

Literariness Journal

A Peer-Reviewed Quarterly
Journal of Literature and Cultural
Studies

P-ISSN: 3108-1614
E-ISSN: 3108-172X

LiterarinessJournal.org

Super Trash and Affect: The Posthuman in *Waste Tide*

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**Vol. 1, Issue 4, September
2026**

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Abstract: In the light of Chen Qiufan's e-waste-centric novel *Waste Tide* (2013), this paper deals with the relationship between human affect and trash, in a futuristic ecological dystopia. It examines the rise of a nouveau 'trash' culture through the lens of posthumanism by normalizing the coexistence of prosthetic playtoys, cyborg failures, body films, bionic arms, hyperrealist human sex organs and 'super' bodies of nonhuman creatures. The oppositional structure of the posthuman as a new-creation on one hand, and a destructive agency on the other, produces ethical problems in terms of ecology. *Waste Tide* reveals the problems of anthropocentrism, and foresees a new hierarchy of the human, non-human, super-human, and waste-human, demarcated by their proximity with nature, trash, and the ecological "spirit". This paper examines the role of the human subject/object in creating trash and super trash, both in power terms with the nonhuman and the marginalized migrants in an e-waste recycling industry in China.

Keywords: *Posthuman, Affect, Trash, Dystopia, Waste-human*

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DOI: 10.67147 literariness.v1i4.006

Introduction

Framing Mimi's posthuman transformation as a "new beginning," Chen Qiufan's dystopian novel or ecological horror *Waste Tide* (2013) posits that the future of humanity may lie in a hybridization of material trash and human consciousness, where the remnants of waste, both human and technological, are repurposed into something that transcends the limitations of their origins. This vision challenges readers to reconsider the value and potential of what society deems as "waste", urging a rethinking of the systems that produce and manage it. The discarded waste in transnational circulation is weaponised in multiple ways. This paper evaluates anthropocentrism in the novel, by highlighting how human-centred exploitation of the environment leads to the creation of "super trash," which in turn exacerbates the vulnerability of all bodies, human and non-human alike, reshaping the ecosystem. "Super trash" represents a synthetic epistemology of trash ecology, where the process of contamination generates new forms of bodies viz-a-viz interaction, chemical dysfunction and change in genetic makeup.

This paper specifically explores the new female Frankenstein creation, Mimi, a marginal "waste girl", whose words, "...I don't want to become a monster. I don't want to commit murder. I don't want to become a laboratory specimen..." (Qiufan 2019, 426), resonates Shelley's dark monster. Mimi is a "super-trash", a posthuman organism metamorphosing due to synthetic virus contamination, whose bio-story is the broader critique of global capitalism and environmental degradation, particularly within the framework of garbocracy in Silicon Isle, a fictional counterpart to Guiyu, China. She is a pawn in the politics and power structures surrounding waste management and disposal, including the hierarchy of the Luo, Lin and Chen clans.

Waste Tide offers a critique of greenwashing, the practice of corporations and organizations presenting themselves as environmentally responsible while continuing harmful practices. The heterogeneity of the novel's plot makes it a sci-fi, climate fiction, dystopian fiction, ecological horror, cyberpunk narrative, and "Chinese cyborg fiction" (Jiang 2020, 655), exploring "genre hybridity" (Healey 2017, 5), etc. Waste is argued to "engender(s) assemblages, entanglements, relations, and frictions that are hardly reducible to given boundaries and univocally-defined identities" (Andolfatto 2022, 73). The novel narrates how trash is not a displaced object after being disposed off by an individual or a collective. Trash is a political object, manipulated for power, by the clans of the Isle, the immigrants, waste processing workshops and the multinational recycling projects, caught in a complex network of "global" versus "local" development. It is also mythologized in the novel, where trash is turned into a seemingly "natural" subject, luminous and sublime in the water bodies. This mirrors real-world

instances where initiatives aimed at “solving” the e-waste problem often fail to address the underlying issues, instead perpetuating the cycle of harm.

