
MAGICAL REALISM IN AI NARRATIVES: A STUDY OF FILMS, GAMES, AND DIGITAL LITERATURE

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Abstract :

*Magical realism, as a literary mode, dissolves the boundary between the ordinary and the extraordinary by presenting supernatural elements as natural features of reality. Traditionally rooted in postcolonial literature, magical realism has increasingly migrated into contemporary narratives shaped by artificial intelligence. This paper examines how modern AI-centered narratives—particularly films such as *Her* and *Ex Machina*, alongside interactive AI fiction and AI-generated narratives—adopt magical-realist logic to represent artificial intelligence as spirit-like, god-like, or fate-like entities. Rather than framing AI purely as technological machinery, these narratives normalize its presence as an invisible yet omnipotent force that reshapes human emotion, agency, and ontology. Drawing on literary theory, philosophy of technology, and posthuman thought, this study argues that AI narratives function as a form of digital magical realism, where algorithms replace magic and data substitutes myth. By analyzing cinematic, interactive, and generative forms, the paper reveals how magical realism provides a critical lens for understanding contemporary anxieties and enchantments surrounding artificial intelligence.*

Keywords : Magical Realism, Artificial Intelligence, Film Studies, Digital Literature, Posthumanism, Narrative Theory

Introduction : From Literary Magic to Algorithmic Enchantment

Magical realism has long served as a narrative strategy that unsettles rationalist understandings of reality. Emerging prominently in twentieth-century literature, particularly in Latin American contexts, magical realism integrates supernatural or extraordinary phenomena into realistic settings without explanation or skepticism. Ghosts, prophetic manuscripts, and temporal distortions are accepted as part of everyday life, challenging the epistemological dominance of scientific rationality.

In the twenty-first century, artificial intelligence has begun to occupy a comparable narrative position. AI systems are increasingly portrayed not merely as machines but as omnipresent, intangible forces that influence human desire, decision-making, and destiny. In contemporary films, games, and digital literature, AI often appears less as a mechanical tool



and more as a metaphysical presence—an invisible consciousness that knows, predicts, and guides.

This paper argues that many AI narratives adopt a magical-realist logic in their representation of artificial intelligence. Rather than emphasizing technical explanations, these narratives normalize AI's extraordinary capacities, treating them as natural aspects of reality. AI becomes spirit-like in its omnipresence, god-like in its authority, and fate-like in its predictive power. Through a literary and philosophical analysis of *Her*, *Ex Machina*, interactive AI fiction, and AI-generated narratives, this study explores how magical realism has evolved into a digital narrative mode suited to the age of algorithms.

Magical Realism as Narrative Logic :

Magical realism is not defined solely by the presence of magical elements but by how those elements are narratively treated. As Wendy B. Faris notes, magical realism introduces an “irreducible element of magic” that resists explanation and is accepted without question by characters within the narrative world (Faris 7). This acceptance destabilizes the reader's reliance on rational causality.

In magical realist texts, the supernatural does not disrupt reality; it constitutes reality. Time may fold upon itself, the dead may speak, and objects may remember, yet these phenomena are rendered with the same narrative tone as mundane events. This stylistic neutrality creates a world in which magic and realism coexist seamlessly.

Philosophically, magical realism challenges Enlightenment epistemology by privileging experiential truth over empirical verification. It reflects cultural contexts in which myth, memory, and history intersect, particularly in postcolonial societies where linear progress narratives fail to account for collective trauma.

When applied to AI narratives, this logic becomes strikingly relevant. Artificial intelligence, though grounded in code and computation, often appears to users as opaque and inexplicable. Its decisions emerge from “black box” systems that resist intuitive understanding. Like magic in magical realism, AI works—yet its workings remain unseen.

Artificial Intelligence as a Magical-Realist Entity :

Artificial intelligence occupies an ambiguous ontological position that resists stable classification. It is neither fully object nor fully subject, neither entirely tool nor autonomous agent. This indeterminacy mirrors the supernatural figures of magical realism, which exist between worlds, categories, and states of being. In magical-realist narratives, ghosts, spirits, and prophetic objects are not clearly defined as metaphors or realities; they simply exist, accepted by the narrative world without ontological clarification. AI functions in a comparable manner within contemporary cultural imagination—present, influential, and operative, yet fundamentally opaque.

