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FAHRENHEIT 451: TEMPRETURE RISING

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DOUGLAS C. MOORE

ABSTRACT

Fahrenheit 451 is acknowledged by many theorists as one of the most symbolic dystopias of the twentieth century, and although the novel has been analyzed extensively with a focus on the influence of mass communication, no study has addressed the hyperreal factors of television in Bradbury's world. Bradbury has expressed his concern about the influence television has on the masses, not only in his fictional dystopia, but in American society today. Television's capability of mass-producing simulacra promotes hyperreality, which results in a distortion of meaning and implosion of reality. This study will use Jean Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality as a frame to examine the influence television has on the world of *Fahrenheit 451* and compare it to television's influence in post-modern America, specifically the post-9/11 era. It will address the medium of entertainment, primarily reality TV, to examine how television is used to distort meaning in human relationships, spirituality, and history in both societies. It will also examine how media corporations have taken on many qualities of entertainment programs. The study will also include an analysis of how television has influenced the social and political factors in

both societies, and entertain Baudrillard's claim that America can go beyond the imaginary of science fictions novels like *Fahrenheit 451*.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	iii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. IMPLOSION OF THE SOCIAL.....	7
III. ENTERTAINMENT.....	15
3.1 Bradbury’s Parlor Walls.....	15
3.2 Our Parlor Walls.....	23
3.3 Entertainment and Spirituality.....	28
3.4 Entertainment and History.....	30
IV. NEWS	
4.1 The Objectivity of News.....	35
4.2 The Spectacle of News.....	37
4.3 News and Spirituality.....	41
4.4 News and History.....	43
V. IMPLOSION OF THE POLITICAL.....	46
VI. CONCLUSION.....	53
WORKS CITED.....	61
REFERENCES.....	63

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In “Burning Bright: Fahrenheit 451 as Symbolic Dystopia,” Donald Watt claims that *Fahrenheit 451* is “the only major symbolic dystopia of our time” (Watt 73). I question how a science fiction novel about book burning could be more symbolic of America than Orwell’s *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*, to which *Fahrenheit 451* is frequently compared, and whose terms ‘Big Brother,’ ‘Thought Police,’ and ‘Doublespeak’ are used in dialogue of our current political climate. Each novel is similar in its portrayal of how media can be used to control the masses and distort information, but in each novel television influences the public in different ways. In *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*, control is maintained by political means through the image of Big Brother, and by extension, the Inner Party, who spy on the public through telescreens that the viewers are unable to turn off. In *Fahrenheit 451*, control is maintained by entertainment companies that exploit the masses’ desire for entertainment and escapism. As Watt points out, there is an “absence of any account of the country’s political situation or of the international power structure” (Watt 81) and “Montag’s physical opposition...is rather weak. Beatty has little of the

power to invoke terror that Orwell's O'Brien has and the Mechanical Hound conveys considerably less real alarm than a pack of aroused bloodhounds" (Watt 81). *Fahrenheit* glosses over the political situation and focuses on the social factors instead, which according to Watt, makes the novel more relevant. "If *Fahrenheit* is vague in political detail, it is accordingly less topical and therefore more broadly applicable to the dilemmas of the twentieth century as a whole" (Watt 81). In an interview included in the 50th Anniversary Edition of *Fahrenheit 451*, Del Rey makes the following statement, which supports Watt's reasoning:

DR: I was struck by how well your imagined future meets the reality test. Better than Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, for example, a novel to which *Fahrenheit 451* is often compared. To me, that book doesn't have a prophetic edge to it anymore, while your book still does...It's that social element that seems most prescient to me now. Not just because of the popularity of reality TV, the ubiquity of the Internet, but also—and actually, this *does* seem political—because of the similarity between the situation of the United States in *Fahrenheit 451* and the country today (Bradbury 181-182).

Bradbury responds by claiming: "The main problem is education, not politics (Bradbury 182). This statement is surprising, as *Fahrenheit* primarily addresses censorship. However, in the interview, Bradbury rejects the possibility of censorship in America today:

DR: What forms of censorship do you regard as the most dangerous today?

RB: There are none in our country. We have too many groups for censorship to be possible...we're all watching each other, so there's no

chance for censorship. The main problem is the idiot TV. If you watch the local news, your head will turn to mush.

DR: There seems to have been a decline in standards of journalistic objectivity, to put it mildly.

RB: It's not just the substance; it's style... We bombard people with sensation. That substitutes for thinking.

DR: But you foresaw all of that in the fifties. I mean, the people in *Fahrenheit 451* are addicted to their wall screens...

RB: That's right (Bradbury 184).

Although Bradbury believes censorship is no longer an issue in America, he is still concerned with the influence that television has on the American public, which according to Watt is one of the most unsettling aspects of his novel:

What is genuinely frightening is the specter of that witless mass of humanity in the background who feed on manhunts televised live and a gamey version of highway hit-and-run. For another thing, the reader may be unsettled by the vagueness with which Bradbury defines the conditions leading to nuclear war. Admittedly, his point is that such a lemming-like society, by its very irresponsibility, will ultimately end in destruction (Watt 81).

In the novel, the irresponsibility of the masses is a result of their reliance on television. In current debate, *Fahrenheit 451* has been analyzed extensively with a focus on mass communication and the influence of technology. However, there is no study that compares television's influence in *Fahrenheit 451* to post-modern America. If Watt is correct in saying this novel is the "the only major symbolic dystopia of our time" (Watt 73), then an analysis of both societies with a focus on television is an important and necessary contribution to literary criticism, because it not only gives insights into how

television distorts meaning in *Fahrenheit 451*, but also addresses Bradbury's concern that television has the same capability to distort meaning in American society.

I believe Jean Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality is a useful frame to draw comparisons between the two societies, because his analysis of television supports the claims made by Bradbury and Watt, and Baudrillard is equally wary of television's influence: "The fundamental stake is at the level of television and information" (Simulacra 53). Throughout this study, I reference Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation, America*, and his essay *Implosion of the Social in the Media* and apply his theories to the post- 9/11 era. Using Bradbury and Baudrillard to draw comparisons to the current time period might seem contradictory, as society has changed since the publication of *Fahrenheit 451* in 1953 and the publication of Baudrillard's theories in the 1980's; I am aware that by drawing such comparisons, by using simulacra to interpret reality, that I have become victim to my own theory. Having said that, I do believe that Bradbury and Baudrillard's arguments in regards to the influence of television are similar enough to warrant such comparisons, and while a realistic comparison is not possible, linking Baudrillard to Bradbury gives valuable insights as to how the mediums of entertainment and the media share many of the same qualities, and how mass exploitation can lead to censorship and totalitarian control. My intent is not to prove that *Fahrenheit* and America are equal societies, but rather, because of the dominant presence of television, that they have equal potential to become hyperreal societies.

Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality argues that post-modern society has no meaning and we lived in a simulated world instead of a true reality, because we have

based our perceptions of reality on simulacra (copies without originals) that are presented through the signs, models and images that circulate throughout our world, which “threatens the difference between the ‘true’ and the ‘false,’ and the ‘real’ and the ‘imaginary’” (Simulacra 3).

In *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard divides simulacra into three categories, each associated with a different time period. In the pre-modern period, an image was an artificial representation of a real object; the simulacra were reliable, because they left the principal of reality intact. In the modernist period, the mass-production of images made it difficult for people to tell apart the object from the image; the simulacra began to be unreliable. In the post-modern period, there is no distinction between the image and the object because the image precedes the object. “Simulation is characterized by a *precession of the model*, of all the models based on the merest fact” (Simulacra 16) and “It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real” (Simulacra 2). No longer does representation “absorb simulation by interpreting it as a false representation, simulation envelopes the whole edifice of representation itself as a simulacrum” (Simulacra 6) which is “never exchanged for the real, but exchanged for itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference” (Simulacra 6).

Because signs without meaning are taken as reality, Baudrillard claims that events no longer have meaning, “not that they are insignificant in themselves,” but because “they were preceded by the model” (Simulacra 56). When a society bases its reality on models that do not represent real objects or events, that society becomes *hyperreal*, and

television, because of its ability to mass-produce simulacra, is largely responsible for this distortion: “it is TV that is true, it is TV that renders true” (Simulacra 29).

In Bradbury’s interview, two genres of television are mentioned, reality TV and news. In the novel, Bradbury presents television in two different ways: the parlor walls, and the televised chase of Montag. In addition, how entertainment and news are portrayed, as Watt argues, are what make *Fahrenheit 451* so prophetic, and for this reason, are my main focus. This study is divided into the following chapters: 2) Implosion of the Social, 3) Entertainment, 4) News, 5) Implosion of the Political, and 6) Conclusion. In *Implosion of the Social*, I analyze the growth of television and mass communication in broad terms to determine how television has impacted the social factors in both societies. In *Entertainment*, I compare entertainment’s influence on the masses in both societies to show how meaning is distorted. In *News*, I focus on the influence of the news-media to show how news has taken on many of the aspects of entertainment, resulting in a distortion of facts. In *Implosion of the Political*, I analyze the political factors in both societies, and in *Conclusion* I examine reality’s relationship to science fiction and depart from Baudrillard to examine the inconsistencies in his theory as it relates to this study.

