

CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF NEOLIBERALISM IN BEAUTIFUL SHINING PEOPLE BY MICHAEL GROTHAUS

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to reveal the representation of neoliberal ideology in Michael Grothaus's *Beautiful Shining People* using Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework. This study employed a descriptive qualitative method with a three-dimensional analytical framework consisting of textual analysis, discourse practice, and social practice. The findings revealed that the novel constructed neoliberal values through linguistic patterns, character transformation, social relationships, and the techno-capitalist setting of the narrative. The dominance of material and mental processes represented characters as self-optimizing, productive, and achievement-oriented subjects. The protagonist's transformation reflected the internalization of entrepreneurial selfhood, technological competence, and personal responsibility, while social relationships were portrayed as competitive networks based on utility and collaboration. Furthermore, the futuristic Tokyo setting and the author's engagement with contemporary digital culture reinforced market-oriented forms of identity and behavior. The study also found that the novel simultaneously critiqued neoliberal society through its portrayal of loneliness, emotional alienation, commodified social relations, and the limitations of technological progress in fulfilling human needs.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Neoliberalism, Literary, Beautiful Shining

INTRODUCTION

Neoliberalism has emerged as one of the most influential ideological frameworks shaping contemporary social, economic, political and cultural life. Basically,

neoliberalism tends to prioritize the free market system, privatization, deregulation, competition and individual entrepreneurial freedom, while reducing the role of the state in providing welfare and economic



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regulation (Gasser, 2024; Girerd et al., 2021). Over time, it expanded from economics to various aspects of daily life, including education, media, technology and cultural production. As a result, many social institutions are increasingly controlled based on market-oriented values such as efficiency, productivity, accountability, competitiveness, and performance measurement. In this context, neoliberalism functions not only as an economic doctrine but also as a broader cultural and ideological system that shapes social practices, individual behavior, and ways of thinking.

Michael Grothaus's novel *Beautiful Shining People* offers a compelling case for examining these dynamics. This speculative fiction novel, set in a near-future Tokyo, explores human experience in a technologically advanced and highly competitive society. It provides a rich literary space to observe how neoliberal values intersect with themes of technology, identity, and personal responsibility.

The ideology of neoliberalism promotes values such as self-development, competitiveness, individual achievement, and market-oriented thinking, but often ignores the structural causes of inequality and social injustice (Ahlstrand, 2025; Delahunty, 2025). Consequently, social value is frequently assessed through indicators such as productivity, achievement, technological competence, and economic contribution.

Because ideology operates through language and representation, discourse becomes an important area of analysis in understanding neoliberalism. From the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), discourse is not merely a neutral form of communication but a social practice closely connected to power and ideology.

(Fairclough, 1995) argues that discourse simultaneously reflects and reproduces social structures and ideological relationships, and also explains that ideology functions collectively by forming shared values, identities and understandings in society. Through discourse, dominant ideologies become normalized or accepted as normal reality. Therefore, the ideology of neoliberalism can be understood as a discursive formation that influences the way society interprets concepts such as freedom, productivity, success, responsibility, and competition.

Critical Discourse Analysis provides an important framework for uncovering hidden ideological assumptions embedded within discourse. CDA examines how language contributes to the maintenance of power relations and ideological systems. Previous studies demonstrate that neoliberal discourse frequently appears in education, the media, public policy, and institutional communication through language that emphasizes efficiency, accountability, competitiveness, and market-driven solutions (Reyes & Jung, 2025; Sellami, 2025).

Several previous studies have examined ideology and discourse through Critical Discourse Analysis in various contexts. Gunawan et al. (2024), in their study *Representation of Neoliberalism Values in Indonesian Arabic Textbook: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis*, investigated how neoliberal values such as consumerism, free-market ideology, luxurious lifestyles, and technological dependence were represented in Indonesian Arabic textbooks through textual and visual elements. The study revealed that educational discourse functions as an ideological tool that transmits neoliberal



values to students. Similarly, Rakhmawati et al. (2024) analyzed cultural discourse in the Tungguk Tembakau ritual tradition using Teun Van Dijk's CDA framework and demonstrated how discourse structures preserve cultural values, social identity, and collective ideology. Putri et al. (2024) also applied Critical Discourse Analysis to investigate gender representation in Indonesian language textbooks and found that discourse structures shape readers' understanding of gender roles and social identity through linguistic and thematic patterns.

