The observations of a spinning centrifuge

A centrifuge: A piece of equipment that puts an object in rotation around a fixed axis. In the novel *Fahrenheit 451,* Bradbury takes a simple centrifuge, an object used to mix chemical compounds, and its distinct properties to demonstrate how the themes in *Fahrenheit 451* highlight current issues we face today in our society. The chemical compound is a dark mixture, combining with creativity and capacity to feel joy and purpose. The high speed of the device prevents us from seeing clearly and realizing the consequences we face in our actions and the lifestyle we lead today. The fast movement of the centrifuge confuses the fact that happiness is learning to appreciate the intangible over the tangible. What is Bradbury trying to convey to us about the way we live and if it’s too late to change? Ray Bradbury explains through this dystopian novel how important it is to take time to reflect on life and the joy the world brings, not what we bring or produce. Throughout this novel Bradbury creates parallels with Montag’s society and our society through the symbolism of a centrifuge.

In Montag’s world, people lack individuality and the capacity to think critically and with a depth of understanding. Technology in *Fahrenheit 451* is in a whirlwind with the people. Their capability to retain information is scarce. Montag expresses there is no meaning to what they do because they “fell so fast {they} didn’t touch the sides either.” (Bradbury 45) They never remember significant or ‘deep’ information: they are taught by the totalitarian government to only do, never think. In fact, Montag describes his world as an abyss that is slowly sinking them into the center of a centrifuge that mixes and spits them out like a piece of waste. Additionally, the article, *time to do everything except think* explores the absence of creativity as we are “swept along in the same narrow current as everyone else, which is swift but not deep” (Newsweek). This shows how information is passed through quickly like a current, but is not significant. The wireless technology in our culture blocks our creativity and our way of feeling any emotion is immersed in the shadow which is technology that controls and blocks our feelings. The parlor walls in *Fahrenheit 451* acts as the ‘creativity blocker’ as it absorbs all who are entertained by it into a dark abyss without realising they’re being sucked into a culture that’s consuming every creative piece of their mind. Also, Montag realizes that “he is certain he wouldn’t cry” (Bradbury 44) if Mildred passed away. His incapacity to feel remorse or grief for Mildred is created by the world they live in. She’s just a “unknown, a street face, a newspaper image…” (Bradbury 44). Instead of putting his relationship first, he is distracted and prioritizes his job and technology. His emotionless effort to feel anything for Mildred is torn away. He then begins to cry “at the thought of not crying at death…” (Bradbury 44). Montag is unable to feel emotion during appropriate time, showing that he’s not in control of his feelings because of societal pressures. The centrifuge’s the dark matter mixing and converging with our creativity and emotions tells us there’s no time to think, just do.

The citizens in *Fahrenheit 451* are like a confused snake that sometimes gets so disoriented it ends up eating the first thing it sees, which is itself. Similar to this snake image, the centrifuge acts to slowly tear apart the people and their perspectives. Faber, a mentor for Montag, tries to tell Montag to stand back and let society kill itself, to “let the war turn off the families” (Bradbury 87). He implies that the only way to ‘turn off’ the status quo is to sit and watch the masses become oblivious to their own destruction. Faber possesses a similar mindset to a Marvel villain. The villain believes that to save humanity, we must sacrifice half the population to regain equilibrium in society. Faber wishes to stand back and not interfere with the status quo even though thousands of lives would perish, but Montag does not agree. Faber warns Montag to “stand back from the centrifuge” (Bradbury 87) as it is difficult to interfere with a machine that mixes chemical compounds at a high velocity. Faber warns against being sucked into the un-diverse, ignorant society. In today’s world, we are sucked into consuming the latest fads and gadgets at our disposal that we don’t realize that production of this technology is in fact, destroying us. We think buying the latest iPhone is the best way to gain happiness, but its only temporary happiness. The video *Wake up call*, demonstrates how consumerism of our technological gadgets will cost more than we think. By the time we are using the iPhone qx909, it would’ve cost too much ecologically and socially. In the end, like the snake, we will have slowly consumed ourselves without even knowing it.

While a centrifuge runs at high speed, the people in *Fahrenheit 451* represent the compound that’s being mixed. As they are spinning, they become disconnected from society and begin to lose consciousness of their surroundings. Spinning at such high speeds blurs everything, “white blurs are houses. Brown blurs are cows” (Bradbury 9). The people in *Fahrenheit 451* are unable to appreciate the nature that’s surrounding them. They allow themselves to be distracted by the parlor walls and the satirical laws, without realising the real issues and lifestyle they’re living. They lose consciousness of what’s around them. They are disconnected from reality, they can’t differentiate between the right and wrong. They never questioned the status quo of burning books and satirical laws. They are unaware of the consequences of toxic technology/habits they developed. Analogous to this in current times, global warming has always been an ongoing issue. Discussing it once in class or watching a documentary seems like a reasonable solution to prevent climate change. Why did we then still use aerosol hairspray and petrol and plastic? How are we so disconnected to the consequences of our actions? Is thirty years enough time to shift our thinking and way of living? Is Bradbury trying to send an underlying message that if we (society) don’t change our lifestyle and get our minds out of the technological world, we’ll face catastrophically empty lives where we use anti depressants (Mildred), anger (Montag and the ladies), and addiction (parlor walls) to find meaning. Like Montag’s realization when he reads a quote from the bible, “Consider the lilies of the field” (Bradbury 78), we should consider the things life has to offer such as, nature (lilies) and love instead of things we can’t control. Montag begins to finally see his surroundings and realize that there’s more meaning to things in life a white, pale flower or a fresh cut lawn.

The chemical compound being homogenized in the centrifuge is a mixture of a dark abyss that’s destroying creativity and our personal feelings. The high velocity of the device prevents transparency and the ability to see and face our real problems. The fast movement of the spinning test tubes represents the tangible over intangible. The learning curve of appreciating the intangible over the tangible and the true source to happiness which lies not within things we posses, it lies in things we cannot posses. In *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury we discover the parallels of their society and our society through a scientific machine called a centrifuge and its symbolic properties.

Cited sources:

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