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## **Paper Pleasure: The Book as Medium, Metaphor, and Artifact in *Fahrenheit 451***

The following contribution engages Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) and François Truffaut's 1966 cinematic adaptation of that novel as reference points for rethinking the place of the paper book in an increasingly media-diverse culture. While the reading offered in this essay is sympathetic to both the novel and the film's bibliophilia, it takes issue with some of the ideological and political implications of the dystopian vision presented in *Fahrenheit 451*. I will argue that the efficacy of the book as a trope in a cultural critique of electronic media and digitality ultimately depends on its metaphorical presence as either medium or artifact.

### **1**

The paper book is dead. It always has been. For the book, as we commonly know it, is an object that owes its existence to the transformation of living matter (wood, animals) into dead material (paper, cardboard, leather). The dictionary, that palladium of semantic coolness, defines the book as "a set of written, printed, or blank pages fastened along one side and encased between protective covers" (*The American Heritage Dictionary*). Yet in spite of such classification, the book has always enjoyed a colorful life as a medium that transcends its own matter-reality, ascending into a meta-reality of metaphors, symbols, and images, in which a stack of wood milled into paper and marked by printer's ink is habitually associated with the life of the mind and the vulnerability of the body. One of the modern classic fictions about a world in which books no longer have a place is Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*. First published in 1953, the novel has never gone out of print.<sup>1</sup> Bradbury is now considered "a mainstream American author" (Eller 2004: 167). François Truffaut's cinematic adaptation of the novel, starring Oskar Werner and Julie Christie, entered the Cinemathek of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, a library of 100 films selected by the editorial staff of the cinema department of this nationwide daily German newspaper. In the liner notes for the DVD, Wim Wenders describes both the novel and the film as fascinating works of art, which captivate all those who consider themselves book lovers and passionate readers.<sup>2</sup> And a new generation follows suit.

Take, for example, the reviewer for TeenInk, an internet platform for book reviews written by teens, who states that "Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* is arguably the most important and influential book of our time" (Jeremy F. 2001.). Young Jeremy is "appalled," even "frightened" by the fact that some of his peers do not share his fascination for Bradbury's novel, but instead find it "stupid," lacking in "action and suspense," and "think it should be thrown away or even burned!" It is hardly surprising that Jeremy perceives these responses as a vindication of "Bradbury's fears." But what if we read that linguistically crude evaluation as a teenage prank, a comment, although articulated in a rather unsophisticated manner, that simply reveals the waning appeal of this particular "literary classic" at the beginning of the 21st century? After all, we do not know whether Jeremy's peers find *all* books stupid. And even if they did (which, indeed, would be worrisome), does that mean that Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* can only be approached with an attitude of reverence, because its subject—books—renders the novel itself sacrosanct?

In the following essay, I will revisit Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, a novel described by Jonathan R. Eller and William F. Touponce as "a work of cultural criticism that is still widely studied today" (167). What is it that we learn about *the book* from reading *Fahrenheit 451*? And what exactly is the book's function in a "work of cultural criticism"? I will address these questions, beginning with some general remarks on the cultural significance of the book, which will then be followed by a close reading of Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*. Occasionally, these readings will be supplemented by comments on Truffaut's translation of the literary text into cinematic images, a method I hope will further illuminate my argument.

## **2 The Book: Metaphor, Medium, Artifact**

The book came into linguistic existence as a metaphor. Etymologically it is related to plant life and nourishment: *bhāgo-*, its Indo-European root, also gave rise to *buckwheat* and *beech*. In a similar vein, the mythological and philosophical traditions of Greece and Rome figuratively link the book with ideas of growth, pleasure, and freedom. When capitalized, *liber*, the Latin word for book and the etymological root of *libertas*, becomes the close associate of Ceres, the Roman goddess of earth and fruit. Associated with husbandry and crops, Liber finds his Greek equivalent in Dionysus, the god of fertility and wine. Greek provides us with another telling association, that of the book with a garden.

In an illuminating essay, Randall L. Anderson takes a closer look at the history of the anthology, the product of "selecting, extracting, and recombining" texts (Anderson 2003: 249) in book form that owes its name to the metaphorization of the horticultural activity of gathering flowers. Anderson observes that the "notion of poems, as flowers, blossoms, posies, nosegays, or the volumes that contained them as gardens, paradise, garlands, arbors, or bowers, had great currency in the early modern period" (254). In English, the leaves (of paper) that are bound into a book still bear verbal witness to the material the thing is made of. Perhaps it is the cultural memory of the metaphorical assimilation of book and garden that lets us perceive the tossing of a box of books into the waste dump as an act of barbarism, while at the same time we happily trade in our laptops, iPads, and Kindles every three to five years. Or perhaps it is because we can touch a book like a body, as the narrator of Franz Fühmann's story, "Pavlos Papierbuch," observed. For compared with the computer and other electronic gadgets, the book appears to be the warmer, certainly the more intimate medium (as media historian Michael Giesecke suggests), one that exerts its authority through promises of intellectual *and* corporeal pleasures.

For Bradbury, the power of the typographically produced book depends on but simultaneously exceeds the content it communicates. As an object and a medium so closely associated with five centuries of Western culture's technological, social, and intellectual history, the book has also developed a high degree of metaphoricity. The cultural currency of the book as metaphor manifests itself in the fact that electronically produced and disseminated texts are still called books—even though "electronic scroll" would be a more appropriate name. Yet we still refer to these texts as books. Is that simply linguistic indolence? Or cultural nostalgia? Or is there something in the name of the book, some kind of cultural magic or hope that we are not ready to let go?

Geoffrey Nunberg was right in pointing out that "the vast majority of books bear no cultural burden at all" (Nunberg 1993: 14). What Nunberg has in mind are "catalogs, census reports, Department of Agriculture pamphlets, tide tables, tax codes, repair manuals, telephone directories, airline schedules" (14), books whose disappearance into electronic storage would indeed "make the world a roomier and greener place" (14). They are not *read* in the same way as, say, a philosophical tract or a novel. As an activity bridging the gap between the private and the public, reading (philosophy, history, fiction, poetry) will survive the ultimate demise of the paper book in the electronic media age. The gradual coming-of-age of the electronic book reader links reading to a different object, yet ultimately it does not matter whether the text is displayed electronically or typographically. And still, book historians remind us that reading is not "the only legitimate use of books;" they are ritualistic objects, gifts, investments, "even an engineering challenge" (Price 2004: 305).

