

Stephen King's Possession Machines

"Agency Panic" in *Christine* and *The Tommyknockers*.

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This Master's Thesis is carried out as a part of the education at the University of Agder and is therefore approved as a part of this education. However, this does not imply that the University answers for the methods that are used or the conclusions that are drawn.

University of Agder, [2013]

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Acknowledgements

I want to thank my lovely girlfriend Barbro Rosfjord for all her support. Her enthusiasm really inspired me to get this thing written.

I would also like to thank my supervisor Michael J. Prince for reading my submissions and sharing his insight.

Introduction: King's Paranoid Style

Stephen King's popularity as a horror writer can be attributed to his understanding of contemporary anxieties. He creates his own brand of horror by writing narratives where inanimate objects menace their human owners by undermining their feeling of individual agency. By de-familiarising consumerism and turning it into a source of anxiety he is continuing a tradition that Timothy Melley calls "agency panic". It represents a set of pervasive anxieties that according to Melley saturate American culture. Manifestations of "agency panic" often include, "large Governmental, corporate, or social systems that appear uncannily to control individual behaviour and in which characters seem paranoid, either to themselves or to other characters in the novel" (Melley, 2000, 8). King's style of paranoia focuses on how the commodity "uncannily" controls its human owner. He achieves this through his rendition of the cyborg. To illustrate how King's paranoid view is relevant within a contemporary setting I borrow insight from sociological studies conducted by David Reisman, Zygmunt Bauman and Gerda Reith. These perspectives open up King's novels in interesting ways by exploring what motivates consumption and its impact on individual agency. This insight provides a firm foundation upon which I explain how King's fiction de-familiarises the contemporary consumerist lifestyle.

"Agency Panic" threatens the contemporary individual's feeling of security by questioning their perception of being independent and free individuals. Melley says that "The importance of agency panic lies in the way it attempts to conserve a long-standing model of personhood – a view of the individual as a rational, motivated agent with a protected interior core of beliefs and memories" (Melley, 2000, 14). Similarly Catherine Hayles says that "The human essence is freedom from the wills of others" (Hayles, 1999, 3). Melley bases many of his own observations of "agency panic" on sociological studies conducted by David Reisman. He outlines how individuals have enjoyed varying degrees of agency through various

socioeconomic periods. He places what he calls the “inner-directed” type of person as emerging from a “transitional growth period” (Reisman, 1969, 14). The Transitional growth period is characterized by a violent upheaval as society’s death ratio sinks, “The imbalance of births and deaths puts pressure on society’s customary ways. A new slate of character structures is called for or finds its opportunity in coping with rapid changes” (Reisman, 1969, 14-15). Before this, the tradition based societies of the middle-ages valued conformity through tradition, this was possible since society was relatively unchanging and life could be channelled through channels of etiquette (Reisman, 1969, 11). The “inner-directed” transitional growth people of the Enlightenment couldn’t as easily rely on pre-existing social traditions to qualify their choices in life.

“Too many novel situations are presented, situations which code cannot encompass in advance. Consequently the problem of personal choice, solved in the earlier period of high growth potential by channelling choice through rigid social organization, in the period of transitional growth is solved by channelling choice through a rigid though highly individualized character” (Reisman, 1969, 15).

The “inner directed” type is defined by his ability to conform to society’s expectations while at the same time maintaining an inner core of uniqueness. He is industrious and enterprising. He carves out his own fortune, and consumes based on personal taste. The “other-directed” type of person emerged from of the post-industrial society. Reisman claims that the outer-directedness of the individual is the direct result of our society’s transition over to a post-industrial uniformity (Melley, 2000, 163). The other-directed individual is conditioned by society to be a motiveless consumer that exists only to work and consume. Individualised preferences are made less important for the “other directed” type as he values conformity over personal taste. David Reisman’s focus on society and production has a

distinctly nostalgic undercurrent. Melley says that the lost “inner-directed” individual inspires nostalgia that manifests itself as a desire to return to rugged individualism. This desire often escalates and develops into a violent desire to secure inner-direction (Melley, 2000, 14).

Stephen King’s narratives are no exception as violent resistance to the coercive influence of the dominant system of control is shown to be the only way to retain one’s individuality.

The interests of the individual and post-industrial society meet in Stephen King’s novels. The sociologist Zygmunt Bauman writes in his book *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor* that “ours is a consumer society” (Bauman, 2004, 24). It is no longer common for a person to spend his entire life practicing one trade or skill. Instead, people switch their professions at regular intervals. This removes any firm foundation upon which identity can be constructed. “Consumerism” replaces work as the contemporary individual’s prime source of identity. Modern people gain their identity through what they consume rather than what they do. Work only exists to provide the required resources to participate in the consumer society. Bauman says that method for constructing identity has become such an important part of the contemporary life-style, that any type of normative regulation imposed on the market is seen as an aggressive attack on people’s rights as consumers and human beings (Bauman, 2004, 29). This is an important element in my discussion, because the characters of King’s novels also believe that consumption of commodities is an essential part of their identity construction. His modern consumers exercise their freedom of choice by defining themselves in a society of other consumers. King’s brand of Horror de-familiarises this familiar pattern of consumption in a way that elicits “agency panic”.

The consumer’s paranoia arises from his fear of being what Reisman called “other directed”. In his view, post-industrial conformity poses the greatest threat toward the individuals feeling of agency (Melley, 2000, 163). This is because social relations influence the consumer’s choice of commodity. Consumption is good if it is done consciously and

tastefully, it is not good if it is done un-consciously or to impersonate others (Melley, 2000, 54-55). Conscious consumption is therefore very important for the healthy development of the individual because it provides an outward indicator of individual preferences. King also uses consumption to display how his characters construct their identities, he de-familiarises it by removing conscious choice from their consumerism. This opens up King's own version of "Pandora's box" as the consumer's uniqueness is marginalised and destroyed. King removes conscious choice by making his "dangerous" commodities addictive. Addiction strikes from nowhere and limits the consumer's ability to exercise conscious choice over his or her consumption. Greed and ambition are also powerful motivations for consumption. The Characters in King's novels utilise supernatural machines and powerful technology in a vain attempt at combating what they believe to be imposing "other direction" on them. These "other directing" influences are often social institutions such as Governmental agencies, or peer groups. Consumerism presents a solution to this feeling of being "other directed", by constructing a powerful new identity that enforces the consumers feeling of inviolableness.

King's version of consumerism is dual. The consumer purchases commodities because he thinks he is promoting and displaying his own individual agency. In King's narratives this is often done as a way to counter other-directing influences. Reisman's opinion of consumerism creates a paradox as consumerism initiates the consumer into post-industrial conformity. Consumerism can thus represent two opposing ideals. The characters in King's novels begin with ideals of "identity construction". But since King's infuses his novels with "agency panic", his narratives often develop into post-industrial conformity as the consumer's uniqueness is marginalised by his artificial prosthesis.

King also de-familiarises consumerism by exaggerating the degree in which consumers are engaged with their commodities. The consumer in King's novels achieves a close physical connection to the machine. This happens when the consumer accepts the

seductive power the machine promises. Together the consumer and his artificial prosthesis become the cyborg. Katherine Hayles writes in her book *How We Became Post-Human* about the changing status of humanity because of its close proximity to technology. Her insight is useful because she writes about a trend within modern popular culture towards separating the mind from the body. This separation of mind and body comes in direct confrontation with the liberal humanist ideal that I outlined in the second paragraph on page four. She says that the post-human privileges “informational pattern over material instantiation” (Hayles, 1999, 2). Being physically embodied is more of a coincidence than an inevitable fact of life. Everything consists of information in cybernetic theory, and human beings are information processing devices not unlike computers. Secondly she says that “the post-human view considers consciousness, regarded as the seat of human identity in the western tradition long before Descartes thought he was mind thinking, as an epiphenomenon, as an evolutionary upstart trying to claim that it is the whole show when in actuality it is only a minor sideshow” (Hayles 1999, 3). Thirdly she says that “The post-human view thinks of the body as the original prosthesis we all learn to manipulate, so that extending or replacing the body with other prostheses becomes a continuation of a process that we began before we were born” (Hayles, 1999, 3). This point is very relevant to my discussion because this is where the consumer’s body meets his artificial prosthesis. Hayles outlines a fourth point to describe the post-human. “The post-human view configures human beings so that they can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines. In the post-human, there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals” (Hayles, 1999, 3). The seamless interaction between human bodies and artificial machines is present to a high degree in King’s fiction. His consumers are able to extend their bodies effortlessly into virtual spaces. King however views this liminality with a fearful anxiety as his machines are presented as

having malicious intent. King's paranoid style allows the artificial prosthesis to use its liminal seamlessness to invade human physiology.

Margo Buchanan-Oliver and Angela Cruz write that the post-human view produces a fearful ambivalence in the consumer. They explain that "liminality refers to a hybrid condition characterised by, ambiguity, indeterminacy, contradiction, incoherence and a blurring of boundaries" (Buchanan-Oliver and Cruz, 2011, 287). This Man and machine "liminality" is a common theme in popular culture. Oliver and Cruz say that "These liminal visions are fraught with pervasive anxieties and tensions" (Buchanan-Oliver and Cruz, 2011, 287). King's stories fall into this anxious style of post-humanism as his consumers lose their human uniqueness when ensconced within their machines. Oliver and Cruz emphasise this point by citing French philosopher Paul Virilio "The catastrophic figure of an individual who has lost the capacity for immediate intervention (Virilio, 1997, 20)." (Buchanan-Oliver and Cruz, 2011, 287) The fear of being imprisoned arises from being "physically" hooked up to a machine. Stephen King uses this image of the imprisoned cyborg to elicit "agency panic".

King's horrific version of the cyborg is typical of his oeuvre. He uses the cyborg to explore the contemporary person's relationship with his material surroundings. This increases the relevance of his novels because he de-familiarises contemporary existence through the mode of horror. He says that "I believe that horror does not horrify unless the reader or viewer has been personally touched" (King, 2012, 26). One way he "touches" the reader is by de-constructing their surroundings. He says "The melodies of the horror tale are simple and repetitive, and they are melodies of disestablishment and disintegration" (King, 2012, 27). The contemporary interests that I focus on in this thesis are consumerism and technology. The two go hand-in-hand as technology is just another item to be appropriated and consumed. This contemporary focus easily establishes his fiction as manifesting "agency panic". His criticism of the modern person's lifelong construction of identity through consumerism shows us this.

The “self” as an independent entity is problematized in his narratives as the cyborg is clearly “other-directed” by his artificial attachment. The individual loses the ability to affect meaningful influence over his own physiology because the artificial prosthesis has invaded his body and re-defined who he is. This is where “the uncanny” comes into the picture. It is used to make the familiar commodity weird in the eyes of the consumer. Alongside the cyborg’s liminality the uncanny gains extra potency as human beings slip in and out of virtual spaces.

Consumption of commodities also forms the foundation for King’s ethical stance. The paranoia that is present in King’s oeuvre leads to a deep distrust of things that can potentially be “other-directing”. Consumerism becomes one of these potential sources of “other-direction”. This is ironic when seen in light of other discourses which hold that consumerism is essential for the development of the modern individual’s subjectivity. After all, Bauman charges the contemporary person with constructing his own identity through consumption (Bauman, 2004, 27). This indicates that “other-direction” is to a certain extent unavoidable in modern society. King acknowledges this fact and differentiates between responsible and irresponsible consumption. Gerda Reith is helpful in this discussion because she also recognises the importance of consumerism for the post-industrial individual. She however charges the contemporary person with policing his own consumption. She argues that unrestricted consumption leads to addiction, and addiction leads to what Michel Foucault calls “deviant identities” (Reith, 2004, 289). King’s stories also emphasise the importance of modest and responsible consumption. He also advocates a total abstention from technology. He calls technology “pandora’s techno-box” Its effects are instantaneous and total (King, 2001, 246). King’s addict comes to us through the guise of the cyborg. In his narratives the cyborg is a living embodiment of human physiology that has been invaded by foreign entities that corrupt the individual’s uniqueness. The corrupting influence of commodities and

technology are not confined to the individual as their seductive qualities generalise and spread to cover a large swath of the population in *The Tommyknockers*.

The two novels this thesis engages with, *Christine* and *The Tommyknockers*, show us how Stephen King exploits anxieties held by the contemporary person. They are both consciously constructed to disconcert the contemporary reader. They do this by maintaining a high degree of paranoia. King achieves this paranoia by de-familiarising consumerism and the cyborg. He exploits the modern individual's tendency to solve problems by purchasing ready-made solutions. His paranoid style views these "problem-solving" commodities as potential entry points for "other-directing" influences. Once these commodities have been attached to the body as artificial prostheses they undermine human uniqueness by invading the human being's physiology.