Focusing on the development of new-bodies and posthuman hybrids within a trash-filled environment, Kaisa Kortekallio characterizes these bodies as “mutant narratives”, denaturalized forms that are likely to emerge in crisis settings such as “post-epidemic, postindustrial, post-catastrophic spaces” (Kortekallio 2024, 4). The Isle’s “undrinkable” water (Qiufan 2019, 28), lack of protective gear, unknown chemicals in the air (30), and scattered “wriggling prosthetic arm” (31) create a landscape akin to the topography of Dante’s *Inferno* (30). Amid this crisis, a hybrid body is emerging, with questions about its nature: “*What if she’s a new creation?*” (Qiufan 2019, 414) and “*But who is her creator?*” (415). This synthesized organism “crosses the boundary between biology and machinery” (415). It can be noted that Haraway’s feminist cyborg, which forms the foundation of cyborg feminism, represents a product of technoscience and global capitalism’s commodification of (bio)technologies, thus redefining the relationship between humans and technology (Melzer 2020, 291).

Mimi-mecha, Waste Girl, Cyber Goddess

The hybrid posthuman being, embodied by Mimi, is a byproduct of the unmanageable human disposal of trash. Mimi emerges as a “cyborg” organism in the text, largely from the intersection of human and machine, local and global colonizers and the colonized. The “new kind of consciousness” that Mimi develops represents a fusion of human empathy and technological efficiency, challenging traditional notions of what it means to be human. This new consciousness is not just a personal evolution but a potential paradigm shift in how humanity might relate to technology and the environment in the future. This new body is an “assemblage” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 4), a complex network of organic and inorganic parts, human emotions, and machine logic, bifurcating into two directions: Mimi I and Mimi O. The human Mimi is a victim, with a body “soaked in dirty water, like a bag of kitchen trash” (Qiufan 2019, 60), raped and humiliated, and was dehumanized as a “sheep, a farming implement, a bag of seeds” (62), also an interview subject and a specimen (84).

Quoting Donna Haraway, Mimi’s hybrid body “challenges the distinctions between the natural and the artificial, the mind and the body, the human and the nonhuman” (Haraway 1991, 150). Hayles adds to this, calling such bodies an “amalgam, a collection of heterogeneous components, a material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction” (Hayles 1999, 3). Melzer says “Cyborg feminism *en masse* also acknowledges the destruction history has witnessed and views the only possibility for change in rejecting dualisms, including that of gender, upon which this destruction was based” (Melzer 2020, 291). Recent scholarship of *Waste Tide* discusses the posthuman body as “a window into the kinds of futures that are yet in the making and can

therefore still be remade” (Auld 2020, 145). Song highlights the “point of difference, as represented in the monstrosity, alienness, heterotopia, transgendered or trans-species beings, and intercybernetic consciousness, poses questions about what is human, or posthuman” (Song 2016, 560). Chen Quifan indeed brings out “the dark side of globalization in how it exacerbates inequality both between and within states” (Sun 2019, 295), weaving “a techno-Occidentalist response” (Ooi 2021, 246).

Taking an episode from the novel, the helmet used to inject a virus into Mimi is a harrowing symbol of technological intrusion, featuring octopus-like tentacles that invade her body, reflecting the invasive nature of this dystopian technology. Its biofeedback signals allow real-time monitoring and manipulation of Mimi’s physiological responses: “Mimi didn’t know what kind of emotion she was experiencing: anger, despair, sorrow, hatred” (Qiufan 2019, 164). Her sense responses changed, she perceived the “illusory rather than real” (Qiufan 2019, 168), with “metallic howls” (168), a “gigantic body” (176) featuring “supercomputer calculations” (176), a “robotic exoskeleton shell” (180), “a zombie” (198), brain metabolic level “unheard of in any mammal” (309), “a soul embedded into a strange new body” (174), “gargantuan robot” (384), and a “cyber goddess” (339). Mimi “realized that she was no longer controlling a flesh-and-blood human body, but a body made of metal” (Qiufan 2019, 175) and “electroactive artificial muscle fibre bundles” (176). When the Clan leader’s son is attacked by the QNB virus experimented in the Project Waste Tide, and which represents a terrifying fusion of biotechnology and cybernetic warfare, where the human brain itself becomes a battlefield for control, Mimi is seen as potent enough to purge this virus because she is in close proximity with contamination. Mimi is infected by the M-virus, a nanotechnological pathogen that radically transforms both her body and mind. This virus integrates at a cellular level, reprogramming her DNA and merging her consciousness with the surrounding electronic environment. She gains increased strength, agility, and resilience, and takes an alternate form of Mimi I, who is psychologically torn, “experiencing the hallucination of being a guest in her own body” (Qiufan 2019, 242), “omniscient and omnipotent” (258).