In the domain of literary studies, Fazil and Ashfaq (2024) examined neoliberal tactics in two South Asian novels, *The White Tiger* by Aravind Adiga and *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* by Mohsin Hamid, using qualitative textual analysis and neoliberal criticism as a theoretical framework. Their study demonstrated how literary narratives represent the adverse effects of privatization and deregulation on marginalized communities, revealing that neoliberal policies disproportionately benefit the wealthy while deepening the economic vulnerability of the poor. The study further showed that characters in both novels are compelled to adopt fraudulent and exploitative strategies simply to survive within systems shaped by market logic and the absence of state protection. This finding affirms that fiction serves as a significant site for the critical representation and interrogation of neoliberal ideology. Similarly, Esnara (2023) demonstrated through CDA of transitivity processes in two African novels that literary discourse carries dense ideological and cultural meanings, encoding dominant and marginalized ideologies through narrative structure, characterization, and linguistic choices.

In political and media discourse, Suhaili et al. (2024) employed Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis to examine Donald Trump's social media discourse about Iran and revealed how lexical choices and discourse structures strategically constructed ideological representations and power relations. Likewise, Budiarta and Kasni (2023) analyzed Covid-19 health-protocol advertisements through Van Dijk's microstructure analysis and demonstrated how semantic, syntactic, lexical, and rhetorical elements were strategically constructed to shape public behavior and ideological understanding. Rahman (2023) further examined the Helsinki Memorandum of Understanding using CDA and Halliday's transitivity system and showed how discourse structures reflected unequal power relations and ideological control within political agreements. In addition, Gunawan et al. (2023) investigated ideological representation in a jihadist testament through transitivity analysis and Fairclough's CDA framework, revealing how discourse functions as a medium for spreading ideological beliefs and shaping social perceptions. Hamid et al. (2021) also demonstrated that media discourse reconstructs women's identities through linguistic and discursive strategies connected to ideology and sociocultural transformation.

Although previous studies have made important contributions to understanding the relationship between discourse and ideology, there are still several limitations. Many studies focus more on educational, political, media, ritual or institutional discourse, while attention to literary discourse as a space for the construction and reproduction of neoliberal ideology is still relatively limited. Existing research also tends to emphasize thematic



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interpretation without examining in depth how neoliberal meanings are constructed linguistically and discursively through vocabulary, characterization, narrative strategies, and discourse practices in literary texts. In addition, although Critical Discourse Analysis has been widely applied to media and institutional texts, there is still little research that uses Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA framework to analyze neoliberalism in contemporary works of fiction. As a result, the relationship between textual representation, discourse production, and broader neoliberal social practices in literary narrative remains underexplored.

Based on these problems, the aim of this research is to analyze the representation of neoliberal ideology in the novel *Beautiful Shining People* by Michael Grothaus using the three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis framework by Norman Fairclough. This research focuses on analyzing how neoliberal values are represented in the novel. Apart from that, this research also aims to investigate how the discourse represented in the novel is related to the broader social practices of neoliberalism in contemporary society. By integrating textual analysis, discursive practices, and sociocultural analysis, it is hoped that this research can contribute to the development of Critical Discourse Analysis in literary studies and provide a deeper understanding of how literary discourse reflects and reproduces dominant ideological structures in contemporary neoliberal society.

METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) method of Norman

Fairclough's three-dimensional model, which consists of three dimensions: text (linguistic), discourse practice (production and consumption of text), and social practice (ideological and institutional context). This approach allows for a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between language, power, and ideology in literary texts (Fairclough, 1995; Hart, 2014). For linguistic analysis, the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) theory developed by Halliday is integrated, particularly the transitivity aspect, to identify processes, participants, and circumstances in clauses that represent neoliberal ideological meanings (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Machin & Mayr, 2023). The object of this study is the novel *Beautiful Shining People* by Michael Grothaus, which was chosen because it represents contemporary speculative fiction that engages with neoliberal discourse practices in a technologically advanced and market-driven society.

The main data consist of discourse units in the novel, including words, phrases, sentences, dialogues, monologues, narrative descriptions, and broader narrative structures that contain neoliberal ideological values. Textual excerpts were selected using purposive sampling based on several criteria: relevance to neoliberal concepts such as individualism, self-optimization, entrepreneurial subjectivity, competition, market logic, productivity, and commodification linguistic salience through lexical choices, evaluative language, metaphors, transitivity patterns, modality, and rhetorical devices; narrative significance within character development, plot progression, and dialogue; recurrence of ideological themes; and contextual richness that facilitates connections between textual representation and broader



social practices. Data were collected through intensive readings of the novel.

Data analysis was conducted following Fairclough's three-dimensional model. The first stage, textual analysis, examined transitivity patterns and other linguistic features to identify how ideological meanings are constructed within the text. The second stage, discourse practice analysis, explored narrative organization, characterization, focalization, and the production and circulation of meanings within the novel. The third stage, social practice analysis, connected textual and discursive representations to broader socio-cultural, economic, and institutional contexts associated with neoliberal discourse. The three dimensions were applied recursively rather than linearly, allowing continuous movement between textual features, discursive processes, and social contexts.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings presented in this section are based on the analysis of 40 textual excerpts consisting of dialogues, monologues, and narrative passages selected from the novel. These excerpts were identified through purposive sampling based on their relevance to neoliberal values such as self-optimization, market subjectivity, entrepreneurialism, technological enhancement, competition, and individual responsibility. Due to space limitations, only 12 representative excerpts are presented and discussed in detail.

Linguistic Features and Transitivity Patterns

The analysis of Halliday's transitivity system reveals that the linguistic structure of *Beautiful Shining People* significantly contains material processes, which construct the protagonist as an active agent

engaged in continuous self-development and technological interaction. Material processes such as "download", "upload", "call", and "head" depict purposeful actions directed toward personal improvement and achievement. For instance, the protagonist states, "I stop, pull out my phone and download the main song from the ghostly love story" (Grothaus, 2023, p. 65). It shows the active use of technology to regulate his emotions and experiences. Similarly, the statement "As soon as we uploaded our project, she stopped returning my messages" (Grothaus, 2023, p. 65) makes digital production and technological competence as central activities in social and professional life. Another example appears when the protagonist explains, "I called his office this morning. It's why I'm on this gravelled path now" (Grothaus, 2023, p. 75) referring to his decision to undergo surgery. These material processes portray the body, technology, and personal achievements as projects that need continuous investment and optimization, which reflects the neoliberal emphasis on individual responsibility and self-improvement.

The use of mental processes is also significant in representing the protagonist's internal struggles and self-reflection. Verbs such as guess, wish, and think reveal how the protagonist evaluates himself and his position within society. When discussing the possibility of changing his beliefs, he states, "Well, I guess I'd have no choice but to change my beliefs. Data doesn't lie" (Grothaus, 2023, p. 64). This cognitive process demonstrates that he is reliant on rationality and empirical evidence, these values commonly associated with neoliberal notions of objectivity and self-regulation. Also, the expression "I wish they'd make more of them" (Grothaus,



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2023), p. 64 reveals personal desire and preference as central aspects of identity formation. The statement “I think it’s hard for anyone who’s been normal their whole life to understand” (Grothaus, 2023, p. 79) depicts introspection regarding bodily difference and social exclusion. Through these mental processes, the novel highlights the internalization of social expectations and the psychological pressures associated with self-worth and belonging.