Similar points can be made about the electronic book reader, and yet the nature of the ritual or the gift changes significantly if the material object itself is different. The magic of a book is inseparable from its material properties, its existence as a thing. And indeed it is hard to imagine that the recent release of the latest and last Harry Potter volume would have engendered a similar ritualistic fervor—readers and booksellers gathering in bookstores from Tallahassee to Tokyo at night, many of them dressed in the costumes of their favorite character—if the book had been published electronically rather than typographically. Obviously, there is something in the thing called paper book, rather than the text itself, that generates its metaphoric potency.

As I will show in more detail below, Bradbury addresses this issue in *Fahrenheit 451*, a novel that reasserts the cultural significance of paper books at the historical moment that marks the dusk of the typographic and the dawn of the electronic media age. Now, almost half a century later, the paper book faces strong competition in the media market from its metaphorical relative, the e-book. Chances are that the paper book will still be around for several generations of readers (and other users) to come. But it will inevitably yield to other media its exclusive position as the primary medium for the production and dissemination of knowledge. What does that shift involve? What do we gain, what do we lose? The book seems to be more than just a medium that represents the waning power of an archaic technology. But what exactly is the book to us as a culture?

Descriptions of the book's anthropological function as ritualistic object, gift, and technological challenge emphasize its character as an artifact. This artifact has a specific *gestalt*. The text (which organizes information and knowledge) is a major component of that *gestalt*, but other aspects like the quality of the paper, the elegance of the typography, the presence or absence of illustrations, and the type of binding (leather, cloth, cardboard, paperback) are no less important. The emphasis on the book's artifactuality marks a new approach in book history launched in the 1960s under the influence of the French *Annales* school. Pioneered by scholars such as Marc Bloc, Lucien Febvre, and Fernand Braudel, the *Annales* approach perceived history as the product of long-term developments of social, economic, and mental structures.

One of the first scholars who applied the *Annales* approach to the study of book history was Donald McKenzie. In their *Introduction to Book History* (2005), David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery summarize the impact of McKenzie's work on the study of book history, pointing out that in two influential essays, "Printers of the Mind" (1969) and "Typography and Meaning: The Case of William Congreve" (1981), he "proposed that scholars move beyond the interpretation of texts solely as the product of an author's intentions, or even solely through quantitative, macro-historical examinations of book publishing and printing trends, towards a study of texts as mediated products within which one could find traces of economic, social, aesthetic, and literary meaning (Finkelstein 2005: 10-11). For McKenzie, understanding the cultural significance of the book and the epistemological authority it acquired as the primary medium of the typographic age included the study of the book's "architecture" as well as "the visual language of typography" (qtd. in Finkelstein 2005: 11). By drawing attention to "architecture" and "typography" as important properties of the book, McKenzie paved the way for a cultural anthropology of the book as meaningful artifact.

It is necessary to enter a caveat here: book as artifact does not equal book as commodity. Although as a commodity, the book is necessarily an artifact, not every artifact is a commodity. The book's artifactuality is defined by a very specific mixture of material and immaterial properties. Robert Darnton's comments on the current state of the academic monograph help to clarify the conceptual difference between book-as-artifact and book-as-commodity. In "The New Age of the Book," a feature written for *The New York Review of Books* in 1999, Darnton contends that every university press editor "has a collection of stories about superb monographs that did not sell," an observation followed by examples of books that "received ecstatic reviews" and won numerous awards, but sold less than a thousand copies. (Darnton 1999) This gap between an enthusiastic reception by experts and the indifference of the economic market marks the difference between artifact and commodity. Does the monograph that hardly sells still deserve the name of commodity? But even if this question is answered in the negative, the book may still establish itself as cultural capital and 'sell' on what Bourdieu alternately described as the education market and the market of symbolic goods.<sup>3</sup> But that requires the artifactual presence of the book, its availability as an object. For even the pirate copy of a published idea needs a printed boilerplate. And the book that remains widely unnoticed (and unsold) immediately after it is first published, may eventually experience steady sales (and, presumably, a steady readership). Again, this requires the book's artifactual presence somewhere in the world, even if it is just in the publisher's warehouse. The catch is that it is not the book's material value (the paper and ink, the labor invested to produce it) that makes stocking up on tons of bound paper worthwhile, but its value as a repository of information and as a tool for the production of knowledge. Only if a culture reaches a consensus on the book's functional utility as a medium, i.e., an "agency by which something is accomplished, conveyed, or transferred" (*American Heritage Dictionary*), does the book as artifact merit its survival.

As I will illustrate in more detail below, the double character as artifact *and* medium, rather than its economic disposition as commodity, warrants the book's usability as a metaphor in discourses of cultural self-criticism and self-ascertainment. The representability (*Darstellbarkeit*) of this process, particularly in film, depends on the book's artifactuality.<sup>4</sup> Yet the metaphoric effect rests with the printed book's historical function as the *leitmedium* of modernity. Critics and scholars have commented on the ambivalent nature of the book's uses throughout history as an instrument of colonization and ideological indoctrination as well as a tool for liberation. Starting in the Age of the Reformation, the Renaissance, and the Enlightenment, the book played a central role in the formation and self-realization of the modern individual, and for the articulation of humanistic values such as liberty, equality, and solidarity. Jürgen Habermas pointed out that the book was instrumental in the creation of the public sphere, that indispensable arena for democratic debates and negotiations. Like other book historians and cultural anthropologists<sup>5</sup> before him, German book and media historian Michael Giesecke launched his own project of dismantling the "myths of book culture" (see [Giesecke 2002](#)), arguing that the emergence of print technology in Renaissance Europe gave rise to a culturally precarious monoculture, one in which print media (with the book at its center) were privileged over all other forms of information storage. Typography, so the argument continues, fostered the ascendancy of textuality over orality, visuality over other modes of sensual perception (touch, sound, taste, and smell), with the line becoming the dominant figure of knowledge acquisition (linear narrative, central perspective, cause-and-effect rationality). Today, we can no longer ignore the book's involvement in processes of industrialization, colonization, and exploitation (of labor and natural resources). One of the most widely used books, the Bible, provides an illustrative case in point for the ambivalent nature of book culture. So do many of the 19th-century scientific publications on race. The lesson to be learned from these observations is that the book's ontology as artifact is not disinterested, nor is it politically innocent. Hitler's *Mein Kampf* was not worth the paper it was printed on. Neither was Nott and Gliddon's *Types of Mankind* (1854), a book whose authors translated differences among humans into the notion of justifiable racial hierarchies. But both books were enormously influential in shaping people's ideas about themselves and others. So was Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, albeit for different reasons and with different political and social effects. For better or worse, books have influenced the cultural and intellectual formation of the world we live in and the ideologies we live by. Thus, it is hardly surprising if anxieties about the demise of that world often figure as the demise of the book, whose artifactual presence or visible absence in film and fiction solicits an immediate metaphoric effect: it signals a major cultural crisis.<sup>6</sup>