The dangerous pathways of trash assimilation lead to the creation of cybernetic gods, illustrating a complex interplay between ecological horror and fantasy. The novel portrays a dystopian reality where the process of recycling and technological exploitation gives rise to a figure that embodies both oppression and divinity. These cybernetic gods are crafted from the detritus of societal excess, worshipped in ceremonies for their perceived salvific power, yet simultaneously discarded as waste once their usefulness wanes. Mimi says “a goddess always has two faces” (Qiufan 2019, 391), and adds “I’m accidental; I’m inevitable. I’m a new error. I’m the master and the slave. I’m the huntress and the prey” (Qiufan 2019, 406).

By transcending human limitations, Mimi attains a form of “devi”-hood, transforming into a “super” recycled being, an avatar, a new god of the excess. Quifan writes, “Mimi’s consciousness oscillated rapidly between the robot and the human body” (Quifan 2019, 180). In prior fiction, we can draw a comparison of Mimi with characters who undergo shifts in consciousness, like Case in *Neuromancer* (1984) by William Gibson, Rick Deckard in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) by Philip K. Dick, Hassan in *The Body* (1998) by Hanif Kureishi, Takeshi Kovacs in *Altered Carbon* (2002) by Richard K. Morgan, Jean le Flambeur in *The Quantum Thief* (2010) by Hannu Rajaniemi, and Jack in *Autonomous* (2017) by Annalee Newitz, Ayo in *Gideon the Ninth* (2019) by Tamsyn Muir. However, Mimi’s shift is also physical in nature, involving cybernetic implants. A hybrid body is not a simple process of evolution or progress but one that is deeply intertwined with histories of violence and oppression. The accumulation of bio-toxic waste in Silicon Isle, pervasive in nature, is depicted as the monstrous offspring of industrial progress and environmental negligence, creating an organism that reflects a fragmentation and reassembly that occurs in both the physical and mental state of being. She is internally divided, a synecdoche of the human cost of e-waste. It is significant to note that through Mimi, *Waste Tide* offers a stark warning and a provocative reimagining of the future in an era dominated by “super trash”, the ethical implications of global capitalism’s insatiable demand for new technology.

Judith Butler’s assertion that vulnerability is a “mode of being” that exposes us to others, making our existence inherently performative (Butler 1993, 15), resonates with how Mimi’s mutant identity is continually reshaped by her interactions. Mimi-mecha embodies hidden instincts that resonate with primal, biological processes such as cellular mitosis, plant phototaxis, and animal instinct (Quifan 2019, 358). These instincts suggest a deep, almost unconscious connection to the natural world, despite the technologically saturated environment. Sara Ahmed explains that “emotions do things, and they align individuals with communities, or bodily space with social space, through the very intensity of their attachments” (Ahmed 2014, 119). In a hierarchical framework, waste is perceived as dirty, inferior, and omnipresent, reflecting a broader system of devaluation where those who produce and handle waste are similarly marginalized. This exteriorization of waste and the people associated with it underscores a profound hierarchy that places waste and the lowly individuals who interact with it at the bottom of the social order.