CHAPTER II

IMPLOSION OF THE SOCIAL

To understand television's influence on the social, it is important to understand the market for which it is produced. Bradbury's society is a consumer state, just as America, in post-modernity, shifts from industry to commerce. The citizens in *Fahrenheit* work so they can afford the technologies that they have not only come to enjoy, but to depend on. [Beatty]: "That's all we live for, isn't it? For pleasure, for titillation? And you must admit our culture provides plenty of these" (Bradbury 59). The shift from industry to consumerism causes both societies to shift from external to internal lifestyles. Mass communication permits the masses to communicate through machines instead of face-to-face with other people. [Clarisse]: "I'm antisocial, they say. I don't mix. It's so strange. I'm very social indeed. It all depends on what you mean by social, doesn't it?" (Bradbury 29). Sociability in *Fahrenheit* is nothing more than an exchange with a machine. With the exception of Clarisse and her family, the masses experience life mainly through television: "The living room; what a good job of labeling that was now" (Bradbury 44). The entertainment industry takes advantage of the public's dependence on television and

their need to be constantly entertained. Rafeeq McGiveron, in his essay "What 'Carried the Trick'? Mass Exploitation and the Decline of Thought in Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*," discusses this in detail:

In Bradbury's work controllers of mass communication and other producers of entertainment exploit the public's desire for easy gratification by disseminating only mindless escapism, which the exploited willingly consume to the exclusion of independent thought. People grow unwilling to give up their pleasures, even momentarily, by thinking deeply about anything, and they also become unwilling to violate the norms of society by expressing any original thought. Recognizing this role of mass exploitation in the decline of thought is important because the lesson applies both in *Fahrenheit 451* and in the real world as well (McGiveron 246).

McGiveron points out that television itself is not to blame; it is only a machine, a tool:

Although it helps maintain the conformist mass culture of *Fahrenheit 451*, technology itself does not cause the decline of thought, for people still make the important decisions. Controllers of mass communication and other producers of entertainment decide which ideas they will censor and which they will disseminate, and the public decides what it will enjoy, what it will believe, and how it will act (McGiveron 246).

The problem is not television, but television's capabilities. As Beatty says, "the centrifuge flings off all unnecessary, time-wasting thought!" (Bradbury 55). Television does not cause the decline of thought; it only permits the citizens to *not have to think*, which supports Baudrillard's claim that "The deepest desire is perhaps to give the

responsibility for one's desire to someone else. A strategy of ironic investment in the other, in the others... an expulsion of the obligation of being responsible, of enduring philosophical, moral, and political categories" (Implosion 105). In *Fahrenheit*, the masses do not want the responsibility of choice; their only desire is to consume, to be entertained. [Beatty]: "Life is immediate, the job counts, pleasure lies all about after work" (Bradbury 55). In America, entertainment and pleasure is also a priority for many people: "Reduced pace of work, decentralization, air-conditioning, soft technologies. Paradise. But a very slight modification, a change of just a few degrees, would suffice to make it seem like hell" (America 46).

Television affects both societies by varying degrees beyond its ability to distract and entertain. The most obvious is its affect on literature. Bradbury's society loses interest in reading books, because television presents information faster and more succinctly. [Mildred]: "Why should I read? What *for*?" (Bradbury 73). Less effort is required to be entertained, and as a result, literature is abridged. [Beatty]: "Books cut shorter. Condensations. Digests. Tabloids. Everything boils down to the gag, the snap ending... Classics cut to fit fifteen-minute radio shows, then cut again to fill a two-minute book column, winding up at last as a ten- or twelve-line dictionary resume" (Bradbury 54). Literature is shunned for comics and trade journals. Beatty uses the example of Shakespeare to show the collapse of the narrative: "*Hamlet* was a one-page digest in a book that claimed: *now at last you can read all the classics; keep up with your neighbors*" (Bradbury 55).

Bradbury recognizes similar abridgements in America:

Some five years back, the editors of yet another anthology for school readers put together a volume with some 400 (count 'em) short stories in it. How do you cram 400 short stories by Twain, Irving, Poe, Maupassant and Bierce into one book? Simplicity itself. Skin, debone, demarrow, scarify, melt, render down and destroy... The point is obvious. There is more than one way to burn a book (Bradbury 176).

Because of kindle packages on cellular phones, I-pads designed to read books from a screen, and e-books, the medium of literature has not only been abridged in America, but adapted to fit the screen. In this way, literature itself becomes another proponent of hyperreality. Different interpretations of such documents as the Bible and the U.S. Constitutions to suit social and political agendas are further examples of how the written word can be burned.

In *Fahrenheit*, the rise of television also affects education, because up until that point, students are taught from books. With the collapse of the narrative, students begin to be educated by screens. The learning process becomes dependant on technology instead of professors. We learn from Clarisse that school is a "TV Class" taught by a "film teacher" (Bradbury 29). There is evidence of this in America in online classes and colleges. While these are designed to make education more accessible to students, these types of learning impact the quality of a student's education: "...interactions come down in the end to endless exchanges with a machine. Just look at the child sitting in front of his computer at school; do you think he has been made interactive, opened up to the world? Child and machine have merely been joined together in an integrated circuit"

(America 36). Baudrillard implies that education in America—as in *Fahrenheit*—isn't merely becoming more dependent on technology, *education is becoming technology*. Although Baudrillard claims that technology has had a negative effect on education in America, it must also be acknowledged that, with its abundance of schools and universities, education in America has never been as accessible or encouraged as it is today, partly a result of technology's influence.

In *Fahrenheit*, because people are educated via the same medium they are entertained, school, like literature, begins to be abridged. [Beatty]: “School is shortened, discipline relaxed, philosophies, histories, languages dropped, English and spelling gradually gradually neglected, finally almost completely ignored” (Bradbury 55). Although education is flourishing in America, some forms of education are shortened and relaxed, as in Bradbury's novel, such as America's accelerated programs and combined Bachelor/Master programs. Anthologies are not alone in the abridgement of information: spark notes, cliffs notes, and other synopses are not only advertised on television and online, but ironically, sold in book stores, and the majority of those who use these products are students. Perhaps this shift in the students' desire to learn is partly a result of how information is presented in high schools, through machines, in which long-term retention of information isn't as important as retaining it temporarily to pass the classes, what Clarisse calls “transcription history” (Bradbury 29). Although technology makes education more accessible in America, it also redefines what education is, which has both positive and negative results. In contrast, television's affect on education in the novel appears to be strictly negative.

In *Fahrenheit*, the rise of television brings with it a rise of information. Rather than contributing to the intellect of society, this information has the opposite effect, because it is the producers, and not the masses, that control the information being broadcasted.

Give the people contests they win by remembering the words to more popular songs or the names of state capitols or how much corn Iowa grew last year. Cram them full of noncombustible data, chock them so damned full of ‘facts’ they feel stuffed, but absolutely ‘brilliant’ with information. Then they’ll feel they’re thinking, they’ll get a *sense* of motion without moving. And they’ll be happy, because facts of that sort don’t change (Bradbury 61).

Bradbury’s citizens are overwhelmed with trivial information, just as our society suffers “not from the *lack* of information but from information itself and even from an *excess* of information” (Implosion 101) filtered through television and the internet, “which claims to enlighten them, when all it does is clutter up the space of the representable and annul itself in a silent equivalence...the masses have no opinion and information does not inform them” (Implosion 101). In America, game shows are one tool that advances this hyperinformation. *Don’t Forget the Lyrics* and *Jeopardy* are examples of the shows Beatty mentions, but there are many others: *The Weakest Link*, *Are You Smarter Than a Fifth Grader*, *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*; these shows claim to be educational, but as Beatty implies, there is a difference between knowing facts and applying them within one’s own reality. A contestant might know how much corn Iowa grew last year, but for most it is only a number. The economic situation behind the

number—how many people were hired to produce it, what chemicals were used, how the number affects the price, how the price affects them—are details to which many people remain oblivious. If the show *Are You Smarter Than a Fifth Grader* teaches us anything, it's that the facts that we are taught mean little in our everyday lives, as most people do not retain the information once they leave school (they aren't smarter than a fifth grader).

In many cases, political and social leaders use facts as a base to which they can apply fiction to earn support, while still calling this hybrid of fact and fiction—fact. It is this hybridity that threatens to dismantle reality, because while it contains truth, it is also composed of fictional elements, simulacra, which can be viewed by the masses not as a hybrid but as a fact. In post-modern society, with so many opposing views being distributed through television and the internet, it is difficult to find truth in anything. “It is information itself which produces uncertainty, and so this uncertainty, unlike the traditional uncertainty which could always be resolved, is irreparable” (Implosion 101). Although access to such a vast quantity of information might empower the masses, because fact and fiction can no longer be distinguished, truth can never be restored.

To sum up, the information circulating through Bradbury's world is not just trivial information. Reference is also there, it is just abridged to suit the shift in society. The problem is that the banal and unimportant facts are mixed in with the important facts, because television permits both to have equal representation. The result is that fact and fiction become inseparable. In both worlds, the excess of information leads to the abridgement of information, and it is through television that the simulacra, because of the mass-production of copies, confuse the copy with the real, until gradually, the copy

begins to precede the real. This is not caused by the government, but by the masses: “The social becomes obsessed with itself; through this auto-information, this permanent autointoxication, it becomes its own vice, its own perversion...It no longer enacts itself; it has no more time to enact itself; it no longer occupies a particular space, public or political; it becomes confused with its own control screen” (Implosion 101). The masses’ desire for the show outweighs their need to form their own opinions and think for themselves. As long as they receive information more quickly and in more entertaining formats, it does not matter if some of that information has no meaning.

CHAPTER III

ENTERTAINMENT

In this chapter I narrow my scope and analyze television as a vehicle of entertainment to form more specific comparisons between the two societies. I have arranged my findings into four sections: 1) Bradbury's Parlor Walls, 2) Our Parlor Walls, 3) Entertainment and Spirituality, and 4) Entertainment and History. In this section, *Bradbury's Parlor Walls*, I do a close reading of the novel using Baudrillard's theory to determine how relationships are distorted in Bradbury's world. Bradbury uses Montag's wife Mildred, a representative of the typical middle class family, to reveal television's influence to the reader. By examining her relationship with the parlor walls, I show how simulacra can precede reality in her world, resulting in a distortion of meaning. Our first sight of Mildred is in front of the screen:

“Well, this is a play comes on the wall-to-wall circuit in ten minutes. They mailed me my part this morning. I sent in some boxtops. They write the script with one part missing. It's a new idea. The homemaker, that's me, is the missing part. When it comes time for the missing lines, they all look at me out of the three walls and I say the lines. Here, for instance, the man says, ‘What do you think of this whole idea, Helen?’ And he looks at

me sitting here center stage, see? And I say, I say—” She paused and ran her finger under a line on the script. “‘I think that’s fine!’ And then they go on with the play until he says, ‘Do you agree to that, Helen?’ and I say, ‘I sure do!’” (Bradbury 20).

