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Patronage and Pornography: Ideology and Spectatorship in the Early Marcos Years

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In the aftermath of the February 1986 "revolution" that forced Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos out of the Philippines, the government of Corazon Aquino turned the presidential palace, Malacañang, into a museum and in doing so meant to put the Marcoses legacy of excess on display. A guidebook on the presidential palace describes one instance of that excessiveness, in which the doors leading to the Grand Staircase are said to have "depict[ed] the Philippine legend of '*Malakas*' (Strong) and '*Maganda*' (Beautiful), the first Filipino man and woman who emerged from a large bamboo stalk. Mrs. Marcos liked to think of President Marcos and herself in terms of these legendary First Filipinos." They identified so thoroughly with this myth that they had portraits of themselves done as Malakas and Maganda in the palace—seminude and emerging from a forest of bamboo stalks (see Plate 1). In 1985 they even commissioned a group of Filipino academics to rewrite the legend that culminated in the celebration of the Marcos regime.[1]

As Malakas and Maganda, Ferdinand and Imelda imaged themselves not only as the "Father and Mother" of an extended Filipino family; they could also conceive of their privileged position as allowing them to cross and redraw all boundaries, social, political, and cultural. As such, they likewise thought of themselves as being at the origin of all that was "new" in the Philippines—for example, the "New Society" (1972–81) and the "New Republic" (1981–86). To the extent that they were able to mythologize the progress of history, the First Couple could posit themselves not simply as an instance, albeit a privileged one, in the circulation of political and economic power; they also could conceive of themselves as the origin of circulation itself in the country.

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[1] *Malacañang, A Guidebook* (Quezon City: Kayumangi Press, Inc.; 1986), 13. For various lowland versions of this myth, see Francisco Demetrio, S.J., *Myths and Symbols Philippines* (Manila: National Bookstore, 1978), 41–43. See also Remedios F. Ramos, *et al.*, *Si Malakas at*

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In this essay, I propose to trace the genesis of this authoritarian wishfulness as it first emerged during the early period of the Marcos presidency, with particular concern as to the ways in which the Marcoses and their supporters produced and disseminated the couple's tendentious reconstruction of history—both in the sense of what happened and that which is "new" or yet to happen—in relation to prevalent ideas about the circulation and display of power in postcolonial Philippine society. Such ideas, I argue, grew out of the gap between consciousness and social experience that became particularly acute in the 1950s and 1960s, as Filipinos from different classes sought to reconstitute traditional notions of patronage within the logic of an expanding capitalist economy. At the same time, new images of female ambition and subjugation emerged in film and politics which would furnish a context for reworking the positions of leader and follower (in terms of the relationship between spectators and spectacle, seer and seen). That Imelda Marcos would become so important in her husband's career was an indication the extent to which national politics had become a stage for playing out a generalized nostalgia for patron–client relationships—a nostalgia fashioned to focus upon the first lady as a prototypical sign for the simulation of patronage within the amoral context of commodity exchange.

A MAN OF DESTINY, A WOMAN OF CHARM

Appropriating the legend of Malakas and Maganda was but one way that the Marcos regime sought to set itself apart from its predecessors. The juxtaposition of images of primordial strength with eternal beauty was symptomatic of a dominant obsession among the Marcoses: the turning of politics into spectacle. We can begin to see this obsession at work by looking at the ways in which Ferdinand and Imelda's private and public careers were represented prior to 1970 in the Philippine press and their respective biographies.

In the presidential campaigns of 1965 and 1969, Ferdinand Marcos often referred to his wife as his "secret weapon." Imelda's presence was considered important at political rallies all over the country in attracting and holding on to the crowd, who waited for her to sing, which she did after routinely appearing to be coy. Her husband would often join her in a duet, much to the pleasure of the audience.[2]

Si Maganda (Manila: Jorge Y. Ramos, 1980). I am grateful to Doreen Fernandez and Ambeth Ocampo for bringing the commissioned rewriting of the legend to my attention.

[2] Numerous accounts of the Marcoses on the campaign trail can be found in various Philippine magazines and newspapers. For this paper I've relied on the following: the series of essays by Kerima Polotan in *The Philippine Free Press* [hereafter, *FP*]: "Marcos '65: The Inside Story of How Marcos Captured the Presidency," March 29, 1969, pp. 2–3, 50–60; "The Men, The Method," April 5, 1969, pp. 4, 54–62; "The Package Deal," April 12, 1969, pp. 2–3, 46–51. See also Carmen Navarro-Pedrosa, *The Untold Story of Imelda Marcos* (Manila: Bookmark, 1969), ch. 15. Napoleon G. Rama and Quijano de Manila, "Campaigning with Marcos and Osmeña," *FP*, August 30, 1969, pp. 2–4, 181–82; Filemon V. Tutay, "Marcos VS. Osmeña: 'Nakakahiya,'" *FP*, September 20, 1969, pp. 2–3, 64–72.

Both were adept at working their audiences. Ferdinand's rhetorical style set him apart from other politicians. The sound of his voice, rather than the content of his speeches, seemed to command attention. One account describes it as a "rich masculine boom . . . that invests him with power and authority. . . . The deep-toned voice, solemnly and slowly articulating the words, where the other [speakers] choose to be just loud and strident, is the voice of authority, no doubt." Because of the immediate distinctiveness of his voice rather than specific element in his oratory, Ferdinand was widely regarded as "one of the best performers among present-day politicos."[3]

For her part, Imelda set a new style of political campaigning in a largely male-dominated field. She came across as a striking presence—tall and youthful in her formal gowns, generously granting requests for songs. "It did not matter whether her audience were urbanites or poor barrio folk: she was an actress putting on a stage appearance. She wore ternos even for appearance on small, rickety makeshift stages of rough wooden planks covered with nipa palms."[4] Imelda made herself accessible to an audience, but this meant that the audience in political rallies were placed in the position of voyeurs waiting to see and hear her. As voyeurs, they did not have to articulate their interests but only had to be alert for the appearance of something that would show and tell them what they wanted.

Because Ferdinand and Imelda worked so closely together in getting him elected in office, they could conceive of the public sphere of politics as coextensive with their private lives. Singing together on stage, they turned their private lives into a public spectacle, staging a stylized version of their intimacy. That intimacy was formalized to a remarkable degree and made over into a staple element of the Marcos myth, particularly in their respective biographies, whether officially commissioned or not. Indeed, the interviews granted by them after their overthrow and exile invariably dwell on the events pertaining to the beginning of their romance with a kind of formulaic wistfulness.[5]

Prior to meeting Imelda in 1954, Ferdinand is described in his biography as a sexually active bachelor: "The young Representative was immensely popular, especially with the ladies. . . . There were whispers that men introduced

[3] Napoleon G. Rama and Quijano de Manila, "Campaigning with Marcos and Osmeña", 2.

[4] Pedrosa, *The Untold Story,* 216.

