

**AT THE THRESHOLD OF GENDER AND CULTURE: AN
ANALYSIS OF MAGICAL REALISM IN ANIMATION**

by
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**AT THE THRESHOLD OF GENDER AND CULTURE: AN
ANALYSIS OF MAGICAL REALISM IN ANIMATION**

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines how the intersection of magical realism, queer theory, and animation can reimagine and reconstruct memory and identity. Using personal and found family archives, it explores animation's formal flexibility and magical realism's narrative strategies to challenge dominant narratives of family, identity, and memory. Central to this study is the author's animated short *Threshold*, which combines archival footage, occult symbolism, and experimental techniques to interrogate exclusionary family rituals. Through a tripartite structure, the film transitions from oppressive domestic realism to a liberatory magical realist utopia, embodying magical realism's capacity to merge the ordinary and the extraordinary. The thesis also engages with *my heart knows*, the author's fabric sculpture that materializes queer kinship and memory through tactile, durational labor, further expanding the discussion on alternative archives. Theoretical frameworks emphasize how magical realism and animation challenge fixed epistemologies. By reclaiming suppressed histories such as Anatolian folk magic and queer counter-memory, this work positions artistic practice as a site of utopian intervention. Ultimately, the thesis argues that magical realism in animation offers a transformative space for reconfiguring identity, memory, family, and temporality, opening pathways to queer utopian futures beyond cis-heteropatriarchal constraints.

ÖZET

TOPLUMSAL CİNSİYET VE KÜLTÜRÜN EŞİĞİNDE: ANİMASYONDA BÜYÜLÜ GERÇEKÇİLİK ÇÖZÜMLEMESİ

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Anahtar Kelimeler: animasyon, büyülu gerçekçilik, kuir teori, hafıza, aile

Bu tez, büyülu gerçekçilik, kuir teori ve animasyonun kesişiminde bellek ve kimliğin yeniden inşasını inceliyor. Kişisel ve buluntu aile arşivlerinden yola çıkarak, animasyonun esnek yapısı ve büyülu gerçekçiliğin anlatı olanaklarıyla yerleşik aile, kimlik ve bellek anlatılarını sorguluyor. Çalışmanın odağındaki *Kapı Eşiği* adlı kısa animasyon film, arşiv görüntülerini okült semboller ve deneysel tekniklerle harmanlayarak dışlayıcı aile ritüellerini ele alıyor. Üç bölümlü yapısıyla, baskıcı bir ev içi gerçekçilikten özgürleştirici bir büyülu gerçekçi ütopyaya evrilerek, sıradanla olağanüstünün nasıl iç içe geçebileceğini gösteriyor. Kumaş enstalasyon *içim biliyor* ise dokunsal ve zaman alıcı üretim süreciyle kuir akrabalık ve belleği somutlaştırarak alternatif arşiv olanaklarını tartışmaya açıyor. Kuramsal çerçeve, büyülu gerçekçilik ve animasyonun katı bilgi sistemlerini nasıl güçlü bir şekilde sorguladığını ortaya koyuyor. Anadolu folkloründeki büyü pratikleri ve kuir karşı-bellek gibi bastırılmış tarihleri birlikte düşünerek, sanatsal üretimi ütöpik bir müdahale alanı olarak konumlandırıyor. Sonuç olarak tez, animasyonda büyülu gerçekçiliğin kimlik, bellek, aile ve zaman algısını dönüştürücü bir potansiyel taşıdığını öne sürüyor. Böylece, cis-heteropatriyarkal sınırların ötesinde kuir ütöpik geleceklere açılan yolları aralamayı hedefler.

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to all who do not fit in...

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1. INTRODUCTION

I grew up with my family's narrative about what kind of child I was, usually the "unchallenging," self-sufficient, and "invisible" one. On the other hand, I also heard and internalized the story of myself as the child who ruined one of my family's most important days with my unprovoked moodiness. At my brother's circumcision, they say, I spoiled the entire evening, especially for my mother, and made the night miserable. I was grumpy, I cried, and I refused to dance. When I converted the VHS tape of the circumcision ceremony into a digital format, this was the first thing I wanted to see. I expected to watch a child running around crying the whole time, but instead, while my parents were mostly the ones in frame, I was barely visible.

I was dressed in a white wedding dress with a red ribbon tied around my waist. Before the evening's festivities began, the jewelry ceremony was the part where I was most visible. They brought my brother out on a car and hung a red ribbon around his neck as people gave him money as gifts. During the ceremony, someone lifted me up and placed me on the car beside my brother. At first, I sat down, my shyness obvious. Then, another person came and made me stand next to him. I, too, had a red ribbon around my neck. While my brother was showered with money, a few people also gave me some, though not as much as he received. I was glancing at his ribbon full of money from the corner of my eye. Near the end of the ceremony, my uncle came, took the money-filled ribbon from my neck, and placed it around my brother's. I didn't react.

As soon as I saw this scene, fragmented memories flew back. I remember my mother pulling me home. I don't know if she forced me inside or if I went in on my own, but somehow, I ended up in the bathroom. I remember sitting on the floor, crying against the wall for what felt like forever. I was very upset that the money was taken from me, and my brother was treated differently. The rest is a blur, but I think what they called my "unreasonable moodiness" was perhaps just the unhappiness that followed that sadness.

This small moment reminded me how dominant and repetitive narratives (the child who “ruins the fun” for no reason) shape the way we construct our own stories of selfhood. Beyond that, it made me wonder: How many other moments like this exist where we’ve internalized information about ourselves simply by accepting what we’ve been told? Realizing that an event I had long accepted as truth was remembered differently with just a slight shift in perspective reveals that memory is not fixed. It is fluid, experienced differently depending on one’s social positionality. This also hints at something deeper. Who holds the power to construct the dominant, accepted narrative of the past and shared experiences? And who has the authority to make that narrative feel like it is everyone’s reality?

I cannot give another example because this is the only video recording from my childhood. But what is important for me here is not uncovering an objective “truth” through “evidence.” What truly matters to me is highlighting how even a subtle touch, a slight shift in perspective, or a deliberate interruption of the dominant narrative, can become a tool to reconstruct my own reality. What I mean by a small touch could be as simple as rewatching that footage, or as radical as cutting off contact with the family. These states of interventions, which take different forms but are continuous in the flow of life, are actually the basis of my struggle for existence, identity, art, and theoretical work.

To revisit the past, to deconstruct and reassemble memories, or to recall what has been remembered differently are not passive acts. They are active interventions in the past that reshape the present. I don’t see time as linear, nor do I believe the past is fixed or unchangeable. Simply reminding alternatives to the dominant narrative or acknowledging their possibilities is itself a way of altering the past, which in turn transforms the present.

This is the point where my lived experience converges with the transformative potential of magical realism and queer theory. Both frameworks expose how the hegemonic, dominant order manufactures “reality” as singular, fixed, and universal, just like the family narratives imposed upon my childhood tape. More crucially, they share my core issue: reality is neither singular nor given, but always open to reimagining and reconstruction. They carry a transformative capacity toward utopian futures while demanding interventionist thinking. Together, these qualities make animation the perfect medium to embody the premises of both magical realism and queer theory.

In this context, my biological and assigned family, which constitutes the primary site of my existence, established the foundational problematic of my artistic inquiry. I do not separate the institution of the family from the broader sociopolitical

mechanisms that sustain its normative continuity. The family, which is shaped by cis-heteropatriarchal structures, functions not only as a realm of personal experience but also as a tool for state regulation and social discipline. Thus, for me, family exists not merely as a social unit but as an ideological battleground where identity, belonging, and resistance intersect.

Thus, my central concern can be defined as queering the historicity and memory of the cis-heteropatriarchal family structure because as queer theory and magical realism teach us, to alter the past's narrative is to destabilize the present's. By queering memories, I don't just revisit history but rewrite its contract with now. At this intersection, counter-memory work and queer studies focus on making visible the erased histories of LGBTI+ struggles, suppressed voices, identities, and narratives excluded from mainstream historical accounts. Archival records, oral histories, and documentary filmmaking have become key methodologies for queering historiography in this field.

In counter-memory work, archival materials often serve to fill gaps in dominant historical narratives. However, as Halberstam and Danbolt demonstrate, traditional archives are deeply entangled with power structures (2009; 2005). Archives systematically privilege official historical accounts, with state institutions and other hegemonic actors determining which documents are preserved and which are erased. Archival impulse expresses a desire to reclaim lost histories (Foster 2004); however, Danbolt and Halberstam (2009; 2005) caution that without incorporating queer-feminist perspectives, this impulse risks romanticizing our own histories. Thus, archival practices demand ethical and political responsibility rather than just recovering suppressed histories. It requires critically reorganizing the archive itself. My own work embodies this paradox. When confronting the absence of childhood footage to fill my life's gaps, I'm forced to invent new methodologies. Here, magical realism meets queer praxis. If the archive won't hold me, I'll animate my own.

Hence, rather than privileging one archival method over another, my work focuses on methodologically queering the way we look at the family institution I seek to problematize rather than prioritizing visibility of LGBTI+ subjects. Borrowing from Halberstam, who positions the phantasmal against hard evidence, lost ancestry against inheritance, and erasure against epigraph as queer strategies (2011), I focus on the silences, gaps, and distortions within normativity, through fractured spaces and figures, translucencies, temporal/spatial leaps, and deliberate disorientations as the queer representation.

In this context, my animation film *Threshold* can be identified as a counter-memory work while also carrying the inherent ambivalence in its relationship to visibility

and representation. While the visibility of queer subjects and narratives remains crucial, both the methods used to render erased histories visible and the politics underlying this re-visibilization constitute the field's most critical debates. A crucial question concerns the distinction between LGBTI+ themed content that includes queer subjects and on the other hand, queer modes of production that methodologically intervene in normative representational forms and narrative structures. At this point, being closer to later methodology, I adopt magical realism's narrative strategies to interrogate familial structures. When examining family practices, a critical intersection emerges between queer studies and memory studies that deserves attention. While I will briefly address this intersection, it's important to clarify that the theoretical foundation of this work remains firmly rooted in magical realism and queer theory.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Magical realism is primarily defined as a literary mode that amalgamates reality with extraordinary elements. It flourished in Latin American literature during the 1960s and 1970s, with the contribution of prominent authors like Gabriel García Márquez and Julio Cortázar. The genre's literary roots are essential for understanding its role in shaping cultural identity and serving as a form of resistance.

Although magical realism is most commonly associated with literature, it also thrives in cinema as a powerful way to reflect contemporary crises like the climate crisis, war, migration, and economic inequality among others. For instance, the Palme d'Or-winning *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2010) employs magical realism to explore themes of memory, temporality, and reckoning with the past within the specific historical context of Thailand, whereas *The Dead and the Others* (2018) addresses cultural exclusion, identity conflict, and historical trauma through a more subtle and immersive form of magical realism.

In *Threshold*, I extend this legacy by weaponizing animation's ability to literalize metaphor. Archival family footage collides with hand-drawn looking metamorphoses; heteronormative rituals unravel through glitching visuals; and suppressed histories reemerge as animated interventions. The three-act structure of the film consciously mirrors magical realism's narrative arc, beginning in oppressive domestic realism before culminating in an abstract finale where disembodied figures dance freely, materializing what José Esteban Muñoz might call queer utopian potential (2019).

This creative choice builds on magical realism's power to simultaneously document reality while undermining its dominant narratives. Just as Latin American authors embedded political critique within fantastical storytelling, my work reconstructs familial archives through animation's unique capacities, transforming occult symbolism (like forbidden amulets) and intentional technical failures (glitches, distortions) into tools for destabilizing normative timelines. Here, the magical operates not as escapism but as what Wendy Faris identifies as irreducible elements that fracture

dominant realities (1995). Just as magical realism reimagines reality to expose its fractures, my work uses the medium's plasticity to reconstruct familial archives, transforming them into sites of queer possibility.

It's a compelling narrative tool deeply connected to social issues and carrying the transformative potential. In literature, magical realism is often treated as a distinct genre, but in cinema, it operates more fluidly. Rather than being studied as a genre, it functions as a storytelling strategy. This approach allows it to adapt to diverse visual forms, making its impact even more striking. While literary and cinematic modes of magical realism share core similarities, the cinematic version unfolds in more varied ways due to film's inherently multidisciplinary nature. Cinema encompasses production, visual composition, narrative structure, theory, and genre conventions. This distinction highlights the unique strengths of visual storytelling compared to its written counterpart. Among cinematic forms, animation proves an especially natural fit for magical realism. Both share a fundamental trait of reconstructing reality and crafting worlds where the extraordinary feels organic. This synergy allows them to create alternative realities, not entirely fantastical or dreamlike, but imbued with traces of the familiar, making the impossible seamlessly believable.

Magical realism's earliest roots in the visual arts reveal its fascination with merging the ordinary and the fantastical. Franz Roh, who first coined the term in 1925, argued that magic realism does not merely imitate the external world through realistic depiction. Instead, it seeks to uncover the existing magic within ordinary objects (1995). Roh used the term magic realism to describe a new European painting style, which he called Post-Expressionism, as a return to realism, though not in the traditional sense of objective representation (Figure 2.1). He argued that this new style emphasized the enchantment of existence, capturing the inherent qualities of objects and the miracle of their being. Unlike Impressionism and Expressionism (Figure 2.2), which embraced fluid, transformative aesthetics, this new approach depicted reality with a heightened sense of permanence, as if objects had a brief stay in eternity (Roh 1995, 17).

Figure 2.1 Conrad Felixmuller, *The Beggar of Prachatice*, 1924



As Irene Guenther observes, magic realism, also referred to as Post-Expressionism, is fundamentally oriented toward everyday reality and the representation of the familiar world (1995). This focus on the ordinary forms a core feature of magical realism across diverse artistic practices, including literature, cinema, and visual arts. This engagement with the usual is often entangled with socio-cultural and historical traumas. This is evident in the differing yet interconnected developments of magical realism in Germany and Latin America in response to distinct political and cultural crises. In the Weimar Republic (1919–1933), magic realism emerged as a dominant artistic expression that captured the contradictions of urban modernity and reshaped subjectivities, while simultaneously functioning as a medium for working through the collective trauma of World War I (Guenther 1995). In Latin America, by contrast, magical realism evolved as a literary strategy of resistance against colonial power structures and hegemonic historical narratives. According to Guenther, the first literary adoption of the term in Latin America followed the 1927 Spanish translation of Franz Roh's foundational text. She links its expansion throughout the Americas in the 1930s and 1940s to the migration of German intellectuals and artists seeking refuge from the rise of the Third Reich (1995). Felicity Gee similarly identifies this translation as pivotal to the transatlantic transmission of the concept, marking a key moment in the evolution of magical realism as a globally resonant aesthetic and political mode (2021).

