

A Possible Dissolution by Patrick D. Flores.

Marta Moreno Muñoz's project *Lost Paradise* seeks to initiate transitions. Or better perhaps to say that it tries to perform a transitive state or condition in which initially we see her translating her body across other bodies, which are of the animal and of the water. Thus, her body and the bodies of a river and a buffalo become intersubjective. This is the first moment of sharing space and of cohabiting experience. And such a gesture requires a high level of sympathy to be able to shed rationality and the privilege of the human. Having said that, it also reveals the power of the human to reorganize the natural world in light of the critique of that very power to convene the earth.

The self in this transitive condition becomes vulnerable to the elements. It is an incipient sortie into this experience. Thus the four screens of the film dwell on the delicate instance where woman, water, water buffalo come together in a continuum. It is a continuum only to the degree that the three gather in a common moment. But such a fluidity is likewise dissolved by the volatility of water itself and the potential plasticity of the moving image.

Marta Moreno Muñoz, however, pursues another transition. And this has to do with the relationship between the secular sovereignty of the self and the animist ecology of the sacred. The desired mingling further disperses the conceit of human agency and instead redistributes its valences across a spectrum of patience with strangers. The self becomes a problem, or better still, a problematic: something that needs to be repeatedly rectified as it plays out its seemingly inexhaustible, ceaselessly liquid subjectivity. This is why, almost like William Shakespeare's Ophelia in John Everett Millais' painting, the artist threatens the possibility of drowning and forces herself to be buoyant, blissfully buoyant as if everything else had been let go.

The other salient detail in this proposition is the idea of field research. It is an investigation that imbibes the social context of the place. Here, the “Philippine” figures sharply as the province of both thinking and action, of both culture and consciousness. Therefore, it must be imagined to be shaping the art itself. It does not only represent this locus; it enables the locus to unsettle the aspirations of representation itself and fleshes out a prospective form that cannot be reduced to either ethnic or universal. The Philippine rather becomes, more productively, an atmosphere, that extends like islands, as an old Visayan dictionary defines, “from sea to sea.”

This artistic act is a form of introspection into the profound implications of the self and its surplus. But what we see unfold in the film through its three iterative channels is, paradoxically, the lack of the self. Its lack of control of the vast energies that surround it; and also the lack, this persistent yearning for reconciliation of its conflicts, that has made it ascendant. The artist frustrates the completion of this lack as it offers a supplement, a way of activating the structures around her to which she is, in the words of Elizabeth Povinelli, “originally obliged”: water, fauna, female, film.

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