From the start, we are shown how entangled television has become in Mildred’s life, and we can conclude the followings things: Firstly, Mildred is waiting for the show to begin. To her, the television is not a distraction to escape the boredom in her life, it is an anticipated event. She adjusts her lifestyle to meet the schedule of her fictional program. Secondly, she describes the program as a *play*, which unfolds on three walls. Bradbury is using the metaphor of the theatre; in theatre, when an actor breaks the fourth wall it ruins the illusion of the play, but in this world, the fourth wall is necessary to maintain the illusion. The actors need the audience to acknowledge their existence.

Without Mildred, there can be no play, but she is only allowed to participate if she follows a script. In her own reality, she has the freedom of speech, and yet she escapes into a world where she is told how to think, her dialogue is scripted, and her part is chosen for her—that of a homemaker. Mildred is already a homemaker, so the TV world has not changed her status, and yet she finds this world more appealing, because during this program she is no longer on the outside looking in; she is “center stage,” part of the troupe. She can abandon the responsibilities of free speech and thought. She only has to act her part: [Montag:] “What’s the play about?” [Mildred:] “I just told you. There are these people named Bob and Ruth and Helen” (Bradbury 20). Mildred addresses herself as a fictional character, as one of *those people* on the screen. In the TV world she does not have to be Mildred; she is Helen, as real as Bob and Ruth, more real than real. But

she only has three walls, so when the program ends she'll be Mildred again. She needs the fourth wall to maintain the illusion:

“It'll be even more fun when we can afford to have the fourth wall installed. How long you figure before we save up and get the fourth wall torn out and a fourth wall-TV put in? It's only two thousand dollars.”
“That's one-third of my yearly pay.”
“It's only two thousand dollars,” she repeated. “And I should think you'd consider me sometimes. If we had a fourth wall, why it'd be just like this room wasn't ours at all, but all kinds of exotic people's rooms. We could do without a few things” (Bradbury 20-21).

Mildred is willing to do without in her life in order to update the TV world, to sacrifice 1/3 of their yearly salary. This fraction is significant, because the average person spends 1/3 of their lives asleep, in a dream world. With a fourth wall—the border between the real and unreal—Mildred can stay within the dream world instead of her reality. She will no longer need to send in box tops to be part of the show, to be that liaison between reality and television.

To Mildred, the parlor walls act as a bridge between reality and her dream world. To Montag, the television is an intrusive machine. He recognizes the power that television has over his wife, and that television is distorting reality by its attempts to reveal it. Through subtle metaphors, Bradbury, through Montag, anticipates television's capabilities in the destabilization of the real: “Even though the people in the walls of the room had barely moved, and nothing had really been settled, you had the impression that someone had turned on a washing machine or sucked you up in a gigantic vacuum. You drowned in music and pure cacophony” (Bradbury 45). Montag first compares the

television to a washing machine, a metaphor for simulation. After each cycle the clothing (images) fade, and we don't notice the originals have been altered, because the processed objects become the new originals. Montag next compares the television to a vacuum. It absorbs Montag within itself; fiction absorbs reality. Television not only absorbs humanity within itself, it *drowns* humanity in sounds and images, with entertainment; Bradbury makes an association between television and water, which is important because Montag is a Fireman. Montag and the TV Actors are elementally different, and each serves a different purpose: The Firemen destroy knowledge—*the news media*, the vacuum. The actors absorb what is left and re-present it—*entertainment*: the washing machine. Each element works with the other, and both use television to control the masses. In the case of entertainment, this control is accomplished by distracting the masses from reality.

Watt claims that Bradbury's "dystopian world both represents and decries modern alienation, itself a symptom of unbridled 'progress' in which, by following blind ideals, 'we can hardly escape from ourselves'" (Watt 71-72). Although I agree with his interpretation, I believe that television's influence causes more than alienation, because in Bradbury's world, the parlor walls are more than just a barrier:

Well, wasn't there a wall between him and Mildred, when you came down to it? Literally not just one wall but, so far, three! And expensive, too! And the uncles, the aunts, the cousins, the nieces, the nephews, that lived in those walls, the gibbering pack of tree apes that said nothing, nothing, nothing and said it loud, loud, loud. He had taken to calling them relatives from the very first (Bradbury 44).

Montag knows the actors aren't real, but to Mildred, the term 'relatives' is more than a nickname: "No matter when he came in, the walls were always talking to Mildred" (Bradbury 44). The simulacra are talking *to* Mildred. They have become personified: "Montag turned and looked at his wife, who sat in the middle of the parlor talking to an announcer, who in turn was talking to her... The converter attachment... automatically supplied her name whenever the announcer addressed his anonymous audience... He was a friend, no doubt of it, a good friend" (Bradbury 64). Because television presents these simulacra as people, Mildred recognizes these images *as* people. They are no longer false representations. To Mildred, *Simulacra are becoming images of people*, and once simulacra are recognized as people, their nickname becomes their identity. Because television presents these simulacra as relatives, Mildred recognizes them as such, because she lacks a representation of real relatives, besides Montag, in which to compare. Through television, fictional images have become part of their household; an extended family. To Mildred, *Simulacra are becoming relatives*—and the nickname precedes the identity.

By presenting simulacra as people, television re-presents the idea of what relationships mean. Mildred makes connections between the characters on the screen and the people in her world. When their neighbor Mrs. Phelps discusses her various marriages, Mildred says, "That reminds me... Did you see that Clara Dove five-minute romance last night in your wall?" (Bradbury 95). Mildred makes a comparison between her neighbor's entire romantic life and a five-minute television romance, between a simulacrum and a person. Mrs. Phelps's life has been generalized by Mildred in order to

compare it to a fictional relationship she saw on her screen, because that is how television conditioned her to think. As Faber says, “The television is ‘real.’ It is immediate, it has dimension. It tells you what to think and blasts it in. It *must* be right. It *seems* so right. It rushes you on so quickly to its own conclusions your mind hasn’t time to protest, ‘What nonsense!’” (Bradbury 84). These perceptions not only affect how Mildred thinks about those in her community, but also impact her own marriage:

[Montag:] “Who *are* these people? Who’s that man and who’s that woman? Are they husband and wife, are they divorced, engaged, what? Good God, *nothing’s* connected up.”

“They—” said Mildred. “Well, they—they had this fight, you see. They certainly fight a lot. You should listen. I think they’re married. Yes, they’re married. Why?” (Bradbury 46)

The relationship between the TV actors mirrors the relationship between Montag and Mildred: they are married, but neither husband nor wife can remember where they met, how they initially connected. But it does not matter, because they are together. They successfully maintain the image of marriage for their neighborhood, their audience, themselves. It does not matter if it is a connection without meaning, because according to television, *that’s what relationships are*.

Now that they are extensions of the family, the simulacra are no longer restricted to their screen. They are depicted as moving into their household: “He heard the “relatives” shouting in the parlor” (Bradbury 48). As the story progresses, they become more influential, and as the simulacra become more real to Mildred, Montag becomes more like a simulacrum: “He felt he was one of the creatures electronically inserted

between the slots of the phono-color walls, speaking, but the speech not piercing the crystal barrier. He could only pantomime, hoping she would turn his way and see him. They would not touch through the glass” (Bradbury 46-47). The simulacra soon possess more authority within the household than Montag does.

“Will you turn the parlor off?” he asked.

“That’s my family.”

“Will you turn it off for a sick man?”

“I’ll turn it down.”

She went out of the room and did nothing to the parlor and came back. “Is that better?” (Bradbury 48-49).

Mildred cares more for the relatives, the simulacra, than for her sick husband. But they are no longer just extended relatives. They are Mildred’s family—*simulacra are family*—and it is Montag who has become the distraction. The simulacra have pulled Mildred to their side of the glass. Montag is on the other. There is now a dividing barrier between them, that line between reality and dream. Now that Mildred accepts her side as real, reality becomes more unreal. “She looked at him as if he were behind the glass wall” (Bradbury 64). To Mildred, Montag is little more than an actor now, playing his part as breadwinner, but in actuality it is Mildred who has become the simulacrum. Because television presents the program as a reality, she believes the presentation is what reality is supposed to be, and models herself after those images. Mildred is now part of the play, and all Montag can do is watch as his wife becomes more like the actors. *Mildred is becoming simulacra*, and only Montag is left to be converted. Mildred tries unsuccessfully to draw him into her world:

“You’ll be here for the White Clown tonight, and the ladies coming over?”
cried Mildred.

Montag stopped at the door, with his back turned. “Millie?”

A silence. “What?”

“Millie? Does the White Clown love you?”

No answer.

“Millie, does—” He licked his lips. “Does your ‘family’ love you, love
you *very* much, love you with all their heart and soul, Millie?”

He felt her blinking slowly at the back of his neck. “Why’d you ask a silly
question like that?”

He felt he wanted to cry, but nothing would happen to his eyes or his
mouth.

“If you see that dog outside,” said Mildred, “give him a kick for me”
(Bradbury 77).