Figure 2.2 George Grosz, *Explosion*, 1917



While Guenther traces magic realism's migration to Latin America, Chanady interrogates its perceived authenticity, questioning why it became uniquely tied to the region despite its transnational origins. Chanady argues that magical realism came to be seen as the region's "authentic literary expression." She examines how the mode was theorized as a "peripheral" aesthetic unique to Latin America by linking it to postcolonial discourse. She builds on Angel Flores' claim that magical realism became a deliberate marker of Latin American identity (Chanady 1995).

Chanady identifies a contradiction in Flores's argumentation. While Flores positions magical realism as Latin America's authentic literary form, he simultaneously traces its roots to transnational modernists like Kafka. Chanady interprets this as an appropriation of avant-garde fiction to a specific continent but fails to provide a convincing justification for why the mode became uniquely tied to Latin America (Chanady 1995).

The essentialist association between magical realism and Latin America is challenged by Chanady, who argues that the region is not inherently "magical." She deconstructs this assumption by highlighting how Latin American artists reappropriated indigenous and local elements as a form of cultural resistance, particularly against the French Surrealists' exoticized portrayals of "primitive mentalities" (Chanady 1995). This resistance, she suggests, was a strategic positioning rather than an innate quality of Latin American identity.

Felicity Gee further contextualizes this debate by examining Alejo Carpentier's transnational influences. Being a central figure to magical realism's literary canon, Carpentier was deeply embedded in European avant-garde circles, having worked

in French surrealist film and Cuban cinema before the magical realism genre's rise (Gee 2021). He was born in Switzerland to French-Russian parents and raised in Havana. Carpentier's cosmopolitan background, which contains extensive travel across Europe and Latin America, complicates the notion of magical realism as a purely "local" expression. While his case does not represent all Latin American writers, it underscores the transcultural exchanges that shaped the genre, revealing the intellectual, social, and economic networks behind its emergence.

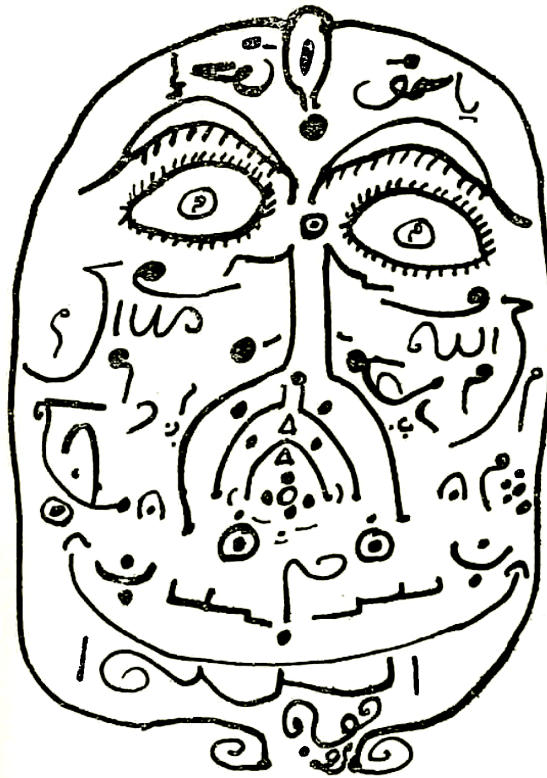
Chanady's critique of the essentialist approach that posits a "natural" connection between Latin America and magical realism provides a critical framework for queer theory and animation studies. Just as queer theory's challenges biologically determined categories of gender and sexuality by revealing their performative construction (Butler 1990), Chanady's analysis demonstrates that cultural expressions cannot be anchored to geographical or identitarian "essences." On the other hand, the power of animation in this context also stems from its capacity to subvert essentialist categories, much like magical realism achieved in Latin America. By constructing reality rather than merely imitating it, animation has the potential to disrupt essentialist representations, transform into a strategic tool for cultural resistance, and conceptualize identities, bodies, time, and space diverged from the laws of the universe we know. For example, at the intersection of queer theory and animation, the medium's unique malleability allows identities to be represented as fluid, performative constructs, challenging dominant discourses that seek to fix and essentialize marginalized subjectivities.

Alejo Carpentier's work is significant in understanding magical realism's engagement with vernacular traditions, folklore, "primitiveness," and the politics of cultural representation. While the "magical" elements in his stories often stem from Latin American mythologies, his portrayal, especially of the Afro-Caribbean protagonist Ti Noël in *The Kingdom of This World* (Carpentier 1989) reveals a tension between local traditions and European exoticism. Though his depiction of the "marvelous real" (*lo real maravilloso*) appears to echo French Surrealist nostalgia for pre-modern utopias, Chanady distinguishes Carpentier's approach. European Surrealists exoticized non-European cultures to critique their own society and the dominant intellectual canon, whereas Carpentier reclaims the "marvelous" as a tool of postcolonial resistance (1989). Here, folklore isn't merely aestheticized; it's a language of resistance, rooted in specific histories of oppression and survival.

This tension between reclamation and subversion extends far beyond Latin America's anti-colonial struggles. For instance, in *Threshold*, I integrate Anatolia's othered occult practices, which are amulets designed to break families and arouse discord (Figure 2.3). In Islamic thought, it is founded on the belief that Arabic letters

and numbers hold divine meanings and effects because they originated in heaven from God (Sariyannis 2020). Therefore, they can contact cosmic powers and affect earthly things. The combination of letters is the key mechanism for contacting the unseen world (*ghayb*) and conveying encoded messages in these amulets. This is forbidden in Islamic thought because it is seen as disregarding God's will and asking for help from dark powers (*jinn*s) to influence the future for earthly aims. Jinn is a supernatural being in Islamic theology. It is mentioned in the Quran and is believed to live in parallel to humans. Such practices were not recognized by the Sheikh al-Islam or the Ottoman Empire, and legal and enforcement measures were taken to prevent them, as they are also prohibited in today's Turkey (Yanardağ 2018). Throughout the history of Turkey, they have been associated with people who are either lacking genuine knowledge or are outright fraudsters. As a result, they are primarily carried out by folk practitioners (Zarinebaf 2010). I interpret them as the queerest of folk spells, doubly marginalized, thrice forbidden. Like Carpentier's Ti Noël wielding Vodou against plantation owners, I weaponize this outlaw magic against the very systems that exiled it, which is the cis-heteropatriarchal order.

Figure 2.3 Amulet, *Ya Âdem* (invocation to Prophet Adam). From *Sevgileri Büyüleri*, by İsmet Zeki Eyüboğlu, İstanbul: Der Yayınları, 2000 p. 354



The amulets infused with Ottoman esotericism, pre-Islamic shamanism, and cross-cultural mysticism like Kabbalah become more than cultural hybrids in my work

(Uluğ 2017). They're queer sabotage, exploiting the taboo power of "family-destroying magic" to expose the fragility of enforced domestic norms and heteronormativity. Their power lies precisely in their outlaw status. What the state called "sedition," what *hodjas* called "deviance," and what court sorcerers called "impurity," I reclaim as an aesthetic of rupture.

In this context, magical realism in my film tries to do more than blur the line between reality and fantasy; it actively reestablishes the suppressed. By giving tangible form to occult practices like forbidden amulets or 'immoral' spells, it haunts the present with the ghosts of marginalized histories. I adopt magical realism to transform the family-breaking magic that power structures are labeled as "wicked" into a queer weapon. When these taboo traditions appear on screen as "real" and undeniable forces, they do something radical, they literalize the fears of the oppressor, mirroring how queer visibility threatens cis-heteropatriarchal power structures. What makes this approach distinctly magical realist is that my intentional reclamation of folkloric and occult elements rather than simply queer representation. The work operates on dual levels. It asserts queer visibility while simultaneously resurrecting suppressed spiritual practices. This creates what I call a "double threat," me as a queer creator engaging with forbidden magic, I challenge normative structures twice over. Firstly, through non-normative gender identity and sexuality, and non-sanctioned knowledge systems. This is magical realism's most destabilizing power, not just to imagine alternatives, but to force the dominant culture to confront what it tried to bury, rendering its panic into a toolkit for resistance (Lang 2020).

Carpentier's work operates similarly. His critique lies in subverting Surrealist tropes. He does this not by exoticizing Latin America's rainforests, rivers, or racial diversity, but by insisting they are inherently marvelous, exposing the colonial gaze embedded in European culture (1989). Like the repurposed amulets in my film, his appropriation of "primitive mentality" thus becomes a strategic act of identity construction, one that simultaneously rejects European hegemony and redefines the marvelous as an organic part of Latin American reality Chanady (1995). Where Carpentier reclaims the marvelous real as Latin America's organic truth, I reclaim othered occultism as queer truth, both exposing how dominant systems criminalize what threatens them, and both resurrecting those very "threats" as acts of defiance.

Extending this debate of Carpentier's surrealist influences, Fredric Jameson offers another key distinction within magical realism by contrasting Carpentier (1904–1980), one of its earliest practitioners, with Gabriel García Márquez (1927–2014), the genre's most iconic 20th-century figure. Jameson argues that while Márquez's work leans more into the fantastic (e.g., flying priests, levitating girls), Carpentier's marvelous real remains closer to surrealism, rooted in historical and

cultural hybridity rather than apparent supernaturalism (1989). This aligns with Chanady's earlier emphasis on Carpentier's strategic use of the marvelous as anti-colonial discourse, further complicating the genre's boundaries and definitions. This is connected to cinema in terms of the visual elements of magical realism. It varies in the sense that overt visual effects can render a film magical realist, as can more subtle techniques, similar to the cultural hybridity found in Carpentier's works. Lang, for example, explores this through the metatextuality and metafictionality of a film as defining features of magical realism in cinema (2020). In my work, while animation effortlessly brings extraordinary elements to life, formal techniques, such as incorporating actual archive footage but interactively blending it into the scene, also contribute to creating a magical realist effect.

The evolution of magical realism in film reflects its literary roots while carving out its own distinct visual language. In the mid-20th century, mainstream Western cinema largely adhered to realist conventions, prioritizing realism and linear narratives. Moreover, later on, while postmodernist films of the 1980s and 90s critique their own representational methods by exposing how ideologies construct historical meaning and subject positions, they often inadvertently reinforce capitalist realism by negating utopian alternatives (Fisher 2009). Magical realism, conversely, employs anachronistic narratives to create collective spaces outside mainstream temporality, as seen in geographically isolated communities where preserve alternative histories (*Underground* 1995; *Daughters of the Dust* 1991), magically suspended worlds where fantasy allegorizes political resistance (Pan's *Labyrinth* 2006, or socially marginalized groups where the oppressed reclaim agency through surreal means (*The Tin Drum*, 1979) (Lang 2020).

Felicity Gee expands this framework by tracing magical realism's subversive role in documentary filmmaking, particularly through what she terms "ethno-magic-realist" cinema (Gee 2021). Analyzing works like Murnau's *Tabu* (1931) and Eisenstein's *¡Que viva México!* (1930), she demonstrates how these films emerged alongside Carpentier's literary magical realism. These films hybridize avant-garde techniques with ethnographic research (Clifford 1986) to challenge dominant ideologies and totalitarian rhetoric. Gee's analysis reveals how early documentary traditions like Buñuel's *Land Without Bread* (1933) and Rouch's *Les maîtres fous* (1955) employed magical realism not merely as aesthetic experimentation but as a counter-hegemonic language (Gee 2021). Just as literature has long balanced mimetic and fantastic modes, cinema inherits this duality, from the Lumière brothers' documentary realism to Méliès' enchanted spectacle. In other words, magical realism is accepted not just a genre but as a narrative strategy. It revives what dominant histories suppress, whether colonial erasures, queer resistance, or subaltern memories, transforming

them into visible, disruptive forces.

Gee's central argument is the role of cinematic ambiguity, which means the deliberate blurring of "fictionality and truth, artifice and artlessness, montage and voice-over narration," which engenders the "magical" dimension of these films (2021). However, unlike Latin American magical realism, which transforms cultural specificity into an accessible metaphor, these ethnographic works often presuppose a Western viewer's gaze. This tension raises critical questions: How does unfamiliarity itself become coded as "magical"? Does this magic function primarily as a state of critique or as an aesthetic device? And how do formal choices such as *cinéma vérité* techniques or voice-over narration mediate audience reception?

These early experiments established key characteristics that would define magical realist cinema. It is the blending of documentary authenticity with surreal elements (Lang 2020), often through *vérité* techniques that destabilize fixed identities. Drawing from post-surrealist visual language and Italian neorealism's social commitment, magical realism frequently incorporated popular forms, using comedy, crime narratives, or romance as vehicles for political allegory. Where literary magical realism primarily engaged postcolonial discourse, its cinematic counterpart developed distinct emphases on historical trauma, collective memory, and utopian visions while maintaining the core tension between ethnographic observation and imaginative intervention that Gee identifies in these foundational works (2021).

On the other hand, Cody Lang examines magical realist cinema through metatextual and metafictional elements that blur the boundaries between a film's diegetic and external reality, diegetic meaning the self-contained world of the story. Metatextuality refers to a text's awareness of itself as a constructed artifact, often through references to other works or commentary on its own form. Metafictionality, a subset of this, actively draws attention to the artificiality of storytelling, such as breaking the fourth wall, exposing narrative devices, or embedding stories within stories. Lang argues that metafictionality is essential to magical realism because it foregrounds the constructed nature of narrative, forcing viewers to confront the fluid intersection of reality and fantasy (2020).

Lang further explores covert diegetic metafiction, which is a subtle form of self-referentiality where metafictional elements are embedded within the story's world rather than overtly announced. Unlike direct address or blatant narrative intrusions, covert diegetic metafiction operates through subtle cues, such as a character's awareness of their fictionality or embedded media such as films-within-films. He analyzes this technique in mockumentaries, film essays, and works like *Three Crowns of the Sailor* (1983*b*), *Kafka* (1991), and Raúl Ruiz's *City of Pirates* (1983*a*), showing how

magical realism uses these devices to destabilize perceived reality (Lang 2020).

These techniques resonate with the animated documentary, which similarly negotiates truth and artifice. Like magical realist metafiction, animated documentaries use self-reflexivity to question representation by juxtaposing hand-drawn or digital animation with archival footage (Waltz with Bashir, 2008) or by employing overt stylistic shifts to highlight subjectivity (Tower, 2016). Both genres destabilize fixed notions of reality, whether through magical realism's narrative layering or animation's ability to visualize memory and trauma beyond live-action's limits. Similarly, I employ metafictional and self-referential techniques in my film. Toward the end, a hand-drawn looking animated character intervenes in the filmic world by pushing actual archival footage within the environment, altering it in the process. It reflects the growing agency of a ghostly presence, a silent metaphor for queer existence, who gradually gains the power to intervene in the film's world by the final act.

While the political and historical dimensions of magical realism have been explored thus far, Wendy Faris systematizes its literary mechanisms, identifying five defining characteristics that distinguish the genre from pure fantasy or surrealism (1995). First is the presence of irreducible magic, events that transgress the universe's known physical laws yet are presented as ordinary occurrences within the narrative world. Second is the attention to realistic detail that constructs the phenomenal world, distinguishing magical realism from fantasy and allegory while representing the 'realism' component of the term. Third, the text creates hesitation in readers in distinguishing reality and the magical. Fourth, the narrative presents a seamless merging of realistic and magical realms. Finally, the genre characteristically subverts conventional understandings of time, space, and identity Faris (1995).

