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Technology's Detrimental Impact on the Future of Humanity

The looming fear of the rise of technology became a main concern for people in the United States during the Cold War. Bradbury builds on this fear with his short stories "August 2026: There Will Come Soft Rains" and "The Pedestrian". The first story describes a time after humans were obliterated by a nuclear bomb, one real life concern for people living during the Cold War, and even today. Only an automated house remains, doing all the daily tasks a human would have done, until it is destroyed by a fire. The latter tells the story of a man, Mr. Mead, opposed to the rise of technology and its negative impact on humanity, who is stopped by a robotic police car while walking the streets at night. Bradbury, like many of the people living during the Cold War, was afraid of technology because of its potential to do harm to humanity. Bradbury shares his concerns on the negative impacts technology could have in the future, through his writing, especially in these stories. Ray Bradbury's stories "August 2026: There Will Come Soft Rains" and "The Pedestrian" both effectively portray the unhealthy dependency that humans will place on advanced dystopian technology through each story's unique use of visual imagery, sinister and apprehensive tones, and distinct writing styles.

Bradbury's use of menacing and alarming tones in both stories equally convey his overlying theme. In "August: 2026," Bradbury's use of word choice depicts his panicked rone about the most threatening type of technology, the nuclear bomb. In the story, the absence of the humans can be inferred to have been caused by a nuclear bomb explosion. In the story, the nuclear bomb turned "the entire west face of the house ... black, save for five places. Here, as in a photograph, a woman ben[ds] to pick flowers. Still farther over, their images [are] burned on wood in one titanic instant, a small boy, hands

[are] flung in the air; higher up, the image of a thrown ball, and opposite him a girl, hands [are] raised to catch a ball which never [comes] down” (1). The reader immediately feels uneasy reading this passage, because it causes apprehension, that the humans have disappeared from an explosion, while leaving behind the remains of a typical life. The story suggests that the humans were annihilated by this technology, and despite their advanced robotic home, they had ineffective means to stop that event. Bradbury’s alarmed tone in this section expresses his fear that humans will become too reliant on the idea that technology would protect or not progress to harm humans, since humans were its original creators. A similarly alarmed tone is also expressed in “The Pedestrian”. As Mr. Mead is stopped on the street by the robotic car, “A metallic voice call[s] to him: ‘Stand still. Stay where you are! Don’t move!’ He halt[s]. ‘Put your hands up!’ ‘Your hands up! Or we’ll Shoot!’” (1). Here, Bradbury expresses his feelings about machine dependency through the character’s actions. Bradbury describes the police car as having a metallic voice, rather than friendly or pleasant, invoking an unpleasant feeling. In fact, it is unsettling that a car even has a voice. As Mr. Mead speaks, the reader perceives his unease and anxiety, through Bradbury’s word choice and actions. The car, in turn, is assertive and does not understand that taking a stroll is just out of the norm, not illegal. Bradbury’s apprehensive tone suggests that he too is uneasy about depending on robots for police patrol, for they do not understand that humans can behave differently, which is not necessarily erroneous. By using similar tones in both stories, Bradbury successfully expresses his fear of reliance on future technology.

Although the spooky and ominous imagery that Bradbury uses in “The Pedestrian” is less effective in conveying Bradbury’s theme than the imagery used to describe the technology’s shift from useful to frightening in “August 2026,” it is more relatable to the reader. In the first story, Bradbury’s deathlike imagery describing the humans and their houses being negatively impacted by technology remains constant. According to Mr. Mead’s account, “Magazines and books didn’t sell any more. Everything went on in the tomblike houses at night now... The tombs [are] ill-lit by television light, where the people [sit] like the dead, the gray or multicolored lights touching their faces, but never really