[5] For accounts of the Marcos romance, see Hartzell Spence, *Marcos of the Philippines* (New York and Cleveland: The World Publishing Co., 1969), 237–67. Originally, this book appeared as *For Every Tear a Victory* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1964). See also the biographies of Imelda Marcos, Pedrosa, *The Untold Story,* ch. 11–12; Kerima Polotan, *Imelda Romualdez Marcos* (New York and Cleveland: The World Publishing Co., 1969), 79–82. For interviews of the Marcoses from exile in Hawaii, see "Marcos Remembers", *Asia Week* (July 5, 1987), 28–33; and "Imelda and Ferdinand Marcos", *Playboy* (August, 1987), 51–61. The romance between Ferdinand and Imelda was also of central importance in the Marcos campaign movies, *Iginuhit ng Tadhana* ("Drawn by Destiny") in 1965 and *Pinagbuklod ng Langit* ("Joined by Heaven") in 1969. Unfortunately, I have been unable to locate copies of these films. See Napoleon G. Rama, "The Election Campaign in Review," *FP,* November 15, 1969, p. 5.

their sisters and daughters to him at their own risk, a reputation which caused him trouble.'' Society pages in Manila daily newspapers referred to him as the ''Number One Bachelor.''[6] Ferdinand was often romantically linked to other women from prominent families, including the daughter of former president Manuel Quezon. However potentially upsetting, Ferdinand's libidinal energy was nonetheless regarded as an indubitable sign of his virility, but this also meant that a woman of special qualities, one specifically destined for him, was needed in order to sublimate his sexuality: ''You remember how we used to tell you that the girls you went with were not right for you?'' Ferdinand, then 31 years old and preparing to run for Congress, is asked by his neighbor, Mrs. Servera Verano. ''You remember how we used to ask, 'How would she be as First Lady?' You must be even more careful now when you choose a bride, because a man's wife is very important in politics; she can ruin him. You have a special mark, Andy. . . . Don't scar yourself with the wrong woman.''[7]

Ferdinand seemed never to have entertained any doubts about Imelda. She had first come to his attention through photographs in newspapers in connection with her involvement in a Manila beauty contest. Seeing her eating watermelon seeds at the cafeteria of the former Congress building, Ferdinand was seized by desire: ''He stood motionless for a moment, an action which did not go unnoticed by canny politicians present, whose eyes miss nothing unusual. Other members of the House drifted in. Marcos asked to be introduced to the fair stranger.''[8] He was convinced that she was the ''Archetypal Woman,'' the ''wife that he had been waiting for all his life. . . who in this case appeared to have all in a woman to make Matrimonial Alliance . . . simply ideal.''[9] As Ferdinand said later, meeting Imelda for the first time ''made me feel as I never felt before.'' It was as if ''I had her in mind many times before, but who she is and where she is, I (didn't) know—now, here she is.''[10]

What is striking about the various narratives of the Marcos romance is the way in which they all indicate the presence of others watching the process of the ''Matrimonial Alliance'' develop. This includes Ferdinand himself, who first sees Imelda's photograph in the papers, and then is stirred by her unexpected appearance in his midst. It is as if her appearance confirmed what he had in mind all along but could not quite articulate. Similarly, the ''canny politicians'' present in the cafeteria recognized the scene as ''unusual''—something set apart from casual meetings. Throughout Ferdinand's pursuit of Imelda, a third party invariably was made to witness the courtship. The position of this third party was, however, taken by neither of the couple's

[6] Spence, *Marcos*, 217.
[7] *Ibid.*, 207.
[8] *Ibid.*, 240.
[9] Pedrosa, *The Untold Story*, 153.
[10] *Ibid.*, 154.

parents, as might be expected in lowland courtship rituals; rather, it was occupied by other politicians, journalists, or the "public." For example, the couple was introduced by another congressman, Jacobo Gonzalez; while a journalist friend of Ferdinand, Joe Guevarra, was seemingly present at every single moment of the eleven-day courtship in Bagiou that led to the couple's marriage. Indeed, Ferdinand's mother never figured in the romance, and Imelda's father was informed of the couple's marriage only after the civil ceremony was performed by a local judge in Trinidad Valley. Just as Ferdinand had first discovered Imelda in the newspapers, Imelda's father, Vicente Orestes Romualdez, first learned of Ferdinand from "articles in old magazines" that featured him as one of the outstanding Congressmen of the year. Parental authority is thus marginalized or more precisely, subsumed into a larger category that includes the "public" as it is constituted of newspaper readers. The relationship between Imelda and Ferdinand seemed from its inception to have been a part of their official history: Rather than held back from view, it is exposed for all to see, an integral moment in the unfolding of his future as president and her's as First Lady.

The chronicling of the Marcos romance, like the identification with the legend of Malakas and Maganda, was part of their larger attempt to manufacture their pasts. The biographies of Imelda and Ferdinand rework their respective pasts to make it appear as if they were always meant to be the First Couple. Ferdinand's commissioned biography, for example, opens with the sentence, "Ferdinand Edralin Marcos was in such a hurry to be born that his father, who was only eighteen years old himself, had to act as his midwife."[11] Having dispensed with the burden of paternal influence, the narrative quickly focuses on the son's life. Its portrayal of Ferdinand's past is relentlessly and monotonously one-dimensional. His "destiny" is never in doubt. Every detail of his life—from schoolboy to law student, from guerilla fighter to congressman, from lover to father—is seen from a single vantage point: his future as president of the Philippines. It is as if everything that has happened in his life was meant to happen. Accused of murdering his father's political rival in 1939, Marcos turns the trial into an opportunity to gain national attention. He defends himself while studying for the bar exams—which he inevitably passes with honors.[12] "Ever since his escape from the youthful murder conviction, the Ilokanos had said . . . that this favorite son would one day be President. . . ."[13] Even minor incidents are seen as auguries of greatness. As a young boy, Marcos, punished by his father for some mischief, is made to work in the mines, there learns how to use dynamite. This knowledge then becomes useful years later when Ferdinand battles the Japanese during the war.[14]

[11] Spence, *Marcos*, 5.
[12] *Ibid.*, chs. 3–6.
[13] *Ibid.*, 194.
[14] *Ibid.*, 28.

One gets a sense from this biography, therefore, that everything in Marcos' life has always been accounted for, all outcomes foretold from the start. Biography merely confirms destiny so that the past becomes simply another version of the future. Personal and public history converge predictably so that events occur in ways that could not have happened otherwise. The point here isn't the accuracy or objectivity of the biography. Indeed, many details in official accounts have been shown to be spurious, particularly the stories of Marcos's war record.[15] Marcos's biography is yet another instance of his characteristic tendency to revise the past in the interest of projecting a spectacle of personal prowess. His notion of "destiny"—which I take to mean a kind of transhistorical and thus "natural" right to rule—is made to function as the unassailable context determining not only his past but that of other Filipinos as well.

In contrast to accounts of Ferdinand's life, Imelda's biographies stress the element of luck in her climb to power. While his past is always and everywhere made to bear the marks of an inescapable future, hers seems to have left the future to chance. It's well known that Imelda's family—the Romualdezes of Leyte—was part of a class of landed elite whose privileges were largely sustained by an American colonial machinery. Imelda's uncles rose to prominence in local and national politics after World War II, though her father, a lawyer by training, was weak and feckless in the care of his family. For this reason, Imelda's childhood was spent in relative poverty. Educated in Leyte, she moved in with her rich uncle in Manila and worked first as a music store clerk and later in the public relations department of the Central Bank of the Philippines. She first came into public attention after being chosen Miss Manila in 1953 and appeared on the cover of a weekly news magazine. Her life was thus marked by a series of transitions—from relative wealth to relative poverty, from countryside to city, from clerical obscurity to cover-girl prominence. Until she met Ferdinand, her involvements with other men seemed to have had no certain trajectory, least of all towards marriage. One reads of Imelda's past and gets a sense of how things could have been different.