Relational processes are used to construct identities and define social realities. The protagonist reflects that “The thing about success ... is it doesn’t change how the people who knew you before see you now” (Grothaus, 2023, p. 67). using the relational process is to define the nature of success and social recognition. Similarly, the assertion “We’re all born blank slates” (Grothaus, 2023, p. 69) constructs identity as something that must be created rather than inherited. These relational processes support neoliberal assumptions that individuals are responsible for constructing their own identities and determining their value through personal effort and achievement.

Verbal processes function as mechanisms through which knowledge, values, and ideologies are communicated. For example, the information bot explains, “The bot replies. Kami are not inherently holy” (Grothaus, 2023, p. 77), introducing cultural knowledge through the verbal process replies. The protagonist recalls that “Mom said no one could be meant to carry out those atrocities” (Grothaus, 2023, p. 69) demonstrating how personal beliefs and moral perspectives are transmitted through language. Even routine interactions with service robots, such as “The server says it’s not a problem” (Grothaus, 2023, p. 68),

reveal how communication increasingly occurs between humans and technological entities. These verbal processes contribute to the dissemination of values related to technology, ethics, and social behavior, reinforcing the novel’s exploration of a technologically mediated society.

Existential processes highlight the existence of opportunities, limitations, and possibilities within the narrative world. The protagonist remarks, “There’s no way I could afford it if not for the Sony deal,” (Grothaus, 2023, p. 79) emphasizing the existence of economic conditions that determine access to bodily transformation. Another example appears when the information bot explains that “If there is a shrine, no matter how small or plain, a kami will find it.” (Grothaus, 2023, p. 77) These existential constructions foreground the presence of opportunities, resources, and structures that shape individual choices, thereby illustrating how personal aspirations remain connected to broader economic and social realities.

Behavioral processes capture the emotional and physiological responses of characters, revealing the human consequences of living within a competitive and technologically driven society. For instance, “She gives a satisfied nod” (Grothaus, 2023, p. 64) represents approval through observable behavior. Similarly, “Neotnia laughs so hard her cheeks flush” (Grothaus, 2023, p. 65) portrays genuine emotional engagement and interpersonal connection. In contrast, the description “Her jaw drops and her entire body freezes” (Grothaus, 2023, p. 84) conveys a moment of intense psychological distress manifested physically. These behavioral processes reveal the emotional costs associated with identity, trauma, and social expectations,



balancing the novel's focus on productivity and technological advancement with depictions of human vulnerability.

The predominance of material and mental processes, supported by relational, verbal, existential, and behavioral processes, constructs a narrative in which identity is closely linked to achievement, self-improvement, and technological enhancement. A particularly significant example appears when the protagonist states, "Success ... it only impresses the people you meet after you've accomplished something." (Grothaus, 2023, p. 67) This shows the neoliberal logic embedded throughout the novel, where social recognition, personal value, and identity are measured by accomplishment and productivity.

Consistency with Previous Research

The findings are consistent with previous research conducted by Bessadat and Abdelhakem (2022), who argue that contemporary fiction frequently constructs characters whose identities are shaped by neoliberal values such as self-governance, self-improvement, and personal accountability. However, differences emerge in the representation of bodily shame, technological embodiment, and ethical dilemmas involving androids, which are portrayed more explicitly in *Beautiful Shining People*. Pereira and Karunakar (2024) similarly demonstrate that contemporary speculative fiction increasingly depicts the body as an object of biopolitical regulation and economic value within neoliberal systems. These studies support the initial assumption that neoliberal ideology extends beyond economic practices and becomes embedded in personal identity, social relationships, and bodily experience. The findings of the

present study extend previous discussions by showing how technological enhancement, bodily transformation, and human–android relations function as mechanisms for producing neoliberal subjectivity and reinforcing the logic of self-optimization.

