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The Ubiquitous Effect of Television and Dominant Surveillance in Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to analyze Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) under the light of Jean Baudrillard's notions of the media and the influences it can have on our daily lives, and under the light of Michel Foucault's concept of *sousveillance*/surveillance. Bradbury's work portrays a representative sample of a culture where different fields including books, education, and history fall under the influence of the media. Guy Montag, the protagonist, initially participates in burning books as a fireman, and as the novel progresses he understands that he has so far been wrong in thinking that books can and do inculcate false notions into individuals, and begins to be skeptical of the manner in which people have been indoctrinated by television to believe that possessing books of any kind could be detrimental and hence should be gotten rid of. The existence of *sousveillance*/surveillance too, engenders an atmosphere of anxiety, trepidation and apprehension for subversive forces and therefore precluding any disturbance on the part of them.

Keywords: Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*, television, *sousveillance*, surveillance, Baudrillard, Foucault

“ There is nothing more mysterious than a TV set left on in an empty room. It is even stranger than a man talking to himself or a woman standing dreaming at her stove. It is as if another planet is communicating with you.”
(Baudrillard, America)

Introduction

“Baudrillard writes,” says Hegarty (2004), “and sometimes the world catches up” (p. 1). He is not only one of the prominent writers on postmodernism, but “somehow seems to embody postmodernism itself” (Lane, 2000, p. 1). What distinguishes Baudrillard from such theorists as Foucault, Lyotard, and Derrida, according to Hegarty (2004), is “the style of his writing.” Compared to the above-mentioned figures, Baudrillard “except in his early writings, is the most intransigent of the lot, the one always beyond the pale, as nothing is to be accepted, no critique or method recommended, no academic convention followed” (p. 1). Acknowledged as one of the foremost intellectual figures, Baudrillard's theories are of paramount importance in the postmodern age. He is the one who has attracted much critical attention over the past few years. His theories are rather difficult to deal with. This can be thought of as their strength; his work became “theoretical objects” rather than being “pieces for someone else's puzzle” (Hegarty, 2004, p. 2). He is “the most notorious and immoderate of the thinkers associated with postmodernism” (Payneh, et al, 2010, p. 57). His most widely read books include: *Simulacra and Simulation* (1995),