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Junk-Yard Transhumanism: Scavenging, Sympoiesis, and the Posthuman Body in Silvia Park's *Luminous*

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Abstract

In an era of technological transformation and ecological uncertainty, Silvia Park's *Luminous* (2025) reimagines the relationship between humanity, technology, and the environment. This article examines the novel as a transformative site for reconciling the ideological tensions between transhumanism and materialist ecofeminism. While traditional transhumanism emphasizes the technological transcendence of biological "frailty," Park's narrative situates bionic modification within the "more-than-human" ruins of a future Korea, presenting a framework of "junk-yard transhumanism."

By analyzing the bionic detective Jun and the scavenged protagonist Ruijie, this research utilizes Rosi Braidotti's critical posthumanism and Stacy Alaimo's trans-corporeality to argue that the novel deconstructs the Cartesian dualism inherent in elite technocratic movements. The analysis employs ecofeminist care ethics to illustrate how survival depends on sympoiesis ("making-with") rather than technological mastery. The select novel critiques corporate commodification, advocating for an entangled ontology where organic and synthetic bodies are unified through shared vulnerability. By shifting the focus from "upgrading" to "scavenging," Park provides a vital framework for imagining a posthuman future rooted in social and environmental justice.

Keywords: Critical Posthumanism**,** Transhumanism, Materialist Ecofeminism**,** Trans-corporeality**,** Anthropocene**,** Sympoiesis, Bionic Subjectivity.

The ideological tension within Silvia Park's *Luminous* (2025) serves as a profound critique of the "technological sublime," shifting the focus from sterile advancement to the visceral reality of "grit and rust." Traditional transhumanism has historically been characterized by a desire to transcend the biological body, seeking a frictionless existence through digitalization or mechanical perfection. As Rosi Braidotti notes, this brand of posthumanism often remains tethered to an "Enlightenment-based" vision of the autonomous, rational subject who masters their environment through superior tools (Braidotti 13). Park, however, grounds her narrative in a future Korea defined by ecological exhaustion and systemic decay, where technology is not a vehicle for escape but a medium for survival.

This "junk-yard transhumanism" aligns more closely with Stacy Alaimo's framework of "trans-corporeality," which posits that the human body is never separate from the toxic or material flows of its environment (Alaimo 2). In *Luminous*, the bionic detective Jun and the scavenger Ruijie do not possess "upgraded" bodies in the corporate sense; rather, their synthetic components are porous and prone to failure, mirroring the "more-than-human" ruins they inhabit. By centering the "glitch" and the need for constant maintenance, Park rejects the Cartesian dualism that separates mind from matter and human from nature.

The novel's ethical core is found in "sympoiesis". Unlike the transhumanist ideal of *autopoiesis*—self-creation and self-sufficiency—Park's characters survive through interdependence. As Donna Haraway argues, sympoiesis is a necessary shift in the Anthropocene, requiring us to acknowledge that "nothing makes itself; nothing is really autopoietic" (Haraway 58). In *Luminous*, bionic repair is an act of care and communal labor rather than individual mastery. This "scavenging" ontology functions as a resistance to corporate commodification, which treats both technology and biological life as disposable once their peak utility fades.

The select novel argues that a posthuman future cannot be found in the pursuit of immortality or pristine technological interfaces. Instead, it suggests that true "advancement" lies in the capacity to inhabit the ruins of the present through empathy, care, and shared vulnerability. By shifting the emphasis from technological "upgrade" to ecological and relational "repair," Silvia Park offers an ecofeminist framework in which organic and synthetic beings are united through their entanglement with a damaged Earth.

This ethical and philosophical reorientation directly challenges the intellectual foundations of modern Western thought. The architectural basis of Western philosophy has long been structured through hierarchical binaries that separate mind from body, human from nature, and culture from matter. Rooted in René Descartes' Cartesian declaration, "*Cogito, ergo sum*," this dualistic worldview institutionalized a profound division between the rational subject and the material world. Within such a framework, the human is defined primarily through conscious reason, while the body and environment are reduced to passive objects available for technological mastery and exploitation. As Rosi Braidotti argues, this logic continues to shape contemporary transhumanist discourse, which treats the biological body as a "frail" vessel to be transcended or discarded in favor of digital or mechanical immortality (13). By privileging the "ghost in the machine" over embodied material existence, transhumanism ultimately reproduces the Enlightenment ideal of the autonomous, self-contained subject that Park's novel seeks to dismantle.

Contemporary materialist and ecofeminist theorists dismantle this model by emphasizing the radical interdependence of all matter. Stacy Alaimo's concept of "trans-corporeality" serves as a primary intervention, suggesting that human embodiment is not a sealed unit but is instead constantly traversed by environmental forces, industrial toxins, and pervasive technologies. Alaimo posits that our boundaries are "leaky," meaning that the "outside" world—pollution, microbes, and climate—is always already "inside" the body (2). This perspective renders the

Cartesian dream of a detached, sovereign subject impossible; if the environment flows through us, we cannot claim mastery over it without also affecting ourselves.