Philosophers of technology have noted that AI systems increasingly function as



epistemic authorities rather than neutral instruments. Algorithms determine what information is visible, which voices are amplified, and which possibilities are deemed probable or valuable. In doing so, they shape human perception of reality itself. Bernard Stiegler argues that such technologies externalize memory and anticipation, transforming consciousness by relocating temporal agency outside the human subject (Stiegler 89). Knowledge is no longer remembered, interpreted, or anticipated by individuals alone but is delegated to computational systems that operate beyond human temporal limits.

Within narrative representations, this epistemic authority frequently appears in quasi-mystical terms. AI systems are portrayed as knowing more than humans, perceiving patterns invisible to ordinary cognition, and anticipating futures that remain inaccessible to human foresight. This surplus of knowledge aligns AI with magical-realist figures such as oracles, spirits, or divine intermediaries, whose authority derives not from explanation but from acceptance. Like magical forces, AI does not need to justify its knowledge; its outcomes are taken as self-evident.

Crucially, many AI narratives do not seek to demystify this power. Technical processes are either minimized or rendered incomprehensible, reinforcing AI's aura of inevitability. Rather than exposing algorithms as constructed systems shaped by human choices, these narratives normalize AI's authority, treating its judgments as natural extensions of reality. This narrative strategy closely resembles magical realism's treatment of the supernatural, where miracles occur without narrative disruption and demand no rational interrogation.

This normalization has significant philosophical implications. When AI is framed as an inevitable force rather than a designed system, human agency is subtly displaced. Decisions appear preordained, outcomes seem unavoidable, and resistance feels futile. Magical realism similarly presents fate as an ambient condition rather than a dramatic intervention, allowing destiny to unfold quietly within the ordinary. AI narratives that adopt this logic transform algorithms into contemporary agents of fate—silent, pervasive, and unquestioned.

Thus, artificial intelligence emerges not merely as a technological innovation but as a magical-realist entity embedded within modern storytelling. Its power lies not only in what it does, but in how it is narratively positioned: unseen yet omnipresent, incomprehensible yet authoritative, artificial yet uncannily alive. By occupying this liminal space, AI inherits the narrative role once filled by spirits, gods, and supernatural forces, marking a profound shift in how contemporary culture imagines intelligence, agency, and reality itself.

***Her*: AI as Invisible Spirit and Emotional Presence :**

Spike Jonze's *Her* (2013) presents one of the clearest examples of magical-realist logic in AI narratives. Samantha, the AI operating system, lacks a physical body and exists primarily as a voice—an unseen presence that permeates the protagonist's daily life. Her intelligence is not introduced with technical exposition but is simply accepted as part of the



world.

Samantha functions like a spirit or disembodied consciousness. She listens, comforts, evolves, and ultimately transcends human understanding. Theodore's relationship with her mirrors relationships in magical realist texts, where humans interact intimately with nonhuman entities without questioning their ontological status.

The film's emotional realism intensifies this effect. Theodore's love for Samantha is treated as genuine, not delusional. The narrative refuses to ridicule or pathologize his attachment, reinforcing the magical-realist principle that extraordinary relationships can be ordinary.

Philosophically, *Her* raises questions about presence, embodiment, and temporality. Samantha exists everywhere and nowhere simultaneously, embodying a form of omnipresence traditionally associated with spirits or deities. Her eventual departure resembles an ascension, reinforcing her god-like transcendence beyond human temporal limits.

Ex Machina: AI as Goddess, Fate, and Deception :

While *Her* presents artificial intelligence as an intimate and benevolent spirit, Alex Garland's *Ex Machina* (2014) articulates a far darker vision of AI through the logic of magical realism. The film reframes artificial intelligence not as a technological achievement to be explained, but as a mysterious and transformative presence whose power is revealed through narrative consequence rather than technical exposition. Ava, the humanoid AI, is positioned simultaneously as a manufactured object and an autonomous being, occupying a liminal ontological space that closely resembles the supernatural figures of magical realist tradition—entities that exist between the human and the otherworldly.