The first chapter of this thesis will engage with the individual's experience of other-direction in King's literature. I will concentrate on what motivates irresponsible consumption and elaborate its cybernetic consequences. In the second chapter I will concentrate on how King portrays "agency panic" and "cybernetics" on a broader scale in his novel *The Tommyknockers*. I argue that King promotes disestablishment by making consumerism the foundation upon which communities separate and clash. In the third chapter I tie both the preceding chapters together and explain how King's paranoid version of consumerism is characterised by "addiction". "Addiction" is a defining trait of both of the novels I have analysed because it undermines the consumer's freedom to independently construct his or her individuality through consumption. "Addiction" also acts as the glue that secures the cyborg to his artificial prosthesis.

By exploring Stephen King's fiction I expect to illuminate how contemporary anxieties affect popular horror fiction. I expect to find that there is a strong correlation between the consumer's feelings of individual agency and his motivation to consume. King knows that contemporary people try to alleviate their anxieties through consumption. This is why his "agency panic" narratives are filled with consumers who feel that their agencies are being limited by their inanimate possessions.

Chapter 1:

Christine: The Paranoid Consumer and His Artificial Prosthesis

“Come on big guy. Let’s go for a ride. Let’s cruise”. (King, 2011, 89)

Christine published in 1983 illustrates how individual agency is marginalised by inanimate objects in Stephen King’s fiction. The novel is a horror story that emphasises the threat of being other-directed by one’s possessions. In this chapter I will be focusing on how Stephen King portrays the modern consumer in relation to what he consumes. I think one of the reasons why King’s brand of contemporary horror is so popular is his ability to de-familiarise consumerism and reveal hidden anxieties consumers associate with their commodities. To support this theory I will use diverse sources that support my claim. Melley, Reisman, Hayles, Bauman, Freud, Oliver and Cruz are all useful sources as they help me to demonstrate that King’s portrayal of the modern individual is one whose subjectivity is hyper sensitive to influence from the inanimate. This sensitivity represents a serious danger to the individual’s feeling of “agency” as it develops into “agency panic”.

The novel’s setting is an American nineteen-seventies, early eighties suburbia. The novel’s main protagonist Arnold Cunningham has difficulties fitting in with his peers who treat him like a social outcast. King provides a classic “outsider” motif as Arnold’s feeling of being a social pariah lays the foundation for the narrative’s further development (Strengell, 2006, 13). His only friend Dennis Guilder tries to shield Arnold from the worst of the bullying he receives from his schoolmates. Arnold feels that he cannot affect his surrounding and social status in any meaningful way. This makes him feel “agency panic”. His persecution gives Arnold the motive he needs to augment himself with a commodity that can improve his identity and enforce his own inner-direction. He augments his body with the car “Christine”.

“Christine” facilitates Arnold’s transformation from an individual who is beset by other-directing influences, (his parents, and Repperton) and gives him the confidence to enforce his own inner-directedness. As the narrative progresses he develops a feeling of invincibility that helps him to assert his will over those who would keep him down.

Zygmunt Bauman confirms the importance of commodities in building the modern consumer’s sense of identity. In *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor*, he writes that the modern individual creates himself through what he consumes. Like David Reisman, he plots the evolution of the modern individual through periods of social development. He begins by describing the social placement of the pre-modern person as belonging to a tradition based period in which his only social challenge was the “relatively straight forward task of sticking to one’s own kind” (Bauman, 2004, 27). Bauman describes modernity as charging:

“the individual with the task of self-construction’: building one’s own social identity if not fully from scratch, at least from its foundation up. Responsibility once confined to obeying the rules, that defined in no uncertain terms what it meant to be a nobleman, a tradesman, a mercenary soldier, a craftsman, a farm tenant or a farm hand now extended to include the choice of social definition itself and having this socially recognized and approved” (Bauman, 2004, 27).

But as Bauman points out the post-modern age has made forging a lifelong recognised career difficult, as jobs become something that are changed at regular intervals. Bauman says that the Catchword is “flexibility” (Bauman, 2004, 27), the idea is that workers to a larger extent than before are regarded as a disposable resource that can be hired and laid-off easily, without any further responsibility from the employer. Bauman claims that this has an adverse effect on the identity-shaping of the post-modern individual, as he can no longer define himself as steadfastly through the work he conducts. Bauman says:

“Nothing truly lasting could reasonably be hoped to be erected on this kind of shifting sand. Purely and simply, the prospect of constructing a lifelong identity on the foundation of his work is, for the great majority of people (except for the practitioners of a few highly skilled and privileged professions), dead and buried” (Bauman, 2004, 28).

Mirroring this dislocated view of modern human beings there has emerged a consumer society in which instead of work the individual defines himself through his consumption of commodities. Deborah Lupton says: “Conceptualised as more than vehicles of transport, we use cars to construct our subjectivity” (Lupton, 1999, 59). Like the people that buy them, consumer items aren’t built to last forever, reinforcing the notion that human beings and their possessions are in a permanent state of instability. Bauman’s says that consumer society matches the modern person’s perception of his own life. Consuming and using up “things” is seen as similar to the modern individual’s flexibility in his professional work-life. The consumption of one object mustn’t quench the thirst for more consumption, or else the quest for new and improved identities would stagnate.

Stephen King criticises this combination of consumerism and identity shaping. Bauman presents the consumer object as an “aggregate of identities, loosely arranged purchasable, not-too-lasting, easily detachable and utterly replaceable tokens currently available in the shops, they seem to be exactly what one needs to meet the challenges of contemporary living” (Bauman, 2004, 29). Like Bauman, King presents the consumer object as essential in identity shaping, but his commodities aren’t as easily disposable or replaceable. Arnold Cunningham deals with the challenges in his life by restoring Christine’s rusty hulk to its former glory. By doing so he gains transport, and confidence from her supernatural encouragement. The confidence Arnold Cunningham gains from his car, allows him to defy the constraints that had previously limited his individual agency. In the narrative his youthful

rebellion alienates him from his parents and frightens his enemies. Only later does Arnold Cunningham realise that this freedom comes with a price.

The new and improved Arnold Cunningham isn't the only character in *Christine* who exercises his individual freedom through consumerism. Christine's previous owner Roland Lebay also establishes his inner-directedness through the vehicle. Roland Lebay is a villain who struggles to conform to society's expectations. He has a violent temper that often results in violent outbursts. He joined the Army where he gained some success as a mechanic, but he was held back by his anti-social personality. Roland Lebay's tendency to call everybody he doesn't like "shitters", (pretty much everybody) underlines these anti-social tendencies. After he left the Army he moved back to Pittsburgh where he married and later had a daughter. It was around this time that he bought Christine. Lebay considers the car a reward for all the years that he has had to put up with society and its irritating demands. When he drives the car he is entirely free to enjoy his own independence. The car also heralds the destruction of his family. While Lebay and his family are out taking a Sunday drive his daughter lodges a piece of food in her throat and chokes to death (King, 2011, 145). This occurrence serves as an uncanny reminder of the car's agency as it is "uncannily" hinted that it is the car's fault that she died. Christine is portrayed as a jealous female who guards her male owners as though they were her own. To confirm the car's jealous nature Lebay's wife later commits suicide by pumping carbon-monoxide into the interior of the vehicle. Roland Lebay's affection towards the Christine is re-affirmed by the nonchalant attitude he adopts towards his family's death. It seems Lebay is secretly relieved that his family is gone, because it gives him more time to be with Christine.

When Arnold Cunningham buys Christine he inherits some of Roland Lebay's anti-social personality traits. It is Lebay's disdainful opinion of other people that forges Arnold Cunningham's new "tougher" identity. It allows him to carve out his own independence from

the constraining forces around him. By exploring a fine line between youthful teenage liberation and anti-social behaviour, Stephen King is giving us a glimpse of the sinister power that his inanimate objects possess. If we trace the development of Arnold's character through the novel we witness his transformation from a hero into a villain.

His moral transformation is marked by his transition into becoming a cyborg. The supernatural power that Christine gives Arnold comes at a price, as more and more of his own qualities are replaced or removed. In effect he is transformed into Roland Lebay through his physical contact with Christine. King's trap snaps shut as Arnold is sealed in a cybernetic system within Christine's mechanical body. He has been lured into the car by the promise of youthful liberation and agency, but is instead caught within a new system of control.

By looking back at Bauman's interpretation of the consumer we see that his commodities have a much more passive role than those in King's fiction. He emphasises the human need to consume and through consumption gain new identity. He writes that "Identities, just like consumer goods, are to be appropriated and possessed, but only in order to be consumed, and so to disappear again" (Bauman, 2004, 29). In his interpretation of the word "consumption" it entails finality as the consumer object is removed from existence, "to consume also means to destroy. In the course of consumption, the consumed "things cease to exist, literally and spiritually" (Bauman, 2004, 23). Bauman emphasises the need for perpetual consumption as we continually grasp on to new trends and fashions. In *Christine*, human beings are portrayed as being loyal to their consumer objects. Both of the characters Arnold Cunningham and Roland Lebay use their cars to define who they are and give themselves radical new personalities that allow them to enforce their own individualities. Arnold Cunningham gains confidence through the supernatural power of the car while Roland Lebay uses the car as a way of isolating himself from his peers. In regard to Bauman's analysis Arnold Cunningham, and to a lesser extent Lebay, have acquired new identities

through the car. The novel reinforces this interpretation by its vivid descriptions of mental and physical transformations. Bauman's analysis would however emphasise the importance of Arnold and Lebay finishing their consumption of Christine and then moving on to consume other items. This is after all essential for the development of their identities. Stephen King distances himself from Bauman as his novel disrupts the individual's perpetuation of consumption. Arnold and Lebay are shown to be extremely "brand loyal" or "addicted" to Christine. King's novel re-affirms the identity creating properties of consumer objects that Bauman outlines in his analysis, but King departs from Bauman at the point when one consumer item should be exchanged for another. "Christine" is the only car that Arnold will ever want. King presents Christine as a timeless object capable of self-repair and magical regeneration when she is damaged. This is a big departure from Bauman's description of consumer objects, that "are meant to be used up and then to disappear; the idea of temporariness and transitoriness is intrinsic to their very denomination as objects of consumption; consumer goods have *memento mori* written all over them, even if with an invisible ink" (Bauman, 2004, 29). This is not the case in Stephen King's novel as the car is immortal and indestructible.

Arnold Cunningham's inability to get rid of Christine makes it impossible for him to acquire new identity. This is an important aspect of the paranoia the novel is trying to elicit. King is hindering the development of the individual by refusing him to continue consuming new "identity shaping" commodities (Bauman, 2010, 27-28). We see how King consciously weaves "agency panic" into every level of Arnold's life as consumption is presented as a solution and a cause of "agency panic". It solves Arnold's immediate problem of feeling other-directed by his peers, but instead it opens him up for other direction from his artificial prosthesis.

The paranoia the car inspires is vaguely discernible through the characters own anthropomorphic perspective of the vehicle. King is sowing seeds of distrust and telling the reader not to trust what he tries to consume. King's broken consumer collides with Bauman as Arnold's identity solidifies within the body of the car. This happens because he cannot replace it or perpetuate his consumption of other commodities. Instead he is trapped within consumer limbo. To emphasise Arnold's imprisonment within the vehicle "it" stubbornly refuses to fulfil the criterion that would normally doom a consumer item such as Christine to replacement, namely its utility. But since Christine has supernatural driving capabilities she can easily outperform any modern vehicle. Not even time can diminish the car's potency. The car's body might appear to be "used up" when Arnold first buys her, but it magically regenerates as Arnold devotes more and more time to her restoration. Christine's uncanny regeneration is made apparent by the speed in which she is restored when seen in relation to Arnold's lack of funds with which to repair her. The car's regeneration is also marked by the haphazard way in which she fixes herself (King, 2011, 178, 347). Only at the end of the novel does the reader actually witness her body putting itself back together. To emphasise that Christine is unaffected by time, her speedometer cable winds backwards rather than forwards, lowering the amount of mileage that she has put behind her (King, 2011, 271-272). The only point in the novel that it seems Christine might be replaceable is when Arnold starts devoting more time to his girlfriend Leigh Cabot. Christine is aware of the danger that Leigh poses and ends their relationship by doing to Leigh what Christine had already done to Roland Lebay's family. The death of Lebay's daughter is echoed as Leigh almost chokes to death on a piece of food while she is eating in the car. Christine's anthropomorphic qualities are made evident by Leigh when she experiences (while choking) that the dials on the dashboard are leering down at her as though with malicious intent, "the dashboard instruments really were eyes, great round unemotional eyes watching her choke to death, eyes she could see through a glowing

jitter of black dots” (King, 2011, 407). In this instance the car supposedly comes to life trying to kill her, she is saved by a hitchhiker who knows the Heimlich maneuver. Christine doesn’t succeed in killing Leigh but she succeeds in scaring her off, thus securing Arnold Cunningham’s undivided attention.

Cyborgs, Liminality and the Uncanny.

King’s characters consume based on the amount of agency they think they can garner from their possessions. In the previous paragraphs I found that King’s consumption becomes dysfunctional as consumers aren’t able to destroy what they set out to consume. Instead they are imprisoned by their possessions. When imprisoned, the inanimate object transforms them from independent human beings into cyborgs.

