



## The Dark Future of Digital Lifestyle: Drawbacks of Technological Determinism in Ray Bradbury's Short Stories

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### Abstract in English

Ray Bradbury's science fiction stories are cautionary tales that highlight the potential harms of technology if not used responsibly. They emphasize technology's inherent risks, necessitating prudent handling and ethical consideration. Bradbury skillfully portrays how the world will be like years ahead with unconstrained technological advancement. The study provides a close examination of how Ray Bradbury's science fiction short stories reveal his negative perspectives on *technological determinism*. Mankind, without a thought to the future, is blindly giving itself over to the power of technology, a surrender to its influence without regard for consequences. The study also mirrors Bradbury's prediction of a bleak future, when technology's seductive ease will steer mankind toward a future of willing submission, a future where convenience dictates the path of humanity by focusing on the exploration of such themes as technology misshaping familial connections in his "The Veldt" and "Marionettes, Inc", dehumanization in "The Pedestrian" and "The Murderer", and the catastrophic impact of technological autonomy in "There will Come Soft Rains" and "A Sound of Thunder", all resulting from humanity's excessive reliance on technology, beside its overconfidence in its own creation that will end in its downfall.

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### 1. Introduction

The positive and negative effects of technology have been clearly manifested in utopian and dystopian science fiction stories. Many science fiction narratives have embodied the principles of technological determinism. Future predictions of the impact of advanced technologies on society and human behavior have become the main theme of several twentieth century novels and short stories in the science fiction

genre. Dystopian science fiction stories have functioned as cautionary tales to mirror the bleak future that arises from the dominance of technology, and its adverse impact in shaping cultural values and social structure. Ray Bradbury, A Pulitzer Prize winner for his works in science fiction, has written many short stories that constantly engage with the idea of technology adversely shaping human society, namely the negative impact of technological determinism on the future of humanity

Acknowledged as one of the foremost American writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and an enduring figure in the realm of science fiction. Ray Bradbury has published about six hundred short stories. Among his highly acclaimed collections are *The Martian Chronicles* (1950) and *The Illustrated Man* (1951). Most of his stories explore the complex relationship between technology and Man. He envisions a world where advanced technology is wielded as a tool for suppressing independent thought. Although Bradbury calls himself an ‘optimalist’ (Quoted in Louv, 2012), he holds a skeptical view towards technology to the extent that he is accused of being a traitor to the science fiction genre (Greenberg & Olander 1980). His science fiction stories forecast the negative future consequences of the fast-paced technological change. They also show a prevailing fear and lack of trust towards technology. The study addresses the question: “how does Ray Bradbury's use of exaggerated and fantastical technological depictions in his science fiction short stories serve to create a pessimistic portrayal of technology’s eventual dominance over mankind?”.

## 2. Literature Review

In the early twentieth century, a group of reductionists investigated the connection between technology and society. They arrived at the conclusion that society is dependent upon technology, rather than the reverse, which they later conceptualized as technological determinism, a term claimed to be coined by Thorstein Veblen, an American sociologist, who is credited for developing the relationship between technology and society (Hauer 2017). The theory suggested that technology plays a crucial role in driving societal change and development. McLuhan, a renowned philosopher and communication theorist from Canada, has made notable contributions to the development of technological determinism during the 1960s. He maintained that the medium by which information is transmitted, be it print, television, or the internet, shapes our culture and decides our future behaviors. Each new phase in human behavior is guided by advancements in technology, for instance, the discovery of metals, and the invention of steam engines, both have permanently changed the history of humanity worldwide (Singh, 2024). Also, from a technological determinist perspective social media platform like Twitter and Facebook have shaped the nature of human communication. They bring us close together, yet they foster our sense of isolation (Hutchins 2024). In the realm of technological determinism, technology is commonly perceived as an independent entity, possessing inherent qualities, progressing along its own path, and resulting in its own effects (Murphie & Potts 2003). Chandler (1995) argues that technological determinists perceive technology as the fundamental element of society, across different time periods; past, present, and future. They believe that technology such as television or the computer have altered society. The entire society, institutions as well as individuals, is seen as being determined by technology. Bell (2006), presumes two distinct types of effects produced by technology; positive effects, when technology leads to progress, and negative effects, when technology deskills or enslaves humanity. Ray Bradbury's cautionary tales warn readers of the negative effects

