

Reel World Replacing Real World In Richard Power's The Overstory

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Abstract:

Virtual game world offers a chance to create a reel world which may replace the real world experiences through the interaction between human and technology. This paper elucidates how the virtual game experience creates an impact in human being and lead to a behaviour changes in human. It also emphasises the importance of being productive in the human life rather than indulging too much in an addictive game world which may create several destructive mental issues to human. To elaborate, it is essential to substantiate the ideas through The Overstory, 2019 Pulitzer Prize winning novel of Richard Powers.

Keywords: Virtual game world, Virtual reality, behavioural change, video game addiction.

Introduction

This world is comprised of millions of living organisms and natural resources which have a vital job on their own that directly and indirectly create an impact which helps to flow the life process of all living beings in a specific way. Change is inevitable in life. The way the ancestors live in this world is entirely different from the life humans live today. Every action that happens in the environment leads to the changes in human condition. It may happen physically or mentally.

During the primal period the way of man's life is on one mode. When human invents fire, the life of human as well as the other living organisms that are closely involved with human life

starts to change. Though the change is trivial, the impact it creates turn the life style upside down. The most recent invention of human which brings a huge impact is the invention of technology. Technology plays a vital role in the development of human life. It has become irresistible in the day to day life of human. For instance, the previous generation may not be aware of mobile phones. The use of mobile and its importance is fully excluded from their life. But today mobile plays an immense performance in human life. After waking up every morning, many people start their routine with the assistance of mobile from morning alarm to a schedule of his day.

It is important to break out the significance of technology in human's life and how it changes the life style and the condition of human. To emphasis, it will be suitable to look out the Pulitzer Prize winning novel *The Overstory* by Richard Powers. Richard Powers is an American writer who elucidate the effects of modern science and technology in many of his works. This novel revolves around the life experience of nine Americans with trees which bring them all together in the end to defend against the destruction of forests.

In the beginning of the novel itself Powers depicts how the life style of human changes once technology becomes flourished. Hoel and his wife start to farm corn, potatoes and beans in western Iowa. When they became old, Hoel's eldest son starts to maintain their farm by using tractors. "John Hoel throws in with speed, progress and machines. He buys a steam tractor that both plows and threshes, reaps and binds. It bellows as it works, like something set free from hell" (Powers 13). It shows the first leap of the betterment of farmer's life.

Technology is not only flourished in particular field but in each part of a person's growth. For instance video games have an increasing incorporation towards the life style of children. Many researches show that video game can increase the ability of children in many ways. Kerwin and Guido elucidate in an article *Game-based training of flexibility and attention improves task-switch performance*, "Skilled video game players effortlessly switch between many actions, rules, objectives and targets, often faster than the untrained eye can follow" (186). Especially in a fast pace action video games, the player has to do his moves much faster, which requires a cognitive flexibility and multitasking ability.

In the novel *The Overstory*, a boy named Neelay who is very much interested in computer programming and games. As a

result, he later becomes an owner of a famous video game called 'Mastery'. In this game a player can create a whole new world of his own which one couldn't do easily in the real life. The game hits the market and brings a huge success that leads Neelay to upgrade the performance and the quality of the game to next level. Web is the prominent platform through which the advancement of technology reaches the world much easier. When Neelay explains the advantage of web in order to upgrade his 3D game, he points out "Fifty big servers at the start of year two, and five hundred by the end. Sites, search engines, gateways. The spent, filled-up cities of the industrialized planet have willed this thing into being, just in time" the saviour of the gospel of endless growth. The web goes from unimaginable to indispensable, weaving the world together in eighteen months" (309). It shows how the web becomes a strong medium in short term. The evolution process of the Web is rapid in this digital era. Wendy Hall in his article The Evolution of the Web and the implications for eResearch implies,

Websites are notoriously difficult to design and maintain, and we rely on search engines to navigate our way around hyperspace. As the Web has evolved to support increasing collaboration, we have seen the growth of Web 2.0 technologies such as social networking. Today the Web is used by millions around the world to link to communities of people with whom they share common interests. (991)

In the novel, the growth of the game 'Mastery' shows that within two years many people have immersed themselves into the world of virtual game. Nowadays, many games are addictive. If people spend much of their time and effort to certain things, it means that gives much comfort and reliability to them. Virtual games are the newly arrived platform where players can do things that they find difficult to achieve in real life. Especially due to the increasing spread of COVID-19, this virtual technology finds new ways to shine in industry. When people find struggle to connect with one another, this virtual technology helps the people to reach one another in reel world. It helps to give the experience from the comfort of their homes. It also raises a question, is it possible for the reel virtual world to replace real world? This virtual world is used in many fields like games, marketing and tourisms. Many finds this virtual world is the best thing to give an undisturbed view for the people. Kai Israel and others insist in an article Virtual Reality-Substitute for a Real Experience? "Virtual experience can eliminate many physical barriers such as financial costs, physical limitations, health concerns, family obligations or transportation requirements."

