

Films in Books/ Books on Film: Media Wars in *Fahrenheit 451* .

This paper concerns the antagonisms between two technological media - the printed book and the celluloid film - as played out across two versions of *Fahrenheit 451*. I argue that both Ray Bradbury's novel and Truffaut's cinema adaptation may be read in terms of a 'competition between media' which, according to Friedrich Kittler, arises from the twentieth-century divergence of media channels into the written, the visual and the auditory.

The 1953 novel, envisioning a dystopian future in which books are outlawed, is ostensibly a humanist defense of the book and reading in a world of intrusive visual media and ubiquitous, mindless TV and film entertainment. Truffaut's 1966 film largely follows Bradbury's narrative plot, but its visual subtext is very different. In it, the act of reading appears stranger and still more intrusive than the interactive TV-like wall screens. Books have a disquieting and sometimes uncanny material presence, emanating from unexpected hiding places and proliferating in disorderly piles, so that the idea of the book itself becomes defamiliarised, figured in terms of mass, weight and waste rather than textual content. Moreover, the film's denouement supplements Bradbury's plot, introducing the idea of an outsider community of readers determined to save literate culture by memorizing and internalizing books before destroying them. Truffaut's film thus stages a nostalgic return to what Kittler describes as an 'oralized' mode of reading, in which text effectively dematerializes into hallucinated voice. Bradbury's novel may be an attack on the corrosive effects of visual media, but film's revenge on writing is to present a literary utopia devoid of actual books.