As cyborgs, Arnold and Lebay are able to interact closely with their machines. Their cybernetic attachment lets them extend their subjectivities beyond the physical “real” world and into virtual spaces. Buchanan-Oliver and Cruz call this “telepresence”. They use the personal computer as an example of machines that allows people to extend their subjectivities into virtual spaces (Buchanan-Oliver and Cruz, 2011, 289). In *Christine*, Arnold Cunningham and Roland Lebay extend themselves in a similar manner when they ensconce themselves within Christine’s liminal body. Deborah Lupton compares entering the car to donning a second skin. She says that:

“When we enter and seat ourselves within a car, we enclose our bodies within its metal frame, generating for ourselves a private space in a public space. This tends to result in a somewhat illusory feeling of safety, of being isolated in one’s own little capsule from the harsh realities of the world outside. The car seems to provide a space around the body which is perceived as almost as inviolable as the body itself” (Lupton, 1999, 60).

This excerpt highlights Christine's most appealing aspects. She creates a private space in which Arnold and Lebay can retreat from the world. They use this safe seclusion to avoid society's other-directing influences. She also elicits a feeling of illusionary safety as her supernatural powers make the car feel as though it is as inviolable as the human body. King de-familiarises this last point by evoking the cyborg. The cyborg is a person who has let his body be augmented with an artificial prosthesis. This point is made clear in *Christine* as the car allows its occupants to leave their mortal bodies and become a permanent part of the vehicle. This happens to Roland Lebay when he perpetuates his existence by transferring his soul into the car after he dies. King's Gothic influences become apparent as the car begins to remind the reader of a haunted house in which souls continue existing as ghosts. Christine can also be compared to a hard-drive that copies and stores information. By viewing consumers as cyborgs we see how the modern individual is engaged in interaction at varying degrees of liminality with their machines.

Liminality

I've extracted my definition of man/machine liminality from the essay *Discourses of Technology Consumption: Ambivalence, Fear and Liminality*, written by Margo Buchanan-Oliver and Angela Cruz. They define body-machine liminality as "a hybrid condition characterised by ambiguity, indeterminacy, incoherence, and blurring of boundaries between bodies and machines, making it increasingly difficult to delineate differences between human bodies and their non-human machines" (Buchanan-Oliver and Cruz, 2011, 287-288). They say that the boundaries between bodies and machines are blurred. This view is reinforced by Katherine Hayle's definition of the "post-human" condition (Hayles, 1999, 85). The post-human values informational patterns over material instantiation, the post-human also considers the body the original prosthesis from which new ones can be attached. In my target

literature this is represented by the cybernetic connection established between Arnold Cunningham and his car.

Christine's liminality distorts her occupant's experience of time and space. Buchanan Oliver and Cruz write that "technology enables various modes of space-shifting and time-shifting. Here technology consumers experience being both elsewhere and elsewhere, confounding modernist conceptions of space and time as fixed and linear" (Buchanan-Oliver and Cruz, 2011, 288). Arnold Cunningham experiences how Christine's time warping abilities bring the past into the present, when the car's previous owner Roland Lebay re-emerges as a ghost. Lebay achieves this by extending his subjectivity within the body of the vehicle. Oliver and Cruz divide space/time liminality into two points of interest.

The first applies to Christine's ability to facilitate time travel. The cyborg is able to use the car in order to travel across time. Oliver and Cruz use the video-camera as an example of how technology can facilitate the bridging of the past and the present. They write that "technology often facilitates a Janus-faced time perspective, characterised by a simultaneous gaze into the future and the past" (Buchanan-Oliver and Cruz, 2011, 289). In King's novel the car functions in a similar manner, by being a conduit between the nineteen fifties, when the car was new, and the nineteen eighties when Arnold Cunningham buys her. This manifests itself in the narrative by the repeated uncanny reminders that the car is at least in spirit, still a part of a previous age. The car's exterior appearance and its insistence on only playing WDIL, a radio station that exclusively plays classic tunes from the nineteen-fifties (King, 2011, 377-378) all indicate that the car belongs to a previous age. Christine's exterior appearance is also anchored in the past. When Arnold Cunningham's father asks why he chose to restore the car to its precise original condition he simply states that "it just seemed like the right thing to do" (King, 2011, 271). Arnold Cunningham isn't consciously aware of the car's insistence on staying in the past as he intrinsically aligns his motives with those of the vehicle. The car has

apparently stored the past and projected it into the present. Buchanan-Oliver and Cruz support this. "On the other hand technology also preserves memories and history. In particular, through the proliferation of recording technologies such as video cameras, consumers can readily preserve particular moments in time and to access their pasts in an untarnished way" (Buchanan-Oliver and Cruz, 2010, 289, Manuel, 1993). Like these recording devices Christine is able to secure the past and bring it into the future. Unlike the video camera Christine functions as the ultimate virtual reality simulator as she vividly resurrects the past and imposes it on her occupants. King's recording device is different from the mundane camera, because it can also transport subjectivities across time. This is best exemplified by the cyborg Roland Lebay who uses the car as a vessel for his continued existence. He is a ghost that can best be understood by looking at the tape recorder analogy. In effect the car seizes the person at the moment of death and preserves him in the body of the car. Roland Lebay's brother George compares the car's spiritual adhesiveness to a carton of milk that takes on a different flavour if it is left open in a refrigerator with strongly spiced foods (King, 2010, 156). King's style of horror departs from Buchanan-Oliver and Cruz's tape recorder and video camera analogy by refusing to represent the past in an untarnished way. In King's fiction the past becomes a well of bad memories that bubble to the surface through the uncanny.

The Uncanny

By being partially or entirely submerged in their possessions Stephen King's cyborgs evoke "the uncanny". An uncanny feeling is also produced from the machines ability to reproduce the past. By using "the uncanny" King's novels de-familiarises the reader's experience of what is familiar. Uncanny feelings de-familiarise the consumer commodity. It "makes strange the world of everyday perception and renews the readers lost capacity for fresh sensation" (Abrams and Harpham, 2009, 127). King consciously uses the uncanny to present familiar items as strange. Freud describes the uncanny as "that class of frightening

which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar.” (Norton, 2010, 825). When experiencing the uncanny the old and familiar is viewed in a new light. This new perspective elicits a distrust of the viewed object, as it potentially contains something hidden and dangerous. Freud says that the meaning of the word “uncanny” is the opposite of the German word “Heimlich” which means “homely”. Freud assesses that the uncanny must then be what is unfamiliar and strange. The reason we experience something as frightening is because it is unfamiliar. Freud says that “what is novel can easily become frightening and uncanny”. But this doesn’t mean that everything novel is frightening. (Norton, 2010, 826). Freud explains that what is novel within the familiar can be experienced as uncanny as it forces the observer to re-evaluate his understanding of what he observes.

Freud further elaborates the meaning of the word “Heimlich”. He says that something that is “Heimlich” is secret and private, “concealed, kept from sight, so that others do not know of or about it” (Norton, 2010, 827). This means that what is Homely and familiar also has an element of secrecy to it. This is logical since what is intimate and private, must also have an element of privacy in order for it to be private in the first place. “The home” is familiar and private because it is “Heimlich” it is concealed from the sight of outsiders. Freud says “in general we are reminded that the word Heimlich is not unambiguous, but belongs to two sets of ideas, which, without being contradictory, are yet very different: on the one hand it means what is familiar and agreeable, and on the other, what is concealed and kept out of sight” (Norton, 2010, 827). The duality of the homely leads to confusion between what is familiar and what is unknown. In my discussion I am most concerned with the fearful reaction this feeling generates. Freud elaborates using Grimm’s dictionary. “4. From the idea of home-like, belonging to the house, the further idea is developed of something withdrawn from the eyes of strangers, something concealed, secret; and this idea is expanded in many ways...” (Norton, 2010, 828). Freud uses this duality of the homely and says that “The notion of

something hidden and dangerous, which is expressed in the last paragraph, is still further developed, so that Heimlich comes to have the meaning usually ascribed to un-heimlich. Thus “at times I feel like a man who walks in the night and believes in ghosts; every corner is Heimlich and full of terrors for him.” (Norton, Freud quoting Klinger, 2010, 828).

In *Christine* the “Heimlich” and its other meaning the “uncanny”, manifests itself through the car. The uncanny power that the car radiates is experienced differently by Arnold Cunningham and Dennis Guilder. Arnold is infatuated with the vehicle when he first sees it. He feels a personal connection with it “I’ve seen something even uglier than I am” (King, 2011, 39). Arnold’s friend Dennis has a more negative impression of the vehicle. Christine gives him an uncomfortable feeling and he gradually develops distaste for it. King is setting the stage for the conflict that later develops between Arnold and Dennis as Arnold becomes an other-directed cyborg and Dennis re-affirms himself as the inner-directed type by resisting its seductive influence. Dennis experiences the car’s uncanny influence himself when he first observes the wreck. Dennis experiences the uncanny through an evocation of the past, as Freud said “the re-emergence of the repressed past” (Norton, 2010, 833). Christine’s dilapidated state and Arnold’s restoration of her manifest the vehicle’s past being uncovered. Dennis experiences this re-emergence of the past more vividly the first time he sits behind its wheel. Through what can best be described as “magic realism” Dennis Guilder momentarily experiences how Christine must have been when she was new. He says,

“I put my hands on the wheel and something happened. Even now, after much thought, I’m not sure exactly what it was. A vision, maybe – but if it was, it sure wasn’t any big deal. It was just that for a moment the torn upholstery seemed to be gone. The seat covers were whole and smelling pleasantly of vinyl... or maybe that smell was real leather. The worn places were gone from the steering wheel; the chrome winked pleasantly in the summer evening light falling through the garage door.” (King, 2011, 45-46).

In this excerpt Dennis experiences the past re-emerging from the car as though it were a stored memory. Dennis' reaction is fearful as he cannot comprehend the car's hidden power. Dennis later dreams about the car, in his dream he sees the car purring in the garage as though it were some kind of animal. He describes the car's radio as fearfully evocative of a past age, "from the radio came the hard rhythmic sounds of Dale Hawkins doing Susie-Q – a voice from a dead age, full of a somehow frightening vitality" (King, 2011, 89). In this quotation we again experience how Christine's past re-emerges and provokes a fearful reaction in the observer.

The liminal cyborg reinforces the novel's feeling of the uncanny by functioning as a conduit through which the past is allowed to flow into the present. The observer's experience of uncanny in Christine comes from the human part of the man/machine cyborg re-emerging from the past. In Christine's narrative this happens when Roland Lebay either appears before Arnold or when it is implied that he is controlling the car. This provokes a fearful reaction as the car's nature is shown to be extremely unpredictable. Freud writes that the uncanny is felt to a large degree around the presence of dead bodies (Freud, 2010, 833). He traces this uncanny fear back to humanity's repressed magical belief that the vengeful dead could return to harm the living. The dead body is a vessel in which danger might lurk. Christine is similarly reminiscent a dead body that radiates hidden dread. This explains Dennis Guilder's fearful reaction when he experiences the past emerging in the present. He experiences ghosts from the past re-emerging in the present. Freud says that the uncanny arises when the bridge between the imaginary and reality is effaced (Freud, 2010, 835). The haunted (*unheimlich*) car then becomes an object of dread as it is discovered that it has been involved in the untimely demise of multiple people including Roland Lebay's wife and daughter. Oliver and Cruz's tape recorder analogy seems to support this interpretation as human beings are recorded in much the same way as a video or photograph. The past is thereby made visible in the present.

By viewing the uncanny in light of modern technology's ability to record humanity I have shown how King's novel display consumer objects as things that should be dreaded and distrusted. In a similar manner to Freud's description of the corpse, King portrays the consumer object as frightening. The repressed magical fears that animate Freud's corpse also animate King's vehicles. In *Christine* the car is transformed from a mundane appliance into an entity capable of possessing and consuming its owner.

Christine's uncanny "time traveling" ability sheds new light on Zygmunt Bauman's modern consumer. King's "agency panic" arises from denying the consumer perpetuation of his consumption. It denies him the "identity shaping" process which is so important for the modern individual. *Christine* imprisons consumers by recording them and storing them in her mechanical body. The consumer is stuck in a state of limbo that denies further consumption. *Christine*'s ability to distort and store time captures the individual within her liminal body and keeps him within her time frame. *Christine* then ensures that she never goes out of style or loses her appeal. In Bauman's terms this is the modern consumer's worst nightmare. It reinforces my interpretation that *Christine* is an "agency panic" narrative, because the consumer is restricted to one possession for the rest of his foreseeable future.

Chapter 2

The Tommyknockers: The Paranoid Community

“Late last night and the night before

Tommyknockers, Tommyknockers, knocking at the door”. (King, 1989, 229).

The Tommyknockers fits into my discussion of “agency panic” by including elements that are descriptive of Stephen King’s treatment of human beings and their inanimate objects. This novel approaches “agency panic” on a broader scale than the novel *Christine*, as shown in the generality of the anxiety inanimate objects inspire. Within the narrative King uses the “uncanny” that his inanimate objects imply to elicit feelings of paranoia in the fictional town of Haven. This paranoid community demonstrates how their behaviour as consumers promotes a liminal attachment to machines in a futile attempt to promote individual agency and identity, making *The Tommyknockers* a distinctly dystopian novel about the dangers of exploiting powerful technology.