of technological determinism and encourage them to critically examine how technological forces can misshape society. While not directly mentioning *technological determinism*, most scholarly researches strongly support this theory through their central points and interpretation of Bradbury's notion of how influential technology is in shaping human life. Many scholars have investigated Bradbury's work, highlighting his views on excessive reliance of humans on technology, a phenomenon strongly linked to the principles of technological determinism. Giraud (2023) states that Bradbury's 'stories often cast technology as a domineering and overwhelming force, cautioning against the misuse of technology as a tool of suppression, and against overindulgence which can lead to distraction' (36). He argues that Bradbury foresees a future where, despite technology's capacity to spread information, its overwhelming dominance encourages distraction and allows for the manipulation of independent thought. In their "Technological Dystopia: A Critical Analysis of Ray Bradbury's *There Will Come Soft Rains*", Numan et al. (2023) examine Bradbury's depiction of technology's harm to nature and ecological integrity through an ecocritical lens. They refer to one of Bradbury's fictional narratives, which seek to expose and warn against the risks associated with unrestrained technological progress and the irresponsible, rapid exploitation of technological capabilities. They also highlight Bradbury's warning against the growing dominance of technology, and how it will soon impact an ever-widening range of life's aspects; consequently, people will feel less independent and more controlled by technology. Anwar (2016) inspects the illustration of destructive effects of technology and dictatorship on individual lives and freedoms in one of Bradbury's dystopian novels. She focuses on how Bradbury reveals media as a tool used to psychologically condition humanity to think in specific ways. Sablatzky (2023) proposes Bradbury's perspective on technology, as demonstrated in various works, where the latter cautions against the dangers of overreliance on technology, which can foster a belief in misinformation and result in the failure of information literacy skills. The article uses Bradbury's anticipations to argue that technology has a profound impact on individuals and society, echoing but not explicitly mentioning the core principle of technological determinism. Hence, dystopian perspectives have dominated scholarly analyses of Bradbury's science fiction, frequently neglecting the equally important and insightful aspects of his implicit reaction to technological determinism ideology. Therefore, in the light of technological determinism, the current study endeavors to investigate the thematic concerns surrounding the damaging long-term effects that advancement of technology may have on humanity as depicted in some of the science fiction short stories of Ray Bradbury.

### 3. Analysis and Discussion

Some of Bradbury's stories depict the potential harm that technology can inflict upon familial connections. Bradbury's depiction of digital houses consistently highlights the tension between technological progress and human values. Many of his science fiction stories frequently delve into the repercussions of advanced technology on personal relationships and emotional well-being, often adopting a cautionary tone regarding the possibility of technology overshadowing fundamental human needs and relationships. Although smart houses provide convenience and effectiveness, they may lead to a type of technological reliance that could be seen as a form of enslavement in various aspects. In "The Veldt" (1950) a small family owns a futuristic house, which is equipped with a technologically-advanced nursery that materializes virtual realms based on the children's preferences. George and Lydia Hadley live with their two children, Peter and

Wendy, in an automated house that feed them, rock them to sleep and even spare them the effort of turning the lights off after leaving rooms. However, eventually the 'Happy Life Home' (1) usurps the authority of the parents by exerting control over their children's minds.

