

**Agency and Consumerism: A Baudrillardian Study of  
Richard Powers' Selected Fiction**

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**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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**ENGLISH**

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## DECLARATION

I, hereby declare that the presented work in the thesis entitled *Agency and Consumerism: A Baudrillardian Study of Richard Powers' Selected Fiction* in fulfillment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) is the outcome of research work carried out by me under the supervision of Dr Balkar Singh, working as Professor in the Department of English, School of Liberal and Creative Arts of Lovely Professional University, Punjab, India. In keeping with general practice of reporting scientific observations, due acknowledgements have been made whenever work described here has been based on findings of other investigator. This work has not been submitted in part or full to any other University or Institute for the award of any degree.



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## CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the work reported in the Ph.D. thesis entitled : Agency and Consumerism: A Baudrillardian Study of Richard Powers' Selected Fiction , submitted in fulfillment of the requirement for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in the Department of English, School of Liberal and Creative Arts, Lovely Professional University, Punjab, India, is a research work carried by Anudeep Kaur , 41900061 is a bonafide record of her original work carried out under my supervision and that no part of the thesis has been submitted for any other degree, diploma or equivalent course.

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## Introduction

The thesis titled *Agency and Consumerism : A Baudrillardian Study of Richard Powers' selected fiction* attempts at analyzing four of Powers selected fictional works including *The Overstory* (2018), *Orfeo* (2014), *Generosity: An Enhancement* (2009) and *The Echo Maker* (2006). The texts are analyzed with special reference to Richard Powers insights, thoughts and discussions about consumerism and technology. Powers novels give an insight to understand how consumerism, usage of technology and gadgets reconfigures human relations with nature and more importantly how nature has been getting used as an object only. Using Jean Baudrillard's philosophy of the agency and consumer society, thesis discusses the various aspects of agency and consumerism in respect to its various elements in the novels of Richard Powers. Further, the various consumerism elements relate to the postmodern conditions, which pose a potential threat to nature and concludes with the strategies to reclaim the empathic relationship with nature. Indeed, Baudrillard discusses consumerism as a way of attaining more and more satisfaction of needs and argued that it is the virtual totality of all objects and messages.

Consumerism integrates and impacts every consumer's relationship with others and with the natural world. The aim of the thesis is to present the prevalence of consumerism in relation to nature and discuss the impact of agency and consumerism on human relationship with the environment. In addition, nature nowadays is commodified and gets recycled through codes and signs in consumer society. Baudrillard's theory of agency and consumerism carries relevance because it

provides an insight and further perspective into human's relation with products, gadgets and services as well as human's relation with nature which are clearly analyzed with Richard Powers novels.

Indeed, similar to how the nine protagonists in the novel *The Overstory* presents an insight into the world of consumerism of logging industries and as agency how the human choices and acts makes an impact and build the harmonious relationship with nature. All the protagonists try to work together to save mother N in the novel. Using Baudrillard's theory of consumerism, thesis examines and discusses the human relationship with nature under the influence of consumerist approach. Besides, the significant insights provided by various intellectuals pertinent to the study shall form the foundation of the theoretical framework of the study. Moreover, the format of the study shall be completely based on MLA 9<sup>th</sup> edition.

The research work endeavours at achieving the following main objectives:

1. To trace the genesis of the concepts of agency and consumerism.
2. To apply Jean Baudrillard's concepts of consumerism and agency on the selected works of Richard Powers.
3. To explore nature's kinship with humans as depicted in Richard Powers works.

In order to achieve the above-mentioned objectives, the thesis is divided into five chapters followed by a conclusion. The first chapter titled '*Making of the Author, Theory and the Theorist*' focuses on the biographical history and account of Richard Powers while emphasizing the four novels selected for the undertaken research work. A review of the literature along with the research gap is also covered in this chapter.



The second chapter titled '*Consumerism, Reification and Symbolic Exchange*' discusses and provides an insight into the approach of consumerism, reification and symbolic exchange in reference to Richard Powers' novels. Further, the chapter discusses the important concepts used in the theoretical framework of the study in reference to Baudrillard theory. In addition to it, various significant theorists and their observations that have been considerably influential upon Richard Powers thoughts and ideas are also enumerated in this chapter. In today's world, consumerism has become an imposed duty, an obligation to perform. The consumers associate their identity with the product or thing they choose or buy and get dominated by objects. Further gets reified due to the presence of simulated images. Individuals neither see nor realize their true needs. Furthermore, the chapter throws light upon how humans as agencies make their choices to drive pleasures from expenditure and becomes a part of symbolic exchange. More focus is diverted to the must haves and consumers are linked to the commodities on the symbolic value of an object that constitutes their status. The chapter through the analysis of Powers novels bring forth that there is a need that man should understand and free him or her from the consumerist oriented patterns to improve the world.

The third chapter titled '*The Kinship between Human and Nature*' analyses the deeper inner connection of relations of humans with nature and with the other living world. The chapter lays emphasis upon that it is not only the relationship of human with human, but also about the relationship of humans with nature which carries relevance. However, the human's connection with nature is getting diminish day by day under the cover of simulated objects in the hyperreal world of today. The chapter put forward the discussion point that there is a need to reexamine the affinity

between humans and nature. In the consumer world, consumers are inclined more towards products and objects and lose the ability to feel connected with nature. There is a denial of human responsibilities towards nature. Further, excessive consumptive behavior becomes one of the principal causes of ecological disturbances.

The fourth chapter titled '*Simulation and Hyperreality*' discusses the aspects of simulation and hyperreality in relation to Baudrillard theory in the selected novels of Richard Powers. Thesis analyzed that with the advancement of technology, humans are getting engrossed in simulated things, which are far away from reality. Moreover, the individuals are getting enslaved to progress and growth on the basis of superfluous consumption of products and services. In the post-modern world, the nature is groomed and modified according to the needs of humans. Virtual video games have become more real and more competitive computer games are prevalent in the society which gives virtual experiences intense with nature, gives ample freedom to program and simulate the experience in the robust manner. In addition to it, the chapter further discusses the role of mass media and gadgets in the consumer society, as gadgets as an electronic device has become the emblem of consumer society. Images and information carry more importance through the medium of mass media which describes the condition of hyperreality in day-to-day life. Products and objects in the consumer world not only simulate the social essence like prestige and status but also generate the demands of more haves. Consumers as agency make a choice to choose signs to enjoy the pleasure of products and services.

The fifth chapter entitled '*Agency, Nature and Culture*' discusses and analyses the crucial points of the role of agency as sign value and code. In the world

of goods and objects, consumers make their choices and perform the actions which define their agency. Advertisement as a medium of mass media agency allures the consumers to choose, to act and to be a part of consumerism. Trees as nature also possess noteworthy form of active agency that contributes to serve mankind. Nature has become a sign to serve and satisfy the needs of humans. Through the advancement and development of digital technologies, nature is getting subjugated to human control. However, the affluence and the possession of products and objects through technical progress also led to environmental nuisances. Further in the chapter, it has been discussed that nature has been groomed and tailored according to the needs of the human's. On the other hand, the excessive consumption of things leads to waste, which is an operational principle of consumer society. Through artificial and hyperreal mediated images, humans are trying to master the nature. In the post-modern consumer world of today, nature is perceived and getting consumed as decorative culture. The products and objects related to bodily devotion have become a cultural object in the consumer society. In addition to this, corporeal recycling has become the culture of consumer society.

## Chapter One

### Making of the Author, Theory and the Theorist

Richard Powers is an American novelist known for his multiple narrative forms and refined creation of diverse field of knowledge. He is born in Evanston, Illinois, The United States on June 18, 1957. His novels explore the impact of advanced science and technology through the arena of literature. Literature is the mirror of society. He won Pulitzer Prize 2019 for Fiction for his novel *The Overstory*. Further, Powers also won the 2006 National Book Award for his novel *The Echo Maker*. Powers has earned several awards in the due course of his career, including a MacArthur Fellowship. Powers has written twelve novels and has taught at the University of Illinois and Stanford University. Richard Powers writes crucial ideas for the various characters who communicate the incredible enterprise with wit and intellect. Powers characters are extraordinarily communicative, considerate and their dialogues are rich with experiences of today's world. Powers novels demonstrate the boldness in structuring the narratives with a keen depiction of love for nature, along with the comprehensive expertise of deep knowledge. Powers portray an extensive use of referents taken from high and low culture of society using the images of contemporary science. His novels depict his profound interest in extensive language; that explicitly shows the imperious of tale telling which further reflects the prominent elements of post- modern fiction.

Richard Powers is known as the novelist of ideas. Powers novels are known for their analytical considerations of the major questions facing modern society,

especially as they include the human impressions of science and technology. Powers describes the Silicon Valley as an ideal mid-spot from which to appreciate both human inventiveness and natural productiveness.

Powers novels are reflexive and have stylistic approach to show the captivating images of the characters in the natural world of flora and fauna. The various characters in the Powers novels portray the picture away from the conventional world of customs and bring forth the reality of the advanced technical world of today. Richard Powers said, "I've tried to approach each book as an experiment in finding the style that best supports and exemplifies a particular story's themes"(16).

Flanders calls Powers as, "The greatest author you have never heard of is nowadays a critically acclaimed author"(23). Powers considers the novel as a supreme connection machine and, by manner of his characters, he often ventures into the territory of the advanced technology. In his novels, he includes subsequently the historical events and music, additionally the topics like modern genetics, computer science, artificial intelligence, and neurology. Richard Powers presents varied themes and diversified topics which cover the multitude of areas and discover the effects of modern science and technology in the field of literature. He presents an aerial view representing the humanity as one element in the big complex universe and his kinship with the objects of nature.

Richard Powers has published twelve novels. The novels are : *Three Farmers on Their Way to a Dance*(1985), *Prisoner's Dilemma* (1988), *The Gold Bug Variations* (1991), *Operation Wandering Soul* (1993), *Galatea 2.2* (1995),

*Gain*(1998), *Plowing the Dark*(2000), *The Time of Our Singing* (2002), *The Echo Maker*(2006), *Generosity* (2009), *Orfeo* (2014), *The Overstory* (2018)

Powers was named a MacArthur Fellow in 1989. He received a Lannan Literary Award in 1999. Further, he got W. H Smith Literary Award, 2004 (Great Britain), National Book Award, 2006 for the novel *The Echo Maker*, 2014 Man Booker Prize (longlist), 2014 California Books Award Silver Medal Fiction winner for *Orfeo*, 2018 Man Booker Prize (shortlist) and 2019 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction *The Overstory*.

Richard Powers is critically admired and praised contemporary novelist in literary fiction. His themes include neuroscience, deforestation, nature of trees, computers, artificial intelligence, mind and self, genetics and musicology. His novels deal with scientific and natural themes like artificial intelligence in *Galatea 2.2*, musical and genetic recombination in *The Gold Bug Variations*. *Galatea 2.2* extends a deeply philosophical discussion about the nature of artificial intelligence, but it's also an almost shy restating of Pygmalion. *Gain* presents the distinctions of a history of the fabrication of soap with a woman dying from a cancer produced by the chemicals involved.

*The Time of Our Singing* was an inclusive epic of race in America covered in an investigation into the workings of vocal presentation. Richard Powers award winning novel *The Echo Maker* explores the theme of mind and self, identity and love. In the novel, Mark grows greater paranoia and gets affected by his environment and people around him. It can be easily seen through the process of healing which the main character of the novel undergoes. Further, Mark also suffers

from identity crisis, as he is unable to comprehend his position in society and in the world. This mental strain causes the breakdown of his mind.

Another character, Dr. Weber also faces the same identity crisis as a husband and a respected neurologist. One's identity plays a vital role in one's life. Moreover, the elements of love also have a critical role to play in one's life. Unconditional and passionate love is shown through the relationship of Mark and Karin in the novel.

The novel *Orfeo* denotes the struggle to settle the past and the future. The story of the protagonist Peter Else, avant-garde musician trapped between legacy and innovation. The work exhibits the established American fear of culture and culture innovation against the rise of culture of fear. Peter, the main character in the novel binds himself to the art of challenge, uncertainty and subversion and run smacks into a society of uncertainty. He attempts to keep himself safe from the outside as well as inside strangeness. The novel revolves around what art can presents and what art should do and should not be acceptable to pursue in the pursuit of re-enchantment. Peter ends up on a sad impression due to a lasting aspiration to place music in rare places and to make music in unusual ways. The various questions arise like fear, safety, danger, place of art in the story which brings a lot of attention in the contemporary era of technology.

The novel *The Overstory* deals with many scientific observations and the main theme talks about the menace of deforestation to the planet earth as well as for the mankind. The story revolves around the main nine protagonists who becomes the part of a group of environmentalist and protester to save trees, to save the environment which depicts the human psyche as a whole. In the narrative, the motif

of the organization psychology is also one of the essential themes which further shows that how the organization gets affected by the deforestation that remain in spite of their diligent efforts.

The author through his writing wishes to convey that human can do numerous things to change the environment, work to change the natural world, to replant and rebuild and to change the heart and mind of the mankind. The trees and human can coexist if they develop a feeling of mutualism. Another important theme is the nature of trees. Trees socialize, communicate, live and are familiar like human beings. The need of an hour for humanbeings is to comprehend the trees, their abilities, and their importance for sustainable future. Humans are capable of bringing change but it takes time to bring a noble change. Humans need to understand the time and the impact of environment in future. Humans are incapable to comprehend their choices and their impact on their future. The author wishes everyone to experience time for every creature. Richard Powers through his novel exhibit the idea of death as a chance for revival and renewal. Humans are unable to comprehend the premature and enforced death of trees and environment. On April 2018, Powers states in one of his interviews, “Everything dies. The best way to think about individual death, he suggests, is not annihilation; rather, it is a return to a way of existing that ultimately lives with the world, not against it” (128).

The selected works for the study are: *The Overstory*, *Orfeo*, *Generosity: An Enhancement*, *The Echo Maker*.

To understand and apply the concepts of consumerism and agency on the selected fiction of Richard Powers, Jean Baudrillard’s works are considered.



Baudrillard is an intelligent and influential thinker. His work is experimental for social and cultural theory. The Consumer Society mirrors modern society as a growth society that is very closely knit with an affluent society. When there is a growth in society, there is a rise in wealth and poverty simultaneously. Baudrillard asserts, "The affluent society is the opposite of the growth society. There is a mark of Marx ideas on the commodities use-value and exchange- value" (37).

Baudrillard compares the production and consumption and how the production is granted more priority over consumption. More than use-value and exchange- value, there is a trend of monopolization in the world of production as well as in the world of consumption. Consumption is enforced as enjoyment as duty on the social beings, where the social beings are supposed to be skilled, educated and consumed. This idea of socialization is emphasized by Baudrillard. Gane has identified Baudrillard's approach to culture as, "Baudrillard remains in many senses on the ground of Marxian theory, giving more weight to economic and material processes in cultural analysis than other Marxists of this period"(89). In order to gain the central form the exchange value starts governing the exchange of goods and markets for the quantitative calculation of values. There comes a mode of analyzing the production and more than production, it is a consumption which initiates to govern the society. For Baudrillard, the economy is a fragment of the system of validation and imitation to control the society. By the passage of time, things become more manipulative and unproductive in production and there comes a gap in the line of argument for a better procedure of organization of production and exchange. Baudrillard argues, "Marxism does not challenge the rationality of the importance of

production in leading society and making progress and in perplexing the central role of production and productivity” (284).

Baudrillard states his point by writing that, “In addition to use and exchange value, there is also sign value, whereby commodities are valued by the way that they confer prestige and signify social status and power” (114).

Baudrillard affirms, “Use values themselves are challenging in that they are created through exchange value and a rationalized system of needs and objects that integrate individuals into the capitalist social order” (141).

Profoundly Baudrillard gets influenced by the striking ideas of Saussure, Durkheim and Freud and keep exploring Marxian theory of production in the light of the structuralist and circulation of signs. He develops and portrays his analytical stance towards society. Baudrillard works with reasons that there is a split between modernity and post modernity, further that split is marked and widened by cyber culture. The cyber culture works with mass media and tries to pester and make the consumers its victim in a long way. Baudrillard finds Marx’s economic philosophy is not able to portray the life of the consumer in true light.

In *The Mirror of Production* (1973), Baudrillard argues about his ideas of Marxism by portraying the different dimension of ideas that does not work critically as a mode of production. Baudrillard states about Marxism as, “A repressive simulation of capitalism and therefore incompetent of describing life before and after the era of production and of presenting an unaffected radical alternative” (263). Baudrillard analyzes consumer society as a functional society. He argues that

redundant consumption makes people think that wasteful and superfluous consumption exists in society.

Further, in the consumer society book, Baudrillard elucidates the study of signs and structural codes. Language is used as a tool to communicate with one another. When consumption is used as a language, we are in the position to use it as a sign, signifier and a code. Therefore, the use-value and exchange values, consumables become sign-values. As what we consume is sign first. Baudrillard asserts, "Commodities are defined by what they signify and their relationship to the whole system of consumerism and signs" (133).

The commodities are interlinked with each other in their nature which produces the consumer society. The society obtains salvation in the consumption of objects which provides logical satisfaction to the people and further promotes the structure of modern growth society. Baudrillard defines consumption as, "Collective behaviour, something enforced, a morality, an institution and a whole system of values" (4). The consumption rather than enjoyment is a duty to perform and oblige. The consumers consume the products not only for enjoyment and to fulfill the needs only. The consumers take it as a duty to consume the products for the sake of buying it. Baudrillard writes about consumption as, "Not merely a frenzy of buying a profusion of commodities, a function of enjoyment, an individual function, liberating of needs: fulfilling of the self, affluence, or the consumption of objects" (15).

Baudrillard explains an object with a semiotic analysis which is an analysis of the meaning of the object. Baudrillard asserts, "An object has a sign-value. Marx evaluates object based on the utility, value and durability i.e. emphasis

on use-value, where Baudrillard argues that value is based on sign or simulation. Thus, he distinguishes between a metallurgic and semiurgic form of society”(373). Baudrillard talks about the affluent society in the consumer society which is opposite to the growth society. He critically defines Galbraith’s ideas about the wealth and affluence in the society. However, growth produces the wealth and poverty in the society simultaneously which is prevalent due to the prevailing system of consumerism. Baudrillard talks about collateral between production and consumption whereas production of things as surplus products leads to the consumption for the welfare of the community. Various objects lead to the new crisis, contradictions and revolutionary changes in the realm of consumerism.

Another classical theorist Emile Durkheim has also a profound impact on the Baudrillard’s work. The theorist refers the consumption as a collective behavior in the whole system of value in the society where consumption works as a duty rather than as an enjoyment. In society, the consumers must be trained to learn to consume the objects. Further, Baudrillard ponders over the function of waste in the consumer society. He argues that the superfluous and waste consumption persist in the society which allows people to consume and the objects of production have been replaced by the paragon of consumption.

Baudrillard in the consumer society refers the conspicuous consumption, where the consumers in the society are spending lavishly on the commodities and products for the status and prestige in the society. In post-modern era, the elite class differentiate themselves from the middle class by engaging themselves in the conspicuous consumption and further utilizing their leisure time in consuming the

inanimate things like watching advertisements and series to attain prestige for themselves in the society. Baudrillard claims:

Commodities are no longer defined by their use, but rather by what they signify. And they signify is defined not by what they do, but by their relationship to the entire system of commodities and signs. (7)

Like language, consumption has also become the medium to communicate with one another in the society, where consumable objects have attained the position of sign value. Baudrillard talks about the social logic of consumption which do not focus not only on the use value of products and objects, but also on the production and consumption of social signifiers. What the people consume is signs rather than the product itself. The consumers must understand the system of consumption in order to comprehend what to consume. The objects in the society are no longer established by their use value but by the signs and images they signify and their relationship to the whole system of signs and objects. The consumers are unable to get satisfaction from the objects and their signs due to the indefinite range of difference available in the world. Baudrillard's ideas talk about the continuous dissatisfaction of consumers as people seek the consumption of the indifferent objects to stand different from the rest of the world. The society itself produces the wealth and poverty, satisfaction and dissatisfaction, progress, growth and disturbances. It is the system which is to be blamed rather than the capitalist who obeys the rule of consumption.

The upper class gets training to have mastery over the code and signs. It is the middle and lower classes of the society who fetish objects and are true consumers who find salvation and enlightenment in the consumption of products. Baudrillard focuses

on the social logic of differentiation which works on the consumption structure of the modern society. Firat, Aytakin, et al. quote Baudrillard in his work and claims:

Commodities are not merely characterized by use-value and exchange value, as in Marx's theory of the commodity, but also in sign-value - the expression and mark of style, prestige, luxury, power, and so on - that becomes an increasingly important part of the commodity and consumption. Just like words take meaning in a system of language, consumer society uses a system of signs to signify prestige and status (194)

In everyday life, the benefits of consumption are experienced as a miracle by people of society. The goods which are consumed by everyone are considered as a gift from nature. The society has developed faith in consumption to inherit the goods and the right to keep the things in abundance. This myth takes the common man away from the realities of consumption world. Consumers remain busy in their expenditure. On the other hand, it also includes expenditure by the government and the corporate. The purpose of government expenditure is to lessen the inequality of the distribution of resources. The increasing demand for the commodities brings forth the problems of the environment too. Due to the industry development and technological advancements there comes a change in the structure of consumption. The advancement has brought the environmental problems along with it in the form of nature destructor.

The excess of technical growth produces the excess of expenditure which further increases the consumption. The number of cars, the petrol price, accidents occurs on road, the treatment contributes to the consumption and there comes a real

increase in the affluent society. However, the environment nuisances are growing at the same pace as affluence and growth. The growth of the society is always linked to the waste which is very harmful to our Nature Mother. The volumes of goods are produced and consumed and there is no limit of waste and redundant goods in the society that is prevalent today. The waste is related to the exploitation of natural resources as people consume objects like signs and discards the things due to the change in fashion.

Baudrillard in consumer society states, “It is wasteful, superfluous consumption that allows people and society to feel that they exist, that they are truly alive” (5). There is a need to review the vision of waste from the moral point of view as individuals and societies as a whole are under the influence of affluence society.

The individuals and societies have always wasted and misspent on the necessary things for the reason that in surplus consumption, the individuals not only exist but they are alive. There is a requirement to maintain the difference between the necessary and surplus. The production and consumption beyond needs can be called as waste. It is wastage which challenges the scarcity and on the other hand, signifies the abundance. In the consumer society, the increased volume of goods and quantities would be there for the well-being of all. The proposition says that all men are equal before need and the principle of satisfaction before the use-value of the objects; on the contrary, men are unequal before the exchange-value. The idealist statement states the growth as affluence and affluence as democracy.

Despite the unequal distribution of goods and objects, the problem of equality and inequality of resources is no longer prevalent. As growth is a function of inequality. The goods which were in abundance earlier are getting the luxurious

status now and are available only for the blessed ones. There comes a change in the social hierarchy. Knowledge and power have become the deficient possession of affluent societies. The objects have become less important as compared to the social marketing of space in the consumerism. In society, people discuss the right for education, health, beauty, knowledge and culture. There comes a disparity in the expenditure of people belonging to the different strata of society. Nature and clean air is the far end to save due to the increase in the consumption of objects as sign-value. There is the transformation of all-natural and moral values into the productive forms for the economic profit and to have social benefits. Consumption highlights the disparity among various things. The new institution has developed where the consumption has been compared to the education system. The preference and utility of the objects are governed by the purchasing power of the people belonging to the different strata of society.

The people those who have rational and logical thinking analyze the social logic of consumption. The people consume the objects not for the use-value, but as signs, which distinguishes them from the rest of the individuals and groups and refers to their group as social status. It is not only the order of differentiation which prevails in the society, however, but the constraint of relativity also plays a crucial role in the society. The persistent introduction of new goods and objects leads to more production and growth which further expands the consumption. The increase in income level promotes quality assurance. This stands true in the consumer society, “The more you earn, the more you want and better” (16). The needs of people depend upon the logic of social differentiation which leads to the contradiction with the



growth cycle, as it produces the goods and needs simultaneously, but does not produce them at the same time.

The people desire for the objects which are reasonable for them to achieve. By having the hope of various objects beyond their reach, internalize the norms and values of growth society. The man's needs are limitless and endless. In the affluent society, there is disequilibrium between the production of goods and the needs of man. The modern affluent society is being compared with the primitive society where people needs were limited and there was no exploitation of natural and economic resources to produce and consume a surplus. The sharing and consumption of everything and making no calculations and hoarding were the characteristics of primitive societies which are the true sign of affluent society. The change and revolution in the social relations and organization would bring the continuity of production and criticized the lack of resources among all.

In primitive societies, time is related to symbolic exchange as compared to the modern time in consumer society, where time is related to the leisure time which can be exchanged with money and there is an obligation on the consumer to spend leisure time in order to be different in the consumer society. Time has become one of the commodities in the consumer society which is rare and valuable and can be exchanged only with one thing i.e money. Time as compared to primitive society is considered as leisure time in modern era where one has the obligation to spend it. Leisure time has become the part and parcel of consumer's life which is proportionately related to the consumption of products, things and signs in comparison to time. Baudrillard finds the contrast between modern and primitive

society in terms of waste also. Waste is a festive ritual and an act of expenditure in primitive society as compared to modern wasteful consumption which is a compulsion. The transition from the primitive society to the modern time has brought lots of changes in the consumption of objects along with the human relations. Primitive societies are called as affluent societies as they trusted in the abundance of natural resources which is in contrast to the modern society where the scarcity and insufficiency is characterized due to monopolization of products and service. The transparent human relations in the primitive societies are the key of symbolic exchange with wealth.

The exchange of resources depends on the cordial relations of human in the primitive societies. On the contrary, the human relations in the modern world are based on differentiation and competition. The penury in the modern world is the result of differentiation and unquenchable thirst of humans. With the advancement of technology and innovations, the society has fallen into the shackle of luxurious penury, where there comes a change in the social relations. Baudrillard refers the concept of simulation in relation to nature in comparison to primitive and modern society. Nature in primitive society refers to the original thing as it is. However, in modern world, nature has been customized according to the needs of the human. The nature has been polished, groomed and has become an object in the consumer world. The sham objects offer the various signs and images which seem to be real but as a matter of fact, they do not represent the reality. They are just images, signs and code in the hyperreal world of products. The presence of kitsch in the modern world refers the abundance of images and signs but lacking the real significance of the products.

The products are the copies of real products which are related to the mass production of the objects in the consumer world. In modern world, simulation plays another important role through gadgets which affect the society. The gadget works without any practicality and the consumers are getting engrossed in the gadgets actually getting dominated by simulations. The consumers are just playing with the gadgets rather than using them without understanding the effects of simulation on the society as a whole.

Kitsch in the consumer market offers the products of aesthetics which are the copies of the original products. The gadgets and the copies of the products make a great impact on the society. The popularity of the products leads to the mass production of products in the market. Some products do not have the real reference; they just simulate the function of the objects without any real reference. There is abundance of artificial, useless and fake imitations of products available in the market.

The consumers do not recognize the real worth of products due to the availability of various simulations and the world gets dominated by the simulations. The consumers consume the products but they do not relate symbolically to the product due to the presence of simulations in the market. Baudrillard asserts:

What is being consumed in the consumer society is consumption itself. The last point is best exemplified by advertising. In watching or reading advertisements people are consuming them; they are consuming consumption. (15)

Advertisements also play a crucial role in presenting the simulation process of

objects in order to allure the consumers. The simulated human relations in the advertisement are seen by the consumers in the modern world which makes them obliged to buy that specific product. The consumers find themselves enclosed by the simulated human relations and emotions as described in the advertisement. These feelings and personal emotions are carefully arranged which is just a pretend thing. The humans become solicitous of others in the presence of unreal things in the modern society. People look towards other being with a pretended smile on face that is being taught to do like this in the consumer society. Furthermore, the body as a commodified object has been discussed in the book *The Consumer Society*. People are free to consume variety of products and varied services to embellish their bodies. Besides, the industrialist and capitalist are engaged in the maximum production of products related to human body.