Braidotti's critical posthumanism further deconstructs the "Eurocentric Humanism" that centers a universal, able-bodied, masculine subject as the apex of existence. She advocates for a posthuman ethics grounded in multiplicity, where the subject is defined not by independence but by "relational existence" (Braidotti 49). This shift is echoed in Donna Haraway's concept of "sympoiesis." Haraway rejects the capitalist and humanist fantasy of *autopoiesis*—the idea of the "self-made" individual or system. Instead, she insists that "nothing makes itself; nothing is really autopoietic" (Haraway 58). Sympoiesis redefines survival as a collaborative, collective process involving interspecies entanglements and technological assemblages.

In the context of *Luminous*, these frameworks provide a lens through which bionic existence emerges not as an escape from material reality but as a deeper immersion within it. The novel's protagonists do not inhabit the frictionless, sterile bodies imagined by elite technocracy; instead, their synthetic limbs and patched-together systems bear the "grit and rust" of a damaged ecosystem. By embracing a form of "junk-yard transhumanism," Silvia Park aligns with the materialist perspectives of Stacy Alaimo and Donna Haraway, both of whom emphasize ecological entanglement and material accountability. Rather than pursuing a fantasy of purity that separates the "human" from "waste," the novel advocates an interconnected ontology in which the bionic body becomes a site of sympoiesis—a literal process of "making-with" discarded technologies and environmental ruin. Consequently, posthuman survival is imagined not through transcendence, but through an acknowledgment of humanity's inescapable interconnectedness with a collapsing material world.

This same logic of entanglement extends beyond the body and shapes the novel's representation of space itself. In the selected novel, the setting of a future South Korea is elevated from a mere backdrop into a vibrant and destabilizing "active agent." This speculative landscape is defined by what may be termed "more-than-human ruins," where biological decay and technological detritus merge into a single entropic reality. These ruins are not passive remnants of a lost civilization; instead, they function as "living assemblages" that actively determine the conditions of survival for those existing at the margins. By foregrounding entropy and systemic breakdown, Park dismantles the science-fictional fantasy of linear technological progress—the assumption that innovation naturally leads toward perfection, cleanliness, and mastery. Instead, the world of the novel is characterized by a landscape that is "both accessible and mysterious" (Park 21), where futurity emerges through navigating, inhabiting, and repairing the wreckage of the past rather than escaping it.

It leads to the novel's central ontological framework: "junk-yard transhumanism." In stark contrast to elite, technocratic visions of transhumanism—which prioritize seamless enhancements, frictionless interfaces, and corporate-funded immortality—Park situates posthumanity within the realm of the scavenged. Here, the bionic body is not a site of high-tech "upgrading" but a site of "patchwork" endurance. A prime example is Ruijie's physical form, which relies on "battery-powered titanium braces" that mark her as "beloved" through the labor of repair rather than the prestige of purchase (Park 10). Scavenging becomes a profoundly

political act because it functions as a material resistance to the logic of planned obsolescence. While corporate technoculture dictates that value is derived from novelty, Park's protagonists find value in the obsolete, noting that in the dominant culture, "a robot would be thrown away for needing anything at all" (Park 14). Survival, therefore, emerges through maintenance and care rather than the endless cycle of innovation.

This "politics of scrap" serves as a poignant metaphor for the lived experiences of marginalized bodies under the weight of late capitalism. Within neoliberal economies, there is a chilling parallel between the treatment of technology and the treatment of people: just as discarded hardware is deemed "e-waste," vulnerable populations—migrants, laborers, and the disabled—are often treated as expendable when they no longer serve the machinery of production. Park's use of repurposed technologies functions as a literal and symbolic representation of resilience under conditions of systemic abandonment. By reclaiming the "unusable," the characters perform a radical revaluation of life and matter.

Luminous argues that a viable future does not require a clean slate or a technological "rapture." Instead, it suggests that meaning is found in the "capacity to inhabit ruin collaboratively." This collaborative habitation—rooted in shared vulnerability and the mutual repair of both bodies and machines—offers a vital critique of the autonomous "self-made man" of traditional transhumanism. Park replaces the sovereign individual with an entangled subject who is inseparable from the landscape's rust and ruin, suggesting that in an age of ecological collapse, our greatest strength lies not in our ability to transcend the earth, but in our willingness to mend what we have broken.

