

HERE LIES LOVE Notes on Fetishizing History

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Abstract

This essay examines “Here Lies Love,” a concept album based on the life story of former Philippine First Lady Imelda Marcos. The album, produced by US-based artist David Byrne, is a fantasy-production of Western imaginary that allows for the fetishization and feminization of history through a sympathetic retelling of Imelda’s biography. Through a discussion of the disco-opera genre and representative songs, the essay moreover argues that the album reinforces the myth of Imelda as it contrasts her life story with Estrella Cumpas, the woman who raised Imelda, whose character serves as the album’s anti-star. The essay finally contends that Byrne’s project dangerously reinforces the myth of Imelda as a fascinating figure of power, as constructed from a distanced Western perspective.

“Imelda began her stint as First Lady by building a fantasy to captivate her country. She ended it as a prisoner of a ridiculous dreamworld.”¹
-*Katherine Ellison*, *Imelda: Steel Butterfly of the Philippines*

The myth of Imelda Romualdez-Marcos remains powerful to this day, not just in the literal sense that she has been re-elected into office or that she walks the streets of Manila as a free woman, having been acquitted from voluminous charges of corruption and human rights violations. The myth of Imelda persists in the ambiguity of the verdict bestowed upon her by Filipinos and non-Filipinos alike. Even as history attests to Imelda’s role as Ferdinand Marcos’ partner-in-crime in twenty years of what has been called the conjugal dictatorship, many still regard her as a woman of charm, a subject of fascination, in spite or because of her role in Philippine history.

The myth of Imelda is a strong example of myth personified, as it “transforms history into nature” (Barthes 1973/2006, 300). As Barthes has

argued, “Myth does not deny things...its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification” (Ibid 301). The myth of Imelda is continuously reproduced through various cultural forms including Imelda’s regular public appearances and interviews. Many commentators have noted that Imelda has a certain “charm” about her, even though her crimes of extravagance are widely acknowledged. One local journalist remarks: “Whatever we may think of her, she is an original. No one like her had appeared on our stage before, and no one has upstaged her since. [...] Even though we know all about her and she is more caricature than real, she remains an irresistible spectacle, a natural crowd drawer” (Coronel 2006). The quote not only points to the seemingly natural and unique appeal of Imelda, it also suggests that Imelda’s myth is propagated as spectacle, through the continuous proliferation of Imelda’s images and performances today.

Such is the myth of Imelda that inspired the production of “Here Lies Love” (2010), a two-disc concept album written and produced by David Byrne, former member and principal songwriter of the American new-wave band Talking Heads. The participation of popular disco/dance DJ/music producer Norman “Fatboy Slim” Cook in the musical arrangement of “Here Lies Love” adds to the appeal of the album. The “disco opera” features 22 songs recorded by various singers—including Tori Amos, Cyndi Lauper, Natalie Merchant, among other popular female singers—that “present[s] Imelda Marcos meditating on events in her life, from her childhood spent in poverty and her rise to power to her ultimate departure from the palace” (Byrne 2010). Interestingly, the album also presents the meditations of Estrella Cumpas, a friend of the Romualdez family who took care of the young Imelda.

Byrne’s musical project parallels a potent aspect of Imelda’s mythology given her well-known penchant for singing in public, a performance she first enacted to support her husband’s political campaigns. As First Lady, Imelda would regularly perform songs such as “Dahil Sa’yo” for local and international audiences. According to critic Christine Balance, Imelda staged these performances as a form of affective politics: “By singing songs familiar to the provincial masses, the former *probinsyana* preyed upon her personal biography of being *promdi* (from the province) and fashioned an alternative mode of kinship through music” (2010, 125). Imelda’s use of music to sustain power was also apparent in the songs and musical institutions she commissioned as “Patroness of the Arts” during the Marcos years. Raul Navarro, for instance, cites “Bagong Lipunan,” a song commissioned by Imelda, which was used to instill the idea of the nation’s prosperity under Marcos rule (2008, 57).