People become narcissist when it comes to grace and adorn their bodies. The body care has become the priority of consumers. The body has attained an important part in the system of objects. People start doing psychological investment in their bodies as quoted fetish by Marxism. People start spending lavishly on the body by consuming various goods and services. Instead of seeking salvation and enlightenment through soul, people have started finding salvation through the service of body. Various body treatments, services and regimes related to body has already attained commercial status in the modern society.

Further, Jean Baudrillard points, "The proliferation of signs combined with the separation of the sign from the object leaves humans inhabiting a symbolic realm entirely of their own making, entailing an eclipse of the real"(232). Baudrillard's unique work analysis of consumer society explains the communication structures and

sign systems that prevail in the society. Consumers as a vital part of the consumer society feels attracted to the system of signs and images in the presence of abundant products and services. As McLaren and Leonardo state in their essay on Baudrillard:

People become functions of consumer society as they are motivated to purchase more and more objects to feel part of the social milieu. Consumerism has taken on a new form in which it has come to dominate our political life and our primary communicative apparatus through the proliferation of signs. Because production is alienating, we seek fulfillment in consumerism; yet consumerism itself, in turn, has become a deeply alienating experience. (9)

Baudrillard discusses about the commodities and a sign which plays a crucial role in the consumer society. He asserts “This is undoubtedly the most impoverished of languages, full of signification and empty of meaning. It is a language of sign”(93). In consumer society, here is a great transition from the production of goods and commodities to the production of signs, further it leads to the transition from the means of production to the means of consumption, or the simultaneous production of the commodity as sign and the sign as a commodity.

Peter McLaren and Zeus Leonardo describe, “The dynamic; domination no longer resides primarily in the control of the means of production. Rather, domination can be attributed more to control the means of consumption” (182).

Furthermore, consumer society is not determined by the requirements and load of consumers, but rather by extreme industrious competence. The consumer society doesn't deal only with the production but work for the consumption of the

objects. The system requires a mechanism to control the demand of the consumers which always rises under the influence of signs and images. Baudrillard writes, “To become an object of consumption, the object must become a sign. It is in this way that it becomes personalized and enters into a series, etc. it is never consumed in its materiality, but in its difference” (97).

For Baudrillard, as a result of the separation from real images, the consumers disappear in the hyperreal images. The supremacy of the code and the abundance of signs cover the copy of images that hides the real image. The image is controlling as what happens there is the loss of the real, the fading point of reality. Additionally, this dynamic is self-perpetuating, as signs must proliferate indefinitely in order to fulfill the absence of reality. For Baudrillard, men of wealth are no longer surrounded by other human beings, as they have been in the past, but by objects. Their daily exchange is no longer with their fellows, but rather, statistically as a function of some ascending curve, with the acquisition and manipulation of goods and messages. Baudrillard asserts:

People are becoming functional. We are living the period of the objects: that is, we live by their rhythm, according to their incessant cycles. Today, it is we who are observing their birth, fulfillment, and death; whereas in all previous civilizations, it was the object, instrument, and perennial monument that survived the generations of men. (41)

Baudrillard states, “Consumption and consumerism do not correspond to the notion of need, desire or pleasure, a confusion which occurs because the sign and object

have been separated and the sign has become a commodity to be consumed” (177). For Baudrillard, the products are not the objects of consumption but they are simply the objects of need and satisfaction. Yet consumerism does not satisfy needs, because needs cannot be satisfied. Baudrillard describes, “Consumption in terms of two acts, fulfillment or completion, the realization of intended use and reconciliation of inherent tension, in the sense of consummation and second cancellation or negation, to be used up, worn out, or eaten in the immense outer world of consumerism” (182).

The consumers desire to consume more and more without any limitation. Besides, consumption does not satisfy desire. The advertisement of products and objects at large scale arise the desire of the consumers in this world. The consumerism is associated with the lack of experience with deceptive dynamism of consumer society. Further, it leads to no satisfaction and make a profound impact in the society. The irrational demand for the excess leads to the more confusing state of buying; which further doesn't yield positive results in the society. Longing for the goods and objects make the consumers attract towards the consumption of products to a great extent. Miles quotes the Baudrillard idea:

Human beings have certain needs which have to be satisfied through consumption is a myth in as much as human beings are never actually satisfied and thus such needs are never actually fulfilled. (26)

For Baudrillard, consumers never show a sense of gratification and always remain dissatisfied due to the prevalence of abundance of products and objects. Advertisement through mass media work as a collective force; which further function as the main tool for increasing the consumption. Baudrillard asserts, “The code is

totalitarian, no one escapes it, our flights do not negate the fact that each day we participate in its collective elaboration. The code comes to dominate us, to enchain us by imposing a coherent and collective vision, like an almost inseparable totality” (366). The prevalence of numerous products, objects and services brings complex choices for the consumers to choose. The consumers under the influence of code lost the capability of thinking from critical perspective and being unable to crack the code, get into the sticking need of consuming the code every time.

Code becomes a crucial part of the consumer society and furthermore, through code it becomes vital to maintain the order and the proliferation of products which moreover becomes an integral part to maintain and sustain the social order. The consumer society works through commercial forces which bind the various components together through signs and images.

Baudrillard defines consumption in his first two main studies, *The System of Objects* (1968) and *The Consumer Society* (1970). He argues, “The place of consumption in the new consumer society is everyday life. Social life is mediated and radically alienated by a controlled logic of merchandise in which consumption has nothing to do with principles of reality and the satisfaction of needs” (482).

Baudrillard’s vital assertion is that signs rein the objects and the value of the signs is getting fixed by the cultural code. The main idea in the society is to display the signs and in addition the signs own relation with other signs which ultimately gets consumed in the society.

In society, the signs of differentiation gets utilized and accomplished personally by integrating the consumers into the complex system of codes and signs.



The consumerism comes as a result of the advancement of technology along with the personal interest. Various personal and professional desires start overflowing in the consumer market. Mass media takes a central position in the consumer society which further exaggerates the demands of various products and objects. Advertisements as a strong medium of mass media start convincing consumers to do more consumption in the name of a duty towards self. Some theorists praised the new developments as being beneficial for humanity; some commended capitalism as the end of man's search for progress; others like Baudrillard saw the overarching socio-economic structures as authoritarian and totalitarian and individuals as stranded and ideologically controlled. In *The Consumer Society*, Baudrillard asserts:

“Our society thinks itself and speaks itself as a consumer society. As much as it consumes anything, it consumes itself as consumer society, as idea. Advertising is the triumphal paean to that idea” (193)

Further, consumption works as a language through which humans communicate and interact with one another through signs and symbols. In consumerism, the things are known for what they signify rather than for their use. The products and commodities are signified by their signs. The people consume the objects as signs which represent the signs of prosperity, joy, affluence and happiness. The products have become the symbol of exchange value. The products get exchanged as compared to the other products not in relation to the utility of the product but according to the exchange value of the product.

Due to this shifting of exchange value to the sign value, the product becomes the product of simulation. In this shift, the product loses the real meaning of the

product and becomes the sign or code only. Hence, in this system of consumerism, the object plays only a role of sign which is very far from the real and all these signs make the simulation possible. The association of the objects as signs and objects as fetish play a vital role in the global world of consumption. This association of objects as code and fetish leads to the highest level of simulation where the people are consuming the products with great enthusiasm in the society of consumption.

The products fascinate the consumers with the variety of signs and codes and take them away from the reality of the product itself. The consumers become an agency to consume the maximum products based on the exchange value rather than on the basis of utility. The products are the signs which are there for the consumer to consume and have no real meaning. The people consume the products based on the images which have no relation to the reality. The consumer self gets associated with the signs in the hyperreal world of simulacra, a hyperreal self which is not based on the real physical self. The signs have become part and parcel of the new self which is completely alienated from the real self. The product and the consumer are the part of the simulated world where in they are evolving at speed with the technology. This has an impact on the environment which is taking the world towards the dangerous and traumatic experience. The technology through the medium of products, signs and images blur the distinction between a real self and second self. Baudrillard talks about the erosion of real identity where the consumer is unable to isolate from the reality due to the presence of images and signs in the post-modern world.

The advancement of technology in this world further increases the gap

between what is real and what is merely perceived in this hyper world of advancement. The image of self is distorted due to the second self in the world of social media. Silviana states by quoting Baudrillard:

Consumption is radicalized into consumption of sign. The consumption society is no longer bound to a morality and habit they once held, the community lives in new culture where they see the existence from the aspect how many signs they can consume. In this kind of society, consumption is no longer seen as an activity to consume the object but as systematic action to manipulate the object (43).

Consumption in the society is not bound to habit and the morality of the society which prevails in the society earlier. Consumption is linked to the aspect of consuming the objects as signs and further manipulating the objects following the systematic procedure of what is being produced. Baudrillard argues that the society has entered the era of post modernism through industrial revolution in the theory of Consumer Society. In the period of simulation, there is no difference between the real and fantasy. The period looks satisfactory through the realm of advertisement, news and television.

There remains no difference between the true and false, between the fact and image and between the varied simulated things due to the consumption of signs. The signs can-not separated the objects into real and false. Everything has become the part of the reality in this world. The reality of life gets dominated by the signs in the consumer world. Signs in real term control the reality which is free of the truth of

reality itself. Consumption in this world is related to the systematic and orderly ownership of the signs of the object. The objects are not known only for their usefulness but have more value as an exchange object and as a sign of the object in the consumer world. The consumption of the objects is not related to what do consumers perceive, it is actually related to the manifestation of signs as objects using the expressions of luxury, status and prestige. In the consumer world, the consumption of the objects depends upon the satisfaction which a consumer derives from the objects. According to Baudrillard, the society is based on the rationality of hedonism, where the consumers enjoy the pleasures of life through the consumption of various objects in life. The consumers perform various activities to enjoy the pleasures of affluent society by buying goods and commodities which they consider for the pursuit of happiness in the society which is influenced by the economic and cultural factors also. Baudrillard refers consumption as, “A profusion of commodities, a function of enjoyment, an individual function, liberating of needs: fulfilling of the self, affluence” (16). Consumption is not only for enjoyment or to find satisfaction in the usage of products and fulfillment of desires, but also about the system of signs which works in the consumption world. The system itself forces the individuals in the vicious shackle of consumption of products and this consumption system has become one of the ways to do communication among others. The consumption theory makes people consider feeling that they are wealthy and prosperous. In the modern era of products which people consume not only related to their need satisfaction but also leads to the consumption of human relationships. Eventually, whatever is consumed by people in the society is

consumption. Baudrillard also gives reference about the virtual consumption along with the consumption of goods and services in the modern world. Therefore, consumption has become a part and parcel of man's life. Everything whatever a man is consuming is a consumer object. Baudrillard describes consumption as phenomenal and enchanted world. The people consume signs in their own terms as they consume different objects scrupulously. The society has become an affluent society not only because of compulsory consumption but also due to compulsory leisure. Man in the society is not only surrounded by other beings but also by the abundant objects in the modern affluent world. In post-modern era, the objects come and vanish as compared to the primitive societies, where objects outlived the generations and human beings grow, become mature and die. People enjoy the miraculous happiness by getting engaged in the system of signs in the affluent society. The products used by people every day are regarded as blessings or miracles. Moreover, the miraculous consumption has become blessing for undeveloped countries by getting help from the developed ones. Moreover, the faith in the consuming is rising day by day in the society. People are not only consuming the products in abundance but also consider it their right to consume.

In modern society, with the advancement of technology, the society is getting enslaved to progress and growth on the basis of superfluous consumption. The society of production gets entangled with the signs which get manipulated in the consumer society. The increasing possession of products and services in the affluent society leads to the environmental disturbances. These environmental disturbances are the result of technical progress and commercial development. The advent of

technology has brought along the degradation of environment through the various activities which lead to severe problem of pollution like water, air and noise pollution. It further leads to the increase in psychological problems of emotional imbalance and put a strong impact on human relations.

Agency denotes the manifestation of the character's capacity to make purposeful choices. It is essential for a character to have agency, the character has to have a choice to make. Agency talks about the ability or capacity of the character in the fiction to make his/her choices. It allows the character to choose between right and wrong based on the circumstances and leads to the moral consequences of his/her actions. The association between the characters action and the impact of the action plays the role of a marker for the sense of responsibility.

It is not only about whether someone actually practices their ability and definitely not whether the outcomes are what the person selected, desired or anticipated. Agency is universally in all kinds of fiction from different perspectives. There are references about individuals who made good or bad choices in the past and then suffer the consequences of those choices. In fiction, the characters have choices and generally the supremacy to choose among them, in other words, they have agency. It is vexing when the protagonists in fiction don't execute his/her agency. The characters reject to utilize his/her agencies which act as a turning point in the novel. Agency is the choice and ability to live or act in a well-defined world. In fiction, we look at a definite character in a novel and comprehend his/her capacity to prefer choices, act generously and control the individual lives within the novel. The

character is intelligent to participate socially, take action on chosen things and have control over his/ her own life.

Agency can be understood from the author's as well as reader's perspective. In every fiction, there is a symbolism, theme or experience that the author always wishes to convey. However, reading is very personal. Every reader can take his/her own lesson from fiction reading. This can be stated as the agency of the reader. The liberty, the choice and the capability to take away from a book whatever may have been learned. The author always has a desire to communicate a particular message, but it's eventually the readers understanding and what they take from the novel. The choice to understand and grasp literature in the readers own way is known as agency.

Baudrillard emphasizes the association between symbolic systems of signification and agency for social transformation. According to Baudrillard, human always consume the object, manipulates the objects as signs which distinguish the one object from the other. The consumption has taken over the ways of thinking away from the reality due to the exchange of values and advertisement of objects. Baudrillard writes, "Our society thinks itself and speaks itself as a consumer society. As much as it consumes anything, it consumes itself as consumer society as idea" (33). Baudrillard emphasized the control of the symbolic system or code. According to Baudrillard, "The consumer practices his unique behaviour as freedom, as aspiration and as choice. His experience is not being forced to be different and to obey a code" (43). Baudrillard in his work in the beginning writes about the kind of labour through the manipulation and portrayal of signs exist in the consumer society for the benefit of various products and objects, which further assist the products to

get differentiation from others in the process of consumption. In his initial writings, Baudrillard reflects the customary events which fascinates the various people in the consumer society and the customs that the world of goods are assuming carries different and new significance all the way through the agency of sign value and the code, which were earlier was the fragment of the world of things, the system of objects. Man exists in a postmodern society which is influenced by the materialist things like fashion and lifestyle. Baudrillard's views emphasizes on the society's outcome and impact on man. It is well-known that society and man affects and enlightens each other. The mentioned agencies in *The Consumer Society* are Mythological Agency, Collective Agency, Repressive Agency and Alienating Agency. Humans develop faith in consumption and the generations do not merely inherit the good but they got the right to consume the objects in abundance. The abundance has become a banal which remains constantly knowledgeable as a miracle, insofar as it does not appear to be rather created and extracted, to some extent won after a historical and social effort, but rather bestowed by a benevolent mythological agency it leads to the right to use of technology, which further leads to the progress and growth. The society is not objectively and decisively a society of production, it is based on the political and economic strategy.

It relates to the order of consumption which indicate towards the manipulation of signs. The elementary phases of the modern society come in the reasoning of significance, where the analysis and interpretation of symbolic units and codes become compulsory. The predicament of the implications of the code fabricates the integral point from the historical view point. Additionally the logical



analysis and reasoning of augmented reality in its continuation of the process further take it to the new horizons. There comes the combination of the various forces of the power , where both the parties , one and the other represent themselves with the accurate vision. There is commendable synthesis of knowledge and technology, where human are being automated by means of a collective agency.

Baudrillard writes, “The computerized medium is just a technical embodiment of the combined medium, of that system of 'lowest common culture' signals which administers the contribution of all in each and the same system” (522). Identities emerge and movements ensue because collectives consciously coordinate action and cooperate and compete in the technical world. The collective agency comprises a sensible group as agent. Further, collective agency is designed in a moral space. A combined follows the liberty to be for the reason that frames the collective’s identity shows their presence as right and good. Baudrillard argues:

We produce, maintain, modify and enhance our bodies as signs. Bodies are formed and enhanced to signify health, fitness, sexiness, youthfulness. These things are qualities or attributes of signs, not of a supposed reality of the body. More generally, proficient associates of the consumer society are obligatory to signify fashion capacity to look fashionable. (93)

The female body is exposed to this process of well-ordered or controlled liberation. The body is an object of salvation and is imperiled to sacrificial practices in the consumer society. The sacrifices make to the body are proportionate to the time, money and energy spend on it. Baudrillard discusses, “A spirit of moral terrorism directs the body, which is exposed to be liberated. The body must be put on

a diet, must be exercised, and must enjoyed eight glasses of water and five portions of fresh fruit or vegetables each day”(563). When the person does not look after and perform the required duties for self and tries to punish himself always get sick, which further leads to the complication by looking old and aged. People start blaming themselves for looking unpleasant and dies early due to the unpleasant feeling their heart and mind.

As maleficent and repressive agency, human does not repress he body and its sexual desires. In the consumer society, the human does not allow themselves to repress their bodies. Sexuality, stopped to exist as a factor of cohesion and shared delight, becomes an individual turmoil for profit. Every person gets obsessed with it and in that way become isolated from others. Baudrillard writes, “It is the individual agency of repression, internalized censorship, which punishes this sexual liberation. In postmodern life, the idea of individual agency, focused on a self with the ability to efficiently act upon the world works through signs and codes” (578).

According to Baudrillard, there is no transcendence in specific mode of consumption any more, not even the fetishistic transcendence of the commodity. There is merely immanence in the arrangement of signs. Baudrillard writes:

There is not any mirror or looking-glass in the modern world in which the human being would be opposed with his image for enhanced or for inferior; there is only the window, at the site of consumption, in which the individual no longer creates his own reflection, but is fascinated in the contemplation of multiple signs/ objects, is engrossed into the order of signifiers of social status, etc. He is not reflected in that order,

but captivated and eliminated. (698)

According to Baudrillard, “The subject of consumption is the order of signs. Baudrillard positioned the situation as the child kissing his image in the mirror before going to bed: he doesn't entirely mistake the image for himself, since he has already recognized it. Nor is it an alien double in which he is reflected: he plays with it, somewhere between sameness and otherness”(417). Amid signs there is no disagreement, in a sense, there is no special opposition between the child and his image.

The consumer involvement in the game by his own choice defines himself as different models or, in other words, through his combinatorial involvement in that game. The consumption plays a lucid role and that the reasoned aspect of spending more has brought the tragic dimension of identity. With the rise of consumerism, the society is gradually aiming on consuming goods and services to enterprise the economies of the world. Individuals get affected by consumerism in number of ways like psychologically, spiritually, in a way it erodes the spiritual connection of humans with nature by giving more importance to the consumption of goods and services. Consumerism threatens to abolish the favorable connection between humans and nature. Nature has been rapidly consumed by human beings, which leads to the lessening of natural resources and dilapidation of environment.

## **Review of Literature**

Richard Powers as one of the successful and famous American contemporary writers explores the impact of crucial factors like ecological environment, artificial

intelligence, virtual reality, technology and culture on the society by utilizing his rich knowledge about neuro science, gene engineering etc through his novels. Powers in his novels explores the relationship between human and human and human and nature. Powers bring forth the crucial discussion about the impact of over usage of science and technology on environment. Powers through his works not only presents his acumen about the understanding of the complexities of science and technology, but also makes the readers to think about the moral and ethical dilemmas of the same. A series of recent studies has shown that *The Overstory* is an endeavor to bring forth the importance of human relation with the natural world. The modern era is an era that is dispensed with lots of superstitious and pre- scientific things. The author writes artistically about human represents non-human nature.

Nature is not passive to human mastery, but instead holds its own species form of communication and consciousness. The human has shown the cruelty towards the nature and ignored the non-human intelligence. The task is to awaken the humans to see the agency of non- human nature. There is a need to recognize the non-human nature as protagonist in the story of their own life. Shannon describes the word, "Animism derived from Latin word anima, meaning life, breath, and soul. It refers to perceptions that the natural entities, forces, and life forms, a soul or vital life-force or spirit, and consciousness"(207).

The concept animism involves communication with the forces of life and viewpoint that the forces are divine, spiritual and intelligence. Further, the divine forces must be worshipped. In *The Overstory*, the tale of nine protagonists is strongly intertwined with the serious concern of deforestation. The story in the novel

represents the frame work which brings forth the climate change crisis through literature in an artistic manner. Additionally, through the novel *The Overstory*, Powers portrays a crucial eco- critical point of view on diverse and interdisciplinary forms of knowledge by displaying its narrative. Trees as non human agency present their narratives as subject in different spatial temporal scales. The trees become subjects of information through which various new and analytical approaches to the environmental crisis of deforestation can be applied together.

Shannon writes, “The individual emotional relationship with nature that has developed through interdisciplinary knowledge, by questioning if such emotional relationships could promote practical solutions to the issue of deforestation”(209). *The Overstory*, the story which attracts and makes the reader feels the omnipresence of trees, of the narratives discussing and showing the spirit like other protagonists in the novel.

Meinen writes about *The Overstory* as, “A very ambitious work which purports to raise the awareness on the life of trees proposing an eco-centered way of being revolving around the enlargement of the concepts of agency and creativity”(35).

Masiero mentions about the article focuses upon, “Powers has strived to give voice to the other than human. And yet it is not simply a matter of putting trees at the thematic center of his epic novel” (135). The author entangles these elements further to re-envision human relations to the non-human in the age of climate change on a different scale. *The Overstory* extends grievability as apprehension of the precariousness of life beyond the human. Powers writes by emphasizing the

innumerable connections among humans and trees, and by pointing out a sense of wonder at these creatures, for the conduct in which their behavior resembles that of humans and for the ways in which they surpass humanity's narrow existence. According to Linda M, "The novel build toward the defiant actions of a group of radical eco-activists who chain themselves to trees, trees it, organize activities of sabotage and arson to save the trees marked for felling. Not only do these activists take an explicit stand in favor of trees, but all the lives of the other five non-activist characters are connected with trees"(35).

Manolescu's research paper explores the concept of Arboretum America in Richard Powers' novel *The Overstory*. She presents a utopian vision of environmental sustainability, where humans prioritize environmental sustainability and live in balance with the natural world. Arboretum America represents a vision of a community-led conservation effort, where individuals work together to protect and preserve the natural environment. The paper explores the symbolism of trees in the novel, arguing that they represent a connection to the natural world and a sense of hope and resilience. The research paper employs a literary analysis approach, drawing on ecocritical theory and close reading techniques to analyze the concept of Arboretum America in the novel. Riem's writes, "Trees in the novel represent a symbol of slow time, contrasting with the fast-paced and technology-driven world of humans. Human-tree relationship highlights the ways in which humans interact with, depend on, and impact trees" (29).

Further, Woodward talks about the concept of forest time, which refers to the slow, incremental, and cyclical rhythms of forest ecosystems He argues, "Old-growth trees embody a unique form of kinship that challenges traditional notions of family,

community, and time. Old-growth trees can be seen as a form of kin, embodying a deep sense of history and wisdom. It highlights the emotional and psychological impacts of losing old-growth trees (39).

Previous studies have emphasized that the novel *Orfeo* bring forth the attention towards the widespread thematic apprehensions about life and art depicted from an extensive musical literary practice well-established in an ancient mythical origins. Fernandez writes, “The association between the specific and the universal in this novel is fabricated according to an artistic taste. It presents an epic journey with the unique purpose of which stands behind an eventual gain of self-discovery that in the novel, involves the protagonist as much as the narrative itself” (126). Else purpose is artistic and is apprehensive with the encoding of his last musical composition in DNA of his bacterium. The main character of *Orfeo*, retired avant-garde composer Peter Els, encodes music into the DNA of a living organism. *Orfeo* is a musical novel that borrows macro-structural elements from musical composition to structure the narrative Reichel, A. Elisabeth writes, “The protagonist’s devotion to writing really new music ruins his marriage and harms his personal life. His fiddling with originality in bacterial genes will seemingly get him destroyed by the police” (81). Powers has argued in *The Gold Bug Variations* that the point of science is miracle, not control. Powers strikes the balance between originality and well-known pattern by striking the Orpheus myth on a composer for whom traditional patterns are abhorrence.

Further, Hume states, “Oppressive police power compels unusual people to fit narrow kind of behavior and belief patterns. The notion of agency gets problematized by the enmeshment of man and machine” (15). Philosophical movements like post-

humanism enable us to analyze the socio-political and cultural status of humans in a world that is enveloped by new technological innovation. The challenging status of human by foregrounding the man-machine interface between Richard and the intelligent artificial machine Helen that is created by the neuroscientist Lentz in order to win a bet. Lentz requests Richard to train the artificial machine Helen to pass a literary test but in the process of training the machine, Richard realizes that to an extent his life is being gradually affected by Helen. The relationship of Richard and the artificial intelligent machine Helen enables us to rethink about the notion language and agency with renewed attention in a post-human world. Karmakar asserts, “Powers initially reduces his autobiographic self to a purely textual subject, only to expose the limitations of such an act by contrasting his own textuality as an 'author function' with the dilemma of a disembodied computer network that is supposed to understand works of literature” (217).

Kucharzewski writes, “Powers's play on words simultaneously makes us aware that language can flawlessly connect the most disparate ideas and concepts to each other, but that these connections are often entirely arbitrary. Paradoxically, the four letters that separate language from life are a distance that can be covered as effortlessly only within the hermetic enclosure of a specific linguistic system”(172). A quite similar observation about the elusive continuities residing in the arbitrariness of language is made by the central protagonist of Powers's fifth novel *Galatea 2.2* as he tries to teach a complex computer system to understand the great works of English literature.

In order to contextualize the purely linguistic knowledge of the machine and



in order to provide the disembodied digital network with a tentative idea of a world beyond texts and binary codes, its creator feeds it a catalogue of worldliness. The novel *Galatea 2.2* preoccupation is with the potential of AI machines to develop self-consciousness. During the training given by the protagonist Richard, AI acquires self-consciousness, which raises a question about this property's exclusiveness to humankind. Pishro in his paper argues, "The perspective of the narrator, which is constructed as a result of the exposure to the narratives, and points out the focus of the novel on self-construction. The focus is on Richard's own selfhood and glosses over Helen's use of narrative-making in self-construction" (12).

The researcher applies the Burner's cognitive perspective to the text to analyze that stories and story-telling as a distinctive human ability. The novel redefines the various concepts of post human, the nature of consciousness and selfhood, make a connection with the narrative. Pishro writes that *Galatea 2.2* is a versatile novel which not only influences how we perceive virtual identity, but also how we imagine human self. Powers put emphasis on narratives and the relation between the author and the narrative construct. Another critic Richard in his article examines, "The presentation of digital humanities (DH) in the fiction of Richard Powers, who has constantly discovered the connection of technology and the humanities in his novels" (12). Precisely, several of Powers novels have projected authentic applications of augmented digital humanities ventures. In the novel, the artificially intelligent algorithmic reading machine in *Galatea 2.2*, is intelligent and trained to read literature and take a comprehensive exam for a Master's Program in English and clear the same in flying colours.