The performance-based identity in *Beautiful Shining People* is represented through the protagonist's understanding of social recognition and personal success. This is evident in his reflection, "Success ... it only impresses the people you meet after you've accomplished something. Everyone who knew you previously just thinks, There must be some mistake, how did he do that?" (Grothaus, 2023). This statement reveals a social environment in which individual worth is measured through achievement rather than intrinsic human value. Recognition is presented as conditional upon visible accomplishment, positioning success as the primary criterion for social acceptance. The protagonist's observation reflects a worldview in which individuals are expected to demonstrate their value through productivity, expertise, and measurable performance. Rather than creating genuine belonging, achievement functions as a mechanism of evaluation that determines an individual's position within social hierarchies. Furthermore, the novel repeatedly associates technological innovation and coding expertise with social legitimacy, suggesting that identity is increasingly constructed through market-oriented forms of achievement and economic usefulness.

The representation of these values does not stand alone but forms part of the broader ideological construction developed through the narrative. As explained by Fairclough (1995), discourse in literary texts functions as a social practice that



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produces and reproduces dominant systems of meaning. In this novel, neoliberal values such as achievement, competitiveness, entrepreneurial selfhood, and market utility emerge as dominant discourses that shape the protagonist's perception of himself and others. This view is further strengthened by van Dijk (2008), who emphasizes that textual structures contribute to the production of symbolic power and the framing of social reality. Thus, the narrative of *Beautiful Shining People* does not merely present a personal story of success and transformation, but also reproduces a neoliberal ideological framework in which recognition, belonging, and social value are increasingly determined by performance, productivity, and market success.

Transformation of Characters as Representation of Ideology

The transformation of the protagonist serves as a central representation of neoliberal ideology throughout *Beautiful Shining People*. Initially, he is portrayed as a talented but deeply insecure programmer whose identity is shaped by bodily shame, social exclusion, and a persistent desire for acceptance. His dissatisfaction with his physical appearance is evident when he describes his body as "My stomach's skin droops like deflated dough... an apron of human flesh" and reflects on his efforts at self-improvement: "Even after I've toiled to change myself physically so I can look like other people – so I can have just the chance of fitting in – it doesn't work" (Grothaus, 2023, p. 185). These statements reveal that the body is constructed as a site of deficiency requiring continuous correction and improvement. Rather than being accepted as an inherent aspect of identity, the body becomes a project that must be transformed in order to meet social

expectations and cultural standards of desirability.

The protagonist's transformation develops beyond physical insecurity and gradually expands into a broader process of self-reconstruction through technology. This shift becomes apparent when he admits "The only people who give me attention are executives three times my age who want my code... blogs and magazines throw around the label 'genius' like it's a good thing. Like it's not merely another term for 'outsider'" (Grothaus, 2023, p. 185). The statement illustrates the tension between social exclusion and technological exceptionalism, suggesting that personal belonging can be achieved through specialized skills and innovation. His transformation reaches a decisive moment when he agrees to assist Neotnia despite significant personal and ethical risks, stating, "I'll try... If you still want me to, I'll try" (Grothaus, 2023, p. 186). This decision represents more than individual courage or personal growth. It marks the protagonist's entry into a system where technological intervention is presented as the primary solution to human limitations and social problems. The narrative therefore reframes self-transformation as a process that depends not on collective support or social change, but on innovation, expertise, and individual adaptability.

According to Nehring and Röcke (2024), contemporary neoliberal culture encourages self-optimization as a moral obligation, thus encouraging individuals to continuously improve their abilities and competitiveness. (Vintiadis, 2025) argues that performance-based identities and the commodification of the body are mechanisms that enable neoliberal values to be internalized within individuals.



Similarly, Butler and Coward, (2024) demonstrate that self-commodification and the need for external recognition play a crucial role in the formation of neoliberal subjectivities. Individuals are positioned as entrepreneurial selves, where their value is determined by social recognition and the performance they display. These studies also highlight how technological solutionism and self-commodification shape contemporary subjectivities by transforming individuals into projects that must be continually improved and developed. These findings support the argument that the protagonist's transformation is not simply a personal change, but rather a representation of broader ideological processes within neoliberal society.

