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Loss of Individualism due to Over-reliance on Technology

The word “innovate” sparks light and passion within most people, which is indicative of the human desire to make our lives easier through our intelligence. There is a common belief that advancing technology is the solution to all problems, but in recent years, many have come to question whether technology can adversely affect society as well. One of these issues is the loss of individualism as technology progresses; for example, trends on social media platforms. Many find that in hopes of gaining popularity on these platforms, they create content similar to what well-known users create, resulting in trends that many follow rather than producing what interests them. Social media exemplifies how technology has become closely intertwined in our lives. With this greater involvement comes the ever-increasing struggle to determine the extent to which technology should be used as well as what effects it has on society. Author Ray Bradbury addresses the issue in his stories “August 2026: There Will Come Soft Rains” and “The Pedestrian.” Written in the early 1950s, Bradbury’s ideas were greatly influenced by events at the time including the recent nuclear bombings that led to the end of WWII, as well as the rise of the television. Bradbury uses his stories “August 2026” and “The Pedestrian” to argue that uncontrolled use of technology causes a loss of individualism within society; however, “The Pedestrian” argues this idea more strongly because the story holds the reader’s attention better, contains a more complete argument, and has aged better than “August 2026.”

The figurative language in “The Pedestrian” guides the reader to the ideas of the story, whereas the off-putting language in “August 2026” causes the reader to be less attentive toward

the story's message. In "August 2026," the dog that once lived in the house is allowed to return by the robots. After entering, "It [runs] wildly in circles, biting at its tail, [spins] in a frenzy, and die[s]" (2). The dog being accepted into the house indicates that it is part of the human family who lived there, making it a compelling symbol of humanity's last stand. Bradbury treats the dog poorly by using short, clipped phrases to describe it from introduction to death. This unempathetic syntax is paired with words such as "wildly" and "frenzy" to reveal Bradbury's disapproval towards the irrational nature of humans which chooses to be self-destructive, such as relying on technology to the extent where it wipes out humanity. This idea insults the reader, resulting in a closed-minded audience that is unwilling and unable to understand Bradbury's ideas. When Mr. Mead in "The Pedestrian" says, "Eight-thirty P.M.? Time for a dozen assorted murders? A quiz? A revue?" (5), a similar mocking tone is presented; however, the tone is directed toward the technology and how predictable it causes humans to be. This allows the reader to remain open to ideas that Bradbury presents. In addition, the story starts with, "To enter out into that silence that was the city at eight o'clock of a misty evening in November, to put your feet upon that buckling concrete walk, to step over grassy seams and make your way...[is] what Mr. Leonard Mead most dearly love[s] to do" (5). The repetition mimics moving one foot after another, drawing the reader into a feeling of walking along with Mr. Mead. This movement starts the reader on a positive and involved note, allowing them to be more receptive to what Bradbury reveals. As a result, Bradbury's stronger use of figurative language in "The Pedestrian" captures the reader's attention better than in "August 2026," allowing his message of over-reliance on technology causing a lack of individualism to be supported more strongly.

"The Pedestrian" contains a strong, complete argument of the loss of individualism due to technology, whereas "August 2026" refuses to recognize any opposing ideas, making it weaker

and incomplete. In “August 2026,” the lonely house is shown to be paranoid by how “If a sparrow brushed a window, the shade snapped up...No, not even a bird must touch the house!”

(2). The house, like the dog, is a symbol of humanity, and Bradbury uses personification to characterize humans. The behavior of deflecting harmless stimuli is seen in humans when they are scared and paranoid. The exclamation mark emphasizes the paranoia and irrationality of the house by expressing strong emotion. Because the author is describing irrationality, the implied emotion is disdain toward the house, and therefore toward humanity who also continues to act irrationally in a self-destructive manner. The frustrated tone is found throughout the story, meaning the piece never considers the opposition. The reader is unclear as to whether Bradbury is fully knowledgeable on the subject and has the expertise to critique, making his story less reliable. In “The Pedestrian,” Bradbury recognizes an advantage of the situation by revealing that “Crime [is] ebbing; there [is] no need now for the police, save for this one lone car wandering and wandering the empty streets” (5). A decrease in crime is the result of many issues decreasing, including poverty, hunger, and corruption. The “one lone car” to police an entire city serves to illustrate the sheer extent to which these issues have disappeared. They continue to plague us, so to have these issues disappear in these circumstances shows an advantage of having a society that has lost individuality. This strengthens the argument because it shows that Bradbury understands the advantages to heavily relying on technology, but despite that, he can show enough reason that the disadvantages of this society outweigh the advantages. Therefore, the choice to include opposing ideas in “The Pedestrian” makes its argument that overreliance on technology causes a loss of individualism stronger and more complete than in “August 2026.”

While both stories utilize dark imagery to shock the reader with the gloomy situation of the world, “The Pedestrian’s” more universal descriptions allow it to demonstrate the issue of

loss of individualism due to technology better than “August 2026.” In “August 2026,” one face of the house is described as having a “silhouette in paint of a man mowing a lawn,” and “a woman bent to pick flowers” “as [if] in a photograph” (1). Visual images such as a “silhouette in paint” and “as in a photograph” suggest the idea of highly accurate images of people. To a contemporary audience, the connotation of these words is of digital images or photographs which are common and generally harmless. It is only later when the story mentions that “their images [were] burned on wood in one titanic moment” that dark words such as “burned” and “titanic” convey the idea of some tragic moment that occurred. The story was written closely after the end of WWII, and the horrors of the US nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were fresh on many people’s minds. These descriptions of people on the wall allude to the shadows of people that were left behind during the bombings and would have been frightening language to an audience of that time. With this language, Bradbury attempts to use the real-world tragedy to convey how the overuse of advanced war weapons has caused a loss of individualism by directly wiping out thousands of individuals and their ideas. In modern times, the horror of these images is not conveyed because the rise of the digital world has created new positive connotations that most are more familiar with. Therefore, the lack of universality in the imagery causes Bradbury’s message about technology and individualism to be lost. In “The Pedestrian,” a highway intersection that Mr. Mead encounters is described as “a thunderous surge of cars” during the day, but in the night is “like streams in a dry season, all stone and bed and moon radiance” (5). The simile emphasizes that the highway is lifeless by comparing it to a stream in the dry season when a lack of water kills all life. This is a contrast to the road filled with sound, with the word “thunderous” implying an abundance of water and life. Bradbury uses this contrast to reveal the difference between the liveliness of society when it is required to work during the day and the

lifelessness all of society chooses to follow at night by watching the television. It shows how society relying on technology for entertainment has led to everyone choosing to watch the same shows at the same time and in the same way, and that there is little individualism among the people. This imagery relies on comparisons to nature, allowing the meaning to come through in modern times as well because nature is common to many people's experiences and cannot be lost as time passes. As a result, "The Pedestrian" is more universal than "August 2026," allowing it to continue to communicate effectively the idea that overuse of technology has led to the lack of individuality among humans.

Bradbury artfully uses figurative language and syntactical devices to present the issue of loss of individualism that comes with the overuse of technology in "The Pedestrian" and "August 2026." Although they present similar ideas, Bradbury is able to connect with the reader more strongly, present a more complete argument, and provide a more universal story with "The Pedestrian," causing to be more effective than "August 2026." Technology is ubiquitous in the modern day; therefore, it is imperative to address the question its effect on society. By doing so, the most advantageous balance of technology and individualism can be created to allow society to advance with confidence that society will benefit.