In most of the Powers's works, the author compares and differentiates the

characters who are engrossed in their own inner subjective worlds compared against an unlimited database. Powers's work depicts the varied impulse in the fiction that grades his work as a significant contributor for intellectualizing multiple concepts and further leads the discussions within digital humanities to great extent. Powers states, "Galatea shares with the philosophers, first, the recognition that what is at stake in questions about artificial intelligence is as much the status of human beings as the status of machines, and second, the intuition that storytelling is one of the most distinctive of human capacities"(262). Robert states, "There are scenarios and scenes illustrating the dependence of semantics upon the skills of everyday embodied and embedded life. At times these skills are highlighted through their absence, as in the text's repeated presentations of minds gone awry, minds comparable to Helen's in their stuttered grasp of the world" (685). Richard Powers' novel *Generosity: An Enhancement* explores the intersection of human happiness, genetics, and technology. The story revolves around Russell Stone, a writer who becomes increasingly obsessed with Thassa, a young Algerian woman who possesses an unusually high level of happiness. Thassa's happiness is diagnosed as "hyperthymia," a condition that sparks a heated debate about the ethics of genetic engineering and happiness. Hegan writes, "Powers employs metafictional techniques to critique the transhumanist discourse on happiness, presenting an alternative view of happiness as a state of mind that can be achieved through resilience and mindfulness"(23). It is a thought-provoking novel that challenges readers to reexamine their assumptions about happiness, technology, and human nature. According to Ortega, "The novel *Generosity* portrays the experiences of refugees, particularly Thassa Amzwar, an Algerian immigrant. Thassa's story highlights the tensions between displacement and

belonging. The novel explores the complexities of cultural identity and hybridity, as Thassa navigates her Algerian heritage and American surroundings” (13). Ortega analyzes how the novel employs refugee narratives and testimony to convey the complexities of refugee experiences and further emphasizes the importance of ethics of care and responsibility towards refugees and migrants. Thassa's narrative serves as a catalyst for exploring the intersections between refugee identity and hospitality. The novel challenges dominant narratives around refugees and immigration, offering a more nuanced and empathetic portrayal. Ortega's analysis offers a thought-provoking exploration of the complex themes in *Generosity*, highlighting the importance of empathy, hospitality, and responsibility in the face of refugee crises. Further, Wiese through his essay addresses, “The systems of time and temporizations used to portray the fictional story of the mixed-race family Daley-Strom and defines its characters in past events that relate to the history of race and racism in the United States, it emphasizes that being-in- one’s-time and being-in-time are at odds with each other” (548). The history of race is apparently static and repetitive represents ontology of time which further assumes it as a dynamic exchange between the past, present, and future; besides it can give rise to an exposure in which race loses its expounding hold on history. The essay however shows how *The Time of Our Singing* establishes an auditory semiotic model in which the serious, callous, and controlling history of competition can make itself heard, lacking abandoning out voices that stand for harmony and hope for the change to come. This essay brings to the fore that *The Time of Our Singing* makes a notion of time which discovers its thematic and structural consequences.

Berger writes, “Hearing and singing echoes and reverberations are crucial

metaphors for considerate the notion of nonlinear time carried forward in the novel. It provides an indication of time that is played out against the naturalizations of race in history as well-known in the story of the mixed- race family Daley-Strom” (123). The protagonists cannot utilize and represent their hidden musical talents because they are provoked to fight against the imbalanced, unkind, and sexist notions of race. The paper presents the unique fundamental point of view about the temporal and aesthetic zone where the past, present, and future times of all the members of the mixed-race Strom family intermingle with recorded events in U.S. history. The novel shows the view point to honor the inexpressible vision of history of slavery; which further makes an impact to notice historical racism and to delineate a potential utopia at the same time.

Knirsch in his paper reevaluates the neuronovel genre in American literature through an analysis of Richard Powers's novel *The Echo Maker*. Knirsch argues, “Powers's work challenges traditional notions of the neuronovel, offering a more nuanced and complex exploration of the human brain and its relationship to identity, consciousness, and the environment. The novel brings together insights from neuroscience and ecology, highlighting the interconnectedness of human and natural systems”(42). The novel *The Echo Maker* attempts to give an answer to the profound and difficult question: what is self? Loon states, “The self can be considered as a cognitive workout, a device to exercise the ability to read the minds of others, and as expected, risk-free sort of a game, precisely because the conventional realist structure”(22). Powers imposes on the text allays any risks inherent in our hypothesizing on something as dangerous as the dissolution of the self. Liu writes,

“The image of sandhill cranes in *The Echo Maker* serves as a powerful symbol of identity crisis, human-nature relationships, and ecological identity. Sand hill Cranes serve as a symbol of identity, community, and environmental connection in the novel” (14). The paper employs a literary analysis approach, drawing on eco-critical theory and close reading techniques to analyze the novel.

In *Orfeo*, it humanizes natural sounds by associating them with music, song, and conversation. Ben asserts, “The sounds provoke an experience of self-transcendence in the human listener. It encourages to take into account creaturely perspectives, using the image of a musical composition to evoke a more inclusive community” (394). Austin in his paper explores the concept of more-than-human storytelling in Richard Powers's novel *The Overstory*. Austin argues, “The novel employs a unique narrative strategy that gives voice to non-human entities, such as trees, and challenges traditional notions of storytelling and agency. Powers attributes agency to non-human entities, such as trees, and challenges readers to reconsider their relationships with the natural world. The author explores the ways in which *The Overstory* employs tree narratives to challenge traditional notions of storytelling and agency” (36). Further, Amour in his paper introduces the concept of tree grief, exploring how trees in the novel experience and express emotions, particularly grief in the novel *The Overstory*. Amour contends, “The novel promotes ecological empathy, encouraging readers to develop emotional connections with non-human entities, such as trees” (8).

Jones in his paper explores the concept of non-human agency, focusing on the role of trees in shaping our understanding of place and time. The paper highlights trees role in creating and sustaining ecosystems, cultures, and histories. The author argues that

trees embody a unique form of agency, one that challenges traditional notions of human-centeredness. The paper employs a qualitative, interdisciplinary approach, drawing on insights from ecology, anthropology, philosophy, and literary studies to analyze the role of trees in shaping our understanding of place and time. Stewart argues, “*The Overstory* presents a vision of organic reform, one that seeks to transform human relationships with the natural world. It demonstrates the power of narrative to shape the understanding of natural world and our place within it” (26).

From analyzing the literature review based on the works of Richard Powers, it is clear that there are research articles, reviews and interviews based on the innovative narrative structure, stylistically extravagant ways of writing, use of colloquial language, settings and themes in some of the selected works. Studies have been done based on the artificial intelligence, neuro science, human machine relationship based on his selected works.

There are no previous studies that explore Agency and Consumerism: A Baudrillardian Study of Richard Powers’ Selected Fiction. Hence, it has been found that application of the theory of agency and consumerism of Jean Baudrillard is a new approach to the literary field. The concept of consumerism and agency is not witnessed in the literature of Richard Powers. The consumerism has a significant impact on the well-being of the society as well as for the human and natural world. The study attempts to fulfill this gap by including the concept of agency and consumerism through the selected works of Richard Powers. Powers novels incorporate scientific and ecological concepts and have been widely appreciated for their ability to raise environmental awareness. However, there is a need for more in -

depth exploration of how Powers novels examine the intersection of technology and nature and further to shape the human's understanding of the natural world. Further, research is needed to explore the implication of Powers representation of agency for the understanding of human experiences and including their potential to inspire environmental awareness and activism.

## **Research Objectives**

The objectives of the study to be conducted are-

1. To trace the genesis of the concepts of agency and consumerism.
2. To apply Jean Baudrillard's concepts of consumerism and agency on the selected works of Richard Powers.
3. To explore nature's kinship with humans as depicted in Richard Powers works.

## **Research Methodology**

The present study falls in the category of qualitative research. So, the content analysis would be the most suitable methodology in which the researcher would analyze the objectives through textual analysis, discussion and interpretation.

1. Using Baudrillard's theory of agency and consumerism as a foundation, the roots of postmodernist society in the works of Richard Powers are located.
2. Explorative approach to explore the relationship of nature with humans at different stages of characters.

## Chapter Two

### Consumerism, Reification and Symbolic Exchange

Consumption is an imposed behavior on the consumers which they perform as a duty to fulfill the moral obligation in the consumer world. Individuals are convinced to purchase more and more objects to feel part of the social milieu in the consumer society. Baudrillard states, "Consumption is a process in which consumers purchase goods in order to create and maintain a sense of identity and difference from others through the display of purchase goods" (10). Consumerism is a dominant and evocative symbol in post-modern world. Consumerism is a lifestyle which is occupied with the rapid possession of supply of things. For Baudrillard, consumerism is the extension of the idea of hyperreal. Baudrillard through the lens of signs and signifiers explain the concept of consumerism. What an individual purchase is not just a product but it carries the signs and a language to convey what it stands for. Malpas states about consumption, "Postmodern consumers can never be fulfilled because the products they consume are only sham objects, or characteristic signs of happiness and do not have any real power to bestow happiness to the possessor" (122). Lang defines, "Consumerism as a doctrine in the developed countries which leads to the conspicuous consumption, a virtual duty important for the economic and political ideology of the country"(9). Baudrillard elucidates the study of signs and structural codes. Language is used as a tool to communicate with one another. When consumption is used as a language, we are in the position to use it as a sign, signifier and a code. Therefore, the use-value and exchange values, consumables become sign-values. As what we consume is sign first.



Commodities are defined by what they signify and their relationship to the whole system of consumerism and signs. It reflects upon the consumption from the structural point of view. The commodities are interlinked with each other in their nature which produces the consumer society. The society obtains salvation in the consumption of objects which provides logical satisfaction to the people and further promotes the structure of modern growth society. Leonardo states, "People become functions of consumer society as they are motivated to purchase more and more objects to feel part of the social milieu" (89). Consumerism is going on a new form to dominate the primary and social life through the proliferation of signs. As the production is alienating, consumers seek accomplishment in consumerism; so far consumerism itself, in turn, has become a deeply alienating experience. The individuals are becoming isolated from society due to more involvement in consumption of products in the modern society. This over indulgence in the consumption of goods takes individuals away from inner-self. Individuals start feeling isolated from the society and from the fellow beings, try to find themselves in the virtual world. The alienation in the modern age relates to the consumerism and advancement of technology in developed world. The reality in the contemporary world is lost. Humans live in the hyper real simulacrum world. Baudrillard's work is a discourse of alienation, where the signified and the referent are abolished for the sole profit of the signifiers, where the code refers to its own logic without referring to any reality. Reality takes the place of semiological manipulation of signs in the simulacrum. The consumption and problem of real life becomes the code in the contemporary age and the humans play the role of agency in the quest of self. The individual as an agent is capable to shape the circumstances in which they live. The

individual requires capacity to make practical judgments in response to the conflicts and dilemmas of the consumer world.

The individual as agency strengthen his ability to implement agency in a contemporary society enabling him to challenge and transform the present perspective of the situation. The consumption has become commercialized and not in the control of individuals and aspirations can easily be exasperated. In addition to this, consumerism has a profound influence on body and soul. People get confined in the world of consumerism and advertisement, finds it compulsory to buy products through the proliferation of the false needs. Baudrillard explores the complexities related to the body and fashion in the consumer world where the attractiveness of body embellishment, tattoos and piercing among many young people is a statement of reification.

In the consumer age, the society is characterized by generalized and totalitarian competition which works at all levels. There are things which are now produced as exchange-value in an never-ending process of demarcation. Further, the world is more engaged in the simulations, entangled in the shackles of consumer products. Patricia feels oneself with the trees however thanks to them and apologize them in the meantime on the behalf of her species, i.e humans. She links herself with the natural world of the trees. She feels epiphany in the world of trees. In her own book *The Secret Forest* in the novel she mentions:

You and the tree in your backyard come from a common ancestor A billion and a half years ago, the two of you parted ways. But even now, after an immense journey in separate directions that tree and you still share a quarter of your genes.(166)

Patricia finds solace within trees. The connection between Patricia and trees is the strongest one in the novel *The Overstory*. Patricia lives amongst nature throughout life and breathes the presence of trees for almost her whole life. Her journey of life from the very childhood spent through the realm of trees. She has learnt the lessons of life through trees and the isolation she felt through her estranged relations. Further, Patricia talks about the isolation that trees live in ,“But nothing is less isolated or more social than a tree” (144).

Trees live in isolation, away from the other species of the world. At the same time, they are social as they provide comfort and worldly things to the mankind. Trees provide the solace and comfort to those who comes closer to them. Nobody knows and cares about the existence of trees. How trees do bloom, how do branches flourish and how do they shed and heal themselves. Trees live away from the consumer world in the modern world. The concern has been raised by Patricia and others in the novel. The feeling of separation from one’s culture and society renders man incapable of controlling the events through his own actions. The man plays the role of object rather than the subject of the event. Nicole in his work quotes Baudrillard’s phrase of the image as:

The image reflecting basic reality, the image masking and perverting reality, the image marking the absence of a basic reality, the image bearing no relation to any reality whatsoever, it is its own pure simulacrum.(7)

The absence of the reality from the image is the manifestation of the form of reification in the society. The failure of the culture and the loss of the code are the

contemporary form of reification. The modern man is limited to the small fraction of the whole and never develops the concord of his being. The man has become a replica of his production, of his business, or of his technology. Reification is a function of relationship between the objects and organization created through man's activity in the society. The significant changes in the society bring drastic changes in the relationship between the human activity and the objects in the society. The societal changes lessen the importance of man as an initiator. The individual feels estranged from the activities he is engaged in it, as he is aware of the fact that he is not going to get any award from the concerned activities. The individuals feel powerless due to lack of control over the work in the world.

In Powers novel, *The Overstory*, one of the characters, Mimi Ma also feels estrangement from the social activities. On the other hand, she feels a strong bond with trees in the novel. Outside her office, she walks to the trees and feels solace. The smell of the trees attracts her and reminds her same smell she is familiar from childhood. The smell of trees, nature permeates her mind and she feels nostalgic about her childhood and reminiscent about the time that she has spent in the lap of nature along with her father. She embraces the connection with trees which takes her to inner self, away from the artificial life of this modern world. She feels confused and reified by the things of the worldly affairs. She feels close intimacy with trees and which gets reflected in her due course of action in the novel. Her affection towards trees let her participate in the protest to save Redwood trees. In the novel *The Echo Maker*, Mark gets entangled in the web of characters due to the misidentification syndrome. Mark suffers from Capgras syndrome and fails to recognize his sister and takes her as an imposter. He recognizes the visual similarity

but considers her as an imposter only. He fails to recognize his own identity in this process. In the novel, Mark states:

I don't know where my sister is. I don't even know where I am. This whole so- called hospital could be a movie studio where they take people to fool them into thinking that everything's regular. (81)

Man as a social being enjoys the complete individual freedom to consume the product of his choice, to enjoy the leisure time but, on the contrary feels powerless over the customs, culture and the laws he himself has created. The hyper reality of the products and the things in different spheres has created the real vacuum in man's life. Debord deliberates the elements of the spectacle in *The Society of the Spectacle*. According to him, spectacle is an interface between people and images controlled by the mass media, advertising, and popular culture. Debord also argues how this spectacle becomes a false reality:

Reality erupts within the spectacle, and the spectacle is real. This reciprocal alienation is the essence and underpinning of society as it exists. In a world that really has been turned on its head, truth is a moment of falsehood. Society experiences a false and alienated reality, replaced by truth. (12)

In contemporary age, the focus is more on the image production and upon the commodification of the object. Individual's act and work is performed as an image in the objective world which represents the image of the devil. The individual life has lost its real and true meaning as the signs are exchanged in the process through exchange value. The disturbing story is that alienated labour circulates freely and

objectively in the world which is quiet away from the real inner world. This is turning against itself, against the real self- world. This makes the human as a system as an alien power to the man in the advanced technological world. In *The System of Object*, Baudrillard asserts:

The mirror image is the symbolism for the meaning of our acts. These images collect around us to form our world. Symbolically, when this image is missing, our world is losing its transparency, we cannot control our acts and we have no perspective of ourselves. (134)

Baudrillard discusses the logic of utility and cultural values in his book *Symbolic Exchange and Death*. Baudrillard discusses the Bataille's definition of symbolic exchange as, "The economy where expenditure, waste, sacrifice and destruction were claimed to be more fundamental to human life than economies of production and utility" (67). Humans derive pleasure from waste, expenditure and festivities and feel free to expand their own values in term of excess flow of intensive energies. Baudrillard writes, "The central idea is that the economy which governs our societies results from a misappropriation of the fundamental human principle, which is a solar principle of expenditure" (57).

Baudrillard discusses symbolic exchange in his book *The Mirror of Production* as, "The symbolic social relation is the uninterrupted cycle of giving and receiving which in primitive exchange, and includes the consumption of the surplus and deliberate anti- production"(143). Baudrillard discusses symbolic exchange, "As expression of a desire to liberate himself from modern positions and to seek a revolutionary position outside of modern society" (126). The consumer society

discusses the idea of contrast between pre-modern societies, which are organized around a symbolic exchange and modern society, which in turn are organized around the production and exchange of goods. Baudrillard states:

You never consume the object in itself (in its use value); you are always manipulating objects as signs which distinguish you either by affiliating you to your own group taken as an ideal reference or by marking you off from your group by reference to a group of higher status. (61)

The current era is the era of consumption which represents the period of reification. The things and products in this age are synchronized with images, signs and consumable prototypes.

The individuals fade away in the signs and images in this consumer world. The consumers never meet his or her own needs or his or her own image. The society in the consumer world shows the society away from the expression of self in the hyperreal world of goods and products. The individuals live in the imaginary and illusionary world where the real meaning is lost. The consumer society lives in the ecstasy of communication under the sign of reification, away from the realities of world. The life of a human is the combination of what human has and what human is and human enters into relationship with nature by senses. Man is the subject constituted by object, yet becomes alien to himself and to the world in taking himself for a simple object and wishing to possess objects. Baudrillard emphasizes upon the question of reality and failure of meaning in postmodernity. The modern man lives in the postmodern world of emptiness, where the reality of the world has been lost.

Baudillard also apprehends the reification as a separation from the nature as well as from God. The nature gives the real good world to the human but the man acts as a devil through the shackles of consumerism and selfish motives gets separated from the nature and become simulacrum. The post-modern world has detached itself from the nature and is not giving back anything productive to the nature. However, the advanced technological world has become so hyper real world, artificial world away from realities that it can be exchanged with anything. The post-modern world is a world of simulacrum, images, signs and artificial intelligence which has been pondered over by the award winning novelist Richard Powers in his novel *The Overstory*, where the nine protagonists raised a campaign against the cruelties of the consumer world against nature i.e trees. Olivia while participating in the protest lost her life too which gives a moral significance to the world of the consumers who are not returning the goodness to the nature mother earth. Baudrillard describes consumption as, "Collective behavior, something enforced, morality, an institution and a whole system of values"(4).

Consumption is a behavior which is imposed on the consumers. It is enforced upon the individuals as a duty to perform and fulfill. It is not only related to enjoyment or purchase of goods or services, but also as a moral obligation to perform its duty to purchase. The individuals are trained to consume the things which lead to individualistic approach of self. Reification permeates the spheres of work and private life, and even leisure is not free of alienation. Leisure may, for example, seem to be a break from the routine but it cannot happen in isolation, and it forms a dialectical cycle with work and family life: although it is separated from productive labour, it needs work to finance itself. The involvement in leisure makes the person



to go back to work and the alienating conditions of the workplace. Therefore, time spent in leisure does not truly provide relief. Work, private life and leisure form the ordered monotony and passivity is the indicative of modern living. Baudrillard refers to leisure as, “More profound as it does not relate to the direct subordination to working time, but is linked to the very impossibility of wasting one’s time” (154). The critical theorists found modern capitalist society as a totalitarian system in its structure and functioning. They called it an administered society. In it, mass culture is methodically created by the entertainment industry and presented to the population as commodities for consumption. The stress is not on the basic values of cultural forms but on the manufacturing of commodities for consumption. The main motive is profit, and it is explicitly followed. This totalizing system carries out products to satisfy to all cultural tastes, and all possible cultural preferences and forms are covered. It has various branches and all of them match one another to produce one systemic whole.

In novel *Generosity: An Enhancement*, Powers states, “I agree; no patent should be allowed to prevent progress. The only thing profit is good ... I want a world where the one source of real wealth, genetic and accessible to everyone” (109). Kurton one of the characters in the novel talks about the companies and ventures he creates which release the new experiments in the consumer world. The only purpose is to do a business to govern all the creations. Powers asserts:

Fifty years from now... between genetic intervention, rising consumer satisfaction, upgraded telecommunications, pharmacology, the solidifying hive mind, improved diet, exercise and behavioral modification, anger will be less of a concern than ringworm. (165)

Baudrillard explains that in modern society, things are not what they look in real life. Every trait of modern life and society is mystified and things look to be the opposite of what they are. The modern society gives a lot of choices at the individual. There are numerous professions and careers, lifestyle selections, educational disciplines, consumer products and so on, and the early impression of capitalist society is that it is full of diversity. However, there is a fundamental unity in this diversity. In the novel *Orfeo*, Powers tells the tale of Peter Else journeying into his past as he desperately flees the present. Powers states, “We are brought back to ourselves by solitude, and from ourselves to God is only a step”(43). The whole life Else disappears into experimental projects that consume his years’ worth, exhaust all his relationships in the quest of perfect musical piece and takes his own identity away from him in the modern consumer world. The commercial outlook is engrossed on individualism and each individual lives a life based on enigmatic consciousness.

The commercial life leads to social atomism with each person stuck inside his or her reserved shell. This kind of consciousness is mystified consciousness. For mystified people, their comfortable private lives inside their homes attain utmost significance. Each individual thinks to be exceptional and distinct but in actuality he is the similar as every other being and the society is split by the individuality of the members of the class. No matter how much people try to become individualistic and diverse from others, they still remain the same: Baudrillard’s analysis of the consumer society is a twofold task. Firstly, he tries a semiological analysis of the consumer society by exploring into the objects, images and sounds found in the capitalist economy and then understand their meanings within the system of signs. Secondly, and instantaneously, he considers the semantic field sociologically through

Marxism. The consumption of objects in modern society is the most advanced form of the rational systematization of the productive forces at the individual level, where consumption takes over production. The factory worker was previously forced to sell his labour to survive, however, the individual in the modern society is obligated to consume. He has no other choice. The basic minimum level of consumption in modern society is the standard package, which refers to the basic set of objects of consumption that are considered as must haves in society. Anybody falling short of the normal package is treated as an outsider.

In Baudrillard's words, the saturated consumer appears as the spellbound avatar of the wage laborer. Consumption takes place regardless of the happiness of the individual. The individual does not necessarily derive pleasure; he is only fulfilling his social obligation. Baudrillard's works deal with all the social conditions of a society: the extension of the logic of specialization from the factory into the wider social life and the resultant bureaucratization of society; the sense of compulsion in consumers and its lack of control and the need for social change in order to bring an end to the above conditions. The individual is unable to think clearly about himself and his context, and his actions are now not in his control. He is entrusting to passivity.

Baudrillard discusses the mass media as an indispensable component of the modern society. Baudrillard looks into the daily life of the consumer. He deliberates the learning on the private and leisure spheres of dull life, on the sphere of consumption. In the consumption-oriented system, the media's function is to eternally cause the individual to seek a communion with the system, to stand for by the system's laws to fulfill the social responsibility. The person's responsibility is to

consume and additionally, confined to consume for the benefit of the system. The personal interests matter less to the system. For him, the electronic mass media reveal the governing spirit of the consumer society. The life of an individual is determined by the manipulation of commodities and interaction of objects in the consumer society. Today, we live in a cashless society in which credit card usage has reached extreme amounts. The individuals have a purchasing power beyond his exchange value of labour power. Baudrillard further claims that in technology motivates postmodern world, subject has become a pure screen. The individuals recognize themselves as an object in this objective world which is away from the good deeds and leads to the alienation from the spiritual world.

The meaning and reality is lost in the post-modern world, which can be interpreted only by codes. The individuals live in the hyper real world of simulacrum finds themselves in the objectified world. The individuals get estranged from reality and nature due to the virtual world, dominated by technology and artificial intelligence. Baudrillard states:

Reification cannot be overcome; it is the very structure of consumer society. It is the essence of real life, as everything is bought and sold. Individuals neither see their own true needs nor another way of life.  
(307)

Baudrillard talks at length about the involvement of human interaction with the technological media. Baudrillard put emphasis on how consumers will shift from a structure where image is based on physical reality into a converting of image that has completely no relation to reality. The current era and time is based on the dazzling

appearance of media where signs are for the consumer to assign, as they contain no real meaning. These signs have then develop into a part of the new self where the item for consumption and the consumer are part of the same system and part of each other as well. Additionally, consumers live in a time where technology is progressing at an augmented speed. They no longer look to past years to gain outlook for how technology has changed how they interact with our environment and other people. They instead look back to grasp these changes. These changes are no longer considered as promising results but are projected as part of the range of life. True to Baudrillard's feelings, consumers are driven by the desire to interact with the hyperreal outward of media interactions. There is a constant flow of information which results in the erosion of the self where an individual is no longer being able to separate reality from the projection of reality by the media. The development of technology and its addition into our everyday lives further decreases the line between what is and what is merely perceived. According to Mellencamp, "One must be deceived by the image in order to see the image" (85). Even our image of self is distorted within the context of social media. The individuals are vanishing into a self-deconstructed from the physical self into an identity of the virtual selves.

Baudrillard seeks to extend consumption not only to objects and services, but to virtually everything else including technology, arts and aesthetics, leisure, and history etc. In this larger scene, he explores how consumer objects and their signification processes our daily life, and in the long run the self.

The proliferation of technology forces an individual to enter a media induced reality which is termed as hyperreality. There is no difference between the original

real and the simulated ones. The consumption of goods is indivisible from the significance of self. For Baudrillard, ambience is also one of the concepts in the consumer society. The ambience' is the sum of associations, produced and consumed by the group as the presence of the group to itself. If it does not exist, it can be planned and fashioned industrially. Baudrillard asserts:

The concept environment and ambience have doubtless only enjoyed such a vogue since we have come to live not so much alongside other human beings – in their physical presence and the presence of their speech as beneath the mute gaze of mesmerizing, obedient objects which endlessly repeat the same refrain: that of our dumbfounded power, our virtual affluence, our absence one from another. (25)

The significance of ambience for Baudrillard is affirmed on the end of the relationship between the signifier and the signified, the real and the simulated and the appearance of a new sign in the form of simulacrum. Baudrillard argues that consumerism is as consequential as any human interaction.

Baudrillard asserts, “Modern society is characterized not only by simulated objects, but also by simulated relationships. A simulated intimacy is created between people doing the advertising and potential customers, as well as between the latter and the products being advertised” (328). This is however a part of what Baudrillard sees as a universal diversion of human relations. As a result, the individuals find themselves surrounded by the number of products, personal relations and emotions which all are orchestrated. What do consumers buy as an individual, it makes an impact on the society as a whole and the consumer communicates within the society through products. Baudrillard talks about the consumerism as per se of hyperreality which is a simulation of the real products in the daily life. Simon Malpas explains:

The circulation, purchase, sale, appropriation of differentiated goods and signs/objects today constitute our language, our code, the code by which the entire society communicates and converses. Such is the structure of consumption, its language, by comparison with which individual needs and pleasures are merely speech effects. (122)

The consumer society is described as the society where the more indulgence is there in the objects, products and images. Everything has been commodified and reality has been virtualized. The post-modern society is characterized by the simulation and hyperreality of the products. People are becoming functional day by day. Baudrillard writes, "Today it is we who watch the objects as they are born, grow to maturity and die, whereas in previous civilizations, it was timeless objects, instruments or monuments which outlived the human generations"(24). The system of object is pre diagnostic for the symptoms of reification of signs. Baudrillard states, "Signs have started separating themselves from their referents, their function has been forgotten and they have started becoming real...reification lies in the shift in the relation of the human to the object" (17). The advancement of science and technology has offered a path to the human to shift from real to unreal without any realization. The virtual world, the simulation replaces the reality in the world of consumerism. Kellner defines reification as, "The process whereby human beings become dominated by things and become more thing-like themselves"(4).