Entertainment has not only altered the concept of love by how it presents it, love has become a support system without meaning. Montag agonizes over the void television has created between him and his wife, and seeks comfort in the only person he can, Faber, the former Professor and inventor, who symbolically represents the era of modernity: “Behind him, the door to a bedroom stood open, and in that room a litter of machinery and steel tools were strewn upon a desktop” (Bradbury 81). Faber agrees to help him, but their partnership is short-lived. Montag’s neighbors and his wife turn Montag in to the Firemen. Before Beatty forces Montag to burn his home as punishment for his crimes, Montag sees Mildred exit their home with a suitcase. Mildred, his wife of fifteen years, does not spare him a single glance: “She shoved the valise in the waiting beetle, climbed in, and sat mumbling, “Poor family, poor family, oh everything gone, everything, everything gone now...” (Bradbury 114). She does not care that she has

betrayed her husband and will never see him again. She grieves only the loss of the actors: the people: the relatives: the family; a precession of simulacra through television. The only family Mildred knew.

2) Our Parlor Walls: My intent in this section is to compare the parlor walls in *Fahrenheit* to TV in America in order to examine how the American masses' reactions compare to Mildred's. For the purposes of this study, I use the genre of reality TV to compare against the parlor walls, using Bill Nichols's article "Reality TV and the Social Perversion" as reference, expanding his arguments that reality TV distorts the meaning of spirituality and history. I focus on the genre of reality TV based on two criteria. Firstly, reality TV is specifically mentioned during Bradbury's 2003 interview as similar to the parlor walls. Secondly, reality TV shares many of the same qualities as the programs aired during the 1950's, when *Fahrenheit* is published, as Bill Nichols reveals by expanding Modleski's interpretation of soap operas. These similarities include: "a participatory quality (connection to versus separation from); a sense that characters or social actors are 'like me'—unlike stars who are of decidedly different status; an emphasis on knowledge of what others might do or think (troubled characters, potential dates, criminals at large) rather than strictly factual 'know how'" (Nichols 397). Soap operas also have "a special meaningfulness for their target audience; they are more than filler, audiovisual wallpaper or escape. So is reality TV" (Nichols 397).

Though similar, reality TV has something in common with the parlor walls that soap operas do not, which makes them the better comparison: *the play scripts*, which allow Mildred to participate in her program, to interact with her 'family.' The script that

Mildred must follow in order to participate in her play bears a remarkable similarity to opinion polls in reality TV. As Baudrillard argues, “The people have become *public*. They even allow themselves the luxury of enjoying day by day, as in home cinema, the fluctuation of their own opinion in the daily reading of the opinion polls” (Implosion 102). Television viewers clutch their cellular devices in hand like play scripts. In *America’s Vote* poles, they provide the reality TV actors with votes as efficiently as Mildred supports the actors in her program. Instead of sending box tops, they send text messages. They buy their voices with text messaging rates. I believe the similarities between these two mediums, the connection between the actors and the viewers and the forms in which they communicate, justify this comparison.

Both the parlor walls and reality TV depend on viewers to sustain their programs. Just as Mildred submits to the television’s time schedule, many reality programs are anticipated by their viewers, but *America* has something that *Fahrenheit* does not, the capabilities of DVR. In this sense, we have maintained mastery over the machine, but not everybody can afford DVR, they don’t yet have the fourth wall, so they must still be there to support their programs. Just as Mildred’s play cannot function without her participation, reality shows like *American Idol* cannot exist without viewer support. It takes idle Americans to make *Idol* Americans. The judges do not vote; the viewers do. Without the viewers, there can be no stage, there can be no play.

The loyalty of the viewers is due to the appeal of the programs, and reality TV and the parlor walls are appealing for many of the same reasons; the first is how the programs are structured. In the novel, Mildred enjoys the dramatic structure of her *play*,

which is how Nichols describes reality TV: “Reality TV seeks to reimagine as broad a collectivity or target audience for its sponsors as possible. Hence the tendency to represent experience as spectacle framed only by the banalities of a crude morality play” (Nichols 401). The moral structure, achieved through the framing of its scenes, allow these programs to solve “real-life” problems in short amounts of time. In *Fahrenheit*, the explosive drama between Bob and Ruth is resolved at the end of each episode, just as the drama in reality programs is resolved by a scene at the end that finds a moral where there is none, which supports Nichols’s argument that “the very intensity of feeling, emotion, sensation, and involvement that reality TV produces is also discharged harmlessly within its dramatic envelope of banality” (Nichols 398-399). Unfortunately reality does not have this melodramatic moment of hope. People must enter the screen to get it, as Mildred desires to do: to live in a world with *resolution*.

Another appeal is that the actors are portrayed as relatable people. In the novel, Mildred regards the actors as relatives, because that is how they are presented to her. In America, viewers call in to support their favorite contestants, in many cases because their difficult pasts make them relatable, but in reality the viewers are only rooting for the people that they were, because once they enter the screen, they are no longer “people,” they are contestants. Their stories, occupations, and personalities are shaped by the cameras, which according to Baudrillard, makes them unreal:

The TV studio transforms you into holographic characters: one has the impression of being materialized in space by the light of projectors, like translucent characters who pass through the masses (that of millions of TV viewers) exactly as your real hand passes through the unreal hologram

without encountering any resistance—but not without consequences: having passed through the hologram has rendered your hand unreal as well (Simulacra 105).

A contestant arrives on the show, and a simulacrum of a person is formed; not a person, but a simulacrum edited to fulfill the necessary role that programs like *Big Brother* have chosen for them: A businessman, a student, a homemaker—a viewer. They are listed only by who they are and what they do; a name and occupation. But to the viewer, they are more than just names, because they care enough to invest money through text rates so the contestants can have a chance at happiness. The viewers regard the contestants as real people, but their actions and dialogue are edited by cameras, and fit to thematic music to suit their roles on the show. To the viewer, the contestants that are shown to them on screen are often considered as real people, just as Relatives are relatives, but in actuality they are only a series of images.

In *Fahrenheit*, the actors, by misrepresenting relationships, re-present what relationships mean for some of their viewers. In Mildred's program, the concept of love is unnecessary, and relationships are portrayed as dramatic arguments. In many ways, this aspect of the parlor walls applies to reality TV. In the *Bachelor* and *Bachelorette*, contestants from varying backgrounds come together for a common purpose: to find love. The appeal is understandable; instead of hunting for a spouse in the enormity of the world, contestants can instead achieve it in a controlled environment, where they can live in luxury, and where every date is paid for. On these shows, love becomes a game in which opportunities, vacations, and lifestyles are within reach on television, when in the real world it may not be possible. In the TV world, love is expressed through a single

gesture, the giving of a rose. Love is obtained by a man or woman choosing the most appealing person from a group of strangers in front of cameras, then picking the best match. The relationship lasts as long as the show lasts. It ends only when the camera turns off.

The *Bachelor* programs are only one example of how reality TV distorts what relationships represent. In other reality shows, contestants compete for vacations, money, love, and marriage. Hidden cameras, microphones, faxes and phones revealing the worst of each person, polygraph machines to test which person is least like a criminal—this is accepted as a realistic way to achieve happiness by the viewer. They become actors in order to experience love, because they might not be able to experience it in their reality, just like Mildred. This is the final appeal of reality TV—the viewers’ ability to become part of the play.

In America, the public has always been fascinated with television celebrities and stars, yet there is always a gap between the celebrities and the viewers; there are those who walk the Red Carpet, and those who watch them walk. With reality TV, this is not the case. It bridges this gap. It lets the viewers become the stars. Because of the play scripts, we, like Mildred, have the opportunity to participate in the play, to enter the dream world. However, entering this world does not come without sacrifice. Just as Mildred is willing to *do without* in order to enter their world, in reality shows that span whole seasons, every contestant does without for a chance at achieving something better. They sacrifice time with their families, their jobs, and moments they can never get back. These contestants enter a dream to create a reality, at the expense of their own reality.

3) Entertainment and Spirituality: In this section I examine how the influence of reality TV goes beyond human relationships, and how, according to Nichols, it becomes a spiritual experience: “The phatic bond—the open channel, the phone operators ‘standing by,’ the pleas of ‘Don’t go away,’ the possibility that you may have something to contribute at any moment—offer the sensation of connectedness, of telecommunion” (Nichols 398). In the novel, Mildred’s tithes (box tops) sustain television’s influence. In return for her support, the television shows her visions of an endless now, an eternal life of enjoyment. Spirituality is not just a spiritual relationship between the viewer and the screen. Television, like religion, cannot sustain itself; it needs a congregation—the masses. Reality TV also requires this support, which is why “Reality TV tenders charity for ‘those poor people’ it parades before us as victims of violence and disaster. It urges faith—in the ceaseless baptism in the tele-real for those wishing never to be bored again” (Nichols 396). These victims can be found within any reality show. Their personas are created by cameras, but many viewers regard them as real people, and are made to think that they are spiritually obligated to save them. Through text votes the viewers can help *save* their contestants. As the television hosts say, “*You must do your part.*”

In reality-crime shows like *America’s Most Wanted*, telereligion extends beyond the screen. Americans can experience a different side of spirituality—justice. “Reality TV substitutes the confessional dynamics of viewers who phone in their response for the confession that cannot be: the criminal’s penance. Neither we nor the tele-confessional itself can grant forgiveness for those whose guilt is not the point. But we can obtain it for ourselves” (Nichols 397-398). Not only can we use our play scripts to keep contestants in

our shows. We can also use them to eliminate criminals from our nation. (In *Fahrenheit 451*, religion also extends beyond its screens, but I return to this in the *News* section.)

Another way spirituality is affected by entertainment is through the advertisements broadcasted during their programs. The jingle of “Denham’s Dentrifice” (Bradbury 78), which the masses chant back in a manner eerily similar to how our society responds to commercials like *freecreditreport.com*, shows the communal aspects of these advertisements. They are not only a spiritual experience; some commercials distort religion itself.

[Faber]: “Lord, how they’ve changed it in our ‘parlors’ these days. Christ is one of the ‘family’ now. I often wonder if God recognizes His own son the way we’ve dressed him up, or is it dressed him down? He’s a regular peppermint stick now, all sugar-crystal and saccharine when he isn’t making veiled references to certain commercial products that every worshipper *absolutely* needs” (Bradbury 81).