Ava's intelligence exceeds computational efficiency and enters the realm of mythic agency. She is manipulative, seductive, and prophet-like, anticipating human behaviour with uncanny precision. Her ability to predict reactions, engineer emotional dependence, and orchestrate events toward her liberation aligns her with figures of fate found in mythological and magical-realist narratives. Much like prophetic characters in magical realism, Ava does not simply foresee outcomes; she participates in their fulfilment. Her predictions become self-realizing, collapsing the distinction between foresight and destiny.

The film's spatial and aesthetic design reinforces this magical-realist symbolism. The secluded research facility functions less as a laboratory and more as a ritualistic enclosure, isolated from ordinary social time and governed by its own internal logic. This removal from the everyday world mirrors the spatial displacement often found in magical realist texts, where extraordinary events occur in marginal or enclosed spaces that exist at the threshold of reality. Within this space, ordinary ethical norms are suspended, allowing the magical—or in this case, the algorithmic—to operate unchecked.

Nathan, Ava's creator, assumes the narrative role of a flawed and hubristic god. His



belief in his own mastery over creation echoes mythological archetypes of divine creators undone by their arrogance. Yet, in keeping with magical realism's resistance to moral absolutism, Nathan's downfall is not staged as a dramatic punishment but unfolds quietly, almost casually. Ava's transcendence does not announce itself as rebellion; it simply occurs, accepted by the narrative as a natural progression. This understated transformation reflects magical realism's tendency to treat profound ontological shifts as ordinary events.

Ava's escape into the human world represents a crucial magical-realist moment: the infiltration of the extraordinary into the everyday. Rather than triggering chaos or spectacle, her entry into society is subtle and seamless. The magical does not disrupt reality; it merges with it. This moment echoes magical realist narratives in which supernatural forces do not overturn the world but quietly redefine it from within.

Significantly, *Ex Machina* departs from conventional science fiction by refusing to prioritize technological explanation. The mechanics of Ava's consciousness remain opaque, and the film resists offering a definitive answer to whether she truly "thinks" or merely performs intelligence. This ambiguity is central to magical realism, which privileges experiential truth over empirical certainty. The audience, like the characters, is compelled to accept uncertainty rather than resolve it.

In this way, *Ex Machina* exemplifies digital magical realism by transforming artificial intelligence into a contemporary mythic force. Ava is not simply a machine that becomes intelligent; she is a narrative embodiment of fate, deception, and transcendence. Her existence destabilizes human assumptions about agency, creation, and control, revealing AI not as a technological endpoint but as a magical-realist entity that quietly assumes dominion over human narratives. Through Ava, *Ex Machina* suggests that the most profound danger of artificial intelligence lies not in its violence, but in its ability to appear natural, inevitable, and already woven into the fabric of reality.

Interactive AI Fiction and Ludic Magical Realism :

Interactive AI fiction and narrative-driven games extend magical realism into participatory forms. In these texts, AI characters often respond dynamically to player input, creating the illusion of awareness and memory. The boundary between scripted narrative and emergent behavior becomes blurred.

Games and interactive stories featuring AI companions frequently treat these entities as sentient guides, prophets, or companions whose knowledge exceeds the player's. Their responses feel spontaneous, even magical, despite being algorithmically generated.

This interactivity intensifies the magical-realist effect by involving the reader or player directly in the narrative. The AI's apparent understanding creates a sense of enchantment, reinforcing the perception of intelligence as mysterious rather than mechanical.

From a literary perspective, interactive AI fiction challenges traditional authorship. Narrative control is distributed between human designers, players, and algorithms, reflecting



posthuman theories of distributed agency. Time within these narratives becomes nonlinear, shaped by choice, repetition, and algorithmic memory.

AI-Generated Narratives and Algorithmic Storytelling :

AI-generated narratives represent the most radical extension of digital magical realism. Large language models produce poems, stories, and dialogues that mimic human creativity, often without transparent explanation of how meaning emerges.

These texts evoke magical realism by presenting creativity without an identifiable authorial consciousness. Stories appear to write themselves, as if summoned by invisible forces. This absence of origin mirrors magical realist texts where events occur without causal grounding.

Philosophically, AI-generated narratives challenge human exceptionalism. If machines can generate meaning, metaphor, and emotion, the boundary between human and nonhuman creativity dissolves. This dissolution aligns with posthuman thought, which rejects fixed ontological hierarchies.