The comparison of low-class and caste individuals to animals, and the treatment of both as “discarded” or “polluted,” reveals an anthropocentric bias that dehumanizes and objectifies them: “*Waste is dirty, inferior, lowly, useless, but omnipresent. They produce waste every day; they can’t live without the waste people*” (Quifan 2019, 197) and “to being treated as trash, to being humiliated, violated, to being discarded” (197). This hierarchical divide, in which waste is seen as useless and inferior, extends to

how humans view and treat both the environment and certain social groups. By positioning waste and marginalized people as expendable and analogous to parasitic animals, as stated in the text “we’re not polluting waste or parasitic animals” (Qiufan 2019, 393), this system reinforces their subjugation and highlights how anthropocentric behaviours perpetuate inequality and disregard for both human dignity and ecological health.

Complex Trash and Image of Hell

The proliferation of prosthetic limbs, akin to fast fashion, creates a significant yet underexplored category of technological waste. This waste, often discarded with minimal consideration of its environmental and social impact, contributes to a “bizarre world” of complex trash, that “wasn’t as simple as people thought” (Qiufan 2019, 64). Considering the transient nature of prosthetics, driven by technological innovation and consumer desire for the latest advancements, Timothy Morton uses the word “hyperobject”, entities that are so vast in temporal and spatial dimensions that they defy easy comprehension and management (Morton 2013, 4).

In the light of creation of trash, the following lines are significant to note:

These days, the rich switch body parts as easily as people used to switch phones...Most haven’t been decontaminated and still contain blood and bodily fluids, which pose a lot of potential risk for public health (Qiufan 2019, 32).

The ease with which the rich “switch body parts” underscores the stark inequalities present in this society, where the wealthy can afford to discard their old bodies like outdated gadgets, while the poor are left to deal with the hazardous aftermath. Trash is connected to the commodification of the human body, and the process of “creating” the monstrous and marvellous:

Translucent artificial cochleas, false lips, prosthetic limbs, breast implants, augmented muscles, and enlarged sexual organs bounced against each other, and the pile collapsed around him. His field of vision was filled with the pink glow of faux health, as though he were trapped in the storage locker of Jack the Ripper (Qiufan 2019, 34).

This highlights the macabre reality where prosthetics human body parts are treated with the same disposability as outdated electronics. Waste is an exaggerated but realistic portrayal of the consequences of unchecked industrialization. This metaphorical and literal dehumanization strips the human body parts of their sanctity, turning them into grotesque remnants that threaten public health. In the hyperrealist world of *Waste Tide*, trash becomes a central metaphor for the confusion and degradation of values in modern society. The statement, “Sometimes you can no longer tell what’s

trash and what's not in our lives" (Qiufan 2019, 24), underscores the collapse of clear distinctions between what is "valuable" and what is "disposable". In this world, the proliferation of waste has reached such an extent that it contaminates all aspects of life. This blurring of boundaries reflects the erosion of moral and ethical clarity, where the detritus of consumerism and technological advancement obscures the true nature of things. In the contemporary scene, Artist Pinar Yoldas' *An Ecosystem of Excess* (2014) can be cross-referred to here, as a speculative design project that imagines a post-human ecosystem where new life forms have evolved from plastic waste. Also, Chris Jordan's *Running the Numbers* series (2006–present) is dialogic, like Qiufan's story, and it visualizes the staggering scale of human consumption.

The readers are in a living inferno in this text, where "[s]trange fish filled with cancerous tumours had been pulled out of many polluted fishing ponds. The number of stillbirths refused to go down, and rumours spoke of a migrant woman who gave birth to a dead baby whose entire body was dark green and gave off a metallic stink" (Qiufan 2019, 54). Even towards the end of the novel, we see an apocalyptic landscape: "the soil had grown poisoned, salinized, and desertified; and the ditches had collapsed, become clogged, or been repurposed for acid baths" (387). The ecological decay is generational and "the so-called Devil's gift, toxic waste capable of creating an ecological disaster" (7). In this dystopian setting, the characters' lives are dominated by the omnipresence of garbage, a spectre, which in turn shapes their identities, social interactions, and power dynamics. Also, in this text, the "natives" view themselves as superior, largely because they are not directly involved in the dirty, dangerous work of handling e-waste. In contrast to this, the "waste people" are dehumanised and seen as little more than "extensions" of the garbage they process. A yearning of Li Wen marks this: "All I want is for you to treat us as people, not waste" (114). Human dignity itself collapses.