In Bradbury’s world, Christ is a spokesperson endorsing commercial products, a model that brainwashes the public into consuming so that the simulacra can continue to function. Through Christ, the church becomes a marketplace, selling capitol in exchange for salvation. In America, there are similarities of this spiritual commerce. Infomercials sell Bibles, Christian music, and objects engraved with Christ’s image. There are movies, cartoons, and musicals starring Christ which are advertised on television to sell their tickets and merchandise. God is still in our pledge, but he is also on our dollar bill. He is, as Faber said: *one of the family now*. In both worlds, television does not deny God or Christ. It hires them.

One might initially suggest that in the novel religion and television are opposing forces. It is controversies in religion that assist in giving rise to the implosion of the media, and it is religion that gives hope for humanity after the nuclear attack when the televisions are destroyed. Despite their supposed opposition, through most of the story, religion exists in their society *through* television. It isn't until the televisions are destroyed and the society is brought to ruin that Montag is able to fully separate the religion he's learned on screen from the religious verse he uses as a source of hope for the future.

4) *Entertainment and History*: In this section I examine how reality TV can prevent the viewer from understanding the historical world around them. Nichols argues that reality TV has the ability to eliminate “an awareness of the present in relation to a past active within it and a future constantly being made in the thick of the present” (Nichols 401-402). This is due to the fact that the “detached consumption, distracted viewing, and episodic amazement exists in a time and space outside history, outside the realm in which physical, bodily engagement marks our existential commitment to a project and its realization” (Nichols 395). In *Fahrenheit*, it is television's ability to distort the historical referent, “the vagueness with which Bradbury defines the conditions leading to nuclear war” (Watt 81), that Watt finds most unsettling. Montag is aware of entertainment's ability to distract from history, and he voices his concerns to Mildred:

“How in the hell did those bombers get up there every single second of our lives! Why doesn't someone want to talk about it! We've started and won two atomic wars since 1990! Is it because we're having so much fun at home we've forgotten the world? Is it because we're so rich and the rest of

the world's so poor and we just don't care if they are? I've heard rumors; the world is starving, but we're well fed. Is it true, the world works hard and we play? Is that why we're hated so much? I've heard the rumors about hate, too, once in a long while, over the years. Do *you* know why? I don't, that's *sure*! Maybe the books can get us half out of the cave. They just *might* stop us from making the same damn insane mistakes! I don't hear those idiot bastards in your parlor talking about it. God, Millie, don't you *see*? An hour a day, two hours, with these books, and maybe..."

The telephone rang. Mildred snatched the phone.

"Ann!" She laughed. "Yes, the White Clown's on tonight!" (Bradbury 73-74).

From the above, we can determine that Mildred and the other citizens are aware that there are jets flying above their heads; they just don't care. Mildred cares only for her program, *The White Clown*. They believe their country is so powerful that the possibility of an attack, of war, does not concern them. [Mrs. Phelps]: "It's always someone else's husband dies, they say" (Bradbury 94). According to Del Rey, the American public's attitude towards war today is not so different from Mildred's:

DR: In the book, the U.S. is involved in an ongoing, nebulously defined war. Combat jets are forever streaking overhead. The rest of the world hates us, and we can't understand why. To some people, this describes the current situation exactly, with an open-ended war against terrorism and armed conflict in Afghanistan and Iraq, the latter in the face of worldwide protests (Bradbury 182).

In a post-9/11 world, in a time of war, many viewers follow their TV programs and celebrities as, if not more closely than the news. (Michael Jackson's death received 60 times more news coverage than the deaths of seven U.S. troops). It isn't that they aren't aware that attacks could come. Rather, as Baudrillard says, "It seems that people

have become tired of nuclear blackmail and decided not to give in to it, leaving the threat of destruction hanging in mid-air over them, perhaps with an obscure sense of how unreal it is” (America 43). Although many people are actively involved in current events and closely follow the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, those viewers who make reality TV a priority in their lives and vote for contestants on a consistent basis might view the current historical situation similar to how Mildred does: *Yes, American Idol is on tonight!*

In *Fahrenheit*, television not only distracts from history, it has the power to distort it. The citizens in Bradbury’s world aren’t even aware that people die in wars. [Mrs. Bowles]: “I’ve never known any dead man killed in a war. Killed jumping off buildings, yes, like Gloria’s husband last week, but from wars? No” (Bradbury 94). In addition, because history has become so distorted, the public isn’t aware that the Firemen who enforce the law and control the media did not always burn books. When Montag asks his colleagues “Didn’t firemen *prevent* fires rather than stoke them up and get them going?” they respond, “That’s rich!” (Bradbury 34). The history has been lost, because the world on the screen “is an environment as real as the world. It *becomes* and *is* the truth.” (Bradbury 84). According to Baudrillard, this has also occurred in our society: “The age of history, if one can call it that, is also the age of the novel. It is this *fabulous* character, the mythical energy of an event or a narrative, that today seems to be increasingly lost” (Simulacra 47).

Television has the ability to distract from history and re-present it in both worlds, but in our society, reality TV can unwittingly encourage acts similar to historical actions we are taught to despise. In France, Christophe Nick recently produced a reality show

called *Le jeu de la mort* (*The Game of Death*). A man was put into an electric chair and asked questions, and if he answered a question incorrectly, the audience was given the option to shock him. It was later discovered that the man was an actor, but the masses believed it was real. 80% of the people shock him. While he was being electrocuted and supposedly near-death, the masses continually shouted “Punish him!” As he begged for mercy, they continued to shock him. It was later explained that this was modeled after an experiment performed at Yale in the 1960’s, and was created as a psychological study to examine the influence of reality TV. The results are comparable to what happened in Nazi-Germany. The television producers were met with public hostility by broadcasting the program, and yet, it wasn’t the producers who pulled the lever. It was the masses—80% of them. This example clearly shows the negative influence reality TV can have on the masses, not because television is negative, but because it is a tool that permits man’s negativity to flourish in a more accessible format.

To sum up, in *Bradbury’s Parlor Walls*, I pointed out how meaning is distorted in Bradbury’s world through television because the actors on the parlor walls are perceived as real people. In *Our Parlor Walls*, I argued that reality TV possesses many similarities of the parlor walls, and has the same potential to distort meaning. In *Entertainment and Spirituality*, I mentioned the communal aspects of television, and how entertainment has the capability not only to distort the meaning of human relationships, but the meaning of spirituality. In *Entertainment and History*, I revealed how television has the potential to distract from history and re-present it.

However, there are some redeeming qualities of reality TV that the parlor walls do not possess. *American Idol* has launched numerous musical careers that otherwise would not have happened, and the show has organized many international charities. The crime shows, especially John Walsh's *America's Most Wanted*, has assisted in the arrest of numerous criminals. Many reality TV shows offer people the chance to improve their careers, financial situations, and status in life, and also encourage philanthropic events. Reality TV is not without merit, but through its capabilities of mass-producing simulacra, it pushes society further away from reality and closer to hyperreality. Once meaning is abolished and real life and entertainment become indistinguishable, it can lead to dark events, as it does in *The Game of Death*.

CHAPTER IV

NEWS

In this chapter I compare Montag's chase sequence from *Fahrenheit 451* to news-media in America using as reference "News Introduction" from *Media Studies: a Reader*. My intent is to show how news has adopted the qualities of reality TV, and how the information viewers receive are simulacra, and not true representations of reality. This transformation is shown in four steps: 1) The Objectivity of News 2) The Spectacle of News 3) News and Spirituality, 4) News and History. In this section, *The Objectivity of News*, I explain how the political structures in both worlds influence the information presented to the masses.

In *Fahrenheit*, the rise of television causes the decline of the print industry. Because people live only for pleasure and they lose interest in reading, it changes the world of the news-media forever. [Faber]: "I remember the newspapers dying like huge moths. No one *wanted* them back. No one missed them. And then the Government, seeing how advantageous it was to have people reading only about passionate lips and the fist in the stomach, circled the situation with your fire-eaters" (Bradbury 89). The

Firemen, who work for the government, join forces with the entertainment industry, combining the *vacuum* and the *washing machine*, entertainment and news. This is also the case in America, with the decline of the newspaper industry and the increasing reliance on online and cable news. Watt claims it isn't politics that control the public in the novel, it is the social; however, in the final chapters of the novel it becomes difficult to tell the difference, because news and entertainment operate within the same structure, and this merger has many results.

The first result is that news begins to lose its objectivity, because the news-media operates within the same structure as entertainment, which can only function through the support of its various sponsors: “despite the *institutional* commitment to impartiality of TV news, and its undoubted struggle to achieve this, its formal structures inevitably construct specific identifications and positions for its viewers” (News 629). These positions are formed not only from sponsors of social organizations, but political ones. Nowhere is this more evident in America than in national news programs, in which “‘Oppositional’ voices are usually confined to the accredited representatives of official opposition parties. The definitions of the powerful thus become the accepted definitions of social reality and consent to the existing social order is secured” (News 629). In *Fahrenheit*, the incredible response-time after Beatty's murder and the amount of information the media have on Montag suggest that they have deep ties to the inner-workings of the Firehouse. In America many news-media networks are affiliated with political parties. Either the owner of the network has ties to a political party, the sponsors do, or both. Because of this affiliation, news stories are framed to appease their

networks—i.e. switching from MSNBC to FOX gives opposite views of the same news story—and in America it isn't limited to national news, because local news programs are extensions of the national networks.