The possibility of that difference, however, is figured by her biographers as the operation of "fate." Carmen Navarro-Pedrosa is explicit: "Imelda Romualdez Marcos more than anything else is a child of fate. Her life . . . is a Cinderella story . . . for her fairy godmother visited her on the evening of April 6, 1954, and with the magic wand, brought her into the life of Ferdinand E. Marcos."[16] She then quickly comes under his tutelage and works as his "secret weapon" to deliver the votes. Imelda becomes "The Other Marcos, beautiful, tender and appealing."[17] "It was she who filled that gap—the need

[15] See for example, Charles C. McDougald, *The Marcos File* (San Francisco: San Francisco Publishers, 1987), 5–108.
[16] Pedrosa, *The Untold Story*, xv.
[17] Polotan, "Marcos '65," 59.

to make her husband more popular—because she was not just a woman but a special kind of woman whose natural charms were lethal.''[18] Imelda's ''potency'' is thus linked to her difference from Ferdinand. Whereas his claims are couched in the idiom of an irresistible ''destiny,'' her power consists of projecting a certain kind of ''natural charm.'' What did this ''charm'' consist of? As the ''other'' Marcos, Imelda is also the other of Ferdinand. He takes over the direction of her life in the same way that she is said to ''fill a gap'' in his. Thus, Imelda provides Ferdinand with an occasion to display his mastery: He turns her into an avid campaigner and a good student of politics by teaching her to defer to his authority. ''She adopted his ways. . . She also took care not to make her husband's mind up for him. 'Even if he asked me,' she once said, 'I would never dare make a decision for him. . . .' ''[19] Through Ferdinand, Imelda discovers politics as a way of articulating her ambitions in ways that would not have been otherwise possible. In doing so, she came to see her power as the result of submitting to the destiny of her husband.

Mere submission to male ambition, however, does not account for the potency of her ''charm.'' Charm suggests the ability to fascinate, to compel the attention of others as if by magic. Its Latin root, *carm* (song or magical formula), points to the necessarily performative, even theatrical nature of that which is charming. Because of its association with ritual magic, the power to charm in one sense can be understood as the ability to present oneself as both source and object of desire. As various accounts indicate, Imelda's body and voice forced people to watch and listen in rapt expectation. A woman journalist and admirer of the Marcoses writes the following description of the workings of Imelda's ''lethal charm'' during a political rally in 1965:

> Led to the microphone, she touches it, and prepares to sing her winning repertoire: *Dahil sa Iyo, Waray, Dungdunguen can to la unay*. She has lost weight considerably, her bones show through her terno—it is a slight and vulnerable back that rises above the scoop of her neckline. But this is not the girl from Olot anymore, not this woman tonight: her face is drawn, fatigue sits on those shoulders, but she looks triumphantly at the scene. From the convention floor at the Manila Hotel nine months ago, to this stage tonight, stretch innumerable miles, and countless lessons and she has learned each one very well. . . . She knows the excitement of power—the crowd waits, like a trapped and unresisting prey, for Imelda to begin using that power: this is the secret they share, the crowd and Imelda, Imelda and the crowd. She will smile and flick those wrists and sing her little songs. . . . She bends and barely sways, beating time, glancing at the guitar and then lifts her face to point with her chin at the night bright with neon lights and a moon—the old charisma, with its look of suffering, potent tonight as never before, the brilliance of beauty commingling with the brilliance of pain, the haunted, agonized, tragic look encircling the plaza and holding her audience in thrall.[20]

[18] Pedrosa, *The Untold Story*, 203.
[19] Polotan, ''Marcos '65,'' 56.
[20] Polotan, ''The Men, The Method,'' 59–60.

This passage recalls the difference between Imelda and Ferdinand that I spoke of earlier. The juxtaposition of contrasting qualities—"fatigue" and "triumph", naïveté and cunning—in the person of Imelda evokes the transitions she has negotiated. Power excites her precisely because she did not always expect to have it. In this case, her power came less from her husband's destiny than from her ability to turn herself into an image that recalls a sense of shared loss among those who watch her. The crowd willingly submit themselves to her charm like an "unresisting prey." In a political rally, they are put in the position of spectators, included in the fantasy of loss that Imelda plays out. The "secret" she shares with them resides in her ability to stir a desire in them to see without being seen, to hear without being heard.

Imelda's charm was lethal to the extent that it was able to instigate and feed the wish for a kind of depoliticized community—one that would make the hierarchy between leaders and followers seem thoroughly benign. Through a series of stylized gestures and a standard repertoire of love songs in the vernacular, she created an atmosphere of generalized melancholia; yet melancholia was but one of the effects that her charm was calculated to generate. Other sensations doubtlessly grew out of seeing her, for her charm compelled others to stop thinking and start looking. Ferdinand himself is said to have fallen prey to her allure. When he saw her for the first time in the flesh, he stood "motionless." "Imelda was such a simple girl then and she had a way of making even the eloquent Congressman tongue-tied," another journalist wrote.[21] During the early stages of Marcos's first run for the presidency in 1965, "the oft-heard remark about the prospect of a Marcos victory was, 'Well, whatever kind of president he will make it is certain that if he wins, we will have the most beautiful and the youngest First Lady.' "[22] And during the inauguration of Marcos, the crowd was less concerned with the message of the speeches than with the appearance of Imelda,

> as if to say, "If there is anything the incoming administration can boast of, it is having the fairest and youngest First Lady". . . . "Just to see, just to see!" they had screamed in mob fashion: it was very little they asked. . . most people who had gone to the Luneta grandstand that morning were merely there to see the celebrated beauty of the new First Lady of the land. . . . Even as they heard the President declare "This nation can be great again," a marvelous slogan calculated to impress the public mind, they preferred the soft smile of the Lady by his side.[23]

What the public wanted was thus not the message of his speech but the sight of her smile. It was as if they saw political gatherings as an occasion to become audiences in a spectacle in which the central figure was the First Lady.

It is, however, important to note that her primacy was thought to stand in

[21] Joe Guevarra, cited in Pedrosa, *The Untold Story,* 156.
[22] Pedrosa, *The Untold Story,* 216.
[23] *Ibid.,* 222–3.

relation to his "destiny." The mythology of the Marcos romance underlined not only the lethal charm of Imelda, but also Ferdinand's conquest of that charm. He married her, taught her, drew her into his future, and by doing so turned her into his "secret weapon". Rather than disrupt his ambition, her charm worked as an instrument for its realization. Imelda's difference became useful in depoliticizing the encounter between the candidate and the crowd. Converted into voyeurs, they took in her feminine charm but at the price of acknowledging its masculine owner.

On one level then, narratives of the Marcos romance are about the domestication and deployment of sexual and historical differences in the realization of one man's ambition. Stories of Ferdinand's eleven-day "coup-courtship" of Imelda reformulated her difference as an asset that redounded to his benefit. Her charm was the feminine surplus that she brought into their marriage alliance and that was put into circulation during political campaigns and throughout Marcos' tenure as president. This surplus was constituted, as we have seen, by the power to instigate interest and thereby set the stage for the exchange between her husband and the public. Imelda's striking presence thus allowed power to circulate between Ferdinand and the crowd. While she reduced the people to spectators, he overwhelmed them with slogans and speeches in his "booming voice." They looked at her while he spoke to them. To employ Imelda, the "Archetypal Woman," is thus to control the conditions of possibility for the circulation of authority, just as in the courtship stories it also implies situating the representation of the past from the perspective of a single, totalizing male ego. Imelda thus makes visible the link between history and circulation. By domesticating her, Ferdinand establishes symbolic dominance over both.