"The veldt" demonstrates the way technology supplants parental responsibilities. Rather than offering emotional support to their children, George and Lydia Hadley, in pursuit of convenience and comfort, give the nursery authority to such an extent that they feel "unnecessary". They abandon their roles as parents, maintaining the belief that the gadget will enhance their children's growth physically and emotionally. However, they did not fully comprehend the disastrous impact of the nursery upon their children's behaviors. Upon the father's realization of the negative impact the nursery imposes on his children, he initiates reforms. He considers the thought of giving up the convenience of the smart house and reverting back to the conventional concept of family, wherein the mother and father assume the roles of raising children and tending to simple household duties. In order to prevent any harm befalling his children before it is too late, George Hadley makes the decision to permanently close the nurse. However, he is confronted by a pair of rebellious children, who have come to rely on the nurse as a source of parental care and provision; "I wouldn't want the nursery locked up," said Peter coldly. 'Ever.' ... Would I have to tie my own shoes instead of letting the machine, do it? And brush my own teeth and comb my hair and give myself a bath?" (8). The lack of real parents' authority results in a precarious shift in power. Peter and Wendy cunningly manipulate the nursery in order to avoid their parents' desires, illustrating the potential of technology to undermine parental guidance when it is out of control. The transition of the nursery from generating fantastical worlds of Aladdin and Alice in Wonderland to the real world of hot Africa and its aggressive animals may serve as a metaphor for the advancement of technology. Bradbury is perhaps trying to convey the idea that, eventually, technology will imitate reality and then it will pose a threat to humanity. While the nursery in the story appears to be influenced by Peter and Wendy's thoughts, contrarily, it effectively controls their minds, compelling them to engage in violent acts and manipulates them to employ it as a weapon in the murder of their own parents.

The Duality in "The Veldt" is also present in "Marionettes, Inc". The story highlights the ingenuity of human creativity through the invention of lifelike robots as obedient servants. Nonetheless, as the plot develops, Bradbury portrays the potential for this obedience to shift, transitioning from a source of empowerment to a vicious rebel. Here, technology is utilized as a means to widen the emotional gap between the husband and wife in the family. It is the type of aid that has resulted in a lack of respect, love, trust, and communication in marriage. "Marionettes, Inc", revolves around a night-out of two married friends, Braling and Smith. They start engaging in conversations about the problems they are facing in their marriages. However, A robot doppelganger of the husband from Marionette Inc. is Braling's solution to every problem in marriage. Thereupon, Braling decides to be replaced by the robot, referred to as Braling Two, so that he can go on a vacation in Rio without his wife's awareness. Smith also intends to buy a marionette, but upon returning home and checking his bank account, he finds out that ten thousand dollars (the amount needed for buying a marionette) has vanished and his wife is behaving strangely. As Braling arrives home, he is met with the distressing realization that he has been completely replaced by Braling Two, who has fallen in love

with the wife and intends to move to Rio with her, while cramming real Braling into a tool box.

The marionette symbolizes both, the advancement of technology (Bonati Muñoz,2017) as well as Man's excessive reliance on it to such a degree that he/she chooses to be replaced by a replica for the sake of a long-term sense of comfort. In the story the incorporation designs the marionettes to serve humans, yet those humanoids embody a deeper truth: once a technology is created, it has the ability to exert control over those who crafted it. Both couples in the story feel emotionally disconnected, which is a typical challenge that couples encounter in their marriage. However, Brawling finds in technology the immediate help to escape this challenge and the marionette efficiently carries out its assigned task supported by the way it is perfected to replace its client. Bradbury presents the concept of technology simulating humans with a touch of exaggeration. The way the marionette is designed elicits concern regarding the extent of technological progress; "he's built to do everything—eat, sleep, perspire—everything, natural as natural is" (2). Moreover, it is not only physical simulation but also emotional; "I'm perfectly alive and I have feelings" (3), which makes it completely prepared to take over its master's role, and, ironically, solution of the problem results in further problems.