Baudrillard defines reification as, "A process in which objects come to dominate subjects thereby robbing people of their human qualities and capacities" (16). The objects dominate the social life of the human beings and make them

dependent. In the media oriented consumer society the humans get away from their individuality due to the dominance of the objects on the people's lives. In the existing world, reification is marked with the presence of new technologies, communication of things and mass production of things. Baudrillard describes reification as a very form of structure of the commodity which is the vital part of the structure of semiotic exchange. The real is present without any referent. Human desires are fulfilled all the way through the consumption of objects. Needs are fulfilled only by the commodity exchange. The exchange value displaces and distorts the truth of use value. The objects are no longer cherished for themselves, for their qualities, but considered as the substance of need fulfillment embodied in the commodified objects. The alienation is understood in reification of objects and turning people into profitable commodities. The commodities are measured against their exchange value rather than use value. The concept of reification can explain how it is that while society is nothing more than a social construction, it influences the action, thought and behavior of the individuals who live in it.

Reification defined by Berger and Pullberg as "The moment in the process of alienation in which the characteristic of thing-hood becomes the standard of objectivereality" (21). In the prevailing society, nothing is in the control of man. All spheres of post- modern society are marked by the presence of reification, alienation and objectification of commodities. In the novel *The Overstory*, Patricia reads a sentence from the book as, "Let me sing to you now, about how people turn into other things" (76). People behave like turning into other things or feels as objects reabsorbing the other elements which take them away from their real sense and the wildness still exist inside people that really never went away. Patricia in the novel



worries about mankind losing solitude and feeling reified into the world of objects away from the natural world. The problem is with the humanity that is making strong connection with the faster growing technology and spelling the doom for the planet by getting separated from the connection of the natural environment. The living and non-living both shares an important and inseparable bond with each other. Man and nature are indispensable to each other. An individual is getting away from the qualities and abilities which he/she inherits are no longer a vital part of his/her personality. They are the things which an individual can easily dispose like other objects in the external world. The novel contains many examples of people indulge in the consumption of objects and in the process destroying the nature and harming themselves while struggling with the idea of an identity. During the protest to save the redwood forest Adam thinks about the condition of man in the consumer world. Adam in his lecture delivers a statement, "You can't see what you don't understand. But what you think you already understand, you'll fail to notice" (253). Human seems commodifying everything which belongs to all creatures and utilizing the objects for profit without giving a thought to the future or for the rights of other beings. Powers states, "Humans are all count, the final word, and their endless hunger for more can-not be slowed about the consumption of things" (389).

The technological advancements are overtaking the reality. The everyday new devices, gadgets and products feed the man. Everything is organized around the consumption of products. The discontented man has given a license to enjoy life through consumption. Individuals are optimistic to consume by creating the impression of false needs and surface level desires that speak to their authentic needs and desires. Individuals are driven by the contemporary growth and progress which

makes them estranged from their authentic needs. The desires for individuals to find and make a place in the society push them to find acceptance and acknowledgement by others. Therefore, the individuals get convinced to attain more objects which are temporarily meaningful without achieving satisfaction.

However, the condition persists. There is a need to raise the awareness about the relevance of basic needs. The need of an hour is to urge the consumers to apply their consumer behavior as a gateway into understanding the authentic needs.

In this chapter, the achieved objective is *To apply Jean Baudrillard's concepts of consumerism and agency on the selected works of Richard Powers*. Powers in his novels throws light upon the prevalent conditions of modern man in the consumer world. Powers discusses the commodification and objectification of nature in the consumerist world of today which is surrounded by the numerous signs and images. Powers through his novel *Generosity*, discusses about the destructive possibilities of usage of science which objectified the subject like Thassa. In the novel, a geneticist tries to treat Thassa as a subject to study her genes of happiness to manipulate the DNA to make certain discoveries for the commodification of products. Powers in the novel also criticizes the media manipulation and social media behavior, where it becomes difficult to distinguish between real and unreal. Powers discusses the serious concern about human's reification from nature in the post-modern world. Reification is the process by which man and woman are turned into objects and things. Reification is getting stronger and deeper in the era of virtual entities.

Powers talks about the endless humans need to grow, to consume and to take control of everything. The prevalent rate of growth and consumption is

unsustainable. In the novel, the rich and famous company of Neelay makes an incredible success through the game Mastery. There is a continuous addition of resources in the game through expanding control and exchange of various things which turns everything into wealth. But inspite of all the resources, the players were unable to find the ultimate satisfaction and joy in it. When Neelay comprehends that the unsustainable consumption is leading the destruction of nature and humanity as a whole, he feels estranged and reified from his own creation. He gets enlightened with a new vision to create the game to educate the players about the real life to learn about the complex web of planet Earth. Powers in his novels discusses that there are only reciprocal processes and networks between the agents and actions and actors of life and that these entire individualistic, commodity driven culture based on fantasy. Powers through his novel *Generosity* tries to give the message that human beings should not use science and technology to mistreat other humans as objects. Thomas Kurton in the novel tries to make human beings happy through the so called gene enhancement technology. In this process of exchange, human beings may become intelligent robots like. Advertisement, fashion and entertainment have become the primary focus of the consumer society.

The consumers may continue to live a life of material abundance. Despite reason and accessible knowledge about what is good for the human beings, humans as consumers urge towards exorbitant consumerism persists. The initiation of environment values in consumers can ensures the sustainable driven behavior of humans for the betterment of nature and mankind. Humans and nature must be considered as an integrated whole.

## Chapter Three

### The Kinship between Human and Nature

Kinship is the deep inner connection of relations with the living world. It is defined as a network of all relations who are related to each other through strong ties of social relationships. Robin states, “Kinship is an evolutionary perspective. Kinship is an adaptation in human evolution” (42). Before the advancement of technology, the humans had to rely on human labour for their survival and formed groups on the basis of kinship. Kinship plays a crucial part in human societies. Kinship determines the social status of the individual in the society. It is not only the relationship of human with human, but also about the relationship of human with nature. There is a deeper connection of human along with non- human beings as well. In post-modern times, the relation of human with commodities is increasing day by day while making an adverse impact on the connection between the human and nature. The relationship of human and nature is vanishing simultaneously in the hyper real world of today. Humans are consuming the resources gifted by nature without giving any return to nature.

Richard Powers states the type of story-telling in which the characters are not separated from the existing world around them in his novel *The Overstory*. The nine protagonists of the novel experience the great impact of affinity between human and nature i.e trees and how the natural life makes a strong impact on the humans in the upcoming life challenging situations. The novel is a story of immense, long-lived creature's i.e trees that communicate and synchronize with each other through

complex networks. The kinship with nature seems quiet distant as it is abstract and comes from different genes. The trees comes from different genes and generations represents several branches of the single relation on the planet earth where, humans also occupies a small and remote branch, loosing connect with the nature itself. Humans depend upon trees for their existence and for the invention of civilization.

In *The Overstory*, Nick who is engaged in an environmental art project states, “Love is a tree with branches in forever with roots in eternity and a trunk nowhere at all” (475). The enormous trees are overwhelming and the haunting silence of the trees is sobering. The humans are deeply dependent upon the communities of the other creatures and treat others as commodities in the consumer world. The humans and trees are deeply entangled and connected to the struggles of times and humans need to reciprocate the service of nature while saving the natural world. The nature as trees is there on the planet earth for long. The human lives depend upon others where no one has any control. The unique relationship of trees and human plays a crucial part in the novel *The Overstory*. The opening chapter of the novel refers, “Old trees are our parents and our parent’s parents, perchance. If you would learn the secrets of nature, you must practice more humanity”(5).

There is a beautiful description of Hoel’s family relationship to a chestnut tree. John Hoel’s father’s desire to take a photograph of the same planted tree each month at the exact same place continues for several generations. Those photographs depict the long projection of the association between human and non-human in the novel. Powers asserts:

We all travel the Milky Way together, trees and men. In every walk with nature one receives far more than he seeks. The clearest way into the universe is through a forest wilderness. (156)

Another character Dr Patricia Westerford expresses the novelist ideas and views in the novel through her controversial research which reveals that trees communicate, send signals to each other and defend their young ones. She illuminates the ecological relations in the novel.

Trees communicate with humans to get their attention. Just like humans have always wanted something from nature, trees likewise, want something from humans. Trees play the role of natural agency to communicate to the various characters in the novel. For Patricia, the relation among the trees is naturalistic and entirely scientific. On the other hand, for the other characters in the story, the outlook is more mystical, sensual and intuitive. The nine characters strive hard to understand and respond to trees voices and spread the message of trees that trees want human to hear the voices of nature. Nicholas Hoel, Douglas Pavlicek, Neelay Mehta, Patricia Westerford, Mimi Ma, Adam Appich, Ray Brinkman and Dorothy Cazaly, and Olivia Vandergriff all originate significant implication from trees and their lives develop into inseparably bound to them. Some trees in the novel carry names and show as characters in themselves (Mimas, the sequoia tree, for instance). However, some human characters get tree names. All the nine protagonists in *The Overstory* unite in their passion for trees, follow common environmental commitment and take action of several kinds, from scientific study to forceful intervention to save nature and mankind. Humans in post-modern times consider themselves superior than other beings and consume everything belongs to this world without considering the

existence of other organism. This world is catapulting towards social and environmental disaster. Patricia states:

Seventeen kinds of forest dieback all made worse by warming. Thousands of squaremiles a year converted to development. Annual net loss of one hundred billion trees. Half the woody species on the planet, gone by this new century's end. (484)

The impact of industries is highly visible on the individual's lives and on the complete humanity as a whole. The man as a consumer is indulged in the consumption of things which has been created by the system of things in the simulacrum. There is a need to evoke kinship feelings between humans and other organism. Olivia , Hoel , Patricia , Mima Ma become environmental activists and lose themselves in an unseen connection of network with trees in the novel. Westerwood's finding on trees in the novel plays a very crucial role. Westerwood's affinity towards tree and their mystical nature that trees communicate and wants something from humans helps to recognize that environment is alive and changing web of information amongst each other. Richard Powers gives an environmental message to the world through the words of Dr Patricia Westerford in the novel *The Overstory*. As one of the strong protagonists in the novel, Patricia talks about the destruction of tress, the loss of diversity and lost spiritual potential of tree. She spreads the message about the strong kinship of humans with nature. Due to the advancement of technology, the people are occupied in consuming the world. In the novel also, the industrialists are involved in the destruction of redwood trees in order to expand the industry and business for the commercial purpose. However, in the real term, it takes the humanity away from the natural world. Powers quotes, "Farmers of

cities, king of industrial trees, that tree without which America would have been a very different proposition” (178).

In *The Overstory*, the genius game designer and computer programmer Neelay Mehta encounters the redwood in the hills above Silicon Valley to explore the relationship of technology as a tool to help or to hamper the efforts to learn how to live in cordial relationship with the natural world. With the advancement of technology in the world of simulation, human is getting engrossed in the copies of things away from the reality. Neelay after creating the several versions of simulated games inside his heart feels the fear, the need to return something to the community which takes him back to the redwood trees. Neelay states, “The world is a living place and I am not the lord and master of it”(86). *The Overstory* refers biotic kinship. Manolescu describes *The Overstory* as, “The novel seeks to take trees to another literary level, far from mere anthropomorphic projection and symbolic annexation” (2). Olivia realizes the divine manifestation through the agency of trees. The trees as an agency play a crucial role in the life of all nine protagonists in the novel *The Overstory*.

Olivia feels the blessings of trees when her senses come back to life and she feels conscious and hears the voices of trees as special agent who intends to save her for a special purpose. All the characters in the novel feel a special bond or a kinship with nature. Powers versatile writing has the capacity to apply metaphors for trees through the actions of various characters in the novel. The novel describes the common bond shared by the ancestors and the trees. Richard Powers’s *The Overstory* describes the collection of events about trees and forests which carry



extreme importance in today's post modern world. Trees become another measure of all things in an endeavor to represent humans and trees growing together. In the novel, the different characters exist and grow through their relation to trees which provides ecstatic and life- changing experiences to some of the characters in the story in their communication with trees. As Patricia Westerford argues in her book *The Secret Forest*:

You and the tree in your backyard come from a common ancestor. A billion and a half years ago, the two of you parted ways. But even now, after an immense journey in separate directions, that tree and you still share a quarter of your genes. (3)

In the novel, the tree stands for an enduring generic landmark in comparison to human history. The trees are not indestructible, on the contrary. The novel insists on the fact that they are eternal than humans. The trees become a simple victim to some profitable industrial forces which uses them entirely as resources. The devastation of trees shows the drastic impact on the humanity. The nature-culture opposition is analyzed to work upon the connection between trees and humans. The likeness between human and tree becomes more abstract and mostly emotional in the case of Ray Brinkman and Dorothy Cazaly who, unable to have children believes that a chestnut tree they planted is their daughter. *The Overstory* is the novel of evolving reality representing the theme of deforestation and the impact of technological progress. The thousands miles of farms and trees are consumed by humans for growth and industrialization. But, in the consumer world of perfect utility, nothing will remain forever. One day humans will also be forced to vanish. Powers in the novel states:

No one sees trees. We see fruits, we see nuts, we see wood, and we see shade. We see ornaments or pretty fall foliage. Obstacles blocking the road or wrecking the ski slope. Dark, threatening places that must be cleared. We see branches about to crush our roof. We see a cash crop. But trees- trees are invisible. (529)

Richard Powers, the master of language and prose, talks about the human and non-human world in a brilliant manner. The nonhuman life works as an agency through the medium of various characters in the novel. The descriptions of the nonhuman world give the novel a startling impact. The trees give signals, communicate to the characters and protect the life of the characters away from the consumer world. *The Overstory* presents a splendid example that how humans and non-humans coexist. If the nature balance gets disturbed, the humans can vanish in the times to come. One of the characters, Nick works as a catalyst to change the people's mind through the through provoking ideas about nature in the quest of changing the society and making the world a better place to live. Human nowadays is engrossed in the shackle of consumerism and technology. Richard Powers talks about the relevance of human and nature relationship through the voice of Nick in the novel. This is not only human's world, but it is the world of trees, where humans live and consume the manner they want. So many wonder drugs and things come from trees. The nature is trying to reach humans, but the humans are unable to understand the voices of nature. The cutting down of trees for consumption refers to vulnerability and loss. Powers asserts:

No one sees trees. We see fruits, we see nuts, we see wood, we see shade. We see ornaments or pretty foliage....We see a cash crop... But trees are..... trees are invisible. (529)

In the novel *The Overstory*, there is a strong connection between the characters and large community of trees i.e. the chestnut tree, the mulberry, the maple, the redwood, the banyan tree. It represents a natural kinship between human and nature as the sections of the novel makes a tree like structure from the title of the novel- Roots, followed by Trunk, Crown and Seeds. The novel represents the kinship point through human-tree entanglement in various sections, starting from Roots and concluding in the last section of seeds. In the section Seeds, Powers throws light upon the realization by mankind over the devastating effects of climate change He writes, "The earth will become another thing, and people will learn it all over again"(500). Powers writes, "If you want to kill it, you'll have to kill me, too"(567).

Powers talks about the sense of relatedness which is deeper than the feeling of dependence on other living things. Powers states, "Kinship based not on relatedness but on common cause, may be the one feature of self –awareness capable of saving our species from all the other potent adaptations that evolution has endowed us with" (159). Powers argues, "Kinship is the recognition of shared fate and intersecting purposes. It is the discovery that the more I give to you, the more I have. Nature launches all separate organisms on a single, vast experiment, and kinship glimpses the multitudes contained in every individual organism" (223). Trees send the signals to other trees through the air, sharing an immune system that saves the other trees from the devastation. Another novel *The Echo Maker* deals with the strange

intelligence of birds, which commute together and sacrifice themselves for their young ones. The novel is a story of forgotten kinship of human with nature and takes the prominent question of relationship between human and nonhuman as its central theme.

The cranes represent the complex elusive nature of the brain that represents the universal links with other living things. The novel represents the cranes coming back to the same spot on the Platte River every year for ages. The birds represent the next of kin, parented and taught like blood relations. Humans become indifferent towards them and lost their inner connection and the ability to feel the connection with the natural things due to more inclination towards the simulated things of consumer world. Powers asserts:

The river's being used up. Fifteen dams, irrigation for three states....  
The river slows; the trees and vegetation fill in. The trees spook the cranes. They need the flats- someplace to roost where nothing can sneak up on you. (71)

In the novel, the protagonist Mark suffers from brain injury, a psychiatric state called Capgras syndrome. His behavior is connected to head trauma where he was unable to recognize his sister and consider her as an imposter. It is not only about Marks suffering from a particular syndrome, the whole mankind suffers from Capgras syndrome. Humans are unable to understand their connection to their kin nature and their responsibilities towards the nature. The understanding of the things is lost and denial of responsibilities happens because of the indulgence of virtual representation of goods and commodities. Human has become very selfish due to which he starts

feeling others as imposter and the deeds full of conspiracy and denial. Power raises the question to our perception and understanding about ourselves, others and about the surroundings. It is of great concern that whether humans have the realization of the virtual realities, whether humans believe the responsibility towards other organism and whether the relationship between human and non-human should be talked about or not? Mark in the novel use to play video games and is willing to spend his time in the purely imaginary world which humans have created as hyper-real world.

Baudrillard argues the same in his philosophy of simulacrum that today's world is technology oriented world where images are dominating and true , the natural world has become artificial, away from the reality and the humans are in the shackles of virtual reality. It depends upon humans to care about other creatures to keep them alive, to be kind and generous towards other species of plants and animals. Humanity suffers like Marks in the novel to recognize endangered other species and creatures. However, Karin in the novel agrees that the whole humanity suffers from Capgras and it is the responsibility of the mankind to share the nature's world and to share the nature's fate. Baudrillard discusses the illusion of reclaiming nature's reality through hyper reality and simulation. The simulation points out that nature can be duplicated. Baudrillard asserts:

The real planet, presumed condemned, is sacrificed in advanced to its miniaturized, air conditioned alone... that are designed to vanquish death by total simulation.(87)

In the consumer world, humans should not try to conserve the nature by trying to simulate and create the artificial one. Rather, they must realize the kinship

between them and nature. Baudrillard discusses the technological simulations leads to the duplication of the real world which raise the question of what is real. Baudrillard's fourth order of simulacra represents the duplicative processes of scientific and technological simulation. Due to the presence of simulacra, the nature's reality has disappeared. Baudrillard identifies:

The phenomena of multinational corporations, urbanization, and circulation of images are to create nature as simulated stimuli for consumption. Such phenomena mediate experiences of nature so that meanings of nature become symbols and signs of a simulation of reality. (132)

*The Overstory* raises the awareness on the life of trees proposing an eco-centered way of being revolving around the enlargement of the concepts of agency and creativity. Olivia and Mimi Ma go through radical conversion moments that allow for a decentering that leads them to rethink their place in a world that has revealed itself to be more meaningful and interconnected than they thought. Powers asserts:

We need more realism ... more life! The animals should start and stop, saunter and stare, just like their living models... Let's build this place up in every detail, from stuff out there. Real savannas, real temperate forests, real wetlands... I want to be able to count 750 kinds of simulated plants in Mastery 7. (347)

Neelay in the novel can no longer tell the difference between real and unreal. Cities full of artificial and simulated things take the people away from the reality in the

modern consumer world. Patricia in the novel talks about the relevance of human and nature relationship. Her experimentation, deliberate efforts towards the forest in the novel attracts everyone's attention. The forest is the richest collection of energy which helps other creatures to grow and survive. Powers states, "Trees are their kin, with hopes, fears, and social codes, and their goal as people has always been to charm and inveigle green things... such a culture might save the Earth"(492). Baudrillard discusses that the societies are administered by symbolic exchange, not by the sign. He asserts, "The prominence of kinship structure means that all exchanges are reciprocal. Private property and accumulation are absent"(243). In the novel *Generosity: An Enhancement*, Powers states, "Nature including both its materials, and its laws, will be more at our command; men will make their situation in this world abundantly more easy and comfortable" (145). Humans should be grateful to nature. Powers discusses the importance of nature as:

The trees are the longest-lived form of life on the planet earth, who lives in the sky, on the surface and under the ground. We will learn to reign ourselves to the influence of the earth or we will disappear (328)

The novel *The Overstory* addresses the idea that trees remain intangible but omnipresent by treeing the story in both its substance and narratology, artfully portraying both the trees. In the post-modern consumer world, the consumers have different attitude towards the world of nature. Humans share the strong bond with nature. Nature in the form of plants, rivers and forest need to be cared about rather than exploited. The epoch of the exploitation of nature by consumption-oriented societies must end.

The relevance of human and nature relationship is explored through Richard Powers' novels. The need of an hour is to understand the importance of nature and to maintain the ecological balance and to sustain the civilized form of living. Richard Powers through his novels talk about the strong kinship that prevails between nature and humans. Through his writings the novelist tries to bring forth the concern to reconnect with nature. In the world of consumerism, many people are forgetting their kin relation with nature. There is a need to raise people's understanding about nature challenges and issues. The right course of action is required by all the individuals, mankind to protect the natural world. In the novel *The Overstory*, Powers describes the relation of humans with trees by the involvement of all nine protagonists in their struggle to save trees. In the progression of story, the characters come forward, feel connected to each other, and take actions against the environmental upheaval to save trees. The novel not only throws light upon the kinship between human and nature but also probes the relationship that exists between them. Powers through his novel tries to expand the human consciousness towards the strong kinship between human and nature, further tries to expand the human vision towards the natural world which is getting mitigated day by day due to the consumption of natural world. By keeping the trees as a central point in the novel, the human interest and characters involvement is there especially around the trees in the novel. Feith writes, "The entanglement of human and vegetal types introduces a double defining move: characterization of the former is enhanced by their association with trees, which latter benefit from the depth of interest we invest in fictional people" (102). The various protagonists are related with trees in a magnificent manner. In novel *The Overstory*, Nicholas Hoel is connected with the Chestnut tree



by his ancestors. He shared a strong bond with the chestnut tree in the novel from the beginning through family photographs.

There is a tradition in the Hoel family to click a picture with chestnut tree every month which results in a good memory book. Powers through his album represents a strong kinship between Hoel family and Chestnut tree. Further, in the novel the another character Mimi Ma, the daughter of a Chinese immigrant is coupled with another tree i.e Mulberry, which is planted by her father in the house garden. Other characters like Roy and Dorothy in the novel with tree like Oak and Linden, that represents a married couple in the novel feels elated and get peace in their life by planting trees in their home. Moreover, Douglas strong relation with trees represents that human must save trees to save them. Powers bring forth the crucial points regarding violence, eager consumption, profit-making, commodification and deforestation through his novels. Powers writes, “The universe is a banyan, its roots above and branches below. Now and then words come trickling up the trunk for Douglas, like he’s still hanging upside down in the air: Tree saved your life” (105). The software engineer Neelay Mehta is also associated with Oak tree. During come back from his school, lost in his thoughts, he fall from the oak tree and got paralyzed. Neelay develops Mastery a video game which is based on the huge structure and vegetation. The video game represents the trees ecosystem. Neelay gets inspired from Patricia Westerwood’s book *The Secret Forest* and work on various computer programs to develop more virtual games related to natural world. Patricia as a scientist and forest lover develops a powerful connection with trees. She is one who talks about that trees share signals and shares a beautiful

kinship with other trees and humans. She discusses the signification communicative abilities of the trees in the novel. Powers writes, “The wounded trees send out alarms that other trees smell. Her maples are signaling. They are linked together in an airborne network, sharing an immune system across acres of woodland” (158).

As the story develops in the novel *The Overstory*, the protagonists Douglas, Hoel, Olivia and Mimi Ma join an environmental campaign to save the giant redwood forest. They start their campaign to protest against the logging companies in the novel. Due to the increasing consumption, the forests are getting exploited day by day. Humans are forgetting their kinship and responsibilities towards nature under the influence of consumption of products and objects. In novel, Powers establishes the importance of trees in the lives of all nine protagonists directly or indirectly in various forms. Somehow, the characters stories actions and movements are around trees from their childhood. Powers writes, “The tree of the tanning industry, of railroad ties, train cars, telegraph poles, fuels , fences, houses, barns, fine desks, tables, pianos, crates, paper pulp, and endless free shade and food-the most harvested tree in the country-is vanishing” (14). Richard Powers through his novels talks about the strong kinship that prevails between nature and humans. Through his writings, the novelist tries to bring forth the concern to reconnect with nature. Powers discusses the progression of virtual games developed by Neelay in the simulated and hyperreal world. Neelay’s realization of a strong bond with natural world makes him to think about a new AI based project which gets refusal by the board of his company. Neelay talks about the usage of simulation in the positive manner by measuring the natural world and trees through satellite and computer networks. He desires to raise the human consciousness for trees in the last of the novel. Powers

through his character Neelay tries to provide the solution for the ecological threat which mankind is facing and will face in future. Powers writes, “New species, exchanging discoveries, as living code has exchanged itself from the beginning. They begin to link up, to fuse together, to merge their cells and from small communities. There’s no saying what they might become, in seventy plus seventy years”(614).

The novel brings forth a significant view regarding human self-interest which defects all the efforts to save the natural world. Powers states, “What is needed is a myth. I do not think it too remote that we may come to regard the Earth, as some have suggested , as one organism, of which mankind is a functional part of the mind, perhaps”(64). *The Overstory* revolves around the theme of the trees only. Patricia in her talk in the conference presents viewpoint and discusses the things in relation to the harmony with ecosystem. Powers writes, “If you want next century’s soil , if you want pure water, if you want variety and health, if you want stabilizers and services we can’t even measure, then be patient and let the forest give slowly” (355). The nature remains unbalance at the hands of humans under the influence of consumerism of natural products. In the world of consumerism, many people are forgetting their kin relation with nature. There is a need to raise people’s understanding about nature challenges and issues. The right course of action is required by all the individuals, mankind to protect the natural world. Under the influence of simulated products and objects, the individuals start feeling their superiority over the natural environment refer nature for use and exchange value only. Powers in his novel discusses the various distinctive and complex facets of nature life which humans must comprehend and provide an optimistic viewpoint for the revival of better environment. Individuals when forget their strong relation with

nature and lives according to their wants and desires, break the rules related to natural environment. Powers discusses that mankind is unite to the nature with the purpose which is vital for the existence of both. Trees share strong kinship with each other also by sharing signals to one another through air, trade sugars through underground and further they sustain their species through fungal intermediaries. Trees represents several acts of cooperation with human beings and as well as with other creatures.

Trees as nature gift do wonderful things by providing food, shelter, and protect all other living beings. Powers himself talks about the relevance of the conscious efforts to be aware about the life of commodity, which humans live at present. Humans must focus on to live the life of community. Powers discusses that how humans are not separated from the natural living world like human's life prevails in his novel *The Overstory*. The characters in the novel have immense experience and encounter with trees which has great impact on everyone's life. All the enchanted experiences with nature lead the characters on life changing journeys and strengthen the kinship which they shared with trees. The characters as active agents in the first instance find it difficult to understand the relation with trees. Their ability to look, feel and understand trees are quite ubiquitous. Powers discusses and presents relationship between nature and human beings from an ecological outlook and further his novels discusses the ultimate goal of mankind that is to maintain the harmonious relationship between human nature. The novel *The Echo Maker* depicts the unique scientific information about the capgras syndrome along with the natural beautiful portrayal of natural habitat of the Sandhill crane on Platte River in Nebraska. The Sandhill crane, a unique bird in the novel migrates every year in the

winter along with his kins to Nebraska. Daniel one of the characters in the novel become mouthpiece of Powers expression of love for nature. He hopes that human beings must live in harmony with nature. He tries his best to save the habitat of Sandhill crane and the natural landscape of Nebraska from the corporate world of today. Powers describes the natural beauty of the Platte River in Nebraska aesthetically. He writes about the long and quiet river where the Sandhill cranes migrates and perches. Powers writing portrays the beautiful and harmonious natural ecological picture by describing the river surface, snow, swamps, riverbanks and willows are part of nature earth.