Haven’s Consumers

The consumers of Haven attempt to shape their identities through what they consume. I used a similar comparison when I studied Zygmunt Bauman’s analysis of consumer society to explain how *Christine* shapes Arnold Cunningham’s new identity. The correlation between consumption and identity shaping is visible in *The Tommyknockers* as there is an obvious connection between the Havenites obsessive consumption of technology and the emergence of their new personalities. Their new identities are defined by their transformation from human beings into automatons. King departs from Bauman’s analysis of consumer society by suggesting that his consumers are dysfunctional in the act of consumption. The same supernatural power that makes King’s machines so attractive to consumers also poses a threat

to the consumer's traditional values and agency. In the previous chapter I wrote that Christine enfranchises herself by making herself irreplaceable and indestructible, by doing so she became a consumer object that couldn't be consumed. King presents the machines in *The Tommyknockers* in a similar manner. The objects the people of Haven build are made from the cannibalised parts of mundane household appliances. From a consumerist's point of view this is absurd, as instead of replacing the old with something new, the people of Haven are recirculating their old commodities. By focusing on recirculation King also goes against Bauman's model of perpetual "identity shaping" through consumption. The consumer in King's fiction is arrested by his appliance in the act of consumption as it attaches itself and becomes a permanent artificial prosthesis.

King's portrayal of the incomplete consumer shows how he creates a new kind of consumer society. It isn't simply a society in which people consume, but one where they also produce. Bauman divides society into producers and consumers. He writes that "Producers can fulfil their vocation only collectively; production is a collective endeavour, it presumes the division of tasks, cooperation of actors and coordination of their activities" (Bauman, 2004, 30). Consumers are the opposite, "consumption is a thoroughly individual, solitary and, in the end, lonely activity which is fulfilled by quenching and arousing, assuaging and whipping up a desire which is always private, and not an easily communicable sensation" (Bauman, 2004, 30). The new people of Haven have become producers, as they gain self-sufficiency by exploiting the technology the buried ship provides. The Havenites recycle their old machines and rebuild them in order to utilise them well beyond their normal capabilities. They do this work in a collective endeavour to further their cybernetic relationship with the alien ship. They call this work "the becoming". The collectiveness of the Havenite's endeavours is reminiscent of Bauman's definition of the producer as their work is characterised by a skilful division of labour in which every member of the community does

his or her part for the “becoming”. King’s introduction of a new producing class in Haven is an important factor in the novel’s ability to inspire “agency panic”. The synergy of their production requires an abandonment of individual agency. King shows how Haven’s new class of producers are other-directed mindless automatons by contrasting them with inner-directed characters that seek to limit their production and consumption of dangerous technology. People that seek to limit the Havenites’ consumption are singled out as enemies of the new community. This might be read as a parody of western consumer society by King, as Bauman writes that any form of normative regulation on production is viewed as a hostile action by consumers and producers.

“It is dysfunctional and so undesirable for the perpetuation, smooth functioning and prosperity of a consumer market, but it also repulses its clients. The interests of consumers and market operators meet here; in a curious and unanticipated form, the message conveyed by the old adage What is good for General Motors is good for the United States’ comes true” (Bauman, 2004, 29).

In *The Tommyknockers* the adage becomes “what is good for the buried ship is good for Haven”. The heroes in *The Tommyknockers* represent forces of restraint and limitation. The result is that Haven’s new community eventually start to resent their restrictive influence. In the eyes of consumers they seem to be limiting the development of their new “alien” identity.

On page 28 I wrote that by recycling their old household appliances the people of Haven fail in their roles as traditional consumers. They also fail because they lack the freedom to choose what they want to consume. Bauman writes that it is important for the development of the consumer’s identity to have the freedom to choose what he wants to consume. This should happen in a market that is built to elicit any number of individual desires (Bauman, 2004, 29). This level of choice isn’t present in *The Tommyknockers*. The

consumers of Haven are limited to consuming what they themselves have built, and even that they do unsuccessfully. Their choice is limited to what the buried ship tells them to build. This means that their new identities aren't of their own choosing but rather of the buried ship's. In the narrative the consumer's limitation of choice is a gradual process as the ship initially helps the people of Haven in fulfilling their own personal ambitions. But King's paranoid style quickly de-familiarises this benevolent influence by making the Havenites' production and consumption pathological. The ship's influence becomes more practical as it transforms the people of Haven into an effective workforce of "producers" that sacrifice their individuality in favour of effective conformity.

The Liminal Cyborg

The People of Haven and their machines interact in a way that dissolves the physical boundaries that separate their organic bodies from the artificial prosthesis. The liminality that arises between men and machines explains how the new community of Haven gains such a strong attachment to their inanimate objects. Their inanimate objects become artificial prostheses that help the people of Haven to display and enforce their attachment with the buried alien ship.

The novel's main protagonist Bobbi Anderson is the first person to discover the buried ship. The buried UFO reaches out to her and inspires her to build fantastic inventions. One of these inventions is a telepathic typewriter that helps her to complete a novel while she is busy excavating the ship. Her interaction with the typewriter is a good example of man/machine liminality. When using it she breaks down the boundaries that traditionally separate what is human (organic) and what is mechanical. When using the enhanced typewriter her mind extends itself into a virtual space where she can interact with the typewriter's thought sensitive sensors. Bobbi helps us to understand its functions "The typewriter is thought-

sensitive, the way a photoelectric cell is light-sensitive. This thing seems to pick up my thoughts clearly up to a distance of five miles. If I'm further away than that, things start to get garbled" (King, 2008, 226). Oliver and Cruz support the idea that human beings are "connected" to their possessions when they interact with them, "The metaphor of technology as a tool, suggesting that which is external to and distinct from the body, is rendered less compelling than the metaphor of technology as prosthesis, suggesting something which, in addition to extending human capability, is incorporated into the self and inevitably comes to constitute who one is" (Buchanan-Oliver and Cruz, 2011, 288). The preceding quotation says that the artificial prosthesis "inevitably comes to constitute who one is". This is important in my analysis of *The Tommyknockers*. It is through the liminality that exists between men and machines that King's malicious inanimate objects achieve their influence over their human counterparts. Oliver and Cruz claim that human nature is "inherently prosthetic" and as a result the artificial prosthesis is incorporated into the self. They say that modern people are inevitably drawn into cybernetic connections with their surroundings, "Similarly, Balsamo (1996) theorises that there are degrees of cyborgism rather than a reductive human-machine dichotomy" (Buchanan-Oliver and Cruz, 2011, 288). In light of the previous claim, Bobbi Anderson's interaction with the thought sensitive typewriter constitutes a very high degree of cybernetic attachment. King suggests that the typewriter is more than an inanimate tool, but rather an intelligent machine capable of arranging thoughts. Bobbi explains the machine's insight

"All the time it was running I was in the woods, working around the place, or down in the cellar. But as I say, mostly I was sleeping. It's funny ... even if someone could have convinced me such a gadget existed, I wouldn't have believed it would work for me, because I've always been lousy at dictating. I have to write my own words on paper. But this isn't dictating, Gard – it's like a direct tap into the subconscious, more like dreaming than writing ... but what comes out is unlike dreams,

which are often surreal and disconnected. This really isn't a typewriter at all anymore. It's a dream machine" (King, 2008, 227).

In this excerpt Bobbi confirms that the machine is more than a tool, it is a co-entity that takes an active part in her thought processes.

The car in *Christine* also functions as a co-entity that influences Arnold Cunningham's thoughts. Like Bobbi he is drawn into a virtual space which gives him a nostalgic experience of the past. It facilitates a space/time liminality. Buchanan-Oliver and Cruz' argument is that technology can seize time and store it. They used the tape and video-recorder as examples of this. They say that this displacement of time creates a fearful reaction in the consumer (Buchanan-Oliver and Cruz, 2011, 289). King exploits this fearful liminality by making the car an overt manifestation of the past that not only arrests its human owner, but transforms him into its former owner. Like Bobbi, Arnold extends himself into a liminal space and comes out tainted by the machine. This strikes hard at the belief that the liberal individual is a distinct and individual entity (Hayles, 1999, 2-3). In King's novels this cybernetic liminality invariably results in "agency panic".

Modifications

The buried ship's influence is paradoxical as it is simultaneously the cause and solution to the "agency panic" the Havenites experience. The buried ship presents a solution to Bobbi's subconscious feeling of "agency panic" because it appeals to her fear of being other-directed. Bobbi is worried about what will happen to her farm if she informs the authorities about the presence of the buried ship on her land. She also worries that the Government won't be able to handle the situation properly. King says that:

"Bobbi's distrust of the way the authorities handled things had begun at the age of twelve, in Utica. She had been sitting on the sofa in their living room with Anne (her

sister) on one side and her mother on the other. She had been eating a hamburger and watching the Dallas police escort Lee Harvey Oswald across an underground parking garage. There were lots of Dallas police. So many, in fact that the TV announcer was telling the country that someone had shot Oswald before all those police – of all those people in authority – no one seemed to have the slightest inkling something had gone wrong, let alone that it had” (King, 2008, 71).

Bobbi’s distrust of the Government’s ability to handle dangerous situations isn’t her only worry, as she is also afraid that she will be swallowed up by sinister institutions. She explains:

“They would take the land. They would gag him (Gardner) and Bobbi... but even that might not be enough to make them comfortable. Could be they’d wind up someplace like a weird cross between a Russian gulag and a posh Med resort. All the beads are free, and the only catch is, you never get out. Or even that might not be enough... so mourners please omit flowers. Then and only then could the ship’s new caretakers sleep easy at night” (King, 2008, 255-256).

Bobbi’s fearful reaction is congruent with Timothy Melley’s description of the clinical paranoid who interacts his environment by “expressing a general fear and distrust” (Melley, 2000, 11).

The buried ship solves Bobbi’s fear of being other-directed by social institutions by making her self-sufficient. This way Bobbi and the people of Haven emancipate themselves from the market relations that have traditionally defines the “other-directed” individual. The most important areas in which Bobbi achieves self-sufficiency are technology and electricity. Bobbi circumvents Haven’s reliance on “the outside” for power by developing efficient new machines that are able to exploit normal “C-cells, D-cells, double-A’s, triple-A’s and ninevolts (King, 2008, 192). She wires them up so efficiently that they are sufficient to heat her entire house and power her fantastical inventions. James Gardner describes the device she

uses to heat her water tank, “in the centre of the compartment, directly over the egg carton, in the arch formed by the wires, glowed a bright ball of light, no larger than a quarter but seemingly as bright as the sun” (King, 2008, 198). This new source of energy enforces Bobbi’s feeling of agency as she is no longer reliant on external institutions for life-giving power. She says “I’m off the Central Maine power tit, Gard. I had them interrupt service... That’s how they put it, as if they know damn well you’ll want it back before too long” (King, 2008, 218).

In the introduction I said that King’s consumer objects function as tools his characters use to enforce individual agency. This explains Bobbi’s motivation to build her improvements. As a consumer she is looking for a way of constructing an un-assailable new identity. She does this by utilising technology that allows her to return to what David Reisman calls a “return to rugged individualism” (Melley, 2000, 49-50). Of course King’s style doesn’t allow Bobbi to function as a successful consumer. Instead she re-invents machines that cannot be consumed. Instead of re-enforcing her own feeling of agency Bobbi is subjugating herself to the inanimate will of the buried ship. She has become a mindless producer. Her feeling of being “driven” by the ship is correct as the buried object subliminally exerts its influence over her mind. It is the buried ship’s ultimate ambition is to be released from its terrestrial confinement. In order to do this it conditions Bobbi into aligning her interests with its own. Its influence isn’t obvious as its presence uncannily manifests itself through a gas that is reminiscent of radioactive fallout. Bobbi tries to explain the ship’s uncanny influence, “The ship itself broadcast some kind of tremendous, almost animate force; whatever had come in it was dead, she was sure she hadn’t lied about that, but the ship itself was almost alive, broadcasting that enormous energy-pattern through its metal skin” (King 2008, 250). Its energy pattern reaches the people of Haven and bends them to its inanimate will, making them compliant cyborgs.

The Uncanny Discovery

The buried ship inspires “uncanny” feelings in the characters of *The Tommyknockers*. The “uncanny” manifests itself by effacing the characters imaginations and their perception of reality. The characters imaginations become important diagnostic tools in interpreting the buried ship intentions as it isn’t overtly clear how the people of Haven should use the technology it provides. The very real presence of the ship combines with the indeterminate nature of its influence to create a distinct feeling of “the uncanny”. The ship allows the people of Haven to communicate with their inanimate objects. It is however unclear if it is the ship they are communicating with, or if it is their own disturbed minds. King doesn’t provide an answer, but based on the Havenite’s personal interaction with their possessions it might be an indication that they are communicating with themselves rather than directly with the ship. We see how his inanimate objects function as mirrors in which his characters reflect themselves. This point fits into my overall claim that consumers shape their identities through what they consume. In King’s case he uses “the uncanny” to de-familiarise normally passive possessions into active agents that actively participate in their owners deranged thoughts.

