

## POST-SCRIPTUM

- 222 Response to “Magic Realism as Metaphysics: Murakami Haruki and the Resistance of Reality Itself” by Gabriel Chin

### **Respondent: Salman Akhtar**

Reading Murakami Haruki’s work has always been a tangential experience. By this I mean that one feels beckoned into a world replete with what from afar seems like a bog-standard circular narrative arc. But stepping inside, one notices that this circularity is actually a series of tangents arranged in such a way as to mimic a circle. First encounters with such a world engenders a strangely disorienting sensation. There is little teleological closure, which is quite contrary to the totalizing narratives we are fed through popular culture media. In time, however, as the reader is exposed to more of his work, Murakami’s writing becomes uniquely satisfying.

Chin’s article exploring Murakami’s work, particularly the idea that “the text is preoccupied with aesthetics as hermeneutic opacity,” is quite precisely the sentiment his writing brought to my mind. The configuration of magical realism not merely as a mode of writing, but as an aesthetic and metaphysical practice through this interpretively resistant mode, is an exercise in tangential acrobatics, much like Murakami’s texts. The article, with its onion-esque structure of [aesthetics (reality (OOO) metaphysics) aesthetics] and forays into tangential spaces such as critical explorations of cuteness, overmining/undermining and occasionalist causality, teems with digressions and discursive walkabout. Several of these explorations strike a nerve, but the one that really hitched onto my brain was the idea that “causality has a structure akin to metaphor.”

This seemingly counterintuitive formulation brought to mind Murakami’s 2017

novel *Killing Commendatore*. Notwithstanding the interpretive dissonance and narrative tangents the work contains, one of the major hurdles the protagonist is forced to overcome after traversing a barren wasteland and fording the River of Metaphor is climactically escaping the dreaded Double Metaphor. As this being slithers up our protagonist's leg and he fearfully awaits his demise, it is his realization of a certain un-anthropocentric aesthetics that allows him to escape and return to some form of normalcy. It is an understanding that all entities can be related to all others without hierarchizing, or placing one ahead of or behind another, that allows him to complete his quest. It is this knowledge that causality is an aesthetic configuration rather than a mundane sequence of events that leads to a breakthrough. Murakami's novel enacts the article's main thrust, much as the article illustrates the novel. Through the use of this ontological equality, Chin's redefinition of magical realism as genre is fascinating and groundbreaking, particularly as it can be applied more broadly, to more variegated texts previously not thought of as belonging to this category. Plus, the digressory ride through challenging philosophico-literary terrain is fun!

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Response to "Jorge Luis Borges in Turkish: Magical Realism in a Politically-and-Poetically Motivated Literary Field" by Ceyda Elgöl

### **Respondent: Kurosh Amoui**

This survey of Turkish translations of Borges is remarkable for two reasons, broadly speaking. First, it offers a window into the contemporary national literature of Turkey, and how the Turkish literary field (and the field of cultural production at large) must be contextualized within larger regional social and political frameworks. Second, it is part of the global reception of Borges, who certainly has become a canonical author of World Literature—travelling well beyond Argentina's national borders. The overlapping of these two scopes has produced a comprehensive analysis that demonstrates how the reception of Borges in Turkey has been part of the globalization of "Latin American magical realism."

Borges's own views on translation have been studied by Efraim Kristal and Sergio Waisman. I am quoting here at length the opening of Borges's 1932 essay "Las versiones homéricas" ("The Homeric Versions") that resonated with me when reading the closing of Elgöl's article:

No problem is as consubstantial to literature and its modest mystery as the one posed by translation. The forgetfulness induced by vanity, the fear of confessing mental processes that may be divined as dangerously commonplace, the endeavour to maintain, central and intact, an incalculable reserve of obscurity: all watch over the various forms of direct writing. Translation, in contrast, seems destined to illustrate aesthetic debate. The model to be imitated is a visible text, not an immeasurable labyrinth of former proj-

ects or a submission to the momentary temptation of fluency. Bertrand Russell defines an external object as a circular system radiating possible impressions; the same may be said of a text, given the incalculable repercussions of words. Translations are a partial and precious documentation of the changes the text suffers. Are not the many versions of the *Iliad*—from Chapman to Magnien—merely different perspectives on a mutable fact, a long experimental game of chance played with omissions and emphases? (There is no essential necessity to change languages; this intentional game of attention is possible within a single literature.) To assume that every recombination of elements is necessarily inferior to its original form is to assume that draft nine is necessarily inferior to draft H—for there can only be drafts. The concept of the “definitive text” corresponds only to religion or exhaustion. The superstition about the inferiority of translations—coined by the well-known Italian adage—is the result of absentmindedness. There is no good text that does not seem invariable and definitive if we have turned to it a sufficient number of times.

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Response to “*Se Habla Español* as ‘*McOndo 2.0*’: Post-Magical Realist Anthologies in Latin America” by Thomas Nulley-Valdés

### **Respondent: Ceyda Elgül**

Thomas Nulley-Valdés’s article examines the links between two post-magical realist anthologies in Latin America: *McOndo* (1996) and *Se habla español: Voces latinas en USA* (2000). Presented as a direct continuation of *McOndo*, *Se habla español* complements the anti-magical realist stance of its predecessor, which Nulley-Valdés observes with a focus on their short-story selection, paratexts, and reception. These two volumes, co-edited by Alberto Fuguet, manifest a shared concern with Latin America’s literary production that should pass beyond the previous generation’s magical realist structures, and despite the initial criticisms posed against them, both mark the emergence of a new moment for Latin American writers.

I believe one of the highlights of the article is its elaboration on anthology as a genre that fulfills a specific function in the formation and operation of literary repertoires. In the words of Alfonso Reyes, anthologies “marcan hitos de las grandes controversias críticas, sea que las provoquen o que aparezcan como su consecuen-

cia” (138).<sup>1</sup> In the particular context of the volumes by Fuguet and his collaborators, these collections present new forms of cultural hybridization that can be used by Latin American writers in the United States who write in Spanish. The reviews that appeared two decades after the publication of *Se habla español* recognize the anthology as the start of a new wave of literature known as the New Latino Boom, which seems to suggest that the anthology succeeded in implementing its views amongst the authors of the new generation.

Aside from such a formative role, anthologies stand out with their representative value, especially when read from a temporal and/or spatial distance. To once again quote from Reyes, they “permiten mayor unidad en menor volumen, y dejan sentir y abarcar mejor el carácter general de una tradición” (138).<sup>2</sup> The representative value that comes along with this compact nature can apply to several cases; for instance, an anthology might present works from a specific culture, epoch, or writing *ecole*.

Although the article focuses on how these two anthologies embrace a post-magical realist form of self-presentation that avoids false exoticisms, its discussion of the anthologies also made me think about potential futures for these volumes in translation. The Latin Americanization of magical realism has much to do with the translation of Gabriel García Márquez and other writers’ works into first European and then non-European languages, and I wonder if the translations of post-magical realist volumes could have similar functions in the implementation of this new stream of Latin American literature in other regions. Perhaps we can even extend the discussion a bit further and ask whether these translations could inspire similar writer groups in other regions that aim to deconstruct the misrepresentations of their own literary traditions within the domain of world literature. An additional issue to be raised might be the possible strategies for translating the bilingual-bicultural texts of the New Latino Boom into other languages. Interlingual translations of hybrid and multilingual works have long been a prolific discussion topic for translation scholars, and I believe the journey of post-magical realism in translation would complement both this particular research frame and the arguments implemented in Nulley-Valdés’s study that uncovers the survival of this Latin American literary context in our day.