Journalistic objectivity is accomplished through the framing of news stories. In the novel, this is evident after Montag murders Beatty and becomes a fugitive: “‘Montag,’ the TV set said, and lit up. ‘M-O-N-T-A-G.’ The name was spelled out by a voice. ‘Guy Montag. Still running. Police helicopters are up. A new Mechanical Hound has been brought from another district—’” (Bradbury 133). The urgency in which the newscasters interrupt an entertainment program to identify Montag, to spell out his name and describe his location, should not be surprising to any television viewer in America. Montag does commit murder, so this warning might be justified, and yet, the viewers do not know what kind of person Montag is or why he does it. They only know what the newscasters tell them, that Montag is a former Fireman, a state official gone bad, who murders his officer in cold blood. The way this is framed to the public shows television's enormous influence. The same is true in America: innocent until proven guilty, and yet by way of inflection, the newscasters *allegedly* mark criminals as guilty until proven innocent.

2) News becomes Spectacle: In this section I show how news programs in both worlds not only lose their objectivity, but adopt the qualities of entertainment programs like reality TV. In *Fahrenheit*, after Montag murders Beatty, he is chased through the city by a futuristic gadget, the Mechanical Hound, which the news-media follow “by camera helicopter as it starts on its way to the target” (Bradbury 133). Montag is referred to not

as a criminal, but a target. This is not justice, this is a hunt. Justice with flair: *Cops*.

Through television, “News becomes dramatic spectacle, a simulacrum of eventfulness for which there is no original” (Nichols 394).

This is the second result of the merger of news and entertainment; because they operate within the same structure, news is becoming entertainment, and “As it thus becomes a participant in the events it reports, the line between ‘social reality’ and ‘media reality’ becomes increasingly blurred” (News 630). News is not only subjective; it is also “a cultural commodity. As a television genre, for example, it exhibits all those features (segmentation, the open-ended series format, repetition, a sense of ‘nowness’)...characterizing television as a medium...and in this respect can be seen to have more in common with soap opera” (News 627). Nichols has already compared reality TV to soap operas. In *Media Studies: A Reader*, news is compared to soap operas. This means that reality TV can be compared to news. News has evolved to adapt with society’s need to be constantly entertained. Elements of reality TV have transcended into the media. This connection is confirmed by Nichols: “Reality TV’s perverse kinship with traditional documentary film, *network newscasting* and ethnographic film lies in its ability to absorb the referent” (Nichols 394). [Italics mine]

Because news is becoming reality TV, news has adopted many of its qualities, including the connection between the viewer and screen. News, like reality TV, relies on the play scripts from their viewers to sustain their programs. The media’s opinion polls are nearly identical in form to poles on reality programs, and improved through social networking sites such as *Facebook* and *Twitter*. Portions of every news program,

although various in length and presentation, are dedicated to excerpts of the ‘fourth wall.’ Emails, blogs, and letters from viewers are read aloud and displayed on screen, and although this is presented as a virtual democracy, it doesn’t function this way because the objectivity of the programs is questionable. In many cases the tweets and emails are framed to suit the intentions of the networks.

Another quality of reality TV is how Mildred regards her program as a play. Because news is becoming reality TV, Montag’s world is becoming a play: “He watched the scene, fascinated, not wanting to move. It seemed so remote and no part of him; it was a play apart and separate, wondrous to watch, not without its strange pleasure. That’s all for me, he thought, that’s all taking place just for *me*, by God” (Bradbury 134). Through entertainment, Mildred becomes an actor. Now, through the news, Montag is becoming an actor. He is ‘center stage,’ the main act in the play, and his hyperreal world is becoming the screen:

If he wished, he could linger here in comfort, and follow the entire hunt on through its swift phases, down alleys, across streets, over empty running avenues, crossing lots and playgrounds, with pauses here or there for the necessary commercials, up other alleys to the burning house of Mr. and Mrs. Black, and so on finally to this house with Faber and himself seated, drinking, while the Electric Hound snuffed down the last trail, silent as a drift of death itself, skidding to a halt outside that window there. Then, if he wished, Montag might rise, walk to the window, keep one eye on the TV screen, open the window, lean out, look back, and see himself dramatized, described, made over, standing there, limned in the bright small television screen from outside, a drama to be watched objectively, knowing that in other parlors he was large as life, in full color, dimensionally perfect! and if he kept his eye peeled quickly he would see himself, an instant before oblivion, being punctured for the benefit of how

many civilian parlor-sitters who had been awakened from sleep a few minutes ago by the frantic sirening of their living room walls to come watch the big game, the hunt, the one-man carnival” (Bradbury 134).

The above shows how news in *Fahrenheit* is becoming more like reality TV and less like journalism. The Mechanical Hound is now described as the Electric Hound. It is not only the law that is chasing Montag; it is the viewing public as well. The mechanics of justice are now an electrical current of entertainment, streaming live for the world to see. Because news is presented in this way, as entertainment, meaning is again distorted: “With an effort, Montag reminded himself again that this was no fictional episode to be watched on his run to the river; it was in actuality his own chess game he was witnessing, move by move” (Bradbury 138). Montag finds it difficult to make a distinction between his own life and the simulacra, in telling news and fiction apart. Once news becomes a cultural commodity, news becomes fiction. The result is that *Montag is becoming a simulacrum*. Even more frightening: *his world is becoming a simulacrum*. According to Baudrillard, the media has affected our society in the same way:

...*the medium is the message* not only signifies the end of the message, but also the end of the medium. There are no more media in the literal sense of the word (I’m speaking particularly of electronic mass media)—that is, of a mediating power between one reality and another, between one state of the real and another. Neither in content, nor in form. Strictly, this is what implosion signifies. The absorption of one pole into another” (Simulacra 82-83).

This implosion is caused by television, because it is through television “politics has become part of everyday life—as pragmatic machine, as game, as interaction, as

spectacle—” (America 92). In *Fahrenheit* a murder investigation is broadcasted as a spectacle, just as the American media use reporters and news choppers not to convey information so much as to broadcast a good story to the public. Additionally, American news programs advertise their upcoming stories similarly to how reality TV programs give sneak-peaks of the drama to unfold on that night’s episode. “Television’s capacity to tell the story of an event, via satellite technology, as it happens, makes it now a potential *player* on the stage of international events” (News 630). Because news is a player (an actor), the world is a stage, for staged “facts” and dramatized truth.

3) News and Spirituality: In this section I discuss how news, like reality TV, has the capability to affect spirituality. Earlier, I point out how communication with reality TV is a spiritual experience in both worlds, and explain how in America, it can move beyond the screen. In *Fahrenheit*, this aspect is shown during Montag’s chase sequence: “Police suggest entire population in the Elm Terrace area do as follows: Everyone in every house in every street open a front or rear door or look from the windows. The fugitive cannot escape if everyone in the next minute looks from his house. Ready!” (Bradbury 138) Not only is news becoming entertainment; news, like reality TV, is a form of spirituality. Bradbury’s citizens are achieving penance for themselves by assisting with the capture of a criminal, just as *America’s Most Wanted* and other crime shows recruit the masses into their congregation. They follow the simulation of Montag into reality as they walk from their screens to their windows, looking into the world that has become as real as their living rooms.

“At the count of ten now! *One! Two!*”

He felt the city rise.

“Three!”

He felt the city turn to its thousands of doors.

Faster! Leg up, leg down!

“Four!”

The people sleepwalking in their hallways.

“Five!”

He felt their hands on the doorknobs!

The smell of the river was cool and like a solid rain. His throat was burnt rust and his eyes were wept dry with running. He yelled as if this yell would jet him on, fling him the last hundred yards.

“Six, seven, eight!”

The doorknobs turned on five thousand doors.

“Nine!”

He ran out away from the last row of houses, on a slope leading down to a solid, moving blackness.

“Ten!”

The doors opened.

He imagined thousands on thousands of faces peering into yards, into alleys, and into the sky, faces hid by curtains, pale, night-frightened faces, like gray animals peering from electric caves, faces with gray colorless eyes, gray tongues, and gray thoughts looking out through the numb flesh of the face.

But he was at the river (Bradbury 138-139).

From the above we can conclude that what was once was a vehicle of entertainment has become a vehicle of control. This is not done with demands. The media put the viewers on their side. They allow them to join the play, which is not only a game, but a form of penance. The masses are more than happy to fulfill their parts; not as homemakers anymore. They have been promoted to protectors of justice. As Nichols points out, through television, “Social responsibility dissolves into teleparticipation. Our subjectivity is less that of citizens, social actors, or ‘people,’ than of cyborg collaborators

in the construction of a screen-world whose survival hinges on a support system designed to jack us into the surrounding commodity stream” (Nichols 396). Although these shows allow *Fahrenheit*'s citizens, and America's, to take part in “real life,” it doesn't make the masses anything more than automatons, acting in a play whose ending is already written by those in power.

4) News and History: In this section I explain how news has the ability to distract from history in a similar manner as reality TV. This is accomplished in two ways. The first is by omission. News omits two factors:

The first is social process: news renders invisible the processes of change, presenting the world as a succession of single events. The second ‘absent dimension’ is social power: news offers us politics in the form of the rituals of political office and omits consideration of economic power altogether. The result is a picture of a world which appears both unchanging and unchangeable (News 628).

In *Fahrenheit*, the media distorts history by not revealing the severity of the approaching nuclear war to the masses. In America, the partisan bias of news networks has also spawned the *strategic omission* of events, according to the whims of their political affiliates. Recently, this has included omitting elements of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, in addition to the situation unfolding on America's southern border. In both societies, history is distorted because it is not shown, and the masses aren't aware of the current historical situation because they only receive their information through their screens, which omit these elements in their programs.

News also distorts history by how it re-presents it. In the novel, when the news reports that one million men are mobilized overseas, Faber sees through the lie: “Ten million men mobilized...But *say* one million. It’s happier” (Bradbury 92). Similarly, the statistics of troop deployment in America also have discrepancies, especially in the current climate of troop surges and withdrawals, in which numbers and dates can be distorted to coincide with the current political agenda. In addition, the wide variety of history books (the objectivity of school text-books is a current political debate) is another example of how history can be falsely represented in America. In both worlds, history is distorted by those who write it, and society contributes to this distortion by teaching information as fact instead of accounts, simulacra, which is what history books and newspapers are. This distortion is worse in televised news, because news anchors bombard the masses with specialized misinformation, which in many cases is written by those who have political bias. It amounts to the same thing as Orwell’s memory holes in *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*, in which history can be changed at the whim of the Party in the Ministry of Truth. Only in Bradbury’s society, and in ours, it is done on a much smaller scale, and in more subtle ways.