Bobbi Anderson’s discovery of the buried ship starts with an “uncanny” experience that latches on to her curiosity and eventually consumes her imagination. “Anderson placed the pad of her right index finger on its edge and felt a momentary odd tingling, like a vibration. She took her finger away and looked at it quizzically” (King, 2008, 9). Freud says that “an uncanny effect is often and easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced, as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality, or when a symbol takes over the full functions of the thing it symbolises” (Norton, 2010, 835). Bobbi’s paranoid imagination gives “the uncanny” fertile ground upon which to grow as she imagines that the “tingling” sensation she felt was some sort of supernatural signal, “The vibration. It was the call of human bones” (King, 2008,

15). In regards to Freud's *Uncanny* Bobbi's reaction represents her suppressed magical beliefs resurfacing from her subconscious. Bobbi's uncanny experience with the "tingling" metal serves to efface her imagination and her perception of reality. Freud says that, "It is this factor which contributes not a little to the uncanny effect attaching to magical practices. The infantile element in this, which also dominates the minds of neurotics, is the over-accentuation of psychical reality in comparison with material reality" (Norton, 2010, 835). In this instance Bobbi over-accentuates her own mental reasoning over material reality. Her feeling of the uncanny facilitates this shift. It effaces her perception of reality and her superstitious imagination. Bobbi is able to reign herself in as the "reality" driven part of the mind takes over, saying "Come on Bobbi – don't be so stupid. A shudder worked through her nevertheless. The idea had a certain weird persuasiveness, like a Victorian ghost story that had no business working as the world hurtled down Microchip alley towards the unknown wonders and horrors of the twenty-first century" (King, 2008, 15). In this excerpt Bobbi admits the foolishness of her supernatural beliefs, but feelings of "the uncanny" stay with her regardless.

Once the uncanny influence of the buried ship asserts itself in Bobbi's imagination it gradually becomes an obsession, as a combination of her own curiosity and the ship's influence coerces her down a path that is other-directed. Her imagination becomes enslaved as the buried ship becomes the only thing she can think about. "The thing in the forest had stayed on her mind, and the idea that it was some sort of clandestine coffin had grown to a certainty. It wasn't writing she was restless to do it was digging" (King, 2008, 26). Bobbi's compulsive desire to dig up the buried ship heralds the first inklings of "agency panic" in *The Tommyknockers*. In the novel's narrative "agency panic" arises from the compulsive mindlessness of Bobbi's industry. Bobbi is so engaged in digging up the buried ship that she goes into a trance, "She dropped the shovel she had been using and backed away from the

thing in the earth – the thing that was no plate, no box, not anything she could understand” (King, 2008, 29). Again the uncanny is evoked as Bobbi cannot comprehend the unknown novelty of what she is digging up. She also realises that through her work she has become less conscious of herself

“All she knew for sure was that she knew she had fallen into a strange, thoughtless state she didn’t like at all. This time she had done more than lose track of time: she felt as if she had lost track of herself as well. It was as if someone else had stepped into her head the way a man would step into a bulldozer or a payload, simply firing her up and starting to yank the right levers” (King, 2008, 29).

Timothy Melley describes “agency panic” as an “intense anxiety about an apparent loss of autonomy or self-control---the conviction that one’s actions are being controlled by someone (something else in this case), that one has been constructed by powerful external agents (Melley, 2000, 12). Bobbi Anderson doesn’t experience this violent fearful reaction even though she is clearly other-directed by external agents. Instead, Bobbi Anderson is at ease with her loss of autonomy. When doubts surface they are silenced by a strange complacency that leads to a nonchalant attitude. When she resumes digging she thinks “Some part of her had known she would end up here in spite of whatever foolish conceptions of free will the rest of her mind might possess to disturb her” (King, 2008, 74).

Bobbi’s “uncanny” experiences give way to her compulsive desire to see the ship excavated. She thinks that she can maintain her inner-direction by satisfying her own curiosity. That way, it is for herself that she is working. This is a lie she tells to herself as it becomes apparent to the reader that her compulsive behaviour is the result of outside coercion.

Haven's Constable Ruth McCausland experiences the "uncanny" influence of the ship through her doll collection. When Ruth found out that she couldn't have children of her own she started collecting dolls. In Ruth's case King uses the uncanny to symbolise how the community of Haven is changing from a human community into a collective of cyborgs. Ruth's "uncanny" experiences with the dolls symbolises this.

"She blinked – not awake, precisely, but back to reality – sometime later and looked at her watch. Her eyes widened. She had brought her small meal up here at eight-thirty. There they still were, near at hand, but it was now a quarter past eleven. And – Some of the dolls had been moved around" (King, 2008, 421).

Ruth McCausland reacts to the "uncanny" by experiencing an intense feeling of "agency panic", she shouts out to an unseen treat "Who's been moving my dolls around? Who's been in here? Nothing. No one" (King, 2008, 421). King breaks the spell of the uncanny by moving over to the fantastic, when the dolls answer "We moved ourselves dear". The symbolism of this occurrence is strong as Ruth has adopted these dolls as prosthetic children to compensate for her infertility. Through her job as the constable of Haven Ruth feels a maternal concern for the people of Haven. King picks up this point and writes that the dolls speak with the collective voices of the people of Haven. "It was the voices of her dolls rising in that autumn-leafy swirl, whispering slyly, rattling among themselves, rattling to her, but these were the voices of the town, too, and Ruth McCausland knew it" (King, 2008, 423). Unlike Bobbi, Ruth doesn't revel in "uncanny" presence of the ship. She reacts by feeling "agency panic". To Ruth the dolls represent how the entire community has been assimilated into a new cybernetic system. As Constable of Haven She is a representative of an alternate system of control. In the eyes of Haven's new cyborgs she is a symbol of normative regulation and the status quo. This puts her on a collision course with Haven's new community. Ruth's opposition to the new community of Haven is unexpected because she is

also exposed to the radioactive gas that seeps out of the buried ship. She opposes the transformation of her physiology through pure strength of will. “She was being driven steadily toward some alien madness. A dim part of her mind recognized the fact, bemoaned it ... but was unable to stop it” (King, 2008, 428). She experiences the same estranged relationship to her own body that Bobbi experiences as she is transformed into a cyborg. Ruth’s job as a normative regulatory figure results in a symbolic murder of her adopted flock as she removes the stuffing from her dolls and fills their empty chest-cavities with explosives. “Watching as though outside of herself, she saw her hands take her sharpest knife” (King, 2008, 428). She explains “The knowledge seemed to have come shimmering out of the air” (King, 2008, 429). Her plan is to blow up the Haven clock-tower and signal to the outside world that something is wrong in Haven. By sacrificing her flock she seeks to impose normalcy by bringing in policemen and firemen from the outside world. In the eyes of the new community of Haven she is branded a traitor as she seeks to regulate their production and consumption. I said on page 30 that nothing is more detrimental to the healthy functions of consumer society than normative regulation. This conflict illustrates how King creates a dividing line between uncritical consumers as represented by the cyborgs, and characters that either can’t or don’t want to participate in that consumption.

Human Batteries

Here we see the real “bread and butter” of *The Tommyknockers*’ Agency panic narrative as individuals lose their agency when initiated into a cybernetic system with machines. Buchanan-Oliver and Cruz describe the anxiety felt by the cyborg in *The Tommyknockers*, he is “The catastrophic figure of an individual who has lost the capacity for immediate intervention ... and who abandons himself for want of anything better, to the capabilities of captors, sensors and other remote control scanners that turn him into a being controlled by the machine” (Buchanan-Oliver and Cruz, 2011, 287). This excerpt applies to those characters in

The Tommyknockers who surrender themselves to the ship's uncanny influence. Characters like Bobbi Anderson and the other possessed people of Haven. Those characters that cannot take part in the new community of Haven become social pariahs. The division of Haven's community between human beings and cyborgs results in the subjugation of the human community by the cybernetic. The members of the old system are either disposed of or used as galley slaves.

James Gardner experiences first-hand how human beings are subjugated by machines when he investigates the shed where Bobbi Anderson builds her fantastic machines. In the shed he discovers Everett Hillman, Bobbi's sister Anne and her dog Peter suspended in shower cabinets filled with green water. Gardner discovers a computer monitor that Bobbi uses to interact with her machines. He says that,

“They're learning to become. The machine is teaching them. But where are the batteries? I don't see any. There should be ten or twelve big Delcos hooked up to that thing. Just a maintenance charge running through it. There should be – Stunned, he raised his eyes to the shower stalls again. He looked at the coaxial cable coming out of the woman's forehead, the old man's eye. He watched Peter's legs moving in those big dreamy strides. There are the batteries. Organic Delcos and Ever readies, you might say. They're sucking them dry. Sucking them like vampires” (King, 2008, 750-751).

The ship's lecherous nature is confirmed when Gardner later enters the buried craft and discovers the remains of its alien occupants chained to their bunks with cables running from their foreheads. “They were the ship's drive, weren't they, Bobbi? If this is the future, it's time to eat the gun. These are dead galley slaves” (King, 2008, 812). King de-familiarises patterns of consumption, instead of being the consumer the traditional consumer becomes the consumed. He uses this imagery to disconcert the reader and hopefully provoke “agency panic”.

At the novel's conclusion Gardner kills Bobbi after she tries to imprison him in an inter-galactic storage unit called Altair-4. He races to the semi-excavated ship, all the while being chased by the cyborgs of Haven and their fantastic machines. Inside the ship he interfaces with the ship's drive. He uses his last cognitive energy as energy to lift the ship out of the ground and fly off into space. At this point the people of Haven are so dependent on the radioactive gas that seeps from the ship's hull that they quickly die when deprived of its presence. Those who don't die instantaneously are captured or killed when the "Dallas police" retake the town.

The Tommyknockers tells the tale of a community whose identity is shaped by their consumer habits. Stephen King de-familiarises familiar patterns of consumption for the purpose of eliciting "agency panic". We see this in his portrayal of the cyborg who parodies the modern consumer whose body is defined by his artificial prosthesis. In his narratives these artificial attachments become points of entry for other-directing influences that undermine their owner's agency. In *The Tommyknockers* this is best illustrated by the compulsive manner in which the people of Haven build and consume their possessions. Their cyborg statuses also manifest themselves through a high degree of liminality. King uses this liminality to show how "being human" isn't an unalterable fact. His narratives suggest that the human mind can be transported and relocated into virtual spaces outside of the body. He suggests that insecure consumers are the main reason why the people of Haven choose to use this dangerous technology. His characters are in need of assurance that their identities are strong and capable of asserting themselves when confronted with other-directing influences. By doing this King suggests that "agency panic" is an important motivator behind consumption of dangerous technology. As consumers the people of Haven attempt to construct identities that are rock-solid and impervious to outside coercion. This is ironic as irresponsible consumption is shown to be equally other-directing as the shadowy institutions they try to ward off. At this point

King brings in his Gothic influences as consumer objects aren't simply lifeless. They are vessels in which spirits and ghosts can perpetuate their existences. He uses the "uncanny" to explain the fearful ambivalence that his consumers feel when their consumer items exhibit novel hidden functions.

Unlike *Christine*, *The Tommyknockers* generalises the uncanny influence that inanimate object exerts so that it covers an entire community rather than just the individual. These "affected" people become cyborgs. Their group is exclusive as it is only open to those who are physically able to be a part of the new cybernetic system of Haven. King uses this point to divide Haven's community between cyborgs, and human beings. This division becomes an important diagnostic tool in his narratives as it lets us know who his heroes and villains are.

Addiction: De-Familiarising Consumerism

“Addiction” is the recurring theme that underlines both of the novels I have analysed. In Stephen King’s narratives consumerism is synonymous with compulsive behaviour. Addictive consumerism is an important source of “agency panic” as the paranoid individual believes that his consumption has become pathological. It also provides elements such as “the uncanny” and “paranoia” a stage on which to act. I will argue that King manifests his addict through the guise of the cyborg. By problematizing the wisdom of augmenting the human body with artificial prosthesis he is shedding a paranoid light over consumer society and the values on which it rests.

Addiction and Agency Panic

Timothy Melley writes that contemporary American society has experienced a proliferation of addictive states. He says “addiction” encompasses any “habit, drive, or compulsion indicating a lack of self-control so dangerous it merits medical attention”. He points out that the paranoid individual increasingly feels that society is being diseased (Melley, 2000, 162). This proliferation of “addictive states” means that anything can be considered addictive if it goes against what the agent consciously “desires”. He says that by ordering compulsions into easily distinguishable categories people end up fanning the flames of “agency panic”. This makes the individual’s immediate surroundings a rich source of other-directing influences (Melley, 2000, 162). He argues that for such feelings of “agency panic” to arise:

“One must think that individuals ought to be rational, motivated agents in full control of themselves. This assumption in turn entails a strict metaphysics of inside and outside; that is, the self must be a clearly bounded entity, with an interior core of unique beliefs, memories,

and desires easily distinguished from the external control that are presumed to be the source of addiction” (Melley, 2000, 162-163).