The nature plays a vital role in the survival of human beings. Nature provides a sustainable environment and conditions for human survival. Humans must have a sense of duty towards nature and give due reverence to the natural life around him.

In this chapter, the achieved objective is *To explore nature's kinship with humans as depicted in Richard Powers Works*. There is a profound intense association of all the living beings in the world. Humans and natural world shares a strong tie of relationship among each other. In the system of social relationship humans and trees also share a special bond. In the hyperreal postmodern world, the real relation of human and nature is vanishing day by day as humans relation with commodities and products has increased a lot. There is a need to reexamine the affinity between human and nature. Richard Powers through the medium of his various works illuminates human about nature's vitality in the consumer world and also put forward the question on expanding human's connection with the consumerist world of today. Powers novels raises several questions on human collective efforts

towards nature and on the whole, the collective efforts towards all the organisms which constitutes the world. Richard Powers novels are read and interpreted to reflect the strong kinship between human and nature, which is getting covered and diminished under the veil of simulated objects in the hyperreal world of today. In post modern consumer world, images, signs and objects has become the new reality. If only humans perceive, feel and understand the reality of their relationship with nature only then humans will learn to focus on the strength of connectivity and kinship with the nature in their best sense. Humans must prevent the manipulation of nature as to offer it as an appearance of supernatural. Humans must realize the potential of nature that give the best resources to mankind unthinkable and unquestionable.

## Chapter Four

### Simulation and Hyperreality

Simulation refers to the model of reality without the presence of any referred reality. In the midst of the advancement of technology, the sign plays a significant role in the world of simulation. The signs and codes represent the reality in a way that there remains no difference between the real and sign. Baudrillard states, "Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal"(2). Bauman elaborates, "Piles of images, heaps of information, flocks of desires have made everything too much, resulting in the images referring back to them only. In the same vein, information loses its functionality in informing and desires turn into their own simulacra" (151-52). Due to the absence of the reality in the world, the simulacrum can't be exchanged. The simulacra are the copies without a real referent. Simulation refers to absence and pretends that thing exist which in real terms does not exist. The representation of the objects depends upon the equality of real and sign, but on the other hand, simulation refers to the opposite of representation. Baudrillard defines simulacra and simulation as the substitution of the signs for the real which has already been lost or does not exist. The simulation logic has no relation with the facts of the real world. The simulated models create the facts which further circulate the models only. Baudrillard asserts, "Simulation is characterized by a precession of the model, of all models around the merest fact, the models come first, and their orbital circulation constitutes the genuine magnetic field of events"(31).

Baudrillard discusses the four successive phases of images. In the first stage, the image reflects a basic reality.

The first order tells the discrepancy between the real and representation. In the second stage, the image perverts the basic reality by purposefully distorting the truth; thus, it hides the truth. Due to the industrial revolution and massproduction, the value between the real and depiction has disappeared. The image works as a concealer of the lack of basic reality in the third phase. At this phase, the signified has vanished and the signifier tries to disguise this absence. John also states, “The third order of simulacra embodies the order of simulation; thus, is controlled by the media and as media itself is also a code, the code is in control of this order”(144). Finally, the fourth stage states that the sign does not share a relation to any reality and it becomes totally self-referent. Hence, it becomes its own simulacrum. In the fourth phase, the image enters into its own simulacrum where it loses the relation to the real. As a result of this, hyperreal begins. Pawlett in the Baudrillard Dictionary discusses, “Simulacra not as false images, nor as obscuring truth behind a façade, but as that which hides the truth non- existence and thus the simulacrum is true” (196). Baudrillard understands that the simulacrum is not based on reality. On the other hand, simulacrum hides the truth that the notion of reality is no longer available. The simulation is not the pretense from the reality. Simulation is the model of reality without the presence of reality. Baudrillard in *Simulacra and Simulation* asserts:

Nothing separates one pole from another anymore, the beginning from the end; there is a kind of contraction of one over the other, a fantastic telescoping, a collapse of the two traditional poles into each other:



implosion – an absorption of the radiating mode of causality, of the differential mode of determination, with its positive and negative charge- an implosion of meaning. That is where simulation begins.  
(31)

In the technology driven post-modern era, it is challenging to distinguish reality from the representation. The term hyperreality is defined as the real models without any originality or reality. The hyperreal images and models are better than the real ones. Baudrillard states, “Hyperreality is a generation of models of a real without origin or reality”(1). Hyperreality creates numerous symbols which do not exist in reality. Torikian states about Baudrillard’s hyperreality as, “A term used to describe the way the world is absorbed by an individual’s preference for illusory objects over authentic ones” (100). Further, Baudrillard describes, “Hyperreality as a condition in which simulacra leave out representation and reality”(1). In post-modern era, the real is missing and the images continuously construct themselves which reshapes the relations, reality and communication among various signs. The imaginary claim its own reality away from the real which do not have a chance to produce the reality itself. Rightly assert by Baudrillard:

Hyperreal fills the void left behind by the absence of the original. Let us be clear about this: if the real is disappearing, it is not because of a lack of it. On the contrary, there is too much of it. It is the excess of reality that puts an end to reality, just as the excess of information puts an end to information, or the excess of communication puts an end to communication. (75)

The excess of anything brings the death of the reality. The lack of the reality does not come from the fading reality, in actual terms it results from the excessiveness of everything. The consumers feel misfit into the society and gets dissatisfaction from their regular life. The consumers are always on the way to upgrade their lifestyle under the influence of simulation. Bauman describes:

If the contemporary individual were to be given the chance to choose between the real and the hyperreal, the hyperreal would be preferred over the real due to its excessiveness. Post-modern culture is a culture of excess and is characterized by the overabundance of meanings. (31)

There is a great role of media in the formation of hyperreal in the post-modern world. The individual perceives experiences and realities through the signs, symbols and codes provided by media and technology in the post-modern society. Pawlett states, “We live in the world of complex simulations, simulacra that only seem real but are in fact sign and media constructs”(105-106). People do every task to put the photographs on the social media and are more concerned about their status quo. The individuals are always in a search of someone on the social media platform and consider the virtual image as the real one. The individual feels one with the image and with the passage of time reality does not exist; only the media created images prevails. In this world, in the midst of the simulation of social relations and consumption, the world has become a fantasy world. Baudrillard in *Simulacra* explains:

Today, it is the real that has become the alibi of the model, in a world controlled by the principle of simulation. And, paradoxically, it

is the real that has become our true Utopia, but a Utopia that is no longer in the realm of the possible, that can only be dreamt of as one would dream of a lost object.(122-23)

The concept of simulation in the consumer society is discussed in relation to nature in comparison to primitive and modern society. Nature in primitive society refers to the original thing as it is. However, in modern world, nature has been customized according to the needs of the human. The nature has been polished, groomed and has become an object in the consumer world. The sham objects offer the various signs and images which seem to be real but as a matter of fact, they do not represent the reality. They are just images, signs and code in the hyperreal world of goods.

Baudrillard talks about the presence of Kitsch in the modern world which refers the abundance of images and signs but lacking the real significance of the products. Baudrillard defines Kitsch as:

A simulation, a copy, an imitation, a stereotype, as a dearth of real significance and a superabundance of signs, of allegorical references, disparate connotations, as a glorification of the detail and a saturation by details.(123)

There is a close relation linking the signs and the mass produced objects. The products are the copies of real products which are related to the mass production of the objects in consumer world. In modern world, simulation plays another important role through gadgets that affect the society as whole. The gadget works without any practicality and the consumers are getting engrossed in the gadgets actually getting dominated by simulations. The consumers are just playing with the gadgets rather

than using them without understanding the effects of simulation on the society as a whole. Baudrillard asserts, “The world is coming to be increasingly dominated by simulations and we are reduced to playing with them rather than using them, or relating to them, symbolically”(25). Baudrillard argues, “Mass media have greatly enhanced and generalized the simulation process. Instead of reality, people are treated to simulations involving the constant recombination of various signs, of elements of the code”(359). A simulated familiarity is formed among people doing the promotion and prospective customers, at the same time as between the latter and the products being advertised. This is however one part of what Baudrillard observes as a comprehensive game of human relations. As a result, the individuals find themselves surrounded by the number of products, personal relations and emotions which all are orchestrated. In post-modern society, there is a huge simulation model of such human relations and products which make an individual feel reified. In the novel *The Overstory*, Neelay after creating the several versions of simulated game mastery feels the fear in his heart and the need to return something to the community which takes him back to the redwood trees. Powers states, “The world is a living place and I am not the lord and master of it” (389). Neelay gets dissatisfied with his game Mastery and think to create a new game that depicts the natural world of earth, for this he wants to create AI based bots to gather the information about the working of forest in hyperreal world.

Baudrillard discusses the organization of the societies around the consumption of commodities and the role of images and codes plays in the simulated world. The signs, images and codes are the commanding principles of a new societal order where the simulation governs. The consumers perceive and relate their choices

of objects to others through the medium of codes and models. The social and cultural life of post-modern world is controlled by the logic of simulations, where signs and images establish the consumption of goods and services.

Baudrillard reflects upon the increasing power of the reign of objects over the people which he denotes as subjects from the beginning of the consumer society. He discusses the various ways that the objects fascinate the consumers through advertisement and mass media in the consumer society. Baudrillard asserts, "The world of objects, commodities and goods are formulating the new world through the agency of sign value and code which are the part of the world of things and holds a vital place in the system of objects"(209). In the world of simulation, the media plays the forefront role to represent the objects to fascinate and allure the people. In the simulated world of objects, the distinction between real and unreal, public and private obliterate and trapped the individuals in the virtual world. The objects gain power and importance. The consumers are living in the era where the objects rein the world. In the technologically advanced post-modern societies, there is no clear distinction between real and unreal. There is a lack of ability of consciousness to make a distinction of reality from the simulation of reality. There is a strong role of information technology in everyday life of the consumers. The information determines the public and private sphere through the medium of signs and images which gives the particular experiences to the consumers and fascinates the consumers to consume more to satisfy their needs as hyperreal emerges as one of the effects and causes between human and information machines.

The interaction of various sources of media, technologies, artificial

intelligence, computer technologies control and put an impact on the choices of the consumers. The embedded information circulates in the simulated hyperreal world of images and signs which erases the distinction between representation and production of objects. The advanced information culture has taken the surprising shift towards reality. The new world of reality has emerged like new world of reality shows on television, virtual games – the games which indulges in selling virtual characters by offering various online role-plays. The virtual games offer the new hyperreal world of objects which takes the consumers of the game away from the realities of the world to the unreal world of representations.

Baudrillard explains about the media which simulates the reality rather than representing it. Everyday revolves around various images and signs which appears on the screen and presents the information which is not real but a simulacrum of it. The artificial intelligence becomes so strong that one's life become like a digital suit and an immense process of simulation takes place. People are engrossed in the new game of hyperreality where they want to discover the rules of dangerous world. They are eager to discover what the world will accept, how life really works and it represents the new age of exploration which is far away from the realities of the existing world. In the personal and social relations, human beings have formed their own moral code of conduct. The advancements and scientific research are like Pandora box; once it is opened, the consequences are unpredictable. The realization of facts leads to a better knowledge and understanding of the modern scenario. Technology has familiarized the consumers to virtual mediatization and the consumers perceive everything real without difference, preferring the unlimited power of the illusory with its effects to the limitations of the real.

It provides a detailed analysis of Richard Powers novels using Baudrillard theory. Multiple examples of simulacra and hyperreality are observed and analyzed by me in the novels.

Technology and artificial intelligence plays a vital role in the events in Powers novels. On the whole, Powers novels focused more on technology which carries strong impact of hyperreality and simulation. In the novels, the reality preceded the image like in the novel *Generosity An Enhancement* genes of happiness are the talk out of the town. The media and scientist are trying to find out the way to get happiness genes and no one is concerned about Thassa. Powers writes, “Digital clip of her outbreak hit the Web for worldwide consumption as early as that evening.....despite her best efforts... viruses broke out on machines across all the advanced countries” (241).

The world of knowledge about scientific genes turned into signs and the humanity gets wipe out and everything become simulacra. Further, in the novel *The Overstory*, the concept of virtual reality is discussed. Mastery games by Neelay Mehta in the novel are the examples of simulation about nature and the real is replaced with unreal, virtual world. The games represent the concept of hyperreality. These are the examples of the effect of technology through hyperreality as discussed by Baudrillard. Humans eliminate the reality and construct a hyperreal world.

Powers writes about simulation in *The Overstory* as, “It’s a simulation, dammit. It’s a simulation”(87). In this world, the consumers are constantly overstimulated, not just by code, images and signs, but by all the agents of unfiltered information that bombard the consumers. Every image, product takes consumers

attention and amid the hypereal world, the consumers have no choice to identify what's important. In the novel *The Overstory*, Douglas participates in the Stanford Prison Experiment, a real-life psychological study where, individuals are considered as subjects and divided into guards and prisoners. Douglas participates in an experiment where simulated environment is created. He will get 15hrs payment in a day. He is labeled as Prisoner 571 and he gets blindfolded in the real life situation. However, in prison, the guards forget that it is a simulated environment for experiment and starts behaving in a cruel manner and abandon the logic and go along with the group behavior. Douglas and other participants realize that the experiment is not only testing their behavior but things are getting frightening day by day. Everything gets worse in that simulated environment and guards escalate the torture and manipulation. Powers states:

"It is a simulation... The guards crush the fire extinguishers, chain up the leaders... Solitary.. No dinner for the rebels... Eating, as the guards remind their captives.. is a privilege" (93).

Powers emphasizes that humans have a tendency to adopt group mentality and behaves similar in a conditioned and simulated environment. Douggie in a hyperreal simulated environment feels stuck and thinks if that experiment happens for years. Powers throw light upon it as, "Five seventy-one lies in bed, under his blanket, thinking. This isn't life. It's just a simulation" (96). Everyone thinks to fight back against the experiment and no one is able to do and no one has the courage to save 416 who has mental breakdown. The powerful scientist in authority at last wakes up with the realization not to continue the experiment after six days.



Douglas along with other prisoners is set free. They are in the world with new reflection of ideas and thoughts. Powers states, “The people who ran this the so called psychologist should be locked up for ethics violations” (97). Douglas finds difficult to understand the hyperreal world outside when on one side people are studying psychology and on other side some twenty-year olds are dying in Vietnam war.

Neelay as a coder and programmer from the very early age in school is interested to work on code. He is the first in the Silicon Valley who develops code and simulated games. He gives away his masterpiece games to other to get the copyright and make huge money. He works as a creator who creates hyperreal simulated world of games. Powers states, “The game presents almost as many meaningful choices as Real life, or as his staff has taken to calling it, a little decisively, RL” (282). He realizes and feels the importance of trees and believes in the end of story that he desires to create a game, a game that unfolds creation and puts the players in the middle of the game to feel the Redwood trees. Powers through his protagonist Neelay Mehta throws light upon the hyperreal simulated world of online games and its addiction in the consumer world. Powers states:

An alpha copy floating around the office brings Semperviens to a standstill. Once the employees get playing, they want nothing else. They stop sleeping. They forget to eat. Relationships are a minor irritation. One more turn. Just one more turn. The game is called Mastery. (247)

The usage of technology increases the consumption. The companies and industries motive is to make more profit day by day. The best developers in the Valley knock on the door every day, wanting to play. Software engineers on Route 128 around Boston, grads from Georgia Tech.... brain shaped from infancy by the games. Neelay used to give away.... by him for the chance to help engineer. (285)

Further, Powers throws light upon the greed and demand of more and more by stating, "The code Neelay wrote is changing this other man's brain...I've been lots of things ...if software keeps getting better and giving us more room. I think that we will be able to make ourselves into anything we want" (287). Neelay codes adventure game like an adventure trip. Every game runs as a success and his game Mastery has sequel with updates. Like Olivia and Patricia in the novel. Neelay also gets mystic message from redwood forest which makes him to keep his company's name *Sempervirens* (a redwood's latin name). Mastery 2 a simulated game is a complete adventure where players can become anyone they want, players can explore the world and build empires. In the game, players can defeat mystical monsters in a simulated environment. Every game brings Neelay a phenomenal success. However, for the realization of a big change, Neelay read Patricia's book *The Secret Forest* in which she mentions about how trees communicate and help another. Neelay works in the complex computer model which can create a network for simulating nature and natural processes that people are ready to experience at the name of human development.

Neelay tries to reconcile the digital world with the natural world. He likes the

nature around, the mountains and the amazing creation of trees and plants surrounded the silicon valley. Neelay experiments the beauty and complexity of real with the unreal. Neelay desires to bring the humanity near to the nature with the vision to create the best game without any selfish motive along with the hope that people can understand what trees are saying and wants to communicate to the mankind the interconnections of trees. Powers describes the simulation and hyperreality through Neelay's programmed game where AI reflects a new form of life. Powers describes it as, "Primal commands, They look, listen, taste, touch, feel, join. They are coded manually, not genetically, but this does not make them any less alive" (239). Through his simulated games, Neelay tries to bring the natural world of trees to the million game followers in the story. His purpose is to aware and spread the love for nature to game players and to overcome the ignorance of devaluing trees. Even another protagonist in the novel Adam Appich thinks about the simulation presence and its impact on the world. Powers writes, "Futures where our robot descendants use us for fuel or keep us in infinitely entertaining zoos" (278). Everyone's survival depends upon each other's survival. It is important to pass the wisdom from one generation to another generation. In another novel *Echo Maker*, Powers describes the map on the same lines as Baudrillardian sense of the map in *Simulation and Simulacra*. Powers describes the Kearny Nebraska as an example of a simulation in the novel. He states, "The blocks scrolled and repeated, the streets a simulation more predictable than one of Mark's online games" (29).

In *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard writes about simulation as, "An absence, it feigns by means of adopting what is not there, blurring the boundaries between the true and the false or the real and the imaginary" (40).

Baudrillard exemplifies the map of Borge's allegory as simulacrum. Baudrillard puts it as, "If once we were able to view the Borges fable in which the cartographers of the Empire draw a map so detailed that it ends up covering the territory exactly.... as the most beautiful allegory of simulation, this fable has now come full circle for us, and possesses nothing but the discrete charm of second order simulacra"(1). In the same reference to Borge's fable, Powers describes the Nebraska as , "The name Nebraska comes from an Oto word meaning flat water. The French , too, called the rivers that ran through it Platte'.... A wide, flat hollow at the heart of map, so level it would make Euclid bliss"(160). The map becomes simulacrum . The cognitive map and body map become simulacrum as well. In the novel, Mark perceives his sister as an imposter. His sister's reality as somebody else is perceived as a simulacrum. His sister's reality shifts into double without any origin or reality. In real terms, Karen is not an imposter but seems to be an imposter to Mark due to Capgras syndrome. Power writes in the novel stating Marks perception for his sister as , "I don't know where my sister is. I don't even know where I am. This whole so called hospital could be a movie studio where they take people to fool them into thinking that everything's regular"(81). Capgras syndrome creates hyperreal world for Mark, where he perceives his sister unreal, someone else, neither Karen (Marks sister) is able to understand this condition of her brother and gets upset for considering her to be his enemy. The impact of simulation and hyperreality is a quite visible on Mark in the novel as he points out the minute details of his sister as in comparison to the imposter Karen. Gradually, in the novel, Karen also starts losing her real sense of belongingness and believing unreal fact of her personality and question her real sense of who she is. Powers depicts Karens condition as, "I just feel

so helpless. I have done nothing at all for him. And to his look of utter incredulity, his real sister would have” (117).

In novel, it's not about capgras syndrome only; Powers throw light upon the psychologist Dr Weber self-consciousness also which gets echo in many ways. While solving the rare disease, his own image gets estranged, he feels alienated and reified in the world of simulation and hyperreality which is a replica of the factual with no foundation or reality. Powers explores the possibilities as, “Weber's growing, dazed suspicion that he might live to see such wild philosophical phantoms solved,.... had pretty much driven out any other resemblance of what in popular parlance had come to be called a real life” (170). In Powers another novel, *Orfeo* main protagonist in the novel is introduced to many classical pieces of music through his father. Peter's love for Mozart's Jupiter is presented vividly in the novel in order to make the readers believe his love for music. With the passage of time and advancement of technology, Else's love and liking for different genres of music gets changed and he becomes avant-grade as he grows up. During his young age, Peter Else has an intense dislike for popular music as he always has an interest in classical musical compositions. His brothers and friends used to tease him for the same. However, with the passage of time, the same Peter has been witnessed to listen to the heavy metal songs at the later stages in the novel. With the advent of technology and in the presence of simulacra, various copies of same musical compositions are there in the market. The music taste is also getting changed day by day due to the variety of musical albums in the market. The musical compositions are varying as per the varying levels of intensity of situations. Joseph Dewey brings forth the concern in the mediated world of signs and images as:

The sheer scale of the techno-world can terrify and compel a withdrawal from its evident brutality and massive facelessness into the clean, simulated spaces of aesthetic refuge, traditionally books and museums, but lately movie theatres, computers and other virtual geographies, theme parks and television. (11)

Richard Powers *The Overstory* illuminates the human path through the enlightenment about nature's vitality and it makes human aware about the relationship that humans share with the material objects and products, which further in the process of consumption takes humans away from natural world. In *The Overstory*, Dorothy and Ray figure out their fictional daughter in the backyard chestnut when Dorothy read Westerwood's book for him. Powers writes, "She sees in the chestnut's branching the several speculative paths of a lived life, all the people she might have been the ones she could or will yet be, in world spreading out just alongside this one" (443). The couple perceive that an impossible tree could have been planted by their daughter. Dorothy in the hyperreal world feels the presence of her daughter. Powers writes about the simulated world of the Dorothy's backyard. He writes, "If the daughter's image is so vivid that Dorothy is sure that she has seen some model for it somewhere that model may lie inside the miniature simulated world of the novel" (459). Writing in 1980's Baudrillard writes, "Real no longer plays a central role in society. Rather, signs have replaced reality and truth, and all reality is reduced to a simulation of itself" (6). For Baudrillard:

Representation stems from the principle of the equivalence of the sign and the real. Simulation, on the contrary, stems from the utopia of

principle of equivalence, from the radical negation of signs as value, from the signs as the reversion and death sentence of every reference. Whereas, representation attempts to absorb simulation by interpreting it as a false representation, simulation envelops the whole edifice of representation itself as a simulacrum. (16)

When the sign and the real code no longer communicate or if the real stops to be part of the equation, representation gives way to simulation. Powers writes about the hyperreal condition of creating a happiness gene as:

Enhancement will mean nothing in the long run. The remodeling of human nature will be as slapdash and flawed as its remodelers. We'll never feel enhanced. We'll always be banned from some further Eden. The misery business will remain a growth industry. When fiction goes real, reality will need a more resistant strain of fiction. (151-52)

The satisfaction that Truecyte's mutant of contentment feels, rest of us can also understand, much more significantly, because more occasionally, through daily effort. Powers states:

Convention centers with the look of fifties science-fiction space colonies warehouse districts full of resale contraband peppered with refrigerated corpses. Cemeteries a hundred times the length of soccer pitch, with gravestones in forty-one languages. There's Chinatown, Greek town, Bucktown, little Italy. (153)

The research covers the aspect of environmental contribution to happiness and depicts the picture of positive psychology through the understanding of genome of Thassa's happiness. Powers throws a light upon the scientific hallucination in this ever growing world of consumerism. In the novel, thassa has just become a publicly traded community due to the commercialization of her genes of happiness. Powers describes the hyperreal world as, "If some newly mutated vines were to decimate the race tomorrow, a fair chunk of civilizations id from the Paleolithic to the Nanotech Age could be recreated out of this room's strewn treasures. The overflowing dragon's hoard of with medieval castles, interstellar Monopoly sets, speech recognizing ant colonies, and GPS- ready counterterrorist dolls" (170)

Further, Powers through Stone's words in the novel *Generosity*, points out the hyperreal world as, "They are in futopia, the persistent massively multiplayer world that Candace's son and millions of others around the globe find more rewarding than anything the less persistent real world has to offer"(171). The kids like Candace's son are addicted to the gadgets, simulated and hyperreal games that can match any sedative hovering around the globe. In the hyperreal world of simulated games, Powers writes in the novel *Generosity*, "You can even create new lands, if you gather enough power"(172). Powers expresses his views about the happy citizen of the planet where the simulated world with advanced technology and cultural evolution tries to shelter the brain of the humans through the presence and usage of various gadgets and products in the consumer world of today. Powers writes about the pleasure of humans in the digital advanced consumer world, where through enhanced artificial intelligence, individuals are getting involved in hyperreal world,



away from the reality of real world. He writes, “That’s the beauty of the digital replacement world. That’s why everyone is moving there” (184). Genes, medicines are getting more complicated with the presence of simulated products in the consumer world. Powers writes, “Computer programming has changed the world....Waiting for the programming of genome”(189). Powers explains the existence of various capitalist companies and their products which further simulates the consumption of products. He writes:

Trucecyte is in the business of selling the same product as most of the biotech sector vaporware.. the venture capitalists known what’s in the pipeline.... Think about five year just before the Internet. The five years just before the steam engine.... Companies will take advantage of the biggest structural change in society.(189)

Powers explains, “Forget what you know. Free your mind. Use your imagination.... Microbes that live on dioxins and digest waste plastics. Fast growing trees that sequester greenhouse gases. Human beings free from all congenital disease”(190). Powers through the words of one of the character of novel *Generosity* Kurton throws light upon the presence and future of simulated products, techniques and medicines in the novel *Generosity*, where Kurton wishes and tries to commodify. Thassa’s happiness genes and considers her as a consumer product of future. Kurton makes a plan to testify her genes in the laboratory and considers her genes as capable of being well in the world whose result will remove the suffering from the world and every individual will wish to consume the happiness genes product. Powers mentions:

Our initial product will likely consist of pharmaceuticals... Drugs tailor made to the genome of the recipient. Smart bullets, genetically personalized perception, and the sooner we get there, the faster we can finally get medicine out of the dark ages. Once we understand the brain chemistry behind depression and elation.(192)

Powers in addition, talks about the networking of genes and consumerism of it as, “Truecyte orchestrates their announcement about the network of genes that helps regulate the brain’s set point for well-being. The few dozen science writers, photographers, lawyers and invest”(195). Kurton in the novel *Generosity* talks about the animation, simulated products in the new era of emotions. In the hyperreal state of world, Powers states in the novel about the progression of science and technology as, “We’re saying that we’ve measured a very strong correlation. People with this grouping of key gene variants will be far more likely to enjoy elevated affective set points than those who do not. All other things being equal”(196).

Advertisement plays its roles in the novel *Generosity*, Powers states, “Newsweek puts the story of genes on their cover. Better than sex, stronger than money, more lasting than prestige.... The secret of happiness? Be Born Happy”(198). In the simulated world of signs and images, Powers asserts:

In one corner, the old style university geneticist, hands full of reagent, head full of a slowly accreting body of knowledge. In the other, the molecular engineer, hands on the computer simulations and head full of informatics, working for a start-up drug company.(212)

In the novel *Generosity*, Kurton portrays the hyperreal character Jen which represents the girl carries genes of happiness on social media, which in actual term doesn't exist in reality in the novel. Powers writes:

Jen Mind, Beginner's Mind-It's a careful piece, distinguishing between destiny and pre disposition. It paints a rich picture of positive psychology's current understanding of emotional set points. It surveys the huge body of research about environmental contributions to happiness.(213)

Moreover, in the novel when Artgrrl comes to know about the real identity of Jen as Thassa. Powers states, "Jen is a scientific hallucination ... She swallowed a little stimulant.... Nobody made the connection ..... The whole hyper thing....?" (216). Baudrillard talks about media, reality shows to allure the consumers in the hyperreal world of consumer society. In the same reference, Powers talks about the talk shows in his novel *Generosity* as, "She has the power to create instant celebrities, sell hundreds of millions of books make or break entire consumer industries, expose frauds, marshal mammoth relief efforts, and change the spoken language" (228). Discussing the impact of consumerism and advanced technology Powers asserts:

Gene sequencing is getting a hundred times cheaper and faster every year. Someday you will be able to order behavioral traits tests for less than you'd pay a psychological testing service and the answer won't depend on self-reporting (235).

