

## Technology vs Society – Who Is In Control?

Technology has become increasingly more important for communication and is now a practically inescapable part of our every day. This dependency has brought into question how much control technology has over us – and how much control we have over it. Even before the information age, people were starting to think about the long-term effects of new technological advancements. The science fiction and dystopian writings of author Ray Bradbury in the 1950s show some of the past generations' predictions of the future. The stories “August 2026: There Will Come Soft Rains” and “The Pedestrian” describe two distinctly different futures with advanced technologies. Although both texts come from the same author, the two stories have contrasting themes; that people are dependent on technology or that technology depends on people. While “The Pedestrian” effectively uses imagery to show its theme, the clarity of the historical context, characterization, and mood in “August 2026: There Will Come Soft Rains” better portrays that technology is dependent on society.

Through the usage of characterization and mood, “August 2026” shows technology's usage in society and how its purpose becomes obsolete without people. While it is clear that the house is not alive, Ray Bradbury uses characterization, and more specifically anthropomorphism, to make the house seem human. There is hinting at a basic knowledge and sentience of the house, which can be seen when, “The voice said at last, ‘Since you express no preference, I shall select a poem at random...Sara Teasdale. As I recall, your favorite...’” (3). This understanding of the person's preferences not only shows the human qualities of the house but uses the futile efforts of the home to make nonexistent people happy to inspire pity. The technology was made

Zoe Butzke  
Bradbury Essay

specifically for people and is cheery and personable, but this attitude only leads to a tense and foreboding mood when there is no one for the house to serve. An example of this can be seen when the bright and happy tone set by the implied singing of “*Eight-one, tick-tock, eight-one o’clock, off to school, off to work, run, run, eight-one!*” is immediately contrasted by the lonely statement that, “no doors slammed, no carpets took the soft tread of rubber heels” (1). Watching the house continue to go along with its routine despite the absence of the people plants the idea that technology is useless without people. Statements such as “At eight-thirty the eggs were shriveled and the toast was like stone,” continue to portray this growing idea that the house lacks a purpose (1). The pitiful and foreboding mood that stems from the idea that the house is not dissimilar to a human character accentuates the notion that the house and its technology are obsolete without people. These literary devices of mood and characterization are able to clearly show that technology is dependent on people for its purpose and therefore dependent on society.

It could be argued that “The Pedestrian” does a better job of portraying its theme of how society is dependent on technology through its usage of imagery. These literary devices are used to show how culture and humanity have been defined by technology. Peoples’ nightly usage of technology in this story is the main way in which technology controls society. Although the usage is not directly mentioned, it can be implied through imagery. The main character, Leonard Meade, who takes nightly walks, “would walk for hours...and it was not unequal to walking through a graveyard where only the faintest glimmers of firefly light appeared in flickers behind the windows” (1). This visual imagery is meant to describe what it looks like through the windows of people who are in their homes watching television. It can be inferred that all those apart from our main character are completely entranced in watching their shows. Here, “The

Zoe Butzke  
Bradbury Essay

"Pedestrian" portrays its theme of society's dependency on technology by showing us how technology has defined a TV-watching culture and controls the people of this theoretical future.

While "The Pedestrian" does give adequate evidence to support its theme, "August 2026" better portrays its theme because it also includes historical context and is much clearer in its delivery. At the time of these stories' writing, the Cold War was still going on. Nuclear bombs would pose a very real threat in the event of an actual war. With the description of the house's side being "burned evenly free of its white paint" and with "the silhouette in paint of a man mowing the lawn... as in a photograph", it can be inferred that the death of the people in this story was caused by a nuclear blast. The purpose of this technology, the nuke, is the mass destruction of humans. As its purpose is entirely based around war, the usage of the nuke can be seen as dependent on society and its agenda. This contributes to the argument that "August 2026" better portrays its theme that technology is dependent on society compared to "The Pedestrian." "August 2026" is also more effective at expressing its theme due to its more literal descriptions of technology's purpose. In "The Pedestrian", there is a lot of inference needed to understand how technology is used. It is never explicitly stated that people spend their nights watching television, although it can be easily inferred. Comparatively, "August 2026" describes many of the functions of the house and how the people would have lived when they were alive. This clearer description contributes to show how "August 2026" has a better portrayal of its theme than "The Pedestrian."

Zoe Butzke  
Bradbury Essay

While “The Pedestrian” effectively uses imagery to show its theme, the clarity and extra evidence in “August 2026: There will come soft rains” helps to better portray its theme of technology’s dependency that is shown through historical context, characterization, and mood. These stories both look at what control we have over technology and how technology controls us. By understanding them and how they relate to our current lives, we can be more conscious of how to avoid a world similar to the dystopian ones described.