The title of Byrne's concept album is derived from a disturbing scene in the movie "Imelda" (2003). Imelda stood beside the preserved corpse of Ferdinand Marcos encased in glass and said: "In his tombstone it says Filipino. In my tombstone, I would like to have inscribed 'Here Lies Love.' But really, here lies love." [Imelda then gazed at her husband's corpse]. This scene, both morbid and tender, would indeed illicit curiosity from viewers, especially from those who are not as familiar with Imelda's strange performances. According to Byrne, his interest in Imelda began after seeing this movie. "The story I am interested in is about asking what drives a powerful person—what makes them tick? How do they make and then remake themselves?" (Byrne 2010).

The question posed by Byrne reveals that the production of "Here Lies Love" is an attempt to retell and re-stage the narrative of the Imelda myth. I posit that this album reveals Byrne's desire to understand Imelda's desires. In the loose sense that desires are comprised of dreams, the album is an attempt to comprehend Imelda through her dreams, which Byrne translated into words and music. Additionally, "Here Lies Love" incorporates the dreams of Estrella Cumpas alongside Imelda's. The concept album may thus be read as product of dreams—the dreams of Imelda/Estrella—as well as the dreams of the Western writer-producer as represented by Byrne.

From the subject used to the form it takes, initial assumptions regarding "Here Lies Love" as a cultural product can already be argued: the choice of subject is a kind of political intervention because of the subject's significance in history; any claim to authenticity or truth in terms of representation is flimsy and suspicious; and most importantly; the project romanticizes (literally, rendered as music) and commodifies (since the album is sold) political history. From these assumptions, this paper will read "Here Lies Love" as a product of dreams that operate as fantasies within the global Western dreamwork.

GLOBAL-FEMINIZED DREAMWORLD

Imelda's life story essentially narrates the rise to power of a beautiful barrio girl turned First Lady, the typical rags-to-riches biography that partly explains the persistence of Imelda's popular appeal. "Here Lies Love" sings and narrates the fulfillment, and the loss, of Imelda's dreams of power and prestige. Certainly, Imelda's dreams may be understood in the whimsical sense of dreams as wishes, but "to the extent that dreams fuel and further the logics of the dominant global order, they perform the

work of fantasies” (Tadiar 2004, 7). Such fantasies may be located within the context of the global dreamwork, the fantasy-production of the global capitalist order, according to critic Neferti Tadiar.

To illustrate the theory of fantasy-production, Tadiar opened her book with a discussion of an infamous video that captured Ferdinand and Imelda singing the anthem “We are the World” during a party on their yacht. For Tadiar, “The tawdry dreams of the Marcoses to be equivalent with world power (‘We are the World’) as well as the dreams of ‘ordinary’ Filipinos, apparently nostalgic for a world they never lost, are deeply implicated in the dreamwork of the capitalist interstate world-system” (Ibid 5). While the Marcoses fantasized that they were “the world,” the world knew otherwise. The US imperialist nation, then and now, owns the “codes of fantasy” in the global capitalist dreamwork, proven true when the Marcoses were deposed shortly after the US withdrew support for Ferdinand, otherwise known as “America’s Boy.”

How do we locate “Here Lies Love” within the existing global dreamwork? Released almost twenty-five years after the 1986 People Power uprising that ousted the Marcos regime, “Here Lies Love” is a product of the Western imaginary, reflective of American fantasy-production built on Imelda’s excessive dreams. Under the imperialist gaze, Imelda’s story is both condemnable and intriguing—her beauty and lavishness are juxtaposed with accounts of corruption and fascism. In an interview, Byrne expressed this ambiguity: “It’s not like they’re all bad: they did some horrible things but they also did some good things.” Fantasy-production allows for this kind of distanced ambiguity.

Tadiar moreover points to the heteronormative framing of Western fantasy-production: “This mode of relations between the Philippines and America operates according to a fantasy of heteronormative relations...a sexual masquerade in which the Philippines serves the US as a feminine ideal...” (Ibid 73). This explains the choice of female subject in Byrne’s Western project, as Imelda’s biography may also be read as a representation of the nation’s biography.

