
Fahrenheit 451: When Technology Causes Apathy, Addiction, And Brainwashing

Technology, while connecting us and letting us share our feelings with the world, it also seems to suck up feeling, leaving us apathetic. With the technology we have today, we see a lot of world events all the time on reality shows and the news. All of this constant media desensitizes the viewer and makes these events seem every day and normal. This is shown in Ray Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451 when our main character is yelling at one of his wife's friends to "go home and think of your first husband divorced and your second husband killed in a jet and your third husband blowing his brains out, go home and think of the dozen abortions you've had, go home and think of that and your damn Caesarian sections, too, and your children who hate your guts!" She, not unlike the rest of humanity in the novel, has been desensitized to much of what we would consider taboo. "Are You Lost in a World like Me" also illustrates this in a more symbolic way. You see, throughout the music video, Steve Cutts animated many cat-like, anthropomorphic people into the crowds. Normally, cats in media represent a deep knowledge of the natural world. But, by contrast, these cat-human hybrids symbolize a dulling of such senses. This is the case due to how the other humans throughout the video are represented. They all act ignorant and drone-like all the while looking down, at their phones. This is further proven with a singular, seemingly normal cat, hiding in the background for a few quick seconds. This shows that cats and these cat-people are different.

Tech can provide constant stimulation in the form of news, relationships, and entertainment, but it can become addicting for those seeking the things that are absent from their lives. Ray Bradbury showcases this while describing a vision our main character has while his city is bombed. Mildred, his wife, "saw her own face reflected there, in a mirror instead of a crystal ball, and it was such a wildly empty face, all by itself in the room, touching nothing, starved and eating off itself, that at last she recognized it as her own." This vivid description of Mildred depicts the health effects addiction has caused her. She has put off doing everything just to feel happy in her 'parlor.' She hasn't slept or eaten; she's become horribly thin. She "needs" the rush of talking with the 'family.' This is further proven by how Mildred interacts with these TV walls: "leaning anxiously, nervously, as if to plunge, drop, fall into that swarming immensity of color to drown in its bright happiness." She uses these walls as her coping mechanism for her troubles. She wishes to envelope herself in the happiness and permanently ignore everything else. Montag views these walls as "great idiot monsters/ with/ white thoughts/ and/ snowy dreams." Both "white" and "snowy" being symbols of false innocence and harsh ignorance, the very emotions Mildred wishes to feel internally. Of course, this dependence of technology is an unhealthy and faulty way of fighting one's problems. It can only prolong the inevitability of your problems snowballing into something you can no longer control. Steve Cutts also refers to humanity's unhealthy addiction to tech in "Are You Lost in a World Like Me" with the phrase "THESE SYSTEMS ARE FAILING" flashing on the screen and appearing in ads throughout the music video. The phrase illustrates how the cycle of addiction is like a system. You do it to distract yourself and to deny the issue; then, realizing that you're only shielding yourself for a short amount of time, you do it again and again, hoping to erase the issue with ignorance entirely.

With all this negativity about technology, there must be another side, right? There is and it's all

about awareness. You see, before people around the world could communicate with one another instantly, things didn't spread much. Sure, we had paper and all that came with it but nothing as reliable or fast. One example of this is the Iran hijab protests. So, if you didn't know already, women in Iran don't have the same freedoms as men. They always must be accompanied with a man and they must wear hijabs. Well, "protests have gone on for years, [most]times unnoticed outside Iran," writes Peter Kenyon, an international correspondent for NPR, "[protesters] say public awareness of the issue has grown [significantly]."

Now, that's good and all but when the higher-ups control what is seen and what isn't, awareness is thrown out the window. Whoever is running things can censor what they don't want people knowing and promoting what they want the populace to know. This is where censorship and brainwashing come into play. Fahrenheit 451 holds technology solely responsible for humanity's brainwashing. Books are burned because, as Beatty lectures, "a book is a loaded gun in the house next door. Burn it. Take the shot from the weapon. Breach man's mind. Who knows who might be the target of the well-read man?" Books are feared because they give the people something to think over, something to argue about. Beatty summarizes this when he states, "if you don't want a man unhappy politically, don't give him two sides to a question to worry him; give him one. Better yet, give him none." The books are gone because they can spark rebellion.

This could also happen with the internet. If a world authority doesn't like a certain website, they can wipe it completely from public consumption. This is already happening in Iran with the women's rights protests stated earlier: "Facebook and Twitter are banned in the Islamic Republic. Other popular platforms like Instagram have also been blocked temporarily from time to time — 'to keep the peace,' according to authorities." The Islamic government doesn't want its people to know what's going on. Things only get worse when the government promotes their own agenda. Bradbury hints at this multiple times throughout the novel but one of his most conspicuous examples is when Faber, an old, cowardly professor, explains to Montag why no one will listen: "[The media] tells you what to think and blasts it in. It must be right. It seems so right. It rushes you on so quickly to its own conclusions your mind hasn't time to protest." Everyone is so addicted to technology that anything they learn from it is now engrained into their own beliefs. Mildred can't understand why Montag cares so much about the books because "she listens to the walls." She has been brainwashed into thinking like Beatty. She believes that books only cause conflict.