Faris's framework provides a crucial foundation for understanding magical realism's narrative techniques, but the mode's adaptability extends beyond literature as it is discussed. Cody Lang (2020) examines magical realism's cinematic applications, analyzing it as a transnational critical category that shares methods with surrealism, horror, gothic, science fiction, and fantasy genres. According to Lang, magical realism in cinema is distinct from its literary counterpart because it has appeared across various periods and regions in film history, often reflecting vernacular representations of communities. In East Central European cinema, for instance, directors like Emir Kusturica, Jan Jakub Kolski, Dorota Kędzierzawska, and Béla Tarr employ magical realism to depict vernacular representations, meaning the local depictions of towns, childhood memories, and marginalized identities that the accelerated modernization of late capitalism has abandoned. These films oscillate between two aesthetic tendencies, a miserabilist approach that underscores societal despair, and a utopian perspective where magic fills everyday life. Lang connects this duality to

Ernst Bloch's theory of utopia, particularly the concept of non-synchronous time, where remnants of the revolutionary past merge with visions of the future, mirroring Benjamin's notion of historical rebellion (2020).

In cinematic magical realism, organically integrating mythic and metaphorical elements into the diegetic reality is achieved through motivated signs, which means carefully chosen visual and auditory elements that function on two levels simultaneously. The first is their literal, surface meaning (denotative) and the other is their deeper symbolic significance (connotative) (Barthes 1977; Metz 1974). This dual operation allows metaphors to literally manifest within the narrative reality. For instance, a character's emotional isolation might physically transform their environment within the film's world. Through this technique, magical realist cinema creates its distinctive aesthetic where symbolic meanings become tangible narrative facts (2020).

Paul Wells (1998), a foundational scholar in animation studies, similarly examines the medium's radical potential to represent fluid identities and challenge normative depictions, a capacity that aligns with magical realism's political function as theorized by Chanady (1995). Where magical realism legitimizes non-Western epistemologies at the narrative level, animation provides the visual and temporal language to render these alternative realities as diegetically authentic. Wells specifically highlights animation's power to reconfigure representations of gender, species, and indigenous identity through its ability to depict the body as fundamentally ambiguous (1998).

Gloria Jeanne Bodtorf Clark reminds us that the genre's magical elements fundamentally emerge from indigenous cultural traditions rooted in "religion, myth, superstition, and nature," with oral storytelling serving as their primary transmission method (2007). This emphasis on indigenous origins intersects critically with Lang's (2020) warning about Western interpretive frameworks, specifically how the Western gaze often exoticizes "magic" by viewing it as uniquely peripheral rather than recognizing its transcultural and historical contexts. This exoticization stems from what we might call the Enlightenment's epistemological hegemony, which systematically constructed indigenous knowledge systems as "irrational" or "backward" (Said 1978; Wallerstein 2006).

When we consider the strong ties between magical realism and indigenous cultures, we must simultaneously confront two problematic tendencies in its reception. Firstly, the exoticization of marginalized voices when their works are classified as magical realist artificially separates them from their Western counterparts. The second is the very act of seeking inclusion in the Western canon. It has the risk of replicat-

ing colonial logic by accepting the West as the judge of aesthetic value and forcing marginalized narratives to conform to Eurocentric expectations. This tension mirrors the skepticism expressed by queer artists and feminists toward mainstream archival and gallery systems. Just as Danbolt (2009) highlights how museums and galleries operate as exclusionary archives that historically marginalize female, non-heterosexual, and non-white artists, the literary canon functions similarly, reinforcing patriarchal, racist, and heterosexist hierarchies.

Moreover, as queer-feminist critiques note, inclusion in the main literary canon may be seen as an ideal, but the concept of canon itself is a mechanism of exclusion (Danbolt 2009; Halberstam 2011). Queer theory proposes that the fact that history, and therefore art history, is written by the male and hegemonic, the attempt to place queer art in this historicity and network of norms in line with male and institutional expectations threatens Queer. On the other hand, from Butler's theorization, overemphasizing and "caricaturing" queer art's differences from other artistic practices and traditions might seem like creating an autonomous area. However, it might lead to originating power structures that bound it. Butler summarizes this: "There is more to learn from resisting the institutional domestication of queer thinking. For normalizing the queer would be, after all, its sad finish" (Butler 1994, 21). In 1987, Bersani put forward arguments parallel to Butler's in that when the differences are overemphasized, they become the only issue. He states that culturally marginal art intermittently celebrates minority cultures in a way that pleases the dominant culture because the dominant culture seeks to reinforce differential barriers (Bersani 2010). The queer critique of institutional domestication and separatism raises a parallel question for magical realism. Should integration into the cultural "center" truly be the goal? Magical realism's radical potential may be diluted if it merely seeks acceptance within a Eurocentric literary establishment.

Drawing from queer and postcolonial critiques, the question is whether inclusion perpetuates the very hierarchies magical realism once resisted. This canonization, integration, separation, or domestication discussion is also connected to the debate over whether magical realism is a postcolonial mode or not. Some challenge this by highlighting its potential European influences and broader global demonstrations. Cody Lang (2020) identifies affinities between magical realism and earlier European traditions of the Baroque and Romantic periods, stating how Romanticism's resistance to Enlightenment rationalism resembles magical realism's subversion of Western epistemology. Lang further supports his position by citing influential magical realist works from dominant cultural centers, such as Robert Kroetsch's *What the Crow Said* (Canada, 1978), Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* (Britain, 1984), and Haruki Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore* (Japan, 2002) (Lang 2020, 8). These

examples, he argues, undermine the notion of magical realism as an exclusively postcolonial mode.

Lang's analysis and the examples he provides (Kroetsch, Carter, Murakami) demonstrate that magical realism is not limited to postcolonial contexts (2020). As Mariboho also demonstrates, contemporary artists like Tea Obreht, Haruki Murakami, Jeff Nichols, and Lars von Trier employ magical realism precisely because it remains uniquely equipped to articulate trauma and systemic absurdity, regardless of their geopolitical positioning (Mariboho 2016). This aligns with Rushdie's seminal 1985 assertion that "Realism can no longer express or account for the absurd reality of the world we live in—a world which has the capability of destroying itself at any moment" (2016, 7).

Faris also recognizes expanding magical realism as a critical framework, building on Jean Weisgerber's binary categorization of the mode into "scholarly" and "mythic/folkloric" types (1995). The scholarly variant, associated primarily with European writers, constructs a speculative universe through artistic and philosophical conjecture. The folkloric tradition draws from indigenous myths and collective cultural memory, also rooted in Latin America. Crucially, Faris transcends this geographical and stylistic dichotomy by positioning magical realism as postmodern in its ethos (1995). She argues for its broader applicability beyond Latin America, identifying characteristics such as the irreducible element, ontological disruption, and narrative simultaneity that allow the mode to vary across cultural contexts while keeping its subversive potential (1995).

This binary of folkloric/scholarly frames the magical realism's mass appeal as either marketable exoticism, which is folkloric elements reduced to cliché, or aesthetic compromise, meaning scholarly sacrifice for popularity (Slemon 1995). It is precisely these rigid categorizations that Jack Halberstam's low theory (2011) seeks to destabilize. Adapting Stuart Hall's concept, Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011) rejects such either/or frameworks, proposing instead a mode of thinking that thrives in in-between spaces. Also drawing equally from marginal knowledge and popular culture to "undo the hegemony of high theory" (Halberstam 2011, 2). By embracing what dominant systems dismiss such as failure, forgetfulness, or illegibility, Halberstam's approach queers these very binaries, revealing how low theory can disrupt capitalism's success-driven logic and the hierarchies embedded in cultural production (2011). Ultimately, framing magical realism's growing popularity as inherently linked to a loss of artistic or intellectual depth risks reproducing the hierarchical divisions that Halberstam critiques. A "low theory" lens, however, encourages us to move beyond binary judgments of "failure" or "success", instead revealing how the genre's broad appeal might disrupt dominant cultural logics.

The illegitimacy of the amulets in my film, within orthodox structures, mirrors the queer art of failure that Halberstam champions. Both represent knowledge systems that “fail” by hegemonic measures yet sustain alternative ways of being and knowing. It happens whether through occult practitioners operating in secrecy or queer artists embracing non-normative forms. In magical realism’s ability to center such marginalized practices as organic components of narrative reality, neither exoticized nor explained away, we see its most radical potential. It renders visible what power structures would dismiss as backward, irrational, or simply impossible.

This tension is further exacerbated by the notion of magical realism as a “natural” genre, and the inherent talent of Latin American writers also undermines the intellectual labor and accumulation behind it. The widespread popularity of magical realist literature is often attributed to its accessible and engaging language, creating the impression that it is an easily producible form. However, this linguistic simplicity is a deliberate stylistic choice, designed to reach a broad audience. Far from being an accidental or unskilled mode of expression, magical realism intentionally transforms complex intellectual and cultural traditions into elements of popular culture. Faris distinguishes magical realist fiction from modernist works by its use of straightforward storytelling to immediately engage the reader. She interprets this as a deliberate strategy to entertain, noting the genre’s expansion into mainstream American films and other media (Faris 1995). The unexplained magical elements, she suggests, invite audiences to enjoy the narrative without immediate rationalization, though this eventually leads to deeper questioning of reality.

Mariboho maps out the ongoing debates about the classification of contemporary works as magical realist. On one side of the argument, scholars such as Liam Connell state that labeling peripheral or marginalized writers as magical realists risks essentializing and exoticizing their works. This categorization, Connell argues, reinforces a binary that positions Western literature as rational and empirical, while non-Western narratives are framed as inherently mystical or faith-based (1998). On the other hand, critics like Maggie Ann Bowers observe that publishers and the cultural industry frequently impose the magical realist label for marketability, even as many writers resist it, with the concern of reducing their works to clichés. In this view, magical realism functions as a commercial strategy, tailored to Western audiences unfamiliar with the cultural contexts these novels engage with (Bowers 2004).

These debates around magical realism’s classification, cultural positioning, and political function become even more complex when situated within specific local contexts. Concerning my own practice, it is crucial to acknowledge that the work is being created in Turkey, a setting where occult traditions, particularly those tied to

heterodox Islamic practices such as amulet use, remain embedded in everyday life. This raises further questions about audience and reception. How might viewers who are culturally familiar with these practices respond to their representation within an aesthetic framework often associated with magical realism? The stakes become particularly acute when considering Turkey's political climate, where the government's declaration of 2025 as the "Year of the Family" signals escalating anti-gender policies. In this charged context, my work deliberately mobilizes heterodox occult imagery, specifically amulets used to disrupt family harmony, as a queer intervention. Through magical realism's visual and narrative strategies, these appropriated practices destabilize normative ideals of family, gender, and morality. My position as a queer creator employing these symbols adds another layer of subversion, transforming folk magic traditionally dismissed as superstition into a potent critique of state-sponsored heteropatriarchy. The very practices condemned as threats to social order become, through artistic recontextualization, tools for exposing that order's constructed nature.

Similarly, Felicity Gee examines magical realism in cinema as a form of creative resistance, arguing that it fosters alternative discourses on lived experiences and global politics. She defines it as "interdisciplinary cinema informed by literature and art history in non-traditional and innovative ways" (Gee 2021, 1). Unlike conventional genre classifications, Gee highlights magical realism's radical potential to challenge hegemonic rationality through formal experimentation, rooted in techniques of photography, painting, and particularly photorealism. This perspective aligns with Mariboho's exploration of magical realism's adaptability, further demonstrating its relevance across visual methods in addressing contemporary crises.

These new adaptations preserve magical realism's subversive core while expanding its political vocabulary. It is a trajectory that finds particularly potent expression in queer animation. Sean Griffin, as a pioneering academic in the field of queer theory and animation studies, states that even though animation is perceived as a children's medium, it has always had a history of "queerness." The mode's inherent fluidity between reality and fantasy, already identified by Faris as challenging fixed categories (1995), mirrors queer theory's foundational critique of stable identities and binaries (Butler 1990). Just as magical realism destabilizes Western rationalism through "irreducible magic," queer animation employs the medium's formal properties to subvert normative representations of gender, sexuality, and embodiment. This connection becomes evident when examining animation through Sean Griffin's (2017) framework of the "illusion of life," which refers to the medium's unique capacity to create movement and continuity from static images. Like magical realism's blending of real/magical (Faris 1995), animation's ontological ambiguity of being

neither fully “alive” nor inanimate makes it inherently queer in its resistance to fixed categorization.

This resonates particularly with experimental animation’s materialist techniques, where filmmakers like Jan Švankmajer use frame-by-frame metamorphosis to destabilize fixed notions of reality. Just as *Happy as Lazzaro* (2018) reconfigures historical time narratively. Such techniques resonate with Judith Butler’s (1990) notion of performative identity, where subjectivity is continually constructed rather than innate, paralleling Berger and Luckmann’s foundational argument that social reality is discursively produced (1967). Butler extends social constructionist principles to gender, sexuality, and identity, revealing how hegemonic discourses systematically regulate and marginalize non-normative identities. According to Griffin (2017), animation, however, resists such regulatory frameworks through its inherent fluidity, a quality that he identifies as central to its queer potential. By visualizing contradictions within dominant discourses, animation creates spaces of resistance where rigid categories unravel. Much like magical realism’s decolonial critique exposes the artificiality of colonial epistemologies, animation’s capacity to juxtapose multiple, even competing, narratives lays bare the constructed nature of gender and sexuality. Thus, animation does not passively reflect reality; it actively participates in its reconstruction, proposing alternatives that destabilize normative structures.

This destabilization is rooted in animation’s formal plasticity, which allows gender and identity to exist in flux, perpetually escaping the “line” of normative categorization. As Saint-Oyant (2017) argues, animation is a form that “moves between categories, blurring and complicating motion and stillness, reality and fantasy, drawing and photography.” This ontological flexibility finds powerful expression in both the metaphorical and technical dimensions of the “mesh” concept. On a theoretical level, Sedgwick’s (1993, 8) “open mesh of possibilities” captures queer relationality’s resistance to rigid taxonomies, a connective tissue between marginalized experiences that fosters unexpected alliances across race, gender, and class. On a technical level, this metaphor materializes literally in 3D animation’s polygonal meshes which is networks of vertices and edges that, like queer subjectivity, remain perpetually unfixed and redefinable. Just as the mesh in digital modeling forms the undifferentiated basis for infinite possible forms, Sedgwick’s mesh represents identity as existing dynamically in the gaps and overlaps between fixed categories (1993).