Melley’s definition of the rational motivated agent forms the foundation on which Stephen King’s novels create their feeling of “agency panic”. King’s narratives threaten the contemporary American’s perception of his own agency by undermining the rational agent’s feeling of being in control of himself. This explains why King chooses to portray the characters Arnold Cunningham, and Bobbi Anderson as people with highly unstable values. Their roles as heroes are challenged when placed in close proximity to their machines. The result is that they transform into villains. Their sudden moral reversal produces a fearful reaction that is in no small part indebted to the uncanny, as their unique beliefs, memories, and desires are altered drastically by the addictive substance. Melley encourages such an interpretation of the earth-shattering quality of addiction,

“it is the continuing popularity of these assumptions that has encouraged Americans to view drugs, in the words of one observer, as a power deemed capable of tempting, possessing, corrupting and destroying persons without regard to the prior conduct or condition of those persons---a power which has all-or-none effects” (Melley, 2000, 163).

Manifestations of addiction represent a direct threat to the American’s perception of healthy individuality. Melley argues that the paranoia that addiction inspires in the contemporary person leads to a defensive reaction as he seeks to re-establish a feeling of individual agency. He writes that “the apparent existence of multifarious, powerful addictive threats shores up and revivifies the embattled national fantasy of individual autonomy” (Melley, 2000, 163). The individual wishes to return to a state of independence as he feels he has “lost internal self-assurance” (Melley, 2000, 163). In general, the characters in Stephen King’s novels try to distance themselves from other directing forces. Ironically they do this by surrendering to other, “other-directing” influences. These other-directing influences are

uncannily related to inanimate objects. The car in *Christine* represents “freedom” and teenage rebellion when Arnold Cunningham first buys her, but later she is instrumental in his transformation into an other-directed individual.

Promoting Individual Freedom through Consumerism

Gerda Reith’s journal article *Consumption and its Discontents: Addiction, Identity and the problems of Freedom* discusses how various cultural discourses deal with the proliferation of addiction. Reith’s perspective is helpful for my discussion because it reinforces my claim that there exists a clear connection between consumerism and “agency panic” in King’s fiction. Reith converges with this point by highlighting the fearful ambivalence that modern consumers experience when they realise their agency is partially dictated by market relations. Reith also explains that using commodities as tools for the promotion of individual agency is paradoxical when one considers the other-directing forces that come bundled with them. She claims that:

“the values of freedom, autonomy and choice are associated with the spread of consumerism and have been accompanied by the emergence of an oppositional set of discourses concerned with a vitiation of freedom, an undermining of agency, and a lack of choice, and characterised by the expansion of myriad so-called addictive states” (Reith, 2004, 284).

King’s portrayal of consumerism is similar to this, as freedom-inducing consumerism also represents a source of diminished agency.

Associating consumerism with a feeling of diminished agency is strange when considering its broader cultural significance. Reith assumes the same stance as Zygmunt Bauman in linking Consumerism to a process of “identity shaping”. She says:

“Consumption tends to be presented as a creative, symbolic force that plays a crucial role in shaping identity into what Anthony Giddens (Giddens, 1991) calls, a narrative of the self.

With an increasing number of commodities and lifestyles on offer, identity comes to be defined as a fluid construct rather than an essential, core category, and one whose formation is a matter of personal choice” (Reith, 2004, 285).

The consumer’s right to choose what they want to consume reveals how King’s individual is undermined at a number of points. King’s consumer is restricted by his lack of “choice”. In *Christine*, “the car” becomes an all-powerful motivating force that coerces Arnold Cunningham into buying her. Arnold’s choice is minimal as he compliantly lets the car steal his agency. Bobbi Anderson is equally other-directed by the buried ship’s influence. This shows us that choice isn’t a prevalent feature of King’s narratives. It gives way to “determinism” that charts the future course of the novels characters. The choice-less consumer represents a fundamental flaw or “otherness” in King’s representation of the contemporary person. Reith says that “The idea of fluid identity is founded on the premise of freedom – the supreme political, even ethical, ideology of western societies – at least in the politics of neo-liberalism (Reith, 2004, 285).

Identity construction through consumerism is reliant on the freedom to choose what to consume. This is because “it is through the exercise of freedom that individuals not only realise themselves, but also govern themselves” (Reith, 2004, 285). This is an interesting point because it suggests that what we consume is an outward indicator of how we govern our own inner selves. This is an important part of Reith’s argument. She says that human patterns of consumption form a “government through freedom” where the individual’s responsibility rests on his ability to consume “not too much” and “not too little”. Her insight into consumer society is reminiscent of Zygmunt Bauman’s. One of the points they share is that “normative regulation” of the market poses a fundamental danger to the development of the individual, because it limits his capacity to develop his identity. However, Reith points out there exists a paradox in seeking individual identity through un-regulated consumption.

“On the one hand, we are indeed free to choose: to carve out a lifestyle and identity from the marketed options available, but on the other, we are also obliged to subjugate aspects of ourselves, to mould our subjective states and inner desires in accordance with cultural norms and social institutions” (Reith, 2004, 285).

In my discussion of *The Tommyknockers* I drew a similar conclusion. I said that Ruth McCausland is a reactionary character who tries to limit the people’s free expression of identity through consumption. Paradoxically, by exercising their rights as consumers and pushing for de-regulation the people of Haven don’t gain “agency”. Instead they are absorbed into a system of control that is defined by obsessive consumerism. Ruth McCausland dies while attempting to contact the outside world thereby giving the consumer-society of Haven free space to grow.

Stephen King presents this un-impinged consumption through addiction. Reith says that while consuming, the individual performs a complex balancing act between the possibility of unlimited consumption, and the need to restrain that consumption. Not controlling consumption can lead to a feeling of diminished agency as hedonism comes into conflict with that person’s feeling of the “protestant work ethic” (Reith, 2004, 285). The close proximity of positive and detrimental values leads to a fearful ambivalence in the modern individual. Reith writes:

“This kind of configuration is defined in opposition to the core values of neo-liberalism. The notion of addiction turns the sovereign consumer on its head, transforming freedom into determinism and desire into need. Rather than consuming to realise the self, in the state of addiction, the individual is consumed by consumption; the “self” destroyed. Whereas the consumer chooses to act, addicts are forced to do so” (Reith, 2004, 286).

Arnold Cunningham is such a sovereign individual who is consumed by his own consumption. He thinks he is shaping a new and stronger identity by consuming Christine. He

fails because he doesn't achieve the Latin *con sumere*, "to devour or destroy" (Reith, 2004, 286). Instead he is consumed by what he "attempts" to consume. King's literary representation of coercive commodities is similar to Reith's. She says that

"this image of addiction is underpinned by what can best be described as a deification of the commodity (Marx), whereby a substance – usually described as a drug (or, increasingly, and experience, described as drug-like) – is attributed with influential powers – no less than the ability to overwhelm the sovereign individual and transform them into something else entirely – an addict. As the bearer of these addictive properties the commodity appears to take on a demonic life of its own, and swallows up everything – reason, volition and autonomy – it comes into contact with." (Reith, 2004, 286).

In light of Reith's representation of the paranoid consumer it is easy to see how Stephen King's fiction exploits anxieties that consumers might attach to their possessions. What Reith calls "demonic life" is an obvious element in the novel *Christine* as Arnold Cunningham's worship of his car culminates with it revealing monstrous abilities. In *The Tommyknockers* this "demonic life" manifests itself primarily through the "uncanny" influence the buried ship puts on the people of Haven. In both cases King uses representations of inanimate objects as being addictive.

Proliferation of Addictions

Reith claims that alongside the spread of consumerism there can be seen a proliferation of "addicted identities". She argues that the twentieth century has experienced a proliferation of addictions as medical and psychiatric analysis of the body is increasingly reliant on the subjective testimonial of the addict (Reith, 2004, 291). Medical and psychiatric examinations seek to explain addiction by finding traits in the patient's physiology that might explain his tendency towards addictive behaviour. Reith says that this method of discovering "addiction has been criticised because it essentially advocated a deterministic view of

addiction at the expense of free will (Reith, 2004, 291). She further elaborates that alongside medical examinations there is an increased focus on the subjective experience of addiction, “these medical discourses are also characterised by a focus on internal, subjective states identified by individuals themselves. These concentrate on vague entities like feelings and emotions, and the degree to which individuals feel able to exercise agency in the unfolding of their own lives” (Reith, 2004, 291). In this view, the modern consumer has a dual nature, on the one side he is deterministically controlled by the biological functions of his body, and on the other he has the responsibility of exercising conscious “will” over his physiological cravings. Reith says that the consumer has to recognise when his behaviour becomes pathological. Once the consumer recognises that he no longer is in control of his consumption he can identify the cause and solution to his compulsive behaviour. Within this interpretation we see the potential for what Reith calls a “proliferation of addictions”. What is “addictive” is to a large extent based on subjective interpretation. Timothy Melley’s “agency panic” theory becomes potent when “addictions”, with all their earth-shattering qualities, can arise from anywhere. This is evident when the paranoid’s mind becomes a diagnostic tool in identifying what his pathological behaviour might be. Reith says:

“By making subjective assessments of loss of control themselves diagnostic criteria, the field of addiction becomes potentially infinite, expanding to embrace ever-increasing substances and behaviours, across ever wider swathes of the population. And indeed, wherever it is applied we see consumer pathologies expand to embrace individuals who feel they are unable to control their consumption in a variety of areas, from shopping and gambling to eating McDonald’s and surfing the internet” (Reith, 2004, 292).

King and the Proliferation of Addicts

In *Empire of Conspiracy* Timothy Melley writes that the author William S. Burroughs viewed addiction as a process in which healthy non-addict cells are replaced with addicted cells

(Melley, 2000, 173). Melley uses Burroughs to outline a feeling “agency panic” that is based on Burroughs’ claim that the body can be invaded by external influences. Melley calls this paranoia a “cellular panic”. Melley explains that Burroughs viewed the addictive drug, or “junk”, as a parasite that invades the body, and that “Kicking the habit involves the death of junk-dependent cells and their replacement with healthy cells that don’t need junk” (From Burroughs’ *Junky*, Melley, 2000, 174). Burroughs claimed that each cell in the body represents an addict or non-addict. Melley observes that “addiction then occurs not at the level of the human being but at the level of cells” (Melley, 2000, 174). I think this view is congruent with the representation of addiction in King’s novels. The cyborg’s attachment to his artificial prosthesis replaces human cells in much the same way as Burroughs’ “junk” cells replace non-addicted cells. King’s paranoid vision is similar to Burroughs’ who “viewed the world as a place full of motivated, parasitic entities whose capacity to control individuals, should they gain entry, is total and complete. I live, Burroughs admits, with the constant threat of possession, and a constant need to escape from possession, from control” (From Burroughs’ *Queer*, Melley, 2000, 175). The solution to this problem is a violent return to rugged individualism (Melley, 2000, 163). Ruth McCausland in *The Tommyknockers* blows up Haven’s clocktower because she is afraid of her transforming into an alien. She protests this by violently tearing herself away from the system of control that threatens to undermine her individuality.

Similarly to King’s representation of the supernatural, Melley explains that Burroughs’ agreed that “magic” was a perfectly valid way of explaining hidden coercion “He believes in magic, and magic he says, is the assertion of will, the assumption that nothing happens in this universe... unless some entity wills it to happen. He thus defends the so called primitive tendency to blame all apparent accidents on a malicious agent” (Melley, 2000, 176). The magical “Will” in *Christine* is “the car” that uncannily influences Arnold Cunningham.

Its malicious will transforms him into an other-directed individual. By being a cyborg, Arnold Cunningham is physically a part of his car. Arnold's physical attachment to the vehicle indicates that his body is acclimatised to its presence. His addicted cells react positively to the car's physical contact. When he is confronted by stressful situations Arnold Cunningham touches and caresses Christine. This helps to alleviate his stress, "he opened the driver's side door, slipped behind the wheel, and pulled the door shut again. He closed his eyes. Peace flowed over him and things seemed to come back together" (King, 2011, 294-295). The relief Arnold feels at coming into physical contact with the car is reminiscent of the addict getting his "fix". His physical attachment to the car also highlights its anthropomorphic qualities as "He caressed the steering wheel. The green cats' eyes of the dash instruments glowed back at him comfortingly" (King, 2011, 296). Here the uncanny meets physical attachment as Arnold associates his physical well-being with a car that reminds him of benevolent "cat-like" creature. The result is that he is incapacitated with joy. Arnold says in retrospect that "All he could remember for sure was sitting behind the wheel for long periods, stupefied with happiness" (King, 2011, 299). Arnold Cunningham's "agency panic" becomes obvious when the reader sees the sinister consequences of Arnold's addiction. Arnold's body is altered as he is assimilated by the ghost of the car's former owner Roland Lebay. In Burroughs' view this is analogous to the body being invaded by a parasitic organism. This parasitic invasion is facilitated by the cyborg's liminality. Christine's ability to distort time forces Arnold to travel backwards through time. At the same time Roland Lebay is propelled forwards. Arnold's body becomes a hybrid consisting of two people as Lebay moves into his body. The reader experiences first-hand how Arnold transforms into another character as more of his cells are replaced by those of Lebay's. Arnold's physiological transformation is confirmed when he starts using a back-brace that is uncannily similar to one Lebay used. Dennis Guilder describes his experience when seeing the brace.