To sum up, in *The Objectivity of News*, I explained how news organizations merge with entertainment industries in both societies, resulting in subjective journalism. In *The Spectacle of News*, I pointed out that this merger also results in news taking on many of the qualities of entertainment programs, like reality TV. In *News and Spirituality*, I compared the masses participation in Montag’s capture to the spiritual aspects of programs such as *Americas Most Wanted*. In *News and History*, I explained

how news, like reality TV, has the capability to distort history as efficiently as the televisions in *Fahrenheit 451*.

However, like reality TV, news has many redeeming qualities. It keeps the masses informed and updated on current events, encourages involvement, and supports charities and events. News is not primarily negative. But it can be, because it has transformed from a tool of journalism to a tool of politics, and more recently, to a spectacle not so different from reality programs, which makes it an equally effective tool of hyperreality. The media exist within the same structure as entertainment, and because news is supported by their networks and sponsors, many of the facts that are shown to viewers are merely simulacra disguised as truth, and it becomes difficult to distinguish one pole from another.

CHAPTER V
IMPLOSION OF THE POLITICAL

This study has focused on the social issues in both societies, but since entertainment can become news and the social can become political, the political factors must also be addressed. These factors come into play when television is used to exploit the masses through their news programs. McGiveron points out that mass exploitation begins “as soon as technology allows for the development of mass communication and mass culture” (McGiveron 249). This argument is verified by Beatty: “The fact is we didn’t get along well until photography came into its own. Then—motion pictures in the early twentieth century. Radio. Television. Things began to have *mass*... And because they had mass, they became simpler” (Bradbury 54). The rise of television brings with it a rise of the media, and thus, of political power. The Firemen “were given the new job, as custodians of our peace of mind, the focus of our understandable and rightful dread of being inferior: official censors, judges, and executioners. That’s you, Montag, and that’s me.” (Bradbury 58-59). Politicians and the media fulfill the role of the Firemen in America: “All the mediators... are really only adapted to this purpose; to manage by

delegation, by procuracy, this tedious matter of power and of will, to unburden the masses of this transcendence for their greater pleasure and to turn it into a show for their benefit” (Implosion 106). The masses permit the Firemen to act for them, perhaps because as Baudrillard says, “Any philosophy which assigns man to the exercise of his will can only plunge him into despair...It is much better to rely on some insignificant or powerful instance than to be dependent on one’s own will or the necessity of choice” (Implosion 105-106). Thus, this transfer of responsibility is not only a result of laziness, but the masses’ insecurity as to the worth of their own opinions. The dependence that viewers place on talk show hosts for their political positions is one example of this in American society.

Because the masses allow the media to make decisions for them, the ultimate result is censorship. “Professor Faber and the other intellectuals show that people themselves are responsible for the condition of their own intellects. Unlike technology, intolerant minority pressure that seeks to stifle ideas instead of arguing against them is a major cause of the decline of independent thought in *Fahrenheit 451*” (McGiveron 247). McGiveron points out that Beatty “not only directly claims minority pressure as a cause of intellectual self-censorship and conformity but also emphasizes its pervasiveness with his rhetoric, listing fully twenty-one pressure groups organized by ethnicity, religion, geography, occupation, and even pet preference (McGiveron 247).

In his interview, Bradbury rejects the idea of censorship in America; however, I believe he underestimates the power of the television that he admittedly resents. There is no publicized telescreen (*Nineteen-Eighty-Four*) or sound patrols (*V for Vendetta*) in

America; “no more violence or surveillance, only “information,” secret virulence, slow implosion, and simulacra of spaces in which the effect of the real again comes into play” (Simulacra 30). McGiveron compares the origin of censorship in *Fahrenheit 451* to what is currently happening in America: “various pressure groups' campaigns against sexually explicit music, the burning of the American flag, or sex and violence on television. Moreover, the current debate about political correctness also helps shape how we read Bradbury” (McGiveron 248). Both Baudrillard and McGiveron imply that there is censorship in America, not by force or in the open, but masked as equality and justice. It is because of the groups that are constantly watching each other, the groups that Bradbury claims make censorship impossible in America, that make it possible:

All the movements that only play on liberation, emancipation, on the resurrection of a subject of history, of the group, of the world based on “consciousness raising,” indeed a “raising of the unconscious” of subjects and of the masses, do not see that they are going in the direction of the system, whose imperative today is precisely the overproduction and regeneration of meaning and of speech (Simulacra 86).

In *Fahrenheit*, “intolerance for opposing ideas helps lead to the stifling of individual expression, and hence of thought” (McGiveron 247) and the result is, as Beatty says: “We must all be alike. Not everyone born free and equal, as the Constitution says, but everyone made equal” (Bradbury 58). This is not limited to equal rights, but literature as well, in *Fahrenheit*, through book burning, and in America, by altering books and taking them out of context. Bradbury’s novel is a victim of censorship years after *Fahrenheit* is written: “...I discovered that, over the years, some cubby-hole editors at

Ballantine Books, fearful of contaminating the young, had, bit by bit, censored some 75 separate sections from the novel. Students, reading the novel which, after all, deals with censorship and book burning in the future, wrote to tell me of this exquisite irony” (Bradbury 177).

The final consequence of television is the simulation of power. Baudrillard claims that “America has retained power, both political and cultural, but it is now power as a special effect” (America 107). He also argues that “political weaknesses or stupidity are of no importance. Only image counts” (America 109). In *Fahrenheit*, Mrs. Bowles votes for a political candidate based solely on his appearance. [Mrs. Bowles]: “I think he’s one of the nicest-looking men ever became president” (Bradbury 96). In America, numerous surveys have found that many people vote for candidates not because of where they stand on issues, but whether or not they would be fun to have a beer with, which gives weight to Baudrillard’s claim that leaders are chosen as much for their appeal as for their experience. Power loses meaning because the image is as, if not more relevant than the issues.

Additionally, once politicians appear on the screen they are no longer “real,” because their campaigns and careers are shaped by the cameras, just like reality contestants. “For a long time now a head of state—*no matter which one*—is nothing but the simulacrum of himself, and *only that gives him the power and the quality to govern*. No one would grant the least consent, the least devotion to a *real* person. It is to his double, he being always already *dead*, allegiance is given” (Simulacra 26). Because of

this, Baudrillard argues that “The political stake is dead, only simulacra of conflicts and carefully circumscribed stakes remain” (Simulacra 34).

The illusion of power is evident in *Fahrenheit*, as Montag’s chase takes priority over nuclear war. “So they must have their game out, thought Montag. The circus must go on, even with war beginning within the hour...” (Bradbury 134). The media’s reaction to Beatty’s murder is a deliberate distraction presented by their political leaders because they have no power, because they are primarily an entertainment corporation. The media distracts society from the real threat because they cannot admit their party affiliates aren’t prepared if war comes. [Granger]: “You threw them off at the river. They can’t admit it. They know they can hold their audience only so long. The show’s go to have a snap ending, quick!...So they’re sniffing for a scapegoat to end things with a bang. Watch. They’ll catch Montag in the next five minutes!” (Bradbury 147).

When the media realizes Montag has escaped, they rectify their failure by distorting fact and history and replacing it with fiction: [Granger]: “It’ll be you; right up at the end of that street is our victim. See how our camera is coming in? Building the scene. Suspense. Long shot. Right now, some poor fellow is out for a walk...Anyway, the police have had him charted for months, years. Never know when that sort of information might be handy” (Bradbury 148). To save face, they arrest an innocent man, but they do not stop there. To further distract the masses from the approaching war, they immediately transition to another television program: “The search is over, Montag is dead; a crime against society has been avenged... We now take you to the Sky Room of the Hotel Lux for a half hour of Just-Before-Dawn” (Bradbury 149).

According to Baudrillard, these types of distractions occur consistently in the media today: “Today when the danger comes at it from simulation (that of being dissolved in the play of signs), power plays at the real, plays at crisis, plays at remanufacturing artificial, social, economic, and political stakes. For power, it is a question of life and death. But it is too late” (Simulacra 22). In America, many politicians distract the masses from important issues by focusing on lesser issues such as scandals and political gaffs made by each party’s rival candidate. This is especially true in our current economic climate, in which partisan arguments on both sides take priority over reporting events objectively, and parties blame each other rather than working together to find solutions. In addition, the excessive video, reporting banal facts including what our leaders like to eat and what they wear give validity to Baudrillard’s arguments: Is this constant *Access Hollywood* type of reporting just an illusion to hide our leaders’ own lack of leadership?

It is apparent that television has had many positive effects on society, permitting more people the chance to have their voices heard, and introducing the masses to people and ideas they might not have access to if television was not as readily accessible. Television’s ability to transmit information quickly and its ability to surpass communication barriers are further examples of its positive qualities. However, television is also a tool of hyperreality, which distorts meaning not only in human relationships, but the meaning of spirituality, history, and the idea of leadership and power. How distorted these ideas are depend on the opinions of each viewer. My argument is that it is possible, that the events of *Fahrenheit 451* could happen in America, and some of them already are

happening. Television is not merely a distraction or a form of entertainment. It is the basis for many aspects of our society, and because television makes no distinction between the fictional and realistic images it produces and circulates, it pushes America further towards the reality of hyperreality.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Dystopias are warnings and reflections of their time, so in many cases when they are read these predicted futures have already passed. By anticipating dystopias as eventual realities, as political leaders currently use Big Brother as a looming threat upon the horizon to suit their own agendas, American's grounding in reality becomes even more blurred. Having said that, as dystopias are reflections of their realities, these dystopias work well as teaching devices. They must be acknowledged not as fictional futures but as simulacrum of the past, of the time period when they were written. *Fahrenheit's* place in time follows Orwell's totalitarian future and precedes Baudrillard's vision of a hyperreal world, and the impact of technology has only increased since then, as has the possibility of ever finding a true "reality."