This dual significance mirrors how queerness functions in Griffin’s (2017) methodological sense, not merely as identity marker, but as a critical lens that interrogates heteronormativity’s “natural” order. The mesh metaphor thus becomes particularly rich. It represents both how queer individuals form relational networks through shared experiences of exclusion, and how identity itself remains flexible, existing in

what Sedgwick calls that “dynamic space in between” fixed categories, neither reducible to gay identity nor to pure ambiguity. José Esteban Muñoz would later term this conceptual openness as a horizon of queer potentiality where identity exists not as fixed essence but as continuous becoming, always negotiated through relational contexts and power structures (2019). In animation studies, this framework emerges as the medium’s formal properties, such as morphing, layering, and temporal elasticity, visually materialize Sedgwick’s theoretical intervention, rendering visible those gaps and overlaps that challenge hegemonic systems of representation.

Saint-Oyant analyzes Japanese anime director Satoshi Kon’s films (*Perfect Blue*, 1997; *Millennium Actress*, 2001) to explore the queerness of animation within the aspects of form, style, and narrative techniques. Her primary focus is Kon’s use of reflexive cinema to resist historical normative codes and conventions (Saint-Oyant 2017). Queerness in Kon’s films is not because the stories of LGBTI+ characters are in focus, but because they deconstruct norms in social and artistic traditions instead.

According to Saint-Oyant, Kon’s films are out of line with mainstream cinema and anime conventions because he instrumentalizes animated images to create alternative paths. Some of Kon’s essential methods are “narrative discontinuities, authorial intrusions, the frame-within-the-frame, the film-within-the-film” (Saint-Oyant 2017, 9). Besides these reflexive techniques, Kon also creates disorientations in gender, sex, class, and family by interwinding reality and fantasy. The formal elements of composition or framing mirror the uncertainty of reality, turning the character’s world into something unstable and untrustworthy (Saint-Oyant 2017, 10).

This capacity to reconfigure reality also makes animation a particularly fertile ground for exploring transformation which is a central theoretical and aesthetic concern in queer art. When examined through the lens of animation’s formal properties, the concepts of transformation, disorientation, and metamorphosis gain renewed critical force. Sara Ahmed’s foundational work on “orientation” (2006) offers valuable insight into the mechanics of disorientation. Drawing on the spatial implications of the term, Ahmed theorizes orientation as the dominant sociocultural directions as spatial, temporal, sexual, and racial, that individuals are expected to follow. These normative “lines,” as she calls them, not only mark boundaries but dictate the “proper” trajectories for identity, desire, and behavior. By revealing the constructed and performative nature of these orientations, Ahmed exposes the illusion of fixed subjectivity and the repetitive mechanisms through which normativity sustains itself (2006).

Animation’s plasticity uniquely materializes this openness through metamorphosis,

exaggerated corporeality, and temporal elasticity (Wells 1998); the medium dissolves monolithic significations. This dissolution not only mirrors the structural and ontological disorientation central to queer theory but also expands the affective and mnemonic capacities of animation. Nicholas Andrew Miller, in his analysis of painting and traditional animation, highlights how both forms engage intimately with visual ephemerality and the fragility of memory. For Miller, the animator, like the painter, experiences drawing as a deeply personal, physical act, rendering animation a kind of “printing machine for the memory” Miller (2020). This personal approach to the past enables a multiplicity of metamorphic expressions across individually rendered frames.

What becomes particularly compelling in this context is Miller’s suggestion that animation, through repetition and variation, mimics the way memory operates, not as a continuous cinematic flow, but as fragmented, image-based recall. Movement, the foundational illusion of animation, is here reconceived not as a stable progression through time, but as an ongoing visual disruption. As Miller notes, “the antithesis of stillness is not motion but metamorphosis” (2020).

In this light, queer magical realist animation does not merely reconfigure bodies or identities, it challenges the very structures through which memory, time, and embodiment are made legible. It becomes a site where personal and collective histories are not only remembered but continuously rewritten, destabilized, and reimaged through the metamorphic logic of the medium itself.

As Suzanne Buchan states, stop-motion animation works with familiar tangible objects, places, and things, which are rooted in memory and lived experiences (2020). She suggests that the medium’s unique syntax can disrupt the rigid conventions of narrative filmmaking, instead embracing the fluid, open-ended rhythms of life itself (Buchan 2020). László Munteán, on the other hand, focuses on the acts of forgetting within the context of memory studies, mainly focusing on collective forgetting and its indications. Muntean points out the daily objects that we realize their presence after they are gone or damaged by analyzing the amnesia in Izabela Plucinska’s short animated film *Liebling* (2004) (2020).

The intersection of memory studies and animation explores the performative nature of memory within animated works, raising new questions about how films resemble memory, perhaps even more than those explicitly about memory. Visual symbolism and the associative flow of memory, as highlighted in Gageldonk, Munteán, and Shobeiri’s (2020) work, serve as key structural elements in understanding memory’s representation. Pierre Nora’s (1989) concept of sites of memory (*lieux de mémoire*) further enriches this discussion, as animation’s fluid and flexible nature allows it to

engage uniquely with place, space, and environment.

This approach resonates with the transformative techniques discussed earlier, where ordinary elements are imbued with new meaning through stylization, pacing, and symbolic framing. Stop-motion's tactile materiality allows it to reframe the mundane, further blurring the boundaries between reality and poetic reimagination. Another form that carries similar characteristics, Torre highlights, is landscape or environmental animation, which often intersects with magical realism (2015). This technique typically employs real-world locations without digital manipulation, preserving natural scales, objects, and lighting to evoke an uncanny yet grounded aesthetic.

When these experimental techniques merges with magical realism's narrative strategies, particularly its subversion of binary oppositions of real/imaginary, history/fantasy, it crystallizes into what this study terms queer magical realist animation. Unlike purely experimental works that often prioritize abstract personal expression, queer magical realist animation consciously deploys these techniques to expose the constructedness of cis-heteronormative norms such as gender roles, and the normative nuclear family ideal, reimagine marginalized histories through magical/fantastical interventions, and create speculative spaces where normative frameworks dissolve. Their political orientations also might diverge in crucial ways. While experimental animation often explores personal historicity through abstract individualism as the psychedelic autobiographies of Stan Brakhage, magical realism more engages collective historical consciousness. Queer magical realist animation harnesses experimental animation's formal radicalism with collective experiences and historicity of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex subjects. Threshold also tries to bridge both tendencies by employing experimental techniques (temporal elasticity, corporeal morphing) to interrogate shared cultural memories and traumas.

This tension between individualism and collectivism is further illuminated by Paul Taberham's definition of experimental animation as an approach rather than a genre. Taberham's criteria of experimental animation are non-commercial production, niche distribution, aesthetics, and the role of the artist. Experimental animation operates largely outside commercial frameworks, typically produced with minimal or no budgets and without profit-driven motives (Taberham 2019). These works circulate primarily through alternative exhibition channels, including gallery showings, academic screenings, and niche festivals, rather than mainstream distribution networks. Another defining characteristic of experimental animation is its emphasis on evoking affective responses and conceptual engagement rather than conventional narrative transmission. The medium's material properties often dominate the view-

ing experience, foregrounding the artistic process over representational content. This results in works where the filmmaker's subjective perspective, their aesthetic decisions, personal expression, and conceptual preoccupations become markedly more visible than in traditional cinematic forms (Taberham 2019).

Yet, as queer magical realist animation demonstrates, these very traits can be repurposed for collective ends. Taberham's framework inadvertently underscores how experimental animation's formal freedoms, when directed toward marginalized historicity, can transcend individualism to forge a politically potent, communal visual language. This synergy is central to my practice. While my work adheres to experimental animation's core tenets, such as artist-driven production, gallery/festival circulation, and material-focused aesthetics, it deliberately hybridizes them with magical realism's narrative strategies. However, while magical realism in literature often operate within popular culture, its adaptation into animation creates a distinct context, one that diverges from mainstream conventions. Therefore queer magical realist animation diverge from both literary magical realism's popular roots and mainstream animation's industrial conventions carving out a distinct space for queer reimagination.

Taberham's framework reveals a paradox, though experimental filmmaking is often labeled elitist, its low-budget, DIY nature makes it arguably the most inclusive cinematic form, accessible to creators excluded from industrial systems. Yet this very lack of infrastructure raises urgent questions about sustainability, particularly for artists in economically precarious contexts. In my case, the ability to work without profit-driven motives depends on my stable employment as the financial source. This tension between radical accessibility and material precarity shapes queer magical realist animation's political potential, it gains creative freedom by existing outside industrial systems because it operates beyond industrial frameworks, but this marginal position also imposes material precarity. My practice strives to overcome this contradiction by weaponizing the tension, for example, elevating DIY aesthetics to the status of a radical political statement.

Another critical consideration is accessibility. While these films might circulate freely online due to their non-mainstream status, their reach remains limited by socio-cultural barriers; not all audiences can readily access these platforms. Finally, it's important to emphasize that while experimental filmmaking can be low-budget, it is never low-effort. The conceptual and intellectual development of such work demands significant investment, and time for research, experimentation, and critical reflection is essential, as the process itself is inherently exploratory. Only through this sustained engagement can artists refine their practice, build a cohesive body of work, and connect with their intended audience. Thus, beyond financial constraints,

experimental filmmaking requires substantial investments of time and intellectual labor. This recalls the deceptive simplicity often associated with literary magical realism. While queer magical realist works may employ a DIY or intentionally rough aesthetic that appears effortless, they are in fact the product of an intensive and prolonged creative process, as previously discussed.

3. MY PRACTICE

The decision to both create and critically engage with animation a few years ago represents a pivotal point in my life and art. My prior relationship with the animated medium was distant; cartoons in my childhood and animated films in my adolescence and youth were largely absent. I had a prejudice towards animations, dismissing them as mere “fantasy” or “imagination,” inherently less “powerful” than the “reality” I sought. This early allegiance to realism evolved into a focus on documentary practices in art and cinema, deeply intertwined with my involvement in LGBTI+ and feminist struggles, grounded in confronting tangible oppression. However, approaching animation through a deliberately cultivated queer lens, informed by queer theory’s embrace of the non- normative, the fluid, and the subversive potential of reimagined worlds, shattered this binary in my mind.

The idea of making a film about family became a years-long companion for me, unfolding across different phases of my life. Looking back, its periodic shelving and multiple unfinished versions weren’t just because of technical problems. When I first decided to make such a film, I was working in documentary formats and envisioned it as a participatory, reflexive documentary project about my own family. The first major turning point came at an international pitching forum I attended. My deeply personal coming-out story, which was already emotionally raw, was suddenly subjected to the industry’s standard processing at the platform. The questions were, for instance, how can we package this as a marketable product? What will make it appeal to international audiences? Though my story was inherently unique, they said, I had to differentiate it from similar narratives. While my footage showed promise as a Middle Eastern lubunya’s (queer person) story, they said, what made my experience truly singular? Five years later, I now better understand the complexities of storytelling and representation. But at twenty-three, being abruptly thrust into this sector, these professional demands intensified my existing vulnerability. My struggle was more fundamental than the market strategies and distribution details because I was already dealing with the profound difficulty of my subject matter. This wasn’t just a professional challenge at the editing table for me, but a personal one that

reappeared through familial contexts with triple intensity.

Another layer I was concerned about was the risk of instrumentalization. How queer stories from this region, including mine, might be co-opted for broader discourses in international markets. While fighting for visibility, I confronted the paradox that being seen as “the exotic other” or “queer survivors of oppressive regimes and conservative families” might simply reinforce the very hegemonic gaze we resist. Ultimately, I couldn’t resolve the core contradiction of how truly queer is it to integrate or assimilate into this hegemonic system, whether through marketing, storytelling, or other strategies, when that very system forces our narratives into the competitive frameworks that queer-feminist politics inherently opposes?

This process felt particularly intense and made it far more overwhelming than it would feel today because of navigating it as a young person, inexperienced in the industry, and personally immersed in these struggles at that time. Though life circumstances eventually shelved the project, this experience granted me something invaluable, space to reflect deeply on my artistic practice, cinema, and queer methodologies. Moreover, the shooting process hadn’t gone as planned. I’d failed to establish collaboration with my family, especially my mother. Yet this didn’t discourage me from exploring the institution of family through my art. This is because when examining family structures, I’m never just looking at my personal experience. I’m engaging with collective memory and all those misfit experiences that can’t conform to normative family frameworks.

At that point, animation created an exceptionally fertile ground for my practice, even though it is not the only way to engage with these representational politics. When I first started learning the craft of animation, I gradually realized this film needed to be an animated documentary. What draws me most to animation is how it breaks free from the obsession with “real footage”. While it’s important to highlight the significance of representation, visibility becomes superficial when it merely shows LGBTI+ characters without deeper engagement with the politics of representation. This kind of visibility can become problematic when it presents a straightforward, unquestioned version of “reality” that audiences consume as “authentic” without challenging norms. That’s why I’m exploring how animation can represent queerness differently, not just in content but in how films are made. This approach can also transform how we experience films, making the viewing process itself more queer.

Batkin argues that animation reveals how both identity and selfhood are constructed. He suggests that identity, much like animation itself, is fundamentally built on illusion and artifice, their common ground being their fictional nature. His analysis explores how animated representations interrogate identity’s core compo-

nents: the body, gender, selfhood, difference, space, and culture (Batkin 2017). This framework becomes particularly important when considering animation's cultural position. For a long time, it has been dismissed as "unserious" due to its association with cartoons. Although it has been changing, animation still occupies a marginalized space in cinema that mirrors the non-normative status of queer identities. This parallel creates a natural alliance between animation and queer theory, turning marginalization into a tool for subversion. Together, they challenge dominant narratives about bodies, representation, truth, and, most critically, family, the central focus of my work.

For a lubunya who is navigating their place within heteronormative family structures and never quite belonging, always searching, family archives became a subversive playground. My work focuses particularly on the ceremonies where cis-heteropatriarchy most visibly reproduces itself: engagements, weddings, and circumcisions, which are ritualistic moments that teach and reinforce gender norms. In this framework, *Threshold* discloses the sounds of such moments through personal and found archives of VHS, Beta, and 8mm tapes spanning twenty years of family rituals while reaching the audience through an animation film.

The studies of traumatic histories such as war, violence, and similar experiences reveal that memory is never singular, and that trauma leaves different marks on different subjects. In this field, the concept of "haunting" itself represents irregular modes of remembering (Gordon 2008). As Halberstam argues, the notion that remembering everything is inherently good must be rejected, and forgetting, too, can be an act of resistance (2011). A lubunya who examines family history is likely to experience this fragmented, nonlinear memory, where recollections shift and transform across time. This disruption of linearity, where parts of the past are erased or transformed, finds common ground with magical realism. Both embrace flows that defy conventional temporality and historical narratives, recognizing such nonlinearity as vital for survival.