The role of the book in the history of Western civilization provides what philosopher Max Black called "the system of associated commonplaces" (Black 1983: 74), by which he means those things that individuals or communities hold to be true about certain objects and artifacts and on which the functioning of metaphors is predicated. These systems of commonplaces need to be easily retrievable for a metaphor to work effectively. For example, readers of the sentence "Books are gardens" need to be sufficiently knowledgeable about gardens in order to decipher (and take pleasure in) the metaphorization of books as gardens. In this sentence, the grammatical function of "gardens" is that of the *focus*, while the rest of the sentence (including "books") constitutes the *frame* of the metaphor. While traditional theories of metaphor define the relationship between focus and frame (and the semiotic systems in which they are embedded) as one of similarity or likeness, in which one system is compared with or substituted for the other, Black introduced a new model for understanding metaphor as an active, semiotic exchange or "interaction" (72) between two systems (frame and focus), a process that generates new meaning(s) and insights, and transforms old modes of producing knowledge into new ones. Black rehabilitated metaphor from its traditional perception as poetic shenanigan and elevates it to the status of an epistemological instrument. Black's "*interaction view of metaphor*" (72; emphasis in the original), first published in 1955, is one of the most influential contributions to understanding the semiotic work of metaphor (cf. Johnson (1983), Haverkamp 2007). Describing the work of metaphor as a "distinctive *intellectual* operation" (79), Black not only reinstated the epistemological creativity of metaphoric language, he also foregrounded its capacity for inducing *cognitive* (as opposed to 'merely' ornamental) *pleasures*. These pleasures derive from the fact that the metaphoric process is a process of semantic re-organization in which one system of commonplaces (in our case the *book*) restructures and rearranges our conceptions of another system (for example *culture* or *modernity*). Although somewhat dated, Black's interaction view of metaphor provides a useful conceptual framework for analyzing the narrative and iconographic functions of the book in *Fahrenheit 451*.

### 3 *Fahrenheit 451*: The Story

It was a pleasure to burn.

It was a special pleasure to see things eaten, to see things blackened and *changed*. With the brass nozzle in his fists, with this great python spitting venomous kerosene upon the world, the blood pounded in his head, and his hands were the hands of some amazing conductor playing all the symphonies of blazing and burning to bring down the tatters and charcoal ruins of history. (Bradbury 1991: 3)

Thus begins Ray Bradbury's classic sci-fi novel about a future in which books are burned because they unnecessarily disturb people's amnesiac peace of mind. The man referred to in these opening lines is Guy Montag, Bradbury's anti-hero whose job as a fireman is burning books. And not only that, he takes pleasure in his destructive work, which, if we define pleasure in neo-Kantian fashion as "consciousness of a present state as causing one to want to maintain that state" (Zuckert 2002: 245), highlights Montag's pyromania. The plot of *Fahrenheit 451* is sufficiently known: Montag, who never reads the books he burns because "That's against the law!" (8), lives in a world of meaningless blabber, permanent TV noise, and social boredom, one in which the Dalmatian at the fire station is replaced by a mechanical hound, gardens (like books) are rationalized out of existence, and his own marital bedroom feels like "the cold marbled room of a mausoleum" (11). By the end of the novel, Montag will be a reader and a savior of books. He will have left the urban world of destructive pleasures for the wilderness, and his author will now associate his character with a metaphor of nourishment of a different kind—Revelation's tree of life, one on either side of the river "which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month" (165). While at the beginning of the novel, "things eaten" suggest destruction and death, at the end they evoke the possibility of survival and living life in an otherwise apocalyptic situation. The world as Montag has known it for most of his life has "eaten" itself in a nuclear war, a fate that he was spared because of his growing love for books. However, at the end of the novel, the book as an artifact or paper object ceases to exist. Yet it survives metaphorically, as an integral part of the human subject: each member of the wilderness community memorizes and thus embodies a book.

Bradbury unfolds his story in three parts: "The Hearth and the Salamander," "The Sieve and the Sand," and "Burning Bright." Interpreting *Fahrenheit 451* as a critique of an emerging, post-World War II consumer culture, Eller and Touponce provide a plausible summary of the three parts as social conformism and sickness, "rebellion and search for an antidote," and "a revaluation of values" such as "literacy, books, and reading in mass culture" (Eller 2004: 186). In each of the three stages, Montag's development is guided by the presence of symbolic characters. In the first part, Montag's awakening as a reader and a seeker of books happens in opposition to Fire Captain Beatty, a god-like figure who carefully guards a bookless paradise, and in acquiescence to the seductive power of 17-year old Clarisse McClellan, a latter-day Eve in a Lolita mask who introduces Montag to the pleasure of tasting the forbidden fruit from the tree of printed knowledge.



Clarisse is a girl who enjoys the smell of old leaves, goes out into the forest to watch birds and collect butterflies, and whose family sits together at night, talking and laughing. After meeting her, Montag begins to wonder what happens to the people whose books he burns. Upon witnessing the self-sacrifice of a bibliophilic woman who opts to go up in flames with her books rather than being committed to a mental institution, Montag begins to withdraw from his duties as fireman. Ignoring his culture's commandment that thou shall not covet thy neighbor's books, he takes one home and launches his transformation from a man who finds pleasure in burning books to a man who is captured by the pleasure of reading them. Montag realizes "that a man [sic] was behind each one of the books" (51-52), that his job was to destroy in two minutes what may have taken another man's life time to create. Becoming a reader himself, Montag, in the second part of the novel, seeks advice from Faber, a retired English Professor "who had been thrown out upon the world forty years ago when the last liberal arts college shut for lack of students and patronage" (75). Faber agrees to become Montag's teacher. Providing him with an audiocapsule that fits into Montag's ear, Faber embarks on a marathon of constantly reading to Montag, even in his sleep. Faber will also be the person who, at the beginning of part three, tells Montag to head for the river and the old railroad tracks, where he will find camps of hobo intellectuals. Granger, the leader of one of the groups and Montag's last mentor, describes his fellow outcasts as "bums on the outside, libraries inside" (153). All men, they dedicated their lives to memorizing sections from their favorite books in order to "keep the knowledge we think we will need intact and safe" (152). Granger, whose name contains the idea of a gentleman farmer in the Jeffersonian tradition, is the antidote to Captain Beatty's nihilism. Whereas Beatty insists that "the books say *nothing!* Nothing you can teach or believe" (62), Granger insists on the value of books as embodied knowledge and believes that they can touch people like his own grandfather, a sculptor, once symbolically touched him: "if you lifted my skull," he tells Montag, "by God, in the convolutions of my brain you'd find the big ridges of his thumbprint" (157). From his grandfather Granger learned that the wilderness he now inhabits is the real world, one that is "more fantastic than any dream made or paid for in factories" (157).