The jellyfish near the power plant are grotesquely mutated by pollution, trapped in a vortex of toxic wastewater that has turned them, and other sea life, into living trash, corrupted by industrial waste. There is a discourse of damage in the novel, exteriorized in the line "the sky, the trees, the earth, and even trash seemed to have been given new life, radiating a warm, loving feeling" (Qiufan 2019, 110), which is a sheer indication of normalization of waste and toxic entanglement. This shift reflects a profound alteration in the Earth's biogeochemical cycles, where waste, once seen as an "external" and harmful element, has now become ecologically embedded. Instead of the creation of a hierarchy of humans, non-humans and trash, there is dangerous assimilation, to which Stacy Alaimo's concept of "transcorporeality" provides a valid framework: "Pollutants are not just external substances but are incorporated into our bodies and become part of our material selves" (Alaimo, 2010, 17) and "reveals how the environmental contaminants that enter our bodies also affect our subjective experiences and physical states, thereby blurring the lines between the self and the surrounding world" (Alaimo 2010,

21). This hybridity is also seen in the lingering dogs, in the permeable nature of their bodies, coexisting in a trash landscape.

The description of soil as a “poisoned wasteland” (Qiufan 2019, 136) and the notion of an illness that “cannot be cured by a simple, strong dose of harsh medicine” (136) underscores the profound and pervasive impact of pollution and highlights how environmental degradation has deeply altered the ecology, with sickness so severe that folk/traditional or aggressive/quick remedies may only worsen the situation. Quifan draws an apocalyptic waterscape:

The sea. Pale like the skin of a corpse, the sea stretched out until it touched the leaden gray sky. At first glance, the sea appeared as a block of solidified polyester plastic: there was no motion, no spray, no birds, only the horizon as still as death (Qiufan 2019, 167).

Also, it is significant that in the image of hell, Brother Wen is remythologized as a “folk inventor living on a garbage heap” (Qiufan 2019, 66), living in a room that “seemed like a bloodless abattoir” (185), leading to the creation of new-gods and new-demons. These images are forged from the detritus of industrial civilization, illustrating the adaptability of human imagination. In the same line, prior to Mimi-Mecha is Ah-Rong-Mech, a monstrous creation, grotesque amalgamation of malfunctioning machinery and e-waste, that wreaks havoc with a ferocity akin to hellish chaos. In the novel, trash emerges as a complex object-subject that embodies creation, metamorphosis, and destruction simultaneously, representing value and abjection together.

Trash-Fashion

The boundaries between technology, fashion, and waste are fluid in Quifan’s novel, leading to the emergence of a unique street culture that incorporates elements of “trash fashion.” This culture is characterized by the chaotic and polluted environment of Silicon Isle, where the “stench, noise, and pervasive lack of order” (Qiufan 2019, 41) become the backdrop for a new form of expression that fuses human bodies with the very waste that surrounds them. One of the most striking elements of this evolving street culture is the use of “body film technology” as a form of fashion display. This technology allows individuals to project various images or designs onto their skin, turning the body itself into a canvas, making bodies more adaptable, coded with information about the surroundings, and repurposing the discarded. Characters in the novel wear accessories made from e-waste, such as bracelets crafted from old circuit boards or necklaces strung together from discarded electronic components. Throughout the text, there are other relatable references to technological excess, innovations such as electronic noses that can separate plastic (Qiufan 2019, 79), augmented glasses

that recognize brain waves (110), digital mushrooms, electronic drugs, and hallucinatory sensations, which illustrate a society where technology has infiltrated every aspect of life.

