

Library 2451: An Idea Worth Saving for Saving Ideas

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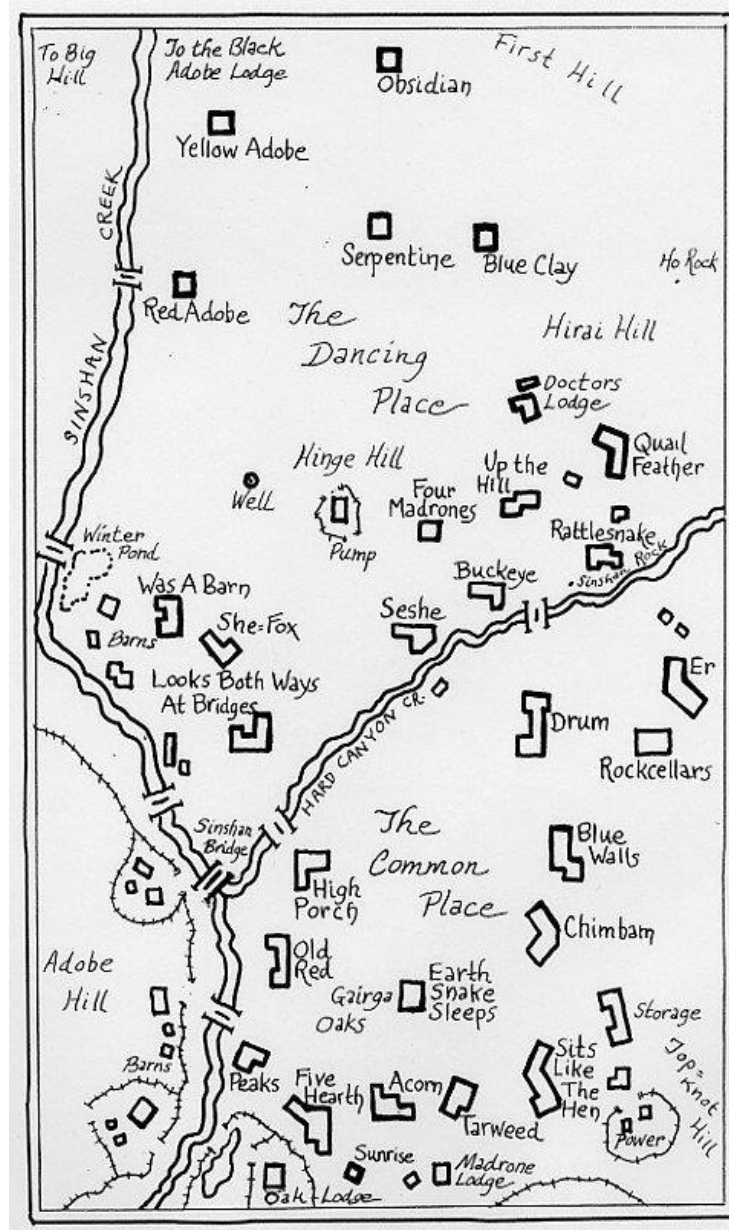
Fahrenheit 2451: Ideas Worth Saving
Internet Archive
San Francisco, CA, January 31, 2025



Yuri Pattison, *Open Stacks*, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art (2023)

2451: Three Scenarios with AI

- Post Civilizational (inspired by *Always Coming Home*)
- Babylon (inspired by the Apocalypse of John)
- New Bensalem (inspired by *The New Atlantis*)





Overview

- I. The Meaning of the Library
- II. Looking Backward
426 Years
- III. Current Patterns
and Signals of
Change
- IV. Looking Forward
426 Years

I. The Meaning of the Library



"I cannot live without books"
Thomas Jefferson, June 10, 1815

Thomas Jefferson's Library

Throughout his life, books were vital to Thomas Jefferson's education and well-being. His books provided Jefferson with a broader knowledge of the contemporary and ancient worlds than many of his contemporaries had obtained through personal experience.

Jefferson's library, which developed through several stages, was always critically important to him. In the midst of the American Revolution and while he was United States minister to France in the 1780s, Jefferson acquired thousands of books for his library at Monticello. By 1814, when the British burned the Capitol and with it the Congressional Library, Thomas Jefferson had acquired the largest personal collection of books in the United States.

Short of funds and wanting to see the library re-established, Jefferson offered to sell his personal library to Congress as a replacement for the destroyed collection. After some controversy, Congress purchased his library for \$23,950 in 1815. Although a second fire on Christmas Eve of 1851 destroyed nearly two thirds of the 6,487 volumes

Congress had purchased from Jefferson, the Jefferson books remain the core from which the present collections of the Library of Congress—the world's largest library—developed.