Powers comments upon the digital era of hyperreal by commenting upon the

interview given by Thassa on the happiness in the novel *Generosity*, where the ultimate aim of corporate world to earn profit and treat Thassa as a subject and happiness as a product and sign. Powers writes, “Digital clips of her outbreak hit the web for worldwide consumption as early as that evening. They multiplied for days after the air date. And by the following week, the YouTube imitations began to appear” (241). Moreover, Powers bring forth consumption as, “Thousands of cords are paying their way through school by donating. It’s a bazaar online one hundred and fifty ads a day on Craigslist. The question is What’s a fair market price, for someone with her genetic profile”(258)?

Powers through his character Thassa in the novel *Generosity* comments upon the consumption of products in simulated world as, “My genes are the key to anything so if some crazy person wants to pay for hallucinations, is it my job to stop them? The more they pay for this, the happier it will make them. And that is the product they want to buy, anyway”(261).Further, Powers writes about consumerism as, “Someone, somewhere and sometime will auction off every inclination. When we tire of happiness, someone will make a market in useful despair”(267). Powers explains how the consumerism starts with the genes of happiness which leads to the selling of Thassa’s sex cells for the profit of 32,000 US dollars. Truecyte’s as s firm tries to earn profit from the profitability of increased emotional health. Powers states:

Hustling of humanity into the consumer genomics era is now hammered in scores of blogs for gratuitously impeding a free market transaction and asserting ownership over a woman’s genes. (272)

There is a question on how large the genomic happiness industry will flourish in times to come, where Truecyte, a profit venture has shown trade interest by charging a cost. Powers writes:

If a reasonably alert person wants to be exhilarated, she just has to be read a little evolution. Think of it: a Jupiter fly by, emerging out of nothing. A few slavish chemicals producing damn near omnipotent brains... That discovery is better than any drug, any luxury commodity, or any religion. Science should be enough to make any person endlessly well. (274)

Powers writes about the future time in the hyperreal consumer world as, “The day may come, when we will choose our children as carefully as we now choose our mates. We may select our natures, the way we screen for a career”(279).Commenting upon the simulated scripts in the T.V shows, Powers throws light through the words of Schiff in the novel *Generosity* as:

Six hundred generations ago, we were scratching on the walls of caves. Now we’re sequencing genomes.... If we accomplished all of that as frightened, negatively biased, misery prone creatures what might we accomplish when genomics takes us.... Working on the transcranial simulation script at three.(280)

While emphasizing on the reality of unreal shows in hyperreal world Powers points out in his novel *Generosity* as, “We are just fanning the unsubstantiated hype. If even one-tenth of this should turn out to be real, then we ought... We’re still a science

show. We should restore some of those scenes with all the objecting researches” (280). Powers writes about simulation in the novel *Generosity* as, “Invention. What did that make them? Less beautiful? More suspect ? Unfair, misleading, personal.... performance, in the place of the real, Devices, in place of facts. The events she described were all fabricated from whole cloth. Not what happened: what could have happened. What might have”(307). In Powers various novels, the over-dependency and over-determination of technology is discussed. There are powerful notions about various concepts like consumerism, agency, nature, simulation and hyperreality and artificial intelligence in novels like *The Overstory*, *Generosity*, *Orfeo* and *The EchoMaker*.

In the novel *The Echo Maker*, Powers is in agreement with Baudrillard about the advent of new technologies, information and media influence and lead the new path in modern societies. Baudrillard put emphasis on the society organized around sign value rather than use value or exchange value. People achieve status, power and prestige according to the objects and products they consume, in which some products have more sign value and status than other products and objects. Powers in *The Echo Maker* explains, “The game controller had at last consummated one of the three great leaps of primate evolution”(192).

In the novel, the doctor Weber explains the simulated version of games which engrossed the children and into the motor cortex of game-cartridge, where they feel the things which are actually not there. They feel their presence in some deep symbolic simulated space of game. Weber becomes curious to know the working of her daughter in the advanced digital world, where his daughter has

started analyzing the traces of light in finding the new planets.

Further, Weber put Mark, who is suffering from capgras syndrome and is unable to recall his self and sister in the same environment of video game that Mark used to play before accident. Powers through his words comments, “See, what we’re saying? It’s not like this is real or anything. We’re not putting anybody through anything” (195). In novel, Karen connected Dr Weber Chung in his paper on hyperreality states:

We are allowing hyperreality to reign over reality and hence celebrate reality as interplay of signs and the collapse of the signified. Reality television demonstrates Baudrillard’s thesis that the obscene lies in the fact that there is nothing to see and that the spectator, rather than desiring difference from others, desire sameness with the subjects that witnessed on television. (34)

In the *Ecstasy of Communication*, Baudrillard discusses the contemporary subject who is unable to make a distinction between internal and external world and states, “The subject (consumer) is the total prey of hyperreality, a pure screen, a switching center for all networks of influence. The body and the self both of which conform to images, can be divided and commodified, as governed by the capitalist/ advertising code”(42). Chung states, “Simulation and the triumph of the hyperreal and mediated reality over actuality, if this does in fact exist” (35).

Chung discusses the role of media, television which diminishes the differentiation between real and unreal. He writes, “Baudrillard argues that

hyperreality threatens to dissolve subjectivity and to control minds; we are subjects of domination by the image and we are encoded within it” (43). In *Orfeo*, the another novel of Richard Powers, the protagonist Peter Else events of life are the product of simulation of a musical composition

Peter Else’s desire to simulate the musical composition talks the ordinary human abilities to the simulated hyperreal world. The medium of music as the expression, based on the code share uncertainty of nature reflects the symbolic meaning of unfulfilled musical desire of Else in the novel. Else dream of musical composition is deep-rooted in the imaginary stage of imagination away from its immediate reality. In the simulated environment of lab created in his house appears to his commitment towards music but has created a problem of his survival in the society. In the novel, when the security forces arrives at Peter Else’s home and suspects criminal aspect with the experiment in his bio-lab, he tries to explain that his lab is not harmful and not simulating any patent credits. He explains to the officers that how he is trying to simulate DNA of a bacteria, which is commonly present in billions around us and which is not a harmful one. Else is trying to do amalgamation of chemistry along with music to create something new in the simulated environment of lab. It depicts his interest and knowledge in chemistry along with his life attachment with music. But this experiment put him into trouble in the novel. Powers writes, “In the year of Peter Else’s birth, no one had even known what a gene was made of. Now people were designing them. The thought gave him the cold chill that music once did. The lab made him feel that he wasn’t yet dead that it wasn’t too late to learn what life was really about” (46).



In novel, Else faces criticism for his experiment in his self- created bio-lab. The government officials condemn Else for the genetic modification of toxic organisms; where in the writer bring forth the point that many pharmaceutical products have been following the same path. Powers throw light on the world's major concern of such experiments and their outcomes that are getting simulated conditions. He discusses the growing urge of the companies to control and master the world at high pace. This kind of categorical experiments disturbs and destroys thereal order of nature. Holt writes, "DNA in any organism encodes, in nature's own language, a detailed history of the environment in which that organism evolved. To alter even a bit of it for world- be artistic purpose is tantamount to aesthetic interest" (65). Else faces the charges of sabotaging ad exploiting the work of science and nature. He explains his experiment and complication of music orchestration to Maddy in the novel. Powers writes, "All those sequences, gigabits long, were just waiting to be auditioned, transcribed, arranged, tinkered with, and added to by the same brains that those score assembled." (299)

In this chapter, the achieved objective is *To apply Jean Baudrillard's concept of consumerism and agency on the selected works of Richard Power*. In the post-modern society, nature persists as a form of simulation in the form of experiences and feelings related to the objects and products. Due to simulation, nature gets groomed and customized according to the human's need. Theme parks are becoming more desirable rather than the original nature. Richard Powers bring forth the influential point of simulation through his novels. In his novel, *The Overstory*, Neelay as a software programmer creates virtual experiences with sense

forest games in the novel. He uses robust simulation in the competitive world of digitalized technology. Neelay has a potential to create the series of games upon the simulation of natural world. Powers through the medium of his novels give message to the mankind to stop using nature as an object and to feel real nature, one need to understand and feel nature in the real essence. Powers in his novels discusses that progress and advancement is associated with the domination of nature through simulation and it creates hyperreal world in the consumer society. The society becomes a society of simulation getting engrossed by the images, signs and code. With the availability of the abundance of signs, the significance of the real objects is lost somewhere in the consumer society. In Powers novel *Generosity: An Enhancement* he discusses the role of media in the transition of society information, advancement and images carries more importance rather than the objects itself. The advent of mass media plays a vital role in generalization of simulation process. The individuals are surrounded by the objects, messages, signs through mass media. Powers talk about the role of mass media in everyday life of consumer in his novels.

In novel *Generosity: An Enhancement* , Powers discusses the role of media which has become a daily phenomenon in one's life. The reality shows away from the reality are scripted and programmed by a fiction commodity. In the novel that makes Thassa Amzwar as an instant fiction commodity who carries genes of happiness and people get interested to be the consumers of same. In the simulated consumer world of today's era, the body has also become a consumer object. The body is worshipped as an object of salvation. The objects, products and services all are being offered and are consumed by the consumers to adore their bodies, which

shows the irrational and excessive devotion of a consumer towards body adornment. In this consumer era, the high technology products for anti-aging, for enhancing beauty, for extending the average life span are creating alarming effects in the society to make people think more about have-nots in life rather than appreciating the haves and what do they possess. The transformation of relations with human to human and moreover with human to objects has taken place already and is continuing with more focus and expression on the style, luxury and power. The ideation of need is there to establish a strong relationship between consumers and objects prevailing in the consumer society. In order to have differentiation from others, people are consuming and wants to consume more and more. In the hoard of money, status and worldly pleasures individuals are getting more attracted to hyperreality rather than the austerity of things.

In novel, *Echo Maker*, Powers compares the human brain with the highest level of technology in the advanced technical world. The brain like internet distributes more networks and modifies the things with other modules. In the era of technology, advertisement comes as a strong and significant consumption tool. With the advancement of artificial technology, virtual reality in form of games and music also presents the simulacra of post-modern society. In hyperreal state there remains no difference in the original and the simulated model of that. Powers discusses the impact of advertisement in his novel *Generosity* by giving the reference of Kurton's company who tries to start the selling of happiness genes and tries to go for the copyright of the same in the novel. Richard Powers highlights Baudrillard theory of consumerism, simulation and hyperreality to great extent. Baudrillard's concept of obtaining pleasure from the objects reflects that needs would never be satisfied in

life. Life is a never ending journey of fulfilling needs, not actually the real needs but the self-created needs in a hyperreal simulated world of today. Powers' novels talks about the technology which holds a significant impact of simulation and hyperreality.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Agency, Nature and Culture**

In the consumer society, the individuals pursue their happiness and find their contentment through various products and objects. The myth of needs makes the individual attract towards the consumption of objects. The needs are generated through code and signs in the world of consumption which mystifies the real needs of the consumers. In the hypereal world of the objects, the individuals are trapped in the illusion of choice. The advertisements allure the individuals and create the sense of choice, which is actually a myth. The individuals are mystified by the presence of simulated objects and find it difficult to distinguish real needs from the artificial needs. The individuals take it as a choice or freedom to pick the pleasure from the objects they choose which they considered it as a need. However, in reality, individual needs are nothing, created by the system of needs, which represents systematization of forces in the simulated world of consumption. Baudrillard considers individuals as active agents in the social system of consumerism. In the world of objects and products, the consumption works as a collective force, where the individuals never consume the things in isolation but in the general system of exchange as a code value. There is no correlation between need and the consumption of objects. Just for the distinction of oneself from others, the consumers fall in the compulsion of extracting pleasure from various objects. It has become a universal phenomenon to arouse the curiosity of the consumers to consume various objects through signs, symbols and code in the mediated society of objects. Meanwhile, the

consumption has become a social responsibility for an individual which creates an urge in the consumer to consume more and more and contribute as a social responsible person.

In this world of affluence, people feel like they need more in comparison or competition to another person. Need has no limit. The needs serve the system of growth and consumption that further mystifies the experience of an individual by adding the factor of pleasure in it. In the glittery hypereal world of simulated objects and advertisements, the individual needs are mystified and are treated as sign and symbols. Through the consumption of various objects, the individuals not only please him / her but also try to please the near ones. The individuals start indulging themselves in an act of self-indulgence and celebrate the consumptions of various goods.

Richard Powers novel *The Overstory* stand out among the various novels for exploring the agency and nature in post- modern world of consumerism. The novel elucidates the context and stakes the choices of the various characters. The protagonists in the novel make different choices and shared responsibility to save the redwood forest. The collective actions of the various characters examine the interdependence of human and the non-human i.e trees in the novel. Both work amidst in the ecology of natural and social forces to save the humanity and nature from the destruction.

The major nine protagonist Patricia Westerwood, Nicholas Hoel, Neelay Mehta, Olivia Vandergriff, Adam Appich, Mimi Ma, Douglas, Ray and Dorothy work together to construct the history through the collective efforts. They remark a

wave that people will ride and remember throughout life in the history of mankind. The protagonists make choice to save the trees and the planet earth which is getting consumed day by day in an exaggerated manner. People or characters perform their tasks, make their choices, create their networks with human as well as with non-human and in particular highlights the connection of non- human i.e trees in the novel.

There are challenging notions of agency in which characters make their choice under the influence of natural forces beyond human control like Adam in the novel *The Overstory* . Powers states, “Don’t worry if your job is small and your rewards are few. Even the mighty Ironwood was once a nut, like you”(63). The choices and the actions of the character in the novel prioritize the future actions. Agency in the present course of action directs and focuses not only the present actions but also enables the future actions. In the novel *The Generosity*, Powers asserts, “Character is a performance born in a core desire that even the performer may not understand”(121).

Kurton’s actions as agent make people crazy for the genes of happiness. The journalist as agent takes a charge to save and alert Thassadit Amzwar. Powers states, “Thomas Kurton, who has long taken a beating for hustling humanity into the consumer-genomics era, is now hammered in scores of blogs for gratuitously impeding a free market transaction and asserting ownership over a woman’s genes” (272).The consumption of things and the greed to have genes of happiness go against the humanity in the novel. Amzwar suffers repression and exploitation because of her presence as an object of happiness and the lust to have more and more in the

prevalent society. Amzwar has been celebrated as a mystic person contains genes of happiness. The scientist considers her as an object of consumption with the right genes of happiness to get more and more profit in the world of consumerism. Powers elaborates, “Science has long since passed beyond the realm of wonder into entrepreneurship. New biochemical properties mean new intellectual property” (195). The network of genes takes the attention of everyone across the globe. Technology day by day is changing the experience of everything what people think is intolerable.

In the virtual world of today, journalist in the novel *Generosity*, plays a vital role to hype the happiness genes of Amzwar and play the role of collective agency to repress her. Powers throws light upon the role of media and science in the novel as, “Newsweek puts the story on their cover. Better than sex, stronger than money, more lasting than prestige... The secret of happiness? Be Born Happy”(197-198).

However, the perspectives of the nine protagonists in the novel *The Overstory* examine the natural and spiritual connection among the human and non-human agents like humans and trees. In the novel, the agents like Adam, the most brood and radical one who does not get people. He opines that people hide things what they mean and run after pointless trinkets. In the various sections of the novel called *Trunk, Crown, Seeds* the humans and the trees shared the signals which facilitate the actions and form of choices of the human agency.

The protagonists are considered as collective agency in the novel to spread the awareness related to the trees and try to resolve the conflict of a purposeful life by saving the redwood forest. In the novel, Patricia work as a nature scientist as an agent make the nature/ trees reading and writing visible to the people. She supports



the trees and talks about the enrich life provided by nature in the modern consumer world. She ponders over the environment and its being which supports the purposeful life of humans. But, the individuals as agents get engrossed in the consumption of the products and make various attempts to mock the talks and study of Patricia in the novel.

Further, this mockery drives Patricia towards suicidal attempt also in the novel. Patricia as nature agent talks about the importance and role of trees.

Powers states, “Men and trees are closer cousins than you think. We’re two things hatched from the same seed, heading off in opposite direction, using each other in a shared place” (567) . The novel *The Overstory* throws a light on the Nature as non-human agent whose importance is diminishing day by day in the world of consumerism. Human as agents are busy in consuming the goods and products provided by the natural environment without considering the depletion of nature and its resources.

The old growth forest and the clear cutting of trees lead to tragedy of mankind in times to come. In the post- modern world of consumerism, the incentivizing firms exploit the nature and timber for the more and more production of consumer goods and exploiting the natural resources. However, in the novel, another character Ray, a law student raises his voice to recognize not only human agents and their efforts, but rights should be extended or given to non-human agents i.e trees. Ray raises his voice for the right to live and survival. He raises a question that why should nature- trees, plants, rivers and mountains be the one to make their choice as an agent to decide the future course of action. The writer Powers through his

intellectual capacity throws a light upon the actualization of the possibilities to work upon through the words of his characters as agents.

The other characters like Mimi Ma and Adam who trade their lives after Olivia's death make a choice as an agency in one's mind that human life is short term and human beings are short term species. Through their choice of actions in the novel, Powers through his pen confronts the readers and society as a whole with the question that whether the time has come to take action, whether to come with the fact that the humans in the shackles of consumer products have just proved themselves as repressive agency and shown themselves of doing nothing worth for nature, as non-human agents.

All the choices reflect the possibilities that even if human race does not prevail, the planet will not even endure the loss of civilization. Agency is well thought-out as a capacity of people to act purposely to form their worlds and convert their ideas into purposeful actions. Lotman defines the role of humans as, "Humans are confined to their species specific and relationship which they share with their species and environment is mediated through signs"(99). The connection of humans with their environment is mediated through signs and symbols.

Human capacity to take creative action leads to the belief that they are the only absolute power in the world that has an agency. But the agency of nature is also interlinked with the simple life of people and contributes in the service of mankind. Humans in technological world complex the perceptions about nature and has imposed the advancements while exploiting nature to a great extent. Human actions, choices and intentions always have an impact on the environment. Humans have

the capacity to act creatively which leads their ideas into actions. Marsden, suggests, “Agency is a relational achievement, involving the creative presence of organic beings, technological devices and discursive codes” (26). Baudrillard writes, “Consumption is primarily defined as a code, the code by which the entire society communicates and converses”(79). Code is one of those concepts that attain a special meaning in *The Consumer Society*. Code is defined as a mechanism of total control by Baudrillard. The idea of code implies a phase of management of consumerism over individuals. Baudrillard mentions about commodity fetishism where consumers falsely perceived objects and which become a powerful force that they penetrate deeply enough into the lives of the individuals and subject to control their inner world.

According to Baudrillard, “Objects can only have use value; everything else is mystification” (74). Another eminent theoretician Latour describes:

An agent is defined as any element which bends space around itself, makes other elements dependent upon itself and translates their will into a language of its own. No science of the social can even begin if the question of who and what participates in action is not first opened up, even though it might mean letting elements enter, that, for lack of a better term, we call in terms of agency. (286)

Thrift states, “The agency of nature such as trees leads us to ask some different but related questions. In one sense, we are seeking to give others their due” (26). Jones and Cloke confirms, “Trees as agency of nature act upon as well as being acted upon” (222). Not like humans, trees possess the intellectual and extraordinary

capabilities, but on the other hand, trees possess significant form of active agency which contributes in the hybrid model to serve mankind. Baudrillard explores, “The fatal strategies (of time) which shape our ways of thinking about the transformation of nature to the hyperreality of media” (282). Baudrillard argues and points out that the excessive consumption of objects and products is the main theory of consumer society. Agency is defined as a subject lead to the scientific construction of nature in relation to mankind. Haraway writes about another dimension of agency of nature as, “Cultural, economic, technical and mystic which collapse into each other in a knot of extraordinary density”(63).Macnaghten and Urry throws light upon the non-human agency by stating, “Landscape and nature are complex, spatial and temporal achievements and that relationships with what is taken to be nature are embodied , involving a variety of senses andthat there are physical components of walls, textures, land, plants which partly constitute such dwellings”(165).

Moreover, In *The Consumer Society*, Jean Baudrillard explains that waste is a sign of affluence. He states, “The more individuals can afford to waste, the better off they seemingly are” (167).Waste has a sign has develop into the main virtue in the consumer society. Waste works as an agency to provide the rational to work for the growth society. It promotes the need of distinction among consumers which further maintains the system of consumption in the society.. Baurdillard defines:

To become object of consumption, an object must first become a sign. That is to say, it must become external, in a sense, to a relationship that it now merely signifies. It is thus arbitrary and not inconsistent with that concrete relationship: it derives its consistency, and hence its

meaning, from a systematic relationship to all other sign objects... thus only can it be consumed, never in its materiality, but in its difference. (200)

Baudrillard argues that the excessive production and consumption of things, fashion, waste is the operational principle of consumer society. Excessive consumption in the form of need leads to the shortage of space and time, fresh air, water and natural resources. Baudrillard states, “Goods, objects and services which were abundantly available and free to use earlier are now luxurious and accessible to few, but on the other hand, manufactured goods and objects are offered on a massive scale nowadays” (57). The consumer society is exploiting and utilizing nature and its resources to meet its own selfish motives and ends. Human relationship with nature has been drastically in the system of signification of images and signs.

Nature in the consumer society is subjugated to human control through digital technologies. Nature gets domesticated as a sign and serves as a resource to satisfy the needs of humans. The novel *The Overstory* becomes the story of evolution and regeneration where the programmer Neelay through his game Mastery reveals life as, “The gardener sees only the gardener’s garden. The eyes were not made for such groveling uses as they are now put to and worn out by, but to behold beauty now invisible” (544). Powers further states, “It wants solutions to problems that nothing alive yet knows how to solve” (496). The seeds of disaster have already been planted in the nature universe. The novel explores the relationship between human and non-human agency in the consumer world of today.

The characters play vital role in the novel. The author represents the world and the character’s agency in the novel through the various events and happenings in

the Redwood trees. Powers through the various actions of different nine protagonists in the novel *The Overstory* represents the agency and the impact of agency i.e characters choice throughout the novel. The mapping of the effect of protagonist actions in the novel highlights the important parts of the novel in which the individuals can see the increasing impact of consumerism in the post-modern world.

Further, in another novel *The EchoMaker* the characters like Mark enable us to recover some sense of agency. The novel weaves the yearly relocation of the Sandhill cranes to Nebraska's Platte river into a story that probes the question of self along with the consumption of natural world. The Echo Maker makes associations which bind us closely to the outer world. In the novel, Schluter gets disconnected to the familiar faces and people related to him and gets mystified in the self- created world.

Even Dr. Weber in the novel represents the fact that how weak our connections are there to the real things in the world. The self, reality and all get distorted in the simulated world of things and objects. The various characters in the novel have broken links to the world they belong to. As a mystified agent, Mark feels no connection with his closest relations- his sister, his dog and his house. The self and the realities of the world are closely- binded and interdependent. Further, the people are rather reliant on the association with other people in their lives.

With the advent of technology and science, there are neurons which simulate the things and feelings in individual's life and recreate the different experience of emotions. In the consumer world of today, human society has changed and is changing rapidly which presents created self- images incredibly enriched with the presence of objects and things.

The excess of consumption of things presents unique view of the world with the perspective of multiplicity and connectivity. As different choices are there for the character to select, humans act differently with different people. Humans are inconstant race of improving their selves and turn actions in presence of kitsch objects. The virtualization of world presents the appalling role of signs, simulation and hyperreality and their implications. Richard Powers is the novelist of idea whose characters as agency distill technical information into lucid, gripping journalistic narratives.

In the novel *The Overstory*, trees as agents make an impact on the human characters and their choices in various ways. In novel, the character's choices affect both human and the natural world and play a vital role in the transformation of the human agents in the story. All nine protagonists in the novel get impacted by particular trees in their youths and realize the importance and function of trees in human and natural world.

The experience characters get due to their choices to save the Redwood forest enhances the experience in which their sensitivity to the suffering that humans impose upon the natural world. In the novel, through their actions, the character brings the awakening with each passing activity in the novel and a person gets persuaded by a wish to save nature from more devastation. The characters choices intertwine their lives like the branches of trees and the humans are on their way to turn their experiences with the realization of subjectivity of trees. Powers states, "They are human on their way to turning their greener things. Together they form one great symbolic association"(141).

In *The Overstory*, many characters hear the voices of trees as a form of nature. Patricia as a scientist hears the voices of nature and in novel; she discovers that trees converse by sending chemical signals all the way through their roots. Powers asserts, “Trees are social creatures... things grow in mass mixed communities... synchronize with one another” (153-154). She makes a discovery that maple trees are under attack by insects signals to other unaffected trees.

It has become pretty apparent that the trees send out alarms that the other trees in the forest recognize. Patricia publishes the result and findings of her study but she did not get acceptance. She got ridiculed by the scientific community. However, Patricia continues her research and realizes biochemical behavior of trees where nature plays a role of an agent to save other trees. Powers states, “The biochemical behavior of individual trees may make sense only when we see them as member of a community” (158).

Patricia after investing a number of years in the wild forest gets recognition after her discovery and becomes the scientist who loves trees and forests. Powers asserts, “Everything in the forest is the forest... competition is not separable.. Trees fight no more than do the leaves on a single tree” (179).

Patricia through her findings in the novel desires to save the existing forest by saving the seeds of various trees. She through her research wants to save the existing species. Further, in the novel another protagonist Olivia Vandergriff, an Ohio college student also hears voices of nature. The moment she starts hearing the voice, the world carries no importance and value for her. She along with Nick is in the struggle to save the Chestnut tree and participate as a protestor against logging to save



redwood forest. Powers states the condition of Olivia and the relation with nature, which she experiences as, “May be I heard about these tree protestors week ago, before I electrocuted myself, and now I’m finally seeing them everywhere” (221). Richard Powers through his characters in *The Overstory* reflects how deeply humankind is ill.

Agency is described as purposiveness to do something, a choice, a freedom, an intentional act and deliberate actions to do the systematic analysis of the given situations. Agency includes the choice and acts of the individuals along with their habitual and repetitive actions. The purpose of performing an action constitutes the important aspect of agency. The judgment based on the various choices by the characters involves the various aspects of the situation in the novel. Humans as agency get embedded in the process of social engagement by the habitual aspects of the work along with the capacity of individuals to imagine and create the alternative solutions and possibilities. Agency works towards the present capacity of an individual to solve the complexities of the situations within the duration of time.

The characters in the novel perform different simultaneous actions and make choices which are oriented towards the present and future actions unfolding the different contexts. Humans as agency become capable of making a choice related to the various contextual relationships in the grand scheme of work. The various protagonists in the novel apply their choices which get reflective in their actions in relation to the context of actions in the given text. Agency represents the possibility of a new perspective upon the choice, act, free will and determination. The capacity of an individual to mediate and transform their choices to the related context brings a dynamic and satisfactory result.

Humans as agency play a vital role in the changing environmental orientation with the current passage of time. The humans as agents are capable enough to take actions related to the unforeseen outcomes in the future. The individuals as free agents are able to make their rational choices for him, for others and for the society as a whole. Moreover, the agency helps the individuals to have the capacity to shape and formulate the situations in which they live.

The agency gives the freedom and choice to act to the individuals which further arouse the interest of an individual to act purposefully. Neelay a computer genius in the novel works on the code which evolves life like structure game Mastery. The complex phenomenon of the game is linked to the evolution of the natural world.