Fashion often mirrors societal crises by translating the anxieties, struggles, and transformations of a given era into wearable art. In 2024, the concept of “trash fashion”, “upcycled fashion”, “eco-fashion” has become a bold statement on the runway, with designers repurposing discarded materials into avant-garde pieces. Marine Serre, Iris van Herpen, Alexander McQueen, and Balenciaga have redefined luxury with designs that incorporate salvaged textiles, recycled plastics, and even ordinary garbage. These initiatives question the fashion industry’s emphasis on rapid fashion and overconsumption, transforming garbage into a tool for artistic expression and environmental awareness. They push the boundaries of what is attractive and valuable. Similar cultural analysis is possible in *Waste Tide*, which creates a microcosm of the broader societal crises- the powerful versus the powerless.

In the midst of fashion, there is an acute animalization in the image of Mimi, sorting through a pile of plastic fragments “like bones picked out of the carcass of some animal” (Qiufan 2019, 78) and likened to a “scavenging mutt” (78) powerfully illustrates the erosion of humanity that she endures. This metaphor reduces Mimi to a status lower than human, aligning her with an unwanted, mixed-breed dog, reflecting how she and her fellow workers are viewed as little more than extensions of the waste they process. The precision with which these women sort the plastic, ABS, PVC, PC, PPO, MMA, with “practiced ease” (78) further underscores the mechanization of their labor, as they are forced into repetitive, hazardous tasks. To quote, “*Human lives are so much cheaper than machines*” (79), and the marginal lives of the waste people are perceived as “slaves, bugs, disposable trash” (261). Here, we can mention Rob Nixon’s concept of slow violence captures how marginalized groups, deemed “subhuman,” suffer from gradual, often invisible harm caused by environmental and social degradation over time. As Nixon notes, “slow violence is typically not viewed as violence at all” (Nixon 2011, 2), revealing how systemic neglect and exploitation render these lives disposable.

In high-end brands, recycling MNCs as well as workshop units, such as Coltsfoot Blossoms, TerraGreen, TechCorp, Zhuo Yu Corporation, Xie Zhi Recycling Project, Ninth City Recycling, human lives are expendable, especially those of the liminal class. The concept of “toxic colonialism” is vividly illustrated through the global exploitation of e-waste, which affluent nations offload to less wealthy regions. As Robin Wall Kimmerer writes, “The most insidious form of colonialism is the one where the environmental costs are externalized, and the local communities are left to bear the burden” (Kimmerer 2013, 232). The “waste people” fall into this category and they are double colonized, by the external and internal agents that come into play.

In the novel, there is a reference to “body fast-moving consumer goods” (FMCG)” (Qiufan 2019, 297), where body parts, such as artificial limbs, cochleas, and other enhancements, are easily replaceable, much like mobile phones or other consumer electronics. Wealthy individuals in this world can switch out body parts as frequently and effortlessly as one would upgrade to the latest smartphone model. This commodification of the body reflects a society where the human form is just another product to be customized, upgraded, and discarded. The disposability of bodies has increased with this fast fashion. The deduction of human lives as objects of utility, and body parts as replaceable and modifiable, is an increasing concern. There is a resulting rise of the “black market” (Qiufan 2019, 297), which creates illegal body accessories, making it easier for a random Ted to “swap limbs with other people at a weekend party” (298). This approach to body modifications symbolizes the normalization of cyborg identities, where the human body is no longer seen as a fixed, organic entity but as a customizable, modular system with detailing usage, ethics, risks, warranties, upgrades, and installation. This is a “neo-bio-logism”, that refers to the creation of new terminology or conceptual frameworks for understanding human bodies in the context of technological interference and bioengineering.