Byrne’s interest in Imelda thus derives from the desire to understand the dreams not just of any national figure, but those of a female national figure. Imelda’s active participation in political affairs and the power she shared with her husband was unprecedented in Philippine political history. As First Lady, she considered herself the Mother of the Republic, whose role was to cultivate the True, Good, and Beautiful in the sphere of national culture. American reporter Katherine Ellison observed that “[Imelda] acquired more power than any other first lady in history,

or for that matter, many chiefs of state” (1998, 8). For Ellison, “It was Imelda’s tragic missteps and the specter of her taking over that finally cost the couple their rule.”

While Imelda’s power is derived from her marriage to Ferdinand, it is clear that she wields power of her own. As Vicente Rafael has argued, differentiating Imelda’s biography from that of her husband: “Power excites her precisely because she did not always expect to have it...her power came less from her husband’s [purported] destiny than from her ability to turn herself into an image that recalls a sense of shared loss among those who watch her” (1990, 289). If the Imelda myth is to be believed, this power is something Imelda rightly deserves. Consider, for instance, this passage from a much-cited Imelda biography: “While it is true that she worked as an intense campaigner for the victory of her husband, her ascendancy to the First Ladyship is largely an accomplishment of fate. The story of her life is a pattern of reward and justice far beyond her power to have attained” (Pedrosa 1969, 221).

For Rafael, Imelda’s power comes from her “lethal charm” that Ferdinand used to serve his political interests. Viewed this way, Rafael considers Imelda the “Other Marcos.” Much like the spectacle of the uninhibited female “bomba” stars in pornographic films which were popular during the Marcos years, Rafael argues that “The mythology of the Marcos romance underlined not only the lethal charm of Imelda, but also Ferdinand’s conquest of that charm” (1990, 290). Imelda was domesticated by Ferdinand and thus served as Ferdinand’s very own political “bomba” star.

While Rafael’s reading of Imelda is persuasive, it also dangerously borders on justifying Imelda’s acts as merely dependent on the male Marcos. It is worth reiterating that for all her drama and antics, Imelda was indeed Ferdinand’s accomplice during the dictatorial regime. As Balance puts it, “...Imelda’s power to charm and deceive [should be viewed] as a gendered corollary to her husband’s legislative and military power by force” (2010, 121). Balance cites Imelda’s performances of singing and weeping in local and international stages as her way of using her “feminine” charm to garner sympathy and perpetuate her myth, as she continues to do so today.

Imelda continues to perform for the public using her infamous charm and other antics, which obviously captured Byrne’s attention. And so, while the Western world continues to watch, (with fascination and from a safe distance), “Here Lies Love” provides Imelda with her own personalized soundtrack.

Balance’s study mostly focused on Imelda’s performance of music and lament, but she also cites recent projects (including Byrne’s) that seek

to re-imagine Imelda's acts as separate from political history. For Balance, Byrne's concept album "continues to maintain an ironic distance from its subject, an amused detachment from the actual events that led to her notoriety" (Ibid 134). In this paper, I wish to extend Balance's insight by shifting the focus on Byrne's project itself.

DISCO-OPERA

"Here Lies Love," as fantasy-production of Western (Byrne's) imaginary, necessarily takes the form of a cultural commodity. The production of the album exemplifies the commodification of music as a product of capitalism (an actual product, packaged, marketed, sold) that listeners buy and consume, not simply listen to. And as a commodity, "Here Lies Love" becomes fetishized, a mysterious, venerated "thing" that conceals social relations among human beings in the capitalist mode of production (Marx in Adorno 1991, 38).

Seen within the context of the global dreamwork, the fetish character of "Here Lies Love" thus operates on two levels, in that it is the fantasy-fetishization of an already fetishized commodity. Imelda herself is a (mythic) female brand, and this Imeldific fantasy-fetish is commodified further in "Here Lies Love." What sets "Here Lies Love" apart from typical music albums is not just that it is a "concept album" but that the concept being sold is a fetishized figure of Philippine history. "Here Lies Love" is a fantasy-production of a fantasy-production—fetishization of history through the fetishization of music.

