fears, as he calls for a solution:

> If you can create a really trusting environment in which we're all in this together, contribute your ideas. If someone says something you think is wrong, say so. That's going to lead to more innovation. That's going to lead to more progress (Big Think. 2018)

As we shall see in this thesis and what Judt argues, there was indeed a lack of a faithful atmosphere in the time after September 11, which were reflected in the literature. Judt would also argue that there has been a lack of talking against something you believe is incorrect, as he argues that 'the critical intelligentsia once so prominent in American cultural life has fallen silent' (Judt, 2006). The possibility of a unification leading to innovation and progress were replaced by a personalization of hatred which arguably was not in the favor of anyone but those who wanted to use aggression as a tool to enforce conformism, increased power and warfare.

The selected works

This thesis' selected works are of three genres, with Wallace's essay, Spiegelman's comic and Moore's documentary film. What they have in common is that they all explore the September 11 attacks and the event's aftermath. The content of the works is connected to the time they were written, which in this case is the early 2000s; in a time overshadowed by the fear relating to 9/11. Regarding 9/11 literature it can be argued that the historical context is an essential point when it comes to understanding the purpose and background of certain works. To read history and literature together with the knowledge of them being able to influence each is what we categorize as new historicism. In *How to Interpret Literature* (2015), Robert Dale Parker notes

that new historicists see history and literature as both equally uncertain and complex (Parker, 2015). Parker states that the study of literature depends on the knowledge of recognizing the distinctive perspectives one can have and that these contrasting viewpoints might lead to separate interpretations. These concepts also apply to history, according to new historicists:

> It is not just about saying here is the historical background and then applying that historical background, as if it were a mere lump of inflexible facts, to the supposedly more nuanced challenge of interpreting literature. For new historicists, the history already has as much multiplicity and nuance as any work of literature (or maybe more, to say the least (Parker, 2015, p. 260-261).

Parker states that new historicists bring history out of the background, seeing history in the larger context together with literature. As for the selected works in this thesis, there are numerous other fields to be explored, as the broad topic of 9/11 could be covered by various approaches. However, to see these works in light of history and the time they were written might give insights to the authors' thoughts and ideas. Though the works in this thesis mostly explores recent history, an essential approach is to see both literature and history together as we today, nearly two decades later, can read both history and literature in retrospect.

The first selected work, *The View from Mrs. Thompsons* by David Foster Wallace, is described in *The Cambridge Companion to David Foster Wallace* as 'an essay examining regional American reactions to the terrorist attacks' (Clare, 2018, p. 16). Wallace's work was published in an October issue of Rolling Stone magazine. The story takes place on the day of the attacks as well as the day after. Wallace narrates his own encounter with 9/11 from Bloomington, Illinois, where a large proportion of the story takes place in the living room of Wallace's friend and neighbor Mrs. Thompson, hence the title. Though Wallace does give us

details of the attacks, the story relies to a larger extent on the reactions of his neighbors and Wallace's own perspective on their behaviors. Thus, the essay follows a nonlinear narrative where Wallace applies background stories and context to the people he describes. Wallace notes that his essay was written rapidly and in light of the recent attacks. This thesis will argue that he captured the immediate fear and patriotism that developed shortly after September 11, as well as Wallace succeeds in articulating an adult, open-minded and thoughtful perspective of the attacks.

There have been considerably more written on Spiegelman's *In The Shadow of No Towers* than Wallace's *The View from Mrs. Thompson's*. However, scholars such as Synyoung Ahn makes interesting points regarding the openness of Wallace's work, in an article from *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* (2019). Ahn argues that Wallace' essay moves away from the influence of postmodernism and 'foster the values of social participation, political openness, and linguistic clarity' (Ahn, 2019, p. 236). She asserts that Wallace looked for ways not to exaggerate around the events of 9/11. According to Ahn, Wallace suggests in *The View from Mrs. Thompson's* that 'there needs to be a cultivation of a worldly citizen who attains a more intelligent sincerity' (Ahn, 2019, p. 247) in order to break away from the approach of naivety and feeling innocent, of which he arguably found at his neighbors.

Other scholars such as Jurrit Daalder at Oxford University focus on the location of the essay and says that the Midwest has been 'a home for all Americans' (Clare, 2018, p. 220) through generations and asserts that The View from Mrs. Thompson's illustrates how Wallace explored the cultural meaning of the region. Daalder explains that one of the working titles of the essay was 'View from The Interior', which Daalder argues displays Wallace's intention in using the Midwest's 'real-and-imagined qualities' (Clare, 2018, p. 223) in order to create and examine a self-reflection. Furthermore, Daalder calls the essay 'up-close-and-personal' (Clare,

2018, p. 223), saying that the nationalism portrayed in the Midwest by Wallace to a degree reflects the United States as a whole:

> In their local response to the national tragedy of 9/11, Wallace's neighbors define themselves primarily by their 'Americanness', not by any distinct Midwestern sense of place. Far from unusual, this 'sublation of regional identity for national representativeness' is entirely in keeping with a 'Midwestern nationalism' that so closely identifies the Midwest with America at large that the region has, in fact, been called an 'antiregion' (Clare, 2018, p. 223).

Daalder argues that Wallace was aware of the nation's identification with the Midwest and asserts that the reactions by Wallace's neighbors should be 'regarded as typical of the nation as a whole' (Clare, 2018, p. 223). Wallace's own specific take on 9/11 set in the heartlands of the United States and explored by Ahn and Daalder will be central to the first chapter, as this thesis will argue that Wallace had a unique and mature approach to the attacks.

Art Spiegelman's *In The Shadow of No Towers* is a comic book from 2004, which reflects Spiegelman's experience as a witness to 9/11. The work was first published as comic strips in 2002 in the German newspaper Die Zeit, after Spiegelman was incapable of finding a publisher in the US. The comic strips were in the end published by Viking Books as a larger board book, with added 20th century comics (Booker, 2014). Spiegelman's work, like Wallace's, follows a nonlinear plot between the day of the attacks and the aftermath, with added historical context. There are especially references to the Holocaust, which was a theme for his most famous work, *Maus* from 1980. In contrast to Wallace, a substantial part of *In The Shadow of No Towers* is criticism towards the United States government, as Spiegelman's comic takes

place in the years after the attacks with ongoing wars. Thus, we get to see the political backdrop of 9/11 in addition to Spiegelman's own traumatic experience as a New Yorker.

As for *In The Shadow of No Towers*, numerous scholars have seen the work in light of trauma. Kristiaan Versluys in *Modern Fiction Studies* (2006) explores how Spiegelman sees 9/11 through Holocaust and the stories that he heard by his father. Versluys argues that 9/11 was Spiegelman's own primary trauma that revives a secondary trauma, which is the Holocaust. Versluys points at Spiegelman's use of his own Jewish identity and the numerous references to his earlier work *Maus* as examples of how he uses the Holocaust analogy. However, Versluys argues that the personal and witnessed trauma of the September 11 attacks might explain Spiegelman's choices as an author, as a survivor of such major events feels the responsibility and duty to tell the story. Thus, Versluys states that *In The Shadow of No Towers* shall be seen as 9/11 literature:

> It records his fear and panic and stages the see-saw between melancholia or acting-out, on the one hand, and mourning or working-through, on the other. In that sense, it is a book about 9/11. It is the record of a psychologically wounded survivor, trying to make sense of an event that overwhelmed and destroyed all his normal psychic defenses (Versluys, 2006, p. 982).

Vesluys asserts that the traumatic experience as described in the citation above was the foundation of Spiegelman's political comments as well and argues that they are 'part of the working-through of the trauma' (Versluys, 2006, p. 992).

Trauma is also an essential part of Professor Katalin Orbán's article *Trauma and visuality: Art Spiegelman's Maus and In the Shadow of No Towers* in *Representations* from 2007. She argues that illustrations have an important goal of holding on to a trauma, which she

asserts that Spiegelman fails at. Through his illustrations, Orbán asserts that Spiegelman emphasizes more on the occurrence of a personal traumatic event. Orbán also gets at the challenges facing Spiegelman, with 9/11 being witnessed and broadcasted on a global scale (Orbán, 2007). She argues that the visual representation stands in competition with high quality images and footages from the attacks. According to Orbán, Spiegelman chose to withdraw himself from the global perspective of 9/11 and rather focus on the 'local landscape of the neighborhood' (Orbán, 2007, p. 72). Orbán's overall argument and suggestion is that the representation of traumatic experiences and catastrophes can be effective if the depiction goes beyond such private and narrow perspectives.

The third selected work in this thesis is Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*. The documentary was released in 2004 and is written by Moore himself, who we also see as a prominent figure and voiceover throughout the film. *Fahrenheit 9/11* is Moore's own view of the United States after the attacks and argues that the Bush administration and the national media promoted an agenda for the wars that followed in Afghanistan and Iraq. According to the documentary's site on the online film data base *IMDB*, Moore's work is the highest grossing documentary of all time and was awarded the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival the same year as the film's release (IMDB, n.d.).

Much of what has been written about *Fahrenheit 9/11* contains the immediate media coverage and film reviews. The film critic Roger Ebert called the documentary 'compelling' and 'persuasive' (Ebert, 2004) after its release, whereas critics such as Cristopher Hitchens, as we shall see later in the thesis, asserted that the film was based on misrepresentations (Hitchens, 2004). The first in-depth study of Moore's documentaries, *Michael Moore and The Rhetoric of Documentary* (2015) has various scholars that examines the content of his works as well as the effect it had on the genre of documentaries. In one of the chapters, Thomas Frent and Thomas Rosteck argues that the popularity and impact of a work is not comparable to 'the rhetorical

significance of a text' (Benson & Snee, 2015, p. 201) and argues that the work's magnitude can be revealed long after its publication. Further, they argue that Moore combines the real world with 'meaning and significance' (Benson and Snee, 2015, p. 189) through the storytelling of subjects. According to Frent and Rosteck, the subjects in *Fahrenheit 9/11* are essential, with the example of Lila Lipscomb, a woman interviewed by Moore which this thesis will explore further in chapter two. They assert that people like Lipscomb represents Moore's own views in a more moderate version of the film maker.

In another essay collection, *The Rhetoric of The New Political Documentary,* scholars analyze political documentaries in relation to the 2004 presidential election. One essay written by Shawn and Trevor Parry-Giles, explores the correlation between images and narration in *Fahrenheit 9/11* and states that the visual effects is an important part of Moore's way of telling a story. They argue that the result can be a portrayal of the true real world, though they assert that the use of images can also be manufactured, creating a false representative of true events (Benson & Snee, 2008). Though Moore, as we shall later see, has been criticized for exaggerations and misrepresentations, he arguably does not manufacture images. On the contrary, he uses original footages from news archives together with his own interpretation to prove his points.

The three selected works are interesting as they differ from each other. They vary in genres, contents and the time period they were written. Wallace's essay appeals by being written a few days after 9/11, with a focus on the behaviors he noticed around him rather than the details of the attacks themselves. *In The Shadow of No Towers* offers a graphic representation from an artist with a minority background who was in New York to witness the attacks himself, whereas Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* is both a controversial and an engaging take on the political aftermath of the attacks. There were other works considered for this thesis, such as Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* from 2007 and films including Oliver Stone's *World Trade Center* (2006) and Paul

Greengrass' *United 93* (2006). Even though DeLillo's *Falling Man* gets at the heart of how the attacks changed the lives of those affected, the novel arguably dwells more on specific characters than the broader image seen in the selected works. The mentioned films both portray the events of 9/11, respectively the collapse of the towers and United Airlines Flight 93's crash in Pennsylvania. While the films are graphic and representative of what occurred that day, they are arguably falling short of the broader consequences of the attacks found in Wallace, Spiegelman and Moore.

One work that was considered in particular, was Thomas Pynchon's novel *Bleeding Edge* from 2013. Not only is it interesting for the novel's depiction of the 9/11 aftermath, but also for exploring the postmodern world of internet and the age of information. However, one can argue that the attacks themself serve as a background to the main plot in the novel, whereas the selected authors in this thesis, though they too delve into the repercussions of 9/11, puts the attacks as a central position in their works. Though *Bleeding Edge* will be briefly mentioned later in the thesis, the works of Pynchon would arguably demand an expanded research because of their complex and philosophical contexts.

Sources

There are various sources used in the writing of this thesis. In addition to the three selected works and Judt's article, this thesis will include the mentions of other authors' work and thoughts. Authors such as Joan Didion is included to demonstrate that there were additional writers that shared similar interpretations as those that are highlighted in this thesis. There will also be mentions of writers that were critical of or did not share the same thoughts as those in the selected works, including Christopher Hitchens and his critic of Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*. Other works are included to contribute as a context, such as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*,

James Baldwin's essay collection *The Fire Next Time* and additional works done by this thesis' selected authors.

Other sources that are used consists mostly of articles that either explains or confirms information related to literature, history, politics and culture. These articles vary from news archives and art works to interviews and scientific papers. In addition, this thesis will include official governmental documents, such as the *9/11 Commission Report*, which examined the facts related to the attacks. The report will be mentioned in the thesis due to the commission's access to information regarding the September 11 attacks, in addition to the report being a factor in Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*.

Quotations at the start of each heading are gathered from historical occurrences relevant to this thesis. The quotes are inserted with the purpose of adding context and additional information to various terms and topics. For instance, the words of President Roosevelt at the start of this introduction chapter are there to introduce fear, which will be a major theme throughout the thesis. The example of Roosevelt's quote can be interpreted as somewhat ironic in terms of his message of not being afraid, as we shall see that fear played a crucial part in post 9/11 US.

The broad topic of an event like 9/11 follows a great number of miscellaneous terms. The balance between which terms that needs to be thoroughly explained, directly defined and what is known to all can arguably be difficult to balance. Thus, this thesis will define various historical and political terms when needed. With the intention of keeping the text as structured as possible, this thesis will be cautious in using excessive numbers of footnotes, though they will be present in cases where smaller definitions can be kept outside the main text.

Structure and terminology

This thesis is structured chronologically in terms of the selected work's publication date, starting with Wallace's immediate response via TV to the attacks, followed by Spiegelman's eyewitness account and ending with Moore's take on the aftermath three years after 9/11. There are two reasons for having Wallace and Spiegelman together in the first chapter. Despite the fact that *In The Shadow of No Towers* was not published as a comic book until the same year as Moore's documentary, Spiegelman, as mentioned, started his work soon after the attacks. The comic can therefore be categorized as an early response to the attacks. In addition, Spiegelman covers the events of that day as one who was there to see it himself and his political recount of the aftermath provides a transition to the second chapter. This thesis will also include illustrations of Spiegelman's comic, as figures are arguably necessary when analyzing an artist who is as much visual as textual. Though *Fahrenheit 9/11* at times gets at the details of 9/11 and even the time leading up to the attacks, the documentary mostly reflects the consequential aftermath. This structure provides a historic overview and timeline of a complex time period. Together, all the three selected works serve the information, context and reflection needed for a final, concluding chapter.