Montag's story is that of a journey from a culture intent on the destruction of all books to a culture concerned with their preservation. The novel shows that books only survive if they are submitted to a continuous process of transfiguration, i.e., if their *gestalt* is adjusted to particular social and political circumstances. Bradbury's major concern is with books as texts, as typographically embodied knowledge. As such, they represent culturally specific ideas and values.

Yet *Fahrenheit 451* also comments on the artifactual value of books, an aspect that is closely linked with the novel's reconfiguration of pleasure. In both instances, the narrative presence of books refers to other systems: First, they metaphorically represent the *values* which, according to the author, sustain or threaten the existence of Western civilization. These values are communicated through the book as *text*, in which capacity the book activates rational modes of cognition. Second, books also appear as *objects or artifacts* whose *texture* elicits sensible modes of cognition. Although narratively connected in *Fahrenheit 451*, these two modes of knowledge acquisition have rather different political and cultural implications.

#### 4 Text and Value

One of the major monologues in the novel, in which books appear as value-communicating text, is Captain Beatty's run through the history of firemen, an attempt to cure Montag from his "sick" desire for books and win him back into the ranks of the gatekeepers of happiness and easy pleasures. During a bedside visit, Beatty informs Montag that the *fire* that destroys books "started around about a thing called the Civil War" (54), the event in American history which, for better or worse, triggered a burst of technological, cultural, and political modernization in the United States. Beatty maintains that new technologies such as photography, motion pictures, radio, and television (54), a growing consumer mentality, and "minority pressure" (58) all led to the demise of the book and the rise of a culture in which "Life is immediate, the job counts, pleasure lies all about after work" (55). Beatty, whose position towards these developments is affirmative rather than critical, articulates here what Neil Postman, in his critique of the "Age of Show Business," would call the end of the "Age of Exposition" (Postman 1985: 63). For Postman, "exposition" is "a mode of thought, a method of learning, and a means of expression" closely associated with "mature discourse" which, in turn, is "amplified by typography" (Postman 1985: 63). Yet where Postman's critique is restricted to a study of the new media and their share in a devaluation of public discourse—as conceptually sound and reasonable conversation about wide-ranging social, political, and cultural issues—Bradbury includes "minority pressure." In the context of the novel, the minorities who ask for the destruction of undesirable or unwelcome books include "Colored people [who] don't like *Little Black Sambo*," "White people [who] don't feel good about *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," and "cigarette people" who do not want to be exposed to "a book on tobacco and cancer of the lungs" (Bradbury 1985: 59).

Beatty's equation of responses to a racially problematic children's book like *Little Black Sambo* and a book on health problems that can be caused by smoking is a device to expose this character's cynical reasoning. The problem is not that a character utters such inadequate comparisons, but that the author, in a "Coda" added to the novel in 1979, seems to corroborate these views. Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, a novel interpreted by many readers and critics as a critique of any form of ideologically and politically motivated thought control and restriction of the basic democratic value of freedom, was itself subject to massive censorship. In *Ray Bradbury: The Life of Fiction*, Eller and Touponce give a detailed description of unauthorized "revisions" of the novel, particularly in an edition meant to be used in schools. Expletives (such as "damn"), oaths, and morally dubious references were deleted from the text without the author's consent (see Eller 2004: 166-186). These changes, as well as reader requests about the treatment of gender and race issues in *The Martian Chronicles* (1950), prompted Bradbury to write a "Coda" to *Fahrenheit 451* in 1979. Following a summary of some reader comments about the representation of gender and race in his novels, Bradbury writes:

The point is obvious. There is *more than one way to burn a book*. And *the world is full of people running about with lit matches*. Every minority, be it Baptist/Unitarian, Irish/Italian/Octogenarian/Zen Buddhist, Zionist/ Seventh-day Adventist, Women's Lib/Republican, Mattachine/ FourSquareGospel feels it has the will, the right, the duty to douse the kerosene, light the fuse. Every dimwit editor who sees himself as the source of all dreary blanc-mange plain porridge unleavened literature, licks his guillotine and eyes the neck of any author who dares to speak above a whisper or write above a nursery rhyme. (176-177; italics added)

And finally:

[It] is a mad world and it will get madder if we allow the minorities, be they dwarf or giant, orangutan or dolphin, nuclear-head or water-conversationalist [sic], pro-computerologist or Neo-Luddite, simpleton or sage, to *interfere with aesthetics*. The real world is the playing ground for each and every group, to make or unmake laws. But the tip of the nose of my book or stories or poems is where their rights end and my territorial imperatives begin, run and rule. (178; italics added)

In these passages, Bradbury lumps his critics (whom he envisions as varying combinations of social, religious, gendered, sexual, and ethnic interest groups) in the same category as the fireman in his novel, thereby sweepingly condemning any form of criticism as book burning. The author's self-defense culminates in his conceptual recourse to aesthetic autonomy and an assertion of his "rule" of "territorial imperatives" that guard the boundaries of the literary text against an invasion of skeptical, critical, or otherwise unsympathetic readers. Immanuel Kant's aesthetic theory seems to be the sounding board of Bradbury's self-vindication. Ted Cohen and Paul Guyer summarize Kant's understanding of aesthetic judgment as the approach to an object that is disinterested<sup>7</sup> "and yet properly attentive to its form" (Cohen 1982: 5). For Kant, the aesthetic is not a phenomenal but an experiential category. In other words, it is not the property of an object but of a subject's evaluative relation to an object. Thus, a reader's complaint about the absence of, say, nonstereotypical female figures in a work of fiction is a response to literary form. It is an observation about characterization and, thus, an aesthetic comment. Such a response may not be considered an immediate response in the Kantian sense in that it was mediated through certain pre-existing concepts based on feminist politics. But even Kant never completely untangled the conceptual links between aesthetic and moral judgments, between disinterested and interested forms of aesthetic evaluation, as §§ 42 and 59 of *The Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* attest. Here, he specifically addresses the issue of intellectual interest in reflections on beauty, and of the symbolic analogy between beauty and virtuousness. (Kant 1974) With this in mind, I now want to take a closer look at a formal aspect in Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* that takes us back to the subject under discussion in this essay—the metaphoric uses of the book in the novel.