Fairclough (1995) argues that discourse operates as a social practice through which identities and social relations are continuously produced and reproduced. Throughout the novel, the protagonist is repositioned from an individual struggling with alienation and bodily dissatisfaction into a subject who embraces innovation, risk-taking, and technological enhancement as pathways to self-realization. As Wodak and Meyer (2009) explain, narratives of transformation frequently serve as discursive mechanisms that align personal experiences with dominant ideological structures. Thus, the protagonist's journey not only illustrates individual change but also constructs a broader vision of human progress in which self-improvement, technological intervention, and adaptability are presented as desirable and necessary responses to contemporary life.

Neoliberal Community as a Competitive Network

The findings of this study support previous research showing that social relationships in neoliberal societies are often shaped by usefulness, opportunity, and shared goals rather than by long-term collective ties. Järvinen and Mik-Meyer (2025) argue that people increasingly build connections that can support their careers, projects, and professional development, and also suggest that digital and professional environments encourage individuals to use social networks as resources for gaining opportunities, information, and visibility. These findings support the view that communities in contemporary society are often organized around practical interests and temporary cooperation.

The protagonist develops professional relationships with Goeido and Neotnia, who assist him in extracting the code and achieving his technological objectives. Their relationship is not based on emotional attachment but rather on mutual benefit and shared interests. The three characters work together because each of them expects to gain something from the collaboration. Similarly, the negotiations involving Sony illustrate how professional connections function within a larger economic system. Through these interactions, the novel presents networking as an important strategy for achieving success. The exchanges among the characters are practical and goal-oriented, emphasizing efficiency, expertise, and problem-solving rather than personal loyalty or friendship. Such representations suggest that social relationships are often formed to accomplish specific objectives and may lose their significance once those objectives have been achieved.

At the level of social practice, the discourse reflects broader developments in contemporary society, where networking,



entrepreneurship, and professional visibility have become essential for social and economic advancement. Neoliberal conditions encourage individuals to build and maintain strategic connections that can be transformed into professional opportunities and economic advantages. As argued by scholars of neoliberalism, social relationships increasingly function as forms of social capital that contribute to career development and market success. In platform-based and knowledge-driven economies, individuals are rewarded for creating flexible professional networks and adapting to changing market demands. Consequently, relationships are often evaluated according to their usefulness in enhancing productivity, employability, and career mobility. This reflects the neoliberal tendency to view social interaction as an investment that can generate future economic returns (Sánchez-Arrieta et al., 2021).

Fairclough (1995) explains that social practices represented in texts can function as ideological processes that create and reinforce particular social structures through discourse. In the novel, technological and corporate communities are framed as hegemonic spaces of subject formation where market norms are reproduced through collaboration, risk-sharing, innovation, and mutual utility. Van Leeuwen (2008) further argues that representations of action are never neutral. Activities such as joint problem-solving, technical cooperation, and temporary alliances are constructed as meaningful and desirable forms of social behavior. The discourse normalizes the idea that successful individuals must continuously cultivate useful connections and maintain networks that enhance their market value.

This representation reflects a broader neoliberal logic in which community is no longer primarily understood as a space of collective belonging but as a competitive network that facilitates self-advancement. As Brown (2015) argues, neoliberal rationality increasingly transforms all spheres of social life into economic domains where individuals are expected to behave as entrepreneurial actors. Consequently, the novel uses neoliberal discourse to construct an ideal social reality in which strategic individualism, networking, and competitive collaboration become essential mechanisms for personal success. The narrative of community therefore functions not only as a literary element but also as a political representation of the neoliberal subject whose social relations are shaped by market logic, performance, and competition.

Contextual Factors: Socio-Cultural and Techno-Capitalist Tokyo

One of the biggest influences on how neoliberal ideology appears in *Beautiful Shining People* is its futuristic Tokyo setting, a setting filled with cutting-edge technology and with techno-capitalist values. (Smit et al., 2025) argues that digital governance systems encourage individuals to continuously optimize their skills and capacities in response to institutional demands, reflecting broader processes of responsabilization and self-management. Butler & Coward (2024) observe that contemporary market cultures promote self-optimization, competitiveness, and achievement-oriented forms of selfhood and further demonstrate that digital and social media environments shape identity formation by linking social value to status, performance, and market-driven criteria. As stated by Docherty (2021), digital



technologies increasingly foster forms of self-regulation aligned with neoliberal rationalities. Together, these studies indicate that neoliberal ideology is not merely an abstract economic doctrine but is embedded within socio-cultural and technological environments that actively shape human behavior, identity formation, and self-understanding.