When this thesis refers to the terrorist attacks on September 11, as already done, the thesis will often refer to the event as 9/11. The expression originates from the American date format and is the collective name that refers to both the date and the actions of the attacks. Linguistic professor Dennis Baron at the University of Illinois says that '9/11' over time has become the most favorable expression and that the words are simply 'rolling off the tongue a little more smoothly' (Baron, 2011) than the longer form of 'September 11'. Needless to say, 911 is ironically also the, but not to be confused with, emergency telephone number of the United States.

In terms of the genres, this thesis will mainly refer to Wallace's work as an essay, as it clearly falls into the definition of 'a short piece of writing on a particular subject' ("essay," n.d.) As for *In The Shadow of No Towers*, the categorization becomes more complex. Scholars such as Jenn Brandt argues that the work can be labelled as graphic autofiction, as the comic is a graphic representation of the attacks and a mixture of an autobiography and fiction (Brandt, 2014). However, this thesis will mostly use the term 'comics' with reference to Spiegelman to distinguish *In The Shadow of No Towers* from works that can be categorized as 'graphic novels', such as *Maus*. In the *Encyclopedia of Comic Books and Graphic Novels*, Professor M. Keith Booker at the University of Arkansas suggests that the graphic novel is 'longer and more complex (Booker, 2010, p. 21) Similarly, *The Cambridge Companion to the Graphic Novel* sees the graphic novel as 'an extended comic' (Tabachnick, 2017, p. 1). Though Spiegelman's work can be argued to have been extended into a longer work with the comic's merging of the strips and publication in 2004, the comic arguably falls short of both the length and complexity of the example of *Maus*.

Finally, the term 'documentary' which here will be mentioned in terms of *Fahrenheit 9/11*, is by film theorist Bill Nichols characterized as a text making an argument about the historical, real world (Nichols, 1991). According to Nichols, documentaries are recognized by either making an argument or attempting to persuade certain ideas, in addition to practices within the film making, such as voice-overs where the narrator is not present. This thesis will interchangeably use the terms 'documentary' and 'film' as they both suit what Fahrenheit 9/11 represent as a work of art, with the latter defined as 'a series of moving pictures, usually shown in a cinema or on television and often telling a story' ("film," n.d.)

Chapter 1: Early Literary Responses

This chapter will examine two of the first literary responses to 9/11: David Foster Wallace's essay *The View from Mrs. Thompson's (2001)* and Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers.* There were several other works created shortly after the attacks, among them Barbara Kingsolver's *Small Wonder (2011)*, Naudet brothers' *9/11* (2002) and Frédéric Beigbeder's *Windows of The World (2006).* The reason for highlighting Wallace and Spiegelman in this chapter is that in addition to the brutality and the shock factor of that day being suitable for creating thrilling stories, there was also a need for representations of human reactions to what was going on. In their own unique way and disparate genres, Wallace and Spiegelman formulated those emotions and the event's possible consequences within a diverse American society in ways not hitherto imagined.

The View from Mrs. Thompson's presents us the initial reactions of an average American, one who is affected by the shock in a globalized world of which Wallace sees as lacking unity going forward. Much of the same view can be found in *In the Shadow of no Towers,* except that it serves us an eye-witness account of much of what Wallace noticed. Spiegelman did not draft the series at the time of the events he describes, giving us the perspective of the time after 9/11, whereas *The View from Mrs. Thompson's* was written just days after the attacks.

The historical context is essential to understand Wallace and Spiegelman. Thus, it is important to read history and literature together with the knowledge of them being able to influence each other, which is the reason why this chapter will include historical and political explanations when needed.

THE VIEW FROM MRS. THOMPSON'S

> 'Oh, there's another one. Another plane just hit. Oh my God. Another plane has just hit another building. Flew right into the middle of it. Explosions!'
>
> Eyewitness Theresa Renaud on CBS News, 11.09.2001 (CBSNews, 2011)

Immediate Patriotism

The View from Mrs. Thompson's is an essay written by the American author David Foster Wallace. Wallace was born in 1962 Ithaca, New York and raised in Illinois. He is most famous for his 1996 novel *Infinite Jest* and he is viewed as one of the most important writers of his generation (Noland & Rubin, 2008). Wallace passed away in 2008, having suffered from depression and drug abuse most of his life (Max, 2012).

The essay was posted on the October 25, 2001 issue of Rolling Stone which later renamed it *9/11, as Seen from the Midwest*[2]. The essay recaptures his own memories of the attacks, covering the very moment as well as the day after. He describes how his town of Bloomington, Illinois reacts to the news and how the community deals with the trauma in the immediate aftermath. His essay is arguably representative of how the whole country felt during what Wallace describes as the 'Horror', a phrase this thesis will return to shortly.

The person within the title of the essay, Mrs. Thompson, is a 74-year-old woman who is the mother to one of Wallace's best friends. She is described as a loving church member and a person everyone can visit at any time. Her house also happens to be the place where Wallace

[2] There are no explanations available for the renaming, other than the fact that the new title appeared in a reprint by Rolling Stones in 2011, which is the one still available. *The View from Mrs. Thompson's* was the original title and also the name of the essay when it was included in Wallace's essay collection *Consider the Lobster and Other Essays* from 2005.

among others gather to watch the news about the attacks. Even though she is described as a smart lady by Wallace, he also points out that she, with the others who are gathered in Mrs. Thompson's living room, does not know much about the places where the attacks had taken place, mainly referring to New York City and Washington DC. Thus, Mrs. Thompson is not only a symbol of how millions of Americans are living in the 21st century, with fewer towns and larger suburbs; a vast nowhere. She, together with her neighbors, illustrates the experience and reactions of the average American on that day. An example of the reactions among Americans is when Wallace sees numbers of American flags on Wednesday, the morning after the attack, where he wonders how everyone suddenly got a flag to put out:

> It's odd: You never see anybody putting out a flag, but by Wednesday morning there they all are. Big flags, small flags, regular flag-size flags (…) It's a total mystery where people get flags this big or how they got them up there. (Wallace, 2001)

Wallace is intrigued by the immediate patriotism revealed by his neighbors in a place far away from the East Coast of the United States. When asking people why they have their flags out, he receives the same response from almost everyone; that it is not about what the flag represents, which is in fact pride and unity. One of the people Wallace asks, answers that 'they've fucked with the wrong people this time' (Wallace, 2020), arguably directing hatred towards those responsible for the attacks. This response stands in irony of what the essay is trying to communicate; that whoever the attacks were aimed towards, it was not the people of Bloomington. To clarify, Wallace presents us an impression that the hatred from the terrorist's perspective was never aimed towards specific people like 'these ladies' (Wallace, 2020) of Bloomington, meaning the ordinary American like Mrs. Thompson, but rather a hatred against the American society. As mentioned in the introduction through Jurrit Daalder, one can argue

that Wallace was aware of how the United States identifies with the Midwest, meaning that the reactions of his neighbors was not abnormal. Quite the opposite, Wallace portrays an atmosphere that reflects a nation where people took the attacks personally. Thus, he foreshadows a personal aggression that seemed to unite, but which in fact was the start of a more divided American society. A personalization of hatred that would dominate American patriotism and politics in the years to come, as this hatred became a source of disempowerment where the unhelpful hate kept a unified nation ineffectual. More importantly, it would in the future of war fares deeply affect families of the Mrs. Thompson's whom Wallace describes; a point made in other literary works this thesis will explore in chapter two.

The Shock

Even though Wallace provides us the honest notion of how the country felt during 9/11 through the faces of his fellow Bloomingtonians, *The View from Mrs. Thompson's* is still a testimony as to how he himself experienced the world around him on that day, rather than an explanation for people's behavior. One could however connect and explain the reactions this essay describes to fear; a word which Wallace seems to avoid. The introduction mentioned research which have found that Americans felt they had lost their sense of security after the attacks. Dr. Bradley Schmidt and Jeffrey Winters assert that the feeling of insecurity and fear led to overreactions such as fearing suspicious objects onboard airplanes. (Schmidt & Winters, 2002). Other scholars, such as Bernardo Carducci of Indiana University, explains in *The Psychology of Personality* how fear and anxiety post 9/11 was managed by seeking comfort and identifying with certain groups such as churches or their own community (Carducci, 2009). Carducci's view descends from a theory called Terror Management Theory, or TMT (Pyszczynski et al., 2003). This theory presents answers to behaviors when people believe their life might be in danger. In other words, Americans saw the attacks as something that could have happened to

them personally and this consciousness of fearing death or harm was managed by defending their own perspective of the world (Pyszczynski et al., 2003). In retrospect one can therefore see the reasons behind the reactions Wallace represents in the essay. However, one should also be aware of the essay's setting, as *The View from Mrs. Thompson's* was written only a few days after the attacks. Wallace himself was in as much shock as everyone else. He is not watching Mrs. Thompson and the average American from afar; on the contrary, he is one of them. Wallace too, though only through the screen of the TV, is horrified by the grotesqueness of seeing the footage of people falling[3] from the towers. Hence, why he is describing the attack itself as the 'Horror', each time with a capitalized H, presumably an indirect allusion to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, first published in 1899. For context, the phrase originates from a figure in Conrad's novel named Kurtz who becomes ill and aware that death is near. His last, famous words were 'The Horror! The Horror!' (Conrad & Knowles, 2010, p. 122) This self-conscious bit of intertextuality is interesting as 'The Horror' in Conrad's novella arguably depicts the brutality and regrets of European colonization in Africa. Conrad criticized the actions of the white man, arguing about the inherent egocentrism and evil in man. A further question is then whether Wallace referred to the attacks or the upcoming reactions when echoing Conrad. One can argue that Wallace is reusing the phrase not only to describe the brutality of 9/11, but also as a realization of the upcoming consequences. In addition, Conrad's original phrase might be a biblical reference as the words are seen in Psalm 55:5: 'Fear and trembling come upon me, and horror overwhelms me' and again in Isaiah 21:4: 'My heart staggers; horror has appalled me; the twilight I longed for has been turned for me into trembling'. Wallace was arguably aware of this additional illusion, as he states in *The View*

[3] Numerous people in the towers of the World Trade Center fell or jumped from the buildings due to the extreme conditions of fire and smoke inside the skyscrapers. For further reading, Mauro Carbone explores footages and photographs of those who jumped in *Falling Man: The Time of Trauma, the Time of (Certain) Images* (2017).

from Mrs. Thompson's that he belongs to a church on Bloomington's south side (Wallace, 2001).

In terms of shock, Wallace talks about being in a state of horror himself and writes as a note before the first paragraph: 'Caveat: Written very fast and in what probably qualifies as a shock'. (Wallace, 2001). Thus, he is trying to illustrate what was at the time indescribable. Even though the essay is mostly observations of reactions rather than a telling of Wallace's own feelings, he does embark upon the trauma of that day:

> Then the hideous beauty of the rerun clip of the second plane hitting the tower, the blue and silver and black and spectacular orange of it, as more little moving dots fell. (Wallace, 2001)

In the first line of this quote, Wallace refers to the footage of United Airlines Flight 175 hitting the South Tower. As the world were watching the flames coming out from the North Tower, numerous cameras documented the second plane crashing just 17 minutes after the first plane had hit (Kean et al., 2004). People watching at home could have seen the crash live on the screens and in many reruns on various news channels. However, the 'hideous beauty' part is what stands out. Even though Wallace finds the images horrific, he still has the urge of watching the footage over and over again, though the 'spectacular' scenes of the explosion are followed by 'moving dots' and people falling to their deaths. As Wallace remarks, people had their own way of dealing with the emotions that day. A few people were making 'some sort of sound' (Wallace, 2001), while others were even mowing the lawn, an ordinary activity that Wallace found offbeat:

> Is it normal not to remember things very well after only a couple days, or at any rate the order of things? I know at some point for a while there was the sound of somebody mowing his lawn, which seemed totally bizarre, but I don't remember if anyone said anything. (Wallace, 2001)

Wallace's depiction of the 'hideous beauty' and his attention to details like the mowing of a lawn is his own reaction of fear as he too, cannot believe what is happening on the screen.

Numerous other works involving 9/11 depict fear. The movies *World Trade Center* (2006) and *United 93* (2006) are based on real, thrilling human stories in the crucial moments inside the burning buildings and onboard the planes. Don DeLillo's novel *Falling Man* from 2007 captures an anxious American society post 9/11. Wallace's essay, by contrast, is written before the events had influenced politics and before the information surrounding the attacks had been presented. For Wallace, the people in the living room and millions of other Americans that day, all they had were the scenes that unfolded on the TV. When describing Bloomington, Wallace notes that they 'watch massive, staggering amounts of TV' (Wallace, 2001). He writes that for the people of Bloomington, the life outside their town is only known through the screen of the TV and that to not own a TV is rather odd:

> Bloomington and the Horror is that reality – any really felt sense of a larger world – is televisual. New York's skyline, for instance, is as recognizable here as anyplace else, but what it's recognizable from is TV. TV's also more social here than on the East Coast, where in my experience people are almost constantly leaving home to go meet other people face-to-face in public places (Wallace, 2001).

This is interesting due to the fact that Wallace, though he does not mention it in this essay, was well known for not owning a TV (ManufacturingIntellect, 2018). In fact, he has warned against the obsession of TV, most notably in *E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S Fiction* from 1993, where he explores how TV impacts people's behavior. Though one might call out the irony in that Wallace was now facing images on the screens that he could not take his eyes away from, Wallace saw that the media consumption was a benefactor to his own and other people's fear and that finally, for a change, the endless TV coverage was about something. The shock was obvious, but the growing fear was provided by the rerun of horrific images; images of places Bloomingtonians recognized from various movies and TV shows. Perhaps what Wallace truly feared coming out of 9/11 a society where people would view the world as they saw them fit. Matthew Mullins gets at a similar thought in *The Cambridge Companion to David Foster Wallace*, where he states that Wallace feared solipsism[4], as such a belief could halt the possibility of seeing other people's perspective and leaving us lonely (Clare, 2018). Because, in the midst of exploding fireballs and people falling from skyscrapers, Wallace covered one's obsession over TV and the reactions of the people around him as the start of a decline which ineffectually would create extreme and ineffectual forms of patriotism.

Signs of Decline

David Foster Wallace saw that the imagination of the individual was breaking up into tribes rather than a political unity and he was certainly not alone. One week after 9/11, the American writer Joan Didion, known for her political essays (ZolaBooksInc, 2016) told journalist Jon Wiener that:

[4] The characteristic of solipsism is defined by Cambridge Dictionary as 'the belief that only your own experiences and existence can be known or are important' ("solipsistic", n.d.)