At the beginning of the novel, readers encounter a yet unreconstructed, pyromaniacal Montag, delighting in the destructive results of the fire he has set on a pile of books, and grinning "the fierce grin of all men singed and driven back by flame" (4). In the next sentence, the mask of the grotesque grin morphs into the image of Montag as "a minstrel man, burnt-corked" who winks at himself in the firehouse "mirror" (4). This rhetorical maneuver has far-reaching consequences, for it lays the ideological foundation of the narrative by actively creating a "system of associated commonplaces" which pushes the reader's interpretation of the metaphor of book burning and its grotesque logic in very specific directions.

By describing Montag as a burnt-cork minstrel man, the narrator imagines the protagonist as a performer in a genre of entertainment that was very popular in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, one for which William Dean Howells had only conditional patience—blackface minstrelsy. In *Criticism and Fiction* (1891), Howells acknowledges the function of popular culture as a mode of recreation, but at the same time, he also comments on the recent "recrudescence" of taste in art and literature. Joining the "unthinking multitudes" every once in a while is "perfectly natural" and there is no harm in indulging in the occasional "debauch." But Howells urges his readers to differentiate between "the pleasures that edify them and those that amuse them," lest they should run the "danger of becoming permanently part of the 'unthinking multitude,' and of remaining puerile, primitive, savage." Howells is enough of a democrat to shun the demand for a decree against popular entertainment. He concedes that "these amusements have their place, as the circus has, and the burlesque and Negro minstrelsy, and the ballet, and prestidigitation." Nevertheless he concludes, "we had better understand that it is not the highest place, and that it is hardly an intellectual delight." (Howells 1891: 110–111) Bradbury's fictional association of book burning with one of the most popular forms of entertainment in fin-de-siècle American culture is problematic because he places it on an ideological and political continuum with other forms of physical and symbolic violence, such as the totalitarian attack of book-burning German Nazis against the ideas and, later, the bodies of their political and ideological opponents.

But even without that transnational, transhistorical reference, the representation of Montag as a blackface minstrel man is highly problematic, for as Toni Morrison demonstrated in *Playing in the Dark*, representations of blackness and whiteness, no matter what symbolic form they take, shed light on the particular shape of the ideology of race by which a text is governed and through which it creates for the reader a sense of identity. (Morrison 1992) If burning books turns the fireman into "a minstrel man," the author, who created this image, points at the theatricality of this act. Yet at the same time, he also racializes the demise of Western civilization, for the white man who burns books inevitably ends up in blackface, the costume for performing acts of dangerously ridiculous buffoonery, donned by a white man acting out his anxieties about blackness. The narrative complement to the mask of grinning blackness created by book burning is the passage that describes Montag and Faber's second meeting, one that takes place in Faber's apartment. The two men had encountered each other once before in a city park (note the recurring trope of books as gardens), and Montag, after he discovered his passion for books, seeks out the professor to find out more about the objects of his newly discovered desire:

The front door opened slowly. Faber peered out, looking very old in the light and very fragile and very much afraid. The old man looked as if he had not been out of the house in years. He and the white plaster walls inside were much the same. There was white in the flesh of his mouth and his cheeks and his hair was white and his eyes had faded, with white in the vague blueness there. Then his eyes touched on the book under Montag's arm and he did not look so old any more and not quite as fragile. Slowly, his fear went. (80)

Every aspect that associates Faber with death (or dying) disappears from the description once he sees the book (which, incidentally, is the Bible). But the mask of whiteness (mouth, cheek, hair) stays where the narrator placed it. Faber, the white man, is the keeper of books, and he will eventually become the agent of Montag's escape to the men, who are no longer *behind* the books but *are* the books they are trying to save into a better world. The roles in Bradbury's drama of book preservation are clearly defined: those who burn books do so under the smirking mask of blackness, whereas those who save them earn the tragic mask of whiteness.

A similar point can be made about the novel's gender configuration. Women appear in two capacities, as readers (Clarisse who disappears halfway through the narrative; the woman who dies with her books) or consumers (Montag's wife and her friends), whereas men are exclusively linked to book culture, which they either destroy, create, or preserve. In this narrative set-up, Montag's evolution from fireman to reader to a man who embodies a book constitutes an interesting narrative problem: for the first step of Montag's transformation is tantamount to a process of symbolic emasculation. Bradbury solves this problem in two ways. First, he kills off the women who love books and challenge the patriarchal order embodied by Beatty, thus clearing the space for Montag and Faber. And second, in classic American fashion Bradbury sends his protagonist out of the city and into the wilderness, where he joins an "odd minority" (152) of men, "model citizens" (152) who, in turn, join hands, "putting out the fire together" (154). Truffaut's film remedies that flaw in that he has both Montag *and* Clarisse escape the apocalyptic city into the forest, where they join a mixedgender, multigenerational, multilingual, and at least biracial group of book people.