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## NOTES

1. “become milestones of the great critical controversies, either by provoking them or appearing as a consequence of them.” (All translations are mine.)
2. “permit a greater unity for less volume, and allow one to feel and better take in the general character of a tradition.”

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Response to “Shahrazad’s Enormous Wings: A Parable of Reception” by Ryan Milov-Córdoba

**Respondent: Lieselot De Taeye**

In “Shahrazad’s Enormous Wings: A Parable of Reception,” Ryan Milov-Córdoba examines the reception of *The Arabian Nights* by Latin-American magical realist writers from the twentieth century. His article analyzes Jorge Luis Borges’s reflections on the infinity of the *Nights*, Gabriel García Márquez’s recollections of learning how to read the book, Isabel Allende’s thoughts on Shahrazad as a feminist rebel, and Arturo Uslar Pietri’s framing of the book as a historical predecessor of the Venezuelan short story. Milov-Córdoba mostly points out how these authors integrated *The Arabian Nights* into their own personal literary projects, and how that made them lean towards reductive readings and stereotypical representations. He thus highlights the missed opportunities of connection; the moments where Arab-American conversations or collaborations could have been established but were not.

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Milov-Córdoba especially reflects on the absence of non-American interlocutors: leading literary voices from the Arab- and Persian-speaking world were not part of the dialogue that defined the reception of *The Arabian Nights* in twentieth-century mainstream magical realism. Neither Allende, Borges, Márquez, nor Pietri engaged Arab or Persian authors in their writings about *The Arabian Nights* (also called *The One Thousand and One Nights*). In his piece, Milov-Córdoba retroactively establishes this dialogue, this South-South conversation, by juxtaposing the impressions of the Latin American writers with the words of three interpreters of the *Nights* from Arabic-speaking countries: Hussain Haddawy, Muhsin Mahdi, and Abdelfattah Kilito.

Studying Congolese magical realist novels in a Western context can equally lead to stereotypical representations. Centering European literary history, which is always a risk, alienates the text from the West African environment in which it emerged and continues to circulate. Not allowing resonances with Congolese culture and religion to inform the readings of Sony Labou Tansi’s *La vie et demie* (1979), the novel I discuss in this special issue, would be a continuation of colonialist behaviour.

Tansi himself actually pushed against this way of reading his work. Although he debuted as a novelist with the French house Seuil, thus engaging with a globalist, mostly Western-inspired literary tradition, his poetry was written in his native tongue of Kikongo, and he was also the founder of the popular theatre company Rocado Zulu Théâtre. By staging his plays in Brazzaville, in the Republic of the Congo, he could reach his own people first, before the work could be recuperated and

integrated into a more Western framework. I am aware that my traditional academic article, even if it leans on the insights of Congolese scholars, does not entirely counteract this tendency. Its contribution lies mostly in contextualizing Tansi's work and letting it challenge extant narrative theory.

Milov-Córdoba's article operates on a different level and in a more expansive way. He, for instance, cites Iraqi translator Husain Haddawy's memories of reading *The Arabian Nights* and points out the strong links Haddawy's text establishes between the *Nights* and contemporary storytelling traditions in Iran. In contrast to my article, Milov-Córdoba's aim is not strictly to describe and historicize, but, as Haddawy's text is not related to magical realism, it is rather to enlarge the framework for future research on magical realism. Milov-Córdoba's reception history of *The Arabian Nights* thus becomes an act of reception in and of itself—a "parable"—as it creates an alternative framework that can guide future readers, scholars, and magical realist writers. The comparison between the personal testimonies of the Arab speaking and Latin American writers is presented as a way to bridge macropolitical divides between the Arab and American world.

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Milov-Córdoba's text does not only analyze the importance of the personal and the lived experience, but also enacts it. As a scholar himself, he acknowledges the influence of his own background and life; moreover, his personal position is foregrounded as the starting point for knowledge creation.