In the film's first part, we're immersed in a relentless chorus of demanding male voices of fathers, brothers, patriarchs, each delivering monologues that expect no response, as if answers never existed in the first place. Though we hear diverse male figures from various familial contexts in these scenes, what unites them is the normative practices demanded by the cis-heteropatriarchal system. Also, the existence of those deliberately excluded from this system's rigid mold, the forms of being rendered invisible, the lives made spectral. There is a ghost in this cacophony, voiceless, unheard, perhaps unwilling to speak, or maybe having forgotten its own words. To me, this specter is the lubunya who has no place within normative family structures. But this ghost doesn't engage with just one voice, it drifts through the

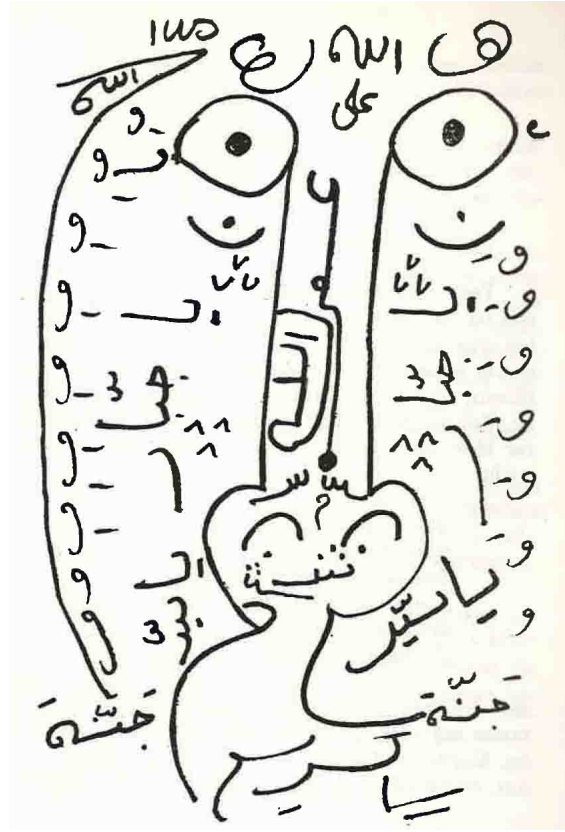
contexts, memories, and histories of different families, haunting them in return.

I also locate my own familial experiences in these gaps, silences, and ambiguities, the spaces between presence and absence. It is an existence caught between the weight of not belonging and the being invisible, and the strategic avoidance of full visibility at the same time. Here, visibility means being open to violence and harm. Therefore, being fully visible is to be vulnerable and even “dangerous.” Instead, I wield invisibility as a shield, shape-shifting as needed, moving between worlds as a protective survival strategy. This is an inherently queer tactic, one that sustains life itself. Leaving no trace behind and artfully weaving truth and lies into an indistinguishable whole becomes a means of avoiding getting “caught” and thus ensuring safety. This is a defense mechanism against systemic violence and othering. Yet the very act of reclaiming these survival tactics and transforming them into practices of resistance and empowerment is itself profoundly queer. That’s why integrating these strategies into my artistic practice is important.

Throughout the film, I constructed environments from scratch while maintaining references to domestic spaces, creating an unsettling duality of familiarity and estrangement. Rather than creating purely fictional narratives, I was intervening in reality through an interplay of lived experience, manipulation, and fabrication, constructing new stories from fragments of the past. When I recognized how this approach intersected with magical realism, I became aware that I had already been employing many of its narrative techniques. For instance, while using visual and auditory elements that evoke familiar domestic spaces in animated scenes, I simultaneously disrupt this recognizable reality through deliberate interventions. This method aligns with magical realism’s signature characteristic of blending fantastical elements into ordinary reality, where the familiar is persistently undermined by the extraordinary.

Another fundamental element of magical realism is that it was developed as a resistance against colonialism. One of its key strategies is reclaiming local elements, especially those marked by Western rationality as “primitive” or “irrational,” and re-asserting them as natural components of identity. In my film, this manifests through fleeting, ambiguous visuals that appear in fragments, dissolving into the environment. These elements represent traditional spells (*büyü*/*muska*) used to disrupt or dismantle family structures, practices still prevalent both in my hometown and across Turkey today (Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1 Amulet, Göz (The Eye). From *Sevgileri Büyüleri*, by İsmet Zeki Eyüboğlu, İstanbul: Der Yayınları, 2000 p. 443



These rituals emerge from a syncretic blend of folkloric, pre-Islamic, and cross-cultural influences. Their significance lies not in their rationality or irrationality but in their role as fundamental fragments of local culture. In my work, I deliberately reinterpret these practices through a queer-feminist lens, transforming them into tools of resistance against cis-heteropatriarchal family norms. Like the magical realist narratives, these amulets perform their wonder-working without elaborate spectacle. The supernatural emerges through the careful arrangement of ordinary components, embedding enchantment within the fabric of daily life. This parallel reveals how both magical realism and occult practices share a fundamental logic. They construct alternative epistemologies where the marvelous operates not as an exception, but as an unremarkable extension of reality's possibilities.

When discussing resistance against this normative system, I must address its specific manifestations in contemporary Turkey. The family institution, where the state's capacity to produce and reproduce social norms is most powerfully manifested, also serves as a foundational structure reinforcing neoliberal capitalism. This dynamic is not unique to Turkey; globally, neoliberal policies atomize individuals, weaken solidarity networks, and intensify precarity, paradoxically revitalizing the family as an imagined "safe space" (Cooper 2017). Simultaneously, the family apparatus

becomes central to the state's project of manufacturing normative citizen-subjects. In this context, the government's official declaration of 2025 as the "Year of the Family" transcends symbolic politics. It constitutes an explicit ideological move to increase the institutionalized cis-heteronormative values, a radicalization of state discourse that seeks to reshape society while systematically excluding alternative lifestyles, non-normative identities, gender expressions, and sexualities.

Within this context, my creative practice is rooted in both personal and political resistance. Every connection I forge with my body, my memory, and my queer existence simultaneously becomes an act of building counter-narratives within the cracks of this exclusionary system. Thus, I position each artistic and intellectual work not merely as individual expression, but also as a political intervention for transformation against cis-heteropatriarchal family structures, neoliberal state policies, and normative constructions of citizenship.

Animated films, often aimed at children who believe that inanimate objects can come to life, are based on this powerful belief itself, which contains transformative potential. Halberstam introduces the concept of "alternative hiding," which underscores how the animated medium can suggest alternative possibilities that challenge dominant narratives. For instance, in Pixar and DreamWorks films, themes of revolution and transformation are prevalent, with queer representation not limited to a single portrayal but woven into a broader tapestry of ideas that encompasses collaboration, creativity, and a commitment to surprise and shock (Halberstam 2011).

After involved into the world of animation, I began to perceive queer joy, moments of coded resistance, celebrations of fluid identities, and utopian possibilities flourishing within the very fabric of animated expression rather than seeing it as an escapism from reality. This discovery initiated a vital process in my journey: relearning to imagine and fantasize, which was missing in my childhood and youth. Moreover, it became a necessary strategy of queer survival, challenging the oppressive "realities" imposed by systems of power that queer-feminist movements fought against. By centering these imposed realities in my struggle and art, I realized I risked obscuring the empowering potential of alternative visions, which animation and magical realism are fruitful at manifesting.

Consequently, my artistic practice, culminating in this animated short film, serves as a living archive of this personal reimagining and an active process of "queering" life, art, and struggle itself. It documents the reconstruction of my identity and struggle through a lens that embraces animation's potential and magical realism's subversive blurring of the real/magical, not as escape, but as essential queer world-building. Therefore, this work is a part of my story of navigating a harsh world by reclaiming

the radical, joyful power of reimagination through animation.

As established in the preceding section, like many contemporary practitioners, I strategically employ magical realism as a critical tool to engage with social issues, a core commitment within my artistic practice. The concept of family occupies a central position within both the queer-feminist artworks and my creative practices. Family, as both oppressive structure and site of longing, became my central tension. While critiquing the cis-heteronormative family structure constitutes a primary aim of my works, my relationship with the concept of family and my own familial ties remains profoundly complex. Cis-heteronormative critique alone couldn't reconcile my lived experiences shaped by remaining closeted, living a life that radically diverges from their various expectations, a fundamental ideological chasm in our worldviews, a persistent sense of not belonging, and the absence of emotional sharing. These specific conditions render artistic engagement with the topic intensely challenging yet uniquely generative. Initially, as someone maintaining these complex and often fraught familial connections, I approached my art practice intending to instrumentalize it as a channel to build healthier communication with them. However, this proved unsuccessful, diverging significantly from my initial expectations. When that failed, I turned to a way to reconstruct memory and reality itself.

Photo albums and video footage are common elements in artworks exploring family, and I also integrate them into my practice. After moving to Istanbul in 2016, I began collecting anonymous family photos from second-hand bookshops and antique stores. Initially, I didn't consider this collecting as part of an artistic process; it was simply relieving to recompose them into collages, often on discarded objects like alcohol bottles or face masks, while imagining the people's stories or reading notes on the backs.

Over time, this practice evolved into the idea of my animation film, where I consciously blended these found photographs with my own family archive to shape its visual language. To structure the film, I created a storyboard, a sequential sketch plan to visualize scenes, while experimenting with a dreamlike watercolor aesthetic layered over tangible archival photographs (Figures 3.2–3.3–3.4). This merging technique naturally aligned with magical realist strategies, combining the ethereal and the concrete. Essentially, magical realism emerged organically from my practice, discovered through experimenting with these combined methods.

Figure 3.2 H. Işık, küreleme – 1, 2023



Figure 3.3 H. Işık, küreleme – 2, 2023



Figure 3.4 H. Işık, *kürleme* – 3, 2023



I also wrote a text as the scenario for the film during the development process. The idea was that there was an external voice, symbolizing a queer consciousness, would move between scenes, recalling the photographs in each as if they were its own memories. It narrates something about those moments. However, since the photos belonged to different families from different times, and this fact was visibly apparent, the viewer would never know which parts of the narration were true and which were fabricated. At the same time, because some of the photographs came from my own family archive and some of the memories were real, not everything told would be fictional. This ambiguity aligns with magical realism's tendency to evoke doubt in the viewer. Additionally, the way this consciousness intervened in family memory added a queer dimension to the act of remembering itself.

I explain this process in detail because what began as a storyboard transformed into an independent series, *Kürleme* (Figures 3.5–3.6–3.7–3.8). While developing the storyboard, I started experimenting with AI to approximate my desired aesthetic. At the same time, I finalized the film's script, started testing voice-over recordings, and created animation with photographs in a 3D environment. However, while AI gradually delivered the visual style I wanted, my attempts in 3D remained unsatisfying. The two-dimensional presence of the photographs never blended seamlessly into the digitally constructed 3D environment (Figure 3.9). Moreover, when I implemented the voiceover, the overwhelming verbal density of the sound design began distancing me from my original concept. My vision had always been more about

evoking emotion through fluid, watercolor-like visuals rather than foregrounding verbal narrative. Consequently, I decided to decouple the AI-developed concept from the film project, choosing to pursue animation while making photographic elements altogether a different but related series.

Figure 3.5 H. Işık, kürtleme – 4, 2023



Figure 3.6 H. Işık, kürtleme – 5, 2023



Figure 3.7 H. Işık, kürleme – 6, 2023



Figure 3.8 H. Işık, kürleme – 7, 2023



The film's development process is significant because its technical "failures" actively reinforced the queering of its aesthetics and techniques. Archival photos, watercolor textures, and an unreliable narrator's voice, each a magical-realist technique, initially sought to destabilize the "real." Yet when 3D environments resisted holding

these layered truths, and voiceovers got ahead of the visual poetics, the project's rupture became inevitable. Rather than force cohesion, I embraced animation's inherent fluidity and split the work into two: *Kürleme* (the AI-assisted photo series) and the animated short. This divergence wasn't a compromise for me, I embraced this "failure" with what Judith Halberstam terms as the "queer art of failure" (Halberstam 2011). Like the animated worlds where penguins and robots defy rigid categories, my "failed" 3D experiments and overbearing voiceovers became generative.

Figure 3.9 Still from the author's animation, *Threshold*, 2023



The film was created using Blender, a free and open-source 3D animation software. While all scenes employ 3D techniques, they deliberately maintain a 2D aesthetic through manipulation of perspective. This hybrid approach combines the stylized simplicity of 2D animation with 3D's capacity for creating detailed, dynamic scenes.

Working in 3D shares fundamental similarities with live-action filmmaking. Camera placement and movement, lighting design, set decoration, character blocking, and environmental composition all follow comparable principles. However, unlike live-action, where elements physically exist, every component in 3D must be created from nothing. This process, called modeling, begins with basic geometric forms like cubes, spheres, or cylinders that are sculpted into the desired shapes. Even environmental effects like wind require precise placement and parameter adjustment.

Character animation presents particular challenges. After modeling characters, they must be rigged, a process of creating digital skeletons that mirror anatomical struc-

tures to enable natural movement. This attention to realistic underlying systems creates an interesting paradox. While 3D allows for hyper-realistic detail, it simultaneously enables the subversion of physical laws. Gravity can be disabled in an otherwise realistic scene, and objects can defy normal behavior. This tension between realism and its deliberate undermining directly serves magical realism’s aesthetic, the familiar made strange, the impossible rendered plausible.

The 3D workflow thus becomes a perfect metaphor for magical realism itself, building worlds that obey their own internal logic while maintaining enough surface realism to feel tangible. Every creative decision, from the suppression of perspective to the manipulation of physics, serves this dual purpose of grounding the viewer while opening spaces for wonder and subversion.

In this context, while scene compositions of my current film generally adhere to physical world logic, such as establishing resemblance through environmental details, the animated medium inherently normalizes the impossible. Unlike live-action cinema, where supernatural elements require visible post- production effects, animation treats the magical as fundamentally ordinary. In this medium, extraordinary phenomena are created through the same technical processes as mundane elements, existing not as disruptive “effects” but as organic components of the world (Figure 3.10). This ontological equality between real and magical elements embodies magical realism’s core principle: the supernatural integrated seamlessly into the fabric of the everyday.