Despite the fact that the exact date the events occur in "Marionette, Inc." is not explicitly stated, the futuristic setting and advancement of technology imply a time beyond the present. However, in "The Pedestrian" (1951) it is explicitly stated that the events take place in the year A.D. 2053, when advancement in technology has had a profound impact on human behavior and society in general. Here, technology has an overwhelming dominance over the populace, that it gradually eroded their essential human qualities. The society portrayed enforces conformity while discouraging critical thinking. It suppresses art and imagination, which represents suppressing individual thought and creativity. The story predicts a future in which television will assume a dominant role, causing individuals to become passive and devoid of life. The powerful imagery highlights the dehumanizing effect of excessive television usage, transforming lively individuals into metaphorical dead entities living in "tombs, ill-lit by television light" (1). The only person, who finds comfort in taking a walk rather than facing the screen day and night is Leonard Mead; a writer who hasn't written in years, because books and magazines do not sell anymore due to people's excessive habit of watching television. While taking a walk one evening, a human-free robotic police car stops Mead and question him. He finds himself "in the position of defending himself to a machine" (Johnson1980). The car arrests Mead for giving illogical answers that do not meet the machine's standards, as taking a walk, breathing fresh air, and having writing as a profession is not something humans do, for the robot. Mead's punishment is that he will be sent to the "Psychiatric Center for Research on Regressive Tendencies" (4) a name that suggests safeguarding one's humanity has become a felony in a dehumanized society. Bradbury also criticizes the wider consequences of automated law. According to him, such systems may result in a dehumanized society, treating individuals as data points instead of recognizing their needs and experiences. The automated police car reveals the potential dangers of relying on technology for governance. It lacks compassion and understanding, enforcing rules mechanically and ignoring human desires.

“The Pedestrian” depicts, what McLaughlin describes as “the loss of human values to the machine” (Quoted in Eller 2014). The inhabitants of the city have locked themselves away from the outside world. They see reality as illusion simulated on television. Contrastively, Leonard Mead is the only inhabitant who does not comply to the rules enforced by the automated law of his city. He stands out as a symbol of humanity fighting the dehumanization effect of technology. Mead takes solitary walks to escape the clutches of technology and embraces the freedom of nature and he refers to himself as a writer of books in a world that relies completely on multimedia. His rebellious nature stems from his opposition to the domination of technology, and his character exposes the extent to which technology has enslaved humanity. However, he loses the fight and is subsequently treated like a criminal for his refusal to conform to a society that has embraced a life fully reliant on machines.

Bradbury's objection is not to the TV per se, but rather to the way people misuse it, allowing it to dominate their life. He believes there is a growing tendency among most people to idolize it, which he finds concerning. In an interview, Bradbury makes an analogy between TV and the altar, with people faithfully kneeling before it: “All the dangers of the world are enclosed in that damn box that stands like an altar in the middle of the house, and they kneel dumbly before it as before an altar” (Quoted in Greenberg & Olander). According to Bradbury, phones are equally prone to misuse as TV. Greenberg & Olander, states that Bradbury did not have a phone at his house over the course of a few years. His “The Murderer” condemns the prevalent obsession with phones through a Leonard Mead-like character, Albert Brock, who tries to safeguard humanity from the dehumanization caused by technology, and later achieves this by systematically “murdering” every gadget that he perceives as stripping individuals of their fundamental human qualities.

In the story, a psychiatrist conducts an interview with an individual identified as Albert Brock, famously referred to as “The Murderer”, due to his destruction of multiple technological apparatuses like his television, wrist radio, phone, and many other devices stemming from his great disdain for the never-ending disturbance and interference they impose upon his daily life. Brock recounts his initial acts of destruction directed towards his telephone and TV set, expressing a profound yearning for silence apart from the ever-present influence of technology. Despite the psychiatrist’s hard efforts to comprehend Brock’s motives, Brock persists in showing no regret and firmly maintains his strong desire to repeat his actions. The psychiatrist’s diagnosis of Brock as “completely disoriented, but convivial” (5) marks the conclusion of the story, as he resumes his day amidst relentless technological disruptions. The story depicts a future society that is heavily influenced by technology. It also depicts how the advancement of devices like the telephone shifts from being convenient to becoming dominant forces that constantly require human attention, regardless of one's desire to avoid engagement. This is illustrated in Brock’s tale about his wife’s anxiousness, when he doesn’t answer her phone calls, which means that he is obliged to respond to all phone calls regardless of his willingness. Hence, he finds solace in terminating the device by inserting it into the kitchen insinkerator.