We go back to the fetish character of music posited by Theodor Adorno, which despite its limitations, still manifests itself in musical productions today. In the capitalist culture industry, Adorno argues that "The fetish character of music produces its own camouflage through the identification of the listener with the fetish" (1991, 48). In the case of "Here Lies Love," the listener buys into (identifies with) the fetishized fantasy of Imelda. The selling factor of this album is dependent not so much on the music, but on branding of Imelda. The fetishization of music in "Here Lies Love" can be coupled with the fetishization of (Imelda's) image, as Byrne's promotional videos for the musical is assembled using historical footage of Imelda in her glory days.

This kind of double fetishism may explain the combination of genres that Byrne used in "Here Lies Love." The fusion of genres used in the record seems like a novel move considering its political/historical subject matter. Byrne calls it "disco-opera." While "Here Lies Love" is often compared to "Evita" in that both musicals feature the tragic lives of what

Westerners consider “fascinating” women leaders from underdeveloped countries, the former is categorized as a “rock opera.” Studies about rock often point to its capacity for subversion, and when coupled with opera suggests the staging of a subversive performance. But what about disco?

This is Byrne’s explanation for the choice of disco: “I thought to myself, wouldn’t it be great if—as this piece would be principally composed of clubby dance music—one could experience it in a club setting? Could one bring a ‘story’ and a kind of theater to the disco? Was that possible? If so, wouldn’t that be amazing!” (2010). Another explanation that Byrne provides is that the experience of dance music may be likened to the experience of being intoxicated with power. In other interviews, Byrne refers to accounts of the disco ball Imelda had installed in her New York apartment, as well as her appearances at Studio 54.

Compared to rock, disco seems to be a more fitting genre for capturing the frivolity and excessiveness of Imelda. The rhythm, tempo, and beats of the songs vary, but I would say that the music evokes nostalgia in the sense that it takes listeners back to the disco fever of the 1970s, which coincided with the period of Imelda’s reign. The genre moreover evokes Imelda’s overconsumption, if it is understood as a signifier of materialism. According to music critic Richard Dyer, disco “is a riot of consumerism, dazzling in its technology (echo chambers, double and more tracking, electric instruments), overwhelming in its scale (banks of violins, massed choirs, the limitless range of percussion instruments), lavishly gaudy in the mirrors and tat of discotheques, the glitter and denim flash of its costumes” (1979/1990, 357).

Dyer points out that disco may have subversive potential if one recognizes the contradiction between the intense experience of disco and the monotonous experience of everyday life outside of disco (Ibid 357-358). This ironic use of the genre is what Byrne generally fails to do in his project, which I will comment on further in the discussion of representative songs.

A review from Filipino writer Jessica Zafra commends Byrne’s choice of music for “Here Lies Love”:

The Imelda who emerges from *Here Lies Love* is not the greedy, power-mad virago many would prefer to see, but a naive country girl who truly believes that the story of the Philippines is her story. In her mind she IS the Philippines. Isn’t that what dance music does? For four minutes, it makes you believe that you are the invincible queen of the dance floor. It’s a match (2010).

It's a match, all right. But it's also a very forgiving portrayal. For most listeners, the depoliticized image of Imelda produced by this album will likely last beyond four minutes. The combination of disco and opera presents Imelda's story as some kind of hedonistic (disco) tragedy (opera). If viewed as a product of fantasy-fetishism, the function of disco in this album is not just to create a sympathetic image of Imelda. The function of disco is to celebrate Imelda's biography; the function of opera is to stage the celebration.

FEMINIZED DREAMS: SINGING ABOUT, SINGING FOR

To the extent that disco highlights the effects of music rather than its cognitive function, as Adorno would put it, the "counterpart" (Adorno, 46) of the fetish character of disco is "regressive listening" (Ibid). But "Here Lies Love," with its political subject-matter, does not automatically lead to this disengaged kind of listening. On the contrary, it invites us to listen more carefully, to consider not just the musical arrangement of the songs but also the words that comprise the narrative.

There are signal phrases in the lyrics of the songs that allude to actual quotes from Imelda. The first song, for instance, "Every drop of rain," refers to Imelda's description of life in poverty: "When you're poor—it's like you're naked/And every drop of rain you feel." Throughout the album, there are references to Imelda's beauty and learned grace—"The Rose of Tacloban," "Pretty Face," "Walk Like a Woman." There is one song sung by Remedios, Imelda's mother, titled "You'll Be Taken Care Of" which functions to tell listeners that Imelda's thirst for power may partly be blamed on her upbringing: "You'll be taken care of—on that you can be sure/If there's any justice in this world you'll never want for more." Also included in the narrative is a duet between Ferdinand Marcos and Imelda on their whirlwind romance, ("Eleven Days") as well as a duet between Imelda and Ninoy Aquino, rumored to be Imelda's first love ("Seven Days").