Figure 3.10 Still from the author’s animation, *Threshold*, 2023

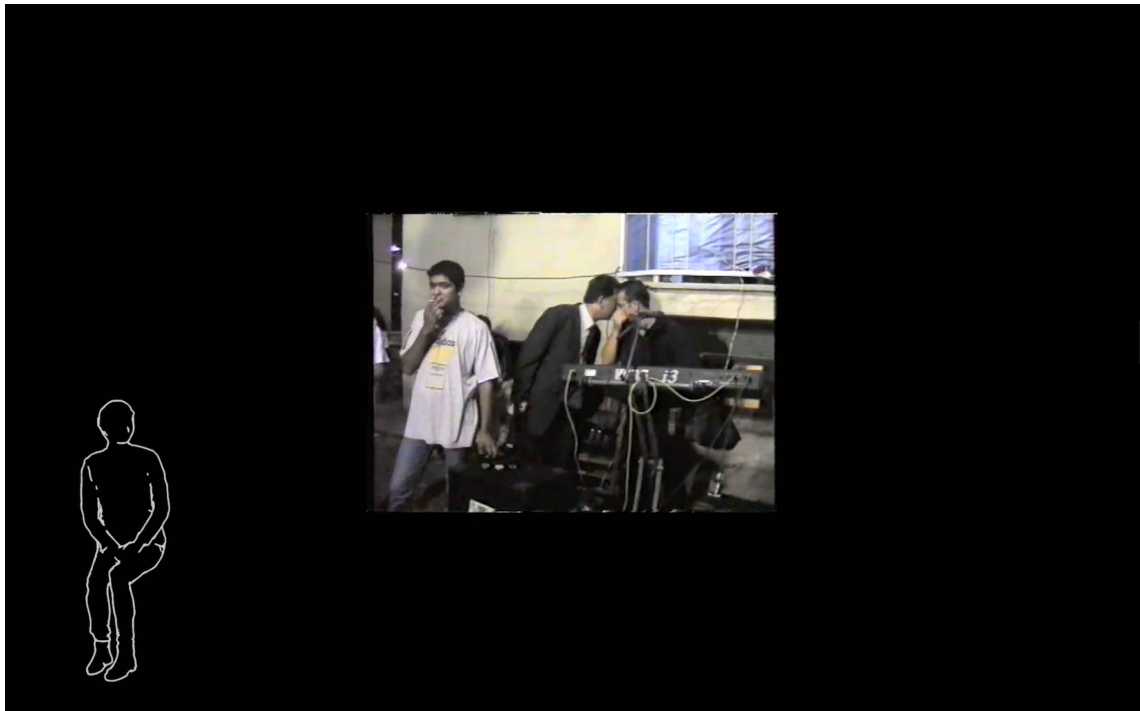


These explorations eventually took shape in *Threshold*, the final version of my animated film. When I realized the voiceover dominated the narrative, I turned to real recorded sounds instead, specifically, audio from my family archive. These recordings, which include my parents' wedding and my brother's circumcision ceremony, are intimate, fragmented sounds that preserve the texture of memory without imposing a singular interpretation. Unlike narration, they don't tell the audience how to interpret what they're seeing. This change created space for the visuals to speak for themselves while keeping the ambiguity that's so important to the project's queer perspective.

Threshold, created entirely in Blender, combines three key elements: animated scenes, archival footage visuals, and a sound design built from found recordings and my family archive. What makes the sound design so crucial is its role in guiding the narrative and visuals. The pairing of authentic archival audio with animated imagery produces magical realism's distinctive effect; the realism of the sound grounds viewers in a tangible world, while the visuals open spaces for wonder. This interplay constructs what Faris identifies as one of the magical realism's essential qualities, realistic details that build a phenomenal world (Faris 1995).

The film's sound design constructs its magical realist reality through localized ceremonial elements. There are sounds of the slightly off-key wedding singers, the amateurish but spirited performances of regional folk tunes like the distinctive Balıkesir çiftetelli rhythms, and the crackling intimacy of domestic cassette recordings (Figure 3.11). For Turkish audiences, these sounds trigger accustomed recognition, not as the polished nostalgia of state folk ensembles, but the lived texture of provincial celebrations where microphones feed back and uncles sing off-beat. For international viewers, they might produce deliberate estrangement, rendering the familiar uncanny or local elements exotic.

Figure 3.11 Still from the author's animation, *Threshold*, 2023



This duality operates as more than aesthetic texture, it's a political intervention echoing Chanady's analysis of indigenous reappropriation (1995). I tried to weaponize these sounds against their own heteropatriarchal origins. The Balikesir folk tune which traditionally accompanying male dancers performing hyper-masculine rituals, here underscores a scene of queer metamorphosis, its celebratory accent ironizing the very gender norms it was meant to enforce.

This sound strategy actualizes Mariboho's argument that magical realism navigates contemporary crises through vernacular forms (2016). The wedding recording as a heteronormative ritual becomes, through queer recontextualization, a site of resistance. Like Carpentier's Afro-Caribbean rhythms in *The Kingdom of This World* (1989), these sounds don't merely accompany the visuals. They perform the film's central tension, the struggle to reclaim cultural memory from the cis- heteronormative frameworks that claim to preserve it. The amateur musicians' missed notes and uneven tempos, far from flaws, become the material of rebellion, proof of lived reality rupturing idealized tradition.

However, working with my personal family archive presented limitations. I only had three recordings to draw from: my parents' engagement, their wedding ceremony, and my brother's circumcision. These clips centered on family rituals tied to heteronormative traditions which are the themes I wanted to explore but the small sample size restricted how far I could delve into them. Recognizing that these

moments weren't just personal but part of broader societal patterns, I expanded my search to include other families' archival footage. This shift allowed me to examine how such rituals function as systemic structures rather than isolated, personal events.

After this point, I started to search for personal video recordings in various places such as flea markets, second-hand CD shops, antique stores, and used bookstores. What surprised me was that while family photographs were widely available in these spaces, finding home video recordings was extremely difficult. For a while, no matter where I looked, I couldn't find any personal VHS or other kind of tapes. Even when I asked vendors, they seemed confused by my request, often showing me recorded TV programs or commercial films instead of private home videos. Their reactions made me wonder that were these tapes were absent from circulation due to socio-cultural norms? Were they considered too private to resell? At the same time, I'm certain these tapes exist and many families must still have them stored away. However, are they being physically preserved, or have they been digitized and kept in private archives? This absence in the second-hand market raises questions about how we value, preserve, and circulate personal moving images compared to photographs.

After an extensive search, I managed to acquire approximately 12 VHS, 8 mm tapes containing personal recordings. Several were discovered at different times in the deeper recesses of vendors' stalls at Kadıköy flea market, while others were sourced from a record store in Üsküdar. Dating back to the early 2000s, these tapes capture a diverse range of domestic moments and family rituals, birthday celebrations, wedding ceremonies, elementary school performance rehearsals, as well as international travels to Africa and Russia. Among these, two recordings stood out as particularly revealing for me. A lively family dinner filled with laughter and conversation, and more strikingly, a covertly recorded argument between a man and woman, where the husband had secretly documented a marital conflict. This latter footage proved especially significant in its unguarded portrayal of "private" tensions, contrasting sharply with the carefully curated family moments typically preserved in home videos.

After facing the limited material in my personal family archive, I unexpectedly found myself engaged in an extensive collection of recordings spanning a wide range of content. The process of forming a coherent narrative, script, or storyline from these recordings was challenging. The emotional intensity of engaging with such intimate material and the diversity of the archive's contents were overwhelming. While the rich material offered for creative exploration, the very abundance and variety made narrative structuring difficult.

This challenge was further compounded by a fundamental tension emerged between my intended narrative about queer experiences within heteronormative family structures and the actual content of the archival material I had collected. The recordings persistently asserted their own reality, dominated by oppressive family dynamics that resisted my queer reimagining and my attempts to mold them into my intended storyline. This created a creative paradox, how to articulate marginalized queer presences using materials that seemed to document only heteronormative family performances. Like the Latin American authors Chanady analyzes, I confronted the need to work within dominant structures while subverting them (1995), in my case, heteronormative family recordings that resisted queer reframing. Having committed to working exclusively with these found sounds, I faced the necessity of finding an alternative approach.

After countless listenings and failed attempts to extract my envisioned narrative, I confronted a revealing pattern. In almost every recording, the camera and narrative control belonged to male figures who are fathers, brothers, or husbands. While this gendered dynamic didn't surprise me, I initially resisted making it a central focus for the film's flow. Yet this was the material guiding me, and I realized the ineffectiveness of forcing it into an imagined queer framework that simply didn't align with its inherent nature.

This realization led me to pivot my approach. Rather than inserting queer experiences that weren't visibly present, I decided to articulate queerness through absence, through the traces of *lubunyas* I knew must have existed in these family contexts but whose voices were never recorded, whose presence was hidden or rendered invisible. This strategy resonated deeply with my own lived experiences of concealment. To achieve this, I made the deliberate choice to amplify the audible presence of patriarchal authority, to make the male voices conspicuously dominant in the sound design. This extreme visibility of heteronormative control would, paradoxically, make palpable the very absences of queer existence I sought to highlight. By pushing their heteronormativity to exaggerated levels in the sound design, I aimed to create what Faris identifies as magical realism's characteristic "hesitation" (1995) where listeners must navigate between surface reality and submerged queer truth. This approach aligns with what Lang describes as magical realism's ability to make "symbolic meanings become tangible narrative facts" (2020), turning the archive's limitations into its most potent critique.

In animation, these distorted familial sounds interact with visuals to create what Paul Wells calls animation's corporeal potentiality (1998), where heteronormative family structures literally morph under the weight of their own contradictions. The VHS aesthetic, frozen in early 2000s time yet reanimated in the present context,

generates what Lang terms non-synchronous time (2020), disrupting linear family narratives much like magical realist novels fracture colonial historiography.

Ultimately, this process embodies what Gee identifies as magical realism's interdisciplinary power of being not just a genre but a mode of resistance (2021). The archive's most oppressive elements became, to borrow Carpentier's formulation, my counter-hegemonic force (Taussig 1987). What began as creative limitation became, through magical realist practice, what Muñoz would call a horizon of queer potentiality making audible the voices the archive tried to silence (2019).

The film has a tripartite structure that employs distinct audiovisual strategies. The six-minute opening section establishes what Faris identifies as magical realism's irreducible element, where ordinary domestic scenes become charged with symbolic meaning (Faris 1995). The sequence begins with an animated depiction of post-partum vulnerability, teacups shattering in synchrony with a man's voice, visually actualizing Lang's concept of motivated signs where sound physically transforms the environment (2020) (Figure 3.12).

Figure 3.12 Still from the author's animation, *Threshold*, 2023



The film then introduces a scene where we understand a man to be Ece's father, constantly making demands of her. Significantly, this section contains the film's only POV shot that actively moves through the environment, a formal choice that creates visceral immersion in Ece's oppressive domestic reality. Following a scene where the father criticizes Ece and reminds her of her impending marriage, we see

a haunting, magical realist image: a wedding dress suspended in mid-air, representing the dowry display tradition. This moment emerges as one of the film's most emotionally charged sequences for me, amplified by the juxtaposition of weeping women's voices with the father's oppressive words. The floating dress transforms from a domestic object to a magical symbol, visually manifesting the weight of patriarchal expectations.

The scene shifts to a POV shot as the camera extricates itself from a seated group of family members, steps back, and turns to observe them. This movement cinematically embodies a queer existence attempting to escape the heteronormative frame. Their distorted forms and vacant motions visually manifest the protagonist's dissociative gaze as they resist this oppressive structure (Figure 3.13). The group's hollow, outline-only figures performing meaningless gestures, accompanied by distorted wedding music, reflect Butler's concept of the performative nature of familial roles (1990), while their warped appearance mirrors the protagonist's subjective experience. Ahmed might describe this as queer disorientation disrupting the normative familial gaze (2006). The gradual distortion of the slow dance music exemplifies what Gee calls magical realism's "aural uncanny" (2021), where familiar sounds become estranged. Meanwhile, the floating wedding dress, paired with women's weeping, evokes what Roh termed "the magic of existence" (1995).

Figure 3.13 Still from the author's animation, *Threshold*, 2023



The subsequent shot dramatically shifts perspective: we now observe the same group from a detached, stationary position, viewed through a window from inside the

house. The music transforms as well, its volume diminishing and timbre altering to signal physical and emotional distance. Though we never visually confirm the escaping protagonist in the previous scene, this deliberate framing reveals their new vantage point, the window now serving as both physical barrier and metaphorical threshold between their emerging queer identity and the heteronormative world they're leaving behind (Figure 3.14).

Figure 3.14 Still from the author's animation, *Threshold*, 2023

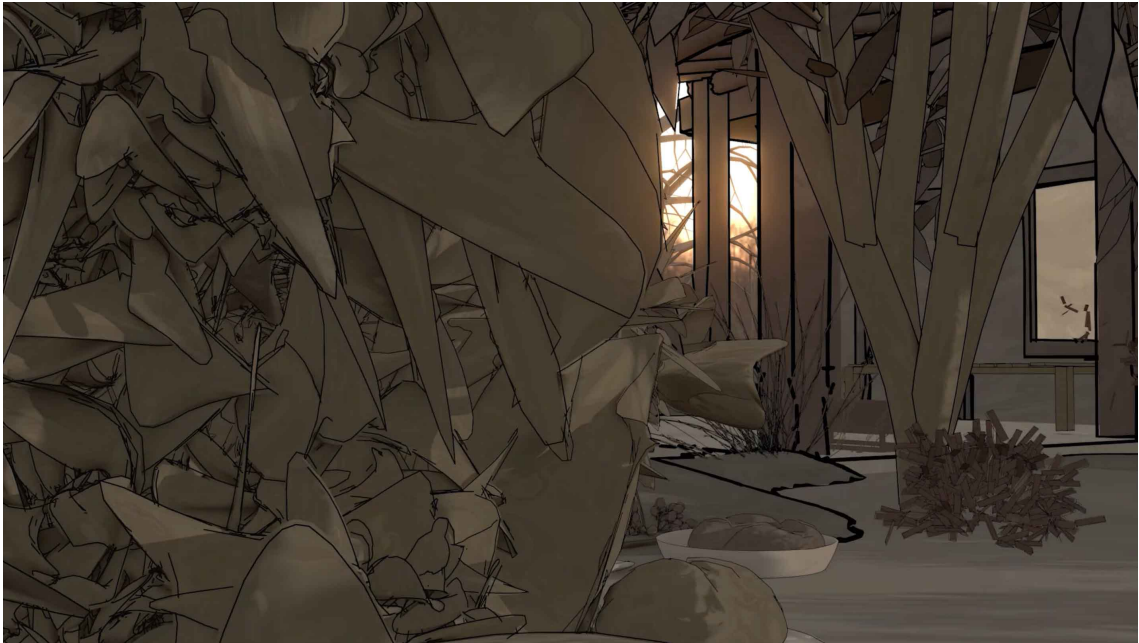


This sequence employs what film scholar Michel Chion calls “acousmatic sound,” (1994, 71–73) the wedding music’s gradual distortion mirroring the protagonist’s psychological disengagement from familial expectations. The visual emptiness of the outlined figures combined with the deteriorating audio creates what magical realist theorists would identify as a “hesitation moment” (Faris 1995, 14–15), where reality becomes unstable and open to queer reinterpretation. The transition to the static window shot demonstrates Lang’s “non-synchronous time” (2020), compressing the protagonist’s physical and psychological distance into a single magical realist image. The viewer’s realization that the window observer is the escaped figure creates what Faris terms “narrative simultaneity” (1995, 171), collapsing spatial and temporal boundaries to represent queer consciousness. This structural choice mirrors what Wells identifies as animation’s unique capacity for “temporal elasticity” (1998, 69–72), allowing multiple subjective realities to coexist within the diegesis.