The talk between Brock and the psychiatrist is characterized by misunderstanding. Brock is frustrated by the constant presence of electronic devices, and the psychiatrist fails to grasp the underlying reason behind this frustration. Here, the psychiatrist

represents the broader society that willingly falls under the influence of those devices. At the end of the story, the psychiatrist is shown to be returning to his technical devices, each of them reaching out to him at the exact same moment; “the phones ringing again, and his hands moving, and his wrist radio buzzing, and the intercoms talking, and voices speaking from the ceiling” (5). Moreover, the repetition at the end highlights the concept of Man’s voluntary subjugation to technology.

In “There will Come Soft Rains”, Man’s subjugation to the power of technology culminates in total surrender, leading to his loss of control over it, as technology has the ability to outlast Man and potentially bring about his downfall. In the story, people meet their demise due to an atomic bomb, however, technology continues to operate uncontrollably thereafter until it is ultimately destroyed by natural forces. Bradbury believes that nature is the most powerful in the man-nature-technology trinity, thereupon, nature will outlive both humanity and technology. He is perhaps subtly reminding humanity that embracing nature will always be the right decision to make. “There will Come Soft Rains” is set on August 4, 2026 in Allendale, California. Bradbury paints a grim picture of a post-apocalyptic future, where a smart house “stood alone in a city of rubble and ashes” (2) emerging from the ruins of a nuclear attack. The city of Allendale has been ravaged by a nuclear bomb, resulting in the eradication of its entire population and the destruction of all structures, excluding a certain smart house. The house, along with its robotic attachments, autonomously carries out the usual actions that are expected during the day like making meals, cleaning, providing entertainment for the family, and preparing for bedtime. These actions are done without anyone inside the house, and the only evidence that a family has lived there are the burned silhouettes of each family member on the walls outside. Coincidentally, a tree falls down and bursts through the window, causing a massive fire. The house attempts to put out the fire, but it fails and therefore meets the same fate as its former residents. The manner in which nuclear bomb technology is portrayed in this story serves as a cautionary tale that highlights the consequences of pursuing technological advancements without ethical consideration. Ironically, in “There will Come Soft rains”, technological progress results in the extinction of humanity. The house is ‘a symbol of a civilization which destroys itself in its own sophistication’ (Greenberg & Olander, 79). However, contrastively nature persists even when all human creations have disappeared.

“There will Come Soft Rains” demonstrates the pointlessness of technological autonomy, when the creator is absent to make use of it. The smart house is compared to a house of worship, where the Gods are absent; “The house was an altar with ten thousand attendants, big, small, servicing, attending, in choirs. But the gods had gone away, and the ritual of the religion continued senselessly, uselessly” (2). Bradbury has realized that the invention of the atomic bomb instilled a widespread fear of advanced technologies, as that such technologies could also be used against humanity.

Man’s overconfidence in technology makes him mistakenly believe that it is completely under his control. In “A Sound of Thunder”(1952), Bradbury highlights a further undesirable consequence of losing control over advancement of technology. The sequence of events in the story illustrates how using technology without caution and proper consideration can have adverse effects in the future particularly when it interacts with complex systems like time and nature. Eckels, the protagonist of the story, pays a

considerable sum of money to Time Safari Inc. in order to travel in a time machine to hunt a prehistoric animal; Tyrannosaurus Rex. The company urges its clients to stay on the path assigned to them to avoid altering timeline. However, consumed by fear when encountering the desired beast, Eckels panics, he unintentionally strays from the path, and accidentally crushes a butterfly. When he returns back to the present after the journey, he notices that his world is not as he left it; language has changed as well as the results of presidential elections.

