ENGL 297

Reading Reflection

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*Uncanny Valley: A Memoir*

Anna Wiener’s *Uncanny Valley: A Memoir* is truly fascinating, and her perspectives on the technology industry as a whole has stimulated me into rethinking about all kinds of contemporary issues brought by the current environment under modern development. The author’s linear story-telling touches base with various aspects of her opinions related to personal experiences while working for different startup companies.

At the beginning, Anna talked about her background as an assistant at a literacy agency in Manhattan. She tended to break through since there was not much to grow for her position. Afterwards, she received an opportunity to work for a startup company which focused on e-books and subscription service for its readers. Anna was unfamiliar with the environment of the technology industry at the time, so she had encountered a wide range of “cultural shocks” within her work span at the new environment. “Technology products were lifestyle products, the CEO said. As he continued to pitch, it became clear that the utility of the e-reading app was not so much about reading as it was about signaling that you were the type of person who would read, and who would use an app with a cutting-edge reading experience and innovative, intuitive design.” (20) Anna here used her words to indicate the different goals the CEO and she intended to achieve. For a technology company, it emphasizes more on user’s experience rather than what an application really has to offer. As for Anna, she cares more about creating a company’s culture and what the readers could actually access through the subscription service. It seems like the technology companies are targeting to create a new way of living as they are making their products rather than the actual content their consumers get to obtain. What Anna had experienced here may be a general idea of what technology industry is pursuing nowadays in the matter of higher profits and better chances to survive in such a competitive environment.

After leaving the e-book company, Anna made her way to San Francisco as she got another job offer from a data analysis company. As Anna started her new career, she soon started to realize everything there has gone to another level. “Homeless encampments sprouted in the shadows of luxury developments. People slept and shat and shot up in the train stations, lying beneath advertisements for fast fashion and productive apps, as waves of commuters stepped delicately around them… This concentration of public pain was new to me, unsettling. I had never seen such a shameful juxtaposition of blatant suffering and affluent idealism. It was well-publicized disparity, but one I had underestimated.” (43) Anna had experienced the same thing at her new data analysis company in San Francisco: fast pace, constant change, on-going pressure, but even more intense. In addition, something really shocked her there is the negative outcomes caused by capitalism along with the ascendency of the technology culture. People who are involved in the technology industry have secretly earned their fortunes “behind the browser” as they kept receiving large amounts of funding, expanding their companies, and growing tremendous capitals. The trade-off under those successful stories is the severe economic inequality which is merely a small part of the problem under the capitalism economy system. Anna brought up what she has seen during her life in San Francisco and could hopefully bring the awareness of how serious damages and negative impacts are threatening the society as the technology industry keeps thriving and dominating the economic environment.