As story proceeds in the novel, Mimi Ma and Douglas also take part in the protest to save Redwood forest. All protestors get strength from the connections with each agent who participates in the struggle to save nature. Humans are reminded about the context of the interlocking networks of trees and their root system. Powers elaborates the story feeling of belongings humans along with natural world as human and non-human agency. Even the Hoel family's photograph of the chestnut tree reflects the life of trees as nature agent which gives the strong sense of humanity's place in the natural world.

The nature gets mystified with the evolution of mankind. Powers states, "Something marvelous is happening underground, something we're just starting to learn how to see" (517) Patricia Westerwood in animistic heaven of forest researches about the trees and plants. She measures the ends of branches at a

measured interval. She works all day long after collecting the samples back in to the lab and spend tedious hours to understand the complex working of trees. She calls it as science paradox. Powers through Patricia in the novel bring forth the aspect of agency of trees.

Powers states, “The secret of life: plants eat light and air and water, and the stored energy goes on to make and do things.... Hundreds of chlorophyll molecules assemble into antenna complexes. .... Millions of cells may shape a single leaf... million leaves rustle in single glorious ginkgo” (155-156). Patricia finally finds out the result about the expanding adventure of mystic life of nature. Nature is talking to itself. And she has listened to it. In the world of consumption, the desire for a specific good is generated and articulated by the presence of simulated goods and objects. The consumers prefer objects which provide the intense satisfaction irrespective of the utility of the particular objects. Nowadays consumers are free to consume the things of their choice. Individuals are inclined towards the consumption of products to satisfy their urge, which an individual presumes what he wants. Choices are imposed by convincing the consumer through advertisement. Advertisements present hyperreal world of things with meaning in regard to the system of values.

Baudrillard draws an attention towards the difference in choices between the societies in his book *The Consumer Society*. Baudrillard writes, “It is the difference of choices between one society and another and the similarity of choices within the same society which forces us to consider consumer behavior as a social phenomenon” (70). The individuals make a choice to buy a particular product according to the system of value attached to it. The freedom and choice of an

individual to buy certain goods and product is mystified. The actual freedom is not granted to the individual. The individual is allowed by the presence of kitsch objects and products through advertisements which creates simulated needs and choices. Gervasi writes about the nature of choices and states, “Choices are not made at random, but are socially controlled and reflect the cultural model within which they are made”(70). In the abundance of signs and symbols in the consumer world, the freedom of choice of products is forced upon the individuals

Baudrillard throws light upon this by writing in the consumer society as, “The consumer is sovereign in a jungle of ugliness where freedom of choice has been forced upon him” (72). It is all about the mystification of nature of choices which is a powerful code in today’s world. Advertisement is the most significant mass medium of post- modern era. Advertisement glorifies the objects and allures the consumers by simulating their interests. Advertisement plays a role of a medium agent and a code which colludes with the message and signs to persuade the consumers in the process of consumption of products. It mystifies the objects whereas reinterpret and construct the images to encourage the consumers to buy certain products. Baudrillard elucidates Barnum’s example as, “It was not how easy it was to deceive the public, but rather how much the public enjoyed being deceived” (127). In the modern world of objects, consumers make their worth by the choices and actions they perform which define their agency.

Agency promotes the choices and ideas of an individual which triggers the overabundance consumption of goods and products. Agency gives the freedom and choice to act to consumers related to everyday consumption of things in life. Richard

Powers in his novels explores the factors like choices, nature, culture, objects, consumption of products, environmental disturbance in the world. His novels *The Echo Maker* and *The Overstory*, throws light upon the plight of nature while giving priority to the special relation shared by humans with nature. The growing ecological troubles have become important and have acutely threatens the survival of mankind on planet Earth. In the novel *The Echo Maker*, Powers writes about the distinctive sandhill cranes of Nebraska who migrates every year in the winter and depicts the ecological disturbance for birds in the novel.

Baudrillard writes, “Commodities are fascinating consumers in the consumer society from the beginning of this world. The proliferation of the objects taking supremacy over the consumers in today’s world” (262). The protagonist Patricia, Mimi Ma, Nick, Olivia in the novel *The Overstory* throw light upon the natural world and develop their urge to help and protect nature in their own ways. Other characters like Ray and Dorothy experience the nature of trees and come to believe that nature bring people together. In the novel, Ray Brinkman and his wife Dorothy are childless and have imagined chestnut tree in their backyard as their daughter.

The tree which they have planted a long ago strengthen their relationship as it grows with the passage of time. Dorothy and Ray identify the same chestnut tree as it is there in Iowa. Power writes, “In the chestnut branching the several speculative paths of a lived life, all the people she might have been, the ones she could or will yet be, in worlds spreading out just alongside this one”(443).

Powers through Dorothy’s character pointing out an alternative universe, alternative lives, and a real world juxtapose with virtual ones. Further, Olivia another

character in the novel with code name Maidenhair another name for ginkgo, the tree participates enthusiastically in the environmental army to save Redwood. She works in an environmentalist project to save the trees. She hears voices in her head and these voices as nature agent directs her to Nick in the novel.

Along with Nick, she feels a desire to fight for the environment rights and they participate in the protest to save Giant Redwood. The heavenly bond with nature provides Olivia's life a purpose to live. Patricia represents the non-human life of the forest which has its own agency- trees, plants, salmon, streams etc. The nature's description in the novel is beautiful.

Powers asserts, "Trees learn to save water, trees feed their young and synchronize their masts and bank resources and warn kin and send out signals to wasps to come and save them from attacks" (566). The forests work as agents, they know things, they wire everything. The environment is alive. Powers writes in *The Overstory* :

Trees want something from us, just as we've always wanted something from them. This isn't mystical. The environment is alive – a fluid, changing web of purposeful lives dependent on each other. Trees work magical and do science. Trees are at the center of ecology. Trees are the earth's endless efforts to speak to the listening heaven.  
(567-68)

Powers bring forth the point of discussion that not only trees but life itself wants something from us. All the beings in nature have agency and purpose and humans

must perform the duties towards the nature. The nature itself is mystic and the path to understand trees and its working is really mystical in nature.

Powers opines that the world is propelling towards ecological disaster and that a mythical transformation of human consciousness is required to reverse the motion. Chung discusses the concept of agency in one of his paper throwing light upon Baudrillard as, “Like Baudrillard, for de-centered agency being passive and manipulated by images which are deceptively produced and orchestrated by television networks”(39) Further Cotton reviews the role of human agency in line to the story of trees in the novel *The Overstory* as, “The title is a play on words, referring at a literal level to the overarching canopy of trees in a forest, the collective crowns of the tallest trees, while signaling the author’s ambition to tell as fully as possible the richly complex story of trees as sentient beings and their interactions with humans”(1)

The nine protagonists become a group of eco-activist who organizes their calls and activities to save trees and did the sabotage activities to protect nature. All the main protagonists take the favour of non-human agency i.e trees as all their life activities revolves around the trees. Masiero writes, “Powers has chosen to circumvent this generic resistance and rejuvenate the potential of the novel to address eco-themes and more broadly the relationship between the human and non-human” (137). The nine different characters connect to the center point of the novel through Patricia’s book *The Secret Forest*. Masiero mentions about a book which Patricia’s father gifted her. Patricia opens the book and read, “Let me sing to you now, about how people turn into other things”(171). Further, Masiero writes throws a light on agency as:

Metamorphosis is what happens in the natural world repeatedly: it is predicated on a conception of time as cyclic rather than linear and of life as comprising death. Metamorphosis implies regeneration, from roots to seeds and potentially back to roots, an integral system in which agency is diffused and collaborative and true mastery becomes the capacity to let things happen according to a network oriented system. (147)

Agents are defined as persons or things, which have the ability and intention to cause something in the vicinity or in the milieu to happen. Agency is not seen as a fixed and unchanging property of the active human subject only but rather as something engendered by the interdependence that exists between agential entities, both human and non-human alike, and exercised through their linkages. Humans are the medium through which action occurs and that therefore, the inherent asymmetries of human interaction with the material world play an important role. Ahern states, “Arguments go back and forth over the degree to which agents, which may be through certainly need not be, human individuals are free to act in the world. This degree of freedom is socio- culturally mediated”(109).

Jones observes and states, “Men appear as the agent defining shell value, but without shells men can-not define their value. In this respect, shells and men are reciprocally and agents of each other’s value definition”(284). Masiero discusses, “Richard Powers novel *The Overstory* to raise the awareness on the life of trees proposing an eco-centered way of being revolving around the enlargement of the concepts of agency and creativity” (135). In his paper, Masiero talks about, “Powers



novels a human-centeredness syndrome, a condition which includes the hyper separation of humans as a special species and the reduction of non-humans to their usefulness to humans” (136).

Further, Lamb writes, “Human civilization has now consumed natural resources twenty two percent beyond the justified sustainable levels. In such a situation, a need exist for protecting the eco system for present and future generations alike” (210). Richard Harper, Alex Taylor and Micheal Molloy state their view on agency as, “The word is used to describe a sequence of acts that make manifest not just an action, a hitting of an object, but a thought, an idea, a moral purpose; in other words, a human action with a particular kind of action”(115).

Carl Knapett states, “Agency is a process distributed across collectives of human and non- human. They are considered in terms of networks, composed of heterogeneous nodes and links” (73). Gell considers agency, “As intention, causation, result and transformation when engaging with imagery” (175). Agency is not only considered as the capacity to act, but also the capacity to reflect upon his capacity. The ability of trees to grow reproduces, spread, break up monuments, and figure significantly in the emotions of near-by residents. Trees deserve recognition because they help make the earth and cities livable. The lively material presence of the trees have acted as untruly threads working at their own speeds, bridging between land uses, scrambling order into disorder and new order.

The agency of trees is as reflexive as human agency, but it can be seen as creative; as meaningful. Hampshire observes, “Even at the most rudimentary stages of consciousness, I always distinguish that which I myself do intentionally in

changing my situation from that which happens to me” (55). The agents have the sense of being in the world, a sense of ideas and impressions. Hampshire observes:

Actions are the initiation of change at will, the changing of position and therefore of our relation to other things. There are many agents in a world of independent objects..... the essential distinction between what we do and what happens to us between what we wish and what we intend and do intentionally.(69-70)

In intentional movement that temporal intervals of before and after impose the experience of necessary events. Hampshire observes, “For any action, as the intended bringing about of an effect, has a trajectory, and so a relation of before and after within it”(71). Due to the past choices of agency, the present situation arises, which in further arises the some other situation in the future.

Hampshire writes, “I am always a continuing thing producing changes of which I know directly that I am the cause. The notion of a perceiving subject is the notion of continuing, embodied intentional agents, who displaces the things around him”(85). In the novel *Geneosity: An Enhancement*, Powers describes the happiness genes as a code and an agent for happiness in a genetic world that makes an increasing impact in today’s society. Powers throws light on the desire of pursuit of happiness through genes. The novel revolves around Thassa Amzawar, a young Algerian woman, who always remains happy despite of being a refugee from civil war. Thomas Kurtan, a genetic engineer and scientist believes that Amzwar state of hyperthermia may have a genetic basis. Thassa Amzwar seems as an agent of happiness to the fellow classmates and even to her teacher Russell Stone in the novel. She remains elated and delightful even after Algerian revolution.

Everyone calls her Miss Generosity. Powers states, “Thassa has emerged from land glowing like a blissed-out mystic”(145). Even Amzwar appears to be strange and mystic to Thomas Kurton, wizard of genomics and CEO of Truecyte in the novel. Kurton in the novel is working on the genes of happiness and takes Amzwar as an object of study. He opines that through investigation and scientific study on Amzwar’s happiness genes, he is trying to provide the world the enhancement of happiness. Amzwar passes the civil war and world’s misery and stays happy. But as an object of research for happiness genes, she goes through repression and loses her happiness and contentment.

Richard Powers through his novel put forward the point of discussion about consumerism which promotes the science and technology to create the genes of happiness for more and more profit. Richard Powers novels reflects how human greed and interference creates destruction and disturb the balance of nature. The humans consume more and behave purposefully selfish in the consumption of things which brings destruction to the nature to a great extent. The plight of chestnut tree and Redwood forest represents how human’s consumption has devastating effect on trees i.e. nature in the novel *The Overstory*. In the novel, various nine protagonist are drawn together gradually in the story through a shared relationship with the environment and a desire to avert the rapid deforestation occurring around the world. Neelay as a video gamer replicates his fascination with the environment through his online game. The choices and actions of each character in the story reflect a growing belief in the importance of environmentalism and the essential need to act. As discussed in *The Consumer Society*, technology, synthesis of knowledge, growth and consumption work as collective agency in Powers novels. Further, consumer

products and goods serve individuals as an object of salvation with the motive of earning profit works as repressive agency for various protagonists in Powers novels. Just like nature is mystic, consumer objects also function as mystic products which lead to consumerism.

Another novel *Orfeo* is typical of Powers's writing which is well versed in multiple fields like in science, art, music and technology. Powers discusses and questions the scope of originality of a music composer i.e. Peter Else in the novel in the consumer driven world of technology and products under the fearful world of surveillance and short-lived things. In the novel, Powers talks about the technology, engineering and music by depicting the character of the protagonist Peter Else in the American society after 9/11.

The novel revolves around Peter Else, a musical composer who studies biochemistry in early years and develops interest in music and genetic engineering afterwards. In the novel, there are references of past and present acquaintances of Peter Else which presents the variety of narratives in the novel. Powers talks about bringing the music as a form of art, technology and role of consumerism in the progression of music in the present society. In the novel, the lyrics or the words complement the music composed by the main protagonist Peter Else. Delazari as a musical expert studies the representation of music and presence of simulation in the Powers novel *Orfeo*. He states, "Passage of verbal music, which I regard as the textual exponent of diegetic music communicated through imaginary content analogies, are the reader's portal to diegetic music... Reading a book, we may vicariously gain experiences comparable to those perceptually given in the immediate

presence of the actual stimuli”(11-12). In the novel, Powers explains the musical experiences in Peter Else’s life and throws light upon the twentieth century western music which gets simulated in context with the presence of various compositions under the social impact. Powers novel *Orfeo* validates the cultural element of music in the novel which is only understandable by the inner circle of people. Powers explains how the title of the novel *Orfeo* gets influenced by the Orpheus myth. Powers explains, “Orpheus’s mastery of music and his ability to make even Stones weep with the beauty of his playing makes him a perfect metaphor for music’s mystical abilities to produce the profound human feelings from nothing but patterns of vibration ....”(104).

In the novel, the story revolves around Peter Else who is related to the power of music and it depicts the plight of a musical composer in the world of consumerism where he lives and in culture of fear while attempting to create the real master piece of musical composition. In the technological advanced world after 9/11, every mystical element makes the people suspect the terrorist activities. In the novel, Powers placed the Peter Else’s experiments at his home in such a context. Richard Powers through his novels incites readers to celebrate the sense of experience. Technology, science and music revolve around the more and more consumption and make people understand different view point and find out the solution for the emerging problems of today’s world. The curiosity is supported by means of simulated code in hyperreal world of today. Individuals are experiencing and discovering the new things in life without pondering over the after effects of consumption on nature and planet Earth.

Richard Powers through his novels addresses the concerns of ever advancing technology and how it affects society as a whole. He makes readers to reflect about the extent and boundaries of human desires and wants. The question arises whether or not the individuals are required to consume each product to great extent. In the process of acquiring more and more, getting advanced and using technology to gather the vast amount of information in the digital world of today's will prove meaningless or examines in an incredulous manner. Powers characters in his various novels experiences and discovers the new insight related to simulation, science, technology and hyperreality.

The references in the novel related to the effect of technology, consumerism, and simulation make readers think and feel the change in the living and conduct of everyday life.

Nature and natural catastrophes are turned into signs that are re-cycled to correspond to the goals of consumer society. In the creation of hyperreal mediated images and artificial material, human are trying to take control over nature. Nature is subjugated to human control through different technologies in the hyperreal world of images. The excessive consumption is the mechanism for increasing and creating the markets and contributes in the affluent growth society. It deepens the understanding of the present era and the environmental crisis by examining technological and ecological dimensions. It is not possible to discern a solution to the global environmental problem related to the exploitation of nature. The human relationship with their environment is mediated by the system of sign and images. The human monologue on the subject of nature can be replaced with the dialogue, since nature is endowed with mystical capacities.

Consumer's response with the goods and services they consume is not well understood. Effectiveness of product labeling to reduce consumption of products with large environmental footprints must be there. Use of platforms and technology to increase resource allocation efficiency and extend product lifespans should be used. Paul Hegarty in his book *Jean Baudrillard: Live Theory* discussed Baudrillard's point about nature and culture. He states, "There has been a real, natural world which has been steam rolled into culture, as the whole world becomes integrated as spectacle in the domestic universe" (16). Baudrillard talks about the systematization of culture in post-modern world where in the name of development, push button control is there in the functional operation of nature. Nature is becoming as an object in culture. In the post-modern world, nature is getting consumed as a decorative culture. The sign, images and advertisements present the varied purposes of nature as an object.

Nature is getting disappeared in the presence of virtual reality in the simulated world of culture. Nature has become a tamed object in the contemporary culture. Baudrillard writes, "Contemporary culture might be harming the environment, but it is the fascination with preserving the environment that is most detrimental to nature" (44). In Richard Powers novels, nature plays a prominent role. His novels represent the nature and culture in a complex environment. His novels are based on science and technology, eco system, nature, self and artificial intelligence. The characters in the novel *The Overstory* flows in parallel with the story line of the novel. Sometimes nine protagonist are intersecting and overlapping in the novel because of multi-perspective narration by the author. Powers novels deal with the transformation of nature, interaction between nature and culture. Through his novels,

Powers put forward the insightful themes and topics about the relationship between nature and culture in the post-modern world of today.

The novel *The Overstory* bring forth the tale of nine protagonist who shares the unique relationship with trees directly or indirectly in the story exploring the importance of trees in the life of ordinary people. The consumer society depends upon trees for food, resources like wood, timber and for so many things. It brings forth the critical impact of logging practices going on in our consumer society. The novel depicts the human relationship with trees and how humans are disconnected with the nature in the commodified world of today. There is a call for the ecological balance for the continuity of life. The novel offers a view point on the narrative of ecology along with the advancement of technology. The novel brings forth the prominent factor of nature in front in order to aware the individuals, about the real spatial- temporal scale used in the novel. The purpose of the novel is to take the individuals attention to what occurs beyond the story, not only from man's point of view but also from trees point of view.

In novel, trees share their signals and nutrients with other trees and life forms through various hidden networks. It has been shared in *The Secret Forest* book by Patricia in the novel. A tree along with humans plays a vital role in the novel to share the information about the working of natural world. Baudrillard in *The Consumer Society* writes about cultural consumptions as, "The time and place of the caricature resurrection, the parodic evocation of what already no longer exist of what is not so much consumed as consummated"(99).The consumers are in the process of consumption of earlier models, conniving automobile objects and products. Baudrillard says, "It exalts signs on the basis of a denial of things and the real" (99).



In the cultural consumption, Baudrillard discusses the visibility of signs everywhere in the consumer society in form of praising mass-media products related to body, sexuality, and weddings under the sign of consumption. The physical body is glorified as a cultural object in the consumer society. There is degeneration of real possibility and it is progressively growing by the system of urban industries and competitive sector in the society.

Baudrillard discusses the role of cultural recycling, where recycling plays a pertinent role as the element of culture in the consumer society. In the advanced technical post-modern world of today, where every professional does not want to be left behind, consumer society put him/ her in competitive race of enhancing and updates the skill and knowledge to be ready for the consumer market. All consumers must update and adapt themselves for the technical training like a changing cycle of fashion in the consumer society. Every ones get concerned about the recycling of clothes, belongingness, cars, gadgets and update all of them on regular basis to be in terms with the continual progress of the world. If consumers do so, then they are called as the true citizens of the consumer society.

Baudrillard points out, “We should have not a rational process of the accumulation of scientific knowledge, but a non- rational social process of consumption, in dissociable from all the others” (100). Further, corporeal recycling is talked as a part of culture of consumer society. In the consumer society, consumers under the influence of signs and images and to reflect the true personality of a consumer go for the consumption of products related to body, diet, organic food, beauty care regime for women. In the consumer society Baudrillard states, “The very rediscovery of the body is a corporeal recycling ; the recycling of nature in the

form of countryside trimmed down to the dimension of a mere sample, surrounded all sides by the vast fabric of the city”(100-101). Nature also plays a role of recycled object in the consumer society. Nature becomes an object, an agent of change in the replacement cycle of consumption. Baudrillard states, “Nature is no longer an original, specific presence at all, standing in symbolic opposition to culture, but a simulation, a consommé of the signs of nature set back in circulation –in short- nature recycled” (101). Nature has also become a subject of replacement cycle. In consumer society, nature is treated by the principle of being upgraded and updated every minute. Nature is compared with fashion always presentable and ready to be consumed by the consumers.

The governance principle of consumerism governs the mass consumers today in post- modern world. It reflects the cultural recycling prevailing in the society. Nature never gets glorified like this earlier. When nature lay as a waste material, then the focus is being given to it. In the consumer world, even after the waste of nature, the new concept of organic products started for the consumption of natural products. The point of consumption of culture is not properly presented and linked to the consumers of culture. The particular objects, things like car, mobile, nature in parklands are objugated to be an ephemeral sign and related to the cycling and recycling of culture.

The message in the form of advertisement in public domain has become a medium and code of reference in the society. Baudrillard mentions and discusses the mass culture as lowest common culture mechanics in the consumer society. He writes, “A kin to the standard package which lays down the lowest common panoply

of objects the average consumer must possess in order to accede to the title of citizen of this consumer society” (104). Virtual games play an important role in the simulated world and it has become an important agent in the form of bringing social advancements in the consumer world of goods and products. In LCC, the quiz machine (multiple choice questions) also presents a mass medium, where the individuals participation in the same system through the computerized and technical contribution of machine. Baudrillard writes, “In playing this machine, where intellectual dexterity registers as beeps and flashing lights-an admirable synthesis of knowledge and the house hold appliance –being programmed by a collective agency”(104-105).

Through this, the consumer is giving a response according to the need, taste and choices which engages the consumers in the collective rituals of consumption. In the response to the different stimuli based on preferences, the questions are not directed according to the utility and purpose of an object, but according to the created signs and images for the consumption of objects in the simulated built system of quiz. The elements of artistic objects create pleasant environment through different objects, shapes and coloured products. Beauty has become a sign and symbol in the consumer world. The objects are turning into signs and images to nurture the simulated dream of consumer society. Baudrillard talks about Kitsch as an aesthetic object in a cultural category easily marketable carrying the imitation of a work of art or cultural object, exaggeration of the work in form of color or properties . Baudrillard defines Kitsch as, “A simulation, a copy, an initiation, a stereotype, as a dearth of real signification and a superabundance of signs” (110).

Powers through his various novels spreads the message that it is not only the human agency that works in the world, but the most important agency i.e nature agency which also plays a vital role on planet earth. Non- human agency i.e trees also have a purpose to fulfill. Humans must stop taking nature as a mean only to serve their selfish purpose. In the novel *The Overstory*, Powers uses trees as central characters around which the nine protagonist stories revolve around. Patricia through her research proves that trees have an exceptional capacity to spread signals and talks to the fellow trees which is beyond the understanding of mankind, who treats trees as a cultural object. She is Powers most strong spokesperson in the novel who reveals the deepest truths about trees. Richard Powers in his interviews with Morrow states, “We are now engaged in a massive, communal, consensual sleepwalk a trance that we can’t even see, under the spell of individualistic humanism and commodity culture that we call inevitable progress”(66).

Through his novels, Powers throw lights upon the function and working of non-human agents nature as trees. In his interview, Powers discusses the relevance of trees as agents and states, “They are intelligent agents, deserving of legal standing, creatures that want something from each other and from us. We are not their masters; our dependence on them should make us more like their resourceful servant” (67). Richard Powers various novels like *The Overstory*, *Echo Maker*, *Orfeo* and *Generosity* talks about the broad range of topics from simulated computer technology to the perplexing nature of trees, science to music, genes to the consumerism of various products and objects, recall of the crane migration along Nebraska’s Platte river.

The significant and pertinent gift of nature i.e trees to mankind is getting threatened by humans because of their indifference, ignorance, greed of consuming more and more. Particularly, through the novel *The Overstory*, Powers bring forth the plight of the oldest trees for instance chestnut being felled due to corporate investments and urge for profits. The novel brings out the dynamic and narrative of different protagonists to come forward and risk their lives in an effort to save the forest from extinction. Trees in the novel represent active nature agents who are interactive, communicative and share their vital presence throughout the novel. Patricia, Hoel, Olivia, Dorothy all of them see trees as natural creatures with agency, who act and has the capacity to do actions, to communicate with others in their own way. Various trees like Chestnut, Redwood, Maple, Mulberry have their distinct personalities and act as agents upon all the nine protagonist in the novel.

In this chapter, the partially achieved objective is *To apply Jean Baudrillard's concept of consumerism and agency on the selected works of Richard Powers*. Agency as a notion to act, have an ability and capacity to do particular task along with human and non-human agency. Mass-media as an agency create the need and desires of objects by drawing the attention of the consumers to purchase more goods and services. It helps the post-modern culture society to be a booming consumer society. The models and simulation have become the reality for the things representing an image and a sign. In post-modern society, there persists a cyber-culture where the consumers buying capacity are in the hands of mass-media. Baudrillard in consumer society talks about the value of goods and objects is based on the sign and simulation. Jim Powell states in this regard, "Baudrillard distinguishes between a metallurgic and semiurgic form of society, that is based

on the material manufacture of commodities as opposed to one based on the production and circulation of signs in the form of information”(31).

In consumer society, the objects represent the sign of status, rank and prestige of the consumers through the products and objects they buy and consume. Richard Powers through his novels throws light upon the human and non-human agency. In one of his novels, *Generosity: An Enhancement*, Powers talks about the happiness genes, “As a code and an agent for happiness in a genetic world that makes an increasing impact in today’s society” (126). Through another novel *The Overstory* Powers talks about the choices and actions of all the protagonists reflecting the relevance to protect nature which is the need of an hour. Powers explore the non-human agency nature in his novel, wherein all the characters share the common responsibility of saving redwood forest by making different choices and actions. They try to protect the ecology of nature and make history through collective efforts in novel. The main characters make their choices and actions to protect trees which are getting consumed by industries and corporate world day by day in an impactful manner.

The protagonist shares a strange and strong connection with nature in the novel to create networks and to perform their task of protecting trees and planet earth. In the simulated world of consumption of the products and images, the needs of the consumers are hallucinated. As in the novel *The Overstory* Powers states about Neelay who through his game *Mastery* reveal the choices of life as, “The gardener sees only the garden’s garden. The eyes are not made for such groveling uses as they are now put to and worn out by but to behold beauty now invisible” (544). Powers

through his novels discusses the relevance of nature in human's life. Further, he discusses that today's advanced scientific digital consumer world, nature has become just a resource in the service of the satisfaction of human needs. The study of the practical implication of Baudrillard's consumer society and agency in the works of Richard Powers bring forth the various dimensions of the excessive consumption of products and objects which has become a mechanism for increasing and creating the consumer markets and contribute in the affluent growth society.

Through Powers works, the understanding of the present consumer era gets deepen which further reflects the environmental crisis by examining technological and ecological dimensions in details. In this simulated world of objects, the relationship of human with environment is mediated through signs and images and because of it, the consumer's response with the goods and services is not well understood. The advisable solution is to use the technology and platforms to increase resource allocation efficiency and extend objects lifespan must be used. Further, the effectiveness of products labeling to reduce the consumption of objects, products, services and resources with large environmental footprints must be there. Richard Powers constructs an intricate text of human agency and the agency of nature about the developing notions of the trees intelligence. Agency is a mutual thing existing between human choices and will long with the agency of nature.