The songs sung by Imelda create a sympathetic image of the Steel Butterfly, particularly those under Act II. "Dancing Together" rationalizes her intoxication with newfound power, as she prefers to share the dance floor with foreign celebrities rather than her constituents: "Charles Jourdan, Oleg Cassini/There was Andy Warhol and Hanae Mori/Beautiful products all over the table/Fills my heart up with thoughts of my people." This is followed up with "Men Will Do Anything," which imagines how Imelda felt about her husband's rumored infidelity: "What's the matter with me baby?/Am I not good enough for you?" Meanwhile, "The Whole Man"

opens with this stanza: “We’re talking—about the whole man/In body—in mind and in spirit/And you, give the body, what is good, good, good, good/You make him—educated.” The song explains Imelda’s philosophy of love and beauty, her interest in cosmology, and her infamous “Pac-man” sketches.

Even as more songs are told from the perspective of Imelda, it is more crucial to look into those sung by Imelda’s Other in the narrative: Estrella Cumpas. The album’s narrative attempts to show the opposite paths that Imelda and Estrella’s lives took. As Imelda rose to power, Estrella plunged further into poverty, despite the promise earlier made by Imelda’s mother that Estrella will “be taken care of.”

“Every Drop of Rain” illustrates how Estrella and Imelda lived in poverty together, but their dreams and concerns were different to begin with. Estrella worried about how they would survive: “When it rained we slept on boxes/There was water all around”; Imelda was already dreaming of a better life: “But the people in the big house/Never bothered to find out/No clothes, no bed, no jewelry/Sometimes I had no shoes.” Two tracks later, Estrella sings again in “How Are You?” Estrella pays a visit to Imelda who was already living with rich Romualdez relatives in Manila. Although the lyrics seem to cover an exchange between the two, Estrella sings the entire upbeat song that fades away in the end, signaling that this is the last time they will meet. This stanza hints at the inevitable parting of ways: “And your life—is just beginning/And my life—is almost through/I’ve given up—never finished school/There was too much—too much work to do.”

After two tracks that feature Imelda and Ferdinand’s romance, the wistful song “When She Passed By” portrays Estrella as an outsider to Imelda’s new life of power. She sings about how she read about Imelda’s marriage in the news, and that she’s happy for Imelda. The song portrays Estrella’s refusal to accept that Imelda has forgotten her, because “letters get lost in the mail.” The last lines of the song shows that Estrella acknowledges Imelda’s importance in history: “Feel like I’m watching history/Living before my eyes/Many years from now/We’ll recall just how/How she looked when she passed by.”

It takes eight tracks after for Estrella to resurface in “Never So Big.” Estrella’s words are confusing, as she herself still cannot accept that Imelda has forgotten her. She asks questions like “Can I get a message through to you?” and “Are you the girl that I once knew?” The 19th track of the album opens Act IV (Imelda’s downfall), “Solano Avenue,” a funky soul song that shows Estrella’s revenge. Although not integrated in the lyrics, notes on the scene structure explain that Estrella exposed Imelda’s life of poverty in

a biography which put her life in danger. In the song, Estrella addresses Imelda: “So take back—all your money/Although I need it—more than you/Just acknowledge—that/you knew me/On Solano Avenue.”

Estrella will resurface again in the backdrop of “Order 1081,” where her house will be bulldozed by Imelda’s beautification projects in Manila. She joins Imelda in a duet in the final song that closes the album’s narrative (a song which I will address later).

While the choice of Imelda as the star of Byrne’s disco-opera is not at all strange given that the First Lady remains a fascinating Third World figure, the more important question is: Why Estrella? Why juxtapose the narrative of the powerful Iron Butterfly to the anonymous Estrella?