> We're seeing a lot of the patriotism of Americans, but we're in danger of seeing it drowned in a surge of jingoism. Which is kind of — frightening (Wiener, 2013)

Didion argued that the patriotic expressions conveyed in the aftermath of 9/11 is capable of turning into extremism where patriotism becomes more arrogant and nationalistic. When Wallace writes 'I think the ladies took it better than I did' (Wallace, 2001), he is not just talking about the attacks itself, but also the fact that he had seen the start of extremism in Bloomington. What Wallace saw in addition to the horrifying images playing on Mrs. Thompson's TV, was the aggression of shocked Americans and a government that sooner or later had to provide them somewhat of a response. Further on, he writes:

> This is the beginning of the vague but progressive feeling of alienation from these good people that builds throughout the part of the Horror where people flee rubble and dust. (Wallace, 2001)

Wallace starts to feel like a stranger to the group, with what should have been a unifying moment, becomes a polarizing one. One can argue that he simply no longer identifies as one of them, perhaps due to Wallace's political views being of another kind than his neighbors. However, no matter Wallace's political beliefs, what he truly fear is that the case within Mrs. Thompson's living room will be the case for the entire nation: As sphere where everyone feels the same way, in shock, horror and grief, but without political unity and power. Wallace might feel that extra concern as he knew that a crisis like 9/11 could have provided a basis for radical change on the order of Roosevelt's New Deal[5]. Instead, that very patriotism, which Wallace saw was on the brink of jingoism, becomes ineffectual. Wallace notes that '(…) what they do

[5] 'a set of actions taken by US President Franklin D. Roosevelt in the 1930s, intended to help the economy when it was in great difficulty' ("new deal", (.n.d.).

is all sit together and feel really bad, and pray.' (Wallace, 2001). Surely the socialization, grief and praying are forms of spontaneous unification, with people coming together during a time of crisis. Wallace even goes on to say that this form of unification is useful. Though he states that the togetherness is 'mostly a good thing' (Wallace, 2001) and cherish that he is together with his neighbors, he also continues with: 'It's just a little lonely to have to. Innocent people can be hard to be around.' (Wallace, 2001). Didion gets at this innocence as well:

> People are talking about 'America losing its innocence.' How many times can America lose its innocence? In my lifetime we've heard that we've lost our innocence half a dozen times at least (Wiener, 2013).

Didion points out that tragic events have occurred throughout American history, from the bombing of Pearl Harbor to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Other authors have discussed innocence as well. For example, in his essay collection *The Fire Next Time* first published in 1963, author and social critic James Baldwin discussed the term in relation to racism. Baldwin saw 'white innocence' as one of the larger issues in the US, arguing that an equal and free society depended on white Americans to lose their feeling of innocence (Baldwin, 1998). As for Wallace, it has already been clarified that he truly believes Mrs. Thompson and the people gathered in her living room are innocent. Nevertheless, what both Wallace and Didion illustrates is similar to what Baldwin noticed in relation to race and inequality, as they warned against the ineffectualness of yapping patriotism. They observed the innocent, average Americans, talking about patriotism without any political power necessary for change. T*he View from Mrs. Thompson* was arguably written as a warning for things to come, as Wallace witnessed the dawn of a patriotism he saw as politically ineffectual. Even though he could see the usefulness in people coming together, Wallace was not seeing a room

free of criticism patriotic at all. Tony Judt would in his essay five years later argue about 'useful idiots', those who blindly followed the Bush administration's arguments for war post 9/11 (Judt, 2006). Wallace witnessed this immediately, in the form of a personalization where the individual customized their own preferences instead of a nuanced response and building the base of radical political change.

The View from Mrs. Thompson's is a title with two meanings. One which refers to how David Foster Wallace as an individual experienced 9/11, hence 'the view' equals Wallace's perspective as an observer. The other meaning captures how the average American, the 'Mrs. Thompson's', reacted to the attacks. Wallace is using the perspective of the individual as a way of illustrating the overwhelming patriotism as a problem, where he warns us that the personalization of aggression is truly a major instance of identity politics that distracts people from seeing the larger picture. By combining his own detections with the ongoing shock that occurs around him, Wallace serves an early nuanced take on the attacks with an open-minded approach.

Likely, Wallace saw these problems of yapping patriotism and personalization in light of a more globalized world, where a tragic event, even though several states away, would have an impact on those Wallace characterized as innocents. Later, the attacks and the responses would affect people outside the American borders, as the politics involved military actions abroad. In the upcoming part, we move the perspective away from the Midwest and to New York City, where the larger part of the attacks occurred.

IN THE SHADOW OF NO TOWERS

> ‘Terrorist attacks can shake the foundations of our biggest buildings, but they cannot touch the foundation of America.’
>
> President George W. Bush Address to Nation September 12. 2001 (White House Archives, n.d., p. 57)

Personal Affection

In the comic book, *In The Shadow of No Towers*, Art Spiegelman like David Foster Wallace, is narrating his own experiences with 9/11 and the attacks’ aftermath. As mentioned in the introduction. Spiegelman’s work can be categorized as an autofiction, a term first used by Serge Doubrovsky, where the story relies on a retelling of a story from the author himself (Célestin, 1997). The comic consists of cardboard pages that are of newspaper size with each page telling a story, with the exception of an introductory essay as well as 19th and 20th century comic strips towards the end of the book. Covering the book is a drawing of the Twin Towers barely visible on a black background along with a small comic strip illustrating people falling, arguably echoing the falling people Wallace saw on TV (Figure 1). The illustration of the towers originates from a *The New Yorker* cover dated September 24, 2001, created by Spiegelman and his wife Françoise (Figure 2). In an interview with Al Jazeera America, Spiegelman states that he wanted to represent the ghost of the towers that had fallen by creating a black-on-black cover where you need to get closer to the drawing or seeing the illustration in a special light for the towers to appear. Spiegelman states that the shadow of the towers symbolized his own experience of the attacks and the feeling of emptiness within New York City at the time (AlJazeeraAmerica, 2015).

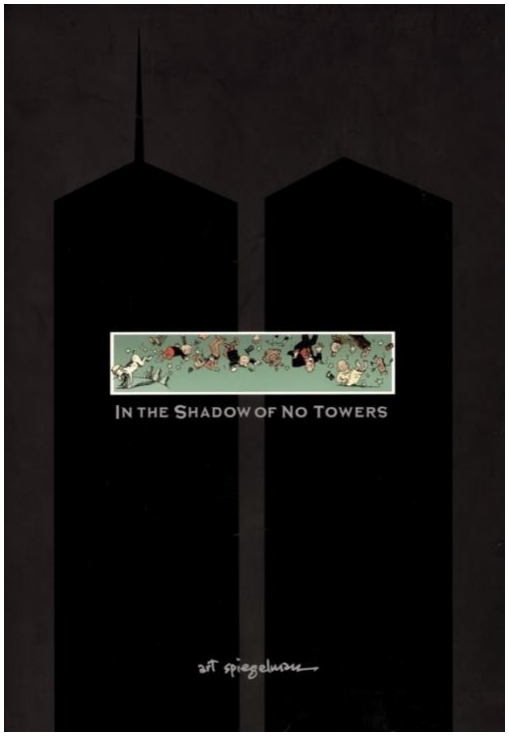

Figure 1: Art Spiegelman, In The Shadow of No Towers

Figure 2: Art Spiegelman & Françoise Mouly, *9/11/2001*

Apart from working in completely opposite genres from each other, this self-experienced trauma differentiates Wallace and Spiegelman, and Spiegelman's story offers an insight to the thoughts of those who were in New York at the time. *In The Shadow of No Towers* is told by Spiegelman as an eyewitness watching the events unfold: a trauma which he describes in the opening pages of the book as something he will never forget (Spiegelman, 2004, introduction). Throughout the comic, Spiegelman continues to portray the attacks and social polarization through symbolic graphics and precise political commentary, though arguably diverting away from fundamental issues, which this thesis will come back to shortly.

Whereas the shock in Wallace's perspective from the Midwest was unfolding through the TV screen, Spiegelman was in New York to see and experience the shock himself. Spiegelman states early in the comic that he does not see the first plane hitting the North Tower, but he hears the sound of the crash and people in the streets of Manhattan screaming. In addition

to his witness, two other aspects make this story even more personal. One is the fact that his daughter Nadja goes to school close to the Twin Towers, where she had started 'just three days before' (Spiegelman, 2004, p. 2). He confirms this in the mentioned interview with Al Jazeera from 2015, where he says that his wife François and himself started running towards Stuyvesant High School immediately after the first plane had hit (AlJazeeraAmerica, 2015). His first reaction when he sees the towers in flames is therefore a reaction of a parent who runs towards the flames rather than one distancing himself from it. It is not until Spiegelman finds Nadja that he starts to reflect on what was happening in front of him, as seen in Figure 3. Spiegelman had seen himself somewhat international, but the events of 9/11 arguably strengthened his identity as a New Yorker:

> Y'know how I've called myself a 'rootless cosmopolitan,' equally homeless anywhere on the planet? I was wrong… I finally understand why some Jews didn't leave Berlin right after Kristallnacht! (Spiegelman, 2004, p. 4).

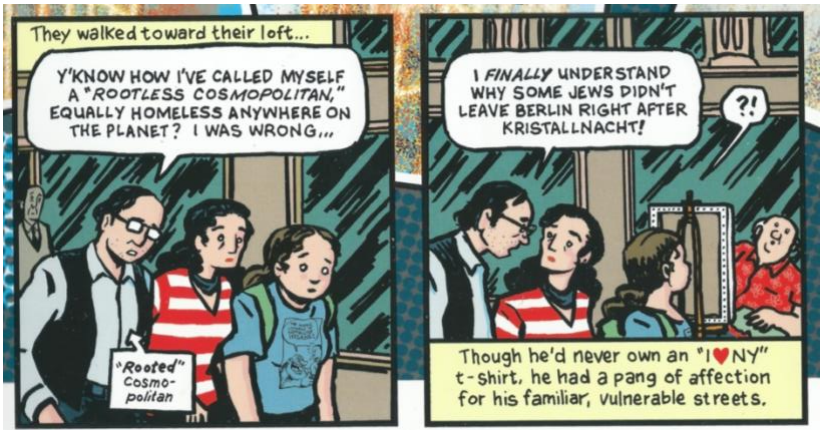

Figure 3: Art Spiegelman, *In The Shadow of No Towers*, 4

Here, Spiegelman refers to the violence against Jews and their properties in 1938, given its name by the many windows of Jewish shops that were broken ("Kristallnacht," n.d.). He creates a comparison between the aftermath of Kristallnacht and the time after 9/11, now understanding

why people feel a stronger connection to home even in the most difficult times. More importantly, the historical perspective is the second personal aspect of Spiegelman, as we know that he has a connection to the Holocaust. According to scholar Joseph Witek and his collections of interviews that covers much of Spiegelman's career, Spiegelman is the son of Polish Jews and immigrated to the United States at age three (Witek, 2007). In one of Spiegelman's most recognized works, *Maus* first published in 1980, we are told his family story through conversations with Spiegelman's father Vladek, who was a prisoner at Auschwitz during the second World War. Famously portraying Jews as mice and the Germans as cats, *Maus* narrates Vladek's life in Poland in the 1930's and through the Holocaust, jumping back and forth in time much like *In The Shadow of No Towers*. In fact, Spiegelman refers to *Maus* a number of times throughout this comic through both drawing and text. For instance, he draws himself as a mouse, often when depicting despair or anger over the attacks or towards the government, arguably to enforce his identification as both a Jew and a victim of his government's actions after the attack. The moment he truly connects the two stories, however, is when he describes the experience of being close to the events on 9/11:

> I remember my father trying to describe what the smoke in Auschwitz smelled like. The closest he got was telling me it was 'indescribable.' That's exactly what the air in Lower Manhattan smelled like after Sept. 11! (Spiegelman, 2004, p. 3)

In this quote, Spiegelman refers to the smoke of burning bodies coming out of the crematoriums of Auschwitz concentration camp, comparing the smell to the dust[6] that settled on the morning of September 11. The use of Auschwitz to describe New York on 9/11 is a use of imagery without having to be particularly descriptive, but it might be inaccurate, even somewhat too

[6] Dust might be an understatement, as there are pictures taken by the International Space Station showing a plume of smoke from the attacks that were visible from space (Smith, 2020).

easy. Where Wallace used 'The Horror' to describe the attacks, Spiegelman is comparing parts of the attack to one of the most tragic and infamous genocide in history. By doing so, the readers do not need to have read Maus to get the idea of how horrifying the experience of 9/11 was for Spiegelman. Arguably, having read *Maus* creates a perspective where the reader knows Spiegelman's background and how he listened to his father telling him stories of which were almost impossible to fathom. This time, *In The Shadow of No Towers*, the point of view is switched from Spiegelman's father to himself. When he compares and refers to *Maus*, Spiegelman is arguably telling us 'we have seen this before'. Not because they are comparable events of history, but because Spiegelman saw the possible effects of fear being a dominant force in society. However, the Holocaust was arguably tragic of a different order than the attacks on 9/11: Whereas 9/11 was a one-time attack on a single country, the Holocaust involved the systematic killings of an entire people. Kristiaan Versluys from The John Hopkins University argues that Spiegelman is not claiming to play the role himself as a Holocaust survivor, but rather as a victim of his own trauma (Versluys, 2006). The question that then arises is whether Spiegelman himself is stoking fear. Not through the autofictional aspect of him as an indirect witness to the Holocaust, but rather through his comparisons of Holocaust and 9/11, creating a lack of imagination through an understandable paranoid mind. This means that Spiegelman, even though he portrays the climate of fear through his own traumatic experience, does not seem to elaborate the situation further than his family's past and his own aggression. He most certainty does so in *Maus*, where the plot of the graphic novel is arguably just as much about what happens to the human mind as the story is about the mass slaughter. One can argue that Spiegelman's lack of elaboration in *In The Shadow of No Towers* comes down to the comic being only a few pages long, which forces it to lack further thoughts surrounding 9/11 and the aftermath of the attack. However, the length of the book could also have opened up to a more precise and direct way of narrating the events, a storytelling which we have seen Wallace

managed only a few days after 9/11. It might be, as Kristiaan Vesluys argues in his essay, that Spiegelman's purpose is to work through a traumatic experience (Versluys, 2006). However, even if Spiegelman does put himself in a state of mourning, he arguably draws himself away from the larger context, with the possibility of himself inciting an irrational fear by focusing on dark aspects of history in which have no direct link to the attacks in New York.

