

FAHRENHEIT 451

RAY BRADBURY

FAHRENHEIT 451—
the temperature at which book-paper
catches fire, and burns . . .

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It is an art and design piece making Fair Use of copyrighted works
in order to question the copyright system.

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Part One:

**THE HEARTH AND
THE SALAMANDER**

Part Two:

THE SIEVE AND THE SAND

Part Three:
BURNING BRIGHT

BLIND CARBON COPY

This project consists of experimental design hacks to reflect and circumvent intellectual property restrictions. *Fahrenheit 451*, a novel by Ray Bradbury, is presented via a web interface and also in print form (print on demand). Several filters offered to users are in place in order to reflect intellectual property restrictions or allowed practices, such as Fair Use. These filters offer a means to circumvent these restrictions by transforming the content. The reader can choose the filter through which s/he wants to “view” the text, each filter being more or less legal.

- Mix of accessibility and inaccessibility.
- Push uselessness to its maximum.
- Make content inaccessible.

RAY BRADBURY'S *FAHRENHEIT 451*

I chose to work with *Fahrenheit 451* because it has several connections to my thesis topic, social accessibility.

Bradbury's novel is best-known for its criticism of state-sponsored censorship, somewhat contrary to the author's claim that this was not his main purpose, it stands in short for a critique of mass media's effects on literature and literacy. Censorship is a practice of making content inaccessible in order to control potential readers social and cultural development, whether it be parents filtering porn or violent images for their kids or governments filtering critical content for their society.

In the novel, Captain Beatty teaches the main character why books are forbidden. According to him, books were not used anymore because mass media took over them, then books were forbidden by the government probably to have a better control on people (although in Soviet Union, the government also controlled book production and reproduction). It is another example, though fictitious, of how a common practice, or non practice, influences the Law.

Books being ignored, and then forbidden, affects education. Beatty recalls: “School is shortened, discipline relaxed, philosophies, histories, languages dropped, English and spelling gradually neglected, finally almost completely ignored. Life is immediate, the job counts, pleasure lies all about after work. Why learn anything save pressing buttons, pulling switches, fitting nuts and bolts?” There is a real danger for education and personal development in restricting access to content with laws. Although we are discussing a fictional text, the French *DADVSI* law is real — one that is hopefully never applied, however this doesn’t reduce its potential danger. Bradbury’s Beatty frames the connection with mass media as potentially dumbing, “[a]nd because they had mass, they became simpler.” Perhaps the censorship modeled by *Fahrenheit 451* has become a reference in social dialogue, much the same way the term “Big Brother”, adapted from Orwell’s *1984*, operates outside it’s original context. Intellectual property law, as I discuss in my thesis, are there to protect the right-owners wealth, which now means the record labels and publishers and not necessarily the authors, besides these powerful companies have a major influence on the same laws which govern how property is conceived and the rights (or lack thereof) that are assigned to the general public. One particular example of this is the recent case against the founders of the Pirate Bay, where the judge who sentenced them was a member of the same copyright protection organizations as several of the main entertainment industry represented in the case. What is perhaps different in current Western societies compared to the hypothetical *Fahrenheit 451*, is that state-sponsored inaccessibility is generally governed by economics on top of censorious ideology.

FEATURED FILTER: NORMAL

The “normal” filter displays the text according to its copyright. *Fahrenheit 451*’s copyright belongs to Ray Bradbury (1953) and the cover photo copyright goes to Philippe Halsman (1966).