Reflecting on all of this, it seems that the balance Tansi found in the 1970s between the global and the local has become historical now, or would maybe even be impossible in today's world. Acknowledging this shift, Milov-Córdoba urges us to find new approaches to engage with literary practices. In embracing a radically transnational, globalized framework, he offers us one way of opening up academic research on magical realism to the dynamics of this new century.

Response to "Women, Violence, and Magical Realism in the Fiction of Mohammed Hanif" by Pooja Sancheti

**Respondent: Sanjukta Banerjee**

"The storyteller," says Irish novelist Colm Tóibín about the process of creating illusion in fiction, "has to deal with reality and all its details to make magic work" (Tóibín interview). The observation could apply to magical realism, especially when explored in relation to world literature in the twenty-first century. It is the understanding of shifting tensions and resonances between local stories, individual sensibilities, and global consciousness, between national interests and world ethics, that can add to the conceptual richness of the idea of world literature. Pooja Sancheti's analysis of women, violence, and magical realism in Mohammed Hanif's fiction adds to the

exploration of these relationships. Its highlighting of magical realism's potential for questioning the limits of realism and the possibility of reading the "abnormal" (4), hidden in plain sight, sets the stage for thinking about the mode's relevance to foregrounding literature's role in ceaselessly reexamining all assumptions and polarities.

Sancheti argues that magical realism in Hanif's novels is distinct from the mode's more conventional iterations insofar as magic in these works has a discrete rather than continuous presence (140). The point brings to mind Valerie Henitiuk's analysis of the creation of a feminist space in Angela Carter's feminist novel *Nights at the Circus* (1984). If Carter's more conventional magical realism, unlike Hanif's, thrives on a *sustained* tension or "antinomy between the magical and the real" (Henitiuk 411), the functions of magic also overlap in their works: much like the antinomy in Carter's novel that does not get resolved, because "antinomies are inherently not resolvable" (411), in Hanif's fiction magic "does not provide fanciful and unrealistic potential for an overnight feminist revolution" (Sancheti 151). Therefore, the impact of magic for the reader at large may not depend on its pervasiveness but on the nature of the "antinomic web" (Henitiuk 412) that holds in tension the plural subjectivities of women, elsewhere, everywhere.

One reason why magical realism has played an active role in literary decolonization is that many of its texts reconfigure structures of autonomy and agency (Faris 111). Sancheti's observation that magic in Hanif's works is brought into play by individuals rather than communities (Sancheti 140) can be instructive for reflecting on these structures, implicating the individual as much as the community, as either self-contained or marked by irreducible duality between the self and the other.

Hanif's attention to the pervasive and differentiated experiences of neoimperialism and its enabling ills, rather than to colonial rule, is of particular interest to me. It brings a diachronic dimension to understanding the continual and changing role of travel, migration, and translation in the rearticulation of the magical in literatures of the world. The confluence of questions around climate, gender, race, and the power of imagination in exposing social values that have been accepted as the norms make studies like this more urgent than ever before. If Hanif's stories are specific, their concerns are local and universal, and implicate all of us. They remind us that magical realism is a site for artistic and critical explorations in a world that is, as Glissant put it, "sans axe et sans visée."

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Response to “Living Presence in Postcolonial Congo: A Comparison between the Narrative Evocations of Ancestral Spirits in Jacques Bergeyck’s *Het stigma* and Sony Labou Tansi’s *La vie et demie*” by Lieselot De Taeye

**Respondent: Pooja Sancheti**

Lieselot De Taeye’s article compares two magical realist novels, written within the same decade, about Congolese society as it transited from a colonial state to a post-colonial one, the legacy of colonization (both political and material oppression as well as evangelism), the complex intersections of indigenous myths and beliefs with Christianity, a lopsided modernity brought in by the West in conflict with already existing systems, and internal political upheavals.