FILM AND FEMALE AMBITION

Imelda Marcos's deference to her husband's ambitions was in some ways quite traditional and expected. Previous first ladies had done no less. Beginning with Mrs. Aurora Quezon, first ladies involved themselves in such ostensively apolitical activities as the Red Cross, The Catholic Women's League, and various charities and civic projects. Others, like Mrs. Esperanza Osmeña and Mrs. Evangelina Macapagal, took active roles in redecorating the Palace and "beautifying" national parks. Living largely in the shadow of their husbands, they seemed to have accepted their place without any qualms. As one writer put it, "All were out to be real helpmates to their husbands and each did it loyally and in the context of what their husbands set out to accomplish."[24]

What was spectacularly different about Imelda, however, lay in the amount of attention that she attracted and cultivated. Her "cultural" projects

[24] Rosario Mencias Querol, "What Are First Ladies For?," *Weekly Graphic* (February 24, 1965), 87 [hereafter, *WG*]

refashioned the landscape of metropolitan Manila. Her active participation in her husband's campaigns, her role in projecting an "international" image for the Philippines, the innumerable rumors of her extravagance, and her own political ambitions placed her constantly in the public eye. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, that public eye had, however, become accustomed to the spectacle of women acting out their ambitions. The rise of a new kind of first lady coincided with the emergence of a new *image* of woman, that of the *bomba* star. Bomba literally means "bomb," and it was a popular way throughout the 1960s of characterizing impassionate political rhetoric. It was also a synecdoche for charges of graft and corruption which were hurled by politicians against each other in Congress or during political campaigns. As Philippine newspapers and magazines of this period make clear, for a politician to "hurl" or "explode" a bomba was to reveal something to the public about another politician that the latter would have preferred to keep secret. By exposing what was once inaccessible to the public eye, one who explodes a bomba is one who gains a privileged visibility. That is, he or she is one who is able to stir public interest at the expense of his or her rival. This interest was directed as much at the nature of the other's crimes as at the fact that it had come to light. What was once hidden is now exposed for everyone to see and hear.

Bomba thus referred to the sudden yet motivated emergence of scandal—that is, of that which was new and out of place. In this way, it allowed for the imaging of scandal as spectacle not only in the domain of national politics but also in other contexts. So much is apparent in the fact that bomba came to refer to the wave of soft- and hard-core pornography that swept over the Philippine movies of this period. More precisely, bomba connoted the specific scenes in the movies in which women exposed their bodies to the camera for the audience to see. It also pertained to the lurid scenes of simulated sexual intercourse. Such scenes were but tenuously related to the narrative of the film and often arbitrarily inserted (*singit*) in the middle of the movie.

Women who appeared in these movies achieved a degree of notoriety which guaranteed further exposure on magazine covers and television talk shows, and in gossip columns. Indeed, most magazines in the Philippines, from the gossip sheets to the respectable weeklies, such as *The Philippines Free Press* and *The Weekly Graphic,* often featured bomba stars on their covers. Featuring such women was meant to increase the sale of these magazines. Their photographs provoked others to look in expectation. One magazine that featured a bomba star on its cover printed the following caption to her photograph: "Besides the ability to peel off her clothes in a provocative manner, what other attributes should a bomba star possess? Annabelle Rama, our cover girl for this issue, and the rest of her kind come up with very startling and exciting revelations."[25]

[25] *WG* (December 30, 1970), 1.

These "revelations" consisted of a kind of double exposure: The woman reveals her body to the camera and a largely male audience, which is exposed to scenes removed from everyday life. The audience in a bomba film—indeed in any film—is drawn to identify in the first place with the camera because the viewer's gaze is welded to the mechanical facility of the camera and so sees things that would normally be unobserved or inaccessible.[26] For this reason one writer was able to describe the bomba scene from the film "Igorotta" in the following way: "In the opening scene, a group of Ifugao maidens are shown bathing *au naturel* in a stream and every now and then, the camera zooms in on bosoms and behinds for intimate close-ups."[27] As the writer and audience watch this scene, they are able to see what is usually hidden and in ways that are unexpected and unnatural. By zooming toward and then away from bosoms and behinds, the camera's eye stands for—as well as extends—the audience's gaze. In this way, bomba movies sustain the interests of a predominantly male audience by mechanically reproducing the "explosion" of female bodies on the screen.

Bomba movies were tremendous commercial successes. They often played to capacity crowds in Manila and provincial cities. The Board of Censors occasionally banned such movies or cut some of its more lurid scenes. Government action, however, had the effect of further inciting people to see these movies, and the excised versions were either replaced with "bonus" scenes or restored in prints that circulated in the provinces.[28] A movie producer said , "Bomba is bombshell at the box office. Working on the proposition that sex almost always sells, local movies have more and more caught on to all the world's sin-erama [sic]."[29]

But bomba movies sold images of women, not the women themselves. What viewers saw on the screen and read about in magazines were understood to be the simulation, not actual occurrence, of violence and sex. For instance, it was common for bomba scenes to begin with the rape of a woman. "The rape scene . . . became more and more realistic with the entry of such cuddly pussycats as Bessie Barredo, Gina Laforteza and Menchu Morelli."[30] The men who portrayed the rapists were usually typecast as *kontrabidas* (villains) or "bomba specialists" who were expected to give in to their urges. Here, the "realism" of rape had to do with the way in which it led to the revelation of what was expected. Indeed, audiences were prone to yell *harang* (foul, cheat) at the screen when bomba scenes that were promised never emerged. Hence,

[26] I owe a great part of my discussion of film to the work of Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations,* Harry Zohn ed., trans. (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 217–52.

[27] Jose A. Quirino, "Another Kind of Bomba," *FP,* December 6, 1969, p. 18.

[28] Petronilio Bn. Daroy, "The New Films, Sex and the Law on Obscenity," *WG,* December 30, 1970, pp. 7–9.

[29] Cited in Quirino, "Another Kind of Bomba," 16.

[30] *Ibid.,* 18.

the scandal that precipitates the exposure of women was neutralized, or, more precisely, bomba movies generated both scandal and its containment insofar as what appeared on the screen were mechanically reproduced images that existed in a space and a time irreducibly separate from that of the viewers. More important, they were also made to seem the product of the intentions of others. We get a sense of this in other more benign but no less tendentious versions of the "revelation" of women in bomba movies. "The sexpots in local movies showed appetizing glimpses of their superstructures in swimming pool scenes where they donned itsy-bitsy, teeny-weeny bikinis which often—oops—got detached in the water, or in the bathroom scenes where their only covering was a curtain of water."[31] Movies were invested here with the capacity to motivate accident and to intend surprise. Shock was thus aestheticized as the product of a prior set of calculations. Perhaps this was the reason that bomba movies could engage in the most graphic violence against women and yet project them as "reasonable" people seeking to realize their ambitions apart from their roles as victims. For example, the trajectory of one bomba star's career was described as follows:

> "It was only of late that I've consented to appear in bomba scenes," Mila del Rosario, 23, admits. "In my first twelve pictures, I never thought I could be so daring. . . ."
>
> Mila started exploding in "Pussycat Strikes Again" when Bino Garcia, one of moviedom's most hated villains, undressed and attacked her in one scene, kissing her torridly and pawing her. In "The Gunman," she had a torrid love scene in bed with Van de Leon. In "Ligaw na Sawimpalad" ("The Wayward Unfortunate"), she was one of several girls victimized in a brothel. . . . She had another love scene with Henry Duval in "Vice Squad". . . .
>
> "I only consent to appear in a bomba scene if such a scene is extremely necessary to the plot and story. After all, European and Hollywood pictures have infinitely more salacious scenes."
>
> Before she entered the movies, Mila was an art model. She insists that all the bombas she explodes are done in good taste and with finesse.[32]