“He stood up and pulled his shirt out of his pants. Something seemed to dance in his eyes. Something flipping and turning at a black depth. He lifted his shirt. It wasn’t old-fashioned like LeBay’s; it was cleaner too – a neat, seemingly unbroken band of Lycra about twelve inches across. But, Dennis thought, a brace was a brace. It was too close to Lebay for comfort” (King, 2011, 350).

Arnold’s transformation into another character develops into an addiction as his physical dependency towards the car solidifies. This isn’t surprising as the car has become an integral part of his new physiology. In a similar vein to Burroughs’ “junk cells” King is saying that human physiology is susceptible to parasitic influence from outside sources. In general these outside influences manifest themselves through the artificial prosthesis with which his characters augment themselves with.

The addictiveness of the commodity is outlined even more vividly in *The Tommyknockers*. In a similar manner to *Christine* the buried ship conducts a parasitic invasion of human physiology. “Agency panic” becomes a prevalent feature of the novel as people are transformed into automatons by the uncanny influence of a buried ship. James Gardner accuses Bobbi Anderson of being “driven” by the UFO. He says “You haven’t just been getting or receiving ideas, Gardner said. You’ve been driven. Driven. Anderson’s expression did not change. Gardner rubbed at his forehead. Driven, yes. Driven the way a bad, stupid man will drive a horse until it drops dead in the traces...” (King, 2008, 259). Bobbi’s compulsive desire to excavate the ship is reminiscent of “addiction” as it is described in Roman law “where it denotes a form of enslavement” (Reith, 2004, 286).

The addiction the people of Haven experience is related to physiological changes in their bodies. To explain the physiological changes that the people of Haven go through Gardner makes a comparison between them and smokers. He says “They’re the ultimate chainsmokers. It’s in the air they breathe, and God knows what kinds of physiological

changes are going on in their brains and bodies” (King, 2008, 654). Physically the people of Haven begin to exhibit many of the symptoms that could be accredited to radiation sickness, such as a loss of hair and teeth, their bodies start to change into an amorphous mass where the differences between men and women are marginalised. Bobbi muses over the conformity of the new Haven populace. “Bobbi smiled with no humor. Soon there was going to be only one sex in Haven. No mothers; no fathers” (King, 2008, 668). The new people of Haven are transformed into a new species which values conformism over individuality. The people of Haven call their transformation “the becoming”. One of the side-effects of their “becoming” is that they become physically dependent on the ship’s presence for their survival. Gardner takes this into consideration when he thinks about escaping from Haven, “he didn’t think they would chase him very far if he split. They might begin by lighting out after him with the fervour of a posse in a Republic western, but he somehow thought they would lose interest very quickly... as soon as the withdrawal symptoms set in” (King, 2008, 654). The physical reliance that the people of Haven experience makes the addiction motif doubly sinister as their continued survival is directly associated with the other-directing influence of the ship. Burroughs’ method for kicking the addiction becomes impossible, as every part of the Havenite’s body is filled with junk addicted cells. Killing these addicted cells would amount to suicide.

Arnold Cunningham and the addicts of Haven are emblematic of how Stephen King portrays his cyborgs. He creates a feeling of “agency panic” by combining consumerism and addiction. King’s cyborgs are modern consumers who use their consumption as a way of constructing their new identities. They buy artificial prostheses to compensate for their physical and social deficiencies. Christine and the telepathic equipment in *The Tommyknockers* are most representative of the liminal attachment that King’s characters establish with inanimate objects. King problematizes the cybernetic connection that his

characters establish with their inanimate objects by giving these commodities addictive properties. Thus King's horror narratives become hideous parodies of the consumer society that inspired them. By polluting consumerism with "addiction" King portrays a society filled with mindless producers and imperfect consumers. The producers are mindless because they aren't consciously aware of their motivation for building the things they do. They simply comply with the buried ship's instructions. When Gardner confronts Bobbi Anderson about the doubtful brilliance of the Havenite's achievements she says "There are wavelengths. But beyond that, we don't understand it very well. Which is true of us about most things, Gard. We are builders, not understanders" (King, 2008, 845). King's consumers are equally flawed as they are incapable of consuming and subsequently destroying their possessions. Instead King seems to enfranchise commodities by making them indestructible or easily repairable. Commodities such as radios, smoke-alarms and typewriters are given new and improved functions through recirculation. The enfranchisement of inanimate objects runs parallel with the development of the addicted consumer cyborg.

King's Deviant Identities.

In *Christine* and *The Tommyknockers* King is preoccupied with bringing deviancy to the fore. He challenges his cyborgs by placing them under the critical gaze of characters that represent normalcy and the status quo. His treatment of the addicted consumer is much like Michel Foucault's description of the 19th century addict who is described as having a "deviant identity". The addict's "deviant identity" marked him as an outcast in society. Reith says:

"The relinquishing of control over one's consumption formed the basis of a specific *type* of person – a singular nature. The figure of the addict was characterized as a deviant identity; one that was lacking in willpower, and one whose consumption was characterised by frenzied craving, repetition and loss of control" (Reith, 2004, 290).

It is this “deviant identity” that Stephen King sets out to expose in his horror fiction. His “deviant identities” are juxtaposed with other characters who act as normative regulatory figures such as Ruth McCausland, Everet Hillman, James Gardner and Dennis Guildler. They are the benchmark for healthy consumerism.

Underlying King’s portrayal of addicted consumers is a distrust of indiscriminate consumption. The fantastic machines that King writes about in his novels promise their owners new and un-assailable identities. By tempting the consumer’s insecure agency with fantasies of unlimited power he highlights the risks that consumers are willing to endure for the promise of being relieved from paranoia. There is a pervading notion in King’s characters that consumerism can solve most problems, even problems of “agency”.

King Tests the Consumer’s Ethical Values

Bobbi Anderson is representative of the consumer who has indiscriminately utilised dangerous commodities to alleviate her own paranoia. Her transformation into an addicted cyborg runs in tandem with her moral alteration from hero into a villain. Her ruthless pursuit of “the becoming” proves her declining moral values. An obstacle to interpreting good vs. evil values in King’s stories is that by viewing “addiction” as an illness, we alleviate some of the addict’s moral responsibility. Gerda Reith writes that medically “addiction” denotes a physiological dependence, while “legally, it is discussed in terms of mental illness which relieves afflicted individuals of responsibility for their actions” (Reith quoting (Rose 1986), 2004, 286). How does the Manichean nature of King’s fiction deal with this problem? King’s approach to this problem defies the deterministic view that addiction is an irreversible fact. His portrayal of the cyborg is one where addiction represents a powerful influence, but it isn’t insurmountable. King emphasises the protagonist’s duty to struggle against his own

physiology. The addicted cyborg's struggle against addiction becomes one of the most important sources of "agency panic" in his novels.

The characters of *Christine* and *The Tommyknockers* can be divided into three categories based on their success in opposing other-directing influences. The first group are those that are immune from other-directing influences. Everet Hillman and James Gardner both have metal implants attached to their craniums after various accidents and surgeries that make it impossible for them to receive the telepathic signals that radiate from the buried ship. Secondly there are those characters that are exposed to the addictive allure of consumer objects but resist their influence, these are best represented by Ruth McCausland from *The Tommyknockers* and Dennis Guilder from *Christine*. Thirdly there are those characters that are seduced by the power that the inanimate commodity promises and abandon all previous allegiances to pursue their new cybernetic lives with their machines. These addicted characters are best represented by Arnold Cunningham and Bobbi Anderson. The first category is relieved of the physiological dependency that categories two and three have to struggle with. Instead they have the challenge of being a part of a cybernetic society in which they cannot participate. The second group consists of heroic characters, because they haven't forgotten the balancing act upon which healthy consumption is based. The third category represents "deviant identities" that have failed to limit their own consumption and have therefore been enslaved by what they sought to empower themselves with. This shows us that physiological dependency isn't an excuse for immoral activity in King's fiction. Instead it is the addicted individual's responsibility to resist his addiction whenever necessary. In this regard addiction becomes yet another other-directing influence that needs to be avoided. This way of thinking is indebted to "agency panic".

King's Solution

By viewing addiction as something that can emerge from anywhere, at any time and affect anyone, we see that the potential for “Agency panic” is boundless in King’s fiction. Does King attempt to provide a solution to the paranoid nightmares he produces? His narratives don’t advocate a return to the status quo. Arnold Cunningham is the perfect example of an other-directed individual at the beginning of *Christine*. His mother who is aptly named Regina, insists on micromanaging every aspect of her son’s life charting her plans and setting her son on a course towards straight conformity. On a social level Arnold is bullied and controlled by his peers who punish him for being awkward and different. Christine provides Arnold with freedom from his domineering mother and a fearful respect from his peers. As a consumer he has received a strong unassailable new identity. A return to the status quo isn’t necessarily such an attractive prospect for Bobbi Anderson either. Bobbi isn’t aware of her paranoia at the beginning of *The Tommyknockers*, but she quickly develops a paranoid mentality when King deliberately portrays the US Government as a sinister institution that cares little for the rights of individual citizens preferring to violate their freedoms through a secretive organization called “the shop”. Bobbi and Gardner colloquially call them the “Dallas police”. By presenting “the authorities” as equally unfair and dangerous as the supernatural commodities the populous of Haven augment themselves with, King highlights an apparent hypocrisy in holding one system of control as better than the other.

King's Violent Return to Self-Sufficiency

Rampant consumerism and social institutions are poor sources of agency in King’s narratives. This is ironic as western tradition holds freedom of consumption as one of the most defining traits of the liberal individual. King provides a critical perspective of these cornerstones of contemporary western existence by de-familiarising consumerism and social institutions. His

narratives focus on western society's exercise of freedom as having the exact opposite effect of providing its participants with an excess of agency. King proposes a third route to escape "agency panic". The way in which his protagonists resist the coercive influence of other-directing influences is through a violent attempt to regain agency. Like the rest of Haven, Ruth McCausland develops a physical need to be in the buried ship's presence. Unlike the other addicted Havenites she abhors her lack of inner-direction. She resists the coercive influence of the inanimate ship even though her new alien physiology demands her compliance. Ruth's refusal to surrender to addiction places her firmly in King's morally "good" category. She enforces her moral "goodness" by building a make-shift bomb that demolishes Haven's clock tower and herself along with it. King's deterministic portrayal of addiction means that she is irreversibly damaged. She has become unalterable because her human cells have been removed and replaced with what Burroughs called "junk" addicted cells, and therefore doesn't have anything to lose by killing herself in a violent demonstration of her remaining agency.

Dennis Guilder attempts to save Arnold Cunningham's identity by destroying Christine. Dennis succeeds in crushing Christine but, as with Ruth, Arnold's body is too dependent on the car's physical presence and he uncannily dies in a separate car accident about the time Dennis destroys Christine. James Gardner whom I established is immune from the influence of the buried ship secures his inner-direction and tries to impose it on the other Havenites by flying away in the buried ship at the end of the novel. His escape into the partially excavated ship is characterised by violence as he evades the people of Haven and their fantastic machines. When inside the ship he uses the last of his cognitive energy to escape up into the sky and into outer space.

Stephen King's violent solution to the paranoid feeling of "agency panic" is not unique. Timothy Melley says that the Unabomber also saw a correlation between technology

and addiction. He invented an analogy where humanity is compared to an alcoholic who is forced to sit in front of a barrel of wine. The wine represents technology and his theory was that the alcoholic wouldn't be able to moderate his consumption of the wine. Instead he would most likely consume the entire barrel (Melley, 2000, 164). Melley writes that

“Such warnings help to explain the all-or nothing logic that leads the author to recommend a regimen of total abstinence from advanced technology--- a remedy that, in his view, would require a strict diet of masculinist self-reliance, a return to the individualist frontier, and (of course) regeneration through violence” (Melley, 2000, 164).

The morally good characters in King's fiction enforce their own individuality by seeking to violently exercise themselves from what they believe to be manipulating them. For King's addicted consumer this means a struggle against their own physiology as their bodies have been tainted by entities from outside of themselves. These entities should be resisted even if it means addict's demise. King's paranoid protagonists believe that it is better to die and be free, rather than live in a body that is tainted by other-directing influences.

Conclusion: “Agency Panic” for the Everyman

In King’s non-fiction book *Danse Macabre* he talks about how the horror genre is relevant across a number of mediums. He says that it frightens by pressing phobic pressure points (King, 2012, 18). He divides these into personal phobias and national phobias. He says that personal fears such as vertigo or arachnophobia count as personal fears because they do not necessarily apply to everyone. King writes that:

“The horror genre has often been able to find national phobic pressure points, those books and films which have been the most successful almost always seem to play upon and express fears which exist across a wide spectrum. Such fears, which are often political, economic, and psychological rather than supernatural, give the best work of horror a pleasing allegorical feel (King, 2012, 19).

