

Sculpting the Post-Body

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As gender continues its necessary unravelling, the body emerges as a dynamic site of cultural and political contestation. Cosmology and digital art practices can become spaces for resistance and transformation, as one might argue they have long been—largely unperceived by the West. Within Central Asian, South Asian, African, and Middle Eastern traditions, we can observe how myths and mysticisms disrupt binary conceptions of gender, reconfiguring embodiment as mutable, relational, and divinely ambiguous. These traditions are not merely historical residues but contemporary resources for theorizing gender fluidity and post-body embodiment. Myth, far from being premodern or fantastical, is a living epistemic technology of cultural meaning-making: one that enables the articulation of gendered and postcolonial subjectivities otherwise suppressed by colonial and normative epistemologies.

Through the lens of media theory, digital creation may offer speculative and decolonial tools for reconfiguring the post-body in other (metaphysical) spaces. Digital sculpting enables the creation of surreal, mythic digital bodies, forms that exist not to mimic reality, but to propose new ontologies. These figures emerge from both ancestral knowledge and imaginative practices enacted through digital means. Enacting a form of gender anarchy, they offer a practice of myth-

making and prefiguration attuned to the urgencies of queer, postcolonial (more precisely, conditions of ongoing coloniality), and media-embedded lives. To mythologize is to externalize abstract cultural forces, to give form to what is otherwise ungraspable. This work of imaginative rendering of crafting figures through which to encounter and reinterpret the world is inherently political. It allows us to contest and transform the metaphysical undercurrents of cultural identity and post-body embodiment.

Post-Colonial Literature and Post-Soviet Gaps

African diasporic theorist Sylvia Wynter critiques the historical construction of “Man” in Eurocentric humanism, arguing that the colonial project, often coupled with the agenda of the Enlightenment, which came to define the human around white, male, rational normativity erased other ontologies.¹ In Wynter’s view, the post-body is not a futuristic condition enabled by technology, but an ancestral one, already imagined in African and diasporic spiritualities that center sonic, ritualistic, and ancestral knowledges. The spiritual is embodied, but not necessarily in flesh: being may extend beyond materiality into rhythm or invocation. The post-body, in Wynter’s framing, has always existed, suppressed not by scientific advancement but by epistemic violence.

South Asian and African postcolonial scholars such as Partha Chatterjee, Romila Thapar, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, and Chinua Achebe have made myth central to understanding colonial rupture and national identity formation. Chatterjee shows how nationalist elites appropriated indigenous traditions to construct modern national cultures, often erasing subaltern voices.²

¹ Sylvia Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom,” *The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003): 257–337.

² Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

Thapar critiques the politicization of myth and history in the construction of Indian nationalism.³ Ngũgĩ insists that oral traditions and indigenous languages are key to resisting colonial epistemologies and reviving cultural autonomy.⁴ Achebe, through both fiction and criticism, likewise challenged colonial myth-making and affirmed the political power of indigenous narrative forms.⁵

However, this discursive framework has largely struggled to accommodate the former Soviet sphere, where the collapse of the USSR is rarely recognized in Western scholarship as a process of decolonization. This epistemological gap obscures the imperial history of Soviet control and flattens Central Asia into either a “post-communist” or “emerging nation” space. The coloniality of Soviet power—its imposition of a singular linguistic, religious, and cultural hegemony—often goes untheorized as such. As a result, Central Asian mythologies are commonly studied through political science or transitional paradigms, rather than as sites of epistemic resistance or post-body discourse. As David Chioni Moore observes, postcolonial studies has systematically excluded the former Soviet sphere from its purview, leaving regions like Central Asia caught in a “double silence”—overlooked both by postcolonial theorists and by Soviet/post-Soviet scholars themselves.⁶

Central Asian thinkers like Hasan Bülent Paksoy and Chingiz Aitmatov have worked to recover the mythic imagination of Central Asia. Paksoy’s work on *Alpamysh* emphasizes the role

³ Romila Thapar, *The Past as Present: Forging Contemporary Identities through History* (New Delhi: Aleph Book Company, 2014); Romila Thapar, *Cultural Pasts: Essays in Early Indian History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁴ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Currey, 1986); Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms* (London: James Currey, 1993).

⁵ Chinua Achebe, “An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*,” *The Massachusetts Review* 18, no. 4 (1977): 782–794; Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (London: Heinemann, 1958).

⁶ David Chioni Moore, “Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique,” *PMLA* 116, no. 1 (2001): 111–128.

of myth in sustaining collective identity under Russian imperial and later Soviet repression.⁷ Aitmatov's novels deploy cosmic allegory and mythic figuration to interrogate the psychological and cultural costs of Soviet modernity.⁸ Yet, despite these literary recoveries, there has not been a comparable Central Asian postcolonial theory that brings together myth, embodiment, and subjectivity. This absence has obscured the post-body formations that emerge through oral and literary traditions. The post-body here is not a speculative futurity but an already existing form of knowledge occluded by dominant academic taxonomies. Moreover, the processes by which identity is expressed and distorted are inflected by the medium through which they are articulated.

Transmutations

When one designs a character—first rendering from life onto a two-dimensional surface, whether screen or paper—this already constitutes a transmutation. This transmutation echoes what occurs in postcolonial literature: a text written by a colonized or formerly colonized author undergoes transformation not only in translation but in its very production and distribution. The requirements of legibility and marketability impose themselves, along with their accompanying transmutations, upon the work. Consider the case of *The Dancer from Khiva*, authored by Hadjarbibbi Siddikova: the text originates, presumably, in Uzbek, is rendered into Russian, and ultimately published in English, where it reaches its widest audience. In this process, even the author's name is transformed into the more marketable "Bibish."⁹ This accumulating cascade of

⁷ Hasan Bülent Paksoy, *Alpamysh: Central Asian Identity Under Russian Rule* (Austin: Association for the Advancement of Central Asian Research, 1995).