Here the bomba star is given a voice with which to speak rather than simply a body with which to act. She is depicted not as a passive victim of male intentions but as one who consented and actively participated in the making of bomba scenes. She thus comes across as "reasonable": open to negotiation and able to express her opinions. It is as if her complicity in the "explosion" of her own body makes those scenes the product of a prior contract among the star, director, producer, and consumer of these films that includes the writers and readers of magazine articles about them. Framed as such, the "explosiveness" and exploitiveness of bomba movies could be legitimized as part of a network of market transactions that included Europe and America. As such, viewing bombas in theatres or reading about them in magazines was

[31] *Ibid.*
[32] *Ibid.*, 36.

conventionalized and made part of a larger ethic of consumption correlated with female ambition. The scandal of male violence against women is reformulated in terms of the "bold" and "courageous" yet "taste[ful]" acts of women in exposing their bodies. In bomba movies, women acted out their ambitions within sight of the public gaze; thus, such movies established a new context for articulating female desire as a function not only of male desire but also of the interests of an anonymous audience of movie viewers and magazine readers.

Imelda Marcos in some ways personified the notion of female ambition that the bomba movies seemed to project. She saw her own desire not simply as a function of her husband's but also as a matter for public display. "She dressed to please Ferdinand . . . she lived, she said to see him look at her. 'I want to stand out in his eyes.' "[33] Just as his destiny validated her fate, her existence was given form for everyone to witness through his gaze. "Politics was his life and Marcos was hers—since she lived for Marcos, she would live for what Marcos lived. . . . Her days rose and fell by the Marcos sun."[34] Driven by his "destiny," she finds a way of expressing her ambition by responding to his desire "[t]o revive national pride and curb national weakness." So while he governed, "she would inspire" and "sow beauty where she could. . . . 'Culture and art and a taste for the beautiful must lead to goodness,' she said."[35]

This peculiar mix of ambition and deference on Imelda's part recalls the coupling of "boldness" and "vulnerability" among bomba stars. As such, the notion of bomba could furnish a means of conceptualizing what was new and thus potentially unsettling about the first lady. That it could do so was in part due to the workings of mass circulation media, which brought together into sharp juxtaposition formerly disparate objects, people, and events. For example, it was not uncommon for magazines to feature bomba stars on their cover with stories and photographs of Imelda Marcos on the inside one week, then to reverse this order of appearance in the next. Since the problematic position of the First Lady could thereby be imagined in conjunction with the "explosive" appearance of women in the movies, the ambivalent representations of Imelda came to share in the conditions of reception of bomba movies. Visualized beyond the public stage of electoral politics, her images, like those of bomba stars, created an audience that came to expect the political style of Ferdinand. For just as she appeared to move back and forth between traditional roles and unexpected prominence and accessibility, her husband sought to project a new postcolonial, nationalist appeal that at the same time capitalized on an older ethos of clientage and factionalism.

[33] Polotan, *Imelda*, 87.
[34] *Ibid.*, 86, 220.
[35] *Ibid.*, 184.

PLATE 1. Ferdinand Marcos as *Malakas* (Strong).

PLATE 2. Imelda Marcos, as painted by Claudio Bravo.

PLATE 3. Imelda Marcos, as painted by Federico Aguilar Alcuaz.

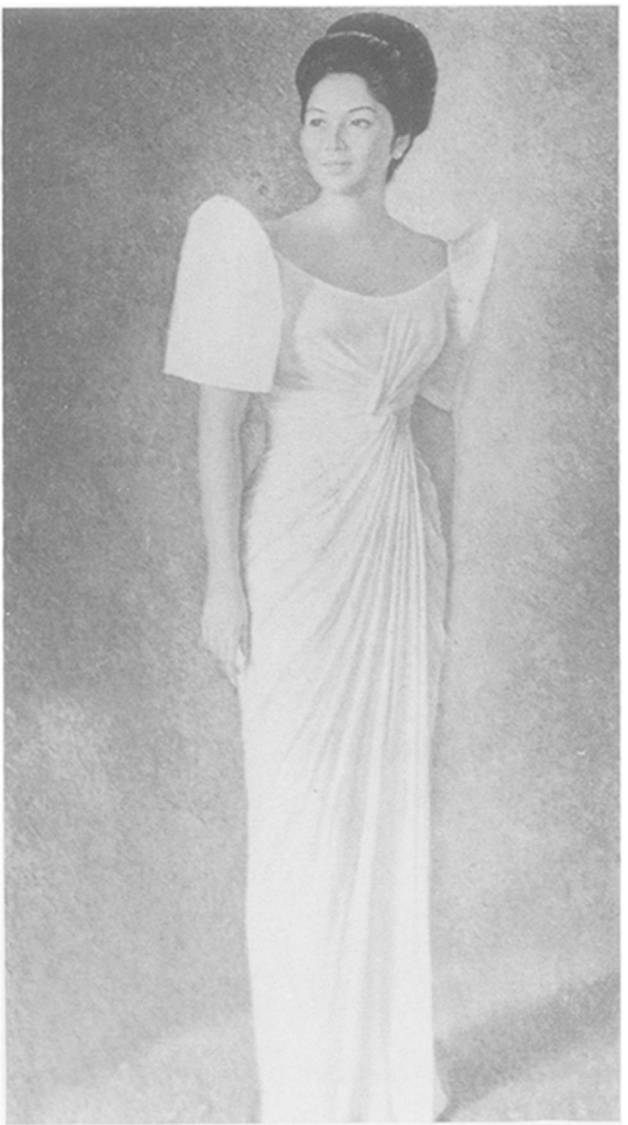

PLATE 4. Imelda Marcos, *A-Go-Go*, by Antonio Garcia Llamas.

What had allowed for the reconfiguration of sexual with political imagery in ways that anticipated and so constructed the terms of their popular reception in the 1960s? To answer this question, it is necessary to consider the larger historical context within which power was spectacularized: the breakdown of traditional patron–client ties in the face of an expanding capitalist market that characterized the dynamics of postwar Philippine politics. We must first turn to this history if we are to fully appreciate Imelda's role in the manufacture of Ferdinand's ''destiny.''

THE SIMULATION OF POLITICS

Imelda's numerous attempts to spread ''beauty'' and ''culture'' were of a piece with Ferdinand's nationalist pretentions of ''making this nation great again.'' As recent studies have shown, Marcos succeeded in monopolizing the resources of the country by joining a modernizing nationalist pose to a parochial, factionalist-oriented politics. As with previous presidents, Marcos turned the state into an instrument for asserting his factional hegemony over the country's competing elites. However, he was also scrupulous in articulating factionalism in terms of a vocabulary of nation building. This language left its most visible marks on the country's landscape by way of new school houses, extensive roads and expansive bridges—more being built under Marcos than under any other president, thanks largely to his ability to secure foreign loans.[36]

Imelda's ''cultural projects'' were logical extensions of Ferdinand's attempts to leave traces of his power everywhere. He sought to instrumentalize nationalism by embarking on development projects (which also served as occasions for the expansion of patronage and pork barrel) and appointing technocrats to his cabinet (thus gaining control of a new elite with no prior bases of influence). She sought to complement these moves by turning state power into a series of such spectacles as cultural centers, film festivals, landscaped parks, five-star hotels, and glitzy international conferences which seemed to be present everywhere yet whose source was infinitely distant from those who viewed them. These spectacles cohered less around egalitarian notions of nationhood than on the fact that they all originated from her and reflected her initiatives, which in turn had been explicitly sanctioned by the president. Whether on the campaign trail for Ferdinand or as first lady, Imelda was in a unique position to remake Philippine culture into the totality of the marks of the regime's patronage. National culture was construed as a gift from above that circulated to those below.