The gendered division between readers and writers in *Fahrenheit 451*, and the designation of low-brow popular culture as blackface and of high-brow typographic culture as whiteface foreshadows a discourse that began to emerge in the mid-1970s and had fully blossomed by the late 1980s and early 1990s—the debate over the cultural value of the Western literary canon. Bradbury's primary concern in *Fahrenheit 451* is not with books as artifacts, not even with the book as the "better" medium vis-à-vis electronic mass media. When Montag turns to Faber in order to find the magical secret of books, hoping that they might provide the happiness that is missing from his life, Faber calls the dissident fireman a "hopeless romantic" (82):

It's not books you need, its some of the things that once were in books. [...] The same infinite detail and awareness could be projected through radios and televisors, but are not. No, no, it's not books you are looking for! Take it where you can find it, in old phonograph records, old motion pictures, and in old friends; look for it in nature and look for it in yourself. Books were only one type of receptacle where we stored a lot of things we were afraid we might forget. There is nothing magical in them at all. *The magic is only in what books say, how they stitched the patches of the universe together into one garment for us.* (82-83; emphasis added)

The last sentence highlights the metaphoricity of the book as historically and philosophically meaningful text. In *Fahrenheit 451*, books are the metaphoric shorthand for the intellectual core of the Western cultural tradition. They represent what Harold Bloom monumentalized as the Western canon of great books, what Mortimer J. Adler would call great ideas, and what Captain Beatty dismissed as "time-wasting thought" (55). For Beatty, all books are bad because they disturb the "peace of mind" (59) in a society of absolute social equality by reminding their readers of the value of individuality. In Truffaut's adaptation of *Fahrenheit 451*, instead of Montag's bedroom the scene of Beatty's lecture about the hazardous nature of books takes place in a library. Beatty, suspicious of Montag's recent interest in books, reminds his fireman that in order for all people to be happy it is necessary to burn the books. "All the books," he adds, holding up Hitler's *Mein Kampf* (Fig.1).



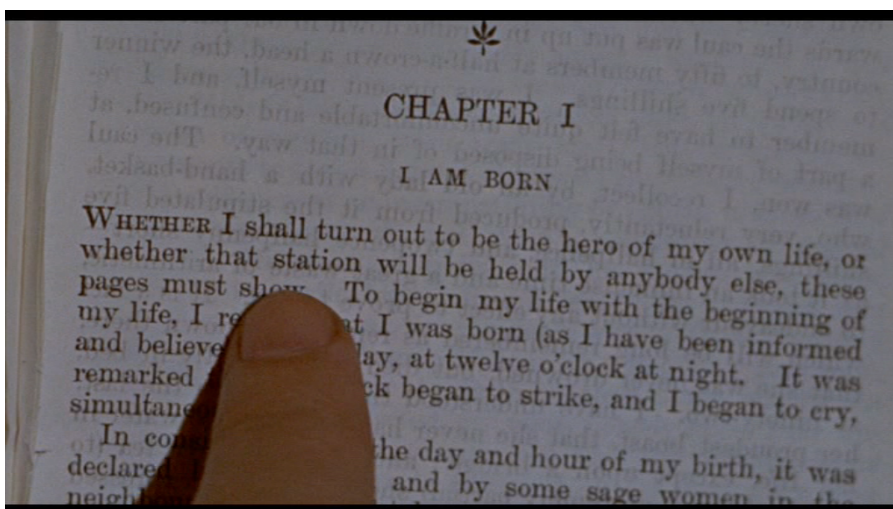
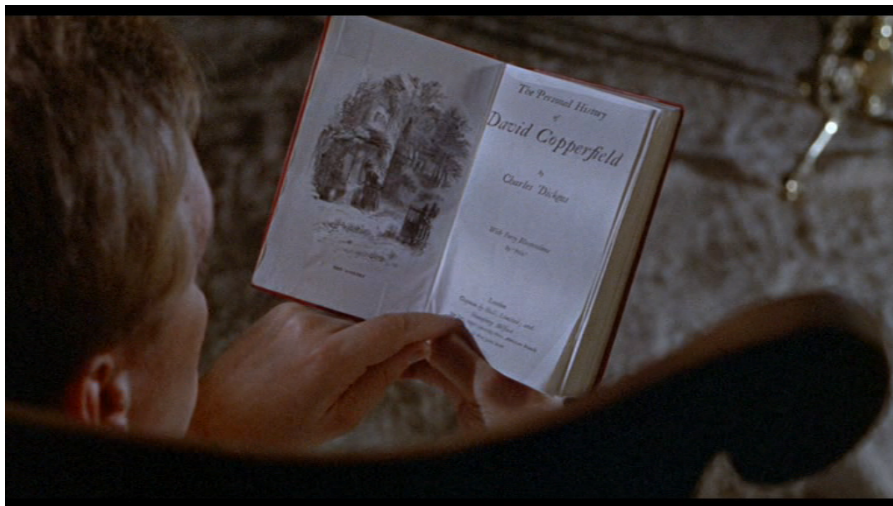
Figure 1. Still from Truffaut's *Fahrenheit 451*

This gesture is Truffaut's invention, but it highlights an aspect of Beatty's character present in the novel: his perception of books as ideologically motivated texts whose ultimate purpose it is to generate war.<sup>8</sup>

As someone who has no patience for fiction, nor the ability to appreciate the power of the imagination, Beatty can be retrospectively recognized as the fictional embodiment of one of "the new commissars" who, according to Harold Bloom, "tell us that reading good books is bad for the character" (Bloom 1994: 16), a position Bloom actually corroborates when he admits that "Reading the very best writers—let us say Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Tolstoy—is not going to make us better citizens" (16). Word choice is important here: "citizen" is an openly political category, one which Bloom does not want to see associated with art and literature at all. This is, in fact, where he differs from Bradbury, whose "model citizens" in the wilderness are the only hope for books. However, in "An Elegy for the Canon," the introductory chapter of *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (1994), Bloom insists that it is the function of the canon "to set a standard of measurement that is anything but political or moral" (35). This demand sounds very much like Bradbury's recourse to the aesthetic to fend off what he reads as a purely ideological or political critique of his literary work. The target of Bloom's criticism are "academic lemmings" (15), that awkward species also known as cultural materialists, new historicists, and feminists whose deconstructive death wish politicizes the literary text to the detriment of its aesthetic autonomy. Bloom's complaint in *The Western Canon*, that in American educational institutions "all aesthetic and most intellectual standards are being abandoned in the name of social harmony and the remedying of historical injustice" (7), echoes Bradbury's contention, expressed through Beatty's cynical logic, that the firemen are "the Happiness Boys" (Bradbury 1991: 61), protecting all members of a bookless society from being exposed to "conflicting theory and thought" (62).