Recipient of Hate

The rise of aggression which Wallace saw as problematic in the Midwest was something Spiegelman experienced as equally problematic himself, but as an author he arguably moves away from the causes and the potential consequences. In a pre 9/11 flash back, he describes a Russian lady who was shouting antisemitic slurs to him. On the afternoon of 9/11, she was nowhere to be seen, causing Spiegelman to hope that the attacks had become a 'shared reality' (Spiegelman, 2004, p. 6) for both of them. The next morning, however, the lady was back. Not only was she still antisemitic towards Spiegelman, but she was also blaming the Jews for the attacks, provoking Spiegelman to shout back at her. These conspiracy theories which are based on the Jews being responsible for the attacks came shortly after 9/11 (Tobias & Foxman, 2003) and there have been stories told of hate crimes in the aftermath, especially towards Muslims and Asiatic people (Peek, 2010). One question that naturally arises is why antisemitic slurs occurred, when the terrorists behind 9/11 were Muslims. The question might be answered by the history of blaming Jews, from the crucifixion of Christ to the cultural and economic decline in early 1900s Germany (USHMM, n.d.). Clearly, Spiegelman knew this history, having grown up with the stories of the Holocaust from his parents. What concerned him was not only that an event like 9/11 gave people like the lady he encountered an opportunity to release what he called 'those inner demons', but he feared the future discussions in the American society. As he mentions in the introduction, he noted a dramatic change in discourse upon finishing the book:

> The climate of discourse in America shifted dramatically just as I concluded the series. What was once unsayable now begins to appear outside the marginalized alternative press and late-night cable comedy shows (Spiegelman, 2004, introduction).

Spiegelman continues in the introduction to characterize himself as an artist ahead of his time and rightly so. He noticed an ineffectual climate of discourse where the aggression worked as a distraction to the changes going on in the US. Spiegelman saw the rise of the jingoism Wallace noticed just days after the attack being taken to a level where everything was allowed for the sake of the country, with little or no room for criticism. Spiegelman experienced now for himself the story told to him by his father, where innocents are blamed as a collective reaction; a form of hatred which is also a form of unification. To put it more simply, the hatred seen in the aftermath of the attack was a result of people coming together to find a common enemy and someone to blame. Spiegelman found a long-lost identity amidst the attacks and a hope that all people were in the same boat, only to find an even more polarized atmosphere. However, it seems like Spiegelman is moving away from the motives and the outcome of 9/11 and instead dwelling on identity politics. At this key turn in contemporary thought, away from a robust liberalism and an acceptance of diversity as key to American lifeways, one can through the passage of the antisemitic woman argue that Spiegelman instead is blaming the individual for the attacks. Spiegelman is therefore arguably falling into the same trap that Tony Judt gets at in *Bush's Useful* Idiots (2006), where Judt explains how liberal attitudes were sidelined after 9/11. Judt argues that American liberalism, including racial, cultural and religious diversity, were replaced with more personalized identity politics. Spiegelman certainly have the credibility as a storyteller through his witness that day, his family history and spectacularly drawn representations. An example of this are the repeated illustrations of people falling capturing the

horror of a nation, arguably even more so than Wallace's written words, as they present a graphical representation of what millions watched on TV. However, Spiegelman's personalization of social and political issues is what might be part of the problem Judt points at, where Spiegelman conveys a narrow and personal approach rather than an open-minded and broader perspective. Spiegelman's attitudes then serve in contrast to Wallace, who arguably demonstrated a more nuanced response in *The View from Mrs. Thompson's*. Wallace did so moreover in another essay, published by The Atlantic in 2007 called *Just Asking*. Here, he questioned whether we should accept 9/11 as part of living in a technological era and not exaggerate the reactions:

> Are you up for a thought experiment? What if we chose to regard the 2,973 innocents killed in the atrocities of 9/11 not as victims but as democratic martyrs, 'sacrifices on the altar of freedom'? In other words, what if we decided that a certain baseline vulnerability to terrorism is part of the price of the American idea? And, thus, that ours is a generation of Americans called to make great sacrifices in order to preserve our democratic way of life—sacrifices not just of our soldiers and money but of our personal safety and comfort? (Wallace, 2007)

Wallace's view of democratic sacrifices being a price to pay in a contemporary society met criticism from scholars, with the likes of Lucas Thompson calling Wallace's piece a 'scandalous claim' (Clare, 2018). Nevertheless, this type of mature response from Wallace in both *The View from Mrs. Thompson's* and *Just Asking* was arguably missing in the more personal and paranoid writing of Spiegelman. In addition, the introduction mentioned that Thomas Pynchon's *Bleeding Edge* from 2013 was considered for this thesis. The novel follows the investigator Maxine Tarnow before, during and after September 11. Due to the novel's complexity,

Pynchon's work could have been dedicated to an own thesis. However, there is a passage late in the book which is essential to mention regarding the chance of acting on 9/11 in a grown-up way. In a dialogue with Maxine, her best friend Heidi asserts what Wallace gets at:

> The day was a terrible tragedy. But it isn't the whole story. Can't you feel it, how everybody's regressing? 11 September infantilized this country. It had a chance to grow up, instead it chose to default back to childhood (Pynchon, 2013, p. 336)

The character of Heidi argues that there was more to 9/11 than the attacks. She asserts, as Wallace, that there was a chance of mature attitudes where true change could have happened. Instead, Heidi says that the United States treated itself as a child without progress. Surely, Pynchon's novel was published later than Spiegelman's comic, but we have already seen through Wallace and Didion that it was possible to write an open-minded and adult response early on. Even though Spiegelman saw the other side of unification, as a recipient of hate, he arguably lacks the imagination of Wallace, Didion and Pynchon in terms of a nuanced approach to 9/11. This thesis mentioned Katalin Orbán in the introduction, who argues that Spiegelman holds on to a personal trauma, focusing on the provincial scenery, rather than a global perspective (Orbán, 2007). The portrayal of personal encounters like the antisemitic lady illustrates what Orbán gets at, as Spiegelman arguably moves away from the attack's repercussions and dwells on the replacement of American liberalism.

One Nation, Two Flags

Art Spiegelman concludes that the country was always divided with an illustration of the election map from the 2000 United States Presidential election, where Al Gore narrowly lost to George W. Bush Akerman, 2001), (Figure 4). Spiegelman uses this map to illustrate American

polarization, and the drawing is followed by two flags underneath the map: one flag consisting only of stars and one only of stripes, calling it the blue and red zone of the US. Holding the flags are one group of people in blue and another group of red, illustrating the colors of the two major American political parties.

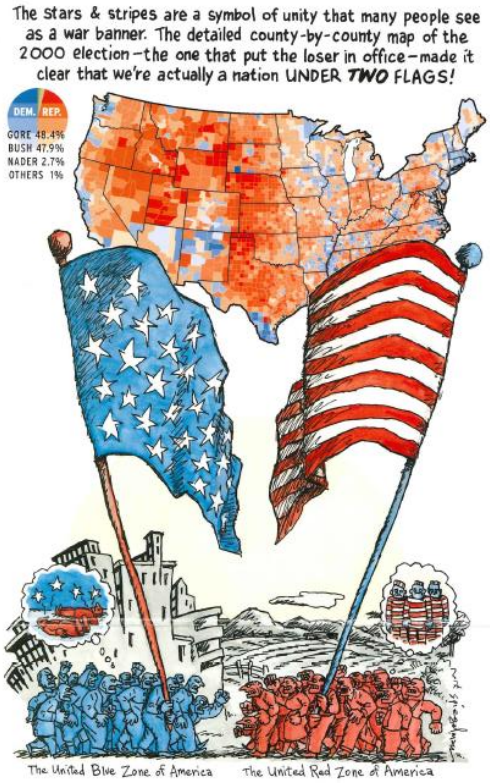

Figure 4: Art Spiegelman, I*n The Shadow of No Towers*, 7.

He continues to use these colors as a representation of a divided country, clearly identifying himself with the blue side in the evidence of him calling Bush a 'creature' and that he upon visiting republican states 'usually end up in the one county that was at least Light Blue' (Spiegelman, 2004, p 7).

He further uses the colors in a comic strip he titles *An Upside Down World*, with the words 'down' and upside' having changed position and being upside down to emphasize the meaning of the strip (Figure 5). The comic strip illustrates Spiegelman having a monologue,

while there are people from the red zone hanging above him, upside down. Spiegelman begins the monologue by telling us that the 'unelected government began its war to begin all wars…' (Spiegelman, 2004, p. 7).

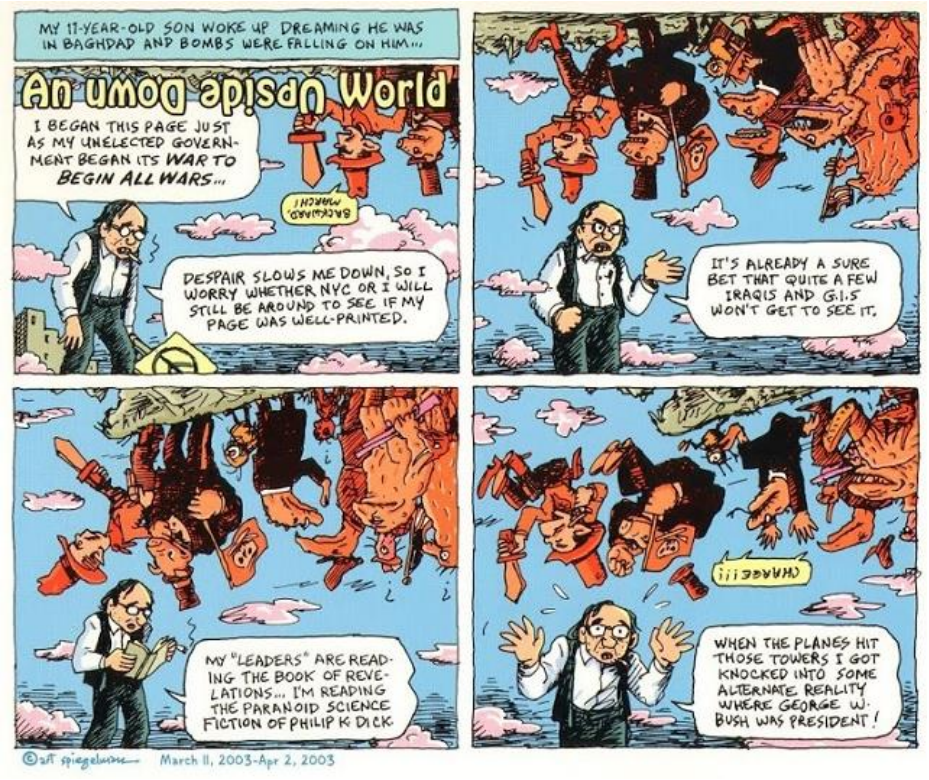

Figure 5: Art Spiegelman, *In The Shadow of No Towers*, 7.

Though Spiegelman clearly displays his own subjective political beliefs throughout the comic, his description of the government being an unelected one is supported by the fact that there was indeed an unusual path to victory for Bush in 2000. Gore had won the popular vote, but Bush won Florida through an intervention of the United States Supreme Court, where Bush's team, according to Bruce Ackerman, a Sterling Professor of Law and Political Science at Yale University, had ordered that the recount of votes in Florida were to be stopped (Akerman, 2001). This led to several protests, claiming that Bush was never elected by the people but by a Republican majority in the Supreme Court (BBC, 2001).

As for ‘the war to begin all wars’, the phrase is a clear play on ‘war to end all wars’, a famous term for the First World War (Lexico, n.d.). By reading the phrase, one could not be sure whether Spiegelman was referring to the war in Afghanistan shortly after the attacks or the Iraq War two years later. However, Spiegelman has dated the comic strip to March and April of 2003, making certain that the operation in Iraq is the war that he is referring to. Further on in the strip, Spiegelman formulates polarization through describing the distance between himself and his government. His government ‘reading the book of revelations’ (Spiegelman, 2004, p. 7) is arguably a way for Spiegelman to say that he thinks the United States government are leading the country towards apocalyptic conditions and that he strongly opposes the mindset of the administration. Meanwhile, an army of people colored red are seen above Spiegelman, led by what resembles a caricature of President George W. Bush, who is satirically used throughout the comic and illustrated as a leader of the polarization Spiegelman is narrating. For instance, on page 4, Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney are riding a bald eagle (Figure 6). Cheney is seated in front of Bush, cutting the throat of the eagle with a box cutter as the eagle is screaming: ‘Why do they hate us? Why???’ (Spiegelman, 2004, p. 4). Bush are watching from behind, saying ‘Let’s roll’.

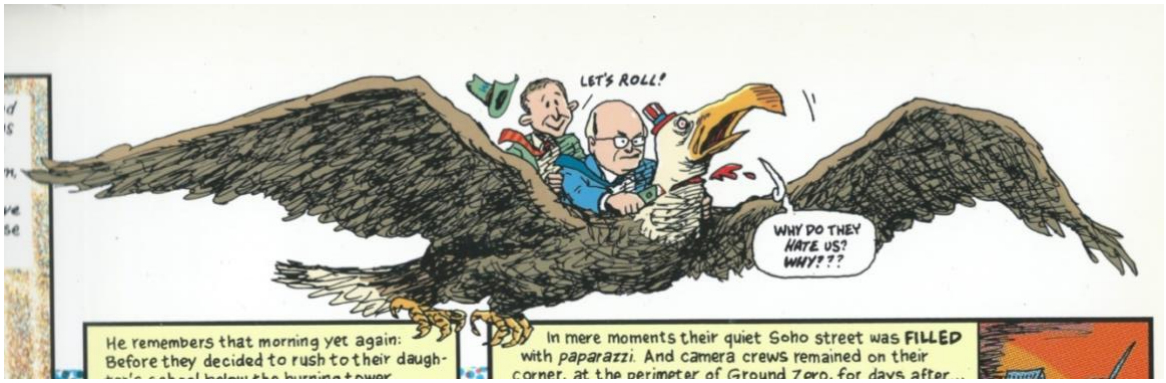

Figure 6: Art Spiegelman, *In The Shadow of No Towers*, 4.