On the surface, it may be argued that the album is able to surface the forgotten character of Estrella by giving her a voice in Imelda’s story. However, a closer look at the development of Estrella’s character reveals the limitations of this attempt at recuperation. Even as the album claims to “also” be about Estrella who appears at “key” moments in Imelda’s life, it is obvious that she is not privileged in the same way as Imelda’s character. While Imelda’s dreams are the fantasies of the album’s star, Estrella is portrayed as the anti-star, almost like the anti-heroine of this disco-opera (like how “Solano Avenue” initiates Imelda’s downfall in the final act). The album invites listeners to understand, and to sympathize with Imelda, but fails to do the same for Estrella’s character. While listeners are also invited to pity Estrella, this character’s primary function in Imelda’s love story is to highlight what could have been the greater tragedy of Imelda’s life story: the failure to climb the class hierarchy, the failure to overcome her class origin.

Estrella’s character shows the real tragedy that Imelda escaped from: a life of poverty, devoid of capital and power. Estrella’s tragedy is Imelda’s triumph. Even as the album considers the Marcoses’ ouster as Imelda’s tragedy, it celebrates, at the same time, Imelda’s triumph in terms of moving up the class hierarchy. And that particular tragedy was obviously short-lived. After all, the Marcoses remain rich and powerful today.

To return to Western fantasy-production, I argue that this album “dreams about” Imelda, while on a more violent level, the album “dreams for” Estrella. Dreaming about suggests that the subject has the capacity to dream; dreaming for suggests that the subject cannot even dream for herself. Imelda had dreams of grandeur, and these dreams were accommodated by Western imaginary as fantasy-production practices, insofar as these dreams were literally translated into support for American imperialist projects during the Marcos years. The West allows itself to dream about Imelda, to recognize her (limited) subjectivity by recognizing her dreams, but only to

the extent that these dreams can support Western fantasy-production of the feminized ex-colony. We might even say that dreaming for Imelda is encouraged, which explains the persistence of Western interest in Imelda.

As for Estrella, devoid of capital and power, Western imaginary imposes on the codes of dreaming, which is manifested in “Here Lies Love.” Estrella’s dreams are dependent on Imelda’s dreams. Dreaming for, in this sense, means that Estrella’s character cannot even dream if not for Imelda, and only as imagined by Byrne. Estrella’s dreams are interpreted only in relation to Imelda’s limited scope of dreaming.

The act of dreaming for Estrella is heard in “Solano Avenue.” Although it seems like a song about Estrella’s anger and her desire for revenge against the ungrateful Imelda, it is actually a song of a desperate appeal. In the final notes, Estrella still yearns for Imelda’s acknowledgment of Estrella’s existence, as though Imelda’s recognition is proof of life. Estrella can only dream about Imelda, nothing more. Which is why we have no idea what happens to Estrella when the album ends.

The final song, “Why Don’t You Love Me?” reinforces how the album limits Estrella’s dreams in contrast to Imelda’s. The two characters sing the same line from different positions, with different addressees. It is clear that Estrella is addressing Imelda: “I rose each morning/Worked way past midnight/Exhausted, expired/Now you kick me out?” Meanwhile, Imelda’s lament is addressed to a larger audience—the World. “I gave you my life/I gave you my time/What more could I do?/I’m broken inside...” followed with “Just look at Nixon/They tore him apart/How could you be so hard?/I gave you my heart.” The voices merge in the end, as though conflating the experience of Imelda and Estrella, which only serves to gloss over how the album privileges Imelda’s dreams over Estrella’s.

THE STUFF THAT DREAMS ARE MADE OF

While “Here Lies Love” favors Imelda’s voice at the expense of Estrella’s, it is worth considering if this ambitious album has anything else to offer. As music sociologist Jacques Attali averred regarding noise and power, “With music is born power and its opposite: subversion” (1977/2009, 6). A question we can ask is this: can this album be saved? There are two songs in “Here Lies Love” that stand out in terms of music and words that may be worth saving. These are the songs that go beyond the scope of Imelda’s personal dreams.