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What is striking, especially in the context of postcolonialism, is the article’s early framing of the “positionality” of the two writers. Sony Labou Tansi was a native Congolese author, while Jacques Bergeyck was a Belgian missionary and anthropologist who spent considerable time in the Congo before and after independence. This difference in affiliation—national, racial, communal, and even epistemological—is articulated in the ways indigenous belief systems, functions of cultures, notions of power, assimilation and hybridity, and even narrative access and focalization are deployed and presented. So, where Bergeyck’s protagonist, Leo, finds hybridity between Christian beliefs and rituals and indigenous beliefs as the way to transition into the future, Tansi’s narrative implodes upon itself, finding little, from within or without, to break the cycle of (political) violence. I feel that magical realism makes the author’s positionality an important basis for the kind of access the author has to a culture and history, and for their choice of instances, explanations, and their treatments of these instances. This positionality of the author vis-à-vis a culture has been a key argument in defining magical realism, starting from Alejandro Carpentier. As shown in the article, the author’s position is also pertinent to the project of decolonization, because colonization causes a fractured terrain and unique power struggles, as well as cultural and economic unevenness. Authorial voices are important interruptions that may not always speak for the margins or be subversive, but can create the space for these to be heard. They can also, as the article elaborates, imagine very different futures for a people and a nation.

A case in point is how Bergeyck and Tansi work with the central motif of Congolese culture: ancestral spirits. The belief that ancestral spirits can and do influence the living world, with varying degrees of agency, is common to many (African) cultures, and is also a primary motif in magical realism more broadly. The intermingling of

the spirits and the living is one of the ways to challenge the notion of linear time, since there is a collapse of the apparently neat distinctions between present, past, and future. Additionally, the idea that lineages spill over is a close analogy to counter the argument that the moment of political independence cleaves a nation's history into a (colonial) past and (postcolonial) present. Really, can neat compartments ever be set up within history and memory—personal or political?

What is also striking about the spirits in the two novels is that they are not always kind or benign and, simply by virtue of having moved on, have not lost the personalities or political persuasions of their living selves. Martial especially, in Sony Labou Tansi's *La vie et demie*, is violent and ill-tempered, and does not hesitate to rape his own daughter to ensure she (and future descendants) moves away and lives in a safer place. These spirits are, as De Taeye puts it, not "exemplary martyrs" but "adamant victims of an absurd system haunted by colonial oppression". This desacralization of spirits humanizes them while also personifying history.

- 230** The two novels present two different futures for the Congo among the many possible ones. Each future is based on the premise it began with, tied to the author's own experiences and belief systems. One proposes a depoliticized hybrid of spiritual cultures, with less problematization of the many other intersections in this process, such as political and economic hegemony. The other fails to find any way out of the violence embedded deep in society; each passing generation adds to this cycle of violence. In both cases, there are no ideal, utopian, or fantastical resolutions to the present problems of the nation. This complexity of problems and solutions, and of cultures, histories, and futures, makes the concerns of these two novels globally and contemporaneously relevant, and strikes at the very heart of the imagination of the nation as a unified, closed, homogeneous, and easily explicable entity.

"Are the Wizards Still at Work?" Response to "Rethinking Missionary Colonization in Tsitsi Dangaremba's *Nervous Conditions*" by Chinelo Ezenwa

**Respondent: Jill Planche**

Toward the end of *Nervous Conditions*, Nyasha angrily accuses her parents, crying out to Tambu, "They've done it to me," but she adds, "It's not their fault. They did it to them too" (200). The "doing of it" to which she refers is the generational, deliberate, and legislated abrogation of their lives; the colonial practice of stealing land and imposing missionary education that Chinelo Ezenwa identifies as "Holy and White" wizardry in her post-magical realist examination of Tambu's and her Grandmother's retelling of their histories, each challenging the colonial missionaries' exclusionary narrative. Her article is timely, coming as it does shortly after the publication, thirty

years after *Nervous Conditions*, of Dangarembga's third novel in the Tambu trilogy, the 2020 Booker Shortlisted *This Mournable Body* (2018). Ezenwa offers a useful critique through which to look at the transfiguration of the colonized native to elucidate the older Tambu's embodiment in the reality of postcolonial, postwar Zimbabwe. Here, I omit the hyphens deliberately because, as Tambu's story unfolds, it is clear that there is no "post" for a systematized, colonized world or self.