To understand the irony and the deeper meaning behind this illustration, one must know the context surrounding the drawing. Cheney’s position as a ‘pilot’ and his box cutter is an allusion

to 9/11, where it was revealed that the hijackers had used box cutters to intimidate and get control of the planes (Kean et al., 2004). In addition, Bush's 'Let's roll!' is another reference to 9/11. The phrase famously belongs to Todd Beamer, one of the passengers of United Airlines Flight 93. While hijacked, passengers and crew heard about the other three planes that had been deliberately flown into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Knowing this, they attacked the hijackers which eventually made the plane crash in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, rather than the believed target of the United States Capitol building. While preparing to storm the cockpit, Beamer was heard by a phone operator saying 'Are you ready? Okay. Let's roll' (Vulliamy, 2001). If Spiegelman had drawn two terrorists on the back of the bald eagle, knowing the eagle is seen as a symbol of the United States, its words would be directed as to why the terrorist hates the country and its people. By replacing them with Bush and Cheney, Spiegelman is implying that the actions of the government are what are truly creates polarization and hatred. This type of irony, together with the powerful representation of polarization in form of red versus blue is arguably where Spiegelman escapes the mentioned 'trap' of Judt's personalized identity politics. It can be argued that Spiegelman holds onto the personal trauma and local landscape of New York by worrying if himself or even the city will exist after the war, as seen in Figure 5 and throughout the comic. However, when Spiegelman changes the perspective to deal with possible casualties of American soldiers[7] and Iraqi civilians (Figure 5), he arguably expands his work beyond his personal traumatic state. Here, there are direct and indirect criticism to the political climate at the time, rather than attitudes that are embracing identity politics.

[7] Spiegelman writes G.I.S, a term used to describe soldiers in the United States army ("GI", n.d.)

Wallace versus Spiegelman

To read the two mentioned works in light of each other is arguably a difficult task as they belong to contrasting contents and genres. That being said, there are some obvious similarities, as both Wallace and Spiegelman narrate the broad topic of the September 11 attacks. However, it can be discussed whether the two authors had the same purpose. From examples shown in this chapter, Wallace's essay appears informative in an open-minded way with his colorful description of his neighbors and the hidden warnings of an increasingly yapping patriotism. In contrast, Spiegelman displays a narrow and dramatic depiction, where his own traumatic experience is prioritized. An example of their differences is clearly shown in their descriptions of the World Trade Center. Wallace articulates the collapse of the towers in what can be called a calm manner, writing that the first tower 'was falling so perfectly-seeming down into itself' (Wallace, 2001) and being confused whether the collapse of the second tower was a rerun of the first. Wallace's contemplative yet pragmatic tone arguably shines through his entire essay, where no matter what he describes is approached in an open-minded and reflective way. In Spiegelman's comic, the World Trade Center occurs in the comic's title. The 'Shadow of No Towers' is arguably a metaphor for the aftermath of the attacks and Spiegelman's take on his own personal trauma after 9/11, but the towers are also an important and recurring symbol in his work. There is a personification of the World Trade Center in the comic, exemplified with Spiegelman drawing himself and his wife as what appears to be the twins from Rudolph Dirks' *Katzenjammer Kid*s with the towers on top of their heads, first seen on page two. On several pages, the World Trade Center is drawn as a glowing structure, where the repeated illustrations of the towers serve as images of Spiegelman's trauma. This representation is clearly seen on page five, with a note over one of the glowing towers reading 'I'm just trying to relive my September 11 trauma (…)' (Spiegelman, 2004, p. 5). In the very last comic strip, the same tower is pictured, as Spiegelman writes:

> The Towers have come to loom far larger than life… but they seem to get smaller every day… Happy anniversary (Spiegelman, 2004, p. 10).

When Spiegelman writes that the towers 'get smaller everyday', the illustrations are drawn darker, suggesting that in the end, Spiegelman is slowly moving away his traumatic experience. The personification and obsession with the World Trade Center make the towers more than just objects on the Manhattan skyline. They are arguably a symbol of trauma and fear; one that is marked in Spiegelman's memories.

Both authors are also actively looking back at easier times. Wallace portrays a notion of carefree existence through memories of his friends and neighbors. However, Wallace's main source of redemption from the horror of 9/11 is from the remembrance of recent everyday occurrences, such as his description of what the weather was like in Bloomington prior to the attacks:

> There are maybe ten days a year when it's gorgeous here, and this is one of them. It's clear and temperate and wonderfully dry after several straight weeks of what felt like living in somebody's armpit (Wallace, 2001).

Whereas Spiegelman reveals little or no direct connection to what his world was before the attacks, Wallace points at the normality of the time leading up the attacks. However, Spiegelman arguably looks back at easier times through 20th century comics. Through old comic strips, he escapes his personal trauma in a time he saw as the end of the world. In the introduction of the vintage comic selection that are gathered in the end of his comic, Spiegelman writes that old comics took his attention away from the attacks:

> The only cultural artifacts that could get past my defenses to flood my eyes and brain with something other than images of burning towers were old comic strips; vital, unpretentious ephemera from the optimistic dawn of the 20th century. That they were made with so much skill and verve but never intended to last past the day they appeared in the newspaper gave them poignancy: they were just right for an end-of-the-world moment. (Spiegelman, 2004, p. 11).

Similar to the joy Wallace found in the small details of everyday life, Spiegelman found his way of coping with a personal tragedy through the optimism given by old comics that he saw as contrasting to the era he was living through.

Finally, they are both arguing against the rampant patriotism that developed in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. This thesis has already covered the patriotic responses of Bloomington, which Wallace sees as having the potential of polarizing the nation rather than being unifying. Though argued that Spiegelman falls into the trap of identity politics by being less open-minded than Wallace in his essay, Spiegelman too worries about the ineffectuality of extreme patriotism. Spiegelman's concerns over a growing patriotism are already shown through his colorful depiction of an increasingly polarized country. As with Wallace, Spiegelman gets at the use of the American flag:

> Nothin' like the end of the world to help bring folks together… But why did those provincial American flags have to sprout out of the embers of Ground Zero? Why not… a globe? (Spiegelman, 2004, p. 7).

Here, Spiegelman refers to flags being planted at the site where the World Trade Center stood. A famous photograph taken by Thomas E. Franklin titled *Raising the Flag at Ground Zero* showing firefighters raising the United States flag at the rubbles of the towers (Franklin, 2001). The photo echoes the iconic image of United States marines raising the flag at Mount Suribachi in the Battle of Iwo Jima, where the latter is often seen as a patriotic symbol of American victory in times of war (Renn, 2015). In a rare case of elaborating outside of his local and personal state of mind, Spiegelman arguably asks why people coming together should be limited to New York or the United States instead of being a chance for the world to become a better place. Instead, both Wallace and Spiegelman saw an extreme form of patriotism that was truly taking place after the attacks. Scholar George McKenna at Yale University asserts in his book *The Puritan Origins of American Patriotism* from 2007 that there were flags waving everywhere after the attacks, from flags on poles to signs on house lawns. In a paragraph explaining the patriotism that arose after 9/11, McKenna is accurately portraying how the patriotic atmosphere came to life immediately after the attacks:

> In the aftermath of the Twin Towers attack the symbolic expression of patriotism seemed to cross all religious, ethnic, ideological, and party lines. Democrats and Republicans from the House and Senate stood in front of the Capitol–toward which the fourth plane was apparently headed before the passengers intervened–and proclaimed their unity. Then, spontaneously, one of them started singing 'God Bless America,' and they all joined in. CBS anchor Dan Rather appeared on David Letterman's television show that evening and chocked up trying to recite a line from Katherine Bate's 'America the Beautiful' ('Thine alabaster cities gleam/Undimmed by human tears!'). Letterman, embarrassed but moved himself, said, 'That's all right. That's all right (McKenna, 2007, p. 353).

McKenna describes the patriotic feelings Wallace experienced in his neighborhood, only that the same patriotism took place in other parts of society as well, here demonstrated through popular culture and the leaders of the country in Washington DC. However, one can argue that the time after 9/11 was an era of misplaced patriotism, as patriotic expressions unfolded beyond the waving of flags, with the example of changing the name 'French fries' to 'freedom fries' after France opposed the war in Iraq (Wilson, 2005). The other side of the misplaced and rampant patriotism is the personal side, which Wallace and Didion gets at, where true patriotism is about coming together in a unifying shock and grief rather than a patriotism in form personalized hatred. Thus, tough both authors depict the problems with extreme form of patriotism, Spiegelman arguably fails to see the larger impact of the rampant patriotic United States after 9/11, whereas Wallace, through his nuanced portrayal of human behaviors saw how patriotism could fuel a personal hate only days after the attacks.

Chapter conclusion

This chapter intended to illustrate how the first literary works about 9/11 represented the patriotic human emotions as the start of a personal and ineffectual aggression. David Foster Wallace and Art Spiegelman presented those emotions and the aftermath together with the political climate at the time. In *The View from Mrs. Thompson's*, Wallace gave us the view of the 'normal', avarage US, seen miles away from the attacks. The essay demonstrated the immediate signs of personal aggression and came with a warning for the potential of missing out on a much-needed radical change. In *The Shadow of No Towers*, the following years of polarization and warfare was foreshadowed through Spiegelman's personal emotions and historical context. However, it was suggested that Spiegelman more so than Wallace, is part of the problem in regard to a personalization of aggression. Surely, New York City was at the time paranoid and chaotic, but as Wallace noted, so was the case miles away. The deeply personal

aspect of Spiegelman's work arguably serves as a contribution to the liberal attitudes of which Tony Judt argued were sidelined after the attacks, through holding on to a limited New York perspective.

However, they both portray the diverse country that was attacked September 11, 2001. Through Wallace we are told the responses of the 'average American' Mrs. Thompson and with Spiegelman we see the view from a minority group, whose story takes place in the metropolis that is New York City. Together they contribute to understand the complexity of the United States as a nation and the diverse views following the attacks.

One major concern to draw from Wallace and Spiegelman is the fact that no matter how the unification takes place, whether a togetherness is seen through patriotism or common hatred, there will still be a world where the majority of people are disempowered. What Wallace and Didion saw as 'yapping patriotism' and Spiegelman's dwelling on identity politics will arguably not solve the equality of opportunity. This personalization of aggression only disables the aggressor and distracts them from the larger political and ongoing social transformations of which this thesis will explore in the upcoming chapter.

Chapter 2: The Useful Aggression

This chapter will argue that through the documentary genre, Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* depicts the personalization of aggression as one factor that disables and distracts the aggressor and thus contributes to the disempowerment of people.

Michael Moore is an American filmmaker, born April 23, 1954. He began his career as a journalist in his hometown of Flint, Michigan, before he started creating documentaries. His directorial debut *Roger & Me* (1987), where Moore interviews those responsible for mass unemployment in Flint, was met with positive reviews and financial success. As were his later films, among them *Bowling for Columbine* (2002) and *Sicko* (2007). (Benson and Snee, 2015).

In *Fahrenheit 9/11*, Moore starts with the images of the 2000 election, along with his own voiceover, making the same arguments as Spiegelman that George W. Bush was an unelected President due to an unfair election process. From here, Moore criticizes both the Bush administration and his family in terms of the reaction to 9/11 and their foreign policy. The documentary is mostly based on public documents and footage from news archives, as well as comments from Moore himself.

Documentaries consists of texts that are presumably non-fiction. Film theorist Bill Nichols argues that the genre can be seen as a text making an argument about the real world (Nichols, 1991), or as the Scottish documentary maker coined it: 'the creative treatment of actuality' (Kerrigan, McIntyre, 2010, p. 112). Nichols further argues that we can categorize documentaries in six specific modes: expository, observational, participatory, reflexive, performative and poetic. This chapter will focus on two of those modes, the reflexive and the performative. Nichols defines the reflexive mode of documentaries for being constructed as they are made, meaning that the story relies on how the process goes as the film is constructed and shot. The performative mode, by Nichols' view, is more personal than the reflexive mode, often using the subjective and affective dimensions of the filmmaker to tell the story. What

these modes provides us is a personal, emotional and the appearance of a spontaneous take on a specific topic. In *Fahrenheit 9/11*, Moore uses the modes to explore the political situation post 9/11, arguably in his own passionate way. The reason for focusing on these explicit modes is that *Fahrenheit 9/11* arguably overlaps them both, which will be shown later in the chapter.

However, Moore's films have also been controversial and met with criticism, varying from the content in his works to the function of his film making, which will also be referred to.

FAHRENHEIT 9/11

> ‘We like non-fiction and we live in fictitious times. We live in the time where we have fictitious election results that elects a fictitious President. We live in a time where we have a man sending us to war for fictitious reasons’
>
> Michael Moore’s acceptance speech after winning Best Documentary Feature at the 75th Academy Awards (Oscars, 2012)

The have-mores

The criticism of George W. Bush is a recurring element throughout *Fahrenheit 9/11*. From early on in the documentary, Michael Moore is portraying the powerful interests of the Bush administration as an explanation of why the American people was disempowered post 9/11. After mentioning the 2000 election, the film shifts focus to the immediate reactions made by government officials following the September 11 attacks. Moore uses examples of these reactions as an introduction to the argument of why Bush had a history to hide from the public. One of the first government responses was the order of approximately 4000 planes to immediately land at the nearest airport, and airports were closed for three days (Cain, 2016). In the film, archived news footage illustrates that the President’s father, former President George H. W. Bush, was one of many who were on a grounded plane. The Puerto Rican singer Ricky Martin is also mentioned in this context, leading Moore to comment, ‘Not even Ricky Martin could fly’ (Moore, 2004), as he humorously illustrates the severity of the situation. Moore then goes on to say that no one wanted to fly, with the exception of the bin Laden-family. This claim is followed by a footage of an airplane taking off accompanied by an ironic use of *We Gotta Get Out of This Place* by The Animals as a background soundtrack. The lyrics reads further ‘if

it's the last thing we ever do' (Mann & Weil, 1965), which is arguably suitable and appropriately apocalyptic to the paranoid climate shortly after the attacks. Moore then claims that 24 members of the bin Laden family were allowed to leave the United States on September 13, without being interviewed by the any form of law enforcement. This assertion has later been claimed as false by a staff statement report from the 9/11 Commission. They found no evidence for flights containing Saudi Arabians leaving the country while the airspace was locked down. Despite the commission also debunk the claim that Saudi nationals were allowed to leave without any form of questioning, they do state that there were planes leaving the United States between September 14 and September 20. This was a request from the Saudi government, in suspect of retaliation against Saudi nationals. The commission could not identify who the Saudi government contacted in relation to this appeal (9-11commission.gov, 2004). In spite of misinformation involving the time of the flights and the disputed claim of a lack of interviews, it is the doubtfulness of who authorized the planes that Moore uses in favor of his argument that the Bush administration helped Saudi nationals out of the country. Furthermore, he uses historical references to give context to the nature of the situation and to address the question of why the American people are hesitant to criticize the government:

> Can you imagine in the days after the Oklahoma City terrorist bombing, President Clinton helping to arrange a trip out of the country for the McVeigh family? What would have happened to Clinton if that had been revealed? (Moore, 2004).