The dynamic is illustrated throughout the novel when the protagonist navigates Tokyo's technologically mediated environment and participates in networks of corporate innovation. His daily activities are deeply connected to digital infrastructures, particularly through coding, data systems, and advanced computational technologies. For example, when investigating Neotnia's systems, he describes how he immediately engages with digital interfaces: "I unfold my phone into a tablet and open the network settings" (Grothaus, 2023, p. 193) and later "I sit sideways on the toilet, using the sink as a desk for my laptop" (Grothaus, 2023, p. 194). These moments demonstrate how technological devices and digital labor are seamlessly integrated into everyday life. The protagonist's identity is further tied to market-oriented technological expertise, as Neotnia repeatedly seeks his assistance because he is recognized as a leading coder. His work is also connected to major corporate actors, particularly Sony, which seeks to acquire his technological innovations. The novel highlights the influence of corporate and political-economic interests when the protagonist receives updates regarding negotiations: "Sony's drawing up the final documents now, and they'll call tomorrow to schedule the signing" (Grothaus, 2023, p. 205). This interaction illustrates how technological

knowledge is commodified and integrated into global market structures.

The city also functions as a space where individuals are expected to create value through continuous innovation and adaptability. The protagonist repeatedly evaluates situations through the logic of efficiency, optimization, and problem-solving. His response to technological challenges reflects an entrepreneurial mindset centered on innovation and productivity. For instance, when confronted with Neotnia's encrypted systems, he immediately frames the issue as a technical challenge requiring specialized expertise, explaining that "there are probably only a handful of people who'd have the knowledge to even recognise the pattern-recognition keys hidden among the gibberish" (Grothaus, 2023, p. 197). Such passages position advanced technological competence as a valuable form of capital, reinforcing neoliberal assumptions that personal success derives from specialized skills and continuous self-development.

Moreover, the broader social environment of the novel reflects a society organized around digital networks, cybersecurity concerns, and technological competition. This is evident when national transportation systems are disrupted by cyberattacks, prompting widespread social anxiety: "It's another cyberattack. This time, the bullet train lines in Hokkaido, northern Japan, were the target". (Grothaus, 2023, p. 214) The dependence on interconnected technological infrastructures demonstrates how economic activity, mobility, and social life are increasingly governed by digital systems. Such conditions reinforce the technocapitalist context in which market efficiency, technological innovation, and



strategic adaptability become essential social values.

Fairclough (1995) argues that social context constitutes an active field of meaning production in which social norms, identities, and power relations are constructed and reproduced through discourse. Similarly, van Dijk (2008) emphasizes that ideological meanings often operate implicitly through cultural and institutional contexts that shape how social reality is interpreted. In the novel, the futuristic Tokyo setting can be understood as a hegemonic space where neoliberal values are repeatedly enacted and normalized. Technological infrastructures of the city, corporate institutions, and competitive social environment collectively promote a worldview in which individual worth is measured through productivity, adaptability, innovation, and market success. Therefore, techno-capitalist Tokyo functions not merely as a fictional location but as a socio-cultural representation of the convergence of technology, capitalism, and neoliberal governance, highlighting how contemporary urban environments contribute to the formation of neoliberal identities and market-oriented subjectivities.

Extrinsic Elements: Influence of the Author and Public Discourse

Extrinsic factors such as Michael Grothaus's professional background as a technology journalist, commentator on digital culture, and long-term observer of the technology industry also influence the strong ideological content of *Beautiful Shining People*. As a writer who has extensively covered topics related to technological innovation, digital transformation, artificial intelligence, and Silicon Valley culture, Grothaus brings

contemporary techno-cultural concerns into the novel.