The presence of simulation and hyperreality in the consumer world make the confounding relationship between human and the agency of nature. In today's world, the forest has become a deserted place and gets entirely antithetical to the consumer world. Richard Powers through his literary works bring forth the attention to the

important notion about the conflation of human agency with the agency of nature to have the sustainable benefits for mankind. Powers in his novel *The Overstory* presents remarkable instances of human agency having the capacity to manipulate the natural world long with the example of capacity of agency of nature to communicate to humans through mind and emotions.



## Conclusion

The thesis is an endeavour to analyse the agency and consumerism in the selected fiction of Richard Powers. The study has three objectives. The first objective of the thesis to trace the genesis of the concepts of agency and consumerism has been achieved in the undertaken study. Media plays the role of an agent which influence and allure the consumers through images, signs and sounds to consume more. It's not always the decision of an individual to buy for the real need, the decision to buy more comes from the forces like media and advertisement which further persuades the consumers to consume more and get into the consumer culture. Further, the consumerism takes place due to the competition in maintaining the standard of life in terms of prestige, rank and status. In other words, consumers can be the one who does not only consider the functions and usages of products while buying products but considering the stature attached to the object.

Moreover, consumerism states the meaning of a profligate behavior of consuming products and services in profusion, which is more than the desire to prioritize needs. With the progress of science, information and technology, simulation of the reality prevails which in result brings glory of consumerism in existence. Consumerism plays a dynamic and vital role in the life of consumers nowadays. Baudrillard presents a excellent, scholarly perspectives and insights into the world of consumerism through his intellectual work *The Consumer Society*. The consumers get trained and learn to consume more to be the part of growth society. Through excessive consumption of products, a person feels relevant in the society. Consumer in the consumption of products tries to find the salvation and seeks

importance to prove them. Furthermore, the wasteful consumption becomes obligatory.

Waste has become a figurative act of expenditure which represents the human relations with the rest of the society. The human relations in the modern world depend on the competition and differentiation. Technology is growing at an accelerated rate, where consumers forget their way of interaction with the environment and other fellow beings. Rather, they are in the continuum speed of life throwing devices on social media and internet communication. Further, individuals are becoming the extension of advanced technology in this world. Through the study, the noteworthy effects of virtual world and advertisement comes into picture which reflects that how the consumers personality, aura and identity is associated with the images and signs and further which has become the part and parcel of today's life.

Consumers spend their leisure time by spending money and maintaining the belief that owning things is the primary means of happiness and satisfaction. The consumers linked their consumption activities with their identity and lifestyle in the society. Consumption of products and services are interlinked with the way to self fulfillment, self realization and self development. In the consumer society, people associated themselves with the maxim that I am what I have. The identity of a person is related with the possession of consumer products. Media and advertisement of products work as effective agents in the world to expose the variety of products and services to the consumers on daily basis. Advertisement works as one of the strongest agents to emphasize the consumer values and promotes the products with the variety of signs and codes in forms of images to program the

consumers for more consumption of products and services. Consumers are not aware about the consequences of their present choices. Human desires and demands are flexible; ever increasing and there are plenty products and services to meet those increasing desires. In the hyper real world of images and signs, people no longer act according to authentic desires or needs. The people's actions, beliefs, and choices are shaped by pre-existing representations of images and spectacles. This complicates the notion of agency, because people are not acting freely but are rather responding to a constructed reality under the influence of simulacra. Media, advertisements and technological system puts a strong impact on the agency. People might feel they are making right choices but their choices are mediated and shaped by the consumer structures that create multiple options. Agency is entangled in network of signs and simulations which further shapes the choices, desires and behaviour of human agency.

Another objective of the research work that is to apply Jean Baudrillard's concept of consumerism and agency on the selected works of Richard Powers has been majorly accomplished. Richard Powers discusses commercial and consumerist disposition of the 21<sup>st</sup> century which represents the technical advancement of techniques and gadgets as whole. Richard Powers novel *The Overstory* is seemingly a narrative on environment representing a strong kinship between humans and trees that depicts a consumerist impact of today's world on everyday lives of people. The novels story presents the life of all protagonists interlinked with trees somehow by dealing and playing with the consumerist industrial situation of today's life which poses a great threat to the natural environment. The novel is full with the idea of

depiction, facts and truths from all phases of life.

Powers not only discusses the impact of consumerism on the life of consumers, but also discusses the symbolic exchange of ideas and the change in the technology. His novels are connected with the changing technical sensibility of 21<sup>st</sup> century, where Powers as writer depicts the new emerging technologies and their deep connection to economy and business of today's world. Through his novels, Powers discusses that how technology like nature has the prospective to grow endlessly. Trees have potential to grow its branches outward endlessly. Neelay in the novel engrossed himself in the new world of working on machine. Neelay continue to grow his game Mastery to another level and will continue to work endlessly and expand the code as trees spread their branches. Moreover, Neelay as a fond member of the community of coders and always claim that machines will be living and will change the entire human community. People make their gaming companies and charge money by creating commercial games, which further leads to the consumerism. Neelay through his fascination for the variety of trees wishes to create a game of the whole new natural world, by its own flora and fauna. Throughout this game, Neelay wishes to build the wealthy and multifaceted world with trees as nature in its center. Through their selfish motives, humans are welcoming disaster for the whole planet earth as well as for humanity. Through the advancement of technology, the coders are busy in developing the new codes and developing the most complex game which already exists. Neelay develops the bots and the various gadgets those are capturing the every minute detail of what is happening.

Besides, Neelay feels grief and disheartened about not to be there to see

future every time. Neelay tries to absorb everything about nature through his algorithms. Neelay through his games in the novel tries to build a bridge between human beings and the natural world. He develops a game about life which is beyond the limits of humanity. Mastery represents the symbol of consumerism which grows incessantly and also represents the human needs which has no end. Mastery as an incredibly complex game engages the players to explore and build success. The many sequels of Mastery game make Neelay and his company affluent and famous in the world of consumerism. Mastery represents all the simulated and hyperreal games which take the consumers in the consumerist world of today to a great extent. In simulated games, the coders and the developers add the new resources and technology everyday to grow, consume and take control of everything.

Furthermore, the growing consumption is taking humanity as well as nature towards destruction. Richard Powers through his character Neelay in the novel, who gets enlightened at last with an aim in life to create a game based on nature that reflects the complex growing world of today's life to help consumers to realize that planet earth is their home and nature also plays a vital role in the existence of human beings.

Richard Powers through his novels puts a seed of thought for future life along with the adaptation of humans in the era of consumerism. In addition to it, Powers throws light upon the loss of authenticity as reproducibility of objects, abundance of signs and images in form of games that makes it difficult to be a natural observant of the reality. Powers discusses the commodification of objects and nature in his novels. The benefits of the advanced technology is the availability of objects, products and

gadgets for masses in abundance which points out the change nature of business and its connection to the consumerism in this world. Powers through his novels *The Overstory*, *Orfeo*, *Generosity: An Enhancement* and *The Echo Maker* points out the strong connection between consumerism and exploitation of nature in all the narrative lines of his novels.

Similarly, in Powers another novel *Generosity: An Enhancement*, there is a complex relationship between human beings and the reality that surrounds around the objects and products. Thomas Kurton as genomicist discusses the genes associated with hyperactivity, anxiety and depression. He in a science talk in the novel presents his views on the relevance and use of technology to create healthier and smarter people by consuming the products like health drinks. In the novel, many bio and medi-tech companies are interested to buy Thassa genes of happiness to make profit by selling her genes in the consumerist world of goods and objects. Human beings in order to enjoy life try to get absorbed in the consumerist products of modern world. The happiness and joy in life can be achieved through the mental efforts, good diet and exercise rather than the technology and science based products. The products should not be purchased to have magical solutions to live a happier life.

Powers in the novel *Generosity* discusses that how Thassa's genes of happiness turn into a commodity in the world of consumerism. It is an advanced technological endeavor to present consumerism by creating the images of happiness through Thassa's genes in the novel. The consumer society gets enter into the genomic age with the help of advanced artificial intelligence and technology. In the novel, another aspect of the modern society through the medium of advertisement is

portrayed by Richard Powers.

In the novel, Powers presents that how the companies promote and ensure the better upbringing of the children with the advance genes through the consumption of products. The culture of betterment and improvement further escalates the consumerism in the society. Further, in the novel, Powers through Russell's brother Robert expresses the concern about the prevalent practice of mood enhancing consumer drugs in the society which helps the consumers to enhance and treat their personality disorders. The analysis has arrived at the outcomes and inferences delineated here.

Keeping in view, the crucial role of consumerism and agency, Powers characterize the agency deals with the new technologies in the hyperreal world. The characters play crucial role to establish a symbolic connection between their past and present life which represents the technological transmission of knowledge and the bond which they share with nature in a unique way. The characters like Patricia, Olivia, Nick and Daniel gives a clear and close observation which depicts their character, feelings and perceptions towards nature, their emotional love, strong bond and understanding towards the plight of nature and its creatures in the respective novels. Richard Powers through the Stanford Prison Experiment in the novel discusses the idea of agency. Humans as agency have a natural tendency to choose and act as others do. Humans act in a certain way to have control over others. People ask logic and as agency go along with others and act intentionally in certain situations. In Richard Powers' works, agency is portrayed as a complex concept, where individuals struggle with external systems of influence, whether those systems are natural and technological. Powers novels question the extent to which humans are

free to act independently of larger forces and examine how agency is both shaped and constrained by these forces. Ultimately, Powers' exploration of agency involves a deep inquiry into the nature of identity, the limits of human control, and the ways in which people can assert their will in a world that seems to be increasingly beyond their grasp.

Another important aspect which Powers bring forward is the technological progress leads to the consumerism of gadgets and products. Humans are in constant flow of energy with the exponential growth of technology. Through his novels, Powers discusses that how technology like nature has the prospective to grow endlessly. Trees have potential to grow its branches outward endlessly. Neelay in the novel engrossed himself in the new world of working on machine.

There is a description and portrayal of various characters as agency in his novels. The novels represent the story of transition from original to reproduction of objects, and transition of virtual technology, from the personality enhancement to the genes of happiness. The novels talk about science, technology and points out the human progress and human development which goes on a high speed at a irreplaceable role of nature. His novels presents the dialectical unity of human beings and nature, the universal connection which humans share with nature and further the humans nature of consumerism leads to the ecological crisis.

In the novel *The Overstory*, all nine protagonists join hands in hand to save the trees from the cruel atrocities of the industrial consumers' world of today. The protagonists love towards nature embodies a new relationship which exists between humans and trees. It throws a light upon the fact that how new technology enables a



producer to create a massive reproduction of the objects of consumption by destroying trees at massive scale. The characters' personal choices such as those of environmental activists, scientists, and everyday individuals are impacted by the larger forces of ecological degradation. The idea of agency here often contrasts human decisions against the long-term, slow-moving agency of trees and ecosystems, which are largely impervious to human desires and actions. The characters struggle with how much control they really have over the environmental crises they face, underscoring the tension between individual human will and the unstoppable forces of nature. For example, characters like Nick and Mimi attempt to engage in acts of resistance against environmental destruction, but often find their individual actions insignificant when compared to the immensity of environmental systems. The novel also throws light upon the influence of technology in shaping human choices and actions. The novel implies that human agency is both enabled and constrained by the technological systems we build.

In the novel, *The Echo Maker*, Powers points out the consumerist nature of the developers who with the motive of earning more profit wants to construct the amusement park to view cranes in Nebraska. One of the Protagonist Daniel raises his voice against the developers to save the water supply of the Platte River for the survival of Sandhill cranes in Nebraska. The nature and human life is universally connected and the harmony of all the beings is essential for the better survival of human beings. Daniel in the novel talks about that how everything is connected with each other. There are no separate paths. In *The Echo Maker*, Powers examines agency through the lens of neuroscience. Mark's ability to understand and respond to

his own reality is profoundly altered due to his brain injury, which calls into question how much of our sense of self and agency is reliant on our brain's functioning. The novel poses significant questions about the extent to which identity is self-determined and the degree to which it is shaped by the brain's biological processes. As Mark struggles to regain his agency, he also contemplates the loss of control over his own perceptions and thoughts.

Mimas represents an agency with a certain natural abilities, temperament and a purpose. Mimas interacts and have special bond with Nick and Olivia in the novel. The death of Mimas in the novel *The Overstory* urges to mourn life like the death of a person. It is to give relevance to the existence of trees, to give the same sanctity to other living natural things as it is to humans only.

*The Overstory* throws light upon the responsibilities of humans towards non human species in this world. Powers discusses the complex ecological crisis and the extraction of natural resources is the acts of violence towards non-human i.e trees in the novel. The increasing consumption of things, behavior of humans towards nature is the relevant points which Powers brings about through his novels. Powers talks about human-nature relationship in respect to the factors of deforestation in his novel *The Overstory*. Patricia talks about the scientific archetype around trees, the way trees communicate, share their signals and how technology and advancement in science plays a crucial role in relation to the environmental crisis. In the novel, the protagonists, group of environmental activists break the rules to protect redwood forest.

In the novel *The Overstory*, the radical environmental group becomes Life Defence Force who raises their voices against logging industries and companies to save Redwood forest. Powers presents a crucial point that no valuable property has been destroyed in the novel story except forest. All the logging activities disrupt and destroy the trees and forest as whole.

However, the activists get brutally assaulted and get imprisoned by the authorities. Another character Ray Brinkman, a property lawyer in the novel gets enlightened towards nature after a stroke that leaves him in a serious paralyzed state. Ray gets self realization about the unfair demands of humans on nature to utilize to the maximum for their profits. Ray realizes that mankind must give back the nature they have taken it from nature. Through Ray, Richard Powers bring forth the prominent point of human culture of consumerism to consume the nature at speed, without giving it back. This represents the inability of humans to get changed to change their intentions about towards the non-human agency ie trees. Another prominent character, Neelay Mehta develops the algorithm through the usage of artificial intelligence to create the passionate world of trees through his game. Neelay tries to bring forth the connection between humans and trees at various levels through AI based games and gives a must try solution for the environmental problems. Powers tries to bring forth that through technology one can try to find the solutions to solve the crisis to some extent.

Technology as a non-human code through simulation tries to understand nature on certain level. There is a scope to use artificial intelligence to support the environment and computational strategies can help to monitor the nature loss and

further to prevent the future loss but with certain limitations. Furthermore, human's selfish motives and biasness may burden the environment more through AI.

In the study, it has been explored that Powers selected novel *Generosity: An Enhancement* throws light upon the humans choices in life. Humans as agency have the possible choices and always try to live longer and better life. In *Generosity*, agency is a key theme in the context of genetic modification and scientific intervention. Powers uses Thassadit's happiness to probe the tension between biological determinism and the possibility of human autonomy. The novel suggests that our desires, emotions, and choices may be more influenced by genetic and environmental factors than we like to admit, leading to questions about the ethics of trying to engineer human beings for improvement. In the novel, Kurton talks about the choices that human makes as agency. Kurton as genomicist through his company Truecyte tries to focuses on the improvement of human life by providing Thassa's genes of happiness. Through his company, he makes a choice to work for the sustainable satisfaction for human life. The novel explores the advanced prospects of using bio technology to enhance human happiness level.

Further, the role of media has also been talked about as one of the agencies in the novel to spread and manipulate the information. The media has overemphasized the Thassa's news of genes of happiness which will help to increase the human happiness level. There is an utmost need to stop and think effectively about the technological progress in the field of genetic engineering in today's world. Kurton in the novel as a human agent makes his choice on the applicability of enhancing the human life through the advanced technology.

Thassa as the main protagonist in the novel in a way to help her family financially makes a choice to sell her eggs for \$32,000 and for which she receives a lots of criticism for making a decision to sell her genetic material. The novel presents a pertinent notion on human agency with the vast impact of biotechnology on self.

Similarly, in another Powers novel *Orfeo*, Peter Else, the main protagonist makes a choice to control the musical composition aspects and phases to reproduce them through the natural processes in the lab created by them. He tries to explore the influence of artistic aspirations of a musical composer with his musical masterpiece with his life experience. Els's choice of conducting an experiment in the home laboratory sells alarm against him as an act of bioterrorism in the novel. His attention is purely artistic and nothing related to illegal thing or activity.

Else another choice as a protagonist of the novel to run away from his home on a journey also presents the conditions and reason to a great extent. Powers presents a conflict between technical and natural aesthetic dimensions.

Powers tries to bring forth the critical awareness regarding the complex system that reinforces the exploitation of nature. Humans utilize the natural resources as the collection of consumer objects which makes them to take nature as for granted. There must be conservation fairness to incorporate the rights of nature. Richard Powers points out the urgency of establishing the ecological justice for the forest as it suffers under the selfish motives of consumption by logging companies.

In addition to the above achieved objective, another objective of the research work is to explore nature's kinship with humans as depicted in Richard Powers

works has been achieved. Richard Powers in his novel *The Overstory* interconnects the nine protagonists along with trees to express the concern about the increasing consumerism and deforestation of trees. In novel, Powers throws light upon the secret lives of trees and through Patricia, one of the characters in the novel, he shows how trees communicate their signals and through fungal networks and interact with each other. The novel is a valuable read about the strong connection between trees and human beings and spread the important and significant message to the world that as human agency, humans should not destroy nature, on the other hand must establish and reconnect the bond with nature. People must pay attention to the nature which is worth and must look upon everything with different perspective.

In the novel, Powers discusses the nature intelligence and brings forth the crucial opinion that trees have their own purpose and sense of time. Powers through his characters like Adam in the novel *The Overstory* shows how few people are closely connected and associated with specific trees in their lives. Adams in the novel feels connected to the trees only and is estranged from the rest of the worldly relationship.

Likewise, Patricia in the novel *The Overstory* collects and maintains a seed vault by travelling and gathering the various plants seeds in order to preserve the dying species of the trees for future. Powers through his various protagonists put a seed of optimism to remain hopeful about the future in the time of adversity. Humans must revive their kinship with nature, which is excellent and infinite in its own potential and nature will help to cure the stress and traumas of human life. The fact is that humanity might not endure or live eternal to see the future, but nature will

always continue to bless the humanity with its resources and blessings. Human beings must revive their individual connection with nature, away from the relationships of greed and commodification. This adaptation will definitely help and improve the human relations with nature not to save trees only but also to save humanity at its best.

Powers through his novels depicts and highlights the broken relationship of humans with trees in this consumer world of today. When people see and consider trees as a product or commodity to use, then people cut them down at speed in the name of advertisement which is extremely destructive. Not only has the mass deforestation brought destruction to nature i.e trees only, but also to the humanity. Humans should not behave like the masters of the natural world. Human beings are the part of it, and thus respect and provide the dignity to the existence of trees also. Nature gives a unique experience to humans, not only inspires them but simultaneously enlightens them also.

Likewise, trees as a part of nature provide experiential learning to the people. Human beings must understand the deeper connection that they can share with nature which will bring positive impact in their lives. The purpose and aim is to highlight the connection between humans and trees in order to bring a positive change in the devastating world that humans are creating for themselves.

In the novel *The Echo Maker*, Powers discusses the extinction of cranes species due to urbanization and advancement. Daniel in the novel talks about the essence of creatures of nature and raised his voice against the choice and actions of people in the consumer world. Daniel, as an environmentalist works to stop the

development company in the novel to build on the land where Sandhill cranes habitat. Daniel works at the cranes preserve and is carrying the mission to stop the housing development and construction on the preserve. He believes that the Sandhill cranes must remain undisturbed in their seasonal migration in the novel. Powers throws light upon the calm and noble nature of cranes, which is worth protecting species as compared to the humans who are cruel and selfish. Powers quest is to spread the awareness to save the environment.

Powers has a wide range of interest and present important perspectives of science, technology and nature in his novels. His novels have a deep impression on the minds of readers. His novels inspire people to read and think about the varied themes and concepts related to computer technology, science, culture, nature, environment and music. Humans under the influence of salvation of technology not ready to sacrifice selfish motives even the devastation draw near to humanity.

The important factor to recall is that all creatures along with humans being succeed by virtues of each other and no one will end until all remain united and share an important kinship bond. Powers through his novels tries to change the perspective of humans towards nature. There are several people who have inability to recognize the existence of nature- as trees and plants. Many people are unable to understand and realize the relevance of trees in human affairs and on this planet Earth. Trees and plants lack their role and importance in the form of lack of agency as humans fail to give due importance to them as well as the life exist in trees as it exists in humans.

Further, this negligence leads to the exploitation of nature. In the novel, there are instances of scientific information about trees, which Patricia presents in her



speech. The trees communicate, exchange signals, nutrients to ensure the survival of other trees and how the trees play a great role to maintain the healthy eco system. In novel, many protagonists take the name of trees like Maple, Mulberry, and Maidenheir to spread the awareness about deforestation and to work for forest conservation.

Moreover, in the novel *Orfeo*, Powers discusses the power and relation of music along with humans and natural elements. Music helps to build a genuine connection and develops a kinship between human and nature. This feeling of kinship helps the human to be more responsible and develops a harmonious society. Peter Else in the novel tries to bridge the representational gap between the music as an art form with nature. He tries to code musical work of art in the DNA of bacterium *Serratia Marcescens* which is harmless in nature.

The natural world always responds to the harmony of the music around it. Music is not only one with the rhythm and composition but it also shares oneness with nature. Peter Else tries to experiments about the music language that links with the human and natural order to create a harmonious whole. Powers novels express the scientific dimension and improvement of life as the present world is engaged in the unlimited consumerism. The accurate perspective of the present world issues is the basis for the resolution of the same thereof. In this regard, the research work is a modest endeavor at understanding the issues which might pave the way for amicable solutions for the bright future. To sum up, the present study is an attempt at providing an impersonal, scholarly and profound insight into the essential dynamics of the concepts.

Richard Powers novels presents a work of affirmation that how deeply humans are related to nature and also shares a strong emblematic bond which leads to a rewarding and peaceful life ahead. The deeper analysis leads to various outcomes of the concerned study. There is a need to spread awareness about environmental challenges among the people of the society and the world as a whole. Humans must re-assume and re-design their responsibility towards nature through the right and appropriate course of action. It is certainly an utmost importance task to give incredible honour to the existence of complex nature which provides plentiful resources to human beings without any selfish interest.

Moreover, the encouraging augmentation of environment issues may provide a sanguine and hopeful foundation for ecological belief and insight. However, mankind will only be able to sustain and prosper if all human beings join their hands, put efforts in recognizing and start working for universal interest which is to maintain and preserve the cleaner environment.

Although the research work has attempted to analyze Richard Powers selected novels keeping in view most of the required parameters and aspects needed for the study, however it is undeniable that there might be some lacunae due to the limitations encountered during the course of the study. Furthermore, the present work does not claim to be the last and final word on the subject due to its limited range and nature. Humans must do their best to work on suitable manner for the existence of human civilization and nature in a sustainable manner. The study leads to the outcome of creating wakefulness among the people of society about respecting nature. Further, it is a high time to educate the consumers about the real needs as well

as the ideology of consumers so that everyone must pay a real attention in the contribution of protecting and maintaining the natural world. In addition, with the right approach and reverence towards nature, the human perception towards the world can change and transformed. Caring for yours and others life must be the widely accepted motto of life with the deep concern for the environmental conservation along with the advancement. Instead of always being concerned about our issues, concerns and sufferings, human beings must adopt a balanced approach and perceptive towards nature, despite of ravaging it again and again. Humans should take it as an obligation to be the guardian of nature. Human actions should not lead to the destruction of the environment and must ensure that future human generations can also enjoy nature's gift and comfort without any guilt. Humans must revive and re-unify their relation with nature which can easily be accomplished by educating everyone about the love for environment.

There is a need to inculcate and administer various programs to strengthen the human and nature interrelationships. Ultimately, the humans must rejuvenate their relations with nature by encouraging advanced and progressive approaches to life.

The important and significant implication of this study is to disseminate the awareness of the natural environment. Further, to raise the considerable knowledge and awareness about the consumerism framework prevalent in the society. Another is to be open up and speak about the needs of the environment outstandingly to encourage the young readers to read and educate themselves and others too. It has become crucial to make our institutions, companies, industries and communities to be environment friendly with a high epitome of learning. Lastly, having a deep

understanding towards nature is the first foremost step to save nature and further, having cognition to respect and start a movement to save nature is the need of an hour.

Richard Powers novels bring forth the unique dynamic problems of present era along with a solution in the literary work. The present study evaluates texts and ideas in terms of the relevance, usefulness and coherence in response to the environment problems in the society. The works give an important social message that is to contribute in preserving nature. It is essential to enrich people's interest, insight and knowledge about the prevalent environmental issues in the society. As a matter of fact, humans can't be separated from nature as nature plays a prominent role in the growth of mankind in the society. Further, one of the most significant needs of human is pure air and clean water for his/ her survival. Trees hold an important place for providing the same to humans.

The research work will give a unique insight and perspective to the readers about the environmental issues and increase their awareness and concerns about the importance of preserving the environment. The thesis would definitely enhance the insight and references related to the consumerism and environment for further studies. The research focuses on the aspects of agency and consumerism in relation to the environment. Moreover, Richard Powers novels has several other interesting concerns and aspects to discuss by applying various theories and applications like in the field of advanced virtual reality.

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## List of Publications

S.No.	Title of Papers with Author names	Name of Journal/ Conference	Published Date	Issn no/ vol no, issue no	Indexing in Scopus/ Web of science/UGC Care List
1	Alienation and Reification in Richard Powers' Digital and Simulated world of <i>The Overstory</i>	Journal of Pharmaceutical Negative Results	December 2022	10.47750/pnr.2022.13.S09.1003	SCOPUS
2	Hyperreality, Simulation and Consumerism in Richard Powers' <i>The Overstory</i>	Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute	Issue-5,2024	ISSN:0378-1143	UGC-CARE LIST GROUP-1
3	Exploration of the intersection of technology, nature and human experiences in relation to environmental sustainability through Richard Powers novels	Cuestiones de Fisioterapia	<u>Vol. 54</u> <u>No. 3</u> <u>(2025):</u> <u>Year 2025</u>	3380-3390	SCOPUS

## List of Conference

S.No.	Title of the Paper	Name of the Authors	Title of the Conference	Date of Conference
1	Consumerism and Self: A Study of <i>The OverStory and The Echo Maker</i>	Anudeep Kaur Bedi Dr Balkar Singh	International Interdisciplinary Conference on “Narratives, Self and Identities: Traditions and Innovations by REVA University, Bangalore, in collaboration with Liverpool John Moores University, England.	30th and 31st August, 2021
2	Alienation and Reification in Richard Powers’ Digital and Simulated world of <i>The OverStory</i>	Anudeep Kaur Bedi Dr Balkar Singh	Ist International Conference- Exploring Digital Humanities: Challenges and Opportunities	10 <sup>th</sup> and 11 <sup>th</sup> December 2022
3	<i>The Overstory</i> :A Digital Change in the Postmodern World of Consumerism	Anudeep Kaur Bedi Dr Balkar Singh	International Conference- on “Emerging Trends in Literature Language & Research (ETLLR-23)” organized by School of Liberal and Creative Arts (Social Sciences and Languages), Lovely Professional University, Punjab	31 <sup>st</sup> October 2023

<b>S.No.</b>	<b>Title of the Paper</b>	<b>Name of the Authors</b>	<b>Title of the Conference</b>	<b>Date of Conference</b>
<b>4</b>	Hyperreality, Simulation and Consumerism in the Works of Richard Powers	Anudeep Kaur Bedi Dr Balkar Singh	International Conference- Recent Trends in Postmodernism	2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> December 2023
<b>5</b>	Exploration of the intersection of technology, nature and human experiences in relation to environmental sustainability through Richard Powers novels	Anudeep Kaur Bedi Dr Balkar Singh	3 <sup>rd</sup> International Conference ELLC 2024 Sustainable Global Goals in World Literature and Contemporary Studies Remodelling Gnoseological Interlinkage	14 <sup>th</sup> and 15 <sup>th</sup> December 2024