In this reconstruction of Jefferson's library, the books have been arranged in an order that Jefferson described as "sometimes analytical, sometimes chronological, and sometimes a combination of both." Jefferson followed a modified version of the organization of knowledge created by British philosopher Francis Bacon (1561–1626). His books were divided into categories of "Memory," "Reason," and "Imagination"—which Jefferson interpreted as "History," "Philosophy," and "Fine Arts." Further divided into forty-four departments, included in this re-creation are 2,000 volumes from the original Jefferson Collection. An additional 3,000 or so volumes—editions that match those lost in the fire that struck the Capitol in 1851—come from other collections in the Library of Congress. Other missing volumes have been acquired through gifts. Several hundred volumes have been purchased since 2000.

*The reconstruction of Thomas Jefferson's Library was made possible by
Jerry and Gene Jones*

*This exhibition was made possible by
Peter D. and Julie Fisher Cummings and Marjorie M. Fisher*

The History of the Library

1. Information attention: reflective attention (~100,000 YA)
2. Information agencies: structural agency (~10,000 YA)
3. Information artifacts: collective knowledge (~5,000 YA)
4. Information automation: automated information processing (~100 YA)

See *Artificial Intelligence and the Apocalyptic Imagination*



What Is a “Library”?

- An **intention** to configure an intellectual order represented by information artifacts for information agency
- A **selection** of artifacts judged worthy of attention to create a collection or context for discovery
- The **mediation** of access through information systems, spaces, and services



**II.
Looking
Backward
426 Years:
1599**



Three Transformative Technologies

- Printing
- Gunpowder
- Compass



Cabinet of Curiosities in *Dell'Historia Naturale* (1599)

Library 1599

- First Bodleian Librarian appointed
- Jesuit educational plan *Ratio Studiorum* issued:
Rule 33: “In order to provide needed books for our teachers, the provincial shall assign an **annyal revenue** from the college funds or from some other source **for building up the library**. This revenue may under no circumstances be diverted to other uses.”

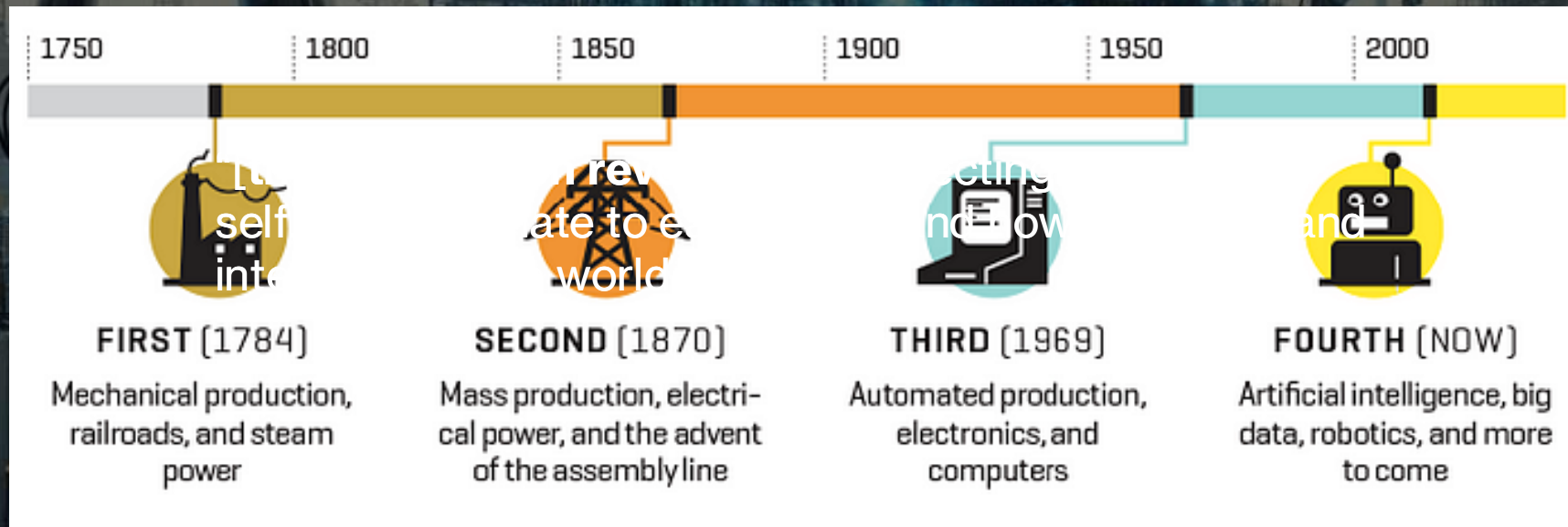
NB: In 2025, the Bodleian Library provides access to over 6,600 books published in 1599; the Internet Archive, over 1,100

III. Current Patterns and Signals



“we are at the beginning of a **[fourth industrial] revolution** that is fundamentally changing the way we live, work, and relate to one another.”