Kai and Dieter further claims “VR technology can replace a real experience not only by means of identifying factors that make experience seem even more realistic (i.e. technical aspects), but also requires better understanding of user characteristics such as (1) motivation and (2) expectations, as well as (3) experience characteristics.” Likewise in *The Overstory*, Neelay wants to create virtual game which can address all the human understandings and expectations. When Neelay comes to know the function of trees and its evolution process it gives him an idea to create his next game in which he wishes to create things that would be a home for people. In this game the player will inhabit a fresh new world where “he’ll be able to dig mines, cut down trees plow fields, construct houses, build churches and markets and schools—anything his heart desires and his legs can reach. He’ll travel down all the spreading branches of an enormous technology tree, researching everything from stone working to space stations, free to follow any ethos, to make whatever culture floats his state-of-the-art boats” (Powers 223).

When a game provides all these things to a person, it can substitute the real world passively. The player will no longer need anything except playing a game because all his expectations and characteristics can be addressed in the reel world. The motive of Neelay is to achieve such kind of real alike environment. When he expresses the performance of the game he implicates, “Once the employees get playing, they want nothing else. They stop sleeping. They forget to eat. Relationships are a minor irritation” (224).

In Neelay’s view, this virtual game world will be the place for people whom the real world is no longer suitable or comfortable to live. Even this motive of Neelay may come as the result of his own living condition. It is expressed that Neelay lost his movement in his legs when he falls out of a tree during his childhood. Though he lost his legs he wants to fulfil his dream of leading an active lifestyle through his virtual game where the player can do anything he desires to do. When he launches his newly upgraded game he insists “Mastery gets on board, goes online, and a million more lonely boys emigrate to the new and improved Neverland” (309).

When such kind of game has the ability to give everything the player wishes to do, it will become an addictive platform. Many people spend ample amount of time in playing games. As a result it separates the link of human from the real world. During the game launch, interviewer exclaims how the game eats up the

productive time of human life and states “you must admit, a lot of productive time is going to waste.” But Neelay defends “It might not be so bad, to destroy a little productivity” (257).

Leading a productive life style is something every human should stick in his life. M.S. Wu Anise and his companions in Psychological needs, purpose in life, and problem video game playing among Chinese young adults claim, “Purpose in life is often regarded as an important component of wellbeing and can be defined as having life goals, perceiving present and past life as meaningful and holding beliefs that give living a reason and objective”(585). When one cuts down the productivity part of his life, it may lead to lost the meaning and understanding of life. But in the novel *The Overstory*, Neelay further claims that the game itself give human a new goal and creates a new meaning in the game where he prefer to spend much more time than in the real world. Neelay points that this state is very “safe and comprehensible, with no swamps of ambiguity to suck you down, no human-on-human darkness, and your own receives its rightful land. Call it meaning”(257). He further exclaims “a lot of people feel more at home, in there” (257). It is the passive result of how the reel world replaces the real world.

When this shift starts to happen, it creates significance behavioural changes in human being. This can be seen in the life of Neelay itself. When he gets much interest in computer programming and video games, his behaviour towards fellow human beings is in a complete imbalance. When Neelay works on his computer programming in the English class of Mrs. Gilpin, he doesn't bother the class. Even when his teacher finds out that he is inattentive in the class, his behaviour towards teacher is aggressive. He enrages “May I have my damn notebook back? Please?” (116). Neelay's furious action made Mrs. Gilpin even more angry. Many children who are highly indulged themselves in technology and games go through minor behavioural changes in a long run.

In an article *Violent Video Gaming and Aggression in Children*, Shainy and Carolyn suggest “Violent Video gamers are more actively involved in the game compared to other violent media exposure and more likely to identify with violent behaviours because they are directly rewarded with game points for violent acts, such as killing or shooting. Compulsive digital gaming can increase aggressive behaviour in children, negatively affect academic performance and sleep and lead to addictive behaviour.”(193). Since addictive behaviour can shift the

behavioural pattern of human and leads to mental and physical issues, it is necessary to lead the life in a real productive way. It is essential to have a purpose in life which acts as a mediator between psychological satisfaction and addictive condition. According to Anise and co-authors, people who have a real purpose in life “would be less likely to pathologically indulge themselves in non-productive or even harmful behaviours such as drug use and excessive video game playing” (585). Thus, though the reel world can replace real world it brings changes in behaviour and imbalance in human. By spending quality time in a generative way in the real environment helps to overcome these issues.

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