[36] See for example, the works of Primitivo Mijares, *The Conjugal Dictatorship of Ferdinand-Imelda Marcos* (San Francisco: Union Square Publications, 1976), 129–275, 400–11; Gary Hawes, *The Philippine State and the Marcos Regime* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), especially chs. 1–5. See also John Bresnan, ed., *Crisis in the Philippines* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), chs. 4–7.

Imelda's role in imaging culture as state beneficence cannot be understood apart from the vicissitudes of a notion of patronage that pervades the history of Philippine politics which assumes that power is synonymous with the ability to provide for all the discrete and multifaceted needs of *specific* others. Patronage implies not simply the possession of resources but, more important, the means with which to instigate the desire for and the circulation of such resources. In a political context ruled by factional rather than class-based opposition, patronage becomes the most important means for projecting power. While it is traditionally defined as consisting of the benign assertion that a hierarchy spanning a long period of time (usually measured along generational lines) will assure those below of benefits from above, it is conversely meant to confirm that those above are the "natural" leaders of those below. Patronage thus mystifies inequality to the point that makes it seem not only historically inevitable but also morally desirable, as it recasts power in familiar and familial terms. As such, the display of patronage is meant to drain the potential for conflict from social hierarchy. Conflict is ideally thought to occur among factions (rival patrons and their respective clients, as in elections, when only those with sufficient means can aspire to have purchase over others), not between patrons and their clients.[37]

The ideology of patronage determined to a large extent the shape of postwar political discourse in the Philippines; however, the economic and social basis for realizing traditional patron–client ties had been steadily eroding even before the war. Indeed, as Benedict Kerkvliet has so brilliantly shown, the intensified penetration of capitalist modes of production into the countryside

[37] The literature on the history and structure of patronage in the Philippines is enormous but not always instructive. The more significant ones include Mary Hollnsteiner, *The Dynamics of Power in a Philippine Municipality* (Quezon city: University of the Philippines Press, 1963); Theodore Friend, *Between Two Empires* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965); David Joel Steinberg, *Philippine Collaboration in World II* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1967); Carl Landé, *Leaders, Factions and Parties: The Structure of Philippine Politics* (New Haven: Yale Southeast Asian Studies, 1964); Onofre D. Corpuz, *The Philippines* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice–Hall, 1965), especially 93–140; K. G. Machado, "From Traditional Faction to Machine: Changing Patterns of Political Leadership and Organization in Rural Philippines," *Journal of Asian Studies,* 33:4 (August, 1974), 523–47; Amando Doronilla, "The Transformation of Patron–Client Relations and Its Political Consequences in Postwar Philippines," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies,* 16:1 (March 1985), 99–116; Reynaldo Ileto, *Pasyon and Revolution* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1979); Benedict Kerkvliet, *The Huk Rebellion: A Study of Peasant Revolt in the Philippines* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977); Resil Mojares, *The Man Who Would be President: Serging Osmeña and Philippine Politics* (Cebu City: Maria Cacao, 1986). The vicissitudes of patronage under the colonial regime of the United States is thematized by the essays in Peter Stanley, ed., *Reappraising an Empire: New Perspectives on Philippine-American History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984); and in Ruby Paredes, ed., *Philippine Colonial Democracy* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1989). My own discussion of the historical origins of patronage and notions of reciprocity in the early Spanish colonial era is found in Vicente L. Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society Under Early Spanish Rule* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 110–35.

immediately adjacent to Manila, which began around the 1930s, resulted in the trend towards wage labor, mechanization, and absentee landlordism. Such developments led to the subversion of the economic and social basis of patronage, while at the same time drawing peasants to frame their demands ever more forcefully along the lines of traditional reciprocal indebtedness. Such demands, ultimately culminating in the Huk rebellion from the late 1940s to the early 1950s, did not, however, result in the restoration of precapitalist forms of personal relationships but to the further institutionalization of impersonally contractual, money-based relationships among peasants, landlords and their local agents. Under the sponsorship of the Philippine state, which in turn was heavily dependent on military and financial support of the United States, the material and moral matrix of traditional notions of patronage rapidly unravelled.[38]

These developments in the Philippines—of which Central Luzon and the Manila areas were perhaps only the most notable examples—amounted to the consolidation of a capitalist economy by the mid-1960s that did not at the same time lead to the widespread establishment of ideas and practices of class-based politics. Instead, a generalized longing for a notion of patronage seemed to persist which harked back to more traditional concepts of hierarchy that simultaneously relied on money to forge and sustain "instant" patron–client ties. National and local elections became the privileged venues for playing out this desire for patronage, as vertical alliances reminiscent of traditional patron–client ties were contracted, consolidated, or redrawn.[39] Such ties were deeply problematic because they tended to be determined less by the exchange of moral obligations than by the circulation of money. Money had the effect of turning patronage into a commodity. Investing the idea of patronage with money made it possible for a candidate running for national office to accumulate a clientage beyond any specific locality over a drastically shortened period of time. These clients, however, remained largely anonymous to the candidate. The exchange of money for votes—a practice almost universally commented upon by those who have written about postwar Philippine politics—had the effect of turning elections into markets.[40] Elec-

[38] Kerkvliet, *The Huk Rebellion,* 1–25, 250–60, 266–69. See also the works of Landé, Steinberg, Friend, Machado, and Mojares cited above.

[39] See Landé, *Leaders, Factions and Parties,* 15–18, 24–25, 72–75, 62–68, 79–81, 111–4; Machado, "From Traditional Faction to Machine"; and Glenn May, "Civic Ritual and Political Reality: Municipal Elections in Late 19th Century Philippines" in *A Past Recovered* (Quezon City: New Day Press, 1987), 30–52, which suggests that the commodification of patronage was a process with roots in the latter half of the Spanish colonial period, just as different parts of the country were going through a more thorough going transition to a capitalist economy. The indispensable guide to the economic and social processes entailed by such a transition is Alfred McCoy and Ed. J. de Jesus, editors, *Philippine Social History: Global Trade and Local Transformations* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila Press, 1982).

[40] See especially Mojares, *The Man Who Would be President,* 71–81, for a succinct summary of the importance of money in Philippine politics.

tions were seen neither in the liberal democratic sense of expressing one's will over questions of political representation nor as rituals for the reiteration of reciprocal indebtedness between leaders and led; instead, in a society increasingly governed by commodity exchange, elections became moments for the *simulation* of patronage. The extremely common practice of buying votes recreated the sense and sensation of patronage as wealthy men distributed money through their agents and thus projected the semblance of being in control of circulation; yet, the treatment of votes, like patronage, as commodities also undercut the moral and ethical basis of traditional patron–client ties. While money made it possible to have instant purchase over a mass of anonymous clients, it also enabled such clients to switch patrons readily and evade their influence. In short, money attenuated the moral implications of reciprocity by trading on the desire for patronage with its calculated imaging.

