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Detriments of Technology in Human Society

Human interactions with nature and with each other are paramount to the survival of a society. Author Ray Bradbury's first short story, "The Pedestrian," describes a society where these interactions have deteriorated. Technological inventions have turned people into mechanical attendees of television screens and advertisements. On the other hand, Bradbury's second short story "August 2026: There Will Come Soft Rains," set post-Hiroshima and Nagasaki, depicts a world controlled by artificial intelligence and weapons of mass destruction which have wiped out the human race. In both stories, Bradbury warns us of how overindulgence on technology and automation can have dire consequences for society. However, "The Pedestrian" more effectively and concretely communicates that excessive dependence on technology results in a reclusive society where people become devoid of primary human qualities such as creativity, empathy, and social interaction.

While "The Pedestrian" distinctly communicates that the addictive use of technology with its strict classification of jobs and professions, deprives human beings of creativity, "August 2026" is ambivalent about the hindrance of technology on creativity. In "The Pedestrian," Bradbury highlights how there is no room in society for creative jobs like writers as people are too addicted to their TV screens. For example, the narrator mentions how "[m]agazines and books didn't sell any more" (2). Instead, "[e]verything went on in the tomblike houses at night...

The tombs, ill-lit by television light, where the people sat like the dead” (2). The fact that magazines and books are not in demand demonstrates that people didn’t find any value in reading and therefore rendered writers useless. Moreover, Bradbury’s use of a simile to compare the people in the narrator’s society to the dead illustrates that these people were completely idle and did not contribute to the well-being of society. By placing control of their lives in the hands of technology, people in “The Pedestrian” lose what makes human beings unique which is their individuality. On the other hand, in “August 2026,” although there are signs of creativity in the society, the author is ambivalent about technology’s effect on encouraging it. For instance, in the evening, the house robot voice asked Mrs. McClellan, one of the owners of the house “which poem would you like this evening?” (3), signifying that society did make room for poetry. Another example where the story implies the society’s creativity is when a tree hits the lone house and the fire “[feeds] upon Picassos and Matisses in the upper halls” (4). While this society was reliant upon technology and automation, it also made a place for art, such as paintings, as well as poetry. While we cannot concretely conclude that creativity was absent in the society of “August 2026,” we also cannot assume creativity existed in that society. However, it is evident that the addictive use of television in “The Pedestrian” prevents the people in the story from being contributing members of society, while “August 2026” is more ambiguous about how people expressed themselves in society.

While Bradbury argues succinctly in “The Pedestrian” how people’s overindulgence in technology and their excessive desire for entertainment leads to serious lack of empathy for other human beings, “August 2026” does not articulate that humans in that society lack empathy since there are no survivors after the nuclear destruction. In “The Pedestrian,” the narrator expounds

on how television, in particular, has desensitized the people in his society. He asks himself: "Eight-thirty P.M.? Time for a dozen assorted murders? A quiz? A revue? A comedian falling off the stage?" (1). The fact that the narrator mentions that people enjoyed seeing other people commit murder demonstrates that people in the "The Pedestrian" severely lacked consideration and care for others. The quote reveals that people in the narrator's society are self-centered as they do not mind entertaining themselves at the expense of others' lives. Whereas, in "August 2026," we cannot infer that empathy was nonexistent. When the house's dog died of severe radiation, the robotic mice simply placed the dog in the incinerator and "a whirl of sparks leaped up the chimney" (3). While the robotic mice clearly demonstrate a lack of emotion for the dog's passing as there was no funeral procession, we cannot predict that humans would have done anything differently if they were still alive. Therefore, there is ambiguity in whether humans cared for each other and for other creatures in the society in "August 2026." While people in "The Pedestrian" were insensitive to the downfall of others, "August 2026" is unable to confirm that humans lacked empathy.

Furthermore, in "The Pedestrian," Bradbury emphasizes that technology has drastically decreased social interaction between people, whereas "August 2026" indicates that human connections continued to exist even right before the nuclear blast killed humans, regardless of their excessive use of technology. Instead of socializing with each other, people in "The Pedestrian" are too addicted to their TV screens which constantly feed them information. When the narrator walks along the street for fresh air at night, he realized that "[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). This unfortunate reality demonstrates how the society in "The Pedestrian"

considered walking outside an anomalous activity. People preferred watching television programs over having meaningful conversations with each other and interacting with nature. On the contrary, “August 2026” does not support the idea that technology removed social interaction as it illustrated images with humans together before they perished. In the story, Bradbury describes the nuclear imprints on the side of the house: “Still farther over, their images burned on wood in one titanic instant, a small boy, hands flung into the air; higher up, the image of a thrown ball, and opposite him a girl, hands raised to catch a ball which never came down” (2). Although in “August 2026” there was excessive automation, we cannot conclude that people never interacted with one another, as the story explicitly mentions how two children played catch with each other right before the nuclear blast. The warm depiction of the scene right before the nuclear bomb hit confirms that people in “August 2026” cherished social interaction with one another.

“The Pedestrian and “August 2026” have profound lessons for people of our generation as technology has pervaded every aspect of our lives in the 21st century. While technology no doubt complements multiple facets of human lives, if used sparingly and conscientiously, it can have disastrous consequences, including the loss of entire humanity, if used excessively and without regard to human qualities of creativity, empathy, and social interaction. “The Pedestrian” is particularly relevant to today’s society as people have become addicted to their personal screens on smartphones and pay very little attention to the world around them. It would not be further from the truth if one were to say that today’s society is far worse than the one portrayed in “The Pedestrian” as people have become more disunited than ever. Even within the confines of a single home, children are glued to their personal devices while parents are attached to their

individual smartphones. Bradbury further warns us in “August 2026” that if advancements in technology go unchecked, we may end up destroying ourselves and all the phenomenal progress that humans have made thus far. In the end, social interaction with each other and with nature is what will provide a sustainable future for mankind.