The rhetorical similarities between Bradbury's fictional dystopia and Bloom's critical jeremiad are remarkable. Neither Bloom nor Bradbury are concerned with the book as artifact or medium, but as metaphor for 'great ideas,' 'unifying narrative,' or 'philosophical explanation.' Bloom's claim that "the Canon is Plato and Shakespeare; it is the image of the individual thinking, whether it be Socrates thinking through his own dying, or Hamlet contemplating that undiscovered country" (Bloom 1994: 35), is prefigured in Bradbury's canonization of books that celebrate individuality and selfhood, such as James Boswell's *Life of Johnson* (1791) or the books of Walt Whitman, Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Thomas Paine. Truffaut finds a powerful image for the self-asserting quality in the philosophical and literary canon of the 18th and 19th centuries, panning from Montag with a book in his hand to Montag looking at the title page of Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* and ending with a series of close-ups of the novel's first lines, in which the first-person narrator announces his birth as the hero of his own life (Fig.2).





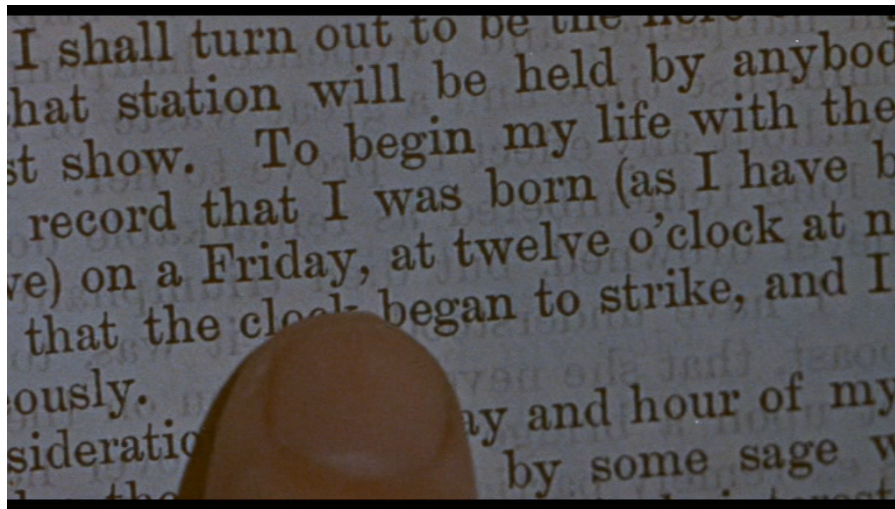


Figure 2. Stills from Truffaut's *Fahrenheit 451*

Interestingly though, Bradbury's list of books<sup>9</sup> that need to be saved from the Happiness Boys also includes Machiavelli's *The Prince*, a political treatise that advocated the pragmatic use of power in order to maintain (or regain) political stability. In *Fahrenheit 451*, Bradbury used his authorial power to defend the status quo of the Western literary canon, complete with a suggestion of the gender, race, and former social status of those appointed as guardians of the book. Read in the awkwardly mixed climate of political fear (McCarthyism, the Cold War, Stalinism), technological progress, and economic affluence, Bradbury's novel was indeed a "nonconformist book" (Ian Bellentine, qtd. in Eller 2004: 165). Reading it today, the novel's cultural biases, as they manifest themselves in the metaphoric employment of the book as text, can no longer go unnoticed. By far the more interesting metaphoric use of the book occurs when the novel emphasizes its texture, i.e., its materiality as an object.

## 5 Texture and Pleasure

Faber's dismissal of a book's magic and of Montag as a hopeless romantic occurs in a context that qualifies the statement as an awkward slip of mind. As it turns out, Faber is a book lover of a special ilk: his first response to the book that Montag brought as a sign of his trustworthiness is to sniff it. "Do you know," Faber asks his guest, "that books smell like nutmeg or some spice from a foreign land?" (81). A few paragraphs later, the author, through the voice of Faber, further elaborates his views on the cultural significance of the book. Books are important, Bradbury ventriloquizes, because "they have quality. And [...] the word quality [...] means texture" (83):

This book has *pores*. It has features. This book can go under the microscope. You'd find life under the glass, streaming past in infinite profusion. The more pores, the more truthfully recorded details of life per square inch you can get on a sheet of paper, the more 'literary' you are. That's my definition, anyway. *Telling detail. Fresh detail.* The good writers touch life often. (83; emphasis in the original)

In this description, the book's property as textual medium disappears behind its texture. The "pores" confer animalistic properties upon an otherwise dead object, thereby prefiguring the transformation of books into human bodies at the end of the novel.

The trope of book-as-animalistic-body also underscores the novel's claim that the cultural significances of the book exceeds its existence as textual medium, thus creating exactly that context which, in Max Black's theory of metaphor, forces us to re-organize our understanding of a given subject. Writes Black: "The metaphor selects, emphasizes, suppresses, and organizes features of the principal subject by *implying* statements about it that normally apply to the subsidiary subject" (Black 1983: 78). Translated into the narrative context of *Fahrenheit 451*, the book (principal subject) combines features usually associated with the metaphor's subsidiary subjects: spices, the possibility of leisurely reflection and argument (i.e., unconstrained by economic or social purposiveness), and actions that are informed by sensory *and* reflective experiences. It is important to note that with Faber's visceral response to the book as an object that provides olfactory pleasures Bradbury shifts the novel's metaphoric focus from 'book as textual medium' to 'book as sensual object,' thus fostering the reader's understanding of the epistemological process as defined by intellectual *and* sensual experiences. The passage is reminiscent of Kant's understanding of pleasure as a complex, cognitive response to an object. Such pleasure is induced by what Cohen and Guyer paraphrased as "the delicate balance" between "the faculty of feeling on the one hand and the faculties of understanding and reason on the other" (Cohen 1982: 5). Although Kant conceptualizes pleasure in the context of his theory of aesthetic judgment, a concern that Bradbury does not explicitly pursue in the novel, the philosopher's insistence on pleasure as an experience that requires the stimulation of the faculties of feeling *and* reason clearly meets the novelist's approval.

Bradbury's metaphoric approximation in *Fahrenheit 451* of 'book,' 'nutmeg,' and 'leisure' functions as a poetic argument for a balanced interaction between a human individual and his or her material environment, one that does not exclude one or the other form of knowledge acquisition. At the same time, Bradbury extends the cultural meanings (and functions) associated with books, using 'nutmeg' as a signifier of the book's corporeality while simultaneously employing the book's historical authority as the communicative and epistemological *leitmedium* of the typographic age to validate the communicative function of non-typographical, non-technological media. In other words, the metaphoric association of 'book' and 'nutmeg' rehabilitates the cognitive value of, as well as the pleasures involved in, relating to the world through the sensory apparatus of the body *and* the rational, purely reflective apparatus of the mind. If the book smells like nutmeg and provides olfactory pleasures, what "pleases" is, in Angelica Nuzzo's formulation, "the material existence of the object" (Nuzzo 2006: 588). But it is only through Faber's imaginative power that his feeling of pleasure in view of the book as artifact becomes communicable. Text and texture form a unified whole, one that is presented as an antidote to the hollow pleasure of the smooth, untextured, wall-size TV screens that leave untouched the bodies that read, or merely consume, the images behind its surface.