touching them” (2). Bradbury’s imagery allows the reader to visualize how television, in a sense, has complete control over the humans, so that they are no longer life-like. This is relatable, as humans today are also obsessed with technology. This relatability helps the reader understand Bradbury’s fear, the imagery of the automated house in “August 2026,” which shifts from a benevolent to destructive light, better conveys Bradbury’s message. Bradbury describes the house performing actions like cooking breakfast, when, “the breakfast stove... eject[s] from its warm interior eight pieces of perfectly browned toast, eight eggs sunny-side up, sixteen slices of bacon, two coffees, and two cool glasses of milk” (1). Although the house’s actions appear to be impressive at first, if the house can act without humans, then the humans are solely dependent on the house for everything. Bradbury continues with this theme of dependency, expressing it in a more harmful way. Later, as the house is being consumed by a fire, “under the fire avalanche, other choruses, oblivious, could be heard announcing the time, playing music, cutting the lawn by remote-control mower, or setting an umbrella frantically out and in the slamming and opening front door, a thousand things happening” (4). The image successfully conveys Bradbury’s fear. The house is clearly unable to defend itself against the fire. It is alarming and horrifying that something so useful in the beginning of the story, that was heavily depended upon by humans, could not even save itself from this disaster. Bradbury’s message that humans will be negatively dependent on technology in the future is conveyed by the description of the fire consuming the house. Its reaction to the unorganized chaos shows just how dangerous it is to depend upon technology. The shock from the change in descriptive imagery in “August 2026” is more effective in showing the reader just how concerned Bradbury is about the rise of dependency on technology, than the relatability from the imagery in “The Pedestrian”.

Despite Bradbury’s use of figurative language in both stories, his use of dialogue in “The Pedestrian” better conveys his fear of overreliance on machines in the future, rather than his use of complex, flowing sentences in “August 2026”. Bradbury’s use of personification creates an unsettling mood. For instance, in “The Pedestrian,” he describes the robot car as if it were human, with

technological characteristics. When it is asked a question, “the car hesitate[s], or rather [gives] a faint whirring click, as if information, somewhere, [is] dropping card by punch-slotted card under electric eyes” (2). The description is uncanny because it makes people uncomfortable to imagine machinery as human-like. Bradbury also uses personification to describe the house in “August 2026”. During the clean-up of breakfast, “an aluminum wedge scraped [the breakfast] into the sink, where hot water whirled them down a metal throat which digested and flushed them away to the distant sea” (1). The use of personification in both stories suggests that not only is the technology functioning, it is alive as if it were human. In fact, with machines living, and performing these actions for people, it is unclear whether humans even have a purpose anymore, or if they have just become so dependent on machines that there is no need for a purpose, or for humanity. Although Bradbury personifies technology in both stories, his stories are unlike in their sentence structure. In “August 2026,” Bradbury prefers to use complex, lengthy sentences as opposed to the short and succinct dialogue in “The Pedestrian”. Bradbury uses long sentences to describe the automated house. It was so efficient at its job that, “Not a leaf fragment blew under the door but what the wall panels flipped open and the copper scrap rats flashed swiftly out. The offending dust, hair, or paper seized in miniature steel jaws, was raced back to the burrows” (2). The sentences cascade, as if part of a lyrical verse. In fact, the long, complex sentences appear to convey the opposite of what Bradbury’s theme suggests because they create a sense of tranquility and peace, not fear and apprehension of dependency on machines. The writing style of “The Pedestrian” better expresses the message. Instead of long sentences, Bradbury uses short dialogue. When Mr. Mead is stopped and questioned by a robot cop, he shares his reason for being outside, rather than watching television. He explains, “‘Walking for air. Walking to see.’... ‘And there is air in your house, you have an air conditioner, Mr. Mead?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘And you have a viewing screen in your house to see with?’ ‘No.’ ‘No?’ There [is] a crackling quiet that in itself was an accusation” (2). The dialogue between the car and Mr. Mead creates a feeling of apprehension, for how the car treats Mr. Mead. The blunt answers that Mr. Mead gives paired with the accusing tone of the car, suggest that technology is an ill replacement for a police officer, or a human. It appears that humans in the future have depended on technology for social

interaction and some human jobs, even when it is inappropriate. The police car is unable to realize that what Mr. Mead is doing is different than everyone else, but not wrong. This dependence on technology negatively impacts society, especially in social interactions as shown here by using dialogue. This writing style is a better method of conveying Bradbury's fear rather than long complex sentences, even with the use of personification in both stories.

To Bradbury, the technology, although astounding on the surface, should be feared and should not be depended upon because it can easily control and remove purpose from humanity. Through both of his stories, he uses different writing techniques to convey this overlying message equally and successfully. The use of tone and personification was similar in effectiveness for expressing this theme. "August 2026" uses imagery in a more impactful, while the writing style of dialogue in "The Pedestrian" better helped the reader understand Bradbury's fear. Bradbury's works reflect the tension and agitation felt by people living in the Cold War era and some today. By reading these stories, the reader can understand this apprehension for technology felt by people then and now. For the future, humans should not depend so heavily on technology, especially since it is quickly advancing, because it could soon have the power to control humanity and remove its purpose.