Moore is here referring to Timothy McVeigh, the perpetrator of the mentioned Oklahoma City attack 1995, a bomb which killed 168 people, making it the deadliest attack on American soil until the 9/11 attacks (Ward & Pilat, 2016). There are comparisons to be made between McVeigh and the 9/11 perpetrators in terms of the hate towards the United States government,

which arguably makes it an appropriate example for Moore to highlight. The question of what would have happened to former President Bill Clinton is comically followed by a film footage of people burning a person at a stake, implying that the American people would have turned against Clinton had he helped the McVeigh family out of the country. By bringing up the repercussions of public insight, Moore argues that Bush had interests in keeping the American people uninformed. Not only because of the Saudi flights, as the documentary goes on to show a CNN interview between the American TV host Larry King and Prince Bandar, the Saudi ambassador to the US. In the interview, Bandar tells King that he once met bin Laden and that he personally thanked Bandar for his efforts in bringing the Americans to help in liberating Afghanistan from the Soviet Union. When asked about his impression of bin Laden, Bandar tells King that he was 'not impressed' and that he thought bin Laden was a 'simple and very quiet guy' (Moore, 2004). The interview is then cut to a footage of Bush looking thoughtful and somber, with Moore narrating a response:

> Hmm. A simple and quiet guy, whose family just happened to have a business relationship with the family of George W. Bush. Is that what he was thinking about? Because if the public knew this, it wouldn't look very good. Was he thinking, 'you know, I need a big, black marker'? (Moore, 2004).

Moore applies the same words Bandar uses to describe bin Laden as a way to characterize Bush as well. In *The View From Mrs. Thompson's,* Wallace noted the growing aggression towards Muslims and the evil behind the attack. Here, Moore is arguably turning that aggression around by making comparisons between the enemy and the United States President, arguing that Bush's history should be looked more into.

Second, the following part of the documentary is where Moore introduces the difficult relationship between the Bush and bin Laden family. The 'big, black marker' that Moore mentions is a reference to Bush's military records, which *Fahrenheit 9/11* notes was released by the White House in response to Moore calling Bush a deserter. The problem according to Moore, is that a name had been blacked-out from the records. Moore explains that in 1972, two pilots had been suspended after from the military. One of them was Bush, the other one was James R. Bath, where the latter was the blacked-out name of the records from the White House. Again, Moore is questioning what Bush is hiding from the public. This time, he argues that the name was hidden because James R. Bath had been the 'money manager for the bin Ladens' (Moore, 2004). Moore goes on to explain that the bin Laden family had hired Bath to invest in business and that Bath invested in Bush, who had started out in the Texas oil business. Through interviews with authors James Moore and Craig Unger, Moore argues that the Saudis wanted to invest in Texas due to Bush at the time was the son of the United States President. This claim is followed by a footage of Bush, who says being the President's son provides 'unlimited access' and that 'access is power' (Moore, 2004). While Moore portrays government records and documents to rightfully support his arguments, he also uses the subject in question to find the conflicting and ironic aspects, as here with Bush, whose own words are used against him. Thus, Moore is claiming that Bush himself admits the power of the elite and the way access to certain interests are defined by the position one may have.

Finally, Moore provides information to argue that American citizens have been disempowered and disabled through powerful government interests. He points out that having a business history with a regime that is condemned by Amnesty International, turned out to be a humiliating fact for Bush after 9/11. Moore argues that a result of this embarrassment was that Bush tried to stop various investigations of the attacks. Moore uses interviews with families of 9/11 victims to stress the importance of having a thorough hearing of the attacks. For

instance, we see one widow emotionally explaining that she needs to know what happened to her husband, which is arguably portrayed by Moore to create an emphatic relation between the viewers and those affected by the attacks. In addition, Moore demonstrates historical references with the examples of Pearl Harbor and the Kennedy assassination, both of which investigations started immediately after they occurred, in order to show historical context and a nod to how events have been dealt with in the past. This segment is also where Moore uses the reflexive mode of his filmmaking, as he, together with author Craig Unger visit the street of the Saudi Arabian embassy in Washington DC. As Unger tells Moore that Saudi Arabian investments represents a large part of the US, they are interrupted by police officers. Moore questions the fact that the Secret Service[8] protects a foreign embassy, before his narrative voice-over claims that Saudi Arabian Prince Bandar is 'perhaps the best-protected ambassador in the US' (Moore, 2004). He follows this claim by mentioning that Bandar was dining with Bush on September 13, just two days after the attacks:

> In the distance, across the Potomac, was the Pentagon, partially in ruins. I wonder if Mr. Bush told Prince Bandar not to worry because he already had a plan in motion (Moore, 2004).

Moore is not only echoing the crash of American Flight 77 at the Pentagon just two days prior to Bandar and Bush's dinner as a way to highlight the 9/11 context, but also to paint the distance between Bush and the American people. He succeeds to portray the separation between Bush and the nation even more clearly later in the documentary, as we see a footage of a speech by Bush on the Al Smith Memorial Dinner, 2000, where the former President says:

[8] The United States Secret Service is responsible for the protection of politicians, including the President ("secret service", n.d.).

> This is an impressive crowd. The haves, and the have-mores. Some people call you the elite. I call you my base. (Moore, 2004).

What Moore argues is that the interests of the Bush administration had been in favor of the elite, or as Bush himself put it, even though humorously, his base. Though there were other aspects in the disablement and disempowering of the American people, as this chapter will take a look at, Moore argues that foundation of the people losing their power was the division between the government and the citizens. Bush had, as Moore points out, frequently acted in his and his family's own interests, fueling power to the 'haves' and 'have-mores' instead of the ordinary American, the Mrs. Thompson. To embark upon a national crisis like 9/11 with this polarizing framework was arguably something to exploit, especially with Bush's upcoming 'plan in motion' (Moore, 2004).

Using fear

Through a creative treatment of reality, *Fahrenheit 9/11* argues that the United States government exploited the personalization of aggression and created a social environment based on fear. One of the claims from Moore surrounding this fear is that it works. Following the war in Afghanistan, Moore argues that Bush had 'a new target: the American people' (Moore. 2004). Succeeding this statement is neither Moore's own words nor government documents, but rather archived news footage that demonstrates his claim. The footages portray various news reports of terrorist threats, urging people to be on the lookout for 'model airplanes packed with explosives' (Moore, 2004) and hijacking taking place on ferries. Moore then interviews congressman and psychiatrist Jim McDermott. He starts the interview with his initial claim 'fear works' (Moore, 2004) to which McDermott agrees. In the question of how fear is used, Moore,

through the voice of McDermott, points at the way the government created ‘an aura of endless threat’ with ‘mixed messages’ (Moore, 2004):

> It's like training a dog. You tell him sit down or you tell him to roll over at the same time, the dog doesn't know what to do. Well, the American people were being treated like that. It was really very, very skillful and ugly what they did (Moore, 2004)

The documentary then cuts to footages of Bush supporting that claim of mixed messages, among these a clip of him saying the American people is ‘no longer safe’ (Moore, 2004) and another clip where he urges his citizens to fly and travel around the country. Moore demonstrates that Bush’s messages were continuously and uncritically broadcasted by various media outlets. It may be argued that the role of the media is to report the order of the day, but seminal contributions to uncritical media can also be found in Tony Judt’s essay *Bush’s Useful Idiots* (2006). Judt argues the same that Moore is pointing at, that ‘a fearful conformism gripped the mainstream media’ (Judt, 2006) post 9/11. On top of that, if the media consumption of the average American that Wallace describes in *The View from Mrs. Thompson* is correct, then Moore arguably has credibility in the claim of the media being an important factor of stoking fear post 9/11.

In question of the consequences connected to the fear that works, Moore claims that the fearful atmosphere spread across the US. One scene involves Moore interviewing residents of Tappahannock, Virginia, a small American town that is mentioned as a possible target for a new terrorist attack, even though the town may have been mixed up with Rappahannock county. When asked by Moore whether the town has any possible targets for terrorism, a woman answers that they have ‘a big spaghetti supper in here’ (Moore, 2004). This is how Moore illustrates the way the fear became personal, with the contrast between a spaghetti supper and

larger terrorist targets like skyscrapers and government buildings. He further proves the point of fear and hatred becoming personal when asking residents if they are more distrustful towards unfamiliar people. One answers that she looks at ‘certain people’ and wonder if ‘they could be a terrorist’ (Moore, 2004). Another says everyone feels that way and that ‘even if you do know them, you really can't trust them then’ (Moore, 2004). Subsequently, Moore’s voiceover concludes:

> From Tappahannock… to Rappahannock… to every town and village in America. The people were afraid (Moore, 2004).

Moore arguably claims that there was a sense of paranoia that had hit the country, which is a realization Wallace’s depictions, as he argued three years prior that 9/11 was never aimed towards the average, rural US. Moore is here claiming that places far away from Spiegelman’s streets of New York had been reached by the fear and paranoid climate that came out of the attacks. He states that a fearful nation then turned to the government for protection, and Moore asks the essential question of what exactly the people were to be protected from, and how. One major instance of safety measures was through the U.S.A Patriot Act. Moore is again working with news archive footage to summarize the Patriot Act’s most essential points:

> The U.S.A. Patriot Act allows for searches of medical and financial records, computer and telephone conversations, and even for the books that you take out of the library (Moore, 2004).

Regarding this new sets of laws, Moore argues that it was never about protecting the citizens, but rather a way of keeping the nation fearful. Through certain scenes that reveals how the law

affected the life of Americans, Moore's claim about consistent fear is arguably a convincing argument. One scene tells the story of Barry Reingold, a pensioner from Oakland, California. In an interview with Moore, he recalls that he was met by the FBI after being critical of Bush and comparing his actions with bin Laden's. As of this occurrence, Reingold felt his rights and freedom had been taken away. Moore arguably portrays his story to claim, through his witness, that the case is the same for all of the United States and that the government was to blame. To back this up, Moore once again uses Bush's own words against him, with a clip of him saying 'a dictatorship would be a heck of a lot easier, there's no question about it' (Moore, 2004). In addition, Moore turns to what now arguably seems like an ongoing interview with congressman McDermott, where the latter claims that the Bush administration had 'ideas of things they would like to do' (Moore, 2004) and that through 9/11 the government found their way of making it happen, arguably insinuating that one of those ways were through the disempowerment of a Patriot Act. On top of that, McDermott argues that no one truly read the Patriot Act before it was passed by Congress, leading Moore to ask another member of Congress, John Conyers of why this is the case. When he is told by Conyers that they 'don't read most of the bills' (Moore, 2004), Moore does what he describes as 'the only patriotic thing to do' (Moore, 2004) and in a short sequence he drives an ice cream truck nearby the Capitol Building while reading out U.S.A. Patriot Act. Though Moore again clearly uses humor to emphasize his claims, the scene is also an example of how he overlaps both the reflexive and performative mode as a documentary maker. On one side, he performs political stunts like the mentioned ice cream sequence above and though such stunts not necessarily impact the process of the film each time, they are part of Moore's way of constructing the story as new information shines through. Moreover, these stunts show the subjective side of the film maker and serves as evidence of Moore's own views on the topics in hand.

In addition of criticizing the impact the Patriot Act had on American civilians, Moore also casts doubt on the presumption that the law was about securing the homeland:

> While homeland security was making sure breast milk was kept off our planes, they were also doing everything possible to ensure no one could light a firebomb onboard (Moore, 2004).

Here, Moore is ironically referring to an interview done with a mother who was not allowed a certain amount of breast milk onboard a plane and the fact that passengers can bring 'four books of matches and two lighters', according to a security guard seen in a brief clip. The clip is part of one last argument to claim that the government's new law was not about creating the feeling of safety, as Moore calls out the hypocrisy of denying breast milk and at the same time allowing sets of flame generating devices onboard airplanes. In another clip, Moore cuts to the state of Oregon, where one police officer guards a 100-mile coastline who claims that there were at times only eight officers in total that protected the entire state. Moore uses these numbers and interviews with the Oregon officers in the same way he does with other interviews, news footage and speeches; to convince the viewers that Bush and his administration took advantage of a nation that felt they were under attack and that they stoked their fear by an increased surveillance and disempowerment of the people.

An aspect that Moore does not touch upon are conspiracy theories regarding 9/11 and such theories might be explained by the fear that Moore portrays in his documentary. Conspiracy theories in various forms have been present since early after the attack. One of the theories are that the United States government knew about the attack and purposely or passively let the hijackings take place as a way of justifying new wars in the Middle East (Norman, 2011). Spiegelman encountered as mentioned the conspiracy of the Jews being responsible of the

attack and one famous rumor after the attack involved a claim that 4000 Jews stayed home from their work at the World Trade Center on September 11. This claim has however been debunked, as 10-15 percent of 9/11 victims were Jewish (Norman, 2011). Other theories name 9/11 as an 'inside job', where the Bush administration were the ones that orchestrated the attacks. The theory involves several claims, such as there being no plane hitting the Pentagon but rather a missile and that United Airlines Flight 93 were shot down by fighter jets instead of crashing due to heroic acts of the passengers. Perhaps the most famous theory relates to the collapse of the World Trade Center. Theories about the Twin Towers involves skepticism towards passenger airplanes being able to knock down two of the world's tallest buildings, with claims that there was a controlled demolition of the towers, thus claiming the evidence of a planned inside job. Both conspiracies involving the Pentagon and Flight 93 have been debunked, as it exists a number of witnesses, audiotapes and scientific explanations that disproves such theories. (Norman, 2011). The claim that there must have been explosives that made the World Trade Center collapse is also incorrect, according to experts such as former New York deputy fire chief Vincent Dunn. Dunn states that though the impact of the planes hitting the buildings were not enough to melt the buildings' steel alone, the impact and the following high temperature made the towers' structure loose its strength (PopularMechanicsEditors, 2020). 9/11 conspiracy theories were also seen in literature and art, such as the film *Loose Change* (2005) that favors the theories (Sales, 2006) and the American hip-hop artist Vinnie Paz song titled *End of Days* where Paz indicates that someone else than Al-Qaida were responsible for the attacks (Paz, 2010). What is interesting in relation to this thesis is that according to a 2006 poll done by Scripps Howard News Service, 36 percent of Americans believed that the United States government had something to do with the attacks (Hargrove & Howard, 2007). One can say that conspiracy theories are unavoidable in times of history changing events like 9/11, as we have seen conspiracies claiming the moon landing being fake (Godwin, 2019) and the

American singer Elvis Presley still being alive (Chan, 2017). In addition, one might argue that such a distrust in the government contradicts the argument of there being a conformism taking place in the United States after 9/11, as the conspiracy theories involving the attacks put the Bush administration at blame. However, the development of such theories could arguably be explained with what Moore gets at in relation to the fear, anger and feeling of insecurity, as Americans looked for answers in a time of war and uncertainty. As we soon shall see, Moore argues that the faith in the government actions were strong, but perhaps the conspiracy theories that thrived following the attacks were another form of people coming together in a fearful atmosphere, as the Terror Management Theory explained earlier in the thesis (Pyszczynski, et al., 2003). Additionally, such conspiracies can itself take advantage of people's personal aggression, especially if the faith in leaders declines. In an article published by Popular Mechanics in 2020, the late senator John McCain gets at this thought about conspiracies making the most out of people's hatred:

> The 9/11 conspiracy movement exploits the public's anger and sadness. It shakes Americans' faith in their government at a time when that faith is already near an all-time low. It traffics in ugly, unfounded accusations of extraordinary evil against fellow Americans (McCain, 2020).