The first is “Order 1081,” which tries to comprehend Imelda’s rationalization of Martial Law. The strength of the song lies in the calmness of the music in contrast to the urgency of words. It begins softly and slowly,

akin to the sound heard while opening a music box, eventually building up to louder beats: “A bomb went off this morning—raining bodies on TV/They are blaming the insurgents, they are blocking off the streets/ And the smoke is rising slowly, from the barrel of a gun/The solution to disruption—Order 1081.” The sound of the voice becomes more urgent, while at the same time retaining a sense of calm.

Another stanza illustrates a contrast of images: “Now the sunsets are incredible across Manila Bay/You can hear the bombers landing at the U.S. Air Force base/And somewhere in the distance, out beyond the setting sun/They will sign a proclamation—Order 1081.” The first line regarding the beauty of sunsets is contrasted with the sound of “bombers landing” at the US base—alluding to the hand of the US in the economic and political affairs of the Philippines.

The song ends with a powerful image of vanity and fascism: “It’s amazing that the soldiers somehow all know how to dance/It’s amazing how the soldiers keep the creases in their pants/Now it’s safe to walk the streets at night—a new world has begun/Everybody’s sleeping soundly— thanks to 1081.”

What the song is able to demonstrate is the political function of sound and music. For Jacques Attali, music is essentially political. For instance, those in power may believe that “music, as an instrument of political pressure, must be tranquil, reassuring, and calm” (Ibid 7). In other words, music may be used to impose silence. Referring to music used as “programming” to set the mood for employees in an office, he writes:

This music is not innocent. It is not just a way of drowning out the tedious noises of the workplace. It may be the herald of the general silence of men before the spectacle of commodities, men who will no longer speak except to conduct standardized commentary on them. It may herald the end of the isolable musical work, which will have been only a brief footnote in human history. This would mean the extermination of usage by exchange, the radical jamming of codes by the economic machine (Ibid 112).

The interplay between calmness of music and urgency of words is sustained throughout the song. There is an eerie aspect to the way this song is performed, like a warning for the dark days following the proclamation of the order. In relation to Attali’s example, “Order 1081” may radically be read as this: The declaration of Martial law produced/programmed silence (“sleeping soundly”), as in the silencing of dissent, not in the serene sense that Imelda imagined it created.

The second song that stands out in the album is “American Troglodyte” not so much because of the music but because it is not really part of Imelda’s narrative. In Byrne’s notes, he describes it as “A song about the Marcoses’ counterparts in the U.S.” (Byrne 2010).

Most of the stanzas in “American Troglodyte” list American signs of social advancement: “Americans are wearin’ those sexy jeans/Americans are usin’ technology/Americans are surfin’ that Internet/Americans are listenin’ to 50 Cent.” The listing of signs is alternated with lines from an imagined persona, an “I” who represents what it means to be American troglodytes.

The persona’s lines are laden with irony, for instance, this stanza that alludes to America’s hypocrisy in its supposed global war against terrorism: “Ev’rybody knows me/They are drinkin’ to my health/I terrorized my fam’ly and I/Terrorized myself.” The song goes on to make a case against perceived American superiority, particularly in the closing stanza: “Americans are dancin’ in discothèques/Americans are payin’ their income tax/Americans are workin’ from 9 to 5/Americans are livin’ like troglodytes.”

“American Troglodyte” interrupts Imelda’s narrative that binds the concept album, and in this way functions as a bonus/hidden track. The song may be read as the album’s internal critique. It interestingly precedes “Solano Avenue” and “Order 1081,” which may be understood as recognition of America’s fundamental role in the construction of neocolonial history. This self-critique, of course, is limited and brief. But to a certain degree, it points to the album’s self-awareness of its participation in the maintenance of the global dreamwork.

ON THE ABSENCE OF SHOES

The obvious absence of any reference to Imelda’s shoes cannot be ignored. Byrne explained that this was deliberately done because the scope of the album allows for the absence. The 3,000 pairs of shoes were discovered only after the Marcoses fled Malacanang. But the timeline is a flimsy excuse for the sake of a claim to artistic novelty. After all, this omitted sign was constructed during, not after, the album’s self-imposed period, as Imelda’s accumulation of shoes occurred while she was accumulating wealth and power. No matter how clichéd, Imelda’s collection of shoes remains as the most important signifier of Imelda’s crimes. While this Imeldific symbol of excess has been co-opted to serve the purpose of consumerism (“There’s a little Imelda in all of us” declares an infamous advertisement in a New York shoe store). Imelda’s shoes still serve as powerful signifiers of extravagance,

greed, excess, waste, vulgarity. If anything, the absence of shoes reinforces the function of “Here Lies Love” as a product that reinforces Western fantasy-production.