The metaphor of the book as pleasurable body (or corporeality) as introduced through the character of Faber reveals the author's view of the book's anthropological function in modern culture as an object that evokes a Kantian "feeling of life" (*Lebensgefühl*; see § 1 of Kant's *Critique of Judgment*) in the subject experiencing pleasure. Bradbury's trope of the intellectual hobos, the men who become the books they love, literalizes the association of 'book' and 'life.' When Montag first enters the wilderness, that refuge of the book people, he encounters a deer and "smelled the heavy musk like perfume mingled with blood and the gummed exhalation of the animal's breath, all cardamom and moss and ragweed odor" (Bradbury 1991: 144). The tropes of "smell" and "cardamom" link this scene of exterior wildlife with Faber's astonishing capacity to smell nutmeg in a book. The narrative thus prepares the last metaphoric turn in the novel, in which people identify as and embody books. Montag, who has taken the book that smells like nutmeg into the wilderness, thus literally becomes the object that has earlier induced Faber's pleasure, a transfiguration that adds an unwittingly queer twist to Bradbury's narrative. Like the other men who left a book-burning, self-destructive culture, the novel ends with Montag beginning to memorize pieces of a book, which, in his case, is the Book of Books.

## 6 Conclusion

The modes of representing the book in Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*—as textual receptacle of traditional, cultural values and as textured, pleasurable object—communicate very different messages. As text, the book in Bradbury's novel upholds culturally conservative ideas of the canon as the creation of great men and as an institution that holds the danger of "recrudescence" (generated by minorities and the growing influence of popular culture) at bay. For readers at this current moment in history, the emphasis on the book's artifactuality and its metaphoric association with sensuality is a much more pressing issue, one that challenges us to think about established modes of knowledge through which we have come to privilege rational, text-based methods of knowledge acquisition over sensual, body-based modes of knowing the world and oneself in relation to it. A new cinematic interpretation of Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*<sup>10</sup> would be well-advised to emphasize this aspect and not expand its creative energies in resuscitating the novel's ideological biases towards Bloomian notions of the Western canon's indisputable value. Images of book destruction will continue to function as metaphors for intellectual ignorance, ideological intolerance, and political totalitarianism. While some of our contemporaries may perceive the gradual replacement of the paper book by the e-book as a form of book destruction the current shift in media technology does not necessarily, and inevitably, jeopardize the culture of text-based communication. In fact, any form of text-based knowledge is much more effectively and quickly communicated through electronic media. Reading books, magazines, journals, and newspapers on an iPad, Kindle, or other electronic device is rapidly becoming common cultural practice. One could even see the sequence of Montag reading *David Copperfield* in Truffaut's cinematic version of *Fahrenheit 451* as a premonition of that development: at the end of the scene, the screen is filled with text, totally obscuring the presence of the book as artifact and foreshadowing the emergence of the book as digital medium. Yet there is also Montag's finger touching the page, a compelling image of the paper book's presence as a medium of "sensual self-revelation" (Fühmann 1981: 159; my translation), a quality, while it remains unsupported by the digital cool of the e-book, constitutes the very ground for a cultural critique of new media technologies.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The cover of my own edition, a Del Rey Book published by Ballantine Books in 1991, informs its readers that there are "over 4 ½ million copies in print." No doubt the number has grown since then, not counting the translations of the novel into languages other than English.

<sup>2</sup> Writes Wenders: "Ein jeder, der Bücher liebt und leidenschaftlich liest, muss von Ray Bradburys Roman ohnehin gefangen genommen sein. Aber wie Truffaut sich dieser Science-Fiction-Geschichte angenommen hat, und wie er von diesem Feuerwehrmann namens Guy Montag erzählt, der kein Feuer mehr löschen, sondern stattdessen Brände stiften und Bücher verbrennen soll, das hat mich beim ersten Sehen mit offenem Mund dasitzen lassen, und seitdem habe ich mir keine Gelegenheit entgehen lassen, den Film wieder und wieder zu sehen. (Truffaut 2005).

<sup>3</sup> In *Distinction*, Bourdieu describes the family and the school as two locations that function like markets: they legitimize social and cultural competences and determine their 'price.' Cf. Bourdieu 1987: 150-161. In *Rules of Art* he develops the concept of the two economic logics within the fields of art and literature: the commercial logic and the symbolic logic, the latter pertaining to products made for the "market of symbolic goods" (cf. Bourdieu 2001: 227-279).

<sup>4</sup> Take, for instance, Umberto Eco's description of books as "machines that provoke further thoughts" (cf. 1996: 296). For its effect, the statement hinges on the book's association with an artifact called machine. The allegorical correlation of book and garden described earlier operates on the same conceptual presupposition, the suggestion of the book's ontological similarity with a phenomenon shaped by human enterprise.

<sup>5</sup> In addition to Donald McKenzie, the names of Marshall McLuhan, Elizabeth Eisenstein, and Benedict Anderson come to mind here.

<sup>6</sup> As Katherine Penñavaria observed, whenever writers envision a future without books, "the result is a stagnant, dying culture. A people might have plentiful food supplies, adequate shelter and warmth, and occupation for their time, but if they have no books and no libraries, the writers tell us, they have only half a life" (Penñavaria 2002: 230).

<sup>7</sup> For Kant, "disinterestedness" is defined by the absence of economic, moral, religious, political, etc. concepts in our aesthetic response to a given object. See Kant 1974:§ 2

<sup>8</sup> During his lecture at Montag's bedside Beatty states: "A book is a loaded gun in the house next door. Burn it. Take the shot from the weapon" (58).

<sup>9</sup> For an extended list of allusions in Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* see Real (2008).

<sup>10</sup> Over the past few years, the two most frequented movie portals, IMDb and Rotten Tomatoes, repeatedly reported on director Frank Darabont's project of creating a new cinematic version of *Fahrenheit 451*. See [http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/fahrenheit\\_451/](http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/fahrenheit_451/) and <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0360556/>.