If *Nervous Conditions* can be considered as a magical antirealist retelling of the "Holy and White Wizards" narrative of negation, inculcated in the encounter of community and colonization, in *This Mournable Body* Tambu performs her self descending into a state of unreality, into a magical realist mode closer to Márquezan visions and transfigurations. Her fracturing, her disintegration, echoes the disillusionment of the postcolony after a brutal war of liberation, and is threaded with concerns of land use, colonial (here neocolonial) power, and split native captured in Ezenwa's article. Despite her attempt to break away from the wizardry, Tambu finds the wizards are still in control in various roles, their superimposing of "civilized" or European ways embedded in the psychological self her body tries to shed in a hearing back to *Nervous Conditions*.

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The major shift between the two novels is Dangarembga's use of the second-person narrative voice, raising the question: is this intradiegetic voice Tambu talking to her self, or, is she drawing the reader into the story? In her notion of 'giving account,' Judith Butler posits, "I' give an account to 'you' and 'you' call me to be 'me,'" arguing that one can only tell an autobiography to another, "an 'I' only in relation to a 'you.'" Without the 'you,' she says, "my own story becomes impossible" (12). It is an idea that subverts the telling of the real (Ezenwa's "porousness"), perhaps to shed the violently imposed subject of the younger Tambu.

As she tries to escape the social world in which her identity has been instantiated, to find her *unhu*—the Shona concept of personhood she seeks at the end of *The Book of Not*, second in the trilogy—Tambu seeks a relational form of narrative toward self constitution, realizing she, the 'I,' cannot exist on her own apart from the conflicting frameworks that have formed her. In her hallucinations, paranoia, and sense of alienation, Tambu sees women as her threat: the family members who try to help her, her mother who sends messages and a bag of mealie meal through one of her cousins, and women in power such as her bosses, co-workers, landladies, and even the young students she briefly teaches. Symbolic of her state is the pair of European shoes sent to her by Nyasha that she calls Lady Dis, which she has to wear in her constant hunt for lodgings and jobs, and which each time turn her feet into bloated, blistered torments, their ill-fitting construction leading to greater physical and psychological degradation. She is recurrently tormented by her image in the mirror that turns into a purple hyena with whom she converses as she descends into nervous collapse.

The climactic scene of the novel returns to the place of her childhood—the Homestead explored in Ezenwa's article—with a fantastical reenactment of the earlier tensions of colonial dominance of land and bodies now manifest in the rupture

between human dignity, *unhu*, and the neocolonialism and capitalism of European ecotourism; the camera serving as the wizardry sent to capture the European's image of the "authentic" native. But this time, Tambu's mother has had enough; flinging the camera to hang useless on a mango tree, she is now 'un-doing it.' The old wizards stole her daughter; the new ones are not going to steal her.

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Response to "Simulacra and SimulAsian: The Culture of Hollywood's Yellow Peril" by Angie Wong

### **Respondent: Chinelo Ezenwa**

Angie Wong's article "Simulacra and SimulAsian: The Culture of Hollywood's Yellow Peril" addresses the subtle ways in which two recent acclaimed Hollywood films reinforce cinematic violence against Asian women, who are either hypersexualized, rendered mute, or shown as carriers of deadly diseases that disrupt the Arcadian world of the whiter Westerner. The article shows that in *Venom* (2018), the two pre-action Asian women are depicted as disease-ridden bodies, whose main role, it seems, is to deliver the disease from Malaysia to San Francisco. Their transference of disease to the white world also conveniently takes place at an airport, at the border where non-white peoples are often designated as non-beings. Kyoko in *Ex Machina* (2014) is similarly subjugated by Nathan, her white creator; she represents the white male exploitation of the body, labour, and sexuality of the Asian woman by a hypermasculine white society. Wong points out that in both films, there is neither character development for those women nor any escape for them as soon as they serve the perverse purposes of their "creators." Perhaps this is because, on the aggregate, they are simulations of real people ("SimulAsians"). But, based on Edward Said's notion of Orientalism, Wong argues that using the fragmented prism of a technological form of Orientalism (techno-Orientalism) and creating such "SimulAsians" allows these movies to violate and exploit the Asian female characters.