⁸ Chingiz Aitmatov, *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years*, trans. John French (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983).

⁹ Hadjarbibbi Siddikova [Bibish], *Танцовщица из Хивы, или История простодушной* (St. Petersburg: Azbuka-Klassika, 2005); trans. Andrew Bromfield, *The Dancer from Khiva: One Muslim Woman's Quest for Freedom* (New York: Grove Press, 2007).

transmutations through translation and renaming exemplifies how the medium (linguistic, commercial, textual) alters not only form but identity and meaning. The body of the text, like the post-body, is multiply modified.



Figure 1. *ANOLI: SU ANA*, 2025. Digital animation, silk satin textile, silver, embedded electronics. Courtesy of the artist.

To design a character in the digital realm, similarly, is to mediate: one perceives from life, flattens it, and then reconstitutes it in imagined space. The sculptural processes that follow enact what myth does: the formation of symbolic, often surreal digital bodies. In the video

installation *I thought you were real, but you called me bourgeois* (2022), I explore these processes through original, surreal figures that stage tensions of identity, ideology, and post-body formation. These include spectral, antagonistic creatures called Gzheztirnaks, who act as furies—judgmental spirits labeling others in activist spaces, echoing the punitive internalizations of identity discourse. Another figure, the Imperatrix du Turkestan, embodies both grandeur and trauma: a Central Asian matriarch fused with imperial nostalgia, evoking the myth of decolonized sovereignty as both fiction and burden. CapitalistWhore, a central protagonist in this work, moves through fragmented, hyperreal spaces. Her name is deliberately provocative; she is both victim and agent, a figure who is commodified and yet mobile. She enacts the contradictions of capitalist subjectivity, especially for postcolonial subjects whose very authenticity becomes a commodity. In the “Tunnel” scene, the Colombian Diva appears glamorous and maternal. She offers help but also represents *pornomiseria*: the spectacularization of poverty and the fine line between witnessing and consuming suffering.

What an artist does unconsciously or subconsciously in practice is not easily communicated consciously. One might surmise, however, that this process is not unlike the reflections produced by a society when it mythologizes, creating imaginary bodies that come to be perceived as entirely real and natural, part of the land and its landscape. The act of sculpting in 3D animation of building figures and environments from fragments and fantasies can thus become a form of myth-making that produces post-bodies through processes of transmutation. Digital tools such as Blender facilitate these transmissions of identity and crisis through the rendering of characters and their social interactions. They allow the artist to scan, sculpt, and reconfigure bodies not bound by the confines of realism.



Figure 2. *ANOLI: SU ANA*, 2025. Digital animation, silk satin textile, silver, embedded electronics. Courtesy of the artist.

My three installments of the ANOLI series explore a rich tapestry of female mythical creatures from Central Asia, resurrected in 3D digital space as post-body figures. The animations draw on the concept of the monstrous feminine to underscore intergenerational connections and to empower future generations toward decolonial reclamation through these recovered narratives. In the most recent installment, *ANOLI: SU ANA*, the female water spirit Su Ana (Su Anasy), literally “Water Mother,” from Kazakh and related Turkic lore is embodied. Typically, she is

depicted as an old woman washing her children and combing her long hair on the river's edge at night. Folklore holds that when displeased, Su Ana can send drought and disease or drown a person; villagers would traditionally appease her with offerings when drawing water after dark, fearing her presence.



Figure 3. *ANOLI: The First Encounter*, 2023. Digital animation, silk satin textile, silver, embedded electronics.

Courtesy of the artist.

The animation gives Su Ana a haunting 3D presence that evokes both her terrifying power and her symbolic depth, weaving regional myth with my own family history. In early

twentieth-century Kazakhstan, when most relatives who supported the anti-Bolshevik independence movement were executed during the Soviet Red Terror, only my great-grandmother survived. One day, she went to the village well after dark and died under mysterious circumstances. In family lore, this death was attributed to Su Ana taking her for disturbing the waters at night. This invented story softened the unbearable truth: the grieving woman had likely died of heartbreak after losing her family to political violence.



Figure 4. *ANOL1: The First Encounter*, 2023. Digital animation, silk satin textile, silver, embedded electronics.

Courtesy of the artist.

Myth here operates as both concealment and transmission, masking trauma while allowing it to persist across generations. Rather than casting Su Ana simply as a villainous creature, the work reclaims her as a post-body figure of intergenerational strength and loss, blending myth and history to foreground the resilience of Central Asian cultural heritage. The animation underscores how once-silenced stories of mythical women and oppressed ancestors can be resurrected through art in order to challenge colonial erasures and give voice to marginalized narratives.

These works are not merely representations but propositions: what might the post-body become when incorporating history's mutilations? How might one reinsert erased cosmologies into the speculative architectures of digital space? In such worlds, the digital medium becomes not merely illustrative but generative, a cartography of bodies that were always possible, always imagined, and now finally rendered.

When experienced through immersive animation, the medium itself exerts a temporary but notable modification upon the viewer's body. Unlike watching a screen at home or in a theater, immersive formats surround the body, implicating it physically and sensorially within the mythic field. The viewer is no longer outside looking in, but rather in dialogue with and within, transformed by the spatial, affective, and perceptual architecture of the myth-making process itself.

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