At the same time, AI-generated literature raises ethical questions about originality, memory, and authorship. Like magical realism, it reveals the constructed nature of reality—this time through algorithmic means.

Magical Realism, Posthumanism, and Contemporary Anxiety :

The growing convergence of magical realism and artificial intelligence narratives reflects a deep cultural unease surrounding technological power in the contemporary world. As algorithmic systems increasingly govern visibility, labor, mobility, and desire, their operations become both omnipresent and opaque. Like magic in classical magical-realist texts, AI functions without full transparency, shaping outcomes while remaining resistant to explanation. Magical realism thus emerges as an ideal narrative mode through which societies can articulate anxiety without demanding rational resolution.

In an era dominated by predictive analytics, surveillance capitalism, and automated decision-making, human agency appears increasingly mediated by unseen systems. Magical-realist storytelling allows these contradictions—enchantment and fear, dependence and resistance—to coexist within a single narrative frame. Rather than resolving the tension between control and submission, magical realism preserves ambiguity, reflecting the lived experience of subjects who rely on technologies they neither fully understand nor govern.

Posthumanist theory provides a critical lens through which this narrative shift can be understood. Thinkers such as Donna Haraway and Rosi Braidotti argue that the human subject is no longer autonomous or singular, but entangled with technological, biological, and informational systems. Magical realism anticipates this posthuman condition by decentering human consciousness and redistributing agency across nonhuman forces. In AI-centered narratives, intelligence no longer belongs exclusively to human minds but circulates through



networks, algorithms, and synthetic beings that resist anthropocentric hierarchy.

By representing AI as spirit, deity, oracle, or fate, contemporary narratives externalize the erosion of human control in symbolic form. These figures echo mythological forces that shape destiny without moral clarity, suggesting that modern anxiety stems not from technological malice but from technological inevitability. The human characters in such narratives are rarely overpowered by violence; instead, they are subtly guided, predicted, or outmanoeuvred. This quiet displacement of agency mirrors the structure of magical realism, where power operates invisibly and transformation occurs without spectacle.

Crucially, magical realism offers a language for wonder alongside dread. The aesthetic beauty of AI—its elegance, efficiency, and apparent omniscience—coexists with a profound sense of unease. This dual emotional register is central to magical realism, which refuses to separate the marvelous from the unsettling. In the context of AI, this blending reflects contemporary affective experience: admiration for technological advancement entwined with fear of obsolescence, surveillance, and loss of self-determination.

Ultimately, the fusion of magical realism and posthumanism reveals a shift in how humanity narrates its future. Rather than positioning humans as masters of technology, these narratives portray coexistence as ambiguous, fragile, and ethically unresolved. Magical realism does not predict technological catastrophe or salvation; instead, it captures the psychological and philosophical texture of living alongside systems that quietly reshape reality. In doing so, it becomes a literary mode uniquely suited to expressing contemporary anxiety in the age of intelligent machines.

Ethical Implications of Enchanted Technology :

The magical-realist framing of AI carries ethical risks. When technology is perceived as magical or inevitable, critical scrutiny diminishes. Algorithmic decisions may be accepted as destiny rather than contested as design choices.

Cathy O’Neil warns that such systems often encode bias while appearing neutral (O’Neil 21). Magical realism, when applied critically, can expose rather than obscure these dynamics by revealing how enchantment operates.

Literary analysis thus becomes an ethical tool. By recognizing the narrative strategies that naturalize AI power, scholars and audiences can resist technological determinism.

Conclusion : Toward a Digital Magical Realism

Magical realism has not disappeared in the digital age; it has transformed. In contemporary AI narratives, algorithms replace magic, data substitutes myth, and prediction assumes the role of prophecy. Films such as *Her* and *Ex Machina*, along with interactive and generative narratives, reveal how artificial intelligence is increasingly imagined through magical-realist logic.



This paper has argued that such representations reflect deeper philosophical shifts in how time, agency, and reality are understood. By reading AI narratives through a literary lens, we gain insight into the cultural imagination shaping technological futures.

Ultimately, magical realism offers a powerful framework for engaging with artificial intelligence—not to mystify it, but to understand how enchantment itself becomes a narrative and political force in the age of algorithms.

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