— Klaus Schwab, *The Fourth Industrial Revolution* (2016)



“**[the information revolution]** is affecting our sense of self, how we relate to each other, and how we shape and interact with the world.”

— Luciano Floridi, *The Fourth Revolution* (2014)

Library 2025

Continuities

- Curating human intelligence, imagination, and hope
- Cultivating human attention and agency

Discontinuities

- Automation, digital first, AI enhancements
- Creating a better information environment for human and artificial agents

See Hope in the Library

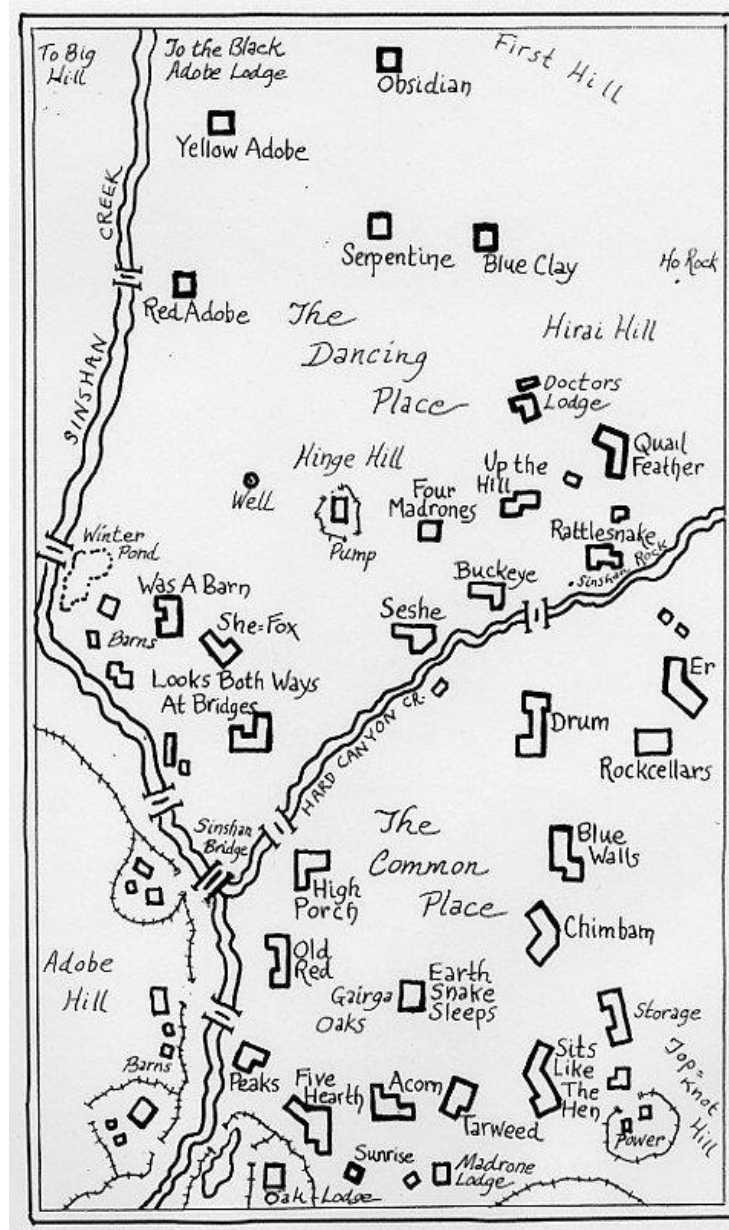


**IV.
Looking
Forward:
2451**



2451: Three Scenarios with AI and Libraries

- Post Civilizational: Fractured Libraries
- Babylon: No Libraries
- New Bensalem: Augmented Libraries



ChatGPT (4o) Predictions

What will the world be like in 2451?

- AI surpasses human intelligence (and doesn't destroy us)
- Space exploration, colonization of other planets, and perhaps the discovery of extraterrestrial life
- Nanotechnologies repair us and our infrastructure
- New political and economic systems ensure peace, equality, and fulfillment of all material needs
- Humans live over 100 years and perhaps forever virtually

ChatGPT (4o) Predictions

What is the role of libraries in this future scenario?

Libraries could become immersive, dynamic, and ethical hubs for the preservation, exploration, and creation of knowledge across multiple dimensions—physical, virtual, and interstellar. In this future, libraries would actively shape the evolution of thought, culture, and human (or multi-species) understanding, serving as both protectors of history and incubators of the future

And what might the human imagination add to this?