The subsequent scene introduces another paternal figure who, much like Ece’s father, puts a loaded statement: “Let’s see how long you can endure this” (Threshold 2025,

00:03:01). This accompanies a rural garden view where a shrub's leaves swell abnormally, covering the entire frame (Figure 3.15). Significantly, this organic takeover emerged unintentionally during the rendering process. It was a technical “error” that distorted the plant's form. Retaining this serendipitous effect aligned perfectly with magical realism's ethos, exemplifying what Felicity Gee calls the generative potential of cinematic accidents (2021). This embrace of the deformed also resonates with Jack Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure* where glitches and malfunctions become sites of resistance against normative perfection (2011).

Figure 3.15 Still from the author's animation, *Threshold*, 2023



The scene then shows the same garden from a different perspective. It is sheets hanging to dry, fluttering calmly in the wind. Here, Ece's father's voice returns, but his words become increasingly ambiguous and contextually unstable. Phrases like “Did you lose your way?” (Threshold 2025, 00:04:19) and “I told you to be brave” (Threshold 2025, 00:04:21) oscillate between paternal concern and veiled threat, their meanings deliberately blurred.

This sequence exemplifies three key magical realist techniques. Firstly, there is the nature's rebellion, the overgrown plant, which visually manifests repressed familial tensions, recalling Carpentier's *marvelous real* where vegetation symbolizes resistance (Chanady 1995). Secondly, the floating sheets create a liminal space between revelation and concealment, mirroring the protagonist's psychological state. The destabilized dialogue produces what Faris identifies as magical realism's characteristic narrative hesitation, subverting patriarchal language's authority (1995).

Through the end of the first part of the film, we observe intermittent water droplets falling into a puddle in the garden's corner. As Ece's father says "You look wretched," (Threshold 2025, 00:04:33) the sound design layers young men's voices mocking someone with "He's ashamed!" (Threshold 2025, 00:04:35) followed by homophobic slurs "faggot" (Threshold 2025, 00:04:43). This aural assault coincides with the droplets' rhythmic falls, each splash visually punctuating the verbal violence like what Chion (1994) terms punctuation sounds in traumatic audiovisual spaces.

The sequence then transforms through three potent magical realist transitions. The previously overgrown plant, shrunk and disintegrated in this scene. Its scattered leaves' independent movements mirror queer fragmentation under patriarchy (Figure 3.16). Then a childlike voice screams, "Enough already!" (Threshold 2025, 00:05:12). Its looped distortion creates what Gee identifies as incantatory resistance in feminist soundscapes (2021). The leaves' screen-filling presence during this cry visualizes Muñoz's queer worldmaking through environmental saturation. At the same time, a marriage officiant's words are abruptly interrupted by a glitched "You're divorced!" (Threshold 2025, 00:06:10) and corrupted wedding footage (Figure 3.17). This digital rupture performs what Halberstam calls *the queer art of failure* using technical malfunction to annihilate heteronormative rituals (2011).

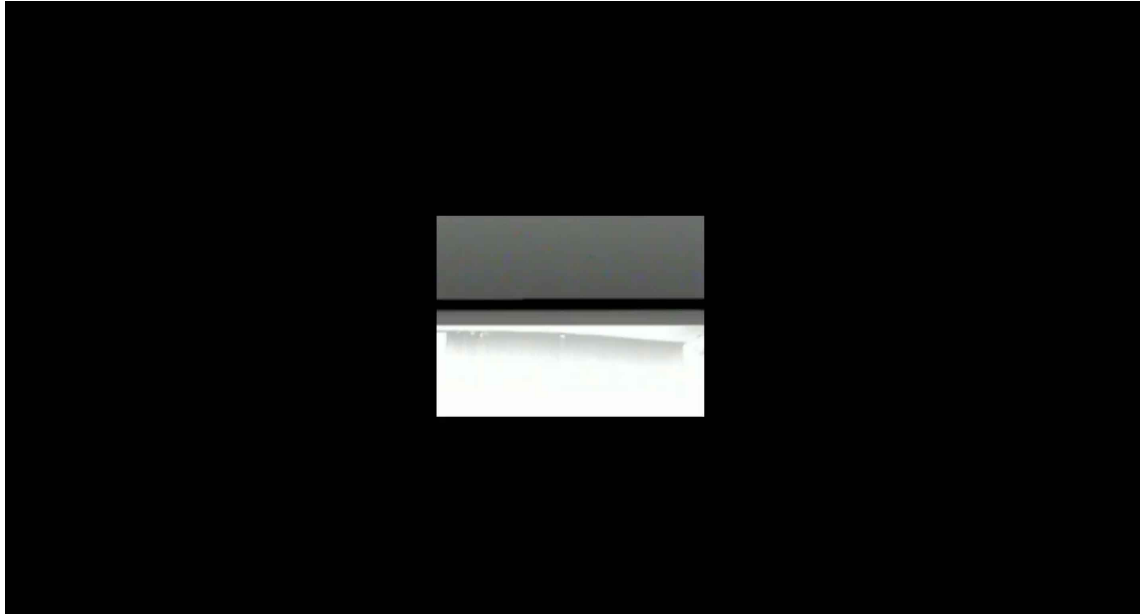
Figure 3.16 Still from the author's animation, Threshold, 2023



The water droplets' persistent return throughout this sequence operates as what Roh (1995) might describe as the miraculous ordinary, their mundane repetition

becoming a counter-ritual to the homophobic dialogue. When the plant's disintegration synchronizes with the "Enough!" scream, it creates Faris's merged realms effect (1995), where ecological and human rebellion become indistinguishable.

Figure 3.17 Still from the author's animation, *Threshold*, 2023



The film transitions into its second part through glitched video footage, marking both a formal and narrative rupture. This approximately five-minute segment combines animated sequences with fragmented archival recordings. In addition, a crucial formal element, occult imagery, emerges in this part. While the first section predominantly features the voices of male authority figures holding the camera and thus controlling the narrative, the exclamation "Enough already!" signals the subversive intervention of previously silenced women and queer subjects. Their gradual formal intervention in the form of the film starts through visual disruption of the established aesthetic, and the symbolic introduction of counter-hegemonic imagery of occult visuals.

This formal intervention mirrors the film's thematic concern with marginalized epistemologies, both the literal invisibility of disempowered groups and the cultural dismissal of "illegitimate" knowledge systems like occult practices. The corrupted footage becomes both metaphor and method, its digital glitches paralleling the disruption of patriarchal narrative conventions.

The second section opens with a slow dance sequence (Figure 3.18), seen from a balcony. Various humanoid figures move rhythmically in a ceremonial gathering. The scene gradually reveals, subsequent footage shows a bride and groom, proving

that this is a wedding celebration. However, the distorted human forms suggest this perspective belongs to an outsider, someone who neither belongs to nor emotionally connects with this environment. This visual estrangement shows queer disidentification with heteronormative rituals and there is a commentary on the performative nature of traditional ceremonies. The warped figures transform the wedding from a familiar social ritual into something unsettlingly other.

Figure 3.18 Still from the author's animation, *Threshold*, 2023



The scene then shifts to a domestic interior, where a translucent projection of wedding footage, a bride and groom, flickers on the wall like a ghostly presence. Behind this ephemeral image, the first explicit visual representation of black magic emerges (Figure 3.19). It is an ominous face-like form drawn directly from Anatolian occult traditions. According to İsmet Zeki Eyüboğlu (2000), this particular spell is known as “The Eye,” classified among the most potent and feared curses in folk practice. It not only sows discord between spouses in the home, but it also extends its influence to future residents. This aligns with regional beliefs about haunted houses (*perili evler*), where such hidden spells are thought to remain in undisclosed locations (Eyüboğlu 2000).

Figure 3.19 Still from the author's animation, *Threshold*, 2023



As the magical sigil fully materializes on screen, the wedding footage preceding it is visibly broken like a glass, which symbolically marks the spell's successful activation. The sound design further amplifies this moment of disruption through a chaotic auditory collage. The children's voices, faint instrumental tones, and the hodja's wedding prayers overlap in dissonant layers. This audiovisual strategy actualizes Faris's concept of *merged realms* (1995), where the magical intervention physically alters both the film's visual texture and sonic architecture, rendering the supernatural as a tangible force within the diegesis.

The sequence fractures further as a series of obscured photographs, personal archival images of mine, displayed on pieces of broken glass with a distorted audio. However, the photos are nearly unrecognizable. This visual fragmentation mirrors the thematic ruptures central to queer magical realism, where domestic archives become sites of contested memory. This visual fragmentation embodies what Batkin (2017) identifies as animation's capacity to disrupt archival memory, here transforming domestic images into contested sites where personal history collides with collective narratives.

We then return to a familiar composition in the next scene. The silhouettes of humanoid figures standing motionless before a house, but this time we see them from next to the camera, where they are posing. Their stillness contrasts with the sound of a hodja's prayer for a circumcision ceremony. His invocation says, "May our child to be circumcised be a blessing to his parents, homeland, and nation,

oh God!” (Threshold 2025, 00:08:10) Then the scene abruptly cuts indoors at the words “homeland and nation.” Here, there is a glitching wedding video flickering in the middle of the room. While the audio stutters, small particles started to converge toward the center of the room.

These fragments gradually unite into the ominous “The Eye” spell visual, its formation synchronized with the hoca’s plea: “Do not spoil the harmony of our homes, oh God!” (Threshold 2025, 00:08:44). This moment exemplifies Lang’s (2020) concept of *covert diegetic metafiction*, where magic emerges organically from the film’s material texture rather than as overt fantasy. As the particles complete their transformation into the spell, the hodja concludes his prayer with “Do not grant opportunities to those who wish to disrupt our homes,” (Threshold 2025, 00:08:51) precisely as the wedding recording vanishes completely (Figure 3.20). At this exact moment, the explosive sound of a marching band intrudes, a recording from March 8th, International Women’s Day. This creates a potent ironic juxtaposition: the spell’s dissolution becomes synchronized with the feminist protest sounds, forming what Muñoz (2019) would term a *queer temporal collision*. As the political demonstration’s audio overwhelms the scene, the spell’s remnants dissolve spatially throughout the room, their magical presence yielding to the collective voice of resistance.

Figure 3.20 Still from the author’s animation, Threshold, 2023



The sequence transitions rhythmically with drumbeats to a circumcision ceremony, seen through between two chairs. It is an intentionally off-center composition suggesting the perspective of either a confused child or a queer person who feels alienated

from the ritual (Figure 3.21). The dancing figures are the same ambiguous humanoid silhouettes we've seen throughout the film. At the center, an empty circumcision costume hangs. Its cape, scepter, and hat moving autonomously through the space, embodying magical realism's characteristic fusion of the mundane and marvelous (Faris 1995). This hollow ceremonial garb performs what Butler (1990) would call the *empty signifier* of patriarchal tradition, its absurdness exposed through animation's capacity to literalize metaphor.

Figure 3.21 Still from the author's animation, *Threshold*, 2023



Before the scene concludes, it cuts to a darker version of the same space, now with darker lights and floating particles in the air. We hear a teacher and two young students rehearsing what appears to be an end-of-term performance. Their disturbing call-and-response echoes the ritualistic quality of the ceremony. When the teacher says, “Shameless woman... immoral...” (Threshold 2025, 00:09:36) students perfectly mimic it as “Shameless woman... immoral...” Other exchanges include: “If you’re a mother, then I’m Napoleon,” (Threshold 2025, 00:09:50) “Disgrace,” “Scandal.” These are like phrases that materialize what Ahmed (2006) terms the cultural scripts of heteronormativity.

The scenes oscillate between celebration and rehearsal, their rhythmic alternation creating queer temporal disorientation (Muñoz et al. 2019). In the final iteration, as the teacher shouts “Witch!” (Threshold 2025, 00:10:42), the word fragments into a glitching loop while floating particles merge into the second occult visual (Figure 3.22). This audiovisual rupture performs what Halberstam (2011) identifies as

productive failure, the system's oppressive language breaking down under its own repetition, even as the gathering magical elements assert alternative epistemologies. That seamless blend of social critique and supernatural imagery is exactly what makes this queer magical realism. It's not just showing the oppression, but visualizing its undoing through the medium's unique capabilities. The particles don't just represent resistance, through animation, they become resistance.

Figure 3.22 Still from the author's animation, *Threshold*, 2023



The amulet's visual shown here is known as "Ya Adem," a spell so potent that social ostracization awaits anyone discovered practicing it (Eyüboğlu 2000). This forbidden magic claims the audacious power to rewrite destiny itself, even altering divine will. The amulet features a human figure composed of Arabic letters, visually articulating a mystical union between humanity and the divine.

The disproportionate lines of this anthropomorphic script perform queer theoretical work, their asymmetry rejecting fixed human ontology in favor of perpetual metamorphosis, recalling Butler's (1990) notion of gender as continual becoming rather than static being. The ritual's material practices intensify this subversion: according to Eyüboğlu's source, it should be wrapped in seven layers of oilcloth and green fabric, stitched with a thousand stitches, hidden in liminal domestic spaces (doorframes, spiderwebbed corners). Its destruction protocol, remaining until the house's collapse, burning with it, or being retrieved to prevent circulation, materializes Halberstam's (2011) queer art of failure, where the marginalized object's survival depends on strategic disappearance rather than triumphant visibility.

The film's second part ends here. The final nine-minute section looks completely different from everything we've seen before. Throughout the movie, we have watched fluid, sketch-like outlines of characters and objects. Now, those outlines become the entire visual, just black lines moving against an empty background, with nothing filled in.

The removal of all interior forms literalizes Butler's (1990) theory of identity as a performative surface rather than an essential core. This minimalist visual phase resonates strongly with experimental animation traditions, particularly the work of Švankmajer and the Quay Brothers, where emptiness becomes politically charged. The hollowed figures evoke what Halberstam (2005) terms the queer art of disappearance, while their relentless movement suggests Ahmed's (2006) concept of orientations in perpetual becoming.

The film's engagement with metafiction, Cody Lang's (2020) theories of cinematic magical realism, unfolds through two pivotal moments in the last section. In the first (Figure 3.23), a character's subtle orientation toward the video recording seems like watching the very footage we are seeing. This establishes metafictionality, breaking the fourth wall to reveal the work's constructed nature. This self-awareness escalates dramatically in the subsequent scene (Figure 3.24), where another character physically manipulates the 2D video element within the 3D environment, demonstrating the concept of covert diegetic metafiction through direct intervention in the filmic reality.

Figure 3.23 Still from the author's animation, *Threshold*, 2023



These interconnected moments achieve a potent dual disruption. Formally, they expose animation's artificial seams through visual transparency and medium hybridization of 2D/3D tensions. Politically, they mirror the work's challenge to cis-heteropatriarchal structures by granting characters agency to rewrite their narrative conditions. The film's power emerges precisely where form and content converge, the animated figures' growing consciousness of their mediated existence paralleling the audience's awakening to constructed social realities. As Lang observes, such strategic self-referentiality doesn't merely entertain, it weaponizes the medium's awareness to dismantle both cinematic conventions and the oppressive norms they typically reinforce (2020).