Philippine politics in the 1960s was caught up in the profound contradiction between the ideology of patronage and the material and social conditions set forth by capitalism, between what appeared to be a generalized wish for a social hierarchy stabilized along traditional idioms of reciprocity and a national state whose links with various localities were mediated mainly by money. It was precisely at this historical juncture that the Marcoses emerged into the national scene. Their success lay in their ability to seize upon—rather than resolve—the central contradictions of postwar Philippine politics. Ferdinand and Imelda played on them, seeking to utilize money and what it could buy in order to simulate patronage and the imaging of benevolent power (inexhaustible "strength" and eternal "beauty") at the top of the national hierarchy. Herein lay one source of their early popularity: They seemed to be able to furnish a way of conceiving the "new" and the alienating changes it implied in the familiar and familial terms of patronage.

The Marcoses deployed a cultural repertoire that ranged from narratives of virility and romance to spectacles of nationalist vigor and feminine allure, appearing to evoke change while simultaneously eschewing the imperatives of social reform. They seized upon the crisis of authority generated by the traumatic changes in colonial regimes and postcolonial upheavals, and they sought to project the aura of patronage precisely by resorting to the very means that guaranteed its disintegration, thereby calling forth its repeated simulation. Converted into grand public gestures and discrete forms of commodities, patronage could hence blur the difference between popular and mass culture, between the ambitions of one couple and the history of the nation. Thus did the imaging of state power in the early Marcos years also attempt to dictate the ideological conditions under which they were to be received.

Imelda's biographies provide one way of getting a sense of the way in which the Marcoses simulated patronage. She styled herself as the consummate patroness of the Philippines. As she tells one of her biographers: "Peo-

ple come to you for help. They want jobs. . . or roads, or bridges. They think you're some kind of miracle worker and because of their faith, you try to do your best.''[41] In this regard, she also saw herself as a privileged mediator between the rich and poor. Rather than reverse or abolish the difference between the two, she sought to drain it of its tensions, ''officiating at the marriage of public welfare and private wealth.''[42] She is characterized not only as generous but excessively so. Constantly besieged by callers of all sorts, from mayors to fashion models, ambassadors to barrio folks, she comes across as a dynamo on the move:

> Day after day, at the stroke of 9 a.m., undeterred by lack of sleep, fainting spells, miscarriages, low blood pressure, kidney trouble, bad teeth, the brutal barrage of newspapers, and the ire of Benigno Aquino, she sits upright in a French sofa, receiving callers.
>
> Fifty callers, on lean days; forty on the average; a hundred when they come in delegations. . . .
>
> She eats a late lunch. ''I take no siesta,'' she says. In the afternoons, before she goes out to ''cut a ribbon, maybe,'' inaugurate a hospital pavillion, attend the opening of a hotel, or launch a tanker, a book or a painter, she has two or three free hours. ''I sit down and am quiet.''
>
> No one disturbs her while she runs mentally through a list, checking and cross-checking what she could have done and failed to do.[43]

Virtually impervious to adversity, Imelda was seen as the symbolic origin of all activity, from ribbon cuttings to book launchings. Nothing ever escaped her, for she kept a running account on all those things completed, as well as those yet to be accomplished. Thus we get the fantasy of a panoptic consciousness wedded to a body that, like money, is in constant circulation. This image of inexhaustible patronage was one that stirred a welter of interest from people:

> Then before I go to sleep, I have to go through the correspondence I received during the day . . . usually 2,000 letters a day. This one asking for a job, that one telling about a child that has to be hospitalized, this one asking for a picture, that one for an autograph. It takes me one or two hours just signing letters: they all want your real signature.[44]

This is to say: ''They all want a part of me. They cannot help but think of me.'' ''They'' ask not only favors but for the ''real'' marks of her person: her photograph and signature. The circulation of her and, by extension, her husband's patronage was thus conjoined to the dissemination of their images.

Imelda was acutely conscious of the link between patronage and its imaging. For example, it was common for visitors to the presidential palace to be presented with souvenirs which included ''pictures, small bottles of perfume,

[41] Polotan, *Imelda,* 195.
[42] *Ibid.*
[43] *Ibid.*, 233–4.
[44] *Ibid.*, 235.

bound copies of a favorite Marcos speech. Who before her ever took the trouble and the thought to make each Palace visit [into] An Occasion?''[45] By converting such moments into ''An Occasion'' for the display of patronage the giving of souvenirs was thus not only to commemorate the simple fact of having been in the presence of the Marcoses but also provided the means for memorializing the distance separating the benefactor from his or her client long after the visit had occurred. The status of such objects as souvenirs lay precisely in their ability to convey the aura of their source—to the extent that they forged a relationship of indebtedness between their source and recipients. In so doing, such objects were meant to ensure that the latter continue to keep the former in mind. Souvenirs as tokens of patronage spurred one to reciprocate and thereby acknowledge the power of their source.

As fetish objects, images of patronage also invoked, however, their character as commodities, especially when they appeared in mass-circulation newspapers and magazines. Mechanically reproduced images of patronage simultaneously denied and confirmed the workings of money at the basis of national politics. One focal point of this tension was the figure of Imelda herself. As suggested earlier, she shared a kind of spectacular displacement with bomba stars, whose public display was regarded to be desirable as much as it was ultimately disempowering. Some examples should illustrate Imelda's ''explosiveness''—in a sense, the real meaning of her ''lethal charm''—which recalls patronage, even as it mystifies its breakdown *and* simulation. For example, the *Philippine Free Press* published photographs of three oil portraits of Imelda shortly after the reelection of Marcos in late 1969.[46] These paintings were given to her by the artists themselves and hung, along with her other portraits, ''above stairwells and along corridor walls where they startled.''[47] An anonymously written commentary accompanies the reproductions and helps us to anchor our reading of these portraits. Although the paintings were done by academically trained painters and were accompanied by a commentary in English, their reproduction appeared in an influential weekly usually purchased by educated readers inside and outside of Manila. Hence, these documents, which are not necessarily representative examples of mass response to the Marcoses, can, nonetheless, be seen as symptomatic of precisely the kind of reception that the Marcoses would have

[45] *Ibid.*, 237.

[46] ''Three Images of Imelda'', *FP,* December 13, 1969, pp. 92–94. By the latter half of 1970, the *Philippine Free Press* became increasingly critical of the Marcoses. Its editors came to be convinced that Ferdinand intended to stay in office beyond his constitutionally mandated second term, which was due to expire in 1973. There were widespread rumors that Imelda was going to be fielded as a candidate for the presidential elections and that her election would maintain her husband as de facto president. The fear of a Marcos dynasty was compounded by reports in 1971 of secret plans for the declaration of martial law, the declaration of martial law in 1972 and the shut down of the *Free Press* along with other media critical of the Marcoses.

[47] Polotan, *Imelda,* 212.

wanted to generate among the nation's population. They thus provide us with an instructive moment in the history of the Marcoses' attempt to encourage and contain the complicity of those whose cultural and social influence was considerable.

The commentary notes that the artists were trying to express the "real" Imelda in a way which would adequately sum up her many roles as "figure of state, a politician, a housewife and mother, a fashion pacesetter, a civic worker, a connoisseur of good living, a patroness of the arts."[48] There is a sense here that both the artists and the commentator were seeking to come to terms with what seemed to be a "new" dimension to Imelda: She exceeded the traditional categories associated with being a woman and a first lady. Imelda provoked attention because—as with bomba stars—she exposed herself in novel situations and made her body available for all to see; but while the bodies of bomba stars bore the signs of the marketplace, Imelda's body figured the vanishing point (in the double sense of the term, as focus and disappearance) of the history of patronage in the midst of the marketplace.