When McCain refers to the faith in the government, it is unclear whether he indicates the criticism of the Bush administration after finding no proof of weapons of mass destruction or the Trump era, which this thesis will come back to in the conclusion. Nonetheless, McCain arguably depicts another result of aggression and fear, where the hysteria that Moore describes alters the public's imagination of reality, thus creating room for conspiracies. Not only are these

conspiracies a threat to the historical truth of what happened before, on and after 9/11 and McCain argues such theories can be ineffectual in the lessons learned from the attacks:

> Journalists, the 9/11 Commission, congressional investigators, academic researchers and others have reconstructed these terrible events in extraordinary detail. Much of what we have learned has been frustrating, even infuriating. Anger can be healthy when it spurs a commitment to change. But it is corrosive and dangerous when it curdles into paranoia and suspicion (McCain, 2020)

McCain arguably gets at a mature form of response similar to what we have seen in Wallace, in addition to Didion and Pynchon, as the senator asserts how anger can be the basis for radical change in society. The fearful nation that Moore depicts had consequences in people's own view of what happened on 9/11, creating a suspicious attitude within the nation's own borders.

Notably, this is not the first time in his career that Moore embarks upon the use of fear. In Moore's 2002 documentary *Bowling for Columbine,* he is again arguing that the media is a benefactor in inciting fear, here seen in the light of gun violence. Here, Moore argues that politicians and the media blamed video games and artists like the American singer Marilyn Manson (Moore, 2002). More importantly, both *Bowling for Columbine* and *Fahrenheit 9/11* portray how a government influenced media is stoking fear and a call for protection. Whereas Moore in *Bowling for Columbine* argues fear contributed to Americans need for buying weapons, he suggests in *Fahrenheit 9/11* that the same element was present in order to get the American people's endorsements for new laws that would limit their liberty. This is arguably why he chose *Fahrenheit 9/11* as a title. The name alludes to the 1953 novel *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury, whose title refers to the temperature it takes for books to burn. In the tagline, which works as a slogan for the film, Moore chose 'the temperature at which freedom burn',

suggesting that citizens got their freedom taken away from them as a consequence of the government's actions post 9/11. This title decision resulted in a dispute between Moore and Radbury, where the latter demanded an apology from Moore for the play on his original title (AssociatedPress, 2004). Despite the controversy surrounding the documentary's name, the title is arguably an accurate one, as Radbury's novel depicts a future American society at which books are forbidden and burned. Moore conveys a similar story, only that his documentary is contemporary and based on real events involving the disempowerment of the American people rather than books. As for the comparisons to Moore's earlier works, they differ on one major issue, as the climate of fear created post 9/11 had another major prospect behind it. Or in other words, as Moore states in the very end of the documentary's section on fear: 'They just wanted us to be fearful enough so that we'd get behind what their real plan was' (Moore. 2004).

The Real Plan

The real plan that Moore refers to was the invasion of Iraq and he illustrates how the war was built on a conformism that resulted in innocent casualties. First, he depicts the faith in President Bush and his actions. In his comic *In The Shadow of No Towers*, Spiegelman mentions that he 'hardly knows anyone who supports the war' (Spiegelman, 2004, 7). However, in a CNN, USA Today and Gallup poll originating from March 2003, 72 % of Americans answered they supported the Iraq War, where 59 % said they supported it strongly (Newport, 2003). In the attempt of highlighting the support Bush had in the people, Moore includes a clip from an interview with the American pop singer, Britney Spears, who says:

> Honestly, I think we should just trust our president in every decision that he makes, and we should just support that. You know? And be faithful in what happens (Moore, 2004).

Moore follows up by saying that Spears was not alone in her support and he states that the majority of the nation had faith in President Bush, as the numbers reveals he had. Where Wallace and Spiegelman too argues against an uncritical sphere, Moore simply states three years after the attacks that the faith was inevitable. As already stated through Moore's views, the United States government arguably spent the time post 9/11 taking advantage of a nation in fear and anger by stoking possible threats and withhold those fears by implementing life changing laws. One can argue that there is a point to make about what happens to a country when its population either are or feel like they are under attack. The psyche of citizens during those times might be explained by factors already mentioned, like the Terror Management Theory, which explains human behavior when people fear for their lives. However, Moore arguably indicates that years of threats and enemy creating developed a robust trust in leadership with no space left for criticism. Moore of all people would know the difficulty of being critical post 9/11, as he was met with negative reactions[9] from the audience upon criticizing Bush during his speech at the 2003 Academy Awards (Oscars, 2012). Another example of consequences of being critical is demonstrated by the American country band, Dixie Chicks, who days before the invasion of Iraq said they're 'ashamed' of Bush and did not support the war. This resulted in the group being blacklisted from radio stations, as well as receiving death threats from protesters (Light, 2016). Moore's and Dixie Chick's experience with the critical sphere are both plausible evidence of Moore's claim that the government had not only stoked fear, but also created a belief that it was eligible.

In another short scene, Moore states that the democratic party 'was there to put a stop to all these falsehoods' (Moore, 2004), followed by a footage of then Senate Democratic

[9] In the clip showing Moore's famous speech, one can clearly hear the audience booing with confusing reactions from the likes of actor Adrien Brody and director Martin Scorsese as Moore speaks. The session ends with the award's orchestra cutting off Moore's speech.

Leader, Tom Daschle, saying that he will vote in favor of Bush's needs. Through his sarcastic tone, Moore claims what Judt gets at; how the war was used as a tool by the Bush administration to enforce ideals of conformism and, as a result, destroy liberal self-confidence. In addition, as Michael Moore illustrates, such a sidelining of liberal attitudes may also disable the necessary contentions that are needed in a robust democracy. Another one of Judt's points surrounding the medias role as 'useful idiots' for Bush comes to mind as Moore argues that they failed telling the Americans the truth. What the media did not cover, according to Moore, was the personal fates of war. Those fates are key elements to *Fahrenheit 9/11*, in which Moore explores both his reflexive and performative mode, is the outcome of the war itself. On one side of that story, he is showing in some detail the consequences it had on Iraqi civilians. To create contrast, he first presents a montage of clips from prewar Bagdad, that illustrates a rather peaceful society with images from a wedding and children playing in the streets. Then the documentary cuts to graphic images of wounded victims of war, many of them children, with a man crying: 'What's this baby's crime? Was he going to fight the soldiers? Cowards!' (Moore, 2004) These words are arguably the views held by Moore and what he intends to convey by showing stirring footages of the deceased and wounded. However, the depiction of Bagdad before the war was later met with criticism from the likes of author and journalist Christopher Hitchens. In an article published by Slate Magazine in 2004, Hitchens neglects Moore's view of United States imperialism being uncalled for post 9/11. In regard to the montage of people in Iraq pre and after the invasion, Hitchens criticizes Moore for not to mention the violations of human rights in Iraq during President Saddam Hussein's regime (Hitchens, 2004). Even though leaving out valuable information and presenting selective sides of the story might be what Hitchens describes as 'ignorant' (Hitchens, 2004) or even on the verge of propaganda, it is arguably easier to accept such a decision within film making because of Moore's role as a performative documentary maker, as Moore is neither running for office nor claiming to speak on behalf of

someone other than himself. He is, as shown, fronting his own views on the political climate post 9/11.

The other side of the war that Moore explores, is the story of American soldiers. Here, we do not see Moore himself as much as earlier in the documentary. He is arguably removing himself from the documentary, in order to make room for the subjects he portrays. One of those subjects is Lila Lipscomb, whose son died in Iraq. Moore follows her upon a visit to Washington DC, where she is told by a woman outside the White House to blame Al Qaeda and not the Bush administration. When asked by Moore what the woman told her, Lila answers:

> That I'm supposed to blame the al Qaeda. The al Qaeda didn't make a decision to send my son to Iraq. Ignorance that we deal with, with everyday people. Because they don't know. People think they know, but you don't know. I thought I knew, but I didn't know (Moore, 2004).

The ‘I thought I knew’ phrase refers to Lila’s background story, where she has always seen herself as a patriot and that she saw protesters of war as someone dishonoring her son. Now, however, she had turned the aggression and blame to those she found responsible for her son’s death. This itself is one of the main conclusions of the documentary. Moore argues that the government exploited the patriotism people like Lila had in the aftermath of 9/11 as a way of getting approval for their actions. Furthermore, he argues that those exploited are often the ones who have it worst:

> I've always been amazed that the very people forced to live in the worst parts of town, go to the worst schools, and who have it the hardest, are always the first to step up to defend that very system (Moore, 2004).

Moore argues through his affectionate and active side as a film maker, that a personalization of aggression disables the aggressor. According to Wallace in chapter one, that aggression and patriotism was strong in the average, rural parts of America. However, through powerful interests, exploitation of fear and a disempowerment of the American people, Moore argues that the very aggression was turned against them, costing thousands of innocents their lives, which would include the families of the Mrs. Thompson's.

Chapter conclusion

In this chapter, the thesis argued that Fahrenheit 9/11 portrays a disempowerment of the American people caused by a personal hatred and fear following the September 11 attacks. Through the documentary genre, Moore presents a narrative based on historical facts and his own political findings of which are seen in context with emotional interviews, as well as humorous takes on political issues. The thesis argued that Moore comes back to the powerful interests of the Bush administration as a source of how the American people got disempowered, as Moore argues that the government created a distance between themselves and the people. While focused on their own power, Moore argues that the administration exploited the personalization of hate and built an atmosphere around fear. This fear involved the introduction of new laws and reminders of potential terrorist threats, to which Moore argues kept a fearful nation trust the government's actions. Moore depicts a society post 9/11 where the conformism was intact, much like Judt argues in his 2006 article. Finally, Moore discuss how this fear was a tool to invade Iraq, which we today know resulted in thousands of casualties. Moore's emotional side as a film maker shines through in this final part of the documentary, as he reveals the consequences of personally embracing hate and fear over time.

Despite his controversial ways of creating stories, Moore portrayed what Wallace warned against three years prior: A personalization of aggression that only disables the aggressor. There

is a chance that Moore would be called unpatriotic by Wallace's neighbors in Bloomington but in the end, the American people are the ones he truly defends. Those people are the likes of Lila Lipscomb. Early on in the thesis, it was mentioned that Thomas Frent and Thomas Rosteck saw Lipscomb as a moderate version of Moore's own views. They further argue that Lipscomb takes part in three types of representation. Frent and Rosteck asserts that she represents the person who sees both sides of politics, as well as one who was transformed. These representations are due to facts mentioned towards the end of this chapter, where Lipscomb had seen both sides of the personalization of aggression. Finally, Frent and Rosteck argues that she is a result of such transformation; an independent woman who is brave enough to visit the home of those she believes killed her son. She is, as Frent and Rosteck describes her, the 'every person' or as one can argue, Moore's Mrs. Thompsons after years of government incited fear and consequences of war.

Conclusion

> '(…) we're going to walk down to the Capitol, and we're going to cheer on our brave senators and congressmen and women, and we're probably not going to be cheering so much for some of them.'
>
> Former President Donald Trump speaking to his supporters, January 6, 2021 (CNN, 2021)

The closing chapter of the thesis presents conclusions based on Wallace, Spiegelman and Moore, in addition to providing discussions and questions in context of today's world. This final part will review the thesis statement and the findings within the works, before discussing reflections in light of recent events. The chapter will also include the limitations this thesis had, such as the international covering of 9/11, as well as self-reflections and suggestions for future research of the topics.

This thesis looked at the personalization of aggression in 9/11 literature through comparisons of authors in different genres and time periods. The premise was that the aggression that occurred after the attacks disabled and diverted the aggressor's attention away from larger transformations in the society. Two of the first literary reactions to the attacks was shown through David Foster Wallace and Art Spiegelman, with Wallace's essay published only days after September 11. Though they both arguably illustrate the aggression and fear that colored the American society in the early 2000s, they each stand out regarding their approach. The distinctive contrast between them is evidently their genres and location. Wallace wrote his essay miles away from where the attacks took place, whereas the cartoonist Spiegelman was there to witness the attacks himself. However, their in-text approach to the aftermath of the attacks is what differentiates them the most. In addition to capturing the immediate patriotism

around his neighborhood in the Midwest, Wallace warns us about a 'yapping patriotism'. He arguably warns his readers about creating an atmosphere where fear and aggression becomes personal, as he dreads these attitudes will not contribute to heal the sorrows.

With Spiegelman we saw an approach of a writer who himself was personally affected by 9/11, as he was there when the attacks happened. Through the genre of comics, he is truly in a unique position when it comes to illustrate the apprehensions of 9/11 and its aftermath. His drawings together with historical comparisons arguably depict the attacks in a distinctive and emotional manner. However, through reading Tony Judt's essay on the loss of liberal self-confidence, this thesis has argued that Spiegelman himself became part of the personalization of aggression, falling into the trap of identity politics that Judt warned against. One can argue about what happens to citizens of a country when they either are or feel like they are under attack, which Michael Moore addressed further in *Fahrenheit 9/11*. The documentary is first and foremost a criticism against the Bush administration and their actions post 9/11, but through his creative take on real world events, Moore presents us the consequences of an attacked country where the personal aggression was exploited by their leaders. Moore's work was controversial as we have seen through Christopher Hitchens in his Slate Magazine article, who asserted the documentary was selective in the film's portrayal of politics and war. However, this thesis has argued that Moore, with a broad assortment of footages and personal stories, depicted the disablement of the aggressor in the form of new laws and warfare.