The team in charge of Time Safari Inc. perhaps represents lack of awareness eventually results in catastrophic changes in the timeline. Humanity does not realize that technology is not a game and that misusing it could lead to regrettable consequences. The time machine in this story perhaps symbolizes human's irresponsibility towards the use of technology. Eckel shows ignorance and irresponsibility towards using a machine that determines existence, and his unfamiliarity with the ecosystem and the symbiotic relationships within the natural world. He responds with the words, "So what?" to Travis's warning him against accidentally stepping on a mouse, which could lead to the eradication of a whole species. The butterfly, unintentionally destroyed by Eckels, symbolizes the delicate balance of the ecosystem, and whose death may initiate a chain reaction of alterations impacting the future. Moreover, the team of Time Safari Inc. may also represent Bradbury's implicit warning of the dangers lurking in technology being monopolized by the wealthy capitalists who would carelessly employ it only to increase their financial gain.

## 5. Conclusion

Sometimes science fiction may act as a mirror, offering a glimpse into the future of technology. Ray Bradbury's science fiction short stories picture horrific future scenes of humanity being enslaved by technology, when despite being the inventor and developer of technology, its lack of responsibility and overconfidence in controlling it will drastically lead to its downfall, transforming the dominator into the dominated.

In some of his science fiction short stories, Bradbury manages to picture the dominance of technology in an exaggerated and fantastical manner. His stories serve as warning tales against mankind's misuse of technology and its overdependence on it, which according to him would pose a threat over humans' personal as well as public life; over family in particular extending to the whole community. Bradbury paints a life where technology renders humanity too weak and dumb to manage society, and human activities are becoming illogical. Furthermore, Bradbury points that mankind's love of indolence is its own fault that would end in swapping roles with technology and instead of becoming the governor it will be the governed, and instead of being the parent, it will be parented. Bradbury does not only bring up the problem but also suggests solution of humanity quit technology and go back to a technology-free world of nature.

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الخلاصة

تعد قصص الخيال العلمي للكاتب راي برادبري قصص تحذيرية تسلط الضوء على الاضرار المحتملة للتكنولوجيا ما لم يتم استخدامها بصورة مسؤولة. حيث تشدد قصصه على المخاطر الكامنة للتكنولوجيا التي تستلزم التعامل الحكيم والأخلاقي. يصور برادبري وبمهارة كيف سيكون حال العالم مع التقدم التكنولوجي الذي لا تحكمه قيود في السنوات القادمة. ويقدم المقال فحصاً دقيقاً لكيفية عرض قصص الخيال العلمي القصيرة لراي برادبري عن وجهات نظره السلبية حول الحتمية التكنولوجية. حيث البشرية، دون التفكير في المستقبل، تسلم نفسها بشكل أعمى لقوة التكنولوجيا، دون اعتبار للعواقب. يعكس المقال أيضاً تنبؤ برادبري بمستقبل كئيب، عندما تقود السهولة المغرية للتكنولوجيا البشرية نحو مستقبل من الخضوع الطوعي، مستقبل تمهد فيه الراحة مسار البشرية، وذلك من خلال البحث في موضوعات مثل التكنولوجيا التي تشوه الروابط العائلية في قصتي " غرفة الأطفال" و" شركة الماريونيت" وموضوع التجريد من الإنسانية في قصتي " الماشي" و" القاتل" وموضوع التأثير الكارثي للاستقلالية التكنولوجية في " وستهطل الامطار الخفيفة" وفي "صوت الرعد" وجميع هذه المواضيع هي نتاج لإعتماد البشرية المفرط على التكنولوجيا بجانب ثقنها اللامحدودة بصنعتها التي ستقودها الى الهاوية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الخيال العلمي، الحتمية التكنولوجية، راي برادبري