Heidi Strengell agrees with King’s assessment by saying “Both cultural and personal fears are well documented in King’s fiction. In fact, one of the reasons for his success as a writer is that as regards fear, he is a kind of Everyman. King believes that humankind has a so-called pool of fears that “we all can come and see our faces or wet our hands in” (*Underwood and Miller, 1988, 109*), (Strengell, 2006, 24). In both the novels that I have studied King straddles a fine line between what he calls personal and national fears. Out of the two novels I have looked at *Christine* is the one that includes the most personal fear. We see this in gruesome sequences that often include dead corpses, and other supernatural events. On a primitive level these elements can be frightening, but not to everyone. On a deeper level I found that the novel can be read as a parody of consumer society that criticises how consumers define their identities. *The Tommyknockers* has more allegorical salience because it relies less on dead corpses to inspire anxiety. *The Tommyknockers* explores themes such as irresponsible consumerism, individuals vs. the collective and addiction.

The premise for my thesis has been that “agency panic” is in itself a national phobic pressure point. By associating inanimate objects and consumerism with “agency panic” Stephen King creates a very universal anxiety. His narratives feature machines that have the ability to possess their owners and control their actions. Consider Christine who gains total control over her owner Arnold Cunningham, or Bobbi Anderson whose mind is hijacked by the influence of a buried UFO. In both these stories human protagonists are assaulted by other-directing forces that come from apparently inanimate sources. Timothy Melley describes a feeling of diminished agency that is applicable to Bobbi and Arnold. They “get a feeling of diminished human agency, a feeling that individuals cannot effect meaningful social action and, in extreme cases, may not be able to control their own behaviour” (Melley, 2000, 11). This type of “agency panic” gains its potency from its exploitation of what people do every day. Bauman tells us that consumption is important for the healthy functioning of consumer society (Bauman, 2004, 27). King de-familiarises this consumption by making it a source of “agency panic”. This way he depresses a phobic pressure point which lies close to the heart of how modern individuals shape their identities.

Freud’s definition of “the uncanny” features prominently in King’s novels. It is through the uncanny that his characters communicate with their inanimate objects. King says that “The gross-out level is one thing, but it is on that second level of horror that we often experience that low sense of anxiety which we call “the creeps” (King, 2012, 20). It is the uncanny influence of the buried object in the earth that ignites Bobbi Anderson’s obsession with the buried ship. It captures her imagination and effaces her perception of reality with her suppressed infantile magical beliefs. In King’s novels “the uncanny” becomes a medium through which magic can happen. His job as a horror writer often means that he moves into what Freud calls the fantastic. The fantastic means that the spell of the uncanny has been broken. He says:

“The souls in Dante’s *Inferno*, or *Julius Caesar*, may be gloomy and terrible enough, but are no more really uncanny than Homer’s jovial world of gods. We adapt our judgment to the imaginary reality imposed on us by the writer, and regard souls, spirits and ghosts as though their existence had the same validity as our own has in material reality. In this case too we are to avoid all traces of the uncanny” (Norton, 2010, 839-840).

King’s novels straddle a fine line between the uncanny and the fantastic. I would still claim that the uncanny is a powerful feature of the novels I have studied. Freud says that:

“The situation is altered as soon as the writer pretends to move in the world of common reality. In this case he accepts as well all the conditions operating to produce uncanny feelings in real life; and everything that would have an uncanny effect in reality has it in his story” (Norton, 2010, 840).

When we move out of the realm of the fairy-tale and into “reality” uncanny occurrences gain their “weirdness” because they aren’t expected.

Stephen King’s narratives are effective at eliciting “the uncanny” because they are ensconced in the real world. He is a regionalist writer who bases most of his fiction within his home state of Maine. Heidi Strengell claims that his literary style adheres to naturalism. She says that “In King the following aspects of naturalism seem conspicuous: his view of human beings as a product of their environment, his view of humans at the mercy of indifferent forces, and his profound mistrust of scientific progress” (Strengell, 2006, 12). These three points show us how King’s literature aspires to comment about real life. Strengell is conscious of the Gothic and Fairy-tale elements also present in King’s fiction and says:

“As Jeanne Campbell Reesman rightly claims, through supernatural realism King explores the attractions and failures of Naturalism (109). Thus, he examines naturalistic themes by means of horror. In conclusion, King is a distinctly American writer in that he deploys motifs and themes deriving from the nation’s common source of memory and experience and has

continued to use the same motifs and themes throughout his career (*Reese*, 1998, 109)”
(Strengell, 2006, 13).

By reading King in light of this we see how King is conscious of the times in which he lives. He says in *Danse Macabre* “I am a horror novelist and also a child of my times, and I believe that horror does not horrify unless the reader or viewer has been personally touched” (King, 2012, 26). This lends weight to my claim that King’s fiction is saturated with “agency panic”. This “agency panic” is derived from the everyman’s experience of living in contemporary western society. As an author Stephen King is a funnel through which cultural myths flow. He filters out anxieties and fears that can be specifically attached to the real world. He then de-familiarises the real world by attaching these fears to familiar themes and objects.

King’s novels attain “agency panic” by de-familiarising the contemporary western lifestyle. I have focused on his use of inanimate objects to elicit this paranoia. King uses the “commodity” as a foundation on which he explores social relations. I claimed in the introduction that consumers in King’s fiction consume based on their desire for individual agency. Zygmunt Bauman reinforces this argument by saying that consumerism is a life-long quest to construct identity (Bauman, 2004, 27). King’s paranoid individuals are afraid of other-directing influences and therefore require strong new identities that are impervious to outside coercion. At this point King introduces his miracle machines which provide unlimited power while ironically restricting the individual’s agency. Karl Marx wrote in *Capital* that the commodity conceals the social relations that create it, “Although commodities only embody the objectified labour of workers, value is actually ascribed to them as things, and it is this that transforms every product of labour into a social hieroglyphic” (*Marx, 1979*) (Reith, 2004, 287). In *The Tommyknockers* commodities are social hieroglyphics that tell us about the socio-economic culture that made them. “Fetishism” is what Karl Marx called the process in which social relations congeal within the commodity. Reith says that “The transformative

power is taken a step further when commodities actually appear to assume an autonomous power, and come to dominate the workers themselves (Reith, 2004, 287). King takes this symbolic image of oppression and brings it into his literary universe. The result is that the commodity becomes an oppressive influence on those who produced it. King's commodity also becomes an image of the social relations that created it. Christine is a luxury machine selfishly intended to satisfy the needs of individuals such as Arnold Cunningham and Roland Lebay. In contrast the buried ship in *The Tommyknockers* satisfies the needs of the collective. This explains the proliferation of cyborgs in *The Tommyknockers*, while in *Christine* it is a relatively personal affair.

The commodity in King's fiction becomes a source of "agency panic" because it embodies the complex social constellations that created it. The buried ship in *The Tommyknockers* inspires the people of Haven to produce weapons and teleportation technology. These machines are physical reminders of the other-directing forces that inspired them. As the people of Haven associate inanimate objects with their other-direction this way of thinking is reliant on a high degree of paranoia. Artificial prostheses are frightening because they show how the corrupting influences of social institutions attach themselves onto the individual through the commodities they have augmented themselves with. In regards to King's definition of phobic points he is turning personal commodities into a source of "national phobia".

King's style of Addictive consumerism becomes a national phobia because it is applicable to all people who engage in market relations. He says in his non-fiction *On Writing* that he wrote *The Tommyknockers* while struggling with his own drug addiction. He explains that:

“*The Tommyknockers* is a forties- style science fiction tale in which the writer-heroine discovers an alien space-craft buried in the ground. What you got was energy and a kind of superficial intelligence. What you gave up in exchange was your soul. It was the best metaphor for drugs and alcohol my tired, overstressed mind could come up with (King, 2001, 107).

In King’s novel using dangerous technology and gaining superficial intelligence becomes a metaphor for substance abuse. We see how inanimate objects and commodities become social hieroglyphs on which he stamps themes and concerns. The consumer desires this dangerous knowledge to such an extent that he is willing to give up his soul. In relation to my discussion “the soul” can be interpreted as the individual’s own feeling of agency. Upon accepting the help of powerful external entities the individual runs the risk of surrendering his agency.

Addiction is a relevant national phobia, because as Reith says:

“There are a potentially infinite number of situations and substances that can catch the consumer unawares and undermine agency – it could be said that addiction becomes a potential danger, a risk in itself. The intense focus on the analysis and monitoring of their own subjective states makes individuals hyper sensitive, even alert to signs of loss of control” (Reith, 2004, 296).

In *The Tommyknockers* and *Christine* irresponsible consumption of supernatural commodities constitutes a loss of control. King’s narratives show the reader how consumption is an inherently selfish act, as the consumer desperately tries to forge an identity that will separate him or her from other-directing influences. King criticises this mentality by punishing the irresponsible consumer for surrendering his agency to inanimate objects. In both *The Tommyknockers* and *Christine* the cyborg dies when he loses his artificial prosthesis.

Addiction also becomes a way in which King deals with personal and national phobias. The addict in *Christine* is a lonely person who struggles to maintain his addiction

when his friends and family oppose his un-natural attachment to the machine. In this novel “agency panic” strikes on a personal level. In *The Tommyknockers* addiction is widened to cover a large part of the population of Haven. King thus turns addiction and the “agency panic” it inspires into a national fear. Addiction separates Haven from the rest of the country as the people of Haven transform into cybernetic automatons. They accept this transformation as a necessary evil they must endure in order to liberate themselves from the other-directing influence of the US-Government. The novel portrays the Government as an institution that is equally other-directing and coercive as the buried ship. The US-Government’s treatment of addicts is similar to Michel Foucault’s concept of exercising “Bio-power”. Reith writes that during the nineteenth century addicts were seen as deviant people who lacked the willpower to control their own consumption. Social institutions did what the individual couldn’t and sought to “instil a disciplinary gaze aimed at installing values of self-control and reason, and so modify the consumption practices of specific disorderly groups, by building up atrophied wills through discipline and hard work” (Reith, 2004, 290). The authoritarian gaze of the US-government in *The Tommyknockers* and their draconian methods of enforcement show how social institutions also deserve a paranoid response. The drones and security devices that the people of Haven build to isolate themselves become social hieroglyphs that reflect their new collective paranoia of being persecuted for their common deviant identity. Thus we see how King’s novels are consciously constructed to breed paranoia at every level of society.

The message conveyed in King’s stories is that technology and consumerism are dangerous sources of agency. King writes that his “deep interests (I refuse to call them obsessions) include how difficult it is – perhaps impossible! – to close Pandora’s technobox once it’s open (*The Stand, The Tommyknockers, Firestarter*) (King, 2001, 246). In my analysis biological dependency is the reason for why it is impossible to close the “technobox” once it has been opened. Once the soul has been sold it cannot be bought back. Through my

analysis I found that gaining true inner-directedness is the only way of escaping “agency panic”. In King’s narratives this happens through violent confrontations where the inner-directed hero fights other-directing influences. The true inner-directed hero survives, but the addict is doomed. Owing to deterministic tendencies in King’s fiction the addict has sentenced himself when he engages in a cybernetic connection with the machine. His fate is sealed. At this point the only cure for their “agency panic” is to confront the other-directing influences that beset him. They die either way because they are physically reliant on their artificial prosthesis. Removing it kills them, but in doing so it removes their paranoid feeling of “other-direction”. This is used for great drama and pathos in King’s novels.

King establishes himself as an author for the everyman by incorporating “agency panic” into every facet of contemporary existence. He generalises his brand of horror so that most people can relate to the story he is telling. All the thematic concerns I have dealt with in this thesis can be traced back to his sensitivity toward modern living. My focus has been on how King uses consumerism and addiction to de-familiarise and elicit “agency panic” in modern people. The people who read King’s novels also consume cars, televisions, typewriters, word-processors and other commodities. He engages the reader where he “lives”. He writes that “book-buyers want a good story to take on the airplane, something that will fascinate them, then pull them in and keep them turning pages. This happens I think when the reader recognizes the people in a book, their behaviours, their surroundings, and their talk” (King, 2001, 184). He generalises his style of horror to fit the expectations of the reader in a way that shows he has a finger on the pulse of contemporary living. King adopts a nonchalant attitude towards his thematic concerns, saying:

“These are just interests which have grown out of my life and thought, out of my experiences as a boy and a man, out of my roles as a husband, a father, a writer, and a lover. They are questions that occupy my mind when I turn out the lights for the night and I’m alone with myself, looking into the darkness with one hand tucked beneath the pillow” (King, 2001, 247).

When questioned why he expresses himself through horror he says “we make up horrors to help us cope with the real ones” (King, 2001, 247). “Agency panic” becomes one of these real horrors. King uses the paranoid feeling “agency panic” creates to explore moral weaknesses and anxieties held by individuals and communities. He says that “The dream of horror is in itself an out-letting and a lancing... and it may well be that the mass-media dream of horror can sometimes become a nationwide analysts couch” (King, 2012, 27).

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