

Technology- Driven Isolation from Nature

Writing has been a part of human culture for thousands of years. While writing can help people in the present learn from the past, it can also warn them about the future. Ray Bradbury was an American author and screenwriter in a variety of genres, from fantasy and science fiction to horror and mystery fiction. In writing two of his famous short stories, “The Pedestrian,” and “August 2026: There Will Come Soft Rains,” he drew upon the world around for inspiration. Technology in the form of computers and new home appliances was becoming ever more prevalent. While many consumers loved these advancements, others were more skeptical of the possible consequences. Compared to “August 2026,” “The Pedestrian,” via its portrayal of people, nature, and the connection between the two (whether explicit or implied), more effectively warns that technology isolates people from the natural world.

The depiction of people in “The Pedestrian”, via a series of resulting implications, more effectively warns that technology isolates people from the natural world because while the family in “August 2026” seems to have been happy, lively, and connected to others, the people in “The Pedestrian” are more dull, lifeless, and disconnected. At the beginning of “August 2026” a computerized voice in the house reports, “Today is Mr. Featherstone’s birthday. Today is the anniversary of Tilita’s marriage” (1). By having the house technology associate those specific dates with important dates in specific people’s lives, Bradbury was able to suggest the importance of personal connections in the community before the nuclear disaster. People feel good when others remember their birthdays and anniversaries, and such things bring communities together. By suggesting people are more likely to do things together, Bradbury implies they are ultimately being exposed to nature in one form or another since many group

activities involve going outside. In contrast, Leonard Mead is alone as he walks outside on the city streets in "The Pedestrian." Everyone else living in the city stays indoors at night watching TV. When he catches glimpses of others in their houses as he walks by, he describes them as, "sudden gray phantoms," that "seemed to manifest upon inner room walls where a curtain was still undrawn against the night" (1). This demonstrates that connections between people are not valued here as much as in "August 2026." People staying indoors watching television implies a society composed of more solitary citizens who do not go outdoors and interact with nature. Consequently, they begin to fade away in one way or another. For example, people who do not go outside tend to be paler than those who do. The people are described as phantoms which implies death and wasting away. These are a result of isolation from nature and therefore imply that such isolation has occurred. Although technology plays an integral part of people's lives in each story, it does so in a different way. It results in the society in "August 2026" remaining social and spends time outdoors, while turning the one in "The Pedestrian" into one that consists of people who shut themselves off from nature and from each other.

"The Pedestrian" more effectively warns of technology leading to the isolation of people from nature through nature's presence in technology in "August 2026," its absence from technology in "The Pedestrian." Technology surrounds them and is a major part of their environment. Whether or not nature is incorporated in that in any way contributes to people's connection with nature or lack thereof. The best example of nature within the house is in the nursery. The description of the nursery is full of sensory descriptions of it inspired by nature and engages multiple senses to give a more immersive experience. There are visual details like "The nursery walls glowed. Animals took shape: yellow giraffes, blue lions, pink antelopes, lilac panthers cavorting in crystal substance," (2) that engage one's eyes. There are auditory details

like, “there was the patter of okapi feet and the murmur of a fresh jungle rain,” (2) that engage one’s ears. There are even olfactory details such as “in the hot still air butterflies of delicate red tissue wavered among the sharp aroma of animal spoors!” (2) that engage one’s nose. All of these details about the sights, sounds, and smells a person in the nursery would experience reminiscent of nature in one way or another demonstrate that this technology is helping preserve people’s connection with nature, especially at an early age, rather than isolate people from nature. In contrast, in “The Pedestrian,” Leonard Mead notes, “Everything went on in the tomblike houses at night now... The tombs, ill-lit by television light, where the people sat like the dead, the gray or multicolored lights touching their faces” (2). This suggests that people are so absorbed by technology that nature is no longer a part of their everyday lives. While technology in “August 2026” fosters people’s connection with nature at an early age, it kills that connection in “The Pedestrian.”

“The Pedestrian” more effectively warns about technology isolating people from nature by having technology cause an entire community of people willing to cut themselves off from nature in contrast to “August 2026” implying that technology is meant to alleviate the need for people to interact with elements of nature, but people still enjoy the outdoors. In “August 2026,” the family died while enjoying the outdoors. They left nuclear shadows on one side of their house. Each one is described in turn: “Here the silhouette in paint of a man mowing a lawn. Here...a woman bent to pick flowers. Still farther over... a small boy...and opposite him a girl, hand raised to catch a ball which never came down” (1). This suggests that the former inhabitants of the house enjoyed outdoor activities, such as mowing the lawn, picking flowers, and play catch. It reflects the white suburban nuclear family popular at the time and portrayed as ideal during the 1950s, when this short story was written as previously mentioned. In contrast, as

he walks outside, Leonard Mead notes in “The Pedestrian,” “In ten years of walking by night or day, for thousands of miles, he had never met another person walking, not once in all that time” (1), which shows that people are so absorbed by their technology that they find no need to go outside and to interact with nature. They willingly shut themselves off from nature. Technology leads to the severing of people’s connection to nature.

While the isolation from nature, and perhaps even from each other, for people in “The Pedestrian” due to technology is clearly and effectively conveyed to readers, that theme is not as effectively shown in “August 2026.” The nature themed nursery and the suggestion of a well-connected white suburban community composed of ideal nuclear families from “August 2026” imply that nature is still a part of people’s lives despite the progression of technology. However, in “The Pedestrian,” readers can see first-hand through the eyes of Leonard Mead, how technology, more specifically in the form of television, leads to the citizens of the city in which this short story is set to sequester themselves into their homes at night and not interact with nature. It is hinted at in the story that during the day that the citizens spend lots of time in cars rather than enjoying the outdoors like the family in the “August 2026” used to. It is understandable that new technological innovations excite people. It often makes life easier, expands the limits of what people can do, and opens new frontiers of exploration. With the increasing prevalence of smartphones, iPads, etc. today, especially among young people, many people are already complaining that young people are too absorbed in their phones and social media that they do not pay as much attention as they should to the physical world around them. This is strikingly like the situation presented in “The Pedestrian.” While new technological advances should not be reason for paranoia, a healthy dose of skepticism, caution, and general awareness may go a long way.