According to Fairclough (1995), discourse not only reflects social reality but actively contributes to its formation by reproducing particular values, identities, and power relations. Grothaus's background as a technology journalist enables the construction of a critical narrative that reflects on the cultural consequences of technological and economic systems. Rather than presenting technology as inherently liberating, the novel examines how market logic increasingly shapes personal identity, social relationships, and human value. As Wodak and Meyer (2009) explains, textual production cannot be separated from the social position and ideological experiences of the author. Therefore, the representation of ambitious entrepreneurs, technologically enhanced bodies, and corporate institutions in *Beautiful Shining People* should be understood as a product of Grothaus's engagement with contemporary digital culture and techno-capitalist discourse.

Thus, the ideological power of the novel emerges not only from its narrative content but also from the socio-cultural context of its production. Grothaus's professional involvement with technology journalism and public discussions of innovation, entrepreneurship, and digital capitalism contributes to a narrative that critically explores neoliberal values.

Criticism of Neoliberal Society through Technological Progress and Human Isolation

Criticism of a society that produces loneliness despite technological progress emerges as one of the dominant social criticisms represented in *Beautiful Shining*



People. The novel portrays a highly advanced social environment where digital technology, artificial intelligence, and innovation have become central parts of everyday life. However, these developments do not guarantee emotional fulfillment or a sense of belonging. The protagonist is recognized for his technological skills and achievements, yet he continues to experience isolation and dissatisfaction. This condition reflects a social system that prioritizes efficiency, productivity, and technological development while paying less attention to human connection and emotional well-being. According to Brown (2015), neoliberalism extends market rationality into different spheres of life, encouraging individuals to organize their lives around efficiency, competition, and measurable outcomes. The novel uses the frame of human isolation to criticize the social consequences of these values.

It can be seen on this quotation “I’ve spent most days by myself, except when I’ve met with Sony’s people. But I’ll have no more meetings for several weeks. And at night, I feel silly going to a restaurant by myself, so I usually just grab some food from a 7-Eleven or Lawson’s and head back to the apartment to read or work on my app” (Grothaus, 2023, p. 38). The quotation shows that although the protagonist lives in a technologically connected society, he remains socially disconnected from others. Instead of seeking companionship, he returns to work and spends his time developing his application. This representation suggests that professional activity has gradually replaced meaningful social interaction in his daily life. The novel, therefore, presents loneliness not as a personal failure but as a condition produced by a society that values

productivity more than human relationships.

Fairclough (1995) argues that discourse can reveal the contradictions embedded within dominant social structures. In the novel, the discourse of progress and innovation is repeatedly accompanied by depictions of loneliness, uncertainty, and emotional vulnerability. While technological achievement is celebrated throughout society, the protagonist’s experiences expose its limitations in addressing fundamental human needs. Thus, the novel challenges the assumption that progress alone can create a meaningful life and emphasizes the continuing importance of belonging, empathy, and genuine human connection in contemporary society.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that *Beautiful Shining People* represents neoliberal ideology through linguistic patterns, character transformation, social relationships, and the techno-capitalist setting of the narrative. The findings reveal that values such as self-optimization, productivity, competitiveness, entrepreneurial selfhood, and individual responsibility are embedded in the construction of identity and social interaction. At the same time, the novel critiques neoliberal society through its portrayal of loneliness, emotional alienation, and the limitations of technological progress in fulfilling human needs.

Theoretically, this study demonstrates the usefulness of Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis framework for examining how contemporary literary texts construct, reproduce, and contest ideological meanings. However, this study is limited to a single novel and focuses primarily on neoliberal ideology through



Fairclough's CDA model. Future research may investigate other contemporary speculative fiction works, conduct comparative studies across different cultural contexts, or combine CDA with approaches such as posthumanism, digital capitalism, and biopolitical theory to provide a broader understanding of ideology in contemporary literature.

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