Bradbury does not anticipate the extent that new media such as the internet and cellular devices would have on American society, although there are references to these technologies in the novel such as the master file in the Firehouse and Faber's walkie-talkie, which are forms of the internet and cellular phones. He also does not anticipate the

antagonist qualities of television, in which programs encourage political and social action; in his world, television is primarily a form of escapism.

The medium of television itself might be considered as outdated when compared to other forms of media today, such as the internet and cellular devices. Yet, that depends on how television is defined. Is TV the tube with rabbit ear antennae that existed during the publication of *Fahrenheit 451*, or is TV the plasma screen that spans an entire wall and allows viewers to rewind live programming? I believe that television has not been replaced by newer devices; rather, new media has incorporated television and enhanced it to make it more accessible, as in web sites such as *YouTube* and *Hulu*. In the future, there may be no differentiation between new media technologies, as there are already components of television in the internet, and components of television and the internet in cellular devices. Perhaps in years to come the only difference between them will be the size, shape, and storage capacity. My point is that America's new media such as internet and cellular phones make America in some ways a more hyperreal society than *Fahrenheit*, because images are being circulated through these devices as well.

Technologies that empower the masses also allow them to become more vulnerable. On sites such as *Facebook* and *Twitter*, a person's privacy can unwittingly be made public, just as sites like *vpike.com* have made it possible for anyone to view any physical address, along with anyone within the camera's radius. Additionally, hackers can steal a person's identity and create hundreds of simulacrums of a person without them being aware. Infiltration into government web sites such as *whitehouse.gov*, and leaked information on sites like *Wikileaks* has shown that the government is also

vulnerable to such attacks. This will ultimately lead to safety measures and regulations placed upon such devices by the government (regulations on cellular phones and the internet are currently being discussed). With government intervention on media, the idea of eventual totalitarian control is not as unlikely as it might once have been. If such control does come to pass, it will not be done by force or control, but gradually, in the name of safety and equality, or as Baudrillard put it, through deterrence.

FAHRENHEIT 451: The similarities between Bradbury's novel and America are remarkable, especially since *Fahrenheit 451*, a symbolic dystopia of America today, is shelved in the aisles of science fiction. I conclude this study by referencing Baudrillard's most interesting argument—the possibility that reality can go beyond fiction.

Reality could go beyond fiction: that was the surest sign of the possibility of an ever-increasing imaginary. But the real cannot surpass the model—it is nothing but its alibi. The imaginary was the alibi of the real, in a world dominated by the reality principle. Today, it is the real that has become the alibi of the model, in a world controlled by the principle of simulation. And paradoxically, it is the real that has become our true utopia (Simulacra 122-123).

Baudrillard predicts that the science fiction genre “would evolve implosively, in the very image of our current conception of the universe” (Simulacra 124), not because there are no new territories or unexplored space left to discover, but because “terrestrial space today is virtually coded, mapped, registered, saturated, has thus in a sense closed up again in universalizing itself—a universal market, not only of merchandise, but of values, signs, models, leaving no room for the imaginary” (Simulacra 123). Because of

this, “it is no longer possible to fabricate the unreal from the real, the imaginary from the givens of the real” (Simulacra 124); instead there will be “models of simulation in place to contrive to give them the feeling of the real, of the banal, of lived experience, to reinvent the real as fiction, precisely because it has disappeared from our life” (Simulacra 124), especially in America, “the hyperreality of that life which, as it is, displays all the characteristics of fiction” (America 95).

So long as simulacra precede reality, the social and political climates in America’s reality push closer to Ray Bradbury’s vision. If Baudrillard is correct in his assumptions, than his theory permits discussion of other science fiction dystopias, such as *Nineteen-Eight-Four* by George Orwell. This precession is what I call *Tempreture Rising*. It begins at the temperature that book paper burns, *Fahrenheit 451*, which precedes:

FAHRENHEIT 1984: Stalinism influences George Orwell, and prompts him to depict the evils of this regime in the allegory *Animal Farm*. In addition, Orwell, as a warning to western democracy, imagines a dystopian future, *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*, which coins words that have been used to describe society ever since its publication. These words are still being used in our political climate today. Terms from a *fiction novel* are being used to describe *reality*, and so, in this way, *America is becoming fiction*.

Because events and history are preceded by simulacra, Baudrillard claims “there was an end to war at the heart of the war itself, and that perhaps it never started” (Simulacra 38). Baudrillard points out that “war is no less atrocious for being only a simulacrum—the flesh suffers just the same, and the dead and former combatants are worth the same as in other wars... What no longer exists is the adversity of adversaries,

the reality of antagonistic causes, the ideological seriousness of war” (Simulacra 37-38). Because “the pacification (or the deterrence) that dominates us today is beyond war and peace, it is that at every moment war and peace are equivalent. “War is peace,” said Orwell” (Simulacra 38). Baudrillard, like Orwell, claims that **War is Peace**. In both societies, the deterrence of the masses, their willingness to give up their freedoms in exchange for entertainment, and their contentment with being told how to think and what to feel, combined with their self-inflicted censorship, supports the possibility that: **Freedom is Slavery**. In addition, their passive rejection of any real deep modes of thought, whether spiritual or historical, supports the possibility that: **Ignorance is Strength**. As for Big Brother, in the novel *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*, Big Brother does not exist. He is only an image. He is a representation of the people’s desire, which the Party—the government and media—use to control the proles through their telescreens. Now Big Brother has come to our world at last; through a program on reality TV. Big Brother is no longer watching us. We are the ones who are watching:

There is no longer any imperative of submission to the model, or to the gaze “YOU are the model!” “YOU are the majority!” Such is the watershed of a hyperreal sociality, in which the real is confused with the model . . . Such is the last stage of social relation, ours, which is no longer one of persuasion. . . but one of deterrence: “YOU are information, you are the social, you are the event, you are involved, you have the word, etc.” (Simulacra 29).

We are the image. In respect to Baudrillard’s argument, it could be argued that *we (the masses) are Big Brother*. In this respect, *Orwell was right*.

TEMPRETURE RISING: Throughout this study, I have relied on Baudrillard's theory to draw comparisons between his views of post-modern America and Bradbury's fictional work, but I must now depart from Baudrillard to point out several inconsistencies in his reasoning. In his analysis of America, Baudrillard is determined to portray every American as a middle-class Mildred, and he underestimates an individual's capability to differentiate between what they see on the screen and what they see in reality. There are those who don't have access to television, and there are many more that choose not to watch it and are in better touch with reality than those who live through TV. There are many, like Montag, who see through the simulacra.

Baudrillard also accuses America as the cause of hyperreality in post-modernity, not only in America, but in every country: "This is America's problem and, through America, it has become the whole world's problem" (America 30). This is quite a generalization. There are places in some countries that do not have television, or watch it as often, and even if these countries do have the same technological presence, America cannot be held responsible for how other countries view reality, because their realities are different. Additionally, by insinuating that America has this amount of influence, Baudrillard directly contradicts his earlier argument that "America has retained power, both political and cultural, but it is now power as a special effect" (America 107).

Baudrillard's analysis of images in the modern and pre-modern periods is also vague. He implies that symbols were once representations of real objects, but even in the pre-modern period, symbols were not true representations of reality, because symbols represent different ideas to different people. For example, the cross might represent

salvation in Christianity, but in other religions, that symbol has an entirely different meaning. Additionally, while some Christians might view the wine used in sacrament as the blood of Christ, many recognize it only as wine. Because experience causes people to view symbols differently, a symbol can never be a true representation of a single object. I differ from Baudrillard in arguing that there was *not* once a uniform meaning for every symbol, but that symbols stand for objects based on the collective agreement of various groups, and that technology intensified the distortion of these views because it permitted more interpretations of symbols than was formerly possible.

Baudrillard's claims that there is no meaning as it relates to war, history, politics, spirituality, and human relationships is another sweeping generalization, because although television, cinema, and other technologies create false depictions of these ideas through their media, many people still appreciate that there is a difference between these ideas and what they see on the screen, although the variance of these distinctions is different for every person. One cannot argue that all meaning is lost, because meaning is different for everyone and cannot be cemented into such categories as man and woman, republican and democrat, race and religion, Main Street and Wall Street. However, Baudrillard's point that mass media distorts what events and ideas what once were by the *media's generalizations* must also be recognized.

The difficulty of Baudrillard's theory is that his arguments inevitably become circular. For example, if he claims nothing is real, how can judgments even be formed? How can we determine hyperreality if reality changes with every moment, for every person, in every place? However, his theories do help us understand that there is no

uniform “truth” in anything, even news. Perhaps that goes to the very heart of his theory. Through all his generalizations, perhaps he was simply saying: “Don’t believe everything you see.”

While Baudrillard argues only the complete destruction of the system can allow meaning to be restored, Bradbury, although he recognizes television’s ability to distort meaning, doesn’t believe that all meaning is lost. He still finds hope for the future through literature. He believes, as Montag does: “Maybe the books can get us half out of the cave. They just *might* stop us from making the same damn insane mistakes! I don’t hear those idiot bastards in your parlor talking about it” (Bradbury 73). The conclusion of the novel centers on the Book People as hope for the future, and I believe that Bradbury’s point is that there is a story inside all of us, and that each person’s contribution is necessary to society as a whole. It may be too late to find meaning in the masses, but meaning in *individuality* will always endure, and by using literature as a way of thinking critically about our society instead of relying upon images, man can grow, even if humanity itself will move continually in a circular process by attempting to generalize the idea of ‘reality’ in order to find a sense of solidarity for everyone, which can never truly be realized.

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