What truly differentiates the authors mentioned in this thesis is the three contrasting approaches. With Wallace, his essay was worked out on the fly. Though he mentions that the text was written fast in a state where no one knew exactly what was going on, he arguably touches upon thoughts about 9/11 that were unthinkable so soon after the attacks had occurred. These were thoughts and ideas contradicting what he saw around him, where he describes a highly personal and immediate patriotism. Wallace understood and accepted people coming

together in tragedy, but his essay was not written to create a unified sensibility. If there is a moral to draw from Wallace, the message would be that the public response to 9/11 was missing grown up attitudes. Approaches where people put their personal aggression on hold in order to create a basis for a positive change. This type of response is what Spiegelman seems not to have come up with. What works with Wallace is that through his essay we see the expressions of Mrs. Thompson, the average American. Spiegelman might just be limited by how his novel is placed in New York, where situations like the one where he encounters an anti-Semite in the street arguably occur all the time, both pre and post 9/11. It does not seem to signal anything of meaningful importance, to the degree that Wallace managed shortly after the attacks. Spiegelman does not in any way promote himself to be an advocate for Bush or the wars. In fact, his colorful drawings depicting the polarization during the Bush era and his historical comparisons to conformism during times of war is where he succeeds. Thus, he is not one of the 'useful idiots' that Judt argues sold the war to the American people. However, Spiegelman arguably falls short to Wallace's mature attitudes at the time, where Spiegelman's personal affections trap him in between the New York bubble and the ineffectual identity politics that Judt warned against. However, one important aspect to note is that identity politics is not necessarily ineffectual or negative. Various civil right movements have depended on the presentation of personal issues with the aim of empower the rights of certain groups within a society. Such politics are however conflictual when they are based on handing out guilt. By blaming the individual for terrorism, such as the anti-Semites on the streets of New York, Spiegelman's comic stands in contrast to *The View from Mrs. Thompson's*, where Wallace saw the blaming, the fear and the personal aggression not only as a negative response, but as a politically ineffectual thought.

Michael Moore's work is also interesting in light of identity politics, as he touches upon the consequences of creating a common enemy. Despite his controversial sides as a film maker,

Moore connects the dots between a personal aggression and a government that incites it. With a closer look at *Fahrenheit 9/11* in comparison to Spiegelman, Moore arguably demonstrates how the Bush administration were pleased with people fighting over identity issues, as it keeps them busy and distracted while larger transformations are happening. He portrays a political climate where the leaders are pointing out those to blame, instead of unifying the people. As Moore depicts, the Bush administration were quick to find the blame of an insecure United States on Iraq; a nation that had nothing to do with the attacks. We also know that Moore has covered similar subjects before, as he in *Bowling for Columbine* argued that the blame of gun violence was put on video games and musical artists. Not only did the hunt for blame lead to a backlash of racism against Muslims and Asiatic people, but Moore reveals how the blame game affected the individuals. Arguably, Moore illustrates the personalization of aggression most ideally when he gets personal and emotional with the people he interviews. One example that was mentioned was the interview with Lila Lipscomb, who lost her son in the Iraq war. She once inhabited a personal hatred, where she had to blame the terrorists for her country's problems. Not until her son was killed did she see the larger picture that Moore argues for. One can argue that Lipscomb's attitude and Michael Moore's documentary changed the personal hatred towards the government instead of terrorists. This thesis has however argued that Moore went after the root of the problems, rather than creating a common enemy. Moore is therefore in contrast to what we saw in Spiegelman, of which this thesis argued fell into the trap of personalization. *Fahrenheit 9/11* on the other hand, sees the broader picture and through various film techniques, such as humorous voice-over, he makes effective points. It might be the creative side of documentary films that makes *Fahrenheit 9/11* persuasive in regard to the topic at hand, but Moore himself arguably knows how to cope with emotions.

To conclude, the three contrasting approaches and contexts surrounding the authors provides us an insight of American culture and politics in the moment of and after 9/11. The

selected works are a few of many depictions about the attacks and its aftermath, but in their narrative, they portray how personal, fearful and hateful a frightened society can be in times of crisis.

Actuality

As this thesis was written, it has been nineteen years since the September 11 attacks and sixteen years since *Fahrenheit 9/11*'s release date, the most recent work of the main sources in this thesis. First, it can be argued that the 'adult response' this thesis advocates is yet to take hold in American politics. We have seen the likes of Wallace having a nuanced view immediately after the attacks calling for an acceptance of the situation. However, Wallace and the authors mentioned did not come up with a unifying imaginary, just as there was a lack of political progress. Through Moore, with the arguments of Judt, we saw how the Bush administration used war and people's fear to enforce ideas of conformism and destroy the liberal self-confidence. We now know that Bush won a second term as President in 2004, just months after Moore's documentary and in addition, the ramification of this destruction is clearly seen in contemporary American society. As this thesis stated, after you have a world where every identity is respected you will still have a world where the majority of the people are disempowered. More importantly, such identity driven politics will not solve any major issues, and this is what seems to have happened in the corporate America, where the most important aspect is to have every race, color and creed represented. This aspect does not make for equality of opportunity for the Mrs. Thompson's of the world or the ordinary people that are given voice by Wallace and Moore.

Secondly, it has been argued that the personal hatred would dominate American politics and in retrospect one can argue that the political basis for the election of Donald Trump was set up under Bush and the response to 9/11. Wallace described the attitudes of the people in

Midwest, which Jurrit Daalder as mentioned depicted as a region that reflected much of the country (Clare, 2018). In Wallace's essay, we saw the portrayal of people who unified behind the United States' flag in support of the victims of 9/11. What followed was a blind following of Bush's foreign policies. There were global protests against the upcoming Iraq war, but as showed through Moore, the Bush administration had used the period after 9/11 to push the agenda of a personal aggression, inciting fear and justifying wars; with an Iraq war that was built upon an incorrect claim of 'weapons of mass destruction'. Thus, the trust in politicians whose political developments did not give a particular direction arguably opened us to more fascist kind of politics where authoritarian ideas could restrain criticism and opposition. The warnings of such suppressing politics are found in the literature as Wallace and to some extent Spiegelman saw an atmosphere after 9/11 where there were no room for criticism. As Judt argues, such a conformism was crucial for Bush to implement his politics in the aftermath of the attacks. In return, the years of not having a particular political direction saw the possibility of others to exploit the system.

Here, I will speak personally, because unlike the historical readings done in the chapters, this is one part of history that I have experienced as a millennial. My generation have seen the result of the personalization of aggression and for the last years, we have seen it being stoked by yet another American President. For context, businessman Donald Trump was the republican nominee for the 2016 presidential election where he defeated secretary of state, Hillary Clinton (Federal Election Commission, 2017). The day Trump announced he was running for president, the now famous or perhaps infamous announcement at his own Trump Tower, contained what I would argue was one of the foundations of his campaign. Amid his speech, Trump said:

> When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're

> bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people (TIMESTAFF, 2015)

What we have seen authors portray in this thesis, especially through Moore, is that fear and hatred is a great motivator. Trump's narrative of Mexicans seen in the above citation was not only a way for the former President to boost his pollical power, but also an active form of creating a common enemy. After 9/11, the enemy was Muslims, Al-Qaida, Iraq and Saddam Hussein. In his time at office, Trump created and stoked new fears and hate, whether that was directed at Mexicans, calling Black Lives Matter-protesters 'terrorists' or the ban on Muslims entering the United States. While Trump kept his supporters busy with such incitements, he distracted them from the other issues that surrounded his presidency, such as Russian interference with the election, hush money payments (Barron, 2018) or refusing to reveal his own tax returns (Rogers, 2020).

I will argue that among the most dangerous examples of Trump creating a common enemy were his attacks on the media. Since 2017, Trump has repeatedly called the media 'the enemy of the people'. The phrase originates from the Roman emperor Nero whose people were aggravated by his leadership. In literature, the term was famously central in the Norwegian author Henrik Ibsen's play, *An Enemy of The People* from 1882, which follows Dr. Stockmann's conflict with the government (Ibsen, 1945). In modern history, the phrase has been used by various political leaders. Dictators such as Mao Zedong and Joseph Stalin used the term against political opponents and people not following their regimes. Then there was Nazi-Germany, where Hitler's Propaganda Minister in 1941 wrote 'each Jew is a sworn enemy of the German people' (Erickson, 2017). The paradox of Trump attacking the media was that he talked to his base through the TV-screen. He talked to the Mrs. Thompson's, who we know from Wallace 'watch massive, staggering amounts of TV' (Wallace, 2001). The difference the

time Wallace wrote his essay and the Trump era is social media. The Mrs. Thompson's are now on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, which I would say is way stronger and more influential in forming attitudes and concerns in targeted individuals than any essay, comic or documentary, as social media is intimate, personal and available to everyone. However, I would argue that no interesting political development, as all three authors in their own way sought, will be generated through these new technical advancements. Such platforms can rather be exploited, just in the way Moore showed us Bush was doing through the media at his time. With naming traditional media outlets 'enemies' and stoking fear on a more powerful and intimate media, I will argue that Trump and future leaders can do more harm than the Bush administration as today's media are easier personalized and more accessible than the traditional media outlets that existed at the time of 9/11 and the Bush era.

Recently, we saw Trump actively tried to distract people's attention away from the high number of coronavirus[10] cases in the US, by calling the virus 'Chinese virus' and 'Kung Flu' (Zitser, 2021). Though this is another example of personal hatred from the former President, it is also interesting to see how the fear regarding the virus was toned down, rather than inciting worry about the disease. I would argue that we can find the reasons for Trump moderating the seriousness of the virus in this thesis' selected works, especially in *Fahrenheit 9/11*. Moore demonstrated how the Bush were actively inciting the fear after September 11 because the fear would benefit him and his administration as a tool for war fares and increased security spending. Trump's vicious attempt of not stoking fear surrounding the virus was beneficial for him as well, as he attempted to hold on to a booming American economy (Barron, 2018), without having to shut down businesses due to lockdowns during the pandemic. Instead of informing his citizens with valuable information about the virus, Trump got personal once again, blaming China for the virus (Zitser, 2021) and attacking the Democrats for wanting a stricter infection

[10] Also named Covid-19: A global pandemic which started in 2019 and originates from China.

control (Givetash, 2020). Thus, Trump created a polarization of 'us vs them', not only in terms of foreign policies, but also domestically, as he aimed for the 2020 presidential election. With his illustrations of the blue and red zone, Spiegelman showed the United States was already polarized in the early 2000s. The polarization changed to a degree in the years that followed, where both Moore and Judt argues that the media and American liberals came together in support of the Iraq war. However, I would assert that the polarization intensified under Trump which was build up from the Bush era and peaked with Trump's reaction to his recent defeat in the 2020 election. To clarify, Trump ran for a second term on November 3, running against the former Vice President Joe Biden. The months leading up the election had been overshadowed by the COVID-19 pandemic and a large number of early votes and voting by mail (Saul & Hakim, 2020). Trump was out early saying that he had to see whether he would accept the election result (Cillizza, 2020). Later at the presidential debate, he claimed that 'this is going to be a fraud like you've never seen' (CNBCTelevision, 2020), hinting that the mail-in ballots will be damaging to a fair election result. Four days after the election, Joe Biden was declared as the 46th President of the US. However, Trump refused to accept defeat, continuing his claim of voter fraud with his campaign filing lawsuits against several states in an attempt to overturn the election (Davis, 2020). What is more disturbing in my view, is how Trump talked to his supporters, exemplified with his quote from the election night:

> And I want to thank the American people for their tremendous support, millions and millions of people voted for us tonight. And a very sad group of people is trying to disenfranchise that group of people and we won't stand for it. We will not stand for it (Reuters, 2020)

Perhaps literature and history are easier to read and understand in retrospect, as knowledge and outcomes of history gets known. However, I would argue that this type of attitude, where Trump takes a legitimate election result to the personal extent of refusal and blaming others, was something writers like Wallace warned about. The obsession of TV that Wallace mentions together with a personal identity politics driven fear and hate made it possible for Trump to make his base believe anything he claimed. The final result of a growing personalization of aggression was seen on January 6, 2021. On that day in the United States Capitol Building, members of Congress were due to count the votes to confirm Biden's victory. Trump had prior to January 6 told his supporters to be in Washington DC, saying that it 'will be wild' (Barry & Frenkel, 2021). As thousands of Trump supporters came to the city in a last attempt to overturn the election result, Trump held a speech where he prompted the crowd to march towards congress and urging his Vice President Mike Pence to 'do the right thing' (Nickeas, 2021), claiming that Pence could object Biden's win. In addition, Trump's personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani told the crowd 'let's have trial by combat!' (Nickeas, 2021), arguably implying that violence might be the solution to overturn the result. Following the speech, hundreds of Trump supporters walked down to the Capitol, where they later would break into and occupy the building. The members of Congress were evacuated, as the rioters vandalized the building for hours, resulting in the deaths of five people. (Balsamo & Daly, 2021)

I will conclude that the time from Flight 11 hitting the North Tower of the World Trade Center in 2001 to the recent storming of the United States Capitol building can be seen as a period where the personalization of aggression got out of control; making it possible to distract citizens away from larger ongoing transformations in the society. If 9/11 was a turn in contemporary United States, perhaps, and hopefully the recent events could be a breaking point where we see progressive and more than identitarian politics start to emerge. We have already seen such progress among my generation, with the example of 'March for Our Lives', where

students have come together in support for gun control (MFOL, 2018). Perhaps there may also be glimmers of 'adults' response' with President Biden and future United States politicians, as they have seen what personal hatred and being a passive 'useful idiot' can do to a country.

Limitation

There were directions this thesis was not able to go. It has already been mentioned that possible works like Thomas Pynchon's *Bleeding Edge* (2013) was considered and though the novel was briefly mentioned, Pynchon's work could have been the basis of its very own thesis. The same thought applies to the discussion regarding the circumstances around recent political events, where the extent of this thesis does not make up for the change in the political landscape over the last ten years, nor the growing number of literary works connected to contemporary United States. To answer the questions around the personalization of aggression thoroughly considering literature and politics could be extended into a doctoral thesis discussion. In addition, it would be interesting to read a study that captures the personalization of aggression not only in light of other authors, but also in the near future with the repercussions of the Trump era and after the end of a pandemic that has affected an entire world in the early 2020s.

A further study on conspiracy theories could be an intriguing idea, as conspiracies are deeply connected to fantasy and alternative storylines, which can surely be further explained by both literature and history, but also by human behavior. The impact that art and literature have on such theories may be of greater relevance today, given the possibilities of reaching people through internet and social media.

Finally, there would have been interesting to see an approach that analyze other works and cultures regarding 9/11. This thesis focused solely on authors from the United States, but the attacks and especially American imperialism in the years that followed had an impact far away from the American borders. Other works such as *Eleven* (2006) by David Llewellyn could

cover a perspective from outside the US, as both the author and the story originate from Great Britain, while a closer study of the Iraqi society and culture post 9/11 could perhaps benefit to a better and broader understanding of themes explored in this thesis.

…

As a last concluding note, the title of this thesis is 'Personalization of Aggression in 9/11 Literature'. Spiegelman enacts this 'personalization,' whereas Wallace and Moore try not to fall into the trap. People and leaders of the country sidelined the possibility of a mature response to the attacks and instead incited upon an atmosphere consisting of fear, blame and hatred that was deeply personal.

Thus, to remember 9/11 should include the remembrance of the mistakes that were made, as well as knowing the repercussions of inciting a fearful, personal hatred.

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