One cannot help but wonder what the real Imelda thinks of Byrne’s imagined character. According to a *New York Times* report: “Removing the ear-buds, tilting her head slightly, she said in an exaggerated tone, ‘I’m flattered; I can’t believe it!’” (Onishi 2010). While this response attests to Imelda’s enduring self-indulgence, thereby granting the album some degree of “authenticity,” it more importantly illustrates the danger posed by the very production of “Here Lies Love.” Imelda’s response of flattery is an affirmation of her dreams, as affirmed by Byrne’s project.

Attali reminds us that “music today is all too often only a disguise for the monologue of power” (1997/2009, 9), and this is what “Here Lies Love” renders audible. While “Here Lies Love” invites us to hear Imelda’s dreams, what we should listen to is how the album ultimately exposes Byrne’s fantasies.

NOTES

¹ In March 2008, following her acquittal from 32 counts of illegal dollar salting, Imelda was quoted as saying: “I am so happy, and I thank the Lord that the 32 cases have been dismissed. This will subtract from the 901 cases that were filed against the Marcoses.” According to a *New York Times* report, “The exact number of charges remaining against Mrs. Marcos is unclear.” See “Imelda Marcos Acquitted, Again,” http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/11/world/asia/11phil.html?_r=1, accessed 31 March 2011.

² Consider, for instance, the somewhat generous approach of an *Inquirer* interview with Imelda on her 82nd birthday. See “Imeldific at 82,” <http://lifestyle.inquirer.net/9585/imeldific-at-82>.

³ Byrne, a UK citizen, was born in Scotland but has lived in the United States for most of his life.

⁴ Imelda tried to prevent the release of this film by filing a case against the director. Imelda claimed she thought the film was only for a school project. See related report: “Imelda hits out at Documentary,” <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2004/06/16/1087244969186.html>, accessed 31 March 2011.

⁵ See James Hamilton-Paterson, *America’s Boy: The Marcoses and the Philippines* (London: Granta Publications, 1998). In his personal blog, Byrne cited a quote from this book as one reason for his interest in Imelda’s story: “There are moments when it seems that the world’s affairs are transacted by dreamers. There is a sadness here in the spectacle of nations, no less than individuals, helping each other along with their delusions. This way what is thought to be clear-sighted pragmatism may actually be shoring up a regime’s ideology whose hidden purpose is itself nothing

more than to assuage the pain of a single person's unhappy past."

⁶ Ibid, 9.

⁷ Before the release of the album, parts of "Here Lies Love" were performed at the Royal Adelaide Showground (March 2006) and in Carnegie Hall, New York (March 2007). The rock musical "Evita" has been staged several times in theater productions and has been adapted into a film starring Madonna in 1996.

⁸ There is a long list of albums and theater productions that qualify as rock opera, such as "Jesus Christ Superstar." Some popular rock opera albums include The Who's "Tommy," David Bowie's "The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars," and Green Day's "American Idiot."

⁹ Byrne, Interview "On the Imelda Marcos Inspired New Album," in Clash Music, accessed March 28, 2011, <http://www.clashmusic.com/feature/david-byrne-interview>, published May 6, 2010.

¹⁰ For links to reviews of "Here Lies Love," see http://www.davidbyrne.com/here_lies_love/press/index.php.

¹¹ All lyrics cited are from the official website of the album. See "Here Lies Love: Lyrics," http://www.davidbyrne.com/here_lies_love/lyrics.php.

¹² Solano Avenue was where Imelda lived in a garage with her brother, mother, and Estrella. See Pedrosa, 71-82.

¹³ See Kate McGeown, "An audience with the one and only Imelda Marcos," http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/mobile/programmes/from_our_own_correspondent/8708324.stm, accessed 28 March 2011.

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