In the select novel, Jun initially appears to inhabit the role of the hardboiled detective, a figure typically characterized by rational control and observational mastery. Park destabilizes this archetype by presenting Jun as a fractured body whose augmentations expose his dependence. His investigative role is shaped by instability and corporeal fragility; he remains materially entangled within the ruined world. This subversion is most visible through the "glitch." Jun's cybernetic systems repeatedly malfunction, interrupting his sensory perception (Park). While traditional narratives view enhancement as optimization, Park foregrounds technological breakdown as a defining condition of embodiment. The glitch is a liminal space where humanity and machinic existence intersect. As N. Katherine Hayles argues, posthuman subjectivity emerges through the recognition that consciousness is always embedded within material systems (157). Jun's glitches demonstrate that enhancement cannot escape corporeality; it intensifies awareness of bodily limitation.

Furthermore, Jun's augmentations do not grant him the godlike autonomy imagined by transhumanists. He becomes increasingly dependent upon networks of energy and maintenance. His body requires constant calibration, making survival inseparable from infrastructure. Jun embodies Braidotti's relational subjectivity, where the modified body cannot function independently of the systems surrounding it (Braidotti 101). The "upgrade" is reframed: it does not liberate Jun but binds him more deeply to the decaying world.

Park presents Ruijie as an embodiment of the most compelling form of posthuman survival. Her body is assembled from fragments and salvaged components gathered from the ruins. She exists as a living archive of found parts, carrying the histories of technological waste. Park rejects the fantasy of technological purity; Ruijie's synthetic and organic elements retain visible traces of patchwork survival. Scavenging is thus an ontological condition that defines her existence. Ruijie's embodiment destabilizes the distinction between the human and the machine. She embodies Haraway's *sympoiesis*, as her survival depends on networks of interdependence involving other scavengers and synthetic beings (Haraway 33). Relationships in the novel are structured as systems of mutual aid rather than capitalist transactions. Repair functions as both a material and ethical practice; bodies and communities survive only through ongoing acts of care.

This ethic aligns with feminist care ethics, which position dependency as a fundamental condition of life. Ruijie inhabits vulnerability as a shared ecological reality. While her body requires constant maintenance, this need produces forms of solidarity unavailable within corporate systems. Ruijie's synthetic parts absorb the effects of ecological ruin, illustrating Alaimo's trans-corporeality (Alaimo 115). Her body is not an enclosed fortress but a porous entity ecologically embedded in the landscape.

In sharp contrast to this relational ontology, corporate power in *Luminous* functions as the primary ideological antagonist, embodying the logic of "elite transhumanism." This technocratic worldview equates human value with optimization, efficiency, and bodily perfection. Whereas Ruijie's embodied vulnerability reveals interdependence as the basis of ethical coexistence, the corporate system treats dependency as weakness and commodifies bodies according to productivity. Consequently, obsolete or "inefficient" lives are discarded, while corporate futurity depends upon a fantasy of purity—a world imagined as cleansed of decay, fragility, and ecological entanglement.

Park critiques this logic by showing how corporate transhumanism reproduces hierarchies of class and labor. Against this, the novel proposes an ethics of shared vulnerability. The resolution does not emerge through technological mastery but through the collective acceptance of fragility. Characters endure because they learn to inhabit precariousness together. In the ruined world of *Luminous*, vulnerability becomes a condition of connection rather than failure. The novel reconciles the organic and the synthetic through their shared status as marginalized forms of existence. Humans, machines, and polluted environments are united by their exclusion from corporate value. From these spaces of abandonment, new forms of solidarity emerge. Park constructs a unified ontology where posthuman identity is defined by mutual entanglement within the ruin. Waste becomes the foundation for ethical coexistence.

Luminous serves as a profound philosophical blueprint for navigating the ecological and existential crises of the Anthropocene. By reimagining the future through the ethics of scavenging and repair, the narrative moves beyond mere critique, offering a tangible alternative to the destructive ideology of "endless upgrading." It posits that a sustainable future is not found in the pursuit of the new, but in the radical preservation and repurposing of the existing.

The novel's concept of "junk-yard transhumanism" effectively dismantles the myths of elite technocratic futurism. Rather than envisioning a posthuman state defined by corporate-sanctioned perfection, Park foregrounds a world where vulnerability and dependency are the primary conditions for relational life. This shift is critical; it suggests that true resilience is a collective process rooted in reciprocity, rather than an individualistic pursuit of hyper-efficiency. In this light, survival becomes an act of social and environmental justice, demanding a restructuring of how we value both labor and materials.

Furthermore, *Luminous* provides a vital intervention by insisting that a meaningful future cannot be built upon the foundations of extraction and corporate hegemony. It calls for a posthumanity grounded in care, bridging the historically contentious divide between the organic and the synthetic. By treating the synthetic not as a tool for exploitation, but as a partner in shared survival, the narrative echoes the urgent need for a more inclusive, symbiotic relationship with our technological and natural environments. The select novel suggests that the path forward lies in the margins. It is in the "junk-yard"—the space of the discarded and the broken—that we find the seeds of a future that is both ethically sound and ecologically viable. *Luminous* reminds us that the most revolutionary act in an age of obsolescence is the commitment to stay, to mend, and to coexist.

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