Following the final circumcision tape footage, the film undergoes a radical formal transformation. After that scene, archival images disappear entirely, leaving only the animated line drawings that have gradually taken over the narrative space. This visual stripping away coincides with a striking auditory shift. The sounds of a family singing joyfully around a dinner table emerge, their warmth contrasting with the now-abstract visuals. Two feminized figures enter into this liminal space and begin dancing together with complete autonomy (Figure 3.25). Their movements embody what Muñoz termed queer utopian performatives, like not merely dancing, but choreographing an alternative sociality, a queer one, that exists outside the film's established rhythms.

Figure 3.24 Still from the author's animation, *Threshold*, 2023



Three crucial transformations occur simultaneously during this part. In terms of medium, the complete disappearance of live-action footage fulfills Lang's concept of (2020) *diegetic rupture*, where magical realist animation fully asserts its constructed reality. Regarding temporality, the figures dance to their own rhythm, breaking from the film's prior editing patterns to create what might be called queer time. Lastly, their unrestrained movements materialize theory of gender as unrestricted becoming rather than fixed being. The sequence visualizes queer orientations. These figures literally and metaphorically turn away from the heteronormative frameworks to create their own relational geometry. Their dance isn't just rebellion, it's what Lang identifies as magical realism's highest function, not merely representing alternatives, but manifesting them through the medium's unique capacities.

Figure 3.25 Still from the author's animation, *Threshold*, 2023



The scene achieves a potent tension between sound and image. While the heteropatriarchal voice toasts to familial happiness, “To health, to all of you, to happiness... We always want to see you like this, your peace and joy multiply our own” (*Threshold* 2025, 00:14:42), the two women continue dancing in silent defiance. This audiovisual dissonance creates a queer counterpublic, their bodies moving in radical indifference to the heteronormative script. Their dance isn’t just reactionary; it’s what Lang identifies as *covert diegetic resistance*, where characters manipulate their filmic reality to assert agency 2020.

They have a strategic performance as their dance mimics compliance; they let the patriarch assume his words govern them, while actually using the body to contradict imposed narratives. Their uninterrupted movement against the father’s static toast refuses to sync with normative familial rhythms. By seeming to let the toast address them while actually subverting its intent, they perform what Sedgwick termed *reparative reading*, not rejecting the dominant structure outright, but reworking it from within (2003).

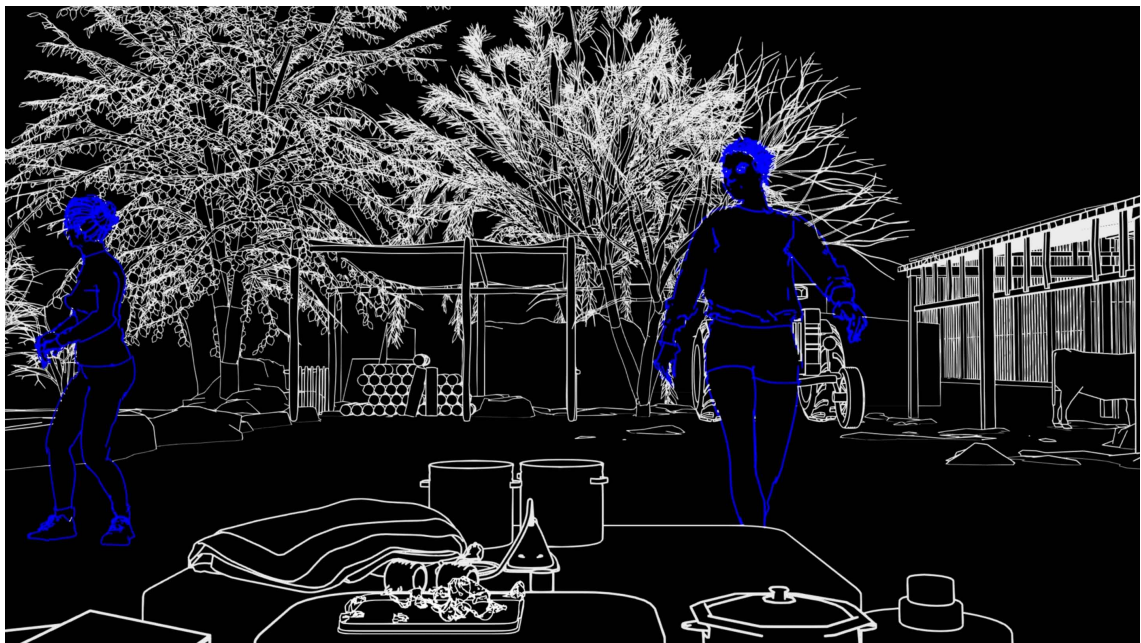
Then there is a sharp transition from the festive dinner to a fight scene, revealing the cracks beneath the performative domestic harmony. This is likely secretly filmed by the man shortly after the same couple’s joyful toast, forcing viewers into uncomfortable intimacy with their “private” clash. The shift from public performance during the dinner to raw, unguarded conflict echoes Butler’s idea of gender as a failed performative, with the cracks in the couple’s curated happiness exposing the instability

of heteronormative scripts.

The two blue-lined people, previously embodiments of queer autonomy, are affected by the argument's eruption. As the fight unfolds, the ground beneath them fractures, swallowing them into a liminal void. Their suspended freefall, followed by awakening in the earlier scene of women's weeping and the wedding dress hanging in the air. This awakening enacts queer temporality, a nonlinear survival tactic where marginalized subjects reorient after trauma.

The characters awaken to a starkly transformed version of the bridal scene, now reduced to its bare formal essence as floating line drawings, the wedding gown absent (Figure 3.26). The women's gradual return to consciousness unfolds with exquisite tension, as they rise, we witness the shattering of teacups from the film's opening scene recurring, which is a cyclical rupture that materializes concept of temporal metafiction, where the film's own history intrudes upon its present.

Figure 3.26 Still from the author's animation, *Threshold*, 2023



Their post-fall behaviors diverge revealingly. One woman exhibits visible anxiety, her glances performing what Ahmed (2006) terms queer disorientation, a bodily awareness of being surveilled even in emptiness. On the other hand, her companion begins wandering freely, treating the destabilized space as exploratory terrain rather than a trauma site.

The recurrence of the shattering teacups is extremely significant, operating on multiple narrative and theoretical levels. This cyclical return to the film's primal rupture,

the very moment when “Çilem brought Fatmagül into the world” (Threshold 2025, 00:00:06), first echoed alongside breaking glass, creates a temporal loop. We might interpret this as the return constitutes neither simple repetition nor regression, but what Elizabeth Freeman calls *temporal drag*, the past insistently pulling on the present to reveal suppressed possibilities (2010). The women do not just revisit trauma, they re-enter the site of origin with new agency. The teacups’ re-breaking materializes what Faris identifies as the genre’s ability to make time palpable (Faris 2004). Unlike linear narratives, the film treats time as spatial, a place one can physically return to and reconfigure. The scene performs what feminist theorists call writing the body anew, returning to the moment of gendered becoming (Fatmagül’s “birth” into the world) to potentially rewrite its meaning through queer presence. The persistent motif of breaking glass functions as what Lang calls *diegetic haunting*; the film’s form itself remembers what characters might wish to forget (2020).

The women’s return to this originary moment with their autonomy suggests not passive reliving, but active renegotiation of the foundational scene. Where the first breaking announced Fatmagül’s entry into a predetermined social order, this recurrence opens the possibility of a then that lets us imagine another now. The empty space where the wedding dress once floated now becomes charged with potential, the absence of the heteronormative symbol (the gown) in the very scene where gendered destiny was initially imposed queer openings in the fabric of narrative. The teacups break again, not as an inevitable tragedy, but as a warning and invitation; the foundational moment is unstable, capable of being reanimated toward different ends.

Speaking of reanimating different ends, another work of mine, *içim biliyor* (my heart knows), comes into frame, its three-dimensional form animating both the memories and future possibilities. It is a fabric sculpture composed of clothes from friends, lovers, and partners who have departed, whether from me, from Turkey, from Istanbul, or from Hisarüstü, the neighborhood I still call home (Figures 3.27–3.28–3.29–3.30–3.31–3.32–3.33). Childhood garments of mine, or those passed down by a neighbor, also weave into the piece. Just like weaving strangers’ archival fragments into my animation, in *içim biliyor* (my heart knows), I stitched together garments once worn by those whose paths crossed mine, each textile bearing the invisible imprint of its wearer. It explores the frayed edges of experimentation and kinship, these fabrics heavy with absences, migrations, and the fragile persistence of connection.

Figure 3.27 H. Işık, içim biliyor (my heart knows), 2024



Figure 3.28 H. Işık, içim biliyor (my heart knows), 2024



Figure 3.29 H. Işık, içim biliyor (my heart knows), 2024



Figure 3.30 H. Işık, içim biliyor (my heart knows), 2024



Figure 3.31 H. Işık, içim biliyor (my heart knows), 2024



Figure 3.32 H. Işık, içim biliyor (my heart knows), 2024



Figure 3.33 H. Işık, içim biliyor (my heart knows), 2024



What fascinates me most is the sewing itself, the violent tenderness of the needle piercing cloth (Figures 3.34–3.35). Like my digital animations that expose their own artifice, I’ve assembled this work with visible brutality. Seams are not even; stitches cluster like scar tissue; the joins refuse to hide their ugliness. This is labor laid bare, echoing both the struggle within cis-heteropatriarchal family structures and the labor of building alternative kinships. In addition, the rough labor evokes animation’s uncanny formalism, a medium built on illusion and fragmentation. The sculpture rejects the lie of wholeness, no unified body, no clear point of connection. Instead, it sprawls, tentacular, unsettling, and disturbing the space it occupies.

Figure 3.34 H. Işık, *içim biliyor* (my heart knows), initial stages of the production process, 2024



After working with digital archives and animated lines, *içim biliyor* (my heart knows) embodies both chosen family and the destabilizing materiality of queer bodily experience. The seams echo the malleability of transness, much like animation’s fluid bodily lines. The work extends queer modes of production, improvised, collective, resisting commodification, while functioning as a kind of animation extruded into three dimensions which is another survival tactic in a world that demands legibility. The process was durational, even obsessive, hours of stitching, unstitching, reworking. This labor, as much as the final form, carries the weight of its making. The labor lingers in the object like a heartbeat, this making was never just about arrival, but the persistent act of tending to what remains.

Figure 3.35 H. Işık, *içim biliyor* (my heart knows), initial stages of the production process, 2024



4. CONCLUSION

Figure 4.1 H. Işık, M.A. Graduation Exhibition, 2025



At the intersection of magical realism, queer theory, and animation, this study has explored how marginalized narratives can be reclaimed through alternative storytelling. It has also been a deeply personal journey, one that demanded vulnerability as I interrogated my own history through *kürleme*, *Threshold*, and *içim biliyor* (my heart knows) (Figures 4.1–4.2–4.3–4.4–4.5–4.6–4.7). The way these works complemented and opened pathways for one another during their production processes was profoundly meaningful to my artistic process. This organic interplay aligns perfectly with experimental practice, while also revealing the unpredictable marks left by unplanned elements, particularly when working with deeply personal themes of memory, trauma, and identity.

Figure 4.2 H. Işık, M.A. Graduation Exhibition, 2025



Figure 4.3 H. Işık, M.A. Graduation Exhibition, 2025



By weaving personal and collective memory with interventions such as glitching archival footage, incorporating forbidden occult imagery, employing non-linear storytelling, stitching worn fabrics, and using AI for reimagination, I have sought to dismantle the dominant cis-heteropatriarchal structures that dictate familial and social norms. All three works analyzed in the study function as both an artistic and political act, one that disrupts linear historicity, queers archival material, and

reimagines suppressed histories through the transformative lens of magical realism. They together adopt narrative strategy of magical realism, beginning in dictated realism, fracturing into counter-memory, and climax in abstraction, a space where queer existence dances or disrupts freely beyond heteronormative constraints. They are also not merely about visibility but about redefining how queerness is represented and experienced, both thematically and formally. In doing so, they open pathways to worlds yet unimagined. Lastly, *Threshold* and *içim biliyor* (my heart knows) are more than artworks for me because they are like incantations, spells, reinvention, and the enduring possibility of queer magic.

Figure 4.4 H. Işık, M.A. Graduation Exhibition, 2025



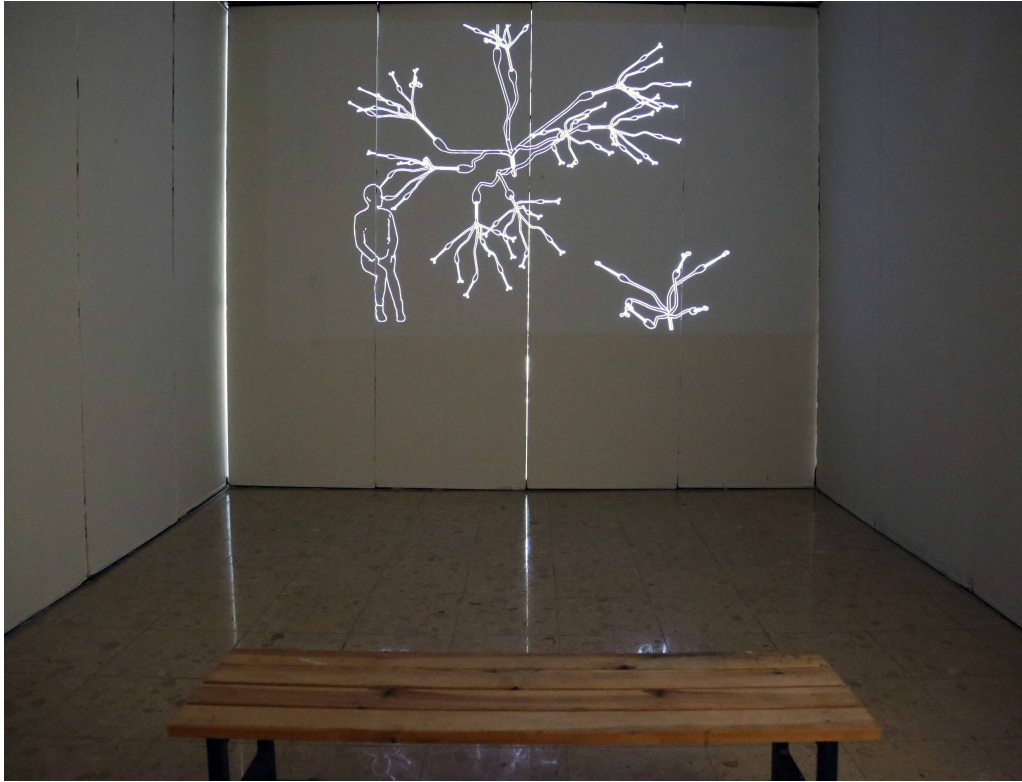
Figure 4.5 H. Işık, M.A. Graduation Exhibition, 2025



Figure 4.6 H. Işık, M.A. Graduation Exhibition, 2025



Figure 4.7 H. Işık, M.A. Graduation Exhibition, 2025



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