Also, Kaizong’s new Cyclops VII eye is a powerful symbol that fuses mythology, folklore, and technology, creating a unique posthuman identity intertwined with *folk-tech*. By referencing the one-eyed giants of Greek mythology, the Cyclops VII evokes ancient power while embodying the novel’s concept of the folk cyborg, a blend of cutting-edge cybernetics and grassroots, traditional ingenuity. Such prosthetics are designed to be fire-resistant and non-decomposable (Qiufan 2019, 299), meaning they endure even after the body perishes, effectively turning the individuals into living carriers of indestructible trash. This idea prompts a critical reflection on contemporary society, where medical advancements have led to the widespread use of metals and synthetic materials in the human body, such as limb implants, and silicone in cosmetic enhancements. As we read in this novel, people want to “update their prosthetics to maintain a sense of freshness” (Qiufan 2019, 299). These materials, while serving vital functions, are also non-biodegradable, raising the provocative question: Aren’t we all carrying trash in our bodies all the time? This research question challenges us to reconsider the implications of integrating non-organic, imperishable materials into our bodies, and as already argued, blurring the lines between bio-value and waste. Shuyuan Lu points out that ecological considerations are central to cultural and societal narratives; however, the “society has not regressed to the state of infancy [...] it has grown into an almighty giant, though it is wandering further away from the origin and the true” (Lu 2017, 145). This deviation calls for a reframing of the spirit of nature, adapting trash as a part of daily life.

The statement “*Your prostheses are you*” (Qiufan 2019, 301), raises another concern in the text that in accidents, individuals are often identified through these indestructible prosthetic parts, which have

become scavenged remnants within their bodies, akin to items in a trash bin. Their bodies are grotesquely opened “like fresh transgenic lemons found at supermarkets, the contents were an unnatural, frosted white” (Qiufan 2019, 300). It is noted that “prostheses were no longer merely aids for the handicapped or even decoration or components of the body, to be exchanged and upgraded at will; rather, prostheses had already become a part of the definition of human life: they were the repositories of our joys, sorrows, terrors, and passions, our class, our social status, our memories” (301). Prostheses, as described in the text, store and transmit affect, and maintain social hierarchies.

Again, note the line: “The secondhand prostheses of the waste people were clearly no match for the quality equipment worn by Luo’s thugs” (Qiufan 2019, 380). The distinction between first-hand and second-hand prostheses accentuates a new class divide based on the accessibility of body accessories. First-hand prostheses, representing cutting-edge technology, are typically reserved for the wealthier class, symbolizing status and privilege. In contrast, second-hand prostheses, often outdated or repurposed, are more accessible to the lower class, highlighting economic and social inequalities.

Conclusion

Anthropocentrism fosters hazardous risks and unmanageable cyborgs in dystopian settings by prioritizing human desires and technological advancement at the expense of environmental health. This perspective leads to severe ecological degradation and the creation of hybrid entities ill-suited to their polluted environments, reflecting the detrimental consequences of disregarding ecological interdependencies. In the hierarchy of trash, humans and animals bear the brunt of environmental degradation and exploitation, while hybrid cyborgs and technological elites often benefit from and perpetuate the system’s inequities, highlighting a critical disparity in who suffers and who gains. In an anthropocentric space, ethics is intricately linked to the economy, revealing its inherent fluidity and dependence on shifting economic conditions, especially in China.

It can be argued that affect works in different scales in a trash-environment like Silicon Isle. On one hand, affect is “localized” in the immediate experiences of those at the bottom of the hierarchy, humans and animals directly impacted by pollution and exploitation, who endure acute physical and emotional suffering. On the other hand, affect is “delocalized” in that the broader emotional and psychological impacts of environmental degradation and technological advancement ripple outward, affecting global communities and ecosystems in less tangible, dispersed ways. Trash is therefore a subject-object and a “developing culture” in this text. It is a catalyst, negotiating between pre-modern Chinese traditions, the spirit and the nouveau posthuman or super trash, whose power, limitation and danger are dark and unknown spectres. Inevitably speaking, in a dystopian society, the normalization of trash as an integral part of daily life extends the boundaries of the surreal.

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