Kyoko, the Asian housekeeper-mistress figure in *Ex Machina*, is the ultimate "Simulacrum" and "SimulAsian," as Wong demonstrates. This is because, for most of the film, one is uncertain if Kyoko is a cyborg created to look Asian, or if she is

an Asian deliberately presented to look like a cyborg. Whatever reality exists for her is premised on Nathan's (her manufacturer's) stereotypical perception of the Asian woman as cold, silent, and sexually available (Wong 9). But it is not even Kyoko's poor development that bothers one most about *Ex Machina*. Instead, it is how the film manages to minimize Kyoko when shown against Ava, the Caucasian cyborg. The latter in fact becomes triumphant by exploiting both Kyoko and the unnamed Asian woman's body. Ava's only means of escape, it seems, is by literally cherry picking the skin off the bones of the unnamed female Asian figure in order to achieve "humanity." Therefore, after their final "battle," only Ava is triumphant while Kyoko remains a victim of the liberation march. Yet, as Wong equally observes, though the film seems to criticize the "dehumanization" of the Asian cyborgs, it is only able to achieve this critique by presenting them as sacrificial lambs, without any will and ability to achieve liberation. This double subjugation is not uncommon for "women of colour." In my discussion of Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, for instance, I show how the Zimbabwean women are double yoked under colonial and traditional patriarchies. The difference is that where the Zimbabwean girls and women are deliberately portrayed in *Nervous Conditions* with critical voices, *Ex Machina* and *Venom* do not allow the Asian women any such power. They are stereotyped as figures of annihilation, while the extreme physical violence against them is masked under the notion that they are not human.

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The horror of that form of cinematic occlusion of violence is perhaps clearer when one considers the implications of the two Asian diseased bodies in *Venom*, as Wong does. They are pitted against the white heroic journalist, Eddie Brock, and his lawyer girlfriend, Anne Weying. Despite their flaws, the latter two characters are somehow found the acceptable bodies of the "future" who are able to not only achieve symbiosis with the alien but still maintain their societal moral codes, act out their heroisms, and rescue their world from the threats of the extraterrestrial disease embodied in the Asian women and the equally Asian-looking genius inventor, Riz Ahmed.

In both films, the viewer is encouraged to ignore the scenes of violence against the Asian women because the action is conveniently set in the magical world of the movies. Wong rightly points out that the Disneyfication of the stories, the use of AIs, the science fiction, and the invitation of extraterrestrial beings allows the movie makers to blur the lines between what is real and what is science, and between what is real and what is considered magic. In the context of *Nervous Conditions*, I also pondered on the instability of the terms *magic*, *reality*, and *magical realism*. Their meanings often depend on readers' interpretations or in this case, the viewers of these films. Both *Venom* and *Ex Machina* deliberately erode the boundaries between science, magic, and reality. This blurring of lines allows the viewer to happily sigh at the end of the movie that "good" (Brock/Weying/*Venom*) once more triumphs over "evil" (Asian carriers of disease and Asian mad scientist), possibly missing the very realities encoded in the movie: the actual abuse of Asians and other marginalized bodies. And even when the idea of those mutilated bodies come to mind, viewers can

reassure themselves with the idea that the film is, after all, not *reality*! Any danger, for them, remains safely in the make-believe world of science fiction.