The first portrait by Claudio Bravo (Plate 2) shows Imelda as if gliding past some mysterious landscape. The accompanying commentary is worth quoting at length for its attempt to match the allusiveness of the painting:

> [T]he figure moves in a light that never was on sea or land. The details are precise: the parasol tugs at the hand and is tugged by the wind blowing a skirt into rich folds. Yet the landscape is not so much seen as felt: a seaside, early in the morning, on a cool day. And the figure seems not to walk but to float on the stirred air. The expression on the face is remote; this is a woman beyond politics and palaces, a figure from dream or myth. It's the pale ivory color that makes the scene unearthly, as though this were a frieze from some classic ruin. Just beyond the frame will be sirens choiring, the swell of a striped sail and, across the perfumed seas, Troy's burning roof and tower.[49]

The remoteness of the figure, combined with its "pale ivory color," gives this portrait an uncanny quality. One looks at it and feels that although one can recognize Imelda's features, one can't quite establish a context for them. Instead, just as the figure seems to "float on the stirred air," so the mind that contemplates this painting drifts outside of the frame towards thoughts of a distant Greek epic; and because this figure seems so removed from the world of politics and exists as in a dream, its "precise details" cannot but take on an hallucinatory quality: They set the mind in motion, inducing it to think of that which isn't there. This painting leads one to perceive not simply the likeness of Imelda but, as with bomba films, the possibility of seeing that which is out of place transformed into an object to be seen. At stake here is the imaging of patronage as something upon which one has a claim because it is shaped by one's own gaze. The figure is compelling not only because one feels one can see through and past it but also because one is reminded of the unbridgeable

[48] "Three Images", 92–93.
[49] *Ibid.*, 93–94.

distance which separates him or her from the source of power that the portrait represents. The viewer is haunted by the absence that the figure makes present.

This sense of being haunted is even more apparent in the second portrait by Federico Aquilar Alcuaz (see Plate 3). Again, it is instructive to cite the accompanying commentary at length:

> [Here] the scene is definite enough. Malacañang is in the background; so this must be the park across the river. . . . Nevertheless, it's not the Palace or park, certainly not the city that we feel here. This is provincial verdure, pastoral ground. And the figure in old rose is a country girl . . . of whom *kundiman* and *balitaw* sing. Indeed the melancholy of our folk music is in her wistful face. She has been sniffing at the white flower in her hand and it has stirred a memory. She herself stirs memories in us. . . . Her quiet dignity evokes a nostalgia for childhood's vanished countryside and its lovely simple girls.[50]

Again, the painting evokes the sense of the familiar sliding into something less so. What looks like the presidential palace and its immediate surroundings is conflated with "memories" of "pastoral grounds," "folk music," and "childhood's vanished countryside." Thus it summons the imaginary scene of patronage untainted by the complexities of the marketplace. Symbolic of this is the figure of the woman in deep reverie. What is curious is that we're never told about the contents of her thoughts but only the fact that in seeing her remembering, the viewer may reminisce as well. Recalling her childhood, the viewer may also be drawn to look back upon another time and place in which women were "simple" and presumably knew their place. In this way the figure calls forth something that's no longer present. The nostalgia-inducing effect of this second painting is not very different from the hallucinatory quality of the first; both lead the viewer to think of something missing and to expect its appearance.

Notably contrasting with these two portraits of Imelda, however, is the third painting by Antonio Garcia Llamas (Plate 4). Here the figure of Imelda is backlighted in such a way as to completely obscure any sense of place. The background exists as mere shadings that serve to highlight the foreground. The figure is erect and thus made to seem wholly autonomous, its sovereign appearance underlined by the absence of details on the dress and the centering of distinctive features on the face instead. The effect of this composition is to lead one to focus on the figure's gaze:

> . . . a poised modern woman looks us over. It's not we who eye her, we can only respond to her glance. She is definitely of the city and of our day, as lustrous with nervous energy as the powerful cars she rides or the go-go committees she chairmans. . . . The glance we respond to flashes across the muddled cityscape we must unravel to get where the white-on-blue decorum is, the promise of a civilized society.[51]

[50] *Ibid.*, 94.
[51] *Ibid.*

In this portrait, we are confronted with a somewhat jarring reversal of the relationship between the subject and the object of spectatorship. Unlike the other two, which exist as objects for our gaze, this figure "looks us over" and so causes us to take notice of her *and* to reflect on the fact that we are doing so. Her glance is what makes up the condition of possibility of our sight. We experience the painting as the presence of a powerful eye that sees all, yet we only apprehend "flashes" of this pervasive glance; and in doing so we feel ourselves to be part of a "civilized society" constituted by the modern state. The power of her gaze is seen in association with the "nervous energy" of cars and "go-go" committees which can operate at all times of the day and night. Thus can we account for what initially seems like a puzzling discrepancy between what we first see of this gaze and what the commentator is led to see. Although Imelda does not, in fact, look directly at the viewer but off to the side, the commentator claims that she looks at us, as if our position as viewers has been split into two: We are at once in front of the portrait, yet also at the margins of the frame—spectators to the extent that we have been incorporated into a prior and largely invisible spectacle. Just as the audience in bomba movies comes to sense its subjection to the staging of revelations intended by others, the viewer of the painting is made to realize his or her other identity as one who sees and to realize it results from already having been seen by someone else.[52]

When taken together with the Marcos biographies, these paintings suggest some of the ways by which assumptions about patronage can work to aestheticize and so dehistoricize politics. Since the relationship between ruler and ruled are converted into fantasies about seeing and being seen, the viewer then imagines himself or herself as alternately the subject and object of the intentions of the other. Imelda's privileged visibility resulted from her use of Ferdinand's name in carrying out projects meant to enhance both of their positions as "national patrons" concerned with the needs of the country. Her visibility, however, corresponded to a pervasive invisibility, as indicated by the third portrait. Constructing her role as patroness meant that, like money, she had to be in constant circulation: Her photographs in newspapers and magazines became as ubiquitous as her various projects. Her images confirmed her ability to seem to be everywhere. Thus, they could and were construed to be traces of a ghostly presence whose gaze, except for flashes, remained essentially hidden from our sight—perhaps why Ferdinand referred to Imelda over and over again as his "secret weapon." Given the foregoing

[52] For elaborations of the theoretical issues informing my account of patronage and spectatorship in post-colonial Philippines, see the closely related essays of Stephen Greenblatt, "Invisible Bullets: Renaissance Authority and its Subversion," *Glyph,* no. 8, 1981, 40–61; Christopher Pye, "The Sovereign, the Theatre and the Kingdome of Darknesse: Hobbes and the Spectacle of Power," *Representations,* no. 8 (Fall 1984), 85–106; and William Flesch, "Proximity and Power: Shakesperean and Cinematic Space," *Theatre Journal,* 39:3 (October 1987), 227–93.

discussion, we might take this to mean that she served as his favored bomba—"exploding" her lethal charms for an audience grown habituated as much to the staging of scandal as to the commodification of politics. In both politics and the movies, women were made to represent instances of larger intentions at work, galvanizing the